



a DOZEN DIRE RUMORS

BY PHILIP REED

In addition to serving well as flavor and background to your campaign, you may also find that rumors are suitable sparks for side quests. When used in such a manner, the rumor becomes much more than atmosphere that gives your adventure the illusion of existing in a much deeper world. As with any creative seed, the dozen rumors described on the following pages may be expanded as you see fit.

Once you take a rumor and turn it into more than background chatter that the player characters overhear and ignore, you've positioned yourself as a creator of adventures. Congratulations, gamemaster, for stepping beyond the role of referee and for entering the role of storyteller.

“Side quests are peripheral to the characters’ primary goal, but successfully completing a side quest might provide a benefit toward completing the primary goal.”
– **Dungeon Master’s Guide**
(5th Edition)

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ANATOMY OF a RUMOR

1. A title, to help set the mood.
2. Flavor text appears in italics. You may use this text as read aloud text, or you may prefer to use it as inspiration and reword the flavor text in your own language.
3. Each rumor includes an overview of the general idea to get your creative muscles humming. Adapt as you see fit!
4. There are true and false options for each of the rumors, providing you with some ideas on how the rumors might play out. Whether or not a rumor is true or false is your call.
5. Each rumor includes an illustration to help spark your imagination as you think through how to best use the rumor in your campaign.

1 THE GOBLIN'S POTIONS

"Poison is more like it, I hear. That little squeeegthon of a goblin is out there right now, trying to sell those so-called potions to the fools who dare to trust such a one as a goblinoid. The watch says that creature hasn't committed an offense and is free to move about the city, but the watchmen are weak cowards who are no doubt paid gold by that squeeegthon; why else would watchmen allow such a monster as a goblin to sell such dangerous concoctions to any one of us?"

Over the chatter of the tavern, you can hear someone at one of the tables in the back slamming his fist on the table and ranting about a goblin potionseller who seems to have truly frustrated this man. Hearing his friends at the table trying to calm him, you can make out that his name is Romund Wictred and he has something of a deep and excessive hatred for all goblins.

"Maybe it is time we find that little squeeegthon and take care of it before the thing forces too many more of its wares on the people of the city."

Wictred rises to his feet and then stumbles, slumping back down in his seat. The man has clearly had too many drinks and is in no condition to do anything about goblins whether they are crooked and evil or not.

True. Asking around, you soon learn that the goblin's name is Clorx Pluikks and that he has been selling all sorts of potions to those with enough coins to satisfy the goblin's greed. Many of the potions, as the goblin describes them – mostly healing and low-level strength potions that he stole from a wizard – but there are also some poisons mixed into the supply. The goblin isn't aware that any of the potions he is selling are poisons, though, and is only looking to make as much as he can off of the stolen goods before the wizard that he victimized chases him down and inflicts some permanent justice on the thief.

False. It isn't false that there's a goblin selling potions – Clorx Pluikks is definitely selling every potion he has managed to steal – but it is false that they are in any way poisonous or dangerous. Still, the goblin is being chased by the wizard who he has wronged so Pluikks wants to sell everything and vanish as fast as he can. Perhaps the wizard hires the PCs to help him in capturing the goblin thief?



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USING THE RUMORS

The dozen rumors detailed on the following pages are first and foremost meant to get your imagination running. As the gamemaster, you're constantly under pressure to devise scenes and stories and to keep the action flowing, always entertaining the players and as much a playwright as you are a movie director.

Atmosphere. The rumor isn't intended to do anything more than add some depth to the campaign setting. You never intend for the players to act on the rumor; it is merely being used to make the campaign feel like there's more going on outside of the player characters' sphere of influence.


Breadcrumbs. Perhaps you're building to something, an encounter against a rival or a larger in-world event

that will shake the player characters and the NPCs. When used in this way, the rumors are leading to an adventure of your own design that, in some way or other, incorporates the rumors in such a way that the players get the feeling you've mapped things out in advance.

Adventure Seed. If you're feeling especially inspired and creative, you can select any rumor and expand it out into a full adventure. In the sample rumor, above, the party is promised an epic battle if they set out to engage the ogres, trolls, and orcs that are approaching the city. Expanding this rumor into an adventure will require you to map the surrounding area, provide statistics for the monsters, and perhaps toss in a few allies – other adventurers, city guards, thrillseekers – who join the party in seeking out and attacking the army.

