



a DOZEN SINISTER RUMORS

BY PHILIP REED

More like adventure seeds than simple rumors, the dozen entries contained within these pages each offer the GM a starting point and information that could be expanded into a session-length adventure. Or, if they wish, GMs may use these rumors as background flavor to add depth to the game's world. If used in such a way, none of the rumors are truly meant to be investigated by the player characters. Still, GMs need to always be ready for when the PCs set off in an unexpected direction.

GMs who prefer to run freeform sessions with little to no prep may find these rumors invaluable; simply select one of the twelve a few moments before the session starts and run with the suggested adventure.

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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 GROWING THREAT OF OGRES, TROLLS, AND ORCS

2 *"An army, so I've heard, moving ever closer to us and certain to slaughter any who haven't the brains to flee. I'm not waitin' out in the morning with the dawn. You'll not catch anywheres near this place once those monsters are at the gates and smashing their way through the town's best watchmen and guards."*

3 The alleys, taverns, and inns of the city buzz with rumors that an army of ogres, trolls, and orcs are intent on invading and capturing the city. Wherever they may be, the adventurers overhear whispers of an imminent invasion. Many in the city are packing their belongings and fleeing the city, even though the city council swears that the rumors are false and there is no threat to the city and her people.

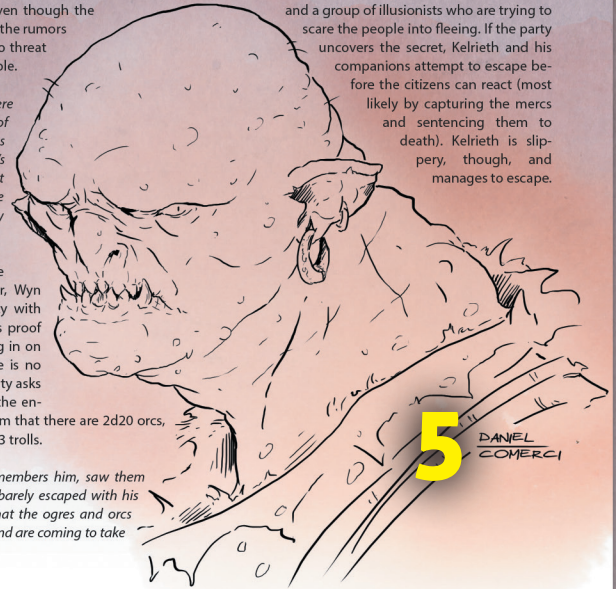
"I heard that the trolls were promised first choice of who they can eat. Unless you want to be a troll's breakfast, I suggest that you get out of here before the army reaches the city gates."

During the height of the panic, an elven ranger, Wyn Kelrieth, enters the city with the head of an orc, his proof that the army is closing in on the city and that there is no time to waste. If the party asks Kelrieth for details on the enemy forces, he tells them that there are 2d20 orcs, 2d6+2 ogres, and 1d4+3 trolls.

"It's true! Rutger, ya remembers him, saw them with his own eyes and barely escaped with his life. He swears to me that the ogres and orcs have joined with trolls and are coming to take over the city."

4 **True.** There is an army moving quickly toward the city. At their current speed, the evil forces will reach the city within 1d4+1 days . . . unless someone does anything to stop them! The city council offers a reward to any brave enough to ride out to engage the evil forces as far from the city as possible. If the army is defeated, Wyn Kelrieth is rewarded and thanked by the citizens for bringing the proof that inspired the people to react fast enough to stop the invaders.

False. There is no army, and Wyn Kelrieth is no ranger. This scoundrel is working with a mercenary band and a group of illusionists who are trying to scare the people into fleeing. If the party uncovers the secret, Kelrieth and his companions attempt to escape before the citizens can react (most likely by capturing the mercs and sentencing them to death). Kelrieth is slippery, though, and manages to escape.



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

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THE WRAITH OF FIVE BELLS

"Every morning at five bells, when the dock warehouse clangs those cursed bells that start my day, they say the monster strikes somewhere within hearing of the clangs. I've not seen it myself, but I've heard stories that would make the hair of your arms stand as straight as a steeple. The inhuman beast is a ghost, I'd bet my life on it!"

When buying gear, the adventurers overhear the shopkeep telling another customer of the spirit that kills every morning just before the sun rises. The shopkeep, if asked about the ghost, has more to say.

