



a DOZEN DREADFUL RUMORS

BY PHILIP REED

Where *A Dozen Sinister Rumors* left off, this PDF of twelve new rumors begins. By now, you're familiar with my approach to creating rumors (for use with most fantasy roleplaying games), meaning that we can skip the need for instructions and dive right into the twelve new rumors.

As always, use each of these rumors as flavor or as springboards to adventure.

As my latest body of work grows, you may notice loose connections between the different titles. While I've not created a complete, detailed setting, I have taken time to construct threads that tie different works together in subtle ways. As the GM, it is your call whether or not the links that exist between my writings have any meaning in your campaign world.

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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 GHOSTS AND ENDLESS DREAMS OF DEATH

"It stood there, staring at me, that foul gaze seeing right through me. I knew that if I were to confront the spirit that it would engage me in conversation, though ask me not how I knew such to be true. We stood, eyes locked, for what seemed an eternity but could have been no more than a moment. It was the chiming of the bells that broke our stare, and when I turned back the spirit was gone."

"Nothing will erase that memory, and ever since I've had naught but sleepless nights for fear of the dreams. Over and over I try to sleep without dreaming, and yet every time I fall into a slumber the spirit's gaze haunts me."

Sitting in the great room of The Twisted Tavern, one of the town's more popular drinking joints, the party can't help but overhear a group of fellow adventurers speaking with one of the locals. The man, a butcher by trade if his bloody clothes are any indication, is telling the others of his encounter with a ghost some two weeks back.

"To give my last copper if one were to erase this vision from my mind. Each time I close my eyes, the dreams strike again. I've not been rested since I met that ghost at the crossroads of Timber Trace and King's Way."

If the competing adventurers catch the party listening in, they encourage the man to join them at a more distant table. If the player characters grow aggressive in their eavesdropping, the other party asks that they kindly stay out of the matter. Experts were on the case and would resolve the man's difficulty.

After some time, the adventurers grow tired of the man's tale and leave. They must have found some reason to abandon the story . . . but what could have led them to dismiss the chance at adventure?

True. If the party asks the man – who is indeed a butcher – for more information, he tells them of how he met a ghost late one night in the city. He did meet a spirit, but not a violent one or one who would do harm. If the adventurers dig deep into the matter, they soon find that the butcher met a common enough local spirit known

as The Guardian. For decades, this ghost has watched over the city, sometimes acting to save the innocent from criminals and thugs.

False. The other adventurers and the butcher are local rogues running a scam. The plan is to convince someone to investigate the butcher's tale, and then ambush and steal everything from the poor victim.



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, thrill-seekers – who join the party in seeking out and attacking the army.

THE TROLL UNDER THE INN

"The beast has lived there for as long as I can remember, that's why you will never catch me spending a night at that cursed place."

Far from the largest towns and cities of the lands, at a small inn at the intersection of two major roads, the party is settling into the inn's common room for the evening when they overhear two merchants exchanging news of the closest towns. One, a dwarven gentleman dressed in fine silks, is telling his dining companion tales of Cratchet's Rest, an inn between the party's current location and their destination.

"I've no clue why Cratchet doesn't have that monster tracked down and slain. It's not safe to stay at Cratchet's Rest!"

True. A troll does live beneath Cratchet's Rest. The inn's owner, Zachary Cratchet, made a deal with the troll decades ago when the inn was first being built. Cratchet bought the land from the kingdom, only to find out that he had been tricked and the troll lived in caverns beneath the newly-purchased land.

In exchange for meals and a promise to be left alone, the troll agreed to leave Cratchet and his guests alone. The troll is rarely anywhere near the inn, preferring to use a cave exit a mile away when setting out to the surface world in search of food.

The truce has held without issue. It would be a shame if meddling adventurers interfered and disrupted the agreement.

False. There is no troll beneath Cratchet's Rest. Several years ago, a crazed troll was found in the caves a few miles from the inn and the beast was stopped before it could inflict too much damage on the area. Over time, the story twisted and warped until it led to the current rumors of a troll beneath the inn.