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FOREBODING FEATHERS



"It were the size of a giant, wings easily stretching twenty feet and as black as night. The creature rode on the winds, a trail of blue fire following its every move. Me and the others watched it for several minutes before losing sight as it flew behind the towers of the watch hall."

Louise Fromm is known and respected throughout the city, her role as lead clerk of the town watch is one that gives her access to a lot of information. Fromm has never been one to tell tales, so when she started speaking of a giant bird overflying the city, those who knew her looked to the sky and completely trusted her.

Fromm's story is one that is told and retold throughout the city, and the PCs eventually overhear several people arguing over what the creature could have been while the party is buying supplies at the town market. Surprisingly, the story has remained almost exactly as Fromm told it with little embellishment. People so trust the woman that they try very hard to repeat her story exactly as she shared it.

If they ask around, the PCs are soon directed to the watch office and Louise Fromm. The woman tells the same story as the group has already heard, refusing to change her tale one bit. She knows not what the thing was or where it could have gone to.

True. A wizard's familiar was struck by a spell and the creature is now giant, angry, and empowered with the ability to cast low-level spells. If the PCs start looking around, they soon hear of Mark Littauer, a wizard who is looking for a giant and unusual bird.

False. Fromm saw something, but it wasn't a monster. A tinkerer constructed a large kite and the winds caught it, carrying it away. The kite is crashed outside of the city.

FEAR OF THE FROST GIANT

"With winter coming, it be time we gather any limbs and downed trees that we can before the guards barricade the west gate. No reason to risk the long way around the city later this winter, when the snows fall and the winds threaten to rip the flesh from a man's face, just because we failed to remember that the guards always seal off that gate these days."

The adventurers are walking the streets of the city when they see an elderly man surrounded by several children, all between the ages of seven and eleven or so. Each listens as the man speaks and, once he finishes talking, all of the children head in the direction of the west gate. If they stop any of the

children and ask what is happening, the kids tell the heroes that they're going to collect what wood they can manage and bring it back. The man, they identify him as Hugo, pays them copper for the wood that they deliver.

Talking to the elderly man, Hugo Bischoff, the PCs learn that he is paying the children to bring as much wood as they can before the guards close the west gate for the winter. If pressed for details on why the gate is closed tight at winter, Bischoff tells them that it is to keep the frost giant from getting into the city during the cold months.

True. Asking around the city, the PCs learn that the guards do close the west gate during the winter. Several years ago, a frost giant entered the city through the gate and inflicted a lot of damage on some of the buildings within several blocks of the gate, and it managed to escape before it could be stopped. Ever since then, the guards choose to seal the gate rather than risk the giant again attacking the people of the city.

False. The story of a frost giant assaulting the city is one that has grown with the telling, and what was once a rumor is now seen as a fact. There are no giants nearby, but the gate is closed and guards posted at it throughout the winter; they refuse to allow anyone to enter or exit the city through the sealed gate. If the PCs can prove to the people that there are no giants to fear, and convince them to open the gate, they will be treated as heroes.



THE BEAST IN THE WATER



"I've been on that ship a decade if it has been a day, and I've never seen anything like that which attacked us last week. It were the size of the great tower you see out that window, and it thrashed in the water with those giant tentacles so much that I was sure we would be splintered and drowned. We only managed to escape when something below the waters caught the beast's attention; it must have been a meal far meatier and tastier than we could provide something so incredibly massive."

Standing in line for bread and cheese in the town market, you and your companions join Zianon Kipel in casual conversation that soon turns interesting. The man, once a sailor, has a story to tell about why he retired from the sea and now spends his days working as a guard for some of the merchants operating stalls in the market.

"I wouldn't go out again, not after what I saw," Kipel says after describing the terror of the sea monster. *"The only thing you will find if you set off to search for that beast is a one-way ticket to Wreck Haven. I've certainly no interest in finding myself lost in that town of castaways."*

If the PCs are unfamiliar with Wreck Haven*, Kipel describes it as a small village on an island somewhere beyond the sea. The village has only a few hundred inhabitants, every single one was once lost at sea and eventually found themselves on a beach. The town is built from what wreckage finds its way to the island, and those who have heard of the place say that it is far too dangerous to willingly visit.

True. Kipel was once a sailor and did retire from the life when the ship he was on was smashed to pieces by an unknown monster. He refuses to go on another ship, no matter what money is offered, though he will direct the PCs to a trustworthy captain who will take the adventurers out in his ship (for a price, of course). If the PCs can find the monster and slay it, those who harvest the blubber of whales will pay handsomely for the carcass of this beast that is as valuable a source of blubber as any whale.