"It's made of shadows and bats, so I am told, and can kill with a single touch. The killings all happen within a mile of the docks and most of the bodies are never found. How is it we know there are killings if there are no bodies? It just stands to reason that the spirit kills every day, right?"

The shopkeep has no solid details, only scraps of gossip and words that he hears each night when he joins his friends at their favorite tavern, The Twisted Soul. If they don't believe him, the shopkeep says, they're welcome to join him that night after dusk to hear the stories from the patrons of the tavern. They'll soon learn, the shopkeep promises, to trust the words of an honorable man such as he.

True. The Twisted Soul is definitely a place where the tales flow as free and easy as the mead. The shopkeep beckons the party to join him and his friends, five other merchants who are in the middle of their drinks and night of gossip and stories. As the night progresses, so long as the party keeps buying drinks, the men keep talking.

While none of the men know it, there is a murderer operating in the city who prefers to kill in the hour before the dawn. The man, Quix Wheachapel, kills for the pleasure and wears a heavy cloak and dark clothes to mask his movement in the shadows.

False. Within a half hour of joining the shopkeep at the tavern, the party soon learns that the man – and all of his friends – are nothing more than a group of liars who spin yarns in an attempt to tell a better tale than the last. There may be a ghost somewhere within the city, but these men have no concrete knowledge and their tales of the "five bells spirit" sound like the ill-conceived stories of one who knows that ghosts exist . . . but knows nothing else.



GOLD AND SILVER EYES

"It was late at night, just after an evening much like this one, when I first saw it in the alley not two streets from here. You know that alley that runs behind the Gilded Heart, the one where old lady Macarie was killed last year? It was in that very alley six months ago that I first saw it. As dark as the midnight soul it was, with the only light cast from the dozen eyes of its head, each sparkling like polished gold and silver sitting beneath the brightest light of the strongest magician."

Henry Cliffscribe spends a few nights each week at his favorite tavern, Ebenezer's Common Room, where he likes to drink strong wine and chat with the other locals. Cliffscribe would happily be here every night if he could afford it, so he is not one who will turn down the party's offer to buy another round if he will share his tale.

Cliffscribe fully admits that he doesn't know what he saw, but he swears that not only has he encountered this unknown beast, but also that he has met it five other times within the last six months. Every meeting, the man says as he nurses the free drink, has been at night, and always a frightening experience that he will remember until his death.

"It stood taller than most, at least seven feet, and it said not a word, only looked me up and down with those sparkling eyes. Every time I have met it I thought I was a goner for sure, but every time that monster has eventually turned and walked off. Not in a rush, mind, but as if it decided I was no threat and wanted merely to go about more important business."

True. A wizard's creation is being tested in the city. A cloaked flesh golem, wearing a helm of many eyes, is sent out night after night to grow more comfortable in the world of men. The wizard, Penton Glowfall, hopes to train the golem as a guardian to protect his personal library. The magic helmet, one the wizard found years ago during his days as a dungeoncrawler, has been placed on the golem's head to give it arcane vision that allows the golem to see in the dark and spot any magic items that may be nearby.

If attacked, the golem runs back to the wizard's library.

False. Not surprisingly, the stories of a drunk's walk home after a night of drinking are nothing more than an active imagination sparked by alcohol. The party can spend weeks exploring the alleys for any sign of the creature, but they won't because it does not exist.

If they offer to walk Cliffscribe home, the man leads them through every alley where he says that he has met the beast. There is no monster.



a ROGUE GOES ROGUE AND KILLS

"So much for the guild's rule against killing within the city. I still cannot believe that Ctalik Ghix would go against the guild's wishes . . . and so blatantly without any attempt to cover her tracks! You can be certain that guild mistress Caele isn't going to let this go unnoticed and unpunished. I suspect we'll see the bounty on Ghix before tomorrow's sun rises in the east, or my name isn't Dran Lightfingers."

His true name isn't Lightfingers, that is for sure, but the mature half-elf otherwise looks the part of a man who could very well belong to the local guild of thieves and rogues. He calls the server over for another round of ale for himself and his three companions – each clearly a cutpurse or pickpocket or other manner of criminal – and continues his tirade.