PROMISES OF RICHES

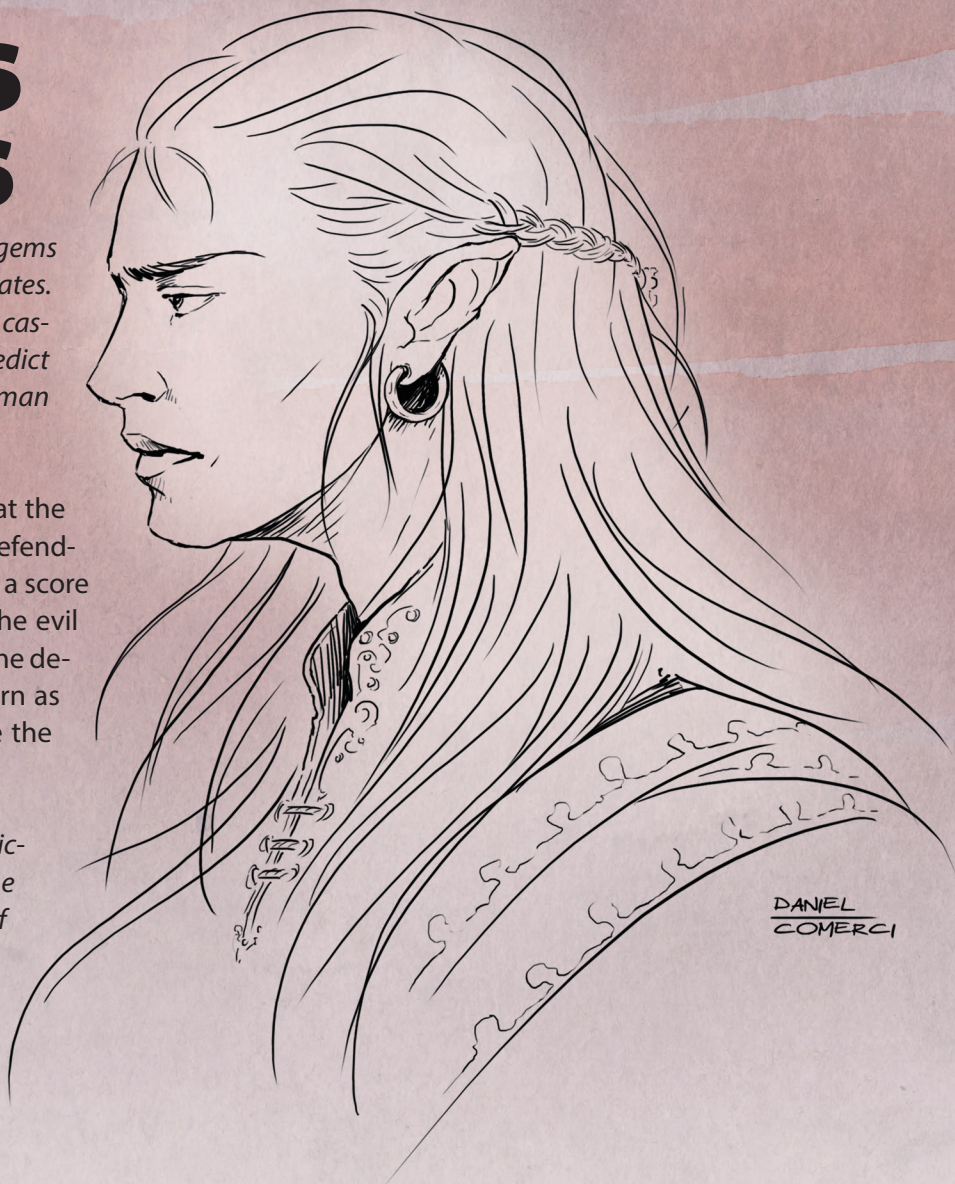
"The chamber was nothing but treasures, gems and jewels and gold in chests and bags and crates. Alongside one wall of the room were stacked cases and cases of who knows what, though I predict that each was enough treasure to keep one man happy for the rest of his life."

Rolim Miadan, elvish warrior, is a name that the party has heard of before. Miadan is the defender of Huntshearth, where he stood against a score of orcs and protected the villagers from the evil assault of the thugs. And now, by chance, the defender of Huntshearth is in the same tavern as the adventurers . . . and Miadan has quite the story to tell.

"It was seven years ago, shortly after my victory at Huntshearth, when I discovered the treasure chamber deep in the lowest level of Cragstongue. That dungeon has murdered many over the years, as you well know, and the day that I ventured into its shadowy halls was one that the dungeon claimed another four brave souls. My companions were each killed that day, and I barely escaped with my life."

Miadan tells the party that he has been keeping an eye open for possible partners to join him in a return to Cragstongue and, he tells them, they seem to be noble and experienced adventurers who could assist him in looting the dungeon. He is certain that the treasure remains, and he is willing to divide the riches evenly in exchange for their help.

Cragstongue, he says, is at least a week away on horseback and he wishes to set out tomorrow. If the party chooses to join Rolim Miadan in his quest to collect all of the treasures that the elf says await them in the dungeon, then he cheers in celebration and buys the group another round of drinks. Miadan has waited years to find the right partners for this journey, and he is anxious to begin the adventure.



Each day as they make their way to the dungeon, Miadan continues to tell the group more and more of his previous visit to Cragstongue. The evil skeletons that confronted him and his companions. The oozes and slimes that surprised them. The giant bugfolk who control the lowest chambers and nearly took his life. Miadan tells them everything that he can remember.

True. Miadan is telling the truth, though there's a chance that someone else has already captured the treasures. If the treasure is still in the dungeon, the elf is true to his word and not once does he attempt to betray the party.

False. Miadan is a scoundrel, seeking to enlist the others in helping him to capture treasure from a small dungeon. The rewards he promised are not there, and the party may soon notice that Miadan is always behind them, letting them take the force of most battles.

THE BOUNTY ON THE RUFFIAN

"Ever since Ctalik Ghix went rogue and got herself wanted, her man has been doing all he can to avenge her. I've no idea if the rumors of her death are true or not, but regardless of what happened to Ghix, Savage Drake has been out killing any who he feels have – or have ever – harmed her."

