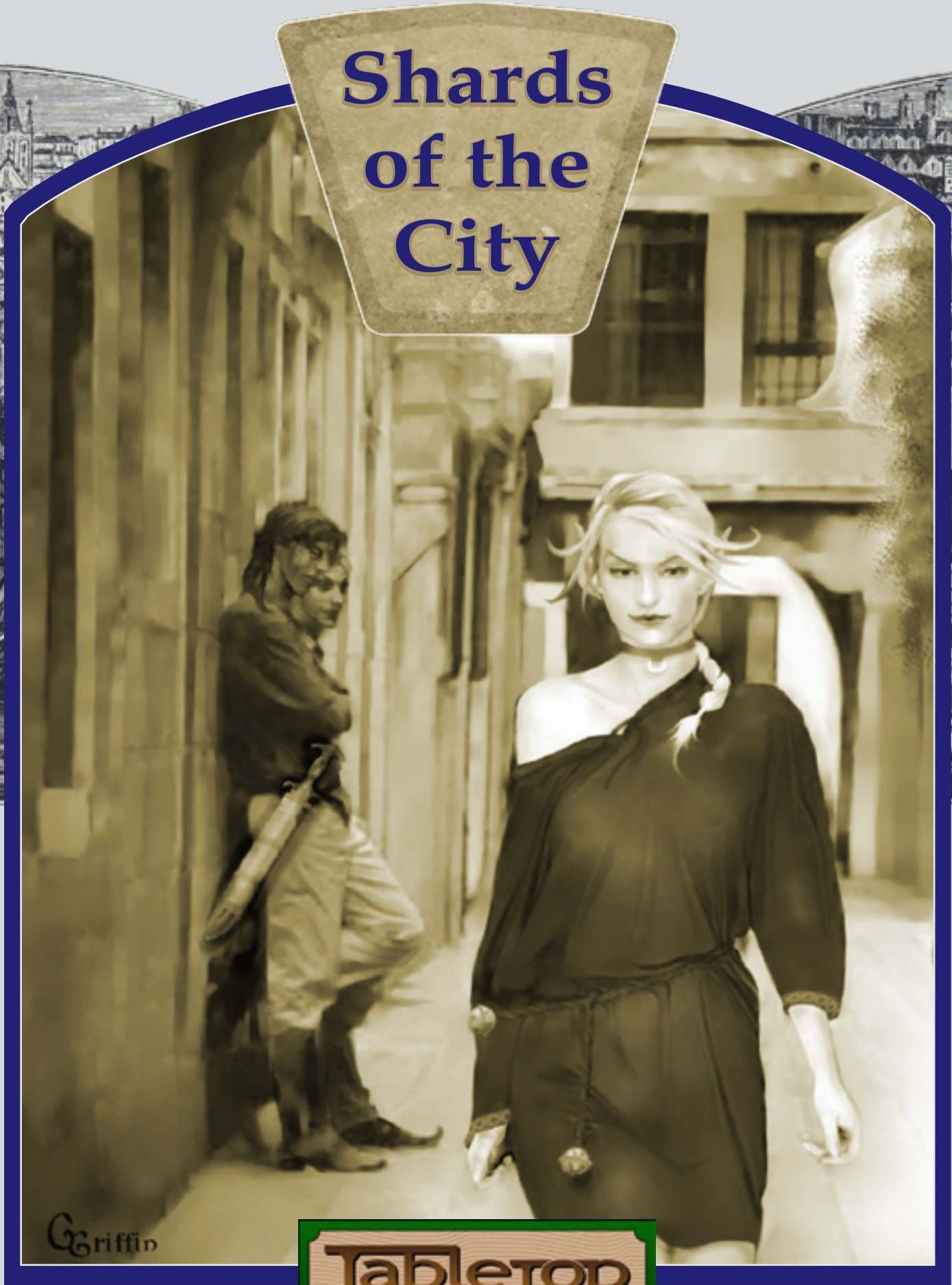


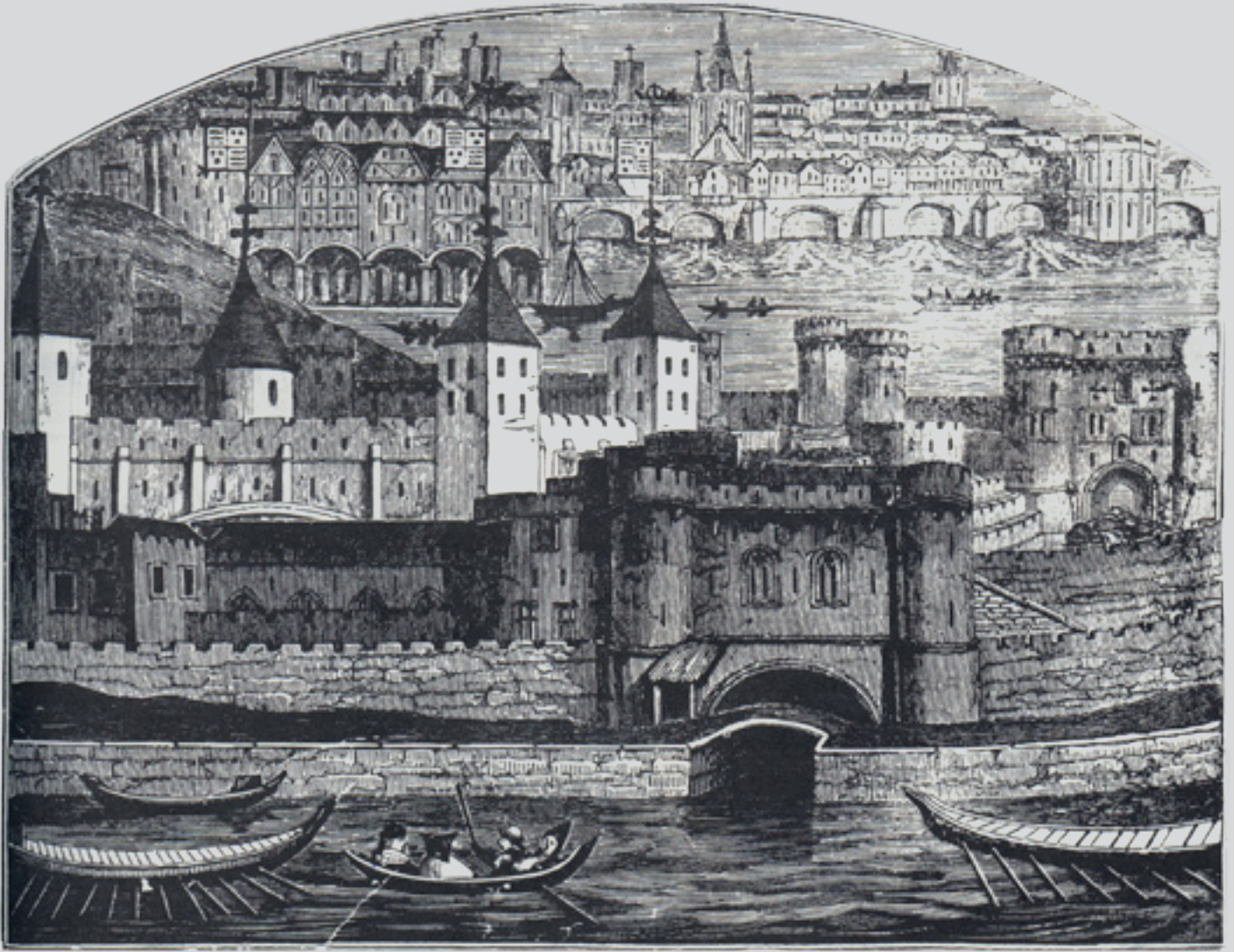
Tabletop Adventures Presents

Shards of the City



Griffin

Tabletop
ADVENTURES



Shards of the City



Writers:

Vicki Potter
Mark Potter
Christopher Field
Rodney Lucas
Daniel Brakhage
Timothy Ganow
Marcella Ganow
Brendan Potter
Michael Kessler

Editors:

Vicki Potter
Jennifer Schoonover
Elizabeth Brakhage

Layout:

Brion Frantz

Cover Layout:

Brion Frantz

Cover Art:

Christine Griffin

Interior Art:

Christine Griffin
Jesus and Javier Carmona
Oliver Diaz
Mark Huffman
Dominika Klosowicz
Gillian Pearce
Brenna Alyn Walters
Terry Moore Strickland

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Some artwork © V Shane.

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Introduction

Welcome!

Welcome to *Shards of the City*[™], Tabletop Adventures' book describing unique sights and people for fantasy cities. With *Shards of the City* a GM can change routine trips to town to buy food into memorable adventures in themselves. By using this product you augment your own imagination with ideas provided by our talented and experienced writers as well their descriptions of a fantasy city's sights and sounds. No need to make yet another city adventure out of drunks, rakes, giant rats, and shadows.

In *Shards of the City* you have a variety of choices to throw at the players, from stuck-up mages to skilled smiths, gamblers and rich matrons. Each has its own unique description, and one section includes plot hooks for each piece, to make it easy to spice up your game and give it a new flavor.

These descriptions generally fit the quasi-European medieval fantasy setting, though some shards use things not found in every game such as goblin bartenders or people with facial tattoos. However, if something seems out of place, change the description to suit or just use it for inspiration. Remember, these descriptions are for your use in your game and you are free to modify them to keep your game fun and exciting for you and your players. Our contribution is to help harried game-masters add another touch of color, realism, or even a taste of the fantastic in ways they might not have thought of before. I am confident that you can find plenty of material in this book to stimulate your players' imaginations and to augment your own ideas for adventures as well.

Harried Game Masters, or How We Came to Write This Book

"So," I hear you ask, "Why write a book like this?" Well, I'm glad you asked. We wrote it for all those game masters who have ever lamented not having as much time as they wanted to spend on their games

because those unforgiving intrusions to gaming (life, work, family, school) interfered. We wrote it for all those game masters who have come home from a hard day of work, or just finished a grueling week of exams, and had friends call up and say, "Hey, let's play tonight. I had a rough day and I want to kill something." For all of you who need more than 24 hours in a day, welcome to Tabletop Adventures' line of products for the Harried Game Master.

We here at TTA believe that description is a very important part of game-mastering and that vivid descriptions can stimulate players' imaginations, helping them to really envision their characters' experiences. Descriptions can also make a world or an adventure come alive, enhancing role-playing situations, and encouraging character development in ways that might not otherwise materialize. However, we have noticed that the more rushed or frazzled a GM becomes, the less descriptive a game tends to be. So we have written a book of a type we always wished to have, one that would have made our lives easier over the years. No need to buy modules and try to cannibalize pieces, or twist and hammer them into shape so they will fit in your campaign. Here we provide building blocks for you to put together as you wish, almost like a 'master builder's kit' of words and ideas to use to create your own great works. Tabletop Adventures' products for the Harried Game Master are designed to be ones that you can buy today and play tonight. We have taken care to make them flexible so they can be used in a variety of ways. They are to help you, the Game Master, make the maximum use of the limited time you have available and to just make your life a bit easier in this busy "real" world.

Enjoy, have fun, and create fun for others!

***The good people at Tabletop Adventures,
and the Overlord.***





How to use this resource

“What are Shards and Bits™, anyway?”

Shards and Bits™ should be viewed as small pieces of an adventure. Think of the scientist or archeologist, gathering the diverse pieces of a mystery or artifact until they fit together into a sometimes-surprising ending or revelation. Bits are tiny pieces of description that can be thrown in to provide ‘color’ or add a little excitement as characters move from one place to another. *Shards of the City* focuses on Shards, which are longer and more elaborate, meant to be selected rather than added randomly. They may describe a certain area, a specific thing, a particular time of year, or other things that work better when purposefully chosen. Some Shards here even include background information or ideas for plot hooks.

Bricks are building blocks of a scene, providing the base for an event or encounter or even the foundation of a future adventure. These pieces assume that player characters want to observe what is going on, and possibly interact with the scene. In general, characters are free to leave at any point in the scene. If they do so, the GM should not read any additional descriptions pertaining to that scene. In that case the adventurers would not see the details available with a closer look or gain any knowledge or benefits that might come from further interaction.

The Bricks feature this format:

Scene: A one-sentence overview for the GM

View I: The situation at a distance, or as it is beginning

View II: Coming closer, or further development

View III: Up close and personal, where the scene touches the adventurers

[GM Note: To explain who is involved and what is going on that is not seen by the player characters]

Plot Hooks: Several possible ways to draw the adventurers and the NPC or event together for future interaction

Bold print is to be read aloud to the players; light print is for the GM. This may include optional changes, such as “stairs going up [down]”, or the notes could be additional information. An Index is provided in case a piece is

needed to fit a particular situation, and we have included many Shards for specific locations or circumstances.

Shards of the City is written to work well with any system you may choose to use for your game, and is designed to be flexible and spark creativity in even the most Harried Game Master.

Taking Liberties is Encouraged

One thing to remember in using this product is that part of the reason for descriptions is to add a bit of drama to your game; therefore, delivery is important. The way you choose to deliver the descriptions here can have a tremendous effect on the subsequent playability of the situation involved. With proper use, these Bricks and Shards can add greater depth to your gaming experience and make things seem more ‘real’ and exciting for your players.

Don’t feel that you must use any of these pieces verbatim! As the GM, you can and should feel free to adapt them to get the effect you want. Some may need to be adjusted to fit your setting. Another thing to consider is that the Bricks, and some of the Shards, are written to be used a little at a time. Read one paragraph, let the adventurers move on a little further or ask questions, and then continue with the text. Whatever the situation, we have tried to make your life easier and give you the tools you need to make even an impromptu game a wonderful adventure.

In some instances these pieces may even give you ideas for additional adventures for your group. These descriptions are for whatever you want! If a piece sparks your imagination (or those of your players) and you want to build on it, then go for it!

Other Products from TTA:

Tabletop Adventures continues to bring you high quality products with lots of description, to augment your imagination and enhance your role-playing experience.

For more information visit our website at

www.tabletopadventures.com





Street Scene Bricks



01 The Third Hanging of Terrance Olmerson

Scene: It is the third hanging of Terrance Olmerson, and the city guards expect it to finally take this time.

View I: **You hear the commotion before you see it: a group of about eight boys comes running down the street and into the open area of the market. They seem to be very excited, as they are jumping up and down and dashing around. Merchants in nearby stalls call out to the boys to find out what is going on. One boy turns and shouts, “They’re hanging Terrance again,” and points up the street. The crowd reacts quickly, moving their things and themselves until there is a clear path along the road. Armed guards come striding down the street, helping widen the pathway.**

View II: Now you can see a platform at the far end of the market where several town officials are busy erecting a standard gallows. They seem well-practiced in setting up the posts and tying the noose. Some of the merchants are scurrying around in their booths, changing the merchandise on display. One woman pulls out black ribbon, tied in bows or elaborate knots, along with some strings of black beads. Across the way, a man has pulled out what appear to be stuffed toys hanging from sticks. Each puppet is vaguely man-shaped, with a black vest and a colorful scrap tied around its waist.

From up the street you hear the sound of a crowd, and people begin to spill out into the market. Many head directly over to the gibbet, vying to get the best place. Others line the path, and the guards already there move them back to allow a clear space through the middle of the market. Finally you see black horses approaching, pulling a wagon decorated with black ribbons.

[GM Note: Just about anyone in the crowd knows the man and his situation. Terrance Olmerson is a notorious local thief and bandit lord who has been executed twice before and raised from the dead both times after his men stole his body from the authorities. The powerful rogue does not fear death because he has never been dead longer than it takes for his men to find a cleric of the thief god to raise him. Obviously, this annoys the city guard to no end and this time they vow they will keep his body until long after most spells become impractical. Terrance, of course, isn’t worried; this is just the kind of challenge his boys like best.]





View III: Standing proudly in the back of the execution wagon, surrounded by several guards, is a lanky man with a smile on his friendly face. He is wearing a simple black leather vest over a fine white shirt, brown leather pants and boots, and an array of colorful silk sashes. (You can make out three.) Although his hands are tied in front of him, he waves to the crowds and calls out, “Thank you all for coming. This is a much bigger show than my last hanging!” Then he turns and makes some remark to the wand-wielding guards sharing the cart with him, but they do not appear to be amused.

The man does not seem to fear death in the least, even as the gallows draw closer. His charm never wavers, but he does unconsciously rub his already scarred neck from time to time. As he is led from the cart to the quickly erected gibbet, you hear him call out, “Can we use silk next time? Hemp chafes,” and the crowd cheers his defiance. At this point it seems that every guard in the city is patrolling through the crowd in the square, or standing watch on the rooftops armed with a wand or a longbow.

[GM Note: At the GM’s discretion, there could be a plot afoot to steal Terrance’s body immediately, or his men may be lying low waiting for a better opportunity. If the theft is attempted, the player characters could choose to get involved on either side, or just stand back and watch the show. In any case, the day could be one to remember.

It can be filled with memorable speeches from the justices of the peace or the town politicians, as well as some truly stunning last words (that lay bare several town scandals) and some great dying jokes from the always jolly Terrance. Or, the authorities could be in a rush to get the job done before anything happens so they proceed

with very little ceremony other than allowing the condemned man to say a few last words – such as, “See you next week!”

The hanging should go exactly as planned, but a near riot may break out as the common people rush the gallows to snatch some memento from the body of the great bandit.]

Plot Hooks:

- The adventurers were hired to capture Olmerson for some theft committed by his band, but someone beat them to it. Now, to collect the really high fee they were promised, they need him alive – one way or another.
- The party needs some information and was told they could get it from Terrance Olmerson. Now it looks as if they may never get what they need, unless they help him in some way. As an alternative, it might be that someone else in his band also has the knowledge required (or claims to) and would be willing to share it with them in exchange for their aid.
- Olmerson (or someone in his group) did a disservice in the past to one of the player characters or a friend or loved one. Now at least one of the group wants to see him dead permanently and is ready to help the town guard, or to actively work against his men’s plans, to be sure of it.
- Of course crooks will be working the crowd. The PCs could have their pockets picked, be robbed in some other way, or instead have something added to their packs – something recently stolen that is now too hot to handle, evidence of some other crime, or a cursed item.





02 No Dainty Flower

Scene: A self-confident mercenary readily handles whatever irritations come her way.

View I: As you walk through the market area of the town, the sights and smells of the heart of the town assault your senses. The merchants, some in small booths but most with their wares spread on a blanket on the ground are active in calling for customers. Bolts of cloth, scented sweetmeats, pottery goods, small furniture, clothes, baked goods, wine sellers, carved toys for the children—it is all here and for sale. The area is thick with townspeople as well, haggling with the merchants. The unusually large concentration of unwashed bodies makes the smell of humanity hard to ignore.

View II: As you look around, you notice a young woman of erect bearing, dressed in breeches, tunic, and boiled leather vest, with a longsword hanging at her side. She haggles with a merchant over a hanging bit of poultry. He evidently values his birds very highly, while the woman suggests that they probably expired of old age and so he was forced to butcher them. You start to pass by the stall, which gives you an excellent view of what happens next.

View III: As the poultryman and his customer argue over the price, a young man of about 15 years of age creeps by them, then sneaks up behind the lady and reaches lightly to the small coin purse tied at her belt. Just as the footpad's fingers touch her purse the woman spins around and catches the kid's wrist neatly in her hand.

“What’s up with you, ya little brat?” Her raised voice is quite easy to hear above the din of the throng. “You want to feel something of mine? Well, here it is.” As quick as lightning her leather-booted right foot springs from the ground to his crotch with a meaty thunk.

The boy doubles up and lets out a string of curses, but she is not done. She lightly steps back and strikes again with her right foot...to the left side of his face. The string of curses is abruptly cut off as he spins around and sprawls back into the crowd, landing under their feet. This altercation, as brief as it was, still attracts quite a bit of attention; all eyes seemed to turn to the action, including a chain-mailed member of the town watch only a few strides away. The would-be thief painfully but quickly gets back to his feet and hastily limps from the area. The watchman tries to pursue through the crowd but is hampered by the pressing bodies and by the fact he is laughing so hard. Most of the other spectators seem to have gotten a chuckle out of the exchange as well.

The woman, however, has already turned back around to pick up her aggressive negotiation with the poultry vendor, who quickly settles on a very reasonable price. Everyone else returns to their business as well and trade carries on briskly.