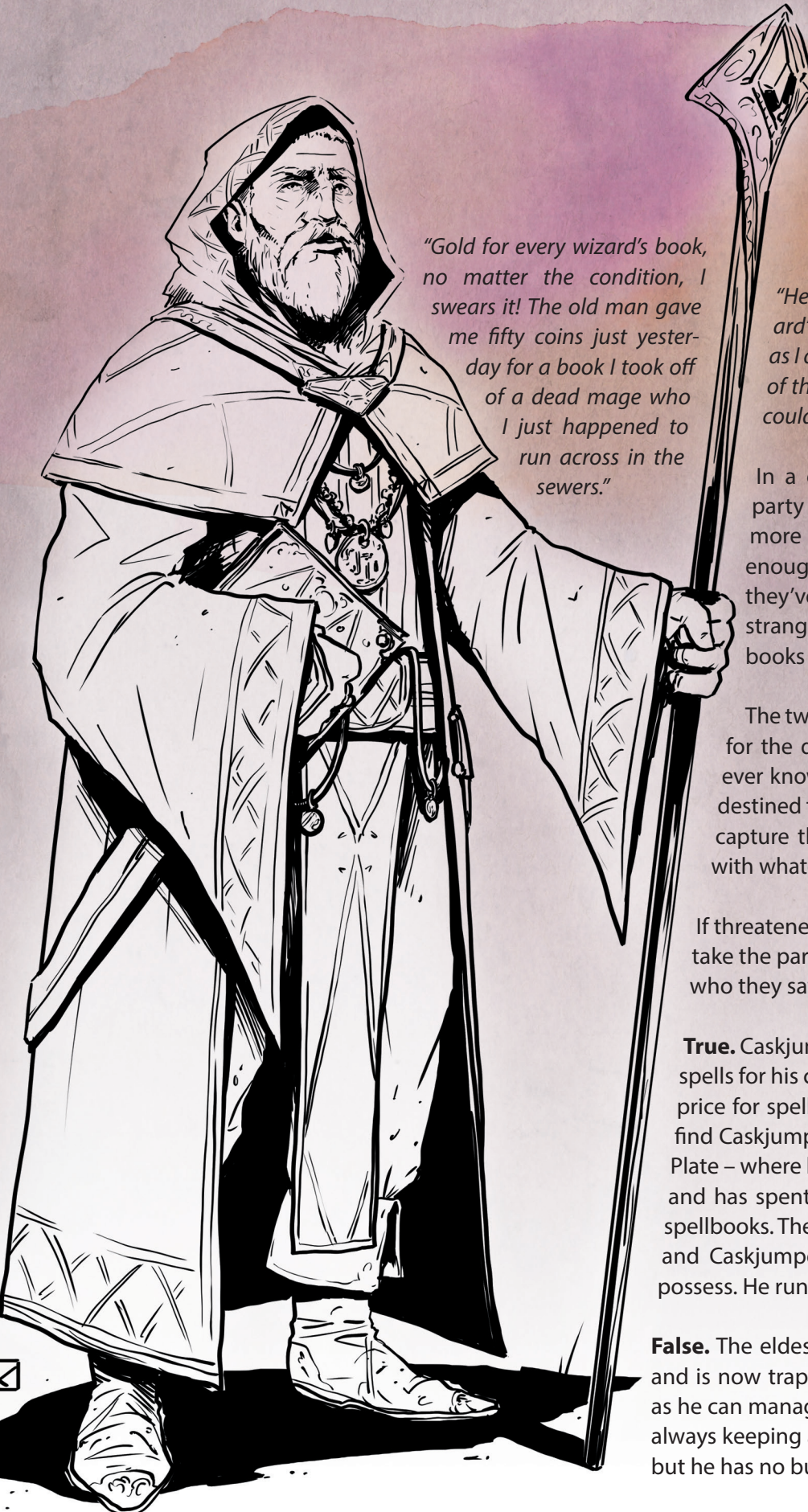
"It was her temper that did it. Ctalik never could contain her thirst for revenge, and there was no way that the captain of the watch wasn't going to suffer after he held her down in public and sliced her cheek. I just thought she would try to hide her act. Murdering the man at noon in the moneylenders' tent was a stupid, thoughtless action."