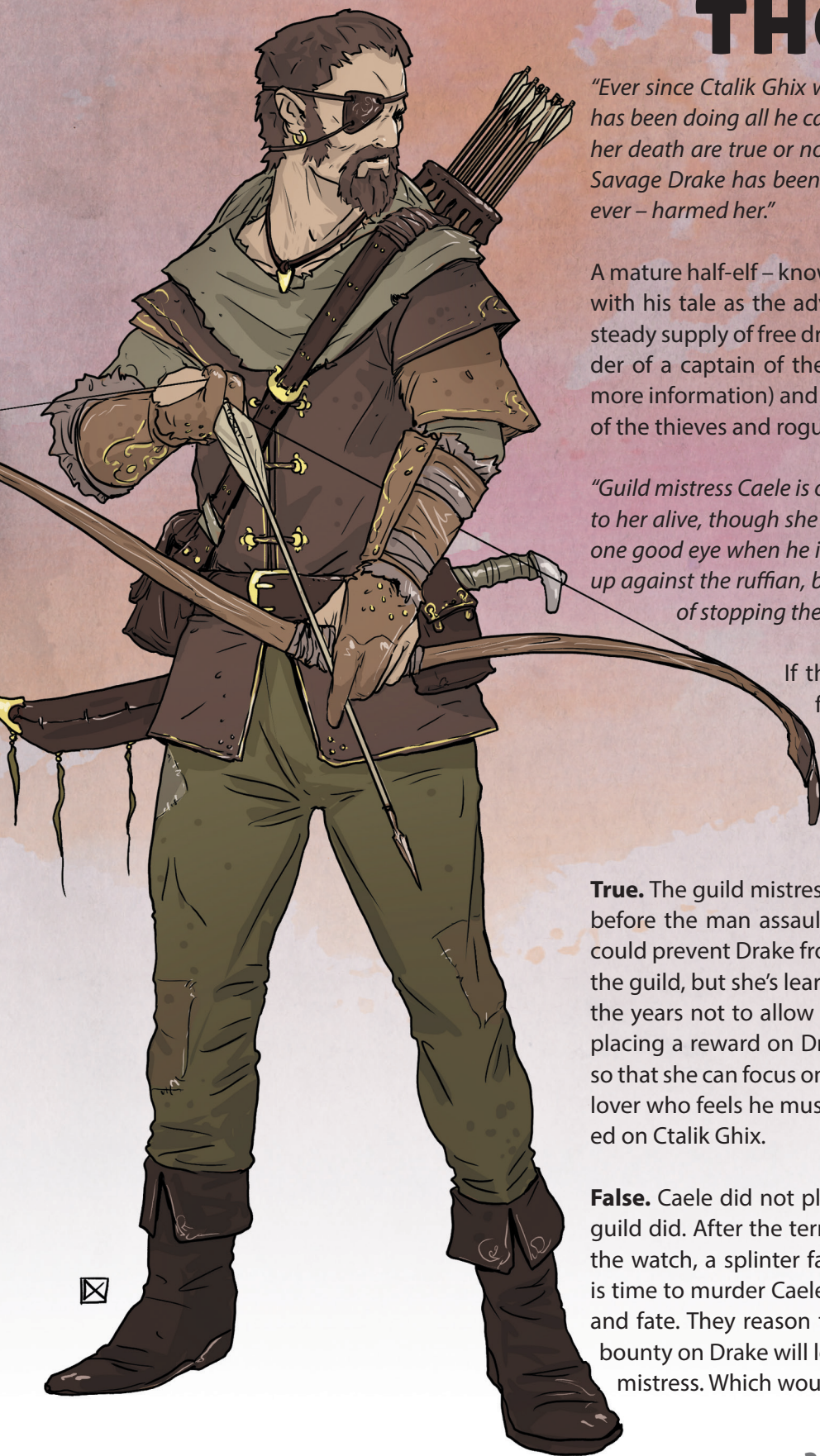
A mature half-elf – known as Lightfingers to his friends – is as open with his tale as the adventurers are open with their purse and a steady supply of free drinks. He tells the adventurers of Ghix's murder of a captain of the watch (see **A Dozen Sinister Rumors** for more information) and how Savage Drake is now terrorizing many of the thieves and rogues of the city.

"Guild mistress Caele is offering 500 gold to any who can bring Drake to her alive, though she said she'll pay extra if the man is missing his one good eye when he is presented to her. I'm not fool enough to go up against the ruffian, but you lot look sterner and far more capable of stopping the man than I'll ever be."

If the party asks for more information, Lightfoot directs them to the local thieves' guild where they will be told how Caele expects the man to be delivered to her and her people. The guild also confirms the value of the reward.

True. The guild mistress, Caele, is desperate to stop Savage Drake before the man assaults her at the guild. She thinks her people could prevent Drake from gaining access to her chambers deep in the guild, but she's learned enough about the assassin's skills over the years not to allow her safety to depend solely on chance. By placing a reward on Drake's head, she hopes to stop him quickly so that she can focus on the guild and stop worrying over a jealous lover who feels he must make up for the wrongs that were inflicted on Ctalik Ghix.

False. Caele did not place a reward for Savage Drake . . . but her guild did. After the terrible incident with Ghix killing a captain of the watch, a splinter faction within the guild has decided that it is time to murder Caele and take control of the guild's operations and fate. They reason that leaking word that Caele has placed a bounty on Drake will lead the mercenary assassin to kill the guild mistress. Which would be a good thing for the conspirators.



CORRUPTION CONSUMES THE FLESH OF THE MAGE

"The guards chased him into the sewers, but they were too cowardly to pursue the fiend and he escaped. They say that the accident changed him completely, transmorphing his form so that he is no longer a true man. Instead, I heard them whisper, he is an agent of vile corruption, twisted so that his flesh has become a sickly green as his limbs shift from those of a human to the terrifying tentacles of a demonic beast."

Late at night, as the party enjoys drinks at an inn or tavern, they overhear some of the locals speaking of a chase.

"My boy has a friend in the watch, and he says that the sorcerer were dealing with wickedness that was beyond his control. It was one of Zen Caidan's kids who identified the evil sorcerer they say. The kid had seen the man trying to hide one of his arms within the folds of his cloak, and that Caidan kid stole a glance and saw only evil there."