[GM Note: Marissa is a scout for a group of mercenaries that are camped outside of town. She is an adept ranger and has considerable hand-to-hand combat skills. Her scouting abilities keep her team from getting surprised when moving on the road or over terrain. She is a superb tracker and is always able to find hostile forces before being seen, thus giving her commander the ability to choose when and where, or if, to make contact with the enemy. She is adept with sword and bow as well as with her





feet and hands, but more importantly she is good at reading people and interacting with others in a way that enables her to get what she needs and leaves the other party satisfied with the result. If engaged in conversation, she has professional respect for other warriors but is merely polite to others, and will reveal little to nothing about herself, her unit, or her mission during the conversation. She is here to procure supplies for the mercenary unit, and is skilled at doing so. Her commander continually puts a lot of trust in her judgment and initiative.]

Plot Hooks:

- Marissa is in town on a shopping mission for her unit prior to them heading out on a trek to capture and bring back to justice a local brigand and his gang of thugs. She can set up an interview with her commander if the adventurers want to tag along. She has a couple soldiers and a wagon with her to take supplies back to the camp.
- Marissa is in town to scout it out. She is finding where and how the town guard works and where the weaknesses of the walls and gates are. This could be just for future information, or it could be that an attack on the town is being planned. If the adventurers discover the plans, they could warn the town, or help the mercenaries in their attack, or use the confusion to accomplish some goal of their own.
- Marissa is trying to find a local noble (or magistrate, or wealthy merchant) that has been hiding from her commander. This person owes the unit for services rendered but has refused to pay. She has a description and drawing of the person but no specific knowledge of where he or she lives or might be found. There are two other mercenaries in the crowd of the marketplace but they will not expose themselves as her allies unless she is threatened and in need of rescue. The party could help her find the deadbeat, or locate the victim themselves and warn him or her in hope of a reward.



03 On a Mission from God

Scene: A priestess on a mission recognizes one of the adventurers – or so she claims.

View I: **The ringing of small bells catches your attention over the noise of the crowd. Others standing around become excited. You hear people exclaim, “They’re coming back!” and “I’m going to stand on the temple steps so I can get a good view of the procession.” The plaza has three temples on it, but only one has steps enough to give a better view; they are wide at the bottom and narrow as they rise to the immense double doors at the top. People arrange themselves so that a clear path runs across the plaza to the temple with the steps.**





View II: **Two pairs of acolytes, in white surplices over black robes, come around the corner carrying frames with bells strung on wires. They shake the frames with each measured step, providing a rhythmic jingling accompaniment to the progress of the group. Behind them are four priests in black, chanting in unison. You can't make out the words—perhaps they are in some ancient language of the priests' religion—but the tones are harmonious. Next come four more priests in red with golden censers. The scent of burning incense reaches you and the spicy odor tickles your nostrils pleasantly. The cloud of smoke they are putting up is impressive, and in the middle of it serenely walks a single priestess. Her robe is white with a sash of gold and her beautiful face bears an exalted expression, as if she communes with another plane. Following her down the street are four more acolytes with bells, stepping along in a dignified manner with serious expressions on their young faces.**

View III: **The procession passes nearby and you get a good look at all the participants. The acolytes (both boys and girls, now that you look closely) are about ten years of age. Their arms seem to be getting tired, judging by how some of the sets of bells are drooping, but they keep the rhythm going regardless. One of the chanting priests frowns in concentration. Another has his eyes on the temple ahead while yet another looks completely bored, though his voice does not falter. The priestess who is the focus of the procession moves with sure steps, her eyes raised. At this proximity you see a thin gold circlet on her brow and the tips of pointed ears peeking through her braided hair, evidence of elven blood mixed with her human heritage. A gold ring with a blue stone adorns one of the hands she clasps in front of her chest. Around her neck on a leather cord hangs a holy symbol of polished wood, its look slightly out of place with the rest of her regalia.**

[GM Note: The GM can choose one particular hero to whom the priestess will speak, or she may address the entire party.]

As she passes you, the priestess unexpectedly comes to a complete stop. One of the bell carriers behind runs into her with a jingle, but she seems not to notice. Instead the cleric turns, and her brilliant blue eyes are fixed directly on you. Stepping forward, past the onlookers in front of you, she addresses you excitedly.

“At last I have found you! We must talk. Come, follow the procession to the temple and we can make plans.”

[When the priestess starts speaking, the forward part of the procession finally realizes that all is not going smoothly and comes to a halt.

If one of the characters says something like, “Do I know you?” or, “I think you have me confused with someone else,” she will respond:]

“We may not have met but the god [or goddess] knows you and my mission. We have been brought together, you and I. Come!”

The woman gives a confident nod and moves back into the formation. She calls, “Carry on!” to the acolytes in front and the procession moves forward again, though not quite in the unison it had achieved before the interruption. They cross the plaza and climb the steps into the temple, disappearing into the shadows inside the great door, which remains open behind them.

[GM Note: This confident priestess is Aelfwyn, a half-elf foundling who grew up in the temple and has never known serious disapproval or hardship. She has been of assistance in some missions for the temple and is about to be sent on a mission of her own. The GM will need to decide what this mission is, and how one or more player characters might be involved.





[If the group (or the single character she approached) follows the procession into the temple, they are permitted to enter and observe a ceremony from the back of the room. (A person familiar with religion may realize that the ritual has to do with dedication and protection.) Afterward they are taken to a side room where they are served food and drink until the priestess comes to speak with them. If the group (or individual) does not follow, but remains in the plaza, after a time one of the other priests who participated in the procession will come out to request them to come in. If they do, they are taken to a side room as above. If the group (or person) does not follow and instead just leaves the area, no one will compel them to enter or stop them from leaving.]

Plot Hooks:

- Aelfwyn is about to begin a mission to carry a special item from the city she is in to another. Because hostile local forces would like to get their hands on the item, she needs guards and wants to hire people who are not part of the normal city politics. She has never been entrusted with a mission of her own; that she has now is a mark of the temple's confidence in her. Also, they believe the opposition would not expect such an important mission to be entrusted to such an inexperienced representative.
- Aelfwyn grew up in the temple. She was a left on the steps of the temple as a babe in a basket and all she has is a wooden holy symbol that was left with her. She still wears the symbol and it has been permanently blessed giving her a small measure of divine protection. It is believed that she was born of an elven father and a human mother and that her mother thought being raised in the temple would protect her child from the prejudices that half-bloods sometimes experience. Now she wants to go in search of her elven parent and has asked her deity to send people to assist her in her quest.
- Aelfwyn has been selected by her order to go on a mission to retrieve a holy relic of the order. The relic had been in the care of an older cleric and his acolytes but they were attacked by a wild band of orcs (or goblins, bugbears, kobolds, or other miscreant intelligent species) and only a few of the acolytes escaped to let the temple know of the problem. The temple is trying to keep the mission and also the loss of the relic quiet as it brings shame upon the local order. That is why they need an adventuring group such as the player characters to help the priestess retrieve the relic. They are willing to pay a high price for the services of the party in retrieving the item. It may also be that the clerics were only kidnapped rather than killed; in that case the temple desires their safe return as well.
- The clerics of this evil temple are preparing for the rites to elevate several of their order to a higher plane to walk with their mysterious malign deity. In order to do this they need the blood and fresh (only just stopped beating) hearts of several humans or humanoids such as are in the adventuring party. The priestess decided (or was instructed by her deity) to solicit the party because of their lack of ties to the community and the likelihood that they will not be missed from the town. The food they are given in the side chamber is drugged to enable their quick capture; they will be put in separate holding areas and guarded until it is time for the sacrifices to be made. In this scenario, if the adventurers never go on into the temple, a number of different people matching the racial (and possibly gender) composition of the party will turn up missing overnight.





04 The Old Guard

Scene: An unkempt old man claims to have once been the city's sergeant of the guard.

View I: As you walk down the street, you notice an old man wearing drab clothing standing alone outside the entrance to a store, gesticulating and apparently talking to himself.

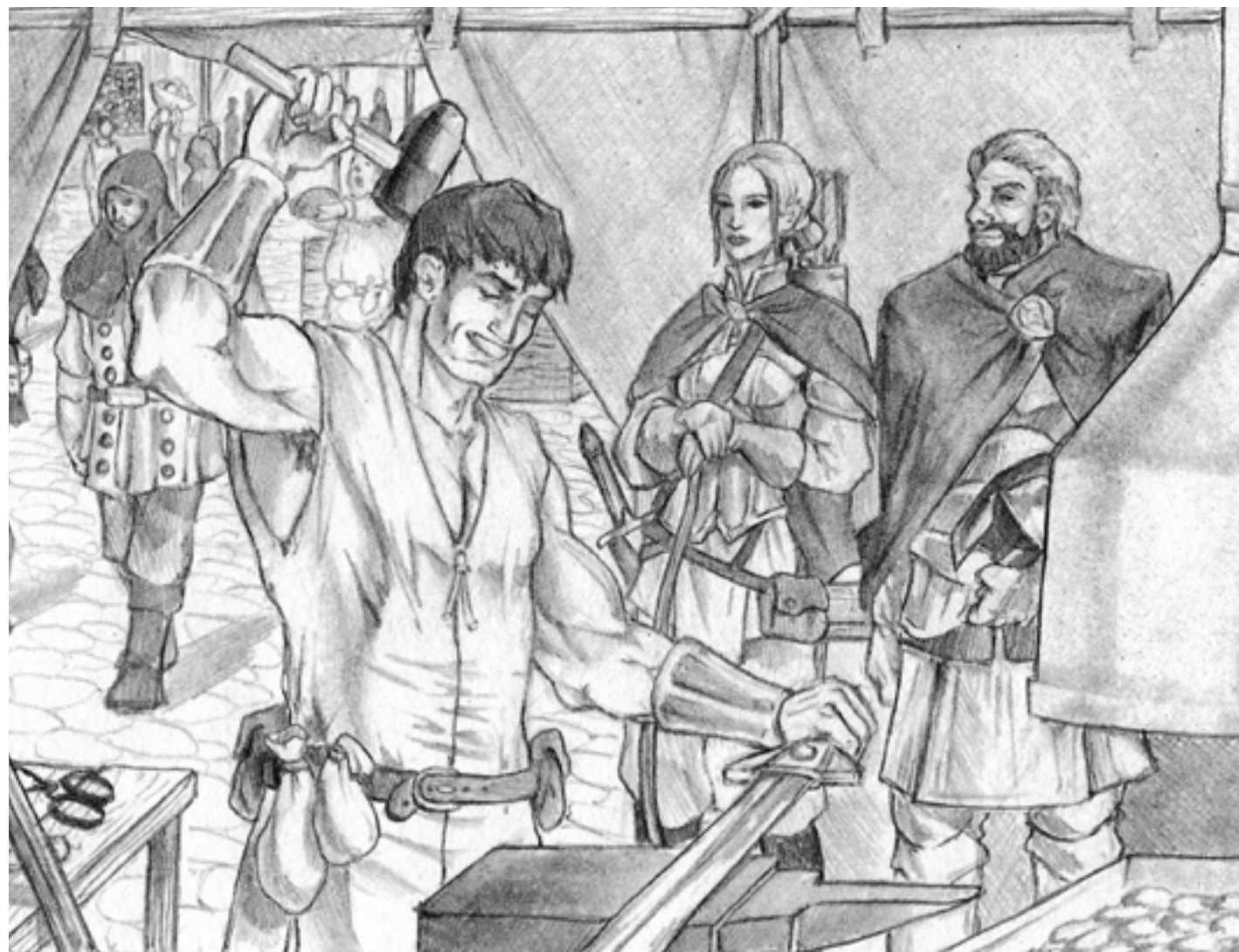
View II: When he turns your way, you see that his face is covered in scars and his black hair falls in clumps over his shoulders. He paces back and forth, smiling and talking as if in conversation with someone, though no one is standing near enough to be listening to him. He occasionally looks around suspiciously, then leans over and says something behind a cupped hand, evidently whispering secrets.

View III: When you pass nearby, it's apparent the man hasn't bathed for some time. He nods to you but continues to talk to his invisible audience; the speech you overhear seems to make no sense at all, until you realize he is mixing words and phrases from several different languages.

[GM Note: Slightly erratic and confused, Old Man Garver has seen many days. Anyone who approaches the man and attempts to talk with him will at first be met with a blank stare. If someone is persistent, however, the man will eventually smile and greet the person normally. He is able to answer simple questions about the city, its people, and places, but is not willing to open up until after continued conversation and maybe drinking a friendly beverage together. Garver could be a source of local information, though some of it may be out of date or otherwise inaccurate.]

Plot Hooks:

- Garver used to be in charge of guarding the city's ruler. When he was discharged he was magically driven insane by the city's leading mage to ensure that any secrets he knew would never be told. Possible tales of corruption or hidden treasures could be gleaned from his stories.
- The old man was never actually a guard, nor a fighter. He has always been a transient and he was born with his insanity. However, the more someone talks to him, the more he will weave tales of fantastic battles and hidden treasures, possibly leading the adventurers on a wild-goose chase.
- While in the employ of the city as the sergeant of the guard, Garver was sent with a detachment of men to ferret out a group of bandits who had been raiding merchants on their way to the city. He still knows where their hideout was and it is possible that there is still treasure there to be found.
- Instead of whispering to imaginary companions, Garver may be talking to actual apparitions, possibly those of his old comrades. In that case, any unlikely information he spouts may be more accurate than whatever the common wisdom says.



05 Blacksmith Extraordinaire

Scene: A blacksmith and his woods-wise companion travel from town to town finding work or adventure.

View I: In the marketplace, in the midst of booths of sweetmeat and vegetable sellers, you notice a tall wooden-sided wagon with a sign painted across it: “Astronde—Blacksmith Extraordinaire.” Two large gray draft horses stand to the right of the wagon, tall enough that you can see them over the heads of the crowd. To the left of the wagon a tent of off-white canvas

tent has been set up, although you can’t see its opening from where you are. You can hear the clang of metal on metal from here, evidently the blacksmith at work.

View II: As you get closer, you also hear the jingle of small bells, and you realize it comes from the huge horses. They have bells on their tethers which jingle as they eat oats from a shallow metal tub; another tub of water is within easy reach. Now you can see a dark-brown mastiff which lies beside the wooden stairs that descend from the door at the back of the wagon. Another lies on the other side of the horses and they both seem quite





alert – and, thankfully, well fed. They are large, even for mastiffs, and you also notice that they do not seem to be tied or chained in any way. The canvas of the tent is thick enough to keep out the weather. Moving around to the open side of the tent, you spy a large sign on a folding stand to one side of the opening: “Chain, plate, and banded armor repaired. Simple weapons and tools repaired. Horse shoeing.”

View III: The inside of the tent is busy. Tables to either side of the opening are lined with tools. A large sweaty man toils over an anvil in the center, while he talks to patrons in his booming and good-natured voice. The smith moves smoothly back and forth from the anvil to a forge at the back of the tent, his movements revealing a skill that could only come from years of experience. The forge itself is unusual. It is about five feet square but is made neither of brick or clay but of some white substance that looks almost like metal. It has a chimney that extends past the ceiling, which is made of a thin, shiny metal. The forge has been stoked with coal until the interior glows red hot.

As you watch the smith pauses in his work to call out to an elderly woman passing by, asking after her husband and family. When he sees you standing in his doorway, he smiles. “How are you doing this fine day? I’ll be with you in just a minute or two.”

[GM Note: Astronde knows his stuff and does excellent work. He is very popular with the locals and often has an audience while he works. He is very talkative and will ask any person about their travels and experiences while he repairs their gear. He has also found this is a good way to collect local legends, stories, and news as people tend to be much more talkative about things when he is working with and for them. What very few people know is that the heavily muscled and good-natured blacksmith is also

an experienced mage. Astronde is very good with the staff he keeps handy and also has a full arsenal of offensive and defensive spells, though he tends to favor fire spells. Since he is an accomplished blacksmith and speaks several languages, Astronde prefers to make his spending money (and disguise his own travels) by taking on the guise of an itinerant smith and helping people who often do not have access to a blacksmith.

[Astronde’s travelling companion and loyal partner is a skilled ranger named Tierra, who is an impressive fighter, archer, and tracker. His dogs are both female, highly trained, and incongruously named “Blossom” and “Sugar Plum.” The horses he creatively calls “Old Gray” and “Cloud.” The travelling forge is made of a high quality ceramic Astronde developed himself; it is strong enough to withstand the heat of working with even exquisite magical weapons and armor. He has quite a collection of books in his wagon and is also well known at libraries in the larger towns and universities as well as having a good reputation in the sages’ community.]

Plot Hooks:

- Astronde can repair magic and master-class weapons and armor as well as making simple repairs or shoeing a horse. Any of these could be a reason for characters to seek him out, and they may be his major functions to the adventurers. On the other hand, the need for repairs might just be a way to convince the party to locate Astronde so that he can pass along information the GM wants the characters to know.
- Astronde collects legends and lore and can be used as a way for a party to get background information on an adventure. Since he and Tierra travel they can show up anywhere, in any town or even on a roadway. Astronde may be willing to trade a story for a story (whether that is lore or an account of the party’s latest adventure), and might even give a discount for an especially good one.





- Astronde could answer questions on local or ancient lore, if a group can find him.
- Since Astronde sees himself as a defender of the common man, he might give people on the run a place to hide if the adventurers find themselves in trouble with a local despot or a Sergeant of the Guard who is abusive of his own power.
- Astronde and Tierra know of a legendary site or treasure in the area but they need help actually going for it and the adventurers can be that help;
- The adventurers might hire Tierra to lead them to a hidden or hard-to-find pass or path. (If Tierra leaves Astronde's company he will always send one of his mastiffs with her.) They had better take good care of their guide, though; the adventurers really don't want an angry and cunning Astronde coming after them because Tierra was hurt or lost!
- The adventurers hear a rumor that Astronde is really a wizard, and he is willing to help out people who are in trouble. They could seek him to get his assistance, though he may not be as altruistic as rumor suggests.

06 Hay Wain in the Gate

Scene: A large hay wain temporarily blocks the city gate and loses part of its load trying to get through.

View 1: There seem to be a lot of slow-moving wagons on the road to the city today. You come to a slight curve where you can see down the road to the gate of the city and there, about six wagons in front of you, is a large hay wain that seems to be quite a bit overloaded. It is so large that it takes up the whole road; when it passes folks headed away from the town, they have to step aside off the road and wait for it to pass before getting back on the road to continue their travel. It also seems to be impossible for any of the wagons in front of you to go around the large hay wain. The terrain alongside the road is quite a bit rougher and would slow down any wagons that tried to travel there. Horsemen or runners might be able to skirt the wain before it reached the city, but the footing is bad enough that a horse's legs might be injured. It is only a few hundred feet to the gate now for the hay wain so it seems the drovers in front of you have decided that patience is the wise policy right now.

View 2: The city's huge double gates are open, but the wagons are backed up before the entry and all traffic on foot and those with single animals are being directed in and out through a postern gate to the side of the main gate. You can see that the huge hay wain entering the town has become wedged in the main gate somehow. The hay in the cart is piled up so high that it touches the top of the gate's opening; it seems to be extremely heavy. The load must be destined for some market or business near the edge of town, since a wagon that size could never navigate most of the streets of this city.





View 3: The driver is shouting at his draft horses, and through the side entrance you can see a youth trying to tug the horses forward, urging them on. Two of the gate guards are shouting as well, offering colorful complaints rather than helpful advice, while a third struggles to keep people moving through the small gate as best he can. Suddenly, you see the top of the load of hay shift and begin to slide. It looks like an avalanche as more and more pours off the top of the pile. The people nearby that had been trying to help are totally buried; it seems possible they could suffocate if they don't get some help. However, the shifting of the load is enough to free the wain from where it was stuck and it lurches forward, finally reopening the gate.

[When the load of hay shifts, it could pour off either side, or off the back of the wagon. The hay could fall on the two gate guards, or some of those waiting in the queue to enter the postern gate, or the helpful citizens pushing the wagon from the back.

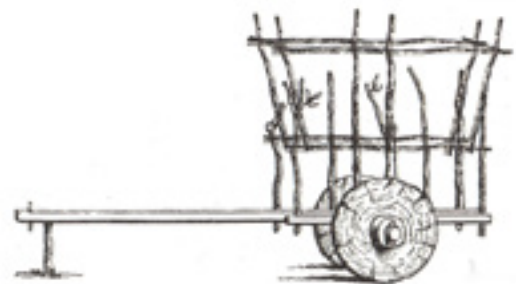
[If this incident is used merely as a bit of color, other bystanders step up to help those in trouble, and the adventurers can go on their way. If the party decides to become involved, they could be the primary rescuers. Helping those covered in hay should not be too difficult; the worst effects are likely to be coughing and sneezing due to inhaling the dust. This could be a good way for a group to meet someone, or earn someone's gratitude.