True. Earlier today, Ctalik Ghix grabbed a captain of the city watch and gutted him, stabbing her short sword deep into the man's gut in plain sight of everyone in the moneylenders' guild tent. Everything is as Lightfingers has described it, and the guild mistress does issue a bounty within a few hours. 250 gold to anyone who brings her the head of Ctalik Ghix. 500 coins if delivered before the sun rises.

False. Ghix murdered the captain, that is true, but her reasons – and the expectation of a bounty – are very wrong. Ghix killed the captain of the watch at the order of the guild mistress and Ghix is now being carried by wagon to a nearby safehouse in the forest. Caele ordered the murder after the captain turned on the guild, leading a raid that severely damaged the guild's ability to fence goods when a warehouse was seized and the occupants jailed. Why Caele and the captain turned on each other is unknown, but now Ghix is on the run and it is only a matter of time before the magistrate issues a bounty for her capture alive.



SPELLS and BOOKS



"Gold for every wizard's book, no matter the condition, I swears it! The old man gave me fifty coins just yesterday for a book I took off of a dead mage who I just happened to run across in the sewers."

"He told me that if I could find a locked wizard's book he would pay extra, just so long as I don't try to force the lock. Word is, some of them mages trap the locks and he said I could die if I try to force one of the locks."

In a crowded tavern late one night, the party listens in as a pair of teens – barely more than children and definitely not old enough to be drinking as much grog as they've had so far – talk in whispers about a strange man who has been buying up spellbooks and other magic items.

The two spot the PCs eavesdropping and run for the door, trying to escape before whosoever knows what terrible fate they feel they're destined to suffer. If the party acts fast, they can capture the two teens before the kids escape with whatever knowledge they may have.

If threatened or bribed, the eldest teen agrees to take the party to meet the man, Mar Caskjumper, who they say is buying up spellbooks.

True. Caskjumper is an older mage who is seeking spells for his collection and is willing to pay a hefty price for spellbooks, regardless of condition. They find Caskjumper staying in a fine inn – The Golden Plate – where he has rented one of their best rooms and has spent the last seven weeks accumulating spellbooks. There are $3d6+2$ spellbooks in the room, and Caskjumper offers to buy any the party may possess. He runs if attacked.

False. The eldest kid was lying to impress his friend and is now trapped. He carries out the bluff as long as he can manage – leading the party across the city, always keeping an eye open for a chance to escape – but he has no buyer for spellbooks. It was all a lie.

TORCHLIGHT MURDERS

"That makes seven this month, each found savaged and cut near-beyond recognition. The watch says they have no leads or suspects, but my friend Thorny Ebkaza says that's a lie and the constable knows exactly who has been out at nights murdering. Here, lean in closer and I'll let you in on the secret."

The party overhears two filthy commoners talking about the gruesome murders that have the city in a panic, the pair as thick as thieves as they gossip at the local inn.

"So long as the killings happen at night, I'm not one to put my nose into the business. I'll stick to my own troubles and leave this matter to the watch."

The two could be thieves, or it is possible that they are little more than dock workers in for the evening.

Regardless, their tale catches the attention of the player characters and deserves attention. Later in the evening, the one who claims to know the details excuses himself to the alley; the perfect time for the party to step in and ask questions. Slipping out quietly to follow the blabbermouth, the PCs soon find their quarry relieving himself in the alley's darkest corner.

How they go about getting information is, of course, up to the PCs. Will they beat it out of the man? Pay him for his secrets? Invite him in for drinks and pry it from him?