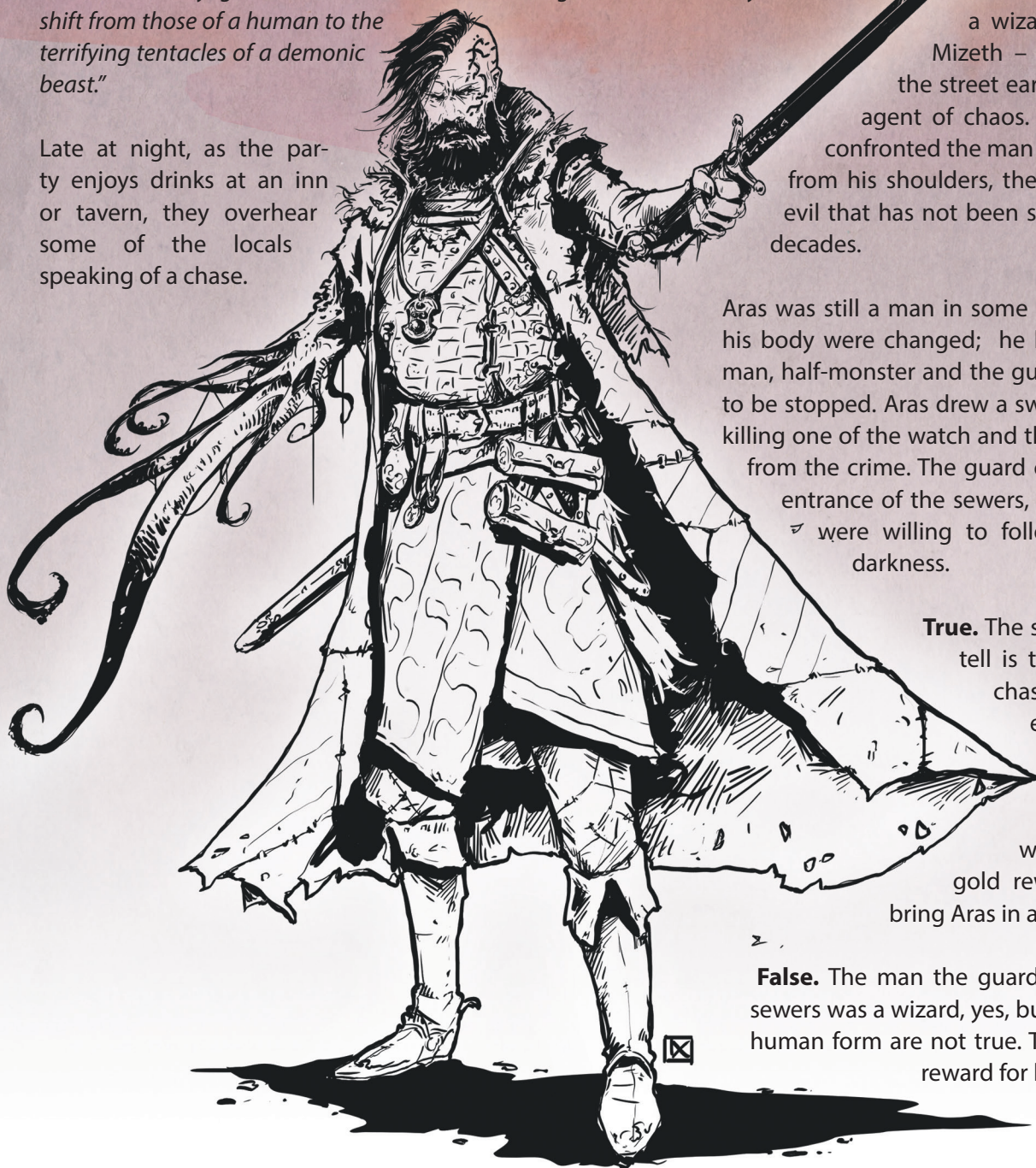
If the party offers to buy the men a round of drinks, they're soon a part of the chatter and listen in as everyone talks about how a wizard – Aras, Son of Mizeth – was identified on the street earlier that day as an agent of chaos. When the guards confronted the man and tore the cloak from his shoulders, they encountered an evil that has not been seen in the city for decades.

Aras was still a man in some ways, but parts of his body were changed; he looked like a half-man, half-monster and the guards knew he had to be stopped. Aras drew a sword and attacked, killing one of the watch and then turning to run from the crime. The guard chased him to the entrance of the sewers, but none of them were willing to follow Aras into the darkness.

True. The story that the men tell is true and Aras was chased into the sewers earlier this day.

The next day, the town watch issue a 500 gold reward to any who bring Aras in alive.

False. The man the guards chased into the sewers was a wizard, yes, but reports of his inhuman form are not true. The watch issues a reward for his capture.



THE SHATTERED BONE

"I broke it when that cursed elemental chased me down the stairs of the cathedral. I've never seen such a terror in all my life, and nothing – not even a shattered arm – was going to keep me from getting as far away from that monster as I could."