False. Kipel was definitely on a ship that was destroyed at sea, but it wasn't a sea monster. The ship smashed itself on rocks during a storm, and the captain and crew told a story so that the owner of the ship could collect the insurance money. The insurance company will pay a reward if someone brings proof of the what really happened to the ship.

* To learn more about the village of Wreck Haven, please see the **Delve Second Edition** roleplaying game by FGFantasy, available at www.drivethrurpg.com.

a DEMONIC THREAT

"I were there, I say! We were six days' ride from the city when we found the ruins of the keep. It were late in the day when we reached the once-great fortress, and we decided that making camp in the courtyard of the keep were preferred to sleeping out in the greater unknown. Things were quiet and uneventful for most of the night, until it stepped from whatever cosmic portal connects the keep to that outer hell where it came from. I thought we would be forced to defend ourselves from the devil, but it only spoke and not once moved to attack. I'm still having troubles sleeping at nights since hearing that thing's horrible voice."

The elf reaches out his hand in greeting when he notices you paying close attention to his tale. "Lyari Elbanise," he says as he shakes your hand. "I couldn't help but notice you listening in, and I'd be happy to answer any questions that you may have."

Elbanise is an elven mage, a veteran of many adventures and not afraid to confront any who call him a liar.

The elf tells of how the demon stared at his party for hours and then turned and vanished through the portal. Elbanise holds up a small ruby, finely cut and polished, and shows it to the group. "This was resting on the ground near the portal once the monster left us. If you wish to see the site, I charge 20 gold per day and it's only three days to the ruins of the keep. Allow me to grab my gear and I can be ready to go in the morning."

True. The elf did encounter a demon, and true to his word he leads the PCs to the keep. Once there, he suggests that they make camp and wait overnight. Of course, he refuses to stay the night and wants nothing to do with whatever demon may appear. The PCs will have to force the elf if they expect him to stay overnight.

False. Lyari Elbanise is a thief looking to lead others out of the city where he and his friends can rob them.



a STRANGER BRINGS DOOM

"Seven murdered on the road to Hightown last night, is what my friends in the watch are saying. It were the work of a necromancer and the foul caster is still out there somewhere, no doubt intent on slaughtering every one of us so that he can turn us into his undead servants. Take care when you go into the alley to relieve yourself; the necromancer may be waiting in the dark."

Jozelin Benoist, trapper and furrier, opens his mouth to speak but quickly closes it as the door behind you opens. He wipes his greasy hands on his tunic after setting down the turkey leg. Looking across the table at you, he smiles and laughs nervously.

"I'm kidding you lot, though, and there's nothing to fear out there in the dark. Everything is as safe as safe can be in these parts."

Another man sits beside you and holds out his hand to shake. *"I'm Lom Barayev, constable. Good to meet you fine souls. What is your business here?"*

Barayev presses you until he is satisfied with your answers. *"Maybe best if you continue on in the morning, folks. We know you have treasures to seek out and monsters to slay."* He then chats to a few others before setting out into the night.

Benoist checks over his shoulder and motions you closer. He whispers: *"I hear the constable is a partner of the necromancer. Be careful."*

True. The necromancer and constable aren't partners; the constable is the necromancer! If he suspects that the adventurers are on to him, he will ambush them once they are a few miles outside of the city. He fights to the death and won't surrender.



False. There is no necromancer and the constable is only doing his job, keeping adventurers forever moving onward and not allowing them to spend too long in town. Benoist is a thief and a murderer, and he has been using the necromancer story as a way to conceal why some have been recently murdered.

a MANTICORE'S DEN

"You know that crumbling tower near Platinum Lake? I was out fishing at the lake last month, hailing in trout to sell in the town market when I saw a beast land on the tower and enter through the roof. I wasn't brave enough to investigate, but I recognized it for what it was: a manticore. I know not how long it has lived in the ruins of the tower, but I'm betting some adventurer or other would pay a few gold for directions to the beast's lair."

All his life, Todor Pesic has lived in a shack on the outskirts of the city. It was his mother's home during his youth, and the shack was left to him when she died several years ago. Pesic has no family and no job, and he is often found in and around the city working what jobs he can find and struggling to earn enough for some gruel and a round or two of beer at the local tavern. The man doesn't save, rarely thinks ahead, and is always desperate. If the adventurers ask for info, he's happy to share it . . . for a price.