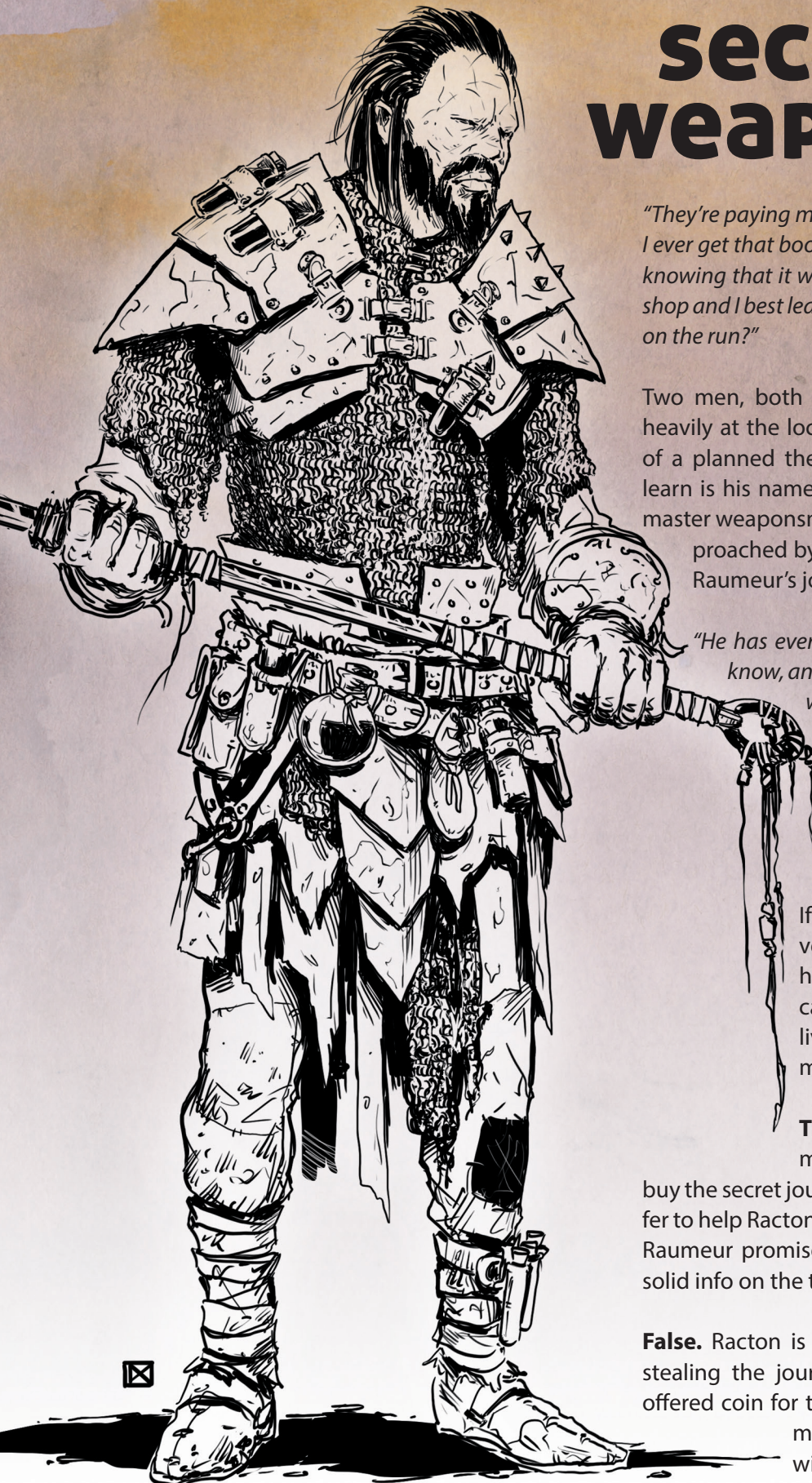
Our commoner friend, Suva Diden, only knows that two noblemen are possible suspects. Faurvid and Bahmim Blazewood are twins who have often been out late at night, near the grisly murders, and are now wanted for questioning by the town's guard.

True. The Blazewood brothers are killing late at night because they can. There are no dark rituals or evil motives, beyond the fact that the two are crazed and draw a sense of power and strength from killing others.

False. There have been no killings. The brothers Blazewood are practicing illusionists who are perfecting their corpse form spell. The two are troublesome, but they are not murderers.



SECRETS OF a WEAPONSMITH



"They're paying me 300 gold if I bring them the book. How will I ever get that book out of the workshop, though, without him knowing that it were me? If I do this, I can never return to the shop and I best leave the city. How far can 300 coins take a man on the run?"

Two men, both around thirty years of age, are drinking heavily at the local tavern when the party overhears word of a planned theft. One of the men – Racton, they soon learn is his name as they listen to the two – works for the master weaponsmith, Deadrock Raumeur, and has been approached by a cabal of men who are willing to pay for Raumeur's journal.

"He has everything in that book. I can read a little, you know, and every now and then I get a peek of the book when we are working. Every secret of weaponry he has ever learned or devised from his own mind is in those pages. Losing it would ruin him. How can I turn on Deadrock after he has treated me so kindly all these years? That is a lot of gold, though."