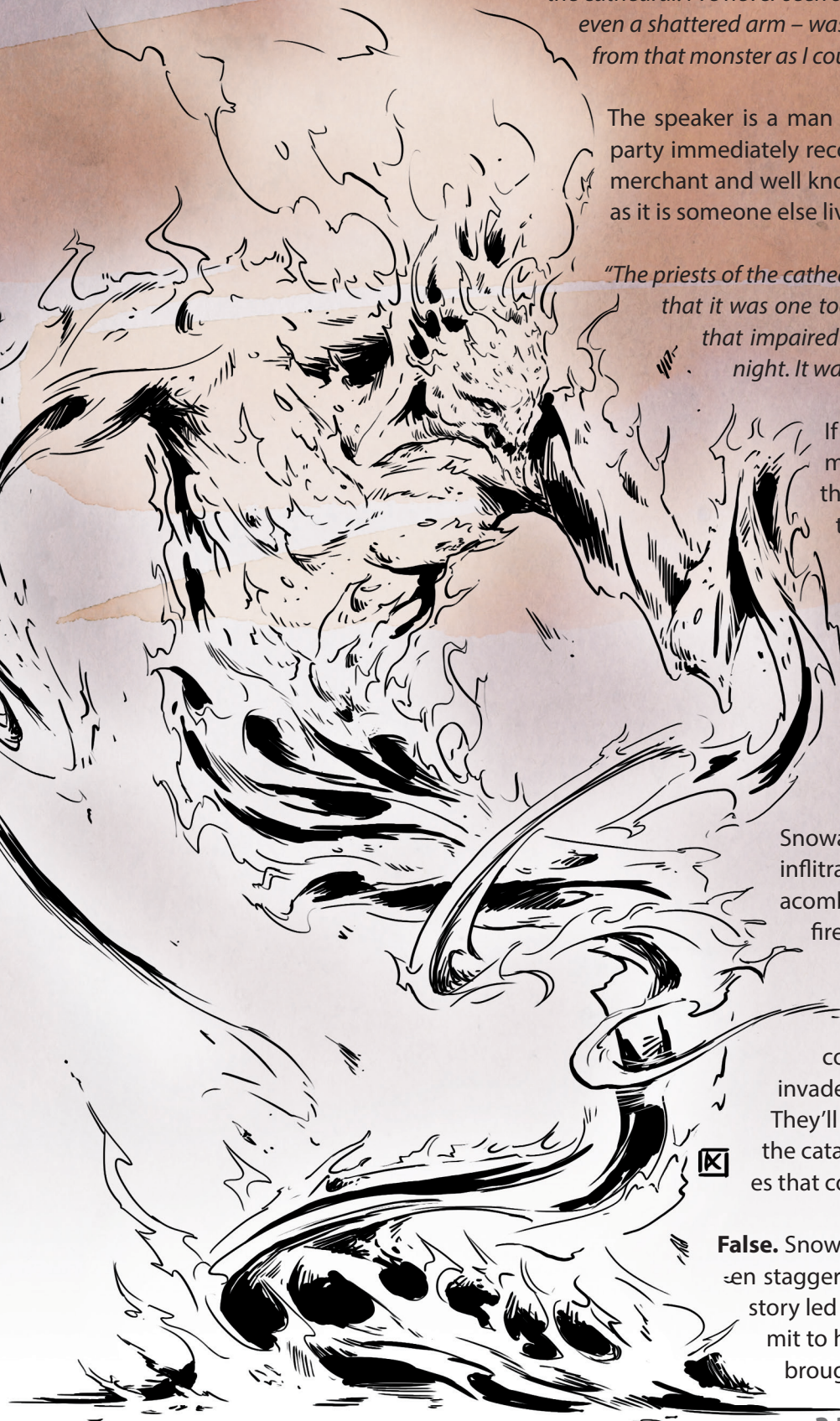
The speaker is a man of such high rank and privilege that the party immediately recognizes him: Kel Snowaxe, nobleman and merchant and well known for his thirst for adventure . . . so long as it is someone else living the adventure and telling the tale.

"The priests of the cathedral tell me I was seeing things, they implied that it was one too many evenings at this fine establishment that impaired my judgment, but I know what I saw that night. It was a flaming elemental!"

If the party asks Snowaxe for more information, he tells them that he was in the cathedral a few weeks ago late at night when the monster assaulted him. He describes it as a flying pillar of flame, with a wicked mouth and long, sword-like arms. He is not interested in taking them to the cathedral, but he will draw them a map of where he encountered the beast . . . if they buy him another drink.

True. The clerics of the cathedral were fighting off an invasion the night that Snowaxe was hurt. A cult of unbelievers had infiltrated the cathedral, entering from the catacombs beneath the building and unleashing a fire elemental that caused significant damage to the building's most private, secret chambers. The clerics are seeking adventurers to explore and clear the catacombs; the clerics suspect that some of the invaders are still hiding beneath the cathedral. They'll pay extra if the party leads workers into the catacombs to find – and seal off – any passages that connect the tunnels to the outside world.

False. Snowaxe is lying and broke his arm in a drunken staggering fall late one night. His love of a good story led him to fabricate the event. He will not admit to his lie, though, no matter what evidence is brought before him.



GHOSTS AND ENDLESS DREAMS OF DEATH

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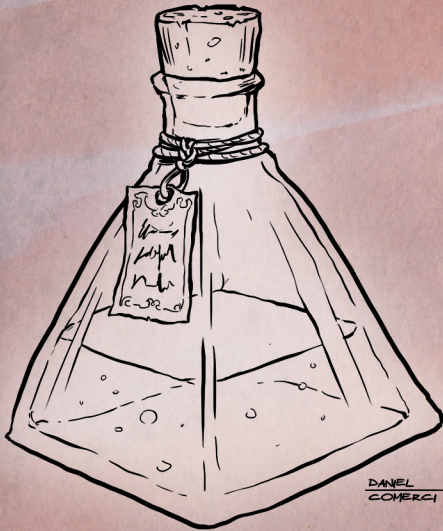
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as The Guardian. For decades, this ghost has watched over the city, sometimes acting to save the innocent from criminals and thugs.

False. The other adventurers and the butcher are local rogues running a scam. The plan is to convince someone to investigate the butcher's tale, and then ambush and steal everything from the poor victim.



a DISCOUNT ON MAGIC POTIONS



"Going out of business, is what they say it is. If you ask me, I always knew that there weren't enough demand for magic in this town. Too expensive and not worth it, I always said. When my lady asked why I wouldn't buy a trinket or two from old Imorn's shop. Well, looks like I wasn't the only one who knew it best to keep money than to give it to that old wizard."