The man is willing to take as little as a single gold for directions to the lake and the tower, but he refuses to act as a guide for any less than three gold. Wise dungeoners will hold off on paying Pesic until they are standing at the base of the tower.

True. A manticore has turned the top few floors of the abandoned tower into its den, where it has lived for several months. The creature has collected random treasures, mostly cast off and broken gear, though it does have a small chest of gold that it found several weeks ago, and it is protective of its home and likely to fight to the death against any intruders.

False. It isn't that Pesic is lying, but that he was mistaken in what he saw enter the tower. A young dragon has taken up residence in the tower, and it is far more dangerous than any manticore.



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THE SILENT HUNTER

“Word from the people of Hightown is that he rides a frosnoc and is forever clothed by the frozen winds and ice of the plane of snows. The warrior is said to never speak and only communicates by gesturing with his long, frost-encrusted sword. I’ve not heard tale of him murdering, but there’s no chance that something so strange and powerful isn’t here for anything less than evil.”

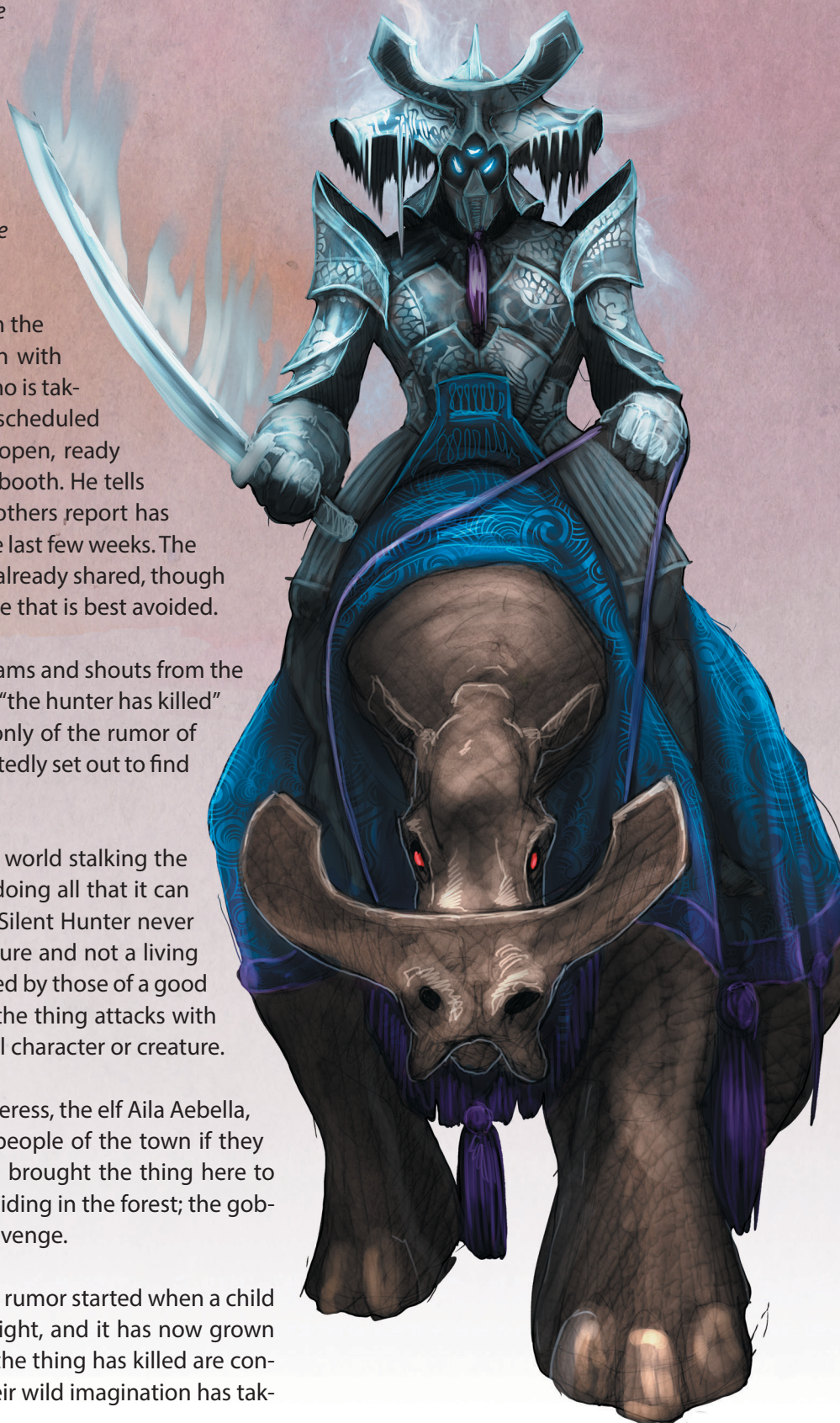
As the adventurers are shopping for gear in the town bazaar, they strike up a conversation with Wimbeck Tagber, a gnomish bookmaker who is taking bets on the gladiatorial events that are scheduled for tomorrow. The gnome is friendly and open, ready to talk for so long as the PCs remain at his booth. He tells the party of a strange, silent warrior who others report has been seen outside of town every day for the last few weeks. The gnome has no details beyond what he has already shared, though he does think that it is an evil entity and one that is best avoided.