[If this is an accident, the driver of the wain is likely to stop to try to load the hay back onto the wagon with the boy's help. The adventurers could assist with that and possibly earn the driver's gratitude. If the wain is here for other reasons (such as those indicated in some plot hooks), the driver will likely not stop for the hay; he will leave the mess for others to clean up and just keep going, with the boy swinging aboard as the wagon goes by.]

Plot Hooks:

- Someone takes advantage of the distraction provided by the hay wain to sneak into or out of town. If the adventurers are alert, they may notice the person and could either call attention to the situation, or keep quiet and possibly take advantage of the knowledge later.
- The wain was brought to the city gate at this particular time as a purposeful distraction, for someone to enter or leave the city. The adventurers could act as in the above hook, but if the situation was planned in advance, the purpose of the person (or persons) doing the sneaking is probably more serious.
- The wagon is heavier than usual because it is smuggling something—casks of wine, armor and weapons, enemy soldiers, or crates of just about anything of value. They could be discovered after the hay slips, or not.
- The wagon is part of an enemy's attack plan. While it is stuck in the gate, enemy archers fire flaming arrows at it, thus preventing the city gate from closing, possibly catching the gate on fire, and giving the advancing army an easier way into the city.

[Of course, some of these scenarios would change the innocuous ending given above.]





07 Baker's Booth

Scene: A popular food stand is the site of an altercation in the marketplace.

View I: The market is filled with the smells of many foods and spices. Many are savory, and some are downright unpleasant, but the sweet scent of spiced apples wafts on the breeze and catches your attention. That is followed by the sound of raised voices; two women seem to be having an altercation.

View II: Ahead you see a small merchant's stand whose hanging signboard bears a colored drawing of a pie. A queue of six people waits there, and your nose begs you to join them, but just now some are backing away as two

women have come to blows in line. From their imprecations, it seems one of them suggested she was going to get the last pie for the day and the other woman would have none. Suddenly a guard rounds the corner of the shop and thrusts a hand between the two. "Here now! Let's have none of that. I daresay Mistress Nia has brought a goodly number of pies, as she always does. If you can't wait peaceably, then you can both go on your way and come back after these good people have all been served." He waves the women off in two different directions, touches his hat to the person inside the booth, and then moves on himself. In the new quiet, a woman's voice is heard giving instructions to the lead customer, who held his position through all the confusion: "You just put that pie in the oven for 15 minutes or so while your dinner bakes and it will be nice and warm to serve along with your ham." The man turns away and the people behind part to let him through, inadvertently clearing the way for you to get a glimpse of the proprietor. You briefly see a pretty woman with pale skin and long red hair, before the next customer steps up.

View III: The stall's business is brisk, but the woman behind the counter takes a minute to visit with all her customers, asking about how things are in their part of the city, or about their recent travels. Your turn comes in due course, and you find that the stand's window concentrates the delicious smells. The odors of spiced apple pie, fresh nut bread, thick sugared rolls, and other sweet items all assail your senses as you step up to the counter. Up close, the woman behind it is more than commonly pretty. Her pale skin is smooth, and her red hair is accented with several braids pulled back at her temples and falling along the sides of her face. She wears a non-descript brown dress over a full linen shirt, the outfit appearing rather dull compared to her vibrant coloring. She smiles at your approach. "Can I help you?" she asks, as you begin to pick out specific aromas.





[GM Note: Nia, who runs the bakery stall, is one of two druids who are caretakers of a nearby forest. She and her mother Niara both love to bake, but their main purpose in running this stand once a week is to keep track of what is going on in and around the city, for its actions and needs tend to influence the welfare of their forest. Nia can answer general questions about the city and surrounding area, though she is guarded in what she says about the forest and will not, under any circumstances, divulge where her home is located. The druids dry plants and prepare medicinal substances from the forest and trade them for spices from distant areas, but sell only their baked goods in the public marketplace.]

Plot Hooks:

- The druids sense negative changes happening in the forest and they are trying to pinpoint what is going on and how to stop it. This is the reason for their information gathering, and Nia would welcome anyone who can give her good information from farther away, or about things that don't interest the common citizens.
- The druids have sensed a shadow growing for some time, but the folks in the town refuse to listen. For now they are biding their time, but Nia might consider sharing their concerns with a sympathetic stranger.
- Nia's mother is sick with a long-term disease the druids' magic cannot cure. They need a healing herb that is far away and Nia is desperate to get it, but she cannot leave her mother for that long.
- Nia is harassed by local toughs (or a small band of orcs) when she is traveling by herself. So far she has managed to hold them off with her magic and by calling on some wild animals, but she believes it is only a matter of time until they get rougher. She would like to have someone she could trust to help her out.

- A disease is beginning to show up in the area, one that could turn into an epidemic if not controlled. Certain ingredients could control its spread (or cure it more easily), but they are at some distance and the druids don't dare leave the area and risk the disease spreading more quickly. They are willing to reward someone for acquiring the ingredients and transporting them here.
- If the adventurers manage to gain Nia's approval, she may be a source of healing potions for them. She could have up to five available any given week, though sometimes she will have none.





08 Friendly Fire

Scene: A bored young guard injures himself on duty.

View I: **The day is a quiet one; very few people are out at this hour. Ahead a guardsman in ring mail and a uniform tunic leans against a winery's moss-covered southern wall, where nearby trees shade him. He occasionally moves his head to observe the scene, but the street is nearly empty today. Even at a distance, the man's boredom is palpable. The fact that he's spinning a cocked and loaded crossbow on one finger further testifies to both his boredom and lack of common sense.**

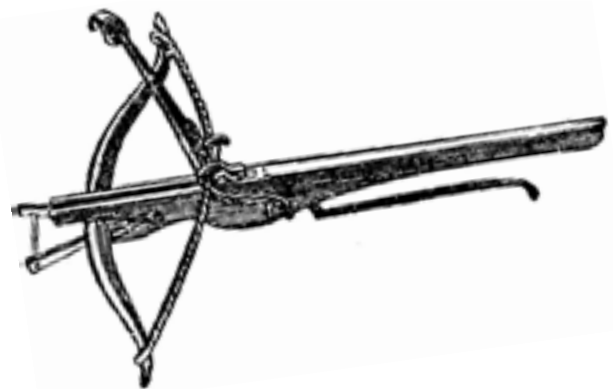
View II: **As you approach, you see that the guard is a very young man, with green tribal tattoos framing his puffy face. Suddenly a rook's call in the tree above him startles the boy. He jerks, the crossbow tumbling from his hand. It hits the ground loudly, the snap and hiss of the bow string lost in the clatter of impact. The guard begins screaming immediately, clutching his right leg as he falls to the ground.**

View III: **Blood fountains up from the wound in his thigh. The bolt juts from the man's leg where it pierced the skirt of his ring mail tunic, the pants beneath, and muscle and bone. The arrow's white fletching quickly stains a bright red.**

[GM Note: The guard's name is Cannix Blackthorn, a not-too-bright young tough still in his probationary period with the watch, who already has several strikes against him. One of the adventurers could heal the guard, by using first aid or with magic, but even if someone does, his agonized yelps are going to quickly attract the attention of his comrades. Two more-experienced guardsmen arrive at a run, weapons drawn, within 2 minutes. These two guardsmen (Hector Pinos and Rudle Bainwright) are capable warriors with the ability to size up a situation and act accordingly.]

Plot Hooks:

- Rather than admit what really happened, Cannix quickly and unconvincingly spins a lie about the adventurers shooting him during a botched robbery. Cannix is used to having other people believe his prevarications, but he is young and inexperienced and may have trouble convincing his colleagues. Even if the other guards initially believe Cannix's lie, a few minutes of investigation will clear the matter up. However, at the GM's option, things might progress to swords and spells before the lie is discovered.
- Cannix may be punished by his unit for betraying his oaths and slandering innocents, particularly if the adventurers are nobles or renowned heroes, or he could be quietly let go from the watch. In either case, it may earn the group a new enemy. Cities with especially harsh laws might execute him, after informing his 'victims' of the punishment for his 'crime.'
- Cannix survives his unfortunate incident, and manages to stay in the guard long enough to learn a thing or two. Later he gets into adventuring, and the group comes across him, either alive or dead, in an unfortunate situation. If Cannix interacted with the adventurers in any way (and he is still alive), he will recognize them and beg for their help.





09 Dancing Queen

Scene: An acrobatic elven dancer advertises her show by strolling around town.

View I: As your party navigates the busy streets in town, you hear high-pitched jingles that cut through the noise of the crowd. You look around for the source of the sound, and then also hear some whistles, the type men might make at a pretty girl. A slight disturbance in the crowd suggests where this pretty girl might be walking.

View II: Coming through the crowd is an attractive female elf, barely an adult. Her attire stands out as very different from that of other women. She wears a colorful tunic that comes just to her mid-thigh while her legs are clad only in a pair of anklets with tiny bells on them, and her feet are bare. She sports a leather collar around her throat, and a sash at her waist that also ends in bells. Her energetic stride means the high-pitched jingles can be clearly heard over the crowd. The elf munches on a pastry as she comes down the street, wearing a mischievous smile between bites. She wanders in and out of the shops, chatting brightly with everyone who crosses her path. You can see why she attracts whistles, as she makes her way along the crowded street with a breezy self-confidence.

View III: The beautiful elf approaches you with a bright smile. “Hello! I’m Reana and I dance at the Golden Dragon this evening. I’d really love it if you would come see my show.” She does a double twirl and you see something embroidered in gold on the back of her tunic – probably a dragon, given what she just said. “It’s not just the entertainment, either; the food’s good, too. Elliran (my boss) likes to have the best – best

cooks, best musicians, and of course the best dancer.” The young woman throws you a wink over her shoulder as she walks away into the crowd, giving you a great view of the dragon writhing along her spine.

[GM’s Note: Reana dances at the Golden Dragon where she is a slave, as indicated by the collar. She is quite a draw, and frankly the main attraction despite the good food and music. In return Elliran, her owner, gives her spending money and no real duties other than dancing and the occasional publicity. She has never known any other life except that of a slave and so is content. (If slavery is unknown or illegal in the area, then Reana may be a servant with a long contract, a foundling being used as a servant who sees no fault in the arrangement, or in some other situation that binds her to the owner of the Golden Dragon for a long time.) The GM could choose to replace the Golden Dragon with any other high-class establishment; just make the appropriate changes to the text.

[In general if the adventurers encounter Reana on the street or in the marketplace and one of the group tries to strike up a conversation with her, she will be happy to give general directions but won’t go into detail. If asked, she will give her name and will state that she works for Elliran at the Golden Dragon but she will resist being drawn into a long discussion. She also has little time for those who wish to compliment her; she believes most people are just exaggerating. If someone pushes her too hard, she will slip away into the crowd and evade any pursuit by disappearing down an alley or over the rooftops as she is incredibly quick, athletic and acrobatic.]

Plot Hooks:

- If any member of the party has a visible instrument, Reana will approach and address that person. “That looks like a fine lute [fiddle, harp]. If you’re any good with it you should come





out and play with Elliran tonight at the Golden Dragon. He'll give you a percentage of the proceeds and as a bonus you can see me dance to your beat." As an alternative, other townsfolk the party encounters could tell the musician approximately the same thing.

- The group may witness a fight in the marketplace or street if Reana feels threatened; she is very good at getting a group of guys to bicker among themselves by making pointed comments. She might also distract someone with a remark like, "It looks like those two old dogs are getting up their courage to hamstring you; you'd better watch out," as she points behind the people to whom she is speaking. As soon as they look away she is very quick to turn and escape from the situation. An adept acrobat, Reana could scale a wall or climb in a half-open window. Most people in the town know her and will help delay a pursuer if they think she is being chased.



- Reana and her owner Elliran have heard about the party and about their reputation, or something specific they have done for which they have gained renown. She is curious about the group, and has also been instructed by her owner to ask their leader to stop by the Golden Dragon for a chat with Elliran. When the group arrives, they find that Elliran is interested in

obtaining a slave who is owned by an evil wizard in a nearby town. The slave is Reana's brother and he is being mistreated, even abused, by the evil mage. The heroes needs to be able to grab the boy and get him back to Elliran without letting the wizard know who their employer is, since the evil mage has no idea Reana is related to the boy.

- In addition to running a top establishment (being both manager and sometimes musician), Elliran is a successful merchant of rare, exotic, and collectible items. Reana takes an active interest in whatever new thing Elliran is

seeking and may ask adventurers to help find it. If Elliran has lost a collectible item to a thief or competitor, Reana could be actively searching for people who can retrieve it for him.





10 Sinkhole

Scene: A busy marketplace is interrupted by the appearance of a sinkhole.

View I: You look across the crowded marketplace, taking a moment to get your bearings before plunging into the crowd. Suddenly the numerous birds pecking the ground or lining the rooftops take wing almost all at once. A small dog and two cats streak by your feet, heading back the way you came. Across the plaza, two horses fastened to a fancy wooden wagon neigh and rear up, pulling in different directions when their hooves hit the ground again. The driver, evidently a purveyor of “Fine Herbs and Medicaments” (according to the sign on the wagon), struggles to get them under control. People crowd back to give the plunging horses some room.

Then you hear a low rumble, and the right rear corner of the wagon dips. Those still close to it try to get even further away but are hampered by the curiosity of those a little farther back. Suddenly there is a great “crack!” and the entire rear of the wagon drops. The front starts sliding back and down, pulling the frantic horses with it. The driver, with a panicked look, shouts “Sinkhole!” He manages to scramble to his feet and launch himself from the seat before the whole wagon vanishes with a deep whoosh, along with the flailing, screaming horses.

View II: There is a moment of stunned silence, in which the screams of one horse can still be heard, and then the crowd erupts in panic. The people’s shrieks and shouts almost drown out another ominous rumble. The center of the market is almost clear now, revealing a sizable hole in the cobblestone pavement with bits of stone still dropping from the edges. You can’t see how deep

it is from here, but the wagon is completely out of view and the cries of the obviously injured horse are slightly muffled. More and more rocks start falling as a crack streaks from the near edge of the sinkhole straight through the heart of the marketplace and then starts to collapse upon itself. People on the other side of the plaza now turn to run, but those in front have no place to go. Dreadful shrieks sound as first one, and then another, bystander topples into the rapidly expanding hole. Behind you people are crowding in, trying to see what the excitement is all about.

View III: The marketplace is the scene of mass chaos as the entire crowd tries to run at once. Street urchins dart between the adults’ legs to make their escape. Unfortunately, people outside the market are still pushing forward; this results in a great jam at every street leading out of the plaza. You see awnings topple as their supports fall into the growing hole.

There is another great “crack!” though you feel it more than hear it amid the panicked noise. Suddenly the crowd ahead of you thins, some leaping away but many falling as the edge of the hole expands rapidly in your direction.

[GM Note: The sinkhole may expand to threaten the player characters, requiring them to roll dice to avoid falling in and possibly becoming injured. Or it could stop short and instead allow the adventurers to become rescuers, helping people who have fallen but who are close enough to climb out or who are merely injured. Sinkholes most commonly form in areas where the underground rock is a type that can be dissolved by water over time, such as limestone. They can also develop in locations with man-made caverns such as large mines. Appropriate terrain can be found in such diverse places as high mountains or plateaus, low-lying semi-tropical peninsulas, and more.]





Plot Hooks:

- The sinkhole is due to natural causes, but now that it is open the caverns under the city have been revealed. The city may or may not try to control access to the caverns, but either way intrepid adventurers will find a way to explore. They may discover caverns filled with valuable minerals, the temple of a hidden cult, kobold warrens, an underground river that leads to the sea, or more.
- The sinkhole is natural, but now that the caverns are exposed, the inhabitants of the underground can get up into the city. Brave souls will be needed to contend with goblins, troglodytes, giant venomous centipedes, or other types of dark-dwellers that are now free to roam the surface.
- The sinkhole is not natural, but rather the result of purposeful undermining by some nefarious agent. (It could be ratmen, an evil wizard, an enemy city, a long-buried lich-king, cunning kobolds, etc.) The enemy may be planning to merely demoralize the populace to soften them up for some other attack; to send masses of warriors up through the hole to strike from the center of the city; or to use the commotion as a distraction from their actual offensive.
- If the adventurers take part in some daring rescues at the time the sinkhole caves in, their deeds could bring them to the notice of powerful people: officials of the city (or the kingdom), generals, warriors, wizards, nobility, wealthy merchants, or others. They may be offered jobs, or they may be asked to do more heroic deeds just to enhance their reputations.
- On the other hand, heroic rescues may make the adventurers the darlings of the common people. Passersby want to shake their hands, or pat them on the shoulder. Small children stare at them on the street, or want to ask them awkward questions. Folks buy them drinks “to hear them tell their stories,” and then end up taking turns putting in excited comments while the supposed hero can barely get a word in. Not only that, but people now come asking for their help whenever there is any type of a problem. Purse snatcher? Pet in a tree? The new heroes will be the ones requested to deal with everything and people will be bitter if they are unable to do it or if they refuse.



11 The Amateur

Scene: A street-smart young wizard is holding her own in the back streets of a city.

View I: As you pass a shadowed alley, you hear a low voice speaking to someone in the alley.

“Stop there, little wench. You’re alone and we got the drop on ya. Hand over the backpack and empty your pockets and you might live to see tomorrow.”

A clear female voice replies: “You really shouldn’t mess with folks you know nothing about. I’ll give you a chance to disappear as quickly as you appeared before I make your lives really miserable.”





“Shoot her in the leg, Vince, then she’ll know we’re serious.” There is the twang of a crossbow being fired, followed by a male voice cursing.

View II: When you look into the alley, you see a young lady in leather trousers and a dark blouse, with a quarterstaff in her hand. Her short hair and slender figure make her appear quite young. Two dark and unsavory men face her, one of them only five feet in front of her, pointing the tip of his short sword at her throat. Behind him and to his right is another man pointing a now-empty crossbow at the young lady and cursing. Behind the lady a third man, with a short sword, sneaks closer to her. It is impossible to tell if the girl has noticed the man lurking behind her. The fired quarrel must have failed to hit its mark, but it is obvious the three men are attacking, not retreating.

The man nearest the young woman steps forward and thrusts with his blade toward her chest. She lightly steps aside and swings her quarterstaff. It connects solidly with the side of the man’s head and he falls temporarily to the cobbles. The crossbowman is busy reloading his crossbow, but the man behind her raises his blade and springs forward to attack her from the back.

[GM Note: The adventurers can intervene at any time. If they call out, or step forward into the alley, the men will notice them and then flee. The man who had fallen was only momentarily stunned; he gets to his feet quickly and flees as well. If the group does not intervene, the scene continues action by action until it is resolved.]

View III: **The crossbowman begins to raise his reloaded crossbow while the man who was struck clambers back up from the cobbles. The young woman quickly steps forward and swings her quarterstaff again, hitting the crossbow and knocking it to the side. It fires prematurely, into the wall to the side of the alley. Then the girl notices the man behind her and dodges to the side before he can thrust his blade into her back, blocking it away with her quarterstaff.**

The man with the crossbow drops it and draws his short sword. The group’s leader, who just got back to his feet, strides purposefully back into the fight while the man who just missed the woman’s back quickly recovers from his thrust. The young woman steps to the wall of the building to the right, putting her back against the wall, and starts mumbling some words you can’t hear.

As the men step forward to attack the girl, she drops her quarterstaff, touches her thumbs together and spreads her fingers. A long arc of flame jumps forward from her hands, engulfing the men in front of her in flame. They scream and back up, dropping their swords and running off the opposite direction down the alley, still on fire.

[GM Note: If the party did intervene, the young lady will thank them, then introduce herself as Cassiya and suggest going to a nearby tavern to chat and have a couple drinks together. (She does not forget to gather up the swords and crossbow dropped by the fleeing men.) If they did not intervene, the girl will pick up the weapons and then leave the alley without looking at the group. As she strides past them, she mumbles something under her breath. Only a person with excellent hearing will be able to make out what she says: “What are you waiting for, an engraved invitation?” She will walk a short way down the street the party was on and go into a tavern where she is known, to temporarily stash the weapons and to get something to drink.

[Cassiya is a young wizard from a hard background, with some skills as a thief she learned in her childhood. She is very competent in her own way (though still short on experience), and knows something of the seamy sides of cities in general. If encountered in her home town, she could be tremendously valuable to adventurers who need a guide or information about the city. Although most comfortable in the city, Cassiya is observant and clever and so learns quickly to get along in other environments if she has an example to follow. She is primarily searching for ways to increase her knowledge of magic.]