The word around town is that Imorn Lantir is selling everything in his shop of magic for way, way below the usual asking price. If the party asks around, they hear the same thing from everyone: Lantir is struggling and has been forced to dump his wares at low prices before creditors murder him.



"Everything is for sale is what I heard, but Imorn's potions are the best buy if you're one to drink foul concoctions. Personally, I think they're a bunch of rubbish and a way for that crazy wizard to steal coin from those too stupid to resist his lies."

If they ask, the party is given directions to Lantir's shop and told that he is open from sunup to sundown every day of the week.

"If you insist on wasting your coin and buying that wizard's useless junk, I suggest you buy something small and test it out before you give him too much of your gold."

True. Imorn Lantir is the owner of a local magic shop and is offering his potions, scrolls, and a handful of magic items at a discount. He doesn't include everything in the sale. If asked why he is discounting his merchandise, Lantir tells the party that he is looking to finance an expedition to a dungeon complex he has learned of that is a week away.

Lantir asks the adventurers if they will join him; he could use some muscle and support to safely explore the dungeon. He will give them 100 gold worth of his merchandise now in exchange for their promise to accompany him to the dungeon next week. He also promises them all non-magical treasures they may discover, as well as another 100 gold worth of his merchandise after they return from the adventure.

Lantir is being honest with the party and does know the location of a dungeon complex that may be a source of treasure and adventure.

False. Lantir's not running a sale of any sort. He sometimes sells one or two small, ineffective trinkets for a very small amount in order to drive rumors and get the townsfolk talking of his shop. It's his way of making sure that the people are speaking about him and his business in the hopes of driving traveling adventurers to his shop.



an APPRENTICE OR a LIE

"She will kill you, Aramas! You should have never signed on with her, because now you've angered her and you just know she will use her magic to completely destroy you and your family."



If the adventurers turn to investigate, they see seven young men – each between 14 and 18 winters of age – sharing a table that is loaded with drink and bowls of nuts. The children are engaged in a heated, serious discussion and are unlikely to notice that they are being watched.

"It weren't my fault! I never meant to drop the jar, but it was so slick and it escaped me. The look on her face when the jar crashed terrified me so greatly that I had no thought other than to flee. Do you think she seeks me still?"

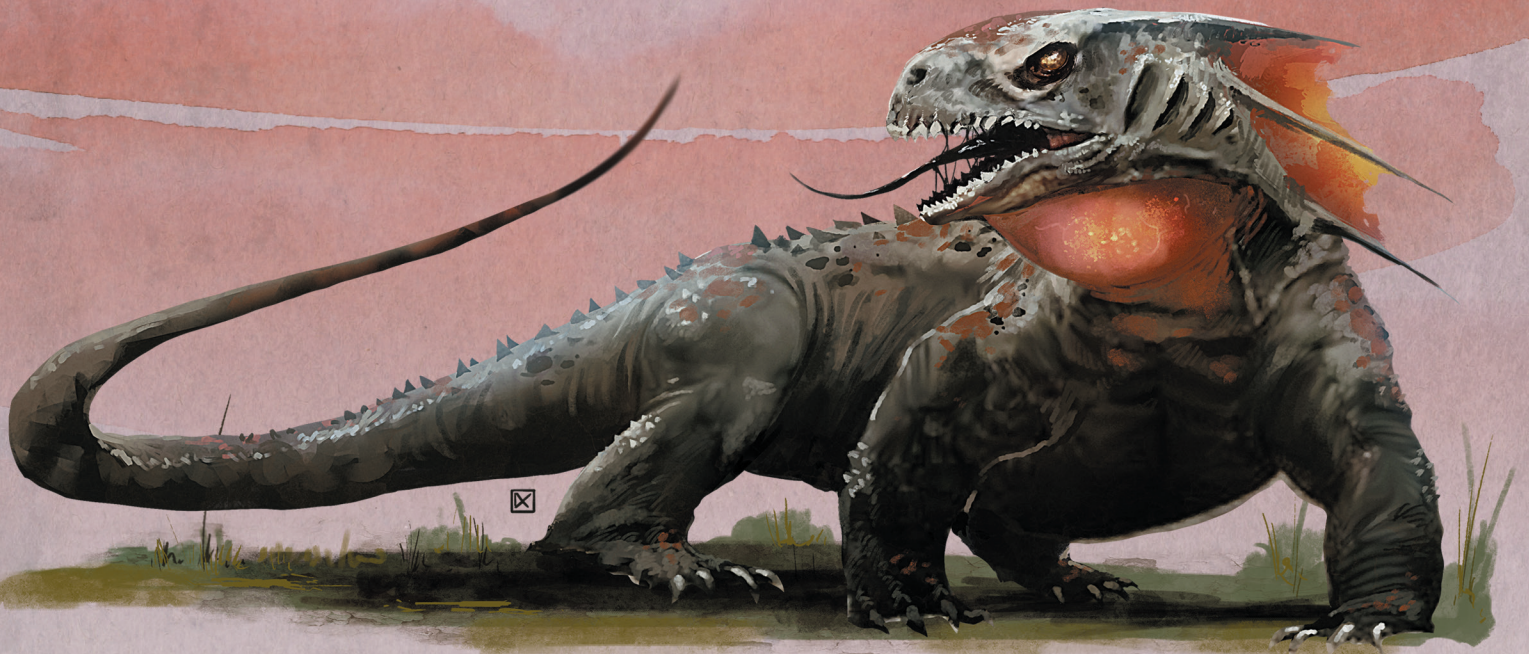
If the party involves itself, they learn that the kids work for Cai Shez, a sorceress who hires locals to serve as labor in her tower. She also watches her hires closely in hopes of finding a suitable apprentice. She has yet to find one worth teaching.