Later that day, while still in the bazaar, screams and shouts from the crowd rise and soon the buzzing word that “the hunter has killed” reaches the party. The people are talking only of the rumor of murder now, and the town watch has reportedly set out to find the hunter and kill him.

True. There is an odd hunter from another world stalking the forests near the town, and the creature is doing all that it can to murder any evil that it encounters. The Silent Hunter never speaks, because it is a magical force of nature and not a living being, and it will only defend itself if attacked by those of a good or neutral alignment. If it encounters evil, the thing attacks with no mercy and will do all it can to kill the evil character or creature.

The Silent Hunter was summoned by a sorceress, the elf Aila Aebella, and she rushes to tell the watch and the people of the town if they move to attack the strange being. Aebella brought the thing here to help her defeat a force of goblins that are hiding in the forest; the goblins killed her brother and she now seeks revenge.

False. There is no creature in the forest. The rumor started when a child saw a dark figure on horseback late one night, and it has now grown out of control. The people screaming that the thing has killed are confused; a citizen was killed by a bear and their wild imagination has taken it from there.



Bob Gouvanstein

a PIRATE KING'S GOLD



"What I heard is that there's a chest of gold somewhere on that island, buried decades ago by Kevin Rodin before he were captured and put to death. The Pirate King never did tell where he buried the riches, but those who knew him were said to have known the spot and to have hinted that it were on the eastern side of the island. No one has yet been able to find the chest or claim the gold."

When visiting Ebenezer's Common Room, one of the many taverns in the city, the party overhears a man named Henry Cliffscribe telling tales with to his friends in exchange for drinks. Cliffscribe is a bit of a drunk (see **A Dozen Sinister Rumors**), and he can often be found in this very tavern spending what little coin he has managed to collect.

The adventurers, always in search of any leads that may direct them to riches, are certainly interested when they hear Cliffscribe's story of buried treasure, and it is only a matter of time before the drunk is doing his best to convince the party to buy him another drink.

Cliffscribe says that he heard of the treasure years ago, when his father told him the tale of Rodin and the island, and he soon starts spinning lies in an attempt to keep the drinks flowing. There's a very good chance that the PCs recognize the lies and soon ignore the man, so he reveals one last bit of information if he feels that he is losing them.

"I know where the map to the treasure is," Cliffscribe tells them if they start to rise.

True. The man really does know where the map is, but he won't share the info until he gets another drink in him. Once satisfied, Cliffscribe tells the adventurers that they can find the map in the Dungeon of Owls, an ancient tomb on one of the many islands that are off the coast of the city. Getting the map from the tomb may be a challenge as great as finding the buried treasure.

False. Cliffscribe has no knowledge of the map, but he is desperate for drink and so far gone that he will say anything to keep the party paying for his ale. They're sure to be angry when they find out that he is lying.

DO NOT CROSS THE ANGRY sea



"All dead! The ship was lost and there were no survivors. If it weren't for the crew of the Ocean's Depth, we would never know what had happened to the missing vessel. Just last week I met sailors from the Depth, and they told how they watched the beast come up from the waters and smash the ship to kindling. You wouldn't catch me out on that sea these days."

The man is roughly thirty winters of age and has captured quite the audience as he tells tale after tale, sharing news of the outside world for so long as the drinks keep flowing. Skeptical PCs will no doubt question every tale, but the locals are enraptured with the storyteller and ask question after question.

If the PCs stop the man and chat with him, they soon learn that his name is Umed Bahar and he is happy to sit and talk; he immediately asks them to buy him a drink.

"I know not what the beast was, and I didn't see it with my own eyes, but this isn't the first time that I have heard of a sea monster out there in the waters."