Plot Hooks:

- Cassiya could discover the characters are looking for information (about a magic item, or something else specialized rather than general), and she has particular knowledge they could use. She will provide it in exchange for some type of training in magic or being allowed to go with them on their travels.
- Cassiya has been hired to retrieve an item (a valuable collectible, or perhaps a magic item) that has been stolen from a local noblewoman. Her patroness considers the thief will not expect her to hire Cassiya and so the young wizard may be able to surprise him (or her). The girl has been authorized to quietly hire others to help her, for a hundred pieces of gold apiece, but the retrieval must be done quickly, before the local thief can fence the very recognizable item or dismantle it and sell its component parts.
- If the heroes are bragging about a special magical item, Cassiya may be tempted beyond bearing and use her thief skills to try to sneak it away from them. If they catch her before she manages to fence it (or decides to keep it and hides it), she tries to convince them she only snagged it “for practice, and for the thrill of it,” and she was going to bring it back.
- If Cassiya notices that the adventurers are hard up for cash, she offers to supply the party with a handy rumor or two from the local area about places where some booty might be found – as long as she is made a part of the group, with an equal share.
- Cassiya decides for some reason that she very much wants to join this group. She will even be willing to follow the party, using her illusion skills as well as her thieving abilities to stay close to the adventurers. She will do this in secret until the party is in need of her skills, and then she will appear and try to save the day. If Cassiya is found out before she is needed, she will claim she was merely traveling in the same direction as the group and staying close to lower the possibility of encountering wild animals.

12 Orc Warband Traders

Scene: Orcs from out of town bring their plunder to sell for a little extra cash.

View I: A band of orcs is in town again, selling some used weapons they have acquired. With passers-by eyeing them warily, the orcs have spread out rich crimson-and-silver tapestries stolen from some manor house over the rocky ground as a plush carpet. The leader sits in a place of honor in the center, while half a dozen guards gather around. Behind the leader sit huge chests with carrying poles, and the four broad-shouldered humanoids responsible for the carrying lounge near them.

View II: The small band’s elderly chieftain sits cross-legged on the carpet and looks up at you with his one good eye; a gilded raven’s skull has been set into the other socket. Notched swords and axes, scarred wooden shields marked with the sigils of nearby keeps and houses, and similar ‘second-hand’ weapons are spread out neatly at the chieftain’s feet. The lesser orcs watch the few customers warily, sharpening their knives.

View III: The orc war-chief pantomimes swinging a sword or axe at you as you approach, his gilded tusks glistening in the sunlight. In pidgin common tongue, the orc curtly lists prices and praises the strength of these weapons, “taken in honorable battle from damned stout men.”

[GM Note: GaldRavven’s orcish warband has earned itself a quiet sort of prosperity by selling back the captured arms of the men they slaughter during their raids. Though nobody likes them very much, they have earned a reputation as honest traders. A warrior can buy any standard kind of armor, shield, or weapon for around 75 to 80% of the usual





price, and even masterful versions are occasionally available. GaldRavven doesn't deal in magical items or weapons, keeping those for his own use.

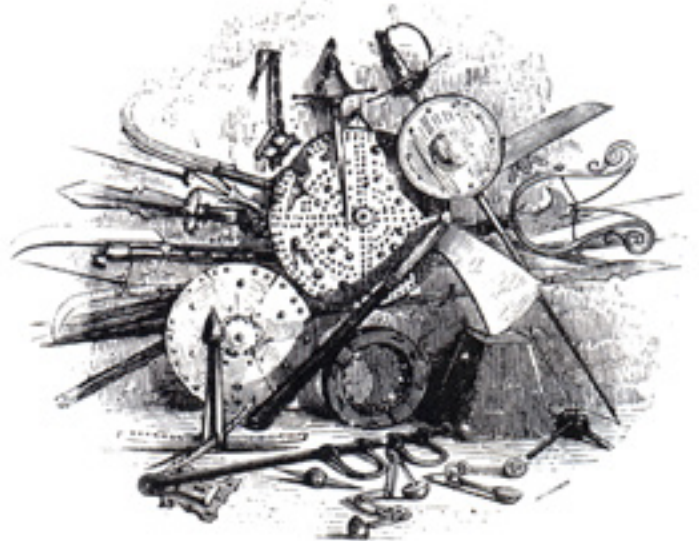
[GaldRavven is an experienced warrior who is used to negotiating with humans and he is cannier than the average orc. He has no patience for thieves or cheats, and anyone trying to rob him is going to quickly taste orcish justice. The half-dozen orc thugs of his guard are also experienced; if a thief is lucky, they will only take one hand.]

Plot Hooks:

- GaldRavven has a special item on his person that is obviously more valuable than the other items present. He likes to tell the story of how he took it from its previous owner, or how one of his warriors stole it and gave it to him, as was rightfully his due, but he doesn't want to sell it. The adventurers recognize the item (a special weapon, or possibly a piece of jewelry such as an armband) or recall having heard the same story from the perspective of the victim. There are people who would pay a lot of money to recover this family heirloom from the orcs that stole it, or possibly to put a rare item in their collection. However, first the adventurers have to convince GaldRavven to part with it, or get it from him some other way.
- One of the orcs picks a fight with a member of the party. It might be any dwarf, just because. Alternately, one of the warriors might taunt a half-orc for being a half-breed, or harass an elf, because they smell funny. If the adventurer responds in kind, the orcs quickly form a circle (chanting "Fight! Fight! Fight!" in orcish) and get ready to cheer on their companion. They won't interfere unless the orc involved is about to be killed. GaldRavven will state the rules

very briefly (such as: "Hands only! No killing.") and then let the contestants go at it. The orcs usually fight hand-to-hand, or with daggers. A hand-to-hand fight generally involves beating the other party into unconsciousness, or at least to where he or she can no longer get back up. A fight with weapons is usually to first blood, but the orc will expect to get in a lot of pummeling before actually drawing blood. If the adventurer wins the contest, the orcs will all want to slap the victor on the back, and then GaldRavven will allow him or her to choose any normal item from the orcs' trading wares.

- Someone important in the city doesn't like the orcs coming in and wants to 'encourage' them to leave, but in a way that won't be traced back to that person. It may be that a group has been hired to cause trouble for the orcs and raid the trading site while the adventurers are there. On the other hand, it may be the heroes themselves who are offered the job of making things difficult enough that the orcs leave.





13 *Night Watch*

Scene: Two intrepid townspeople patrol the night streets to keep down the criminal element in their area.

View I: Night has fallen, and the torches or lanterns outside various establishments make only isolated pools of light in the darkness. Down the street a tall man saunters your way, his head turning from side to side as if searching for something. Lantern light glints on metal sleeves so you know he is armored, though he wears no helmet. From time to time he stops to exchange a word with people passing by, or lounging against the wall of a tavern. At the mouth of an alley he takes up a watchful pose and gazes around him. Across the street, a little behind the man, a shadow detaches itself from the darkness. You catch a glimpse of a person in dark clothing but see very little more. Where the man strode forward this one seems to glide, slipping around the pools of light and obstructions on the street to take up a position much nearer to you than before.

View II: The armed man moves in your direction again and now he is close enough to make out his features. His slender face sports a neatly trimmed beard; his light-brown hair, somewhat less tidy, falls below his shoulders. A plain tunic covers his mail shirt, and a longsword hangs from his right side. He is actively scanning the area as he steps forward, moving purposefully but without hurry as he seems to take in every detail of the street.

He has noticed you as well, and his eyes come back to your group every time his head turns in your direction. The warrior takes up a position at the end of a nearby alley and continues to watch you, but also gives attention to people up and down the street, greeting several and

nodding to others. In keeping an eye on the man nearby you almost miss the furtive movement across the street, as someone is slipping from shadow to shadow. At one point the dark-clad figure moves into the edge of a lighted area before disappearing again into the darkness.

The figure's slight build and something about its movement give you the impression that it was a woman. Whether she is spying on the warrior, or is on her own nefarious business, is impossible to determine.

View III: The warrior strolls past you, nodding and greeting you courteously. His study of you is careful, though, and he seems a little tense. As he passes close by, you see that he is younger than you thought based on the way he carries himself.

His clothing is good quality but not rich and the dagger he wears on his left side matches his sword. A little farther down the street he again pauses to examine an alley and then takes up a station there, keeping watch on the people coming and going. Once again you catch movement in the darkness opposite, someone slinking down the street past where the man stands guard, but whoever it is stays hidden from sight this time. You wonder if the warrior has noticed his sneaky shadow.

[GM Note: Jayden, a warrior of some experience, has taken it upon himself to patrol an area near where he lives, to keep down the criminal element there in the evenings. His partner, who uses some rogue skills to keep to the shadows, is his younger sister Salome. They have lived their entire lives in their home city and love it deeply, so they are trying their best to keep it safe. They have been patrolling at night for a couple years. Jayden has a good sense of humor but is very serious when it comes to his duty. Salome is quieter but also devious and with a dry sense of humor.]





Plot Hooks:

- These siblings are looking for a group to help them: their middle sister (Ludra) was kidnapped a week before her wedding and their mother had a dream that a group of strangers would have the key to her release. Kidnapping may have been by organized crime elements who oppose their patrolling, by business opponents of her soon-to-be husband, by someone who mistook her for a wealthy young woman of similar features, or by some other faction entirely. Jayden and Salome have experience in the city, but the kidnappers are thought to have taken Ludra out of the city, so the brother and sister need people experienced in the wilderness to help find her.
- Jayden and Salome take notice of the party's actions and gear and ultimately conclude the group poses a threat to the future security of their home area. At a later date the pair will take steps to oppose the party or hinder them in their objective in the city.

- Salome might try to trick the adventurers into an altercation.
- Jayden could take affront at some real or construed insult, such as the suggestions that his sister is a thief or rogue. At some critical point in the future, the two incite the locals (either populace or authorities) against the adventurers.



- Rather than siblings, these two are adventuring partners. Although currently comfortable in the city (where they work as special-purpose bodyguards for wealthy or noble patrons), they are gathering information about a new item of treasure to pursue, or a lost city to seek, and will be searching for a compatible group of adventurers to join them.

- As siblings or partners, Jayden and Salome are bored with their current activities and are looking for a change. If an attractive offer is made, they would consider taking on a travelling job for someone, or joining a group on an expedition.





14 Tax Collector

Scene: The arrival of a tax collector provides a spectacle.

***View I:* People are pushing back in the street, moving away from something coming down the way. The jangling of many copper bells carries over the noise of the crowd. You see a woman on horseback moving through the street slowly; her tabard shows her to be a royal tax collector, a status also announced by the jangling copper bells on her horse and those pulling the carts and wagons in the well-guarded train behind her.**

***View II:* Just behind the tax collector rides the guard captain, accompanied by two wizards, to judge by their robes and paraphernalia. Following them is a parade of wagons and carts, protected by a score of warriors. The guards are a grim-faced collection of mercenaries and civic guards, clad in grey plate and scale. Some ride beside the carts on horseback, while others remain in the shady wagons, crossbows at the ready. They joke and talk about unimportant things, seemingly bored by this mundane assignment, but their eyes never stop scanning the crowd and the rooftops.**

***View III:* As the cavalcade passes, you get a good look at the entire train. The carts are filled with provisions and tribute of a hundred different kinds: flour and grain, corn and hard bread, as well as horseshoes, bolts of cloth, and many more things. You also spy well-locked strongboxes, no doubt full of glittering coins from many nations. Pigs, chickens, ducks, and dogs are all caged on the carts, making an unearthly din. Cows, horses, and ponies trail behind the wagons, lashed to them with sturdy hemp rope and supervised by various anxious squires.**

Plot Hooks:

- The tax collector is stopping in town to collect taxes from local households and merchants. The caravan moves into the marketplace, sets up some folding tables, and starts taking in money and goods from various citizens. The collection is a marvel of efficiency, but the presence of so many armed guards wrecks havoc on the market's business. They crowd everything, and the adventurers are going to find it a challenge just to buy the things they need.
- The tax train may be a tempting target for adventurers. If so, it should not be an easy one. The 20 guardsmen are seasoned warriors, with an experienced squad commander for every five guards and a competent captain over the whole. The tax collector herself is a notable priest and has four wizards to assist her as well as to back up the guards. The tax train's guardsmen are excellently instructed, extensively drilled, and well-equipped. Make no mistake, these people are determined to protect the goods and money which have been collected; a poorly planned or impulsive frontal assault would be suicide.
- Even if the party doesn't decide to raid the caravan, that doesn't mean someone won't. Virtually any monster or human enemy might show up to win the rich profit tax day promises. The adventurers could assist the guards to protect the tax train (and any new collections); take advantage of the distraction provided by the attack to try to gain some profits of their own; protect the townspeople while the guards and the attackers battle; or of course decide to sit the whole thing out.





15 Wagers on the Street

Scene: A street gambler with a slightly different dice game has caught the attention of a crowd.

View I: Making your way down the street you see a small crowd of people gathered around a makeshift table near the blank wall of a building, with a man standing behind it. You can hear the sounds of men and women yelling, some obviously happy and some complaining.

View II: As you approach the table you see that a game of chance is being played. The man behind the table is taking bets from anyone interested in trying their luck. It appears to be a dice game in which the person with the highest roll wins the pot, but as you watch, you're not sure of the exact rules of the game.

View III: [If one of the adventurers asks how the game is played the man says:] “Ahh... **new blood. Welcome to the table, my friend. I call this game ‘Even Strength’ and it’s quite easy to play. You see, we each roll a pair of dice and the one with the highest roll wins. But there’s a twist. Even numbers always beat odd numbers. So if I roll a 13 and you roll a 10, you win. But if we both roll odd numbers, the highest roll wins, and the same goes if we both roll even numbers. You can bet as little as one silver and as much as one piece of gold. So do you feel lucky?”**”

[If an adventurer decides to play the game the man says:] “**Good, good. I’m glad to see a new player try his [or her] luck. We’ll play as long as you have money to spend or until you decide to quit. Then it’s someone else’s turn. Here, you choose which two dice you feel are lucky and I’ll take the other two, and let’s have at it.**”

[After the player takes two dice:] **You pick up two dice and feel the cold smooth bone from which they are carved. Dots are etched into the bone to represent the numbers 1 to 6, and the dice feel heavier than you would have thought from looking at them.**

[GM Note: This cocky, street-wise fellow calls himself Dirren; his current money-making line is running a street game. As long as he’s winning, he will tease the player a bit with a smile on his face in order to try to get him to continue playing, and say things like “You can’t leave now; I’m just about to start losing.” When he is losing, he will shrug it off as temporary bad luck and encourage the player to bet higher.





[When playing the game, give the player who is gambling 2 six-sided dice and the GM (acting as the man behind the table) takes 2 six-sided dice. The player should state his wager first. Any bet from one silver piece to one gold is acceptable. Both the player (adventurer) and GM (the man behind the table) roll at the same time. As stated above, add each person's two dice together and the highest roll wins, with the caveat that an even number always beats an odd number.]

Plot Hooks:

- Dirren actually works for the local thieves' guild. His real job is to watch for newcomers who could pose a threat to the guild. Gambling is a great way for him to do this because it allows him to watch for those who are adept at sleight of hand, or even watch the crowd for unauthorized pickpockets and cutpurses. He may also be alert for strangers with deep pockets that could be worth investigating.
- Dirren is simply a poor man trying to make a bit of coin. His game is actually illegal and if the party watches him closely they will see he is nervous. Should the city guard happen by while Dirren is running his game, he will grab everything on the table and run as fast as he can away from the guards.
- Dirren has permission to run his gambling table, but the city guard takes a cut at the end of the day. Dirren resents this and if the crowd thins he will whisper that he would pay to have a 'favor' done. He will gladly pay his entire day's winnings (3d10 silver and 2d8 gold coins) to have the captain of the guard killed.
- Dirren himself may be a rogue looking for a mark, either to fleece the person later in private or to follow someone for direct theft later.

16 Runaway Horse

Scene: An injured horse disrupts the market.

View I: Merchants and their customers and apprentices are busy at the various shops and stalls that line the marketplace. Trade is brisk and coins clink as they change hands. The grain sellers have set up their scales and are weighing their goods into baskets or sacks. An area farmer unloads a fresh lot of grain and then moves his two-wheeled horse cart clear of the crowded area, heading toward the city gate. A few moments later a series of shouts and the clatter of hooves are heard even over the din of the haggling and general gossip. At first, it sounds as if the farmer may have upset his cart, but the sounds continue and seem to be coming closer.

View II: The ruckus and commotion up the way has grown louder. People are shouting and some ladies screeching. Shouts of the city guard and the clatter of armor can also be heard in the street between the gate and the marketplace. The high-pitched whinny of a horse in distress is heard, and some clear calls: "Stop him! Stop him!" "Clear the way; look out!"

Merchants around you begin to move quickly, gathering up the best of their wares and shuffling carts or displays away from the street, in a rushed attempt to protect their wares. A hurrying apprentice spills a bushel of grain and frantically tries to scoop it back up. Several others crane their necks to see what is happening.

View III: You hear an inhuman scream and a grey and auburn mare shoulders aside a stack of baskets, her silver-shod hooves flashing as she rears back for a kick. A yellow-and-black fletched arrow protrudes from her shoulder, spraying





steaming blood in a wild scatter. There is no sign of her owner, save for the sweat-stained saddle hanging crookedly from her thrashing back. Half-empty water skins pound into her flanks as they dangle from the saddle, spurring the horse to even greater panic.

The horse's path from the city's gate is clear; blood and destruction marks her back trail. A cart full of plump watermelons is overturned, several fruit spilling their juice into the street. Merchants, apprentices, and customers have been knocked down; a young grain merchant bleeds from a nasty gash on her temple.

[GM Note: The horse may be calmed, with difficulty, by someone with skill with animals. The wound in its haunch, though somewhat deep, is a straightforward injury that can be dressed with a moderate amount of skill.]

Plot Hooks:

- The horse's name is Quilt, and she was part of the hunting party of Sir Almont Morray, a local lord, until she was mistaken for a buck and shot by a careless hunter. The horse panicked, instinctively heading home, with confused grooms a few minutes behind. Sir Morray (who will arrive eventually) will reward anyone helping his horse with 20 gold coins each.
- The horse was injured in a hunt but it turns out that the "careless" hunter is a neighbor who has a dispute with Sir Morray over land or livestock. The horse was shot to take revenge on Sir Morray for certain actions, or to persuade him to change his mind on some point.
- The horse was injured during a hunt, as the result of a failed robbery attempt. Local thugs accosted one of the ladies riding to the hunt, throwing her

to the ground. One robber then was unseated himself, accidentally firing his crossbow in the process and injuring the riderless horse. Hunt members captured the robber; if desired the hunting party could bring in the thief after the horse has been caught.

- This isn't the first time this horse has gotten away from its stables and run through town, overturning carts and stamping on fruit, but the local merchants are determined to make it the last. The horse was uninjured when it started the stampede; one of the city guards fired the bolt now protruding from the horse's side in an attempt to slow it down but instead the injury only increased the horse's frenzy. Even now the guards are scrambling to corral the horse. This is one of Sir Morray's favorite horses and one of that lord's allies who happens to be in the marketplace will plead for the horse's life.
- The horse makes a habit of stampeding through the marketplace, as above, but in addition one of the merchants is a member of a gang known to take matters into its own hands. Sir Morray was warned previously and now he is sure action will be taken against him, his property, and his family. He can't hire anyone from town to guard him as they might very well be part of the gang. He needs outside protection, and the adventurers seem like a good prospect.





17 Smidek's Map

Scene: A man with a map to sell accosts the party outside (or in) a tavern or inn.

View I: A man catches your attention as he makes his way through the crowded tables. He may have once been a sailor; now his worn leather vest and cotton breeches barely cover his emaciated body. Around his head he wears a bandana that was once red. He appears to be looking for someone in the crowd, but he moves behind a group of burly fellows and you lose sight of him.

View II: “Hey, you look like someone looking for high adventure.” The man you noticed across the room is approaching you. He has a wooden peg in place of his right lower leg and now you can see that his clothes are dirty as well as worn. His broad smile reveals a gap where the front two of his yellowish teeth should be. As he limps closer, you see he carries a leather pouch on his left hip, supported by a cross strap over his right shoulder. The pouch seems to be in better condition than the rest of him.

“What I ’ave for you could make you all rich if you’ve got the guts it takes to get it, and all your limbs. That lets me out,” he says, shaking his wooden leg.

[GM Note: If the man is ignored he will shrug and say, “Or, if you all are happy with your lot more power to ya; there ’as to be someone ’ere who wants to be rich!” He then drops back into the crowd. To any response at all—whether positive or negative—he will go on.]

View III: The man steps right up to your table. “Yessirree, ol’ Smidek has just what you need. I’d use it myself, but [clears throat] I’m not as spry as I once was.” The man lowers his voice and leans close. His breath smells like fish that have been lying on the beach for a few days.