True. If the party involves itself in the event, they may visit Shez and ask about the described scene. She remembers, yes, but it wasn't the breaking of the jar that upset her. She was more annoyed that yet another potential apprentice turned out to be unworthy of her time.

She tells the party that she is seeking an apprentice and is willing to pay them 500 gold if they find one who she deems worthy of training. The offer is open forever, she states, since she is not opposed to training multiple students at once.

False. There is no sorceress. The kids are running a scam, hoping to lure people into alleys with promises of "the lady has treasure, heaps of it" and then rough them up and steal their belongings.

DRAGON ON THE ROAD



"It was only yesterday that Deadrock Raumeur – you know that weaponsmith, right? – was forced to turn back and return to town rather than journey to Covestar to sell his wares to the king's armory. Despite the weapons he and his men were transporting, and the dozen capable soldiers guarding the caravan, Raumeur had no choice but to run for home once that dragon thundered out of the woods and threatened to kill the group."

If the party takes time to ask the man with the tale, a local merchant who specializes in satchels and bags, he gleefully tells them all about how he heard direct from one of the soldiers that the dragon made it impossible for the weaponsmith to continue on his journey.

Even more, the dragon has been befouling travel between the town and Covestar for weeks now. No one knows where the dragon came from, but it is as large and powerful as any the town has ever seen. The man tells the adventurers, regardless of anything they may have seen in their travels, that this dragon is the largest and most terrifying beast to ever live.

If the party chooses, they could seek out the weapon-smith and ask for his word on what prevented him from traveling to Covestar.

True. The story is true, Raumeur tells them, and he and his men were forced to return to the town after they were rushed by a dragon.

"It were like no dragon I've seen before, more lizard than wyrm, with no wings. And not once did it threaten us with its evil breath, though it was large and managed to kill one of my men and a horse before we escaped."

The dragon, if the party investigates, is a giant lizard that is protecting a clutch of eggs. The lizard's mate was murdered weeks ago, and now the father is doing all that it can to give its offspring a chance at survival. If the party includes a druid or has the ability to speak to beasts, it may be able to convince the lizard that the townspeople mean the eggs no harm.

False. Raumeur knows not of what the men could have been speaking of. He isn't scheduled to visit Covestar for another month, and he and his workers were in the shop yesterday doing all that they could to complete their latest order of weapons.

Perhaps the man with the tale of dragons at the cross-roads is hiding something? What criminal acts could be taking place to justify such a bold lie?

BLACKMARKET MAGIC ITEMS

"Don't share this with anyone."

While drinking at one of their favorite taverns in the city, the party notices a few men at a nearby table leaning in close, speaking to each other in hushed whispers. Every few moments, one of the men glances around, looking to see if anyone is trying to overhear their private conversation.

"If the watch were to catch wind of this, we would be arrested and likely thrown into prison with no chance of justice. We must keep the secrets, friends, or risk forever losing our freedom."

The men are exchanging scraps of parchment, small bags of gold, and they continue to look up at the others in the tavern every few moments.

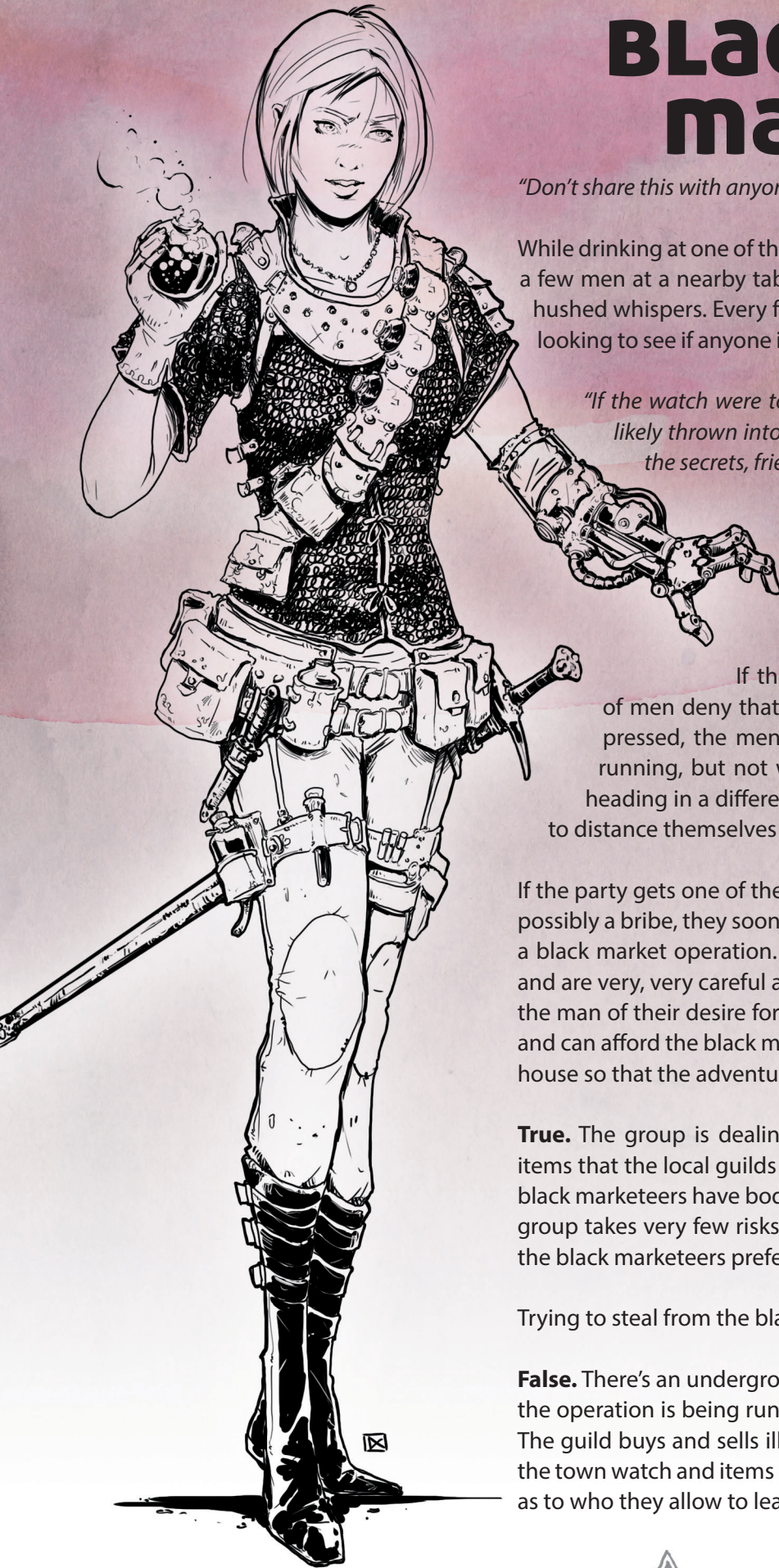
If the adventurers approach the table, the group of men deny that they're discussing anything of importance. If pressed, the men excuse themselves and attempt to flee, not running, but not walking with any confidence. Each separates, heading in a different direction, and all of them do what they can to distance themselves from any followers.