If the PCs try to ask Racton about the conversation, he excuses himself and rushes home. Their act has convinced him that he cannot betray his master and he will now live in fear for ages that they will tell Raumeur of the overheard conversation.

True. Racton has been approached by three men, competitors of Raumeur, who wish to buy the secret journal of ideas and instructions. If the PCs offer to help Racton and Raumeur find out who these men are, Raumeur promises them a reward if the party brings him solid info on the three men.

False. Racton is lying to his friend. Racton is thinking of stealing the journal, yes, but not because someone has offered coin for the book. Racton has gotten the idea that maybe stealing the book and running away will allow him to set himself up as a weaponsmith somewhere else in the lands.

SUBTERRANEAN TREASURE



“The mage said that he and his companions were forced to run before they could grab the gold and gems. A group of hobgoblins drove them from the caverns before they could claim all of the treasures. I asked him about the hoard, and after buying several rounds the mage handed me this priceless map to the riches.”

The player characters overhear the discussion and, if they are quick enough, get a glimpse of the supposed treasure map. The speaker is a human rogue, likely a thief, roughly thirty winters of age and dressed in leathers. He is talking with three others, two half-elven women and a dwarf, and the group appears to be in the middle of bargaining for either the map or, more likely, a share of the rewards if they join the thief in his quest to claim the promised loot.

Possible ways in which the party may involve themselves in this hunt for treasure include:

- Wait until the thief is alone and attack him, trying to take the map by force. Of course, this all hinges on the thief not selling the map to the others. If they buy the shredded paper, the player characters will have to attack three other adventurers to claim the map. That could be a tough fight.

- Try to slip into the conversation – “We couldn’t help but overhear . . .” – and insert themselves into whatever plans may be made to go after the treasure. Strength in numbers and all that, right?
- Offer to buy the map, which could set off a bidding war between the PCs and the unknown adventurers. Buying a map of unknown value is never an easy decision to make. What if the entire thing has been arranged to trick the PCs into buying worthless paper?

True. The map is real and leads to a small, abandoned cavern complex where hobgoblins have made their home. The “treasure” is only what the creatures have managed to take in their repeated attacks on merchants, farmers, and others who travel too close to the caves. There are gold coins and gemstones, yes, but the entire hoard is only worth a few hundred gold pieces.

False. It’s a setup! The thief, the dwarf, and the two half-elves are con artists who are looking to make some easy coin. They travel from city to city running the same basic scam, trying to sell worthless “treasure maps” to adventurers . . . and then run to the next city before their lies are uncovered. If the PCs fall for the trick, you can be sure they’ll set off in search of this group of liars.