“Treasure’s what I’m talkin’ about.” He clutches the bag close to him. “You’ve heard of the Sea Swan Mutiny? That was my ship. I’ve got the map to the treasure. No one else knows. Just ol’ Smidek.” He stops and gives you a sly look. “It’s not doing me one pence of good here. I’ll sell you the map, and you gets the treasure for yerself.”

[GM Note: Smidek wants to make as much as he can on the map. He won’t give people more than a quick glance at the map unless they buy it. He does his best to set the price according to the amount of money he thinks the party he speaks with will have in their possession. Smidek was actually once a sailor on the Sea Swan but it is hard to determine what his role on the ship was, or when he was aboard. It is up to the GM determine that.]

Plot Hooks:

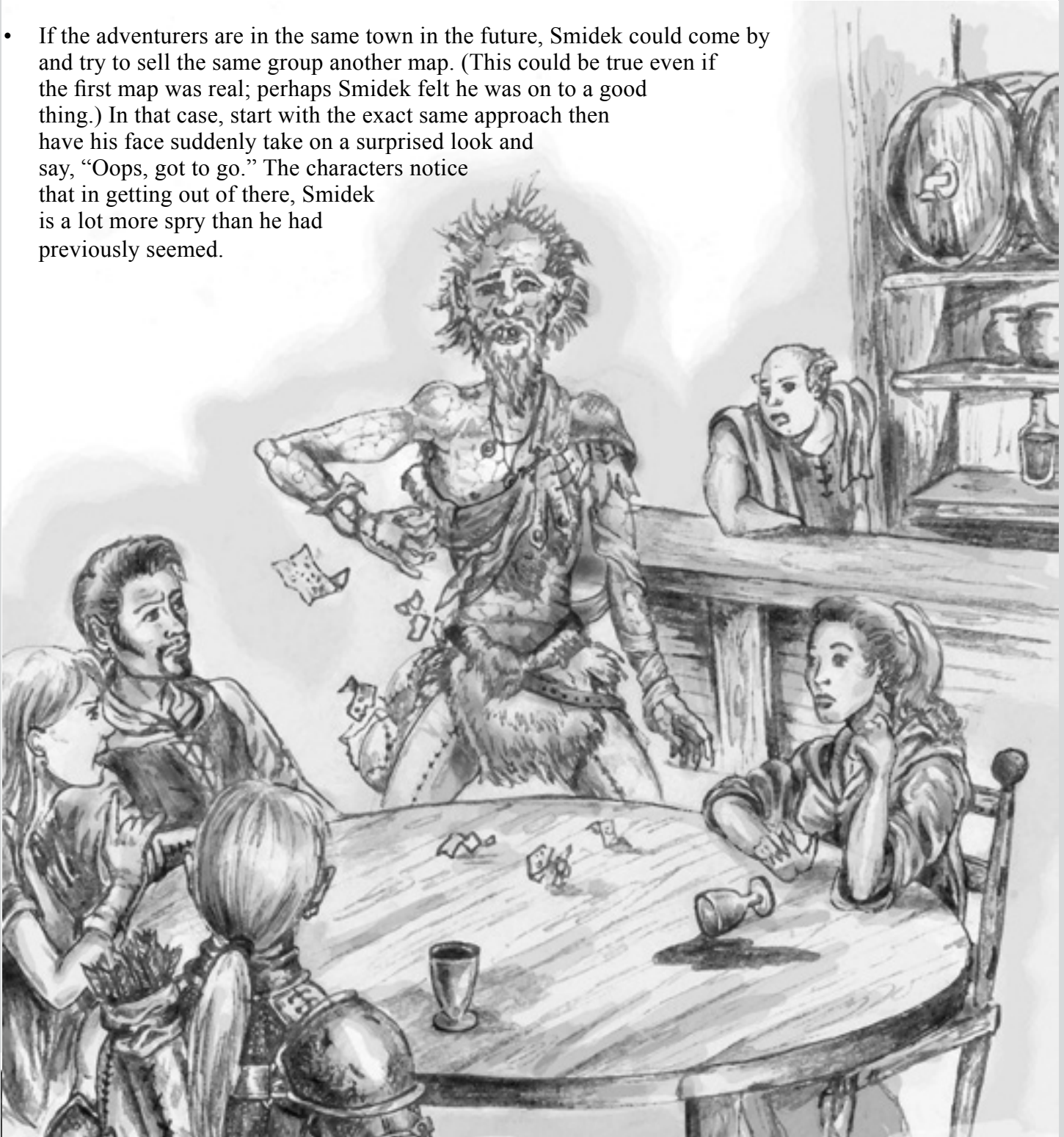
- The map is a real map, to treasure hidden after a mutiny aboard the merchant vessel Sea Swan. The mutineers put the valuable cargo somewhere it would be safe while they eluded pursuit, but a huge storm drove the ship a long distance and the location of the treasure was lost – or so it was widely believed. The GM could use this map to send the adventurers to a new area, or in search of some special item that was rumored to be aboard the Sea Swan.
- The map is a real map, but it is not the only copy. Smidek has made several copies on old parchment and is making extra money selling them all to different people. He is trying to do this in different parts of town, hoping to avoid any chance of the groups discovering each other’s maps. The adventurers could go after the treasure, but they may have competition!
- The map is a real map, but it will lead the party on a wild goose chase. Either the treasure was recovered years ago by someone else, or the map is inaccurate for some reason that will not be apparent until after traveling to the region.





The map might also be ambiguous; it could be accurate, if only one knew what was meant by some odd phrase such as “the third island north of the place where we spotted the great whale.”

- The map is a scam; Smidek has a whole pouch of similar maps and after he has sold one in this establishment, he will be off to another place to find another hopeful customer. Anyone who tries to follow it, or does the least bit of research, will discover the locations mentioned do not exist.
- If the adventurers are in the same town in the future, Smidek could come by and try to sell the same group another map. (This could be true even if the first map was real; perhaps Smidek felt he was on to a good thing.) In that case, start with the exact same approach then have his face suddenly take on a surprised look and say, “Oops, got to go.” The characters notice that in getting out of there, Smidek is a lot more sly than he had previously seemed.





18 *The Floating Mage*

Scene: An arrogant mage turns a walk through town into a spectacle.

View I: Ahead you can see an eddy in the crowd, people moving aside from someone coming down the street. The man stands a full head higher than most of those surrounding him and his movement is somehow odd; his pace is very smooth and he seems to almost glide as he approaches. A flicker of gold on his shoulders catches your eye, indicating the dress of a wealthy man.

View II: When the man gets nearer, you can see why his walk seems so strange. The mage (for so he must be) floats down the center of the twisting street, the hammered gold scales sewn onto his cloak gleaming against the green satin. As he approaches, invisible waves of force gently push spectators back; it seems the wizard likes his space and doesn't want anyone too close. One man turns unexpectedly and bumps into whatever sphere of force surrounds the floating mage. Losing his balance the man falls backward, glaring at the spell-caster. The wizard looks down his nose at the unfortunate fellow, gestures as if brushing him out of the way and says, "Move aside, mortal, or I shall be forced to obliterate you."

View III: As he passes nearby, the levitating mage looks in your direction, curls his lip, and quickly glances away. His unusual almond-shaped eyes of green and gold are set off by his figured silk tunic in the same colors and his ears show he has some elven heritage. His bare feet, which feature intricately painted toenails, never touch the ground. Softly muttering ancient words of power, the wizard continues on his path.

[GM Note: This is the mage Xing-chi, who has a reputation for being arrogant and cold-blooded. He seems to eschew companionship, and rumor has it that he came here from a far country after murdering his own teacher. Everyone seems to fear his wrath, although no one is quite sure what he would do if he were angered.]

Plot Hooks:

- Xing-chi loves the attention he gets from the people in the street, which is why he creates such a display. If the party catches his attention and showers him with flattery, he might grant them a boon: a few platinum coins to show his generosity, a minor spell cast upon them, or some other insignificant favor. On the other hand, if they annoy him by their request, any spell he casts may not be helpful at all.
- The mage is purposefully making a spectacle of himself as a distraction for something else going on at the same time. It may be pickpockets working the crowd, a theft or assassination taking place nearby, or some other action.
- Xing-chi is masquerading as a powerful wizard when actually he is not. One magic item produces the levitation effect while another creates the field of force that surrounds him. If anyone got too close, they could see that his rich garments are not so luxurious after all. He may be trying to attract the attention of a particular person, or he may be part of an elaborate scam.
- The wizard is truly powerful and he is on his way to perform a regular (daily/weekly/monthly) ritual at a place that needs his services: a temple or government building, on the city wall, etc.
- Xing-Chi is on his way to consult with someone of importance and is producing this show of power to impress the person with whom he is meeting.





- The mage is looking for a party to find an item for him, or to help him wrest an item of power from a rival wizard or overlord. However, he tends to kill his henchmen after their usefulness has waned (rather than pay them off) so adventurers should beware. Potential employees might be able to get some clues by the way Xing-chi talks about his previous hirelings, or someone who knows what happened in the past might inform them.

19 *Pretty Woman*

Scene: A lovely lady turns heads, dressed almost too well for just a walk down the street.

View I: **On the other side of the street, a beautiful woman catches your eye. Her auburn hair is set off strikingly by her dress of deep teal green, and the tiny white dog she is walking presents another nice contrast. The woman is generously endowed, and her full hips sway from side to side as she walks down the street in your general direction. You are not the only one to give her a second glance, but her eyes move from her dog to the scenery and she seems not to notice the attention.**

View II: **As you draw nearer this unknown woman you can see that her dress is trimmed with gold lace around the short puffed sleeves, and also around the edges of the low-cut bodice. Some of her soft curly hair is caught up in a knot and held with sparkling pins. She wears a jewel on a chain around her neck, as well as other jewelry, and carries the strings of her purse wrapped loosely around the hand not holding the dog's lead. Several people also eye her speculatively, and whether they are considering the value of the ornaments or of the woman, this lady walking alone may be in for trouble.**

View III: **Then, as if she feels your eyes upon her, she looks up and meets your gaze. You are close enough now to see that her eyes are a warm brown, and that the heavy fabric of her dress has a subtle pattern woven into it. You also catch a whiff of scent that reminds you of spring flowers. The lady gives you a polite smile then looks down and away, turning her attention back to her pet. [If one of the adventurers approaches the lady, delay or skip the following:] Just then a knife appears around the edge of her skirts and cuts the strings of her purse, which falls into a waiting hand. The lady cries out as the chain is roughly snatched from her neck, and you see the cutpurse dart through the crowd and disappear into a nearby alley.**





[GM Note: Lady Jamisa spent the past year officially in mourning for her husband on their isolated estate. Now that the time for mourning is past, she has decided to move to the city. She and her servants are staying at a small inn while she looks for a long-term residence. Lady Jamisa's purse holds only a few coins of each gold and silver; she carries more money in a pouch she can reach through a slit in the side seam of her dress but is not likely to take any out in public. The little dog (Prince) is well-behaved but will try to bite anyone who harasses his mistress.]

Plot Hooks:

- Lady Jamisa is a wealthy widow looking for some companionship, which could be provided by one or more of the adventurers:
- She would welcome a well-set-out local guide, or even someone who is also a stranger to town but offers to accompany her as she explores. She is also ripe for someone to take advantage of her; a player character could either be the one to do that, or the one to prevent it. If the group is local to the area, someone recommends one of them to Lady Jamisa as a guide and she sends a servant to contact them. The chosen guide will not necessarily put the name together with the lady seen in town earlier.
- She would like a respectable-looking companion with whom she can spend some time, whether that person is male or female.
- The lady's wealth is only a pretense; she is actively looking for a rich second husband. While she might be tempted by a wealthy protector, she is not yet ready to settle for a relationship that does not bring her the social security of marriage.
- Lady Jamisa is impressed with the heroes and hires one or more of them: One of the adventurers foils the attempted robbery and is offered a job on the spot as a guide or bodyguard. Or, after a successful robbery, Lady Jamisa is frightened. If the adventurers are at all sympathetic, she will try to hire one as a bodyguard.
- The little white dog runs away and one of the heroes catches it and returns it. Or, the dog is snatched away and one of the heroes either volunteers or is hired by Lady Jamisa to find it and return it safely.
- Lady Jamisa's estate is in a strategic location and several area nobles are scheming to obtain control of the lands. Attempts to date include romantic overtures, subtle coercion, and various strong-arm tactics, including threats to kidnap herself or members of her household. The lady is distressed and is in the city seeking a way to secure her estate from predation, but is not sure who she can trust.
- The lady is a trickster and the thief her partner. Their object is to lure would-be heroes into going with her to an isolated location so that she or her partner can rob them. The little dog is what makes her so disarming.
- While powerful in her own right (whether wizard, priestess, or other) Lady Jamisa is looking for a worthy person to undertake a quest, either out of altruism or for pay. She is using the theft, or the rescue of her dog, to test the mettle of possible candidates. If the adventurers don't impress her when she first encounters them, they may see her again—in another part of the city—using a similar set-up to continue her search for help.





20 Lamp Oil Thief

Scene: A young thief may be in for a tangle with the law.

View I: The shadows play against the walls of the buildings as you walk down the darkened streets. The oil street lamps have been lit by the watch and they give off some light on these main thoroughfares. It is late and the streets are clearing as you walk back to your lodging, but it is not yet curfew. You pass a ragged man slumped against the wall; out of the corner of your eye you see a couple members of the watch crossing the street to where the man sits. A snatch of their conversation comes to your ears as they pass behind you.

“Too damn hot [or “cold”, or “wet”], I say.” A gruff voice speaks.

“That’s for sure,” responds another. “I’ve ‘ad about enough of this. Ho, you there! Up and move along.”

View II: You round a slight bend in the street and see up ahead that a young lad has shimmied up one of the light poles. With a jar in one hand he is removing some of the lamp’s oil.

[GM Note: Some adventurers may decide to intervene at this point, either stopping the boy’s theft or aiding him in some way. If the lad is caught and accused of theft, his reaction will be the same as it would if the watch caught him; see below.]

Behind you there is the sound of booted feet and the creak of leather armor; the guards of the watch must be coming along behind you. They are grumbling again in carrying voices.

“Imagine after all that we’ve been through, we’re on street patrol.” The first voice says.

“What we need is some action to take our minds off ‘ow miserable it is,” answer the other.

“Righto.” The first voice speaks again. “Knocking a few ‘eads together would make the night much more agreeable.”

View III: As you draw close to the scrawny lad up the lamp pole, you see his clothing is little better than rags and his feet are bare. His small jar is nearly full. The guards will undoubtedly be around that angle in the street in a moment and catch him at his theft.

[GM Note: Request a reaction from the characters at this point if they have not previously given one. Some possible choices would be to warn the boy or even help him get away; call the watch; just keep walking; or step out of the way and just see what happens. If the player characters do not intervene, the guards will catch the boy before he climbs down, capture him (giving chase if necessary) and arrest him, confiscating the jar of oil and taking him to lock him up. If nabbed, the boy pleads for mercy, though the guards will pay no attention. [“No! Please don’t ‘urt me! I’m just trying to feed meself and me sickly little sister. We’re orphans. Please lemme go!”]

Plot Hooks:

- The boy really is stealing the oil to support his little sister. If the heroes help him out at all he will be very grateful. He will keep turning up whenever the adventurers are in town, trying to help them out or do them favors. The boy may be a nuisance, or he may turn out to be clever and streetwise and really be able to assist the group.]
- The boy has a sick grandmother and the oil is somehow a key to her recovery. (It might provide light for her treatment, give the ability to heat medicine over an oil lamp, etc.) If the adventurers help the boy, or find out the trouble and help his grandmother directly, she will be grateful. She is a wisewoman and will repay them by sharing her knowledge of nature (weather, seasons); plants (herbs, gardening); or local history and people.
- Stealing the lamp oil is part of the boy’s initiation into some group: the thieves’ guild, a gang from some other part of town, the ‘in crowd’ at a school for sons of nobility, or some other organization. If the boy is able to complete his task and get away, the heroes will likely never see him again. On the other hand, if they interfere and the lad is caught and jailed, his buddies will be out to get the people who did their recruit such a bad turn. This could be an annoyance, or it could be big trouble.





21 Uncharitable Giving

Scene: A cleric takes advantage of his position to require favors from those he is supposed to help.

View I: Some little commotion is going on in the small plaza outside the back door of a white temple with a bell tower; a good-looking young priest is distributing food to a group apparently made up of widows and orphans, and as usual there are some who feel they did not receive enough. A stocky servant in a linen tunic and round cap hands out bread and sometimes fruit, and a few pieces of cheese to some lucky women. In the meantime the priest, in a rich brown robe, passes out smiles or stern looks depending on whether the recipient is appropriately grateful or complaining. Those who are given both cheese and fruit as well as bread seem to be receiving the most smiles, which makes sense as they appear to be expressing the most gratitude, one even going so far as to kiss the priest's hand.

View II: Moving a little closer, you can see the servant does not look very happy at his role in the food distribution, though it is not arduous. Two women do try to persuade him to give them fruit along with their bread, but he just shakes his head, unwilling to meet their eyes, and gestures them toward the priest. The next woman, pretty despite her extreme slenderness, has three skinny children hanging on her skirt. She receives four pieces of fruit and a large wedge of cheese as well as bread, which excites the children very much but seems to make the woman extremely unhappy. She glances at the clergyman once and he gives her a welcoming smile, but that only disturbs her more. She hurries her children past you, a sick look on her face and tears in her eyes.

View III: The two women who were refused more food step over to talk to the cleric, and he guides them over to one side of the diminishing group. The he takes the arm of the first, who is probably old enough to be his mother, and guides her a few steps further away. This brings the pair not too far from where you are standing, and some of his words carry to your ears: "...loyal members... service to the temple... tomorrow morning..." The woman nods and the priest turns and puts his hand at her back, gently urging her to where his assistant waits. "Marmond!" he calls out, then gestures toward the woman and nods to the baskets with the remaining food. Marmond pulls out another piece of bread and a wedge of cheese and helps the dame get them arranged in her cloth bag. His eyes follow her as she trudges away wearily and he continues to look in that direction rather than turning his attention back to his master.

In the meantime, the priest turns back to the other, younger, woman. Her clothes are clean though patched, and she was undoubtedly pretty before she fell on hard times. Her breasts are rounded though her arms are thin; perhaps she is still suckling a babe. The cleric puts his back to his assistant, standing quite close to the young woman and speaking to her in low tones. She does not appear to like his information, because she shakes her head several times. The man's face takes on a sly look and he seems to be insisting on something but the woman looks toward the ground and turns her head away from him. While she is looking away, the man brings his hand up between their bodies and caresses the woman's breast. That gets a reaction, as the woman jerks back and her hand flies up to slap the man's face. Instead he catches her wrist and holds it, amused at her reaction. He makes one last remark, then releases her with a disdainful gesture and heads back to the door. The man in the tunic gathers up the last of the food and follows behind, but not without a glance to the woman so rudely dismissed.





That young woman is hurrying away in tears, clutching the one loaf of bread she was allotted. At the edge of the plaza she is halted by an elf woman dressed all in black, and with long black hair. (Black hair is not usually a color that comes naturally to elves; it is very likely dyed.) You see the elf take the other woman's arm and speak earnestly to her. The she slips the young woman a small pouch, pats her arm, and lets her go on her way. The elf looks after her for a moment and then quietly moves off a different direction.

[GM Note: The cleric Juseron oversees distributions to widows and orphans for his temple. Scrupulous with the funds, no one could accuse him of any misappropriation. He is not so scrupulous, though, with his approach to the needy women he is supposed to be helping. Under the guise of 'service to the temple,' he requires services of many of them and so his rooms are cleaned, his clothes laundered, new garments sewn, and so on. He also has other, more intimate, needs attended to by some of the women who are desperate for a little more food for their children. It's a good thing he likes them skinny, because the women coming for help are always underfed and in some cases by the time they consent to come to his bed they are very thin indeed.]

[The priest's assistant, Marmond, loyally served the previous holder of the position but now only his vows keep him from walking away from what he considers an immoral situation. He obeys Juseron's orders, because he believes his commitments to the temple require that, but will try to work around them if he can. The dark-clad elf discovered Juseron's tendency to prey on the poor women who come to him for aid and is working on a way to expose him for the scoundrel he is without harming the needy women in the process. In the meantime, Anasea (as she calls herself here) uses her thievery skills to gain a bit of coin she can share with those trying to avoid being dependent on Juseron's good graces.]