If the party gets one of the men alone and applies threats of violence, or possibly a bribe, they soon learn that the man and his friends are running a black market operation. They deal in rare, secretive magical treasures and are very, very careful as to who they sell to. If the party can convince the man of their desire for magic – and that they possess a lot of wealth and can afford the black market prices – he offers to take them to a warehouse so that the adventurers may buy a magic item or two.

True. The group is dealing in black market magic, buying and selling items that the local guilds and town watch have identified as illegal. The black marketeers have bodyguards – both fighters and wizards – and the group takes very few risks. If the party shows any sign of being trouble, the black marketeers prefer to kill first and sort out everything later.

Trying to steal from the black market would be a very bad idea.

False. There's an underground market for questionable magic items, but the operation is being run by a guild of mages and not a criminal outfit. The guild buys and sells illegal magic treasures – both items banned by the town watch and items of questionable morality – and they are careful as to who they allow to learn of their operations.





a DRAGON APPROACHES



"Annesinore is behind this, she has to be! Only her horrible magicks and thirst for power could have summoned such a foul beast and drawn it to our city."

Four members of the town watch are overhead chatting amongst themselves as the party walks down one of the city streets. The watchmen are engaged in discussion of clearly urgent, serious matters and the men are failing to pay close notice to the action around them.

"If that woman gets her way, the beast will devastate our defenses and she'll be free to steal anything without fear of capture or defeat. I say we imprison her now, and then deal with her dragon."

The word dragon very likely catches the ear of the party. If they ask the watchmen for more information on the matter, the more vocal of the four begins to tell the adventurers all about the sorceress Annesinore.

"This isn't the first time that Annesinore has been involved with dragons. I can think of two other times I've heard of her conversing with the wicked wyrms, but I know of no other time that she has invited such a beast to our city."

True. The sorceress Annesinore didn't so much invite a dragon as she accidentally summoned one. In her hunger for power, the sorceress was reading from an ancient tome when she unwittingly unleashed a summoning spell that is right now drawing a dragon closer to the city. The party may choose to help the guards in capturing the sorceress, or they may set out to engage the dragon far from the city walls.

False. Annesinore didn't summon a dragon and there is no dragon on its way to destroy the town's walls and buildings. The watchman heard a rumor and now shares it with his companions, despite instructions from his commander to lay off his desire for gossip.

a WIZARD'S ONLY REGRET

"I failed them all. My friends. I failed them. I couldn't save them, no matter what I tried; they were lost once that gate collapsed. Everything I had within me was too little to hold the gate, and now they're forever trapped in that accursed demiplane. By now, I hope, they've all died and been released from that infernal prison."

The elven wizard seated at the nearby table in the tavern has clearly had one too many drinks, and he's now rambling on and on about his failure to any willing to listen. And if none of the other guests of the tavern pull up a chair to hear the wizard's tale, he takes the story to others, moving from table to table throughout the night until he encounters a sympathetic ear at which point his story continues.

"We were seeking the Stone of Truth, a powerful artifact that was rumored to be on Blackheart, a distant demiplane filled with shadow beasts and evil, wretched, half-goblin monsters. Our leader, the paladin Gaulter of Mount Tower, had secured a key that would allow us access to Blackheart. If I had known then what I know now, I would have stolen that key and destroyed it."

The wizard introduces himself as Elphar Oloris and tells of how he was tasked with guarding the gate as his companions explored the demiplane in search of the artifact. He was attacked by the creatures of the plane and was unable to stop them from collapsing the gate. Oloris says that he was close to death when he awoke, back in this world, with his friends trapped on the other side.

True. Oloris is telling the truth . . . as he sees it. He and his friends did invade the demiplane of Blackheart, though his friends were not trapped off-world when the gate collapsed. Gaulter had a second key to activate the gateway, and the party returned to the world without the artifact that they hunted. They are now looking for Oloris and it is possible that a week or so after the party meets the elven wizard, they meet the human paladin and the wizard's other friends.

False. Oloris tells a partial truth. His companions were lost in the demiplane, but only because the wizard thought he had found the Stone of Truth and fled, hoping to keep the item. It turned out he didn't have the artifact, though, and now he lives with a terrible secret.