THE SACK OF GOLD COINS

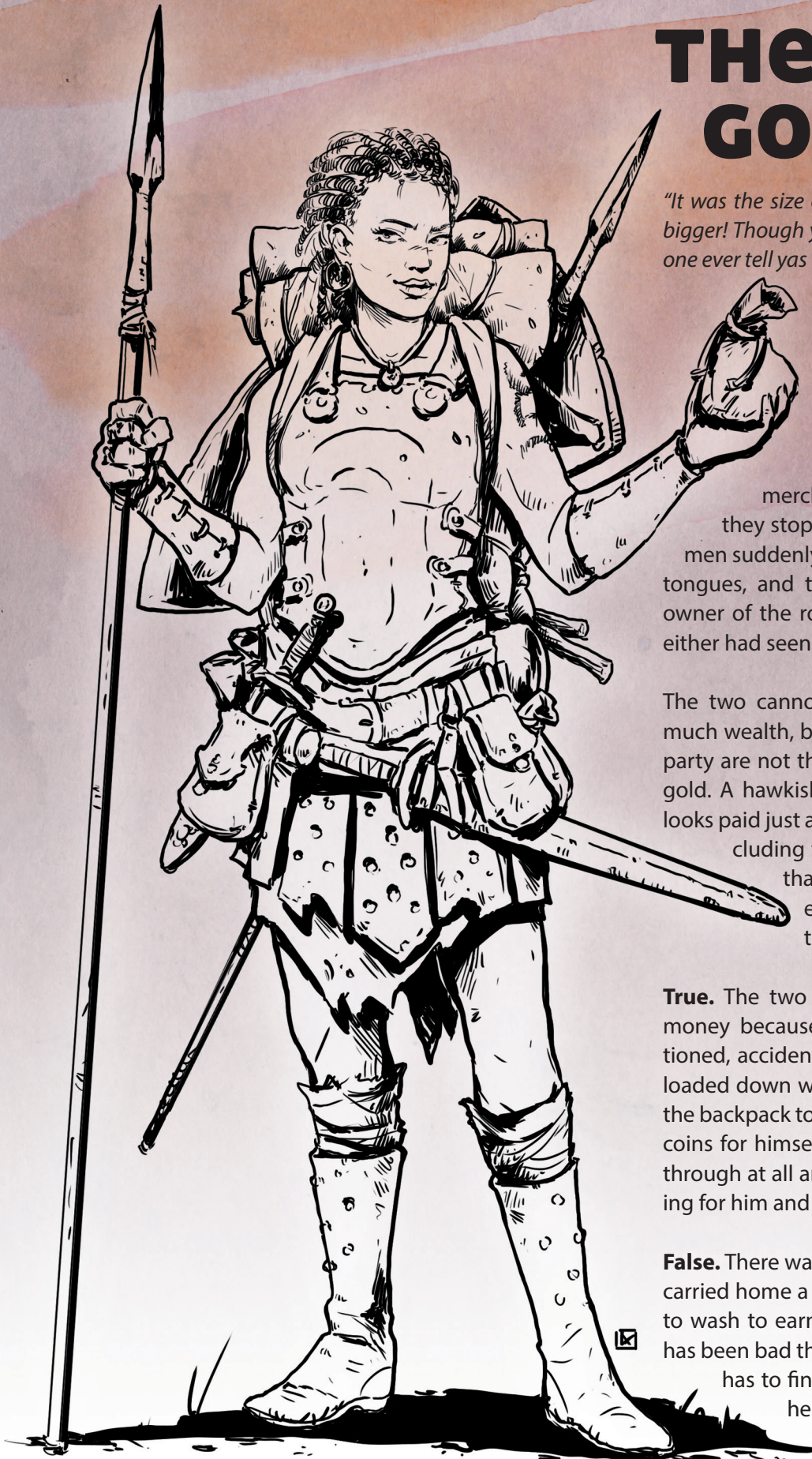
"It was the size of your head, I tells ya, or maybe even bigger! Though you do have a big head, Jorge, did anyone ever tell yas that before? Your head is massive, like a melon. And I swear to ya that the sack was as big as your head. Or bigger!"

Walking through the market at day, the party overhears two shopkeepers in adjacent stalls talking about the size of the moneybag that a fellow merchant was seen carrying yesterday. If they stop to ask for more information, the two men suddenly go quiet. A gold or two loosens their tongues, and they slowly tell of how Zen Caidan, owner of the rope stall, left with more money than either had seen him with before.

The two cannot say why Caidan suddenly had so much wealth, but another coin soon reveals that the party are not the only ones to ask about the sack of gold. A hawkish, ugly brute of a man with grizzled looks paid just an hour ago for similar information, including the address of the flea-infested room that Caidan rents over the stables of an elderly couple who live on the edge of the city.

True. The two men have not lied. Caidan has the money because a customer, the same brute mentioned, accidentally left behind a backpack that was loaded down with silver and gold coins. Caidan sold the backpack to a different customer and claimed the coins for himself. The man didn't think the situation through at all and now he has an angry warrior looking for him and the sack of gold.

False. There was no gold. There was no brute. Caidan carried home a sack of filthy laundry that he is going to wash to earn some extra coin. The rope business has been bad these last few weeks, and the merchant has to find odd jobs to earn some cash before he is evicted from the loft he is renting. There is no gold.



a THREATENING WYRM

A large, dark, spiky dragon breathing fire. The dragon is black with sharp, dark spikes along its back and neck. Its mouth is open, breathing a bright orange and yellow flame. The background is a light, hazy sky.

"Ten days' ride is what he said. Deep within the Sorcerer's Rest, that crumbling old wizard's tower on the road to Tortortown, lies a hollow beneath the earth where the ancient wurm makes his home. The dragon comes and goes through the gaping hole in the remains of the tower; the entry is so constrained that the beast has to crawl in and out of its lair like it were no better than an earthworm."

If the man notices the party eavesdropping, he introduces himself as Locus the Trusted, and asks that they join him. He can see, he tells them, that they are experienced adventurers with a taste for gold and arcane power, and maybe they would accompany him to the dragon's lair and assist in stealing a bit of the treasure.