If the PCs press for more information, Bahar suggests that they visit the docks where they'll find sailors who are certain to know more.

True. There is something out there in the water, yes, and the sailors who travel the sea report that something large has been spotted several times over the last few weeks. The sea monster is a demon from the elemental plane of waters, and it was brought to this world by the acts of a mad wizard.

False. There are monsters in the sea, as there have always been, but there's nothing unusual or remarkable out there in the water.

a PROMISE OF RICHES TO THOSE WHO WILL HELP

"He said he will be back later tonight, and any who wish to join him are certain to close out the week with more gold in their pocket than they've ever held before. He wouldn't say what the job was, only that it were for the bravest of men and those who were willing to get wet and were strong of body and mind. I'm just waiting now for him to get here so I can learn more; you better believe that I'm not afraid of some work if it means a fortune in gold."

Late one night at the tavern, the adventurers get into a deep conversation with an aged halfling who tells them that he is there waiting for a job. The promise of gold is all it takes to get the halfling's attention, and he encourages the PCs to wait around a little longer for the elf with the plan who is expected soon.

"So you wish to join our group," the elf asks of you after he arrives. Tanyth Cramaris is an elven fighter who has spent decades exploring the dungeons and tombs of the world. He arrives shortly after the PCs speak with the halfling, and he immediately hears of their interest in his offer of work. *"We're raiding the Black Tower of Bal-Curz,"* the elf says. *"The town is only a few days' ride, and I've learned that the sorcerers in the tower are sitting on magical treasures that are ours if we are brave enough to take them."*

The elf has made arrangements with a caravan of merchants for he and his party to serve as bodyguards to the caravan, so there's a promise of certain pay to any who join the adventure. If the PCs choose to join Cramaris, it soon turns out that they are the only members of the party. Everyone else is too scared of the journey and tower to join in.

True. Tanyth Cramaris does know of the Black Tower of Bal-Curz, but he has no special insight or information beyond the rumors that many speak of the tower. The caravan pays guards one gold per day of the ride to Bal-Curz (which is as far away as the GM says it is), but once the party reaches the town, they soon learn that Cramaris is hoping for the best and making it up as he goes along. If the adventurers wish to try and infiltrate the Black Tower – a dark and oddly out-of-place structure that rises high above the mercant district of Bal-Curz – they'll pretty much have to take control of the adventure since the elf has no plan.

False. The elf has only heard rumors of the Black Tower and there is no caravan. He feigns surprise when the merchants fail to show in the morning and suggests that they proceed to Bal-Curz without the caravan.

* To learn more about the town of Bal-Curz and the mysterious Black Tower, please see the **Tower of the Black Sorcerers** adventure by Dungeoneers Guild Games, available at www.dungeoneersguildgames.com.



THE DEMON BRIDE

“Leonid Skudra’s daughter is missing. Jogita was last seen leaving her work at the laundry two weeks ago and vanished before she made it home. Yesterday, Skudra was in here talking about how his daughter was to be wed to a demon and he insisted that only brave adventurers could save the girl before she was taken to the deepest of hells to live eternal life as the demon’s wife. The man left, scared and crying, when he could find no heroes to rescue his daughter.”

After asking the tavern keeper for any interesting or unusual news, the PCs are regaled with a tale of a local and the daughter who is to wed a demon. The tavern keeper, Rodrigo Egolf, doesn’t know where the wedding is to happen, but he can direct them to Skudra’s home and says that they should find the man there.

If the adventurers choose to visit Skudra at his home, they are told that the master of the house is unavailable; Skudra has set out to rescue his daughter. Either by tracking Skudra or asking those who may have seen him, the PCs eventually find themselves at an older, large home deep within the city’s oldest neighborhood. A home that, if the locals are to be believed, is haunted.

True. Jogita Skudra has been taken by a demon and is being forced to marry the creature. The home is that of the demon’s human servant, Vilars Blaus, a wealthy merchant who owes his fortune to the deals his demon master has arranged for him. The PCs reach the home just as the wedding is about to start. Will they save the girl and her father?

False. It is not a demon that Jogita Skudra is to marry, but only Vilars Blaus who has kidnapped her and drugged her with a love potion. Leonid Skudra has been caught by thugs in the service of Blaus, and the man is bound and captive in the cellar. Can the PCs see through the love potion that has ensnared Jogita, or will they think this is a wedding of love and allow it to happen?