Plot Hooks:

- Marmond has alerted others to the priest's activities, to no effect, so he has been devoutly praying for aid. Now he has noticed the interest of the adventurers and is convinced that they party has been sent to help. He will contact them and try to involve them in correcting the situation.
- The priest secretly runs a slave ring. The local officials who are suspicious are unable to intervene due to a lack of concrete evidence and the positive reputation the priest manages to maintain for all the good things he ostensibly does. Now the eldest daughter of a prominent land owner is missing and he is sure she was lured away and taken by the priest. He has gotten no satisfaction from the authorities (either they don't believe his accusations are possible, or they just shake their heads) so he is searching for someone else to find his daughter.
- City officials are aware of Juseron's increasing victimization of local women and have wanted to rein it in, but they have bigger problems on their hands. A lord outside the city is dunning the populace for his "protection" and threatens to send his bully boys to collect if the city doesn't keep paying. Food is already scarce and the city's treasury too weak to mount a vigorous response. Officials are looking for a smaller group that might be able to dissuade the threatening lord and then take the lead in cleaning up the corruption in the city.
- The black-clad elf had gone to some lengths to disguise herself because she once had problems with this priest and has sworn to hold him responsible. However, she can't do it alone. Even if she can convince his superiors of his transgressions, the priest won't just submit quietly. It would be easier and more certain to show him the error of his ways herself, if she could find a little help. If the adventurers express any interest in or concern about the situation, she will approach them (immediately or later) and ask for their assistance.
- A member of the party is from the city and knows people who have been hurt by the priest's unethical behaviors. (It could be that a mother, sister, love interest, or friend was pressured to provide services to the priest.) No longer a helpless youth, the adventurer is now in a position to help the priest see the error of his ways.







22 *Three Jesting Guardsmen*

Scene: Three guards, confident enough to let their humor show in public, send another on an unknown mission.

View I: **A little way down the street you see three guardsmen talking to a young man; one of the guards is holding the reins of a saddled chestnut horse. The guardsmen are wearing tabards emblazoned with an emblem, over chainmail, and are each armed with a longsword and dagger. The young man wears leather armor and also a longsword, and holds a small round shield. The men all seem to be joking with each other. Presently, the young man takes the reins of the horse the guardsman is holding and mounts it.**

View II: **The men are not speaking quietly and you are now close enough that you can hear what they are saying. As the young man turns the mount away from the group, the tall thin one of the trio tell him, “Remember, time is of the essence. Ride hard! They will have a fresh mount for your return.”**

At that point, the shortest and stockiest of the guardsmen steps forward and slaps the rear of the horse. As the horse shoots away, he calls after the young man, “Yes, and be careful of the bystanders and pedestrians that may cross your path.” He laughs heartily as the youth quickly guides the running mount around startled pedestrians who are trying to scramble out of his way. “Hurry back, with good news this time,” the third shouts last, still laughing.

View III: **The guardsmen turn and walk down the street in your direction, joking and chuckling as they go. The stocky one seems to be doing most of the laughing now. The taller man has become more serious, and is carefully examining the street and the people around them. The third of the group (who is more of an average height and very athletic-looking) suggests, “Let’s get back to the**

barracks before we are too terribly missed. The regular patrol will be by soon.” The others nod, and the three men pick up their pace and move on without speaking.

[GM Note: These men are local guards, or part of the king’s guards, or something else, depending on the plot hook chosen. In any case, if the guardsmen are approached they will be generally polite, but act as if they need to be on their way. They will answer questions regarding directions, but will not be chatty. The longer they are engaged in conversation, the greater the chance the short stocky guard will say something he thinks should be funny, but may be offensive to some characters, such as:

- [“Check with the brothel down the street, they have always given me good directions.”
- [“If you need more help, the church up the street always has a priest on duty.”
- [“Go down to the docks; they always have what you need at the dock, and you would fit in better there as well.”

[Then he will laugh as if to a private joke. The other two will try to placate any offended character and disengage from the conversation in order to be on their way. However, if they are insulted, beware—they are each expert swordsmen.]

Plot Hooks:

- Local officials are siphoning off tax revenues for their own benefit and therefore overtaxing the people of the town. This means prices are up, morale is low, and crime is on the rise. These three guardsmen and the young guard they just sent on his way are here in town on assignment from the king, investigating the suspected officials. The young man has been sent with news of their latest findings, for the king’s ears only.
- The local thieves’ guild is paying off nearly the entire town watch. As a result, few thieves are ever apprehended, and those who are caught are generally let go “with a warning” once out of sight of the victim. Robbery and pickpocketing





have become commonplace, and merchants are arming themselves in an attempt to keep possession of their own property. These three guardsmen, and the young man who just left, are the last guards in the town watch who are not 'on the take.' All four have survived assassination attempts and have become thorns in the guild's side, being responsible for putting quite a few of their number in jail. Almost as fast as these guards put the thieves in, though, a local official seems to be finding ways to get the thieves freed.

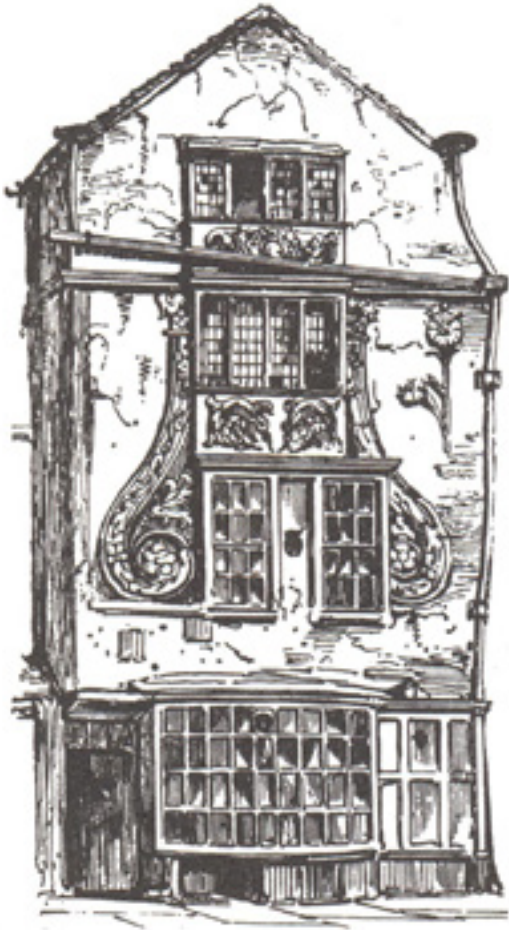
The younger guard has just now headed to the king's marshal in a town a few days away with evidence of the malfeasance. The local thieves' guild will no doubt send men out to try to stop the young guard before he reaches his destination, but hopefully the marshal and his men will soon be heading this way to make things right.

- The local bishop (or other powerful religious leader) of the city has created his own extensive guards, to "protect the people from their own vices as well as the evils of others." These guards are very prominent in the city, harassing people for such 'crimes' as public drunkenness or gambling, or haranguing women whom they view as dressed like prostitutes.
- The three guardsmen are the cream of the crop in the local guards and have been targeted by the bishop's men as undesirables, as they influence the local authorities against him. As the party watches, the three guards are accosted by a contingent of seven of the bishop's guards, told they are under arrest and ordered to surrender. The men refuse and a sword fight breaks out. (The adventurers can chose a side and get involved if they wish, or not.) Each of the three guardsmen takes on at least two of the bishop's guards and fight them to a draw; in fact it seems like the three guardsmen have the upper hand.

Soon the bishop's guards retreat with their injured and the three guardsmen are on their way again. (If the party helped the guardsmen, the men with thank the group before proceeding and remember them positively should their paths cross in the future. If the adventurers helped the bishop's guard, the three will arrest them, or at least threaten them with arrest before leaving.)

- The town has a new prosecutor who is newly rich and not well trusted by the 'old money' in town. In addition, he is very conscientious, which makes him greatly disliked. The three guards and the young man work for him, investigating things and incidents in town. The investigators have many enemies in town themselves, but most people are in awe and in fear of their martial skills as they are veterans of the king's elite forces from the latest war. If the adventurers are from out of town, the men might ask them to help gather information for the prosecutor's current case, as strangers could ask questions less conspicuously than the well-known guardsmen.
- One of the three guardsmen is actually a noble, staying out of notice by the current régime in control of the city. His estate outside of town was confiscated by the local duke while he was away at war fighting for the king, and the duke's powerful relatives at court prevented the affronted noble from presenting his grievance to the king. Most people in town know the man only as a local guard, but the nobles of the area know who he is and watch him closely. The noble is quietly trying to find evidence of the wrongdoing on the part of the duke (and possibly other local nobles) with which he can get the king's attention and get him his birthright back. The other two guards are dedicated to him as the three served in the king's army together for some time. Since he is frequently watched, the noble guardsman may ask the adventurers to help him gather information against the local authorities or find the land titles that were changed while he was away at war.





23 Aiming to Misbehave

Scene: An innkeeper tries to keep his eye on his daughter, who has hers on the adventurers.

View I: **The smell of roast pig wafts out and the sounds of laughter and a good time can be heard as the party comes into view of the inn. The courtyard has many tables occupied as the spit turns to the rhythms of a young man who seems more interested in the table next to him than in turning the spit. The crowd seems to be enjoying themselves, with the groups at a few tables raising mugs and saluting someone across the yard.**

View II: **Stone paving covers the courtyard and extends a couple feet beyond the fence surrounding it, giving a place to stand for those who have merely stopped to experience the scene. Enticing odors of roast pig, mutton, savory herbs, and vegetables tantalize the nostrils. The crowding people chatter and carouse amidst their plates and mugs of ale, happily feasting. The few servers are in constant motion as they cater to requests from all sides.**

View III: **The inn and its courtyard show signs of stability and long service in this location. The stones of the courtyard show a smooth polish from much use. The tables are made of dark wood that has worn well over time. The years of use have produced rounded comfortable spots in the chairs and benches. The servers, who continue to move constantly from one group to the next, appear to be the sons and daughters of the innkeeper. One daughter is obviously distracted from her duty, asking questions of different groups about the goings on outside the city. She can't seem to get enough of their stories.**

[GM's Note: The distracted daughter is Bellia, whose current dream is to become an adventurer, despite the fact that her training involves the skills needed to run an inn, not survive in the wilderness. She will try to hear as many adventuring stories as she can, and if she believes a group is sympathetic to her, she will try to talk them into letting her join. Her father, Jarreth, is very protective of his family and not fond of adventurers, although increasingly this tends to be where his clientele is leaning. If he sees Bellia taking what he views as an unhealthy interest in a group he will call her away and give her something else to do. Although Jarreth has no adventuring skills, he swings a mean leg of lamb.]





Plot hooks:

- Bellia will try to find a way to be to extend her acquaintance with adventurers past the evening's celebration at the inn. If they are staying at Jarreth's inn, she will find every excuse to be around them and try to get them to chat and tell stories. If they are staying elsewhere, she will follow them back to their inn and then turn up there the next day with some thin excuse. She continues to pop up in unlikely places when the adventurers least expect her. The fact that she is trying to get into their good graces may have side benefits, as she might turn up with some small item or two that the party has been wanting but has not been able to acquire.
- When the adventurers leave on their next travel or mission, Bellia will follow them and get into real trouble in the process, or just make trouble for the adventurers. If she does get into trouble, her father the innkeeper will blame the adventurers for putting foolish thoughts in her head.
- Bellia hires ruffians to kidnap her right in front of the adventurers, so the party will feel a need to be heroic and rescue her, after which she hopes to inveigle her way into their group. She is prepared to be roughed up just a little, in the interest of making it look real, but is not expecting bad treatment since she is the one paying. However, the rogues she hired believe they can get a much greater payoff if they truly hold Bellia for ransom, since her father has a large and undoubtedly profitable inn. On their own, they never would have considered trying to grab her as it would be too risky. Since she was willing to cooperate with them, though, they are willing to take advantage of the situation.
- Bellia disguises herself as a thief and attempts to seduce one of the party later in the night after the adventurers have gotten into their cups and her father thinks she is safe in her own bed. She will try to attach herself to the group, relying on her very poor thieving abilities and guile as well as her sexual prowess. If she is caught with the adventurers in their rooms by her father or someone else that recognizes her, she will be taken back to her father and the party will probably be put out on the street depending on the circumstances. Otherwise she will stay with the group for as long as she can even though she has very little in the way of adventuring skills.
- Bellia bought a love potion from the local apothecary, and she slips it into the drink of the leader of the adventuring party or someone she perceives as a powerful person in the group. She will then present herself in an attempt to become the object of the powerful potion's spell effects. Of course, her success is not guaranteed. Bellia obviously hopes this action will cause the group to let her go with them when they leave and she will try to sneak away with them, disguised (if necessary) so that her father doesn't notice her.





24 *Blind Old Woman*

Scene: An elderly blind woman makes others nervous, possibly because she sees things others don't.

View I: As you walk down the street you notice the crowd ahead of you moving around an old woman with a gnarled oaken cane, giving her a wide berth. She looks as if she is using the cane to feel her way along rather than leaning on it, but still moves in your direction at a good pace.

View II: As the woman comes closer you note she wears a wide skirt and sturdy blouse (common to peasant women in the area), overlaid with at least two shawls. The fabric of her skirt is clean but badly worn and her shawls have holes. Despite her closed eyes, the dame walks with confidence; she must know these city streets very well. Others on the street are obviously avoiding her, make an effort to stay out of her path. To one side, you see a mother grab her daughter's arm and pull her back; she speaks quietly but the word "witch" carries to your ears. The woman with the cane turns her head sharply; evidently there is nothing wrong with her hearing.

View III: When she draws quite near you can see the old woman is not only blind, her eyelids are actually sewn shut. As she begins to pass you by, her head suddenly comes up and she looks in your direction. [When the adventurers and the old woman cross paths she stops and grabs the hand of the nearest person in the party:] The woman grabs ahold of your hand. You can feel her own wrinkled and calloused hand on your skin as she begins to speak. "Give heed to the words of an old woman, my friend. I see very

little and yet I see much. I could feel your coming and it brings much strife to this city. For but a few silvers I can tell you what I see and you will be the wiser for it." As the woman waits for your response, you notice the lines of age on her face and catch the faint smell of a sweet rare tobacco.

[GM Note: This woman has spent her whole life in this region and she knows the city and surrounding countryside like the back of her hand. However, she will not under any circumstances divulge her name. If the party asks other citizens they will say that she is known only as the "witch." Some believe her to be a true witch with hidden magical powers, while others believe she is simply a charlatan using her wits to garner money from unsuspecting visitors. The only things of value she carries are a bag with her pipe and possibly a few coins, and a small pouch with a rare kind of tobacco which she loves to smoke. It is a rare weed, grown hundreds of miles away; nobody knows how she always seems to have a good supply of the uncommon tobacco, nor is she interested in selling it to anyone.]

Plot Hooks:

- The "witch" is a propheticess who has chosen to live simply among the people. Her prophecies are often disregarded, but never wrong. She will tell the full measure of what she sees, even if the news will be unwelcome. (In fact, that was how she ended up being blinded.) She has no means of support other than the coin or gifts she is given for the news she brings.
- The old woman actually possesses some small measure of supernatural power. She feels drawn to certain people, and when she touches them she is able to get a glimpse into their future. Her visions are not always accurate





and they often include only minor information about some future event that involves the person touched. The GM should decide what information the seer is able to relate based on the situation. In any event the information she divulges should be minor and in no way give the adventurers significant knowledge of what is to happen in the future.

- The “witch” is indeed a swindler. She is in fact blind, but her highly developed sense of smell allows her to locate newcomers to the city. She will tell a tale of impending danger to anyone who is foolish enough to give her money. The GM should make up some completely unrelated tale that will strike fear in the adventurers. A person who has the cunning to sense people’s motivations may be able to determine that the woman is lying. If caught in her lie she will begin to yell for the city guards, claiming that she is being harassed by the adventurers.
- The woman is not a witch, nor does she have any special powers. Instead she overheard a man (in a tavern known to be frequented by a local group of bandits) talking about a group of strangers who would be entering the city soon. The bandits plan to keep an eye on the adventurers and then wait in ambush just outside of town when they leave, hoping to take the adventurers for everything they have, including their lives. The old woman has had neighborhood children (or her own numerous grandchildren) on watch for the group mentioned and so was able to put herself in their path. However, she is not altruistic and figures she should get a bit of coin for telling the adventurers what she knows, which is why she pretends to be clairvoyant.

25 Wizard vs. Thief

Scene: An old man turns out to be well able to take care of himself.

View I: **A man with white hair and red and blue robes trudges ahead of you, carrying a woven bag full of potatoes, onions, and some greens. It seems heavy for him and he leans to his left, but he moves along at a good pace.**

View II: **The old man stops at the gate to a fence around a stone home, and sets down his sack to fumble for a key in one of the bags and pouches he wears at his waist. He applies the key to the lock and struggles with it, trying to get it to open. You hear him shout at the gate, then rattle the bars and kick it at the bottom.**

View III: **When you draw closer you hear the man muttering to himself, occasionally speaking to the gate to berate or shame it. As the gate finally unlocks, a young man runs past and grabs the elder’s purse, roughly shoving him aside and starting to run off. He does not make it far, though; the white-haired man straightens up, snaps out a few words, and magic flows from his fingertips. The would-be pickpocket is frozen in place but you can see that his eyes are wide as he is stuck looking over his shoulder. The wizard steps over to the thief, plucks the leather purse out of the rogue’s unmoving fingers, and then walks back to his shopping bag. At that point he notices you, and he eyes you a moment, waiting to see what you do.**

[GM Note: The old man is Linistan, a wizard of some power. He is grumpy at the moment, but may be willing to answer some questions from the adventurers. If the party does not interrupt him he will go in, lock his gate, and proceed into his house. The spell on the pickpocket will wear off in a few minutes, at which point he will stumble off, confused and embarrassed.]





Plot Hooks:

- The old wizard is still very sharp and has a considerable amount of knowledge about the local area and its rumors and myths. He will give advice or information, for a price. Part of that price will be taking the thief back into town to where his mother worries about him and letting her know what he was doing.
- The old wizard has a message that he wants delivered to a general store in town, letting them know his needs for the coming week. He offers the party ten gold to deliver it today so he does not have to go out tomorrow, since he believes it will be raining then.
- The old wizard is in need of a very expensive and rare spell component, perhaps some dragon scales or blood. He is willing to pay a few hundred gold for the party to



go into a nearby larger town and find out if any of his contemporaries there have any he could buy. He gives the adventurers a scroll with a message spell on it to let him know if someone has what he needs; if so, he will then teleport to their location and make the purchase himself. He just does not want to

take the time to look for the spell component himself. He will promise and deliver to the party a couple hundred gold if their search is unsuccessful, or as much as 500 if they find the component he needs.

- The old wizard is a bit upset with the authorities of the town (for some reason which he refuses to divulge), but he is willing to hire the group to do something for him, if there is a spellcaster in the party. He informs the adventurers

that there is a large stone statue of a bull just outside the town hall. He has a scroll which he would like to have read to the bull in the





middle of the night some night soon. (The wizard may try to explain this as a prank, but say that he is too old to make the quick getaway needed.) The scroll holds a spell to animate stone which has been modified to instruct the animated giant stone bull what to do while the spell effects last. (The spell instructs the bull to completely destroy the land office inside the town hall building. Of course, this will result in quite a bit of destruction on the way in to the proper room. It could be possible, though difficult, to determine this if someone familiar with spellcraft studies the scroll carefully.) The adventurers get a cool two hundred gold when they agree to do the deed. The wizard also tells the group they have four days in which to do the deed or there will be a curse and the scroll will

self-destruct. The scroll also has an attachment spell on it so that it cannot be easily discarded, although the old man does not mention that. It will appear again in the spellcaster's backpack or luggage if it is thrown out. It also has a curse on it that activates if it is not read within four days such that all people within twenty feet of the scroll when it activates will suffer bad luck for the next ten days. If read at the proper place within four days, the scroll will simply self-destruct, harming no one.

- If the party threatens the old wizard, he will ask them if they would like to join the statuary in his sculpture garden, and tell them to be on their way. If they attack or try to harm him in any way, the old man will attempt to turn them to stone. If any survive he will

animate the statues in his sculpture garden and have them chase the party away, or crush them, if they stay to fight.





Street Scene Shards

01 “Come back!” a venerable woman shouts, brandishing a rolled-up pamphlet. Similar leaflets litter the square in the wake of the parting crowd. “I’m going to be late!” A naked tot, splashing in the crystalline waters of the fountain in the center of the square, cackles with glee and then shuffles quickly behind a golden statue of a stag bending to drink. The little one peeks from between the statue’s legs and giggles as the woman tries to determine how to get him out without getting wet herself.

02 To drum up attention for his product, a dwarven locksmith wanders the streets, draped in his wares. Iron and copper chains hang over his broad shoulders and wrap around his ample belly, with dozens of samples of his work hanging from them. He beats an old bronze shield with a craftsman’s hammer and shouts out his prices to anyone who will listen. [GM Note: Algar Whitetell is trying to get rid of surplus stock and build the capital necessary to expand his small shop. He will sell any of the locks he carries for 60-75% of their usual values, depending on how well someone haggles. He is adorned with two dozen regular locks and seven others that are masterfully made.]

03 A trio of barristers, distinctive with their purple and black robes and shaven heads, walks quickly through the city, so intent on their goal that they are oblivious to those they push aside. They loudly argue the merits of a local taxation case to a beleaguered judge who walks in front of them, still dressed in his powdered white wig and spectacles. The look on his face seems to indicate that he is obviously tired of their squabbling and would really rather be free of them.

04 A young woman moves through the streets, twirling and dancing as she goes. She sings a melody, innocent and uplifting, as she weaves through the crowd deftly. Close behind her is another young woman, beleaguered-looking and carefully keeping an eye on the dancing girl. She mutters apologies as she pushes past people. [GM Note: The dancing woman is not of sound mind; her friend and caretaker is trying to get to her and get her back home, preferably without causing a public commotion.]

05 Three red-skinned young women saunter through the theater district’s many inns and dancehalls, laughing among themselves and speaking rapidly in an exotic dialect. All are dressed in gowns made from what appear to be swan wings and white silk, and all are heavily perfumed. They swirl past you, laughing as they make their way from party to party; your nose itches from their overwhelming scent.

06 A wide-nosed gnome, wrapped up past his lips in tight purple banding, calmly flips through a pamphlet while sitting in a comfortable overstuffed chair just inside a nicely maintained apothecary. He watches the passers-by and lifts a hand in greeting to several. If a visitor steps inside, he’ll cheerfully introduce himself as “Doctor Finnis Flaeon,” and announce that leeching and enemas will cure all ills. [GM Note: For a few pieces of gold, “Dr. Flaeon” will gladly work his medical miracles on anyone feeling under the weather. Needless to say, the doctor has no real medical skill and all a person would get for the money is humiliation, and temporary weakness due to the leeching.]





07 People on the street are stopping to stare, and some are even moving aside for a tall woman who is walking your way. In many ways she gives the impression that she is ‘not from around here.’ She is not beautiful but she is striking, being about six feet tall with long dark hair. The woman is dressed in a calf-length sleeveless green tunic over pants of ivory leather and knee-high hard black boots. At her side is a scabbard, narrower than the ones you are used to seeing and wrapped in black leather. The woman carries a small piece of parchment and consults it frequently. As you watch she stops one person and seems to be asking something, but the man shakes his head and just moves on. A young woman stands in the open window of a shop and the tall lady steps up to talk to her. When the stranger turns away from you, you see she is wearing her shield on her

back. Instead of being covered with canvas with a device painted on, the woman’s shield is covered in ivory leather which is stitched with the design of a butterfly. The colors of the stitching are rich and deep and almost glow in the light. [GM Note: This woman is indeed from someplace far away. The parchment contains the name of a person or place she needs to find and she is trying to ask directions. Unfortunately, she speaks very little of the common tongue and is primarily sounding out simple questions also written on her parchment. The woman understands much more than she can express, however, and can get the general idea of directions given slowly, in simple words. In her own country she is an experienced warrior, but as a stranger she is trying hard to travel peacefully.]

08 This high-brow street features awnings covering a portion of the walkway in front of each shop and eating establishment. At their outer edges, the awnings are fastened to iron poles which hold fancifully shaped copper braziers at the top. Naked flames belch from the mouths the braziers, which have been formed not to resemble dragons and other beasts, as might be expected, but caricatures of famous local politicians.

09 The door of each home in this neighborhood is painted with a simple X-shaped pictogram drawn with what looks like a mix of blue and purple berry juices, and animal fat. Flies buzz quietly, enjoying the curious offerings. If asked, any of the locals will gladly tell you the reason for the marking: to celebrate their annual hog roast that commemorates the autumn and ends the growing season.

10 A group of northern barbarians have taken over a section of one the great open-sided trading halls and set up a canopy there to shade their leader from the sun. The section they commandeered has a small platform for auctions and here they have installed their white-bearded





prince on a chair covered with cloaks, almost as if he were on a throne. One or two warriors stand nearby, fingering their daggers and frowning at those who stare. However, most of the northerners move about the open area, checking out the wares for sale and asking questions using a combination of gestures and a badly mangled version of the common speech.

11 The middle of a busy market is an odd place for a statue. A stone figure of a kneeling boy is protected by a crude tent, and foot traffic snarls into a crawl as heavily laden merchants try to work their way around the figure. The statue's position makes it extremely difficult to get a horse and wagon through the market at all.

Upon closer inspection, the sculpture itself is a stunningly realistic depiction of young human boy, about age ten or so, kneeling on the ground as if looking for something there. The fragile remains of long-decayed flowers surround the statue's feet and a few sweets rest in the stone boy's outstretched hand. [GM Note: The 'statue' is actually the remains of Tobias, a local farmer's son who was transformed when a cockatrice wandered into the marketplace on a black day ten years ago. If the adventurers ask around, it will not be difficult to learn the whole sad story, including the location of the boy's surviving family. The Garretts are a prolific clan that lives on one of the smaller farms surrounding the city. Despite having 13 surviving children, they have never forgotten unlucky Tobias. The Garretts are the only people who still leave offerings to Tobias, and their blind dedication is the only thing keeping Tobias from being moved from his rather inconvenient location. The Garretts are terrified that moving the statue will destroy the boy, and they remain convinced that he can still be saved.... somehow. [Someone who finds a way to cure Tobias will quickly become a local hero. The Garretts will



offer the person the hand of one of their many children in marriage, providing what is for them a grand dowry (or wedding gift) of 45 pieces of gold. It may be that due to his long exposure to magic, the reborn Tobias Garrett would discover a natural talent for sorcery. His eyes remain stone grey, but he can see perfectly through the new organs, and he instinctively understands magic dealing with earth, time, and paralysis.]

12 The rain, which seems to have been going on for days, has stopped for the moment and the district's cats venture out from under piles of trash and out of sheltered corners to hunt. An old grey tom with a deformed extra ear growing out of the right side of his skull rubs past your ankles as he slinks along, searching for something to kill.





13 Your eyes are drawn to an alleyway, where it seems that a young boy is lying on the ground resting. However, as you draw closer you notice the large crimson stain on his shirt. No one else seems to notice nor care about the boy; they all pass by without giving his body a glance. [GM Note: The boy is dead, killed by a single slash across the throat. He was a homeless orphan, and so has no family to mourn him. He has no items of value on him; presumably if he ever had any, they were taken by whoever killed him.]

14 From the sign over the door, it would seem the Canellfeld Brothers have moved their scribe's shop outdoors to take advantage of a beautiful summer day. The fattest and eldest-looking brother squats in the shop's doorway, going over a lengthy inventory with a grizzled old farmer as the two share some good beer from a sweating pitcher. The two younger brothers sit in the shade of an old oak and laboriously hand-copy local tax regulations for a city contract, glancing enviously at the older brother and his mug.

15 Every tree, lamp post, and similar column within sight has been wrapped with cheap red and purple ribbons sewn with fish designs in white thread. As you stroll down the streets, you have to duck your head to pass under the dangling loops of colorful bunting. Everywhere revelers are buying ceramic trinkets of sea monsters, and planks of salted fish and octopus; the salty seafood smell makes your mouth water. Two women stand on a street corner, their hair let down and tousled, wearing long tight skirts made of some shiny green fabric, with short trains at the back. It takes a moment to register, then you realize that the two are dressed to appear like mermaids. It is not clear if they are streetwalkers, or just women out having a good time, but they seem to be attracting a lot of attention.

16 As you walk down the city street, thick dark clouds are rolling in from the west. The air cools quickly, causing an involuntary shiver. A light rain begins to fall and you look around for a place to take shelter from the coming storm. Suddenly a young boy, dressed in rags and already soaking wet, rushes up to your party from out of nowhere. He grabs the nearest person by the arm and yells in a frightened voice, "I told them it was coming. I told them. Now it can't be stopped! Run from here as fast as you can." With that said, the wild-eyed boy takes off running down the road. [GM Note: The boy is basically a simple commoner. If the GM chooses to have him actually possess powers of premonition, they should be treated as an extraordinary ability possessed by an otherwise ordinary young boy. Everyone in town knows him as a street urchin who has scraped together a life from fallen bread crumbs and handouts, though nobody knows where he is from. If asked, any citizen will say that the boy is simply mad and is always rambling about terrible things whenever a storm arises.

[At the GM's discretion, the boy may indeed possess some powers of special foresight. The storm could possibly be the precursor to a tornado that will wreak havoc through the town in several hours. On the other hand, it could be the magical creation of a powerful sorcerer who has been paid by a rival city to cause destruction and confusion in order to draw people and trade away from the town.]

17 A pair of male barbarians swagger through the town square, conspicuous in their blood-spattered furs and self-inflicted scars, with their bone and obsidian spears lashed to their backs. They seem to speak very little of the language as they are mostly communicating with food vendors and shopkeepers by pointing and gesturing. You catch a glimpse of the coins they are using and those are strange, too.





18 The entrance door of every house and business is covered with intricate hieroglyphs in blue shellfish ink. On the inside, every exit door is covered in similar hieroglyphs in a greenish white ink which almost seems to glow against the dark, polished oak that is most common for doors here. Most of the sigils have a worn place in the center, which becomes understandable as you watch people touch the center of the symbol as they go in and out of buildings. [GM Note: According to local folk lore, the hieroglyphs mimic the protective runes adorning the entrance to the underworld. These are placed on the doors during an observance in memory of the dead and will not be found there all year round.]

19 The arched wooden bridge in the middle of the town is busy this morning, with pedestrians, hand carts, and mule-drawn carts crossing in both directions. A boy about eight years of age sits on the edge of the bridge about a third of the way across.

His feet swing slowly over the edge and he holds a fishing pole with a substantial line dropped into the gently flowing water below the bridge. He seems to be doing well; he has another line tied to the bridge's railing with three good-sized fish already on it. A large skinny dog slinks along between pedestrians, nosing around for any fallen tidbits of food. The mongrel spots the boy and reaches for a fish or two with his snout. Turning, the boy slaps the dog on the neck with his hand. "Get away mutt, these are my fish!" Instead of backing off, the dog bares his teeth and lets out a deep growl. Unfazed, the boy grabs the scaling knife lying by his side. The dog barks and lunges forward but the boy is ready—he pokes the tip of his knife squarely into the dog's nose.

The mutt lets out a yelp and jumps back, and manages to get its tail caught under the wooden wheel of a mule cart. The yelping turns into a howl

as the dog unsuccessfully tries to pull his tail free. As the wheel rolls forward, the sudden release causes the dog to barrel forward again. Rather than face the boy and his knife, the animal twists to the side and slides off the edge of the bridge. He falls nearly ten feet to the water and comes up wet but swimming. The dog swims across the stream and climbs out, heading off in search of easier food. Meanwhile, the boy has pulled up another fish. He adds it to his stringer then gathers up his equipment and heads across to the other side of the bridge.

20 A well-fed, finely dressed slave, his facial ownership tattoos indicating his servitude to the city's mayor, strides quickly thorough the street. He carries a heavy wooden box with an open top, filled with slices of meat and cheese on fine white rolls, fresh fruit, and roasted mutton joints wrapped in waxed paper. It appears he was sent out to fetch lunch while his master was busy in a meeting.

21 The snow piled in the yards around the homes in this ward has yellowish streaks and stinks with a distinctive tang. Glancing around you catch sight of two young housewives walking up opposite sides of the winding street, carefully pouring a trickle of yellowish fluid from jars onto the snow. [GM Note: Anyone who has hunted bear, or had training in the wilderness, has a chance to recognize the distinctive odor as that of bear urine. Otherwise either of the women can identify it. If questioned about the practice, the housewives say that during the winter, everyone on the street stores fish and fresh meet under the snowbanks to keep it as long as possible. The bear urine keeps roaming bands of wild dogs away. If asked about the urine, one woman will indicate that her husband gets it for people to use. If the adventurers press the issue, and ask how he gets bear urine, she will say she doesn't ask him about the details! What she will not say is that her husband is a werebear and produces the liquid himself when needed.]





22 An elf in exotic robes strolls about the marketplace, looking with interest at all the sights. He appears to be contemplating the antics of all the humans as he walks with his fingertips touching in front of him. Neither scruffy dogs dashing past his feet nor dirty children tumbling in his way ruffle his calm. Woven tabs hang from the edges of his hood down past his shoulders, embroidered with some type of symbols in gold. The elf buys a few tidbits of food and nibbles on them as he rambles; his plan (as far as you can tell) seems to be to try a little bit of everything. Once or twice he takes two or three bites of a food, wrinkles his nose, and then throws it to any dogs nearby. His preferred food seems to be the different types of fruit available, and he finally settles down to munching on strawberries as he ambles.

[GM Note: This elf is a cleric, come to town to visit a temple of a similar alignment for reasons which are up to the GM. Before he heads for the temple, though, he is spending a little time just getting to know the city. It has been centuries since he has been out of the elven lands, and he is acquainting himself with what humans are like these days. He speaks the common tongue fairly well, but is very formal and uses archaic terms.]

23 A fat possum wanders down the dark street, and people passing step aside for it or give it a wide berth. It stops in the middle of the dark street and hisses at you menacingly. Around its meaty neck it has a heavy golden chain with a pendant of some kind. Moonlight reflects off one dark eye, but the other is curiously dull. The arrogant vermin refuses to move aside as you approach, hissing again imperiously as if expecting you to retreat. [GM Note: The possum is Minchi, the beloved pet and familiar of Arisus Boyle, a prosperous necromancer who occasionally acts as an undertaker. A close look will show that the creature has a false eye, made of a piece of jade which may be moderately valuable. The back of the pendant is inscribed, "MINCHI, beloved pet of Necromancer Arisus Boyle." Unknown to most, the stone in the pendant carries a spell that allows Boyle to see through it, giving him a view of everywhere his pet goes.]

24 A trash picker and two rag-and-bone men are tossing hunks of rotten fruit at neighborhood dogs for sport, as they make their nightly rounds. They're more than half drunk, talking too loud and making entirely too much noise for the late hour. Residents poke their heads out shuttered windows to shout at the men, but in this quarter they have no reason to expect the watch to respond to the disturbance.





25 A crowd of people is gathered in a building with one long open side. In the center of one short side an auctioneer stands on a platform, an elaborate armoire standing on the floor nearby. “Will no one—no one—offer a single coin for this fine, though slightly out of fashion, armoire?” A portly, bespectacled man at the podium chatters in frustration. The room is full of milling folks, all dressed in finery, but oddly silent. “Two of its four legs are perfectly serviceable, I’ll have you all know, and the main chamber—look at the quality here, won’t you—is large and...oh dear. Oh, dear me.” Inside the armoire, a skunk, baring its teeth and arching its back, guards a mess of leaves, parchment, and debris; you can see the movement of its kits from within the nest. A look of sudden insight creeps across the auctioneer’s features as the creature’s tail twitches and a lithe, demure woman to your right issues the first polite scream.

26 A golden-skinned woman in a tight dress is caressing an orc warrior in red enameled armor. Her pale dress is traced in green vines, and she looks like a vine herself as she has one leg and both arms wrapped around parts of the warrior. The pair is just inside the entrance to a tiny court between two shuttered stores, and despite the obvious distraction, the orc keeps a watchful eye on everything that passes in the street in front of him. [GM Note: The orc is called Red Burk; the woman is a prostitute whose name is Linini.]

27 A pretty, dark-skinned woman, her face studded with copper piercings and lined with henna tattoos, busies herself dusting an ancient stuffed polar bear that is displayed in the bay window of a taxidermist’s shop. It looks as if it has not been cleaned in years and its dingy fur is falling out in clumps. She sneezes often from all the dust her broom is stirring up.

28 As you approach the great gates of the city you notice a goodly number of people coming and going. All the wagons, and everyone with a bag or pack, are being quickly inspected and assessed a toll. It appears to be rather arbitrary and based upon the whims of the sergeant at arms. As you watch, a party of richly clad riders escorts a wagon out. They are neither stopped nor searched; the sergeant at arms only waves at them. A young woman carrying a bundle attempts to slip in the gate on the opposite side of the riders but the sergeant sees her. “You there! What’s in that bundle, missy?”

29 As she opens her bakery for the day, an old woman knocks icicles off her wooden shop’s awning with a beautiful black lacquered staff. The old woman seems oblivious to the item’s beauty, she’s just trying to get back inside where it is warm as fast as possible as her threadbare green robe offers little protection from the cold. [GM Note: The woman’s name is Marj LaRouche and as far as she knows the staff is something a distant cousin of a cousin brought back from the wars during his brief stint as a conscript on a crusade. It came into her possession after its two previous owners died of flu and old age. What the woman thinks of as a pretty stick is actually a masterfully made bo-staff. She would be willing to part with it but only for what she thinks of as a fortune: 17 pieces of gold; she is certain that is more than it is really worth.]

30 The chill autumn wind has blown in the red pollen from the Tinwhist trees, and a thin layer of the dust covers everything. People’s hair and faces are stained a faint brownish pink, and windows and buildings are tinted the color of blood. Horses stir up red pollen clouds as they trot down the curving streets. [GM Note: Feel free to substitute any other fantastic name for these trees. Allergies could be a real concern, causing problems



with any activity that requires deep breathing. This is especially true for people who are not local and may experience severe reactions to the high amounts of pollen.]

31 A mature man with his hair in multiple shoulder-length braids strides confidently down the street in a poorer part of town. His good-quality leather boots, thigh-length tunic, and blue cape make it very clear he is not from this district. He looks back and forth, taking in details and nodding to folks on the street; most of them just stare, but some cautiously nod back. He passes an alley, and suddenly two raggedy urchins jump out behind him and start pelting the back of his fine cape with clods of dirt and bits of broken pottery. The man spins immediately and grabs the two children; it looks as if he knew they were there and was waiting for them—either that or his reflexes are incredibly fast. He starts to shake them both and berate them for their behavior, then pauses and takes a better look at them. You are close enough to hear the surprise in his voice. “Imogene? Ranulf? What are you two doing running around like little hoodlums when your mother is home washing other people’s laundry so she can take care of you? You ought to clean yourselves up and make a few coins holding people’s horses, or carrying their packages! Now go home and get cleaned up and find a way to help out! I’ll send my assistant around to check on you in a couple days; don’t think I’ll forget.” Then he gives the children each a little shove on the back to get them going, and they run past you and on down the street. [GM Note: This man is a member of the city’s ruling council, or some other important official whose area of responsibility includes this district. Unlike most officials, he takes an active interest in what goes on here and has gotten to know (or at least recognize) many of the inhabitants. He often urges them to better themselves; some appreciate this, and some consider him a busybody.]



32 A goblin bartender in a bright blue fez pushes a short mop across the cobblestones in front of a dilapidated tavern, cleaning up blood that was splashed in the entrance way. The door is just right to admit a halfling or gnome – or a goblin, of course. A handful of outdoor stools, almost as tall as the door itself, are evidently intended for taller patrons. [GM Note: If travelers approach the goblin (who is Meejen, the owner of the tavern), he greets them with obviously false good cheer. He ushers smaller folk inside the dim establishment, where the ceiling is nearly five feet high, and offers larger patrons seats on the stools outside his front door. He calls an assistant, one of his many wives, to finish cleaning up the blood.]

33 The wide shutters of a butcher’s shop are open, revealing the chest-high counter and the butcher behind it hard at work. The butcher keeps a stone bowl of salted nut meats on the counter, as a





snack for himself and to share with his customers. Occasionally he'll reach in with a bloodstained hand and toss a handful of nuts into his mouth, chopping flank steaks into small cubes all the while. A few of the man's regular customers also grab some nuts as they negotiate their orders, ignoring the spatters of blood on the pieces.

34 A small crowd has gathered, taking up about half the street. Two young men are standing on sturdy wooden boxes a short distance apart. A crowd has gathered, listening to the pair argue back and forth. While both are using raised voices, they are each being polite and respectfully hearing the other's argument.

[GM Note: Choose a topic of debate that fits your setting. If an adventurer wants to interject, he or she can do so if it is done politely. The men are both experienced debaters, and are unlikely to change their views. However, they have gained a great deal of respect for each other in the short time they have been debating. If an interloper is rude or uses a fallacious argument, both men will scorn the intruder. Threats will similarly be looked down upon. Any violence will cause both men to dash off and call the watch.]

35 The wind whistles across the snow-covered rooftops, dislodging a thin mist of white powder. Dozens of finches peck for bits of bread and seed scattered across an icy walkway along the side of a bakery. The baker throws crumbs out here regularly, and the city's birds recognize his shop as their best chance at a free meal. The icicle-draped overhang along the side of the building is spotted with dried bird droppings.

36 A grotesquely fat nobleman dressed in silk and ermine staggers down the street, a goblet clenched in one bejeweled hand. As the fat man weaves and stumbles, more wine sloshes out over the goblet's gilded lip than ends up in his mouth,

but more than enough finds its way down to keep him very drunk. A serving boy scurries along next to him, refilling the goblet as fast as the man empties it.

The drunk noble approaches you, bellowing greetings. His finery is stained with vomit and wine, but was obviously rich and new before his latest bar-crawl began. Even his serving boy—straining under the weight of the wine bottles his master insists he carry—is dressed exceedingly well, and the glint of silver rings can be seen on the boy's fingers. Plain silver rings are no comparison, however, to the precious metals and bright jewels visible on the fat man's sausage-like fingers. [GM Note: The fat man is named Tyrell Whent, and he is a local wine baron, despite the fact he drinks most of his own stock. He would be a tempting and easy target for larcenous characters; other than his serving boy, Harrick, he has no guards and his only weapon is a small dirk. Tyrell carries a money pouch full of gold and silver, and wears inexpensive but flashy rings on nine of his finger, as well as several gold chains around his neck. Even Herrick has a pouch with a few coppers, and a silver ring on each hand. The latter are gifts from his master and the boy will die rather than give them up.

[It is possible that Tyrell might take a liking to the party and offer them dozens of lavish gifts, job offers, and minor noble titles. Of course when he sobers up, he will not remember any of this nor honor any promises.]

37 A dozen dwarven jugglers march in a line as they toss polished handaxes, tumble willy-nilly, and otherwise practice their legerdemain for the parting crowd, humming a whimsical tune and doffing their skullcaps for coppers. Following the diminutive troupe plods a short forlorn man with a meager beard and tattered shirt, looking sulky and playing a tarnished flute with questionable enthusiasm.





38 Wreaths of woven tulips and violets hang from the center of every window and door, celebrating the flowering of Spring. Fat honey bees drift through the market, sampling the wreaths' nectar. Their constant, low drone creates a barely registered undercurrent to the street's noises. Most of the women on the street, even the grannies, wear knots of colorful ribbon in their hair or on their sleeves. Even the men have bows fastened to their coats or tunics with a pin or a bit of thread.

39 This square holds a statue of the warrior-king Fortinubas, according to the plaque on the base. It depicts the great leader evidently in a moment of repose, leaning against his spear and staring out over the horizon, perhaps planning new conquests. Once it may have been a thing to behold, but it has been damaged and repaired several times and now it is an odd conglomeration of different types of stone. The feet and knees (the only parts remaining of the original statue) are carved from maroon-veined obsidian. From the knees up, the

destroyed icon was repaired with smooth black granite. Furthermore, the statue's head has been re-carved over the years to emulate various kings. The granite head became worn enough that it too has been replaced, and the statue's current head is a dark grey marble, giving the ancient statue a piecemeal, motley appearance.



40 As you round a corner, you almost run into a ladder that is set up across the walk. You hear hammering from the top and a young carpenter looks down and shouts, "Hey, watch yourself! You're not in the boondocks any more—this here is a real city. We've got work to do here." The journeyman on the ladder seems to be fixing an overhang for a sign. He does not appear well-off by any standard but he does seem to be a hard worker; in fact, he has already returned to his hammering. You look at the young lad who is holding the ladder.

He is barefoot, in drab homespun clothing. He looks up at you uncertainly but with an honest face, blue eyes, and tousled hair the color of fresh





straw. He doesn't seem to know whether to smile, say hello, or just look away and be inconspicuous.

[GM Note: If the adventurers don't say anything, the boy will give an uncertain smile and look back up at the working man. If they ask his name, he says it is Tom. The lad will answer any questions with short answers but seems to be a bit shy. He knows simple directions but not much else. If the group talks with the boy too long, the young man on top of the ladder will shout down, "Hey, we're trying to get some work done here."]

41 A three-sided wooden structure is tucked into a little nook between buildings. Its roof protrudes past the walls a little, protecting the contents inside. The walls of the little building are covered with children's sketches, miniature scrolls with written messages, small tokens like rings and lockets, and similar items. The ground beneath has ends of candles in holders, flowers both cultivated and wild, and bits of incense in small burners. An old man has drawn a low stool up next to the structure, where the jutting roof provides a bit of shade, and is whittling what may be some type of animal. [GM Note: This

shrine memorializes a number of people who died in a recent tragic incident, which is left up to the GM. It could be placed in a busy square or market where people were killed in a horrible accident or a magical explosion. It might appear near the city gate to commemorate victims of a series of vicious attacks. On the other hand, it could be placed near a graveyard (where it might be freestanding) to acknowledge victims of a plague whose bodies had to be burned and were not actually laid to rest. (Fighting the return of such a plague could be a challenge for a cleric in the adventuring party.) It is possible that a local cleric or wizard put a curse on the shrine to punish anyone who steals one of the trinkets left as memorials. As an alternative, the structure could be a religious shrine connected to a deity, perhaps one worshipped by a member of the group.]

42 A brown-skinned teen with completely golden eyes and the distinctive ears of a half elf runs up to you, brandishing a whetstone and several dirty rags. Immediately he begins a singsong spiel about the importance of 'such great heroes' looking the part and about how you never know when a well-maintained sword might save your life.

[GM Note: If the group allows him, the boy will immediately set to scrubbing their armor until it shines and will sharpen their knives to a razor's edge. He will charge only a few gold coins to polish and put a basic edge back on one of the adventurer's weapons. The lad is a journeyman armorer, being older than he looks.]

43 Ahead of you, you notice a stir in the crowd. The traffic swirls to the sides of the street as people make way for a group coming toward you. A woman in leather armor and a gray cloak walks in front of seven or eight other gray-clad figures, all wearing veils, robes and cloaks. The last one of the bunch leads a donkey laden with packs.

As the company approaches, you see the warrior in front carries a sword belted at her waist. Her boots are sturdy, and you can see her hair has been twisted up under her small helm. Behind her walk two of the robed figures, and behind them three more. They are not in any type of formation; other than staying close together, they could all just be out for a walk. Their sturdy footgear and travel-stained clothing, however, suggest that is not the case. [GM's Note: This is a group of women from a cloistered religious order on a rare trip. (The GM should select an appropriate deity for these women, most likely of lawful alignment.) They could be on an urgent pilgrimage, or moving to a new location because their home was destroyed. Their reason for travel would need to be very important, because normally they would never





leave their home. Their gray cloaks and veils are to preserve (as much as possible) their separation from the world. The religious women will not speak to or acknowledge anyone on the street. They rely on their guide (or guard) to take care of any necessary communication. If anyone approaches one of the veiled figures, the person will turn away and look down. The guard will intervene and do all the talking for the group. The others will remain close together and wait silently until the guard is ready to move on.]

44 A trio of identical halfling sisters—all plump and pretty with faces floured white and then painted with cosmetics—is on a shopping expedition. Only the best is good enough for them and they haggle with jewelers and sweets vendors with practiced cruelty. The three sisters are trailed by a quartet of burly human and orc males carrying their purchases. Though the men are finely dressed, you can see they are armed and armored under their gold-trimmed cloaks. You suspect that despite the heavy bags and bundles they carry for the women, they are not just porters.

45 A horribly burned old man, his hairless face shiny with old pink scar tissue, a strapping young man, and four young teens carefully load an enormous stained glass window into a wagon. The window is wrapped securely in thick wool blankets, but occasional glints of rainbow light flash from under the protective wrapping.

[GM Note: The man's burns come from an unfortunate accident in the glass-blowing trade. The young man is his son, and the others are apprentices. A window the size of this one is extremely valuable.]

46 You catch the scents of sandalwood and roasting meat as light from a tremendous bonfire casts an amber glow over a mysterious celebration. As you pass through the crowd,

a group of masked celebrants press wooden goblets of yellowish wine into your hands before disappearing into the throng. Conversation is loud, but below it you can hear the relentless beat of a drum.

47 A huge pack of street cats prowls the streets and alleys at night. You constantly have cats underfoot; they seem to be everywhere, chasing the hundreds of mice that infest this district. Some strange fungus grows on the mangy hides of these feral felines. Luminous splotches glow a faint aquamarine in the darkness, making the mass of cats resemble starlight on a dark ocean as they stream around your ankles. [GM Note: A magical and parasitic fungus was carried to the area by a pet cat that was part of a foreign trading caravan and it has infested these nearly wild creatures. It could eventually be deadly to them, but these street cats are almost certain to die of something else first. The fungus could infect a domestic cat, but cleaning a cat even once in a while will be enough to keep the fungus from taking hold and reproducing.]

48 A gaggle of stooped crones draws water from a town well, trading gossip. The well is an old decorative one, its wide opening carved in the shape of a gaping catfish's mouth. One of the elderly women has leashed a mangy gray-furred dog to one of the columns which supports the well's roof. Anyone who stays around and listens to the gossip can find out a great deal about the town's comings and goings.

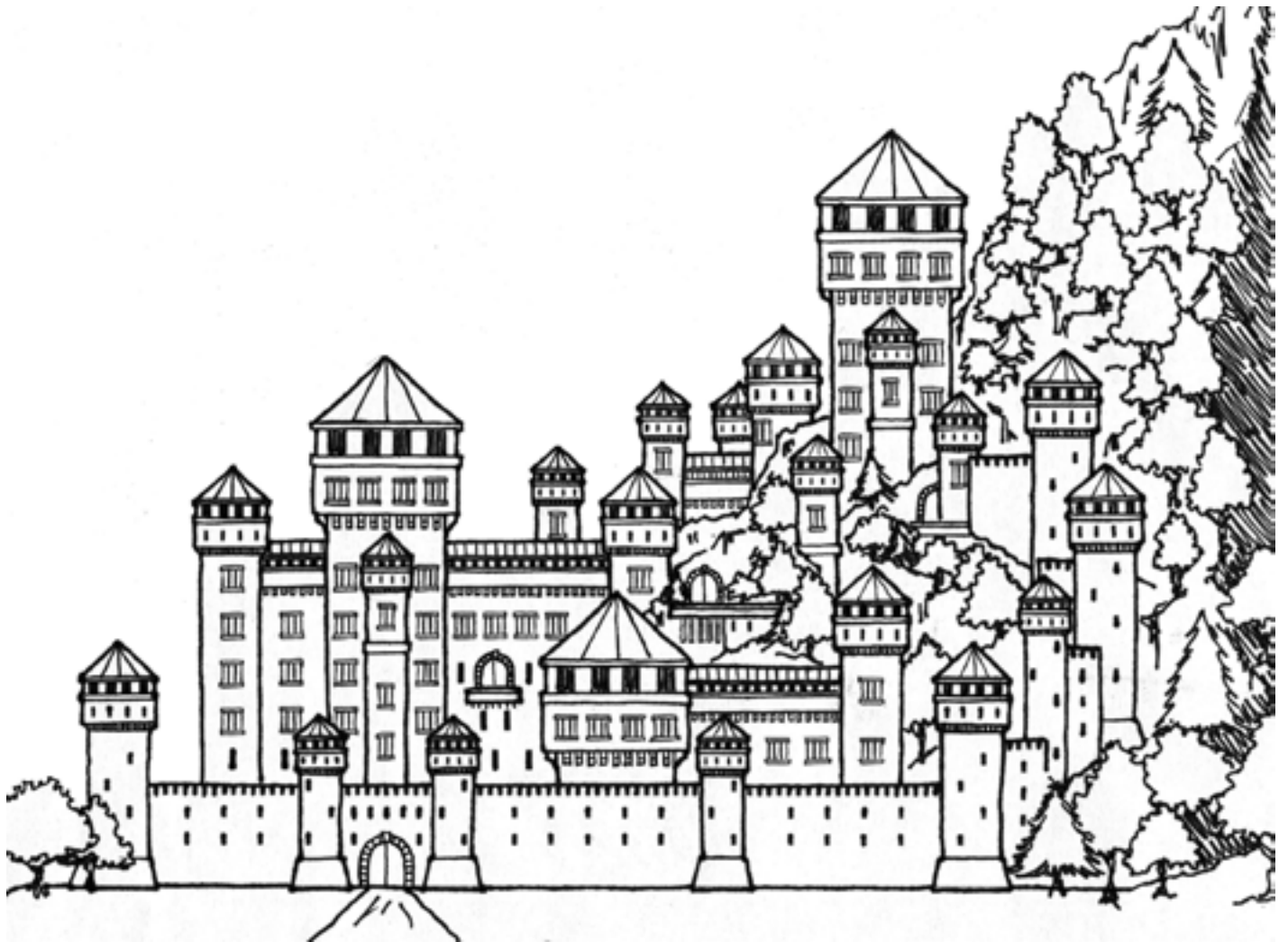
49 As you move across the city square, a group of conical-helmed men gasp and point up at a grand cathedral of black granite. The edifice is adorned with seven lofty spires and massive flying buttresses. The men shuffle to the sheer, narrow stair leading up to the cathedral's iron gates, then, trembling, trudge upward.





50 A halfling traveling circus has erected a tent city just to the right of the public assembly area outside the main gate, where they are watched constantly by suspicious guards. A cluster of low yellow-and-brown tents has sprung up on the other side of the enormous, rainbow-colored festival pavilion under which the circus performs. In the evening, paper lanterns are hung between wagons and in the trees, bathing the entire camp in a wavering, magical amber glow. The area smells of a myriad of different dung scents and oil-fried corn. An hour after the evening show, the area is quiet. Performing

animals growl or rest contentedly, while the three captive demons that are part of the side show pace back and forth in their magically reinforced cages. Singing and tambourine music drift across the clearing from the camp; this late at night the circus is shut down, and the halfling performers play only for their own amusement. The only part of the circus still doing business is the crowded section of brothel wagons, which are obvious from the enticing phrases covering their sides and the occasional giggle or playful shriek to be heard from inside.





Exotic Locales

01 The desert city's gates consist only of a pair of rotting ivory tusks from some ancient behemoth, tied together with thick chains to form an arch. Strips of leather and the thigh bones of elephants form a crude 'wall' around the encampment, and during a crisis, a web of rusting chains are strung between the tusks to slow invaders. An old orc thug, his skin blotchy with age and his stringy locks a dingy grey, squats on an uneven stool. A warped spear within arm's reach suggests he is supposed to be standing guard. The bored sentry barely looks up at you and snorts derisively as you pass.

02 Elephants with several tons of spices, lumber, and bolts of silk strapped to them are being led through the city's widest and busiest gate. The lumbering creatures are being stubborn today, frightened by the noise of the bustling marketplace just beyond the gate, and their masters are trying everything from beatings to cajoling to get the beasts moving again. Already arguments and shoving matches have erupted between the elephant drivers and those merchants inconvenienced by the delay.

03 A banana tree near the entrance has been struck by lightning and crashed against the city's mud-and-mortar protective wall. Tiny fires still burn on the tree's shattered stump, the last remnant of the powerful strike that brought down the great tree. A few tropical birds and monkeys have braved the storm, pecking or nibbling away at the scattered, burst fruit.

04 A dark-haired woman with fish-like scales tattooed around her almond-shaped eyes sells beautiful paper and bamboo umbrellas out of a small wooden stall. The umbrellas are

masterfully painted, depicting similar-looking maidens going about their daily activities, walking together in the rain, and other related scenes.

05 Those wishing to enter the mercantile city of Rachellis must fulfill an ancient custom at the city's fortified gates. Visitors must make a shallow cut on their palm or forearm with one of their own blades, and let the blood drip onto the flagstones surrounding the gate. Those wishing to enter must then swear an oath to abide by the city's laws and customs, which is sealed by their blood. [GM Note: This custom may also have a deterrent effect on those wielding poisoned or magically enhanced blades. The consequences of breaking the blood oath while in the city are up to the GM.]

06 Mounts of any kind are not allowed within the wealthy enclave of Hoarfell's Repose. The picturesque village is a vacation retreat for the nobility, who will not allow even a trace of horse dung on their gilded streets. A dozen cheap stables have sprung up around the gated enclave's well-patrolled outer walls, to care for the servants' mounts and the merchants' workhorses while they conduct business in Hoarfell's Repose.

07 Every building visible on this street is fronted by a smooth facade of pink and crimson limestone. The limestone's natural white veins have been scraped and delicately painted to resemble jungle vines and serpents. Rough woven curtains flap languidly in the humid air, attempting to keep the endless swarms of mosquitoes out of the dwellings.

THE END



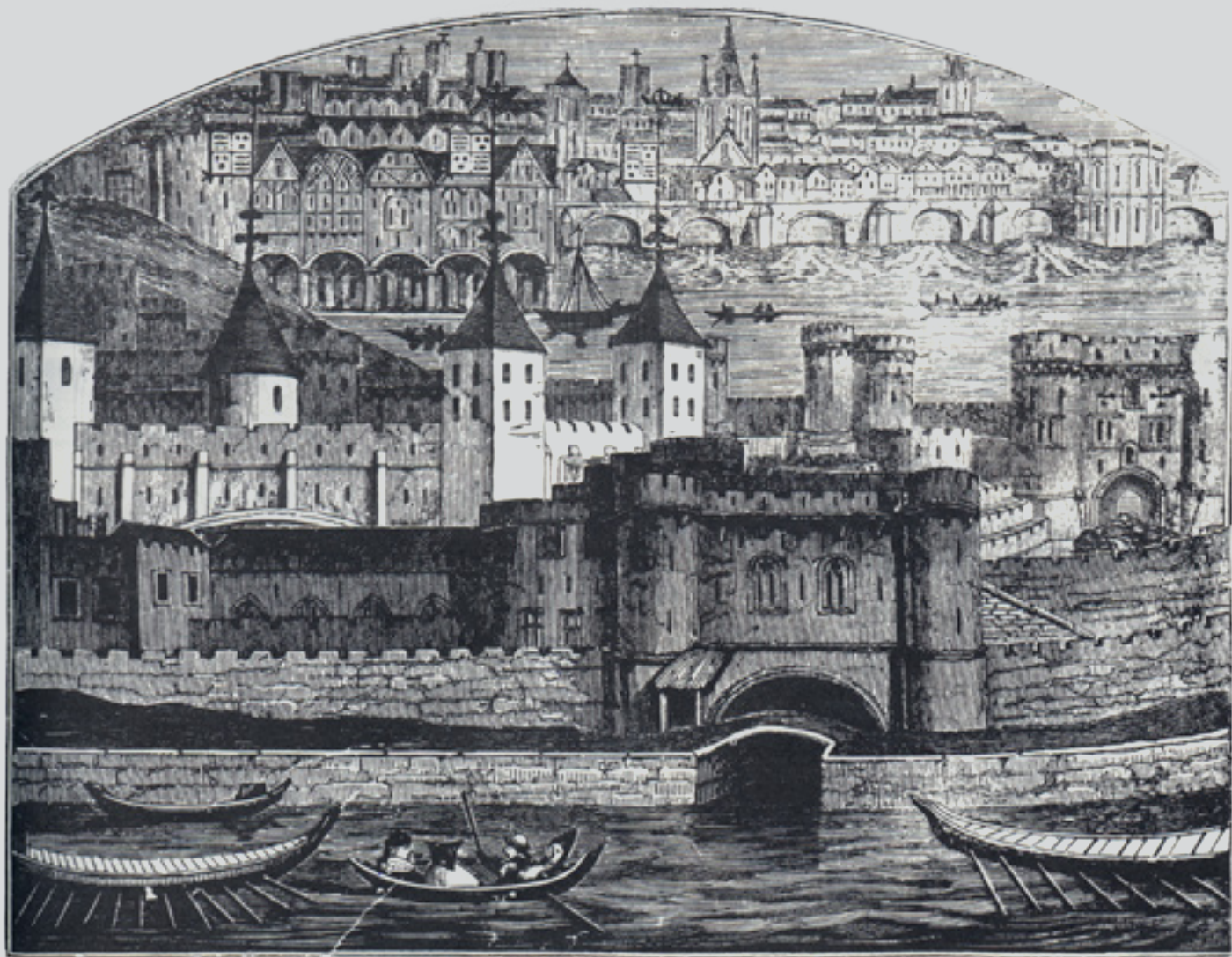


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