Locus is a tall human male, some thirty winters of age, battle scarred, and carries an aura of strength that even the least observant cannot help but notice. Wearing studded leather armor, armed with sword and daggers, a bow and quiver of arrows near at hand along with his pack, he may very well be a ranger. If asked, Locus nods yes and assures the group that he is a noble, friendly woodsman who seeks the assistance of like-minded warriors who will help him capture some coin . . . and mayhaps slaughter the dragon.

"It will be good for the city, this deed, for it can only be a matter of time before the beast hungers for more riches and turns its attention to these fine people."

If the party agrees to join him in the adventure, Locus asks that they meet back at this very tavern in the morning. He has some matters to attend to before he is ready to journey. He also asks if the others he is speaking to – 1d4+2 random, inexperienced adventurers – will join the growing party in their mission to claim treasures from the dragon's hidden lair.

True. There is a dragon, yes, but it is no ancient beast. A wyrmling has made its home in the rotting cellar of a destroyed tower. The "treasures" are a few hundred coins of various denominations as well as an assortment of mundane gear. No great treasure here.

False. A more likely outcome. This is an elaborate ruse designed to separate the gullible from their possessions. Locus the Trusted is not to be trusted; he is a thief and not a ranger, and he makes his living by conning others and stealing their belongings. If necessary, he kills those from whom he steals; it is always better to kill than to be killed.

Locus waits no more than a few hours ride from the city before unleashing his trap. He has hired 2d6 ruffians – little more than city youths armed with clubs – who are waiting on the road and ambush the group. Locus instantly turns on the adventurers, attacking in hopes of quickly subduing the party. If the fight goes poorly, he and the ruffians attempt to escape into the forest.

THE KNIGHT and an UNWANTED BATTLE

"Help me. I've put it off as long as I could, the gods know all I've done to avoid this, but there's no escaping it. Once the sun's light illuminates us once again, I've no choice other than to go through with the terrible meeting."

A noble, strong man seated at a nearby table is speaking in whispers with another and the party cannot help but overhear when the man's voice suddenly rises in volume. His companion, an elderly gentleman wearing the robes of a wizard – or maybe just the rags of an insane man – tries to calm the troubled nobleman.

If they attempt to insert themselves into the conversation, the noble and his friend look offended and would clearly prefer to be left alone. They are both polite men, and will not bluntly ask to be left alone. A few more drinks loosens their tongues and attitudes, though, which is all it takes for the party to learn that the man, Berengar Ballynn, is a knighted soldier of the king's guard who has been roped into an unwanted duel with a less experienced warrior.

Ballynn is distraught because he is sure to kill this weaker opponent, and there is no honor in ruthlessly slaughtering one weaker than yourself. What makes it worse yet; the man, Josef Eldove, is the brother of a woman that Ballynn wishes to court.

The knight is unsure of what to do. He does not wish to murder Eldove, but he also doesn't want to lose face. Do they have any advice that may prove useful here?

True. Every word of Ballynn's tale is true and he is a man who is about to commit murder. The city watch and the authorities won't see it as murder, though, because Ballynn is merely exercising his knightly and noble purpose. Eldove called for this challenge, and it would be cowardly for Ballynn to refuse yet again. Eldove has called for this duel because he believes that the knight has wronged his sister. In truth, the knight and the woman have never spent time alone and have met only once before.

False. Again, the knight is telling the truth, but Eldove is not who he seems to be. He is not the woman's brother. No, Eldove is an assassin who was hired by another noble; Eldove is playing the part of a nobleman and will be paid once Ballynn is dead.



THE GROWING THREAT OF OGRES, TROLLS, AND ORCS

"An army, so I've heard, moving ever closer to us and certain to slaughter any who haven't the brains to flee. I'm gettin' out in the morning with the dawn. You'll not catch me anywheres near this place once those monsters are at the gates and smashing their way through the town's best watchmen and guards."

The alleys, taverns, and inns of the city buzz with rumors that an army of ogres, trolls, and orcs are intent on invading and capturing the city. Wherever they may go, the adventurers overhear whispers of an imminent invasion. Many in the city are packing their belongings and fleeing the city, even though the city council swears that the rumors are false and there is no threat to the city and her people.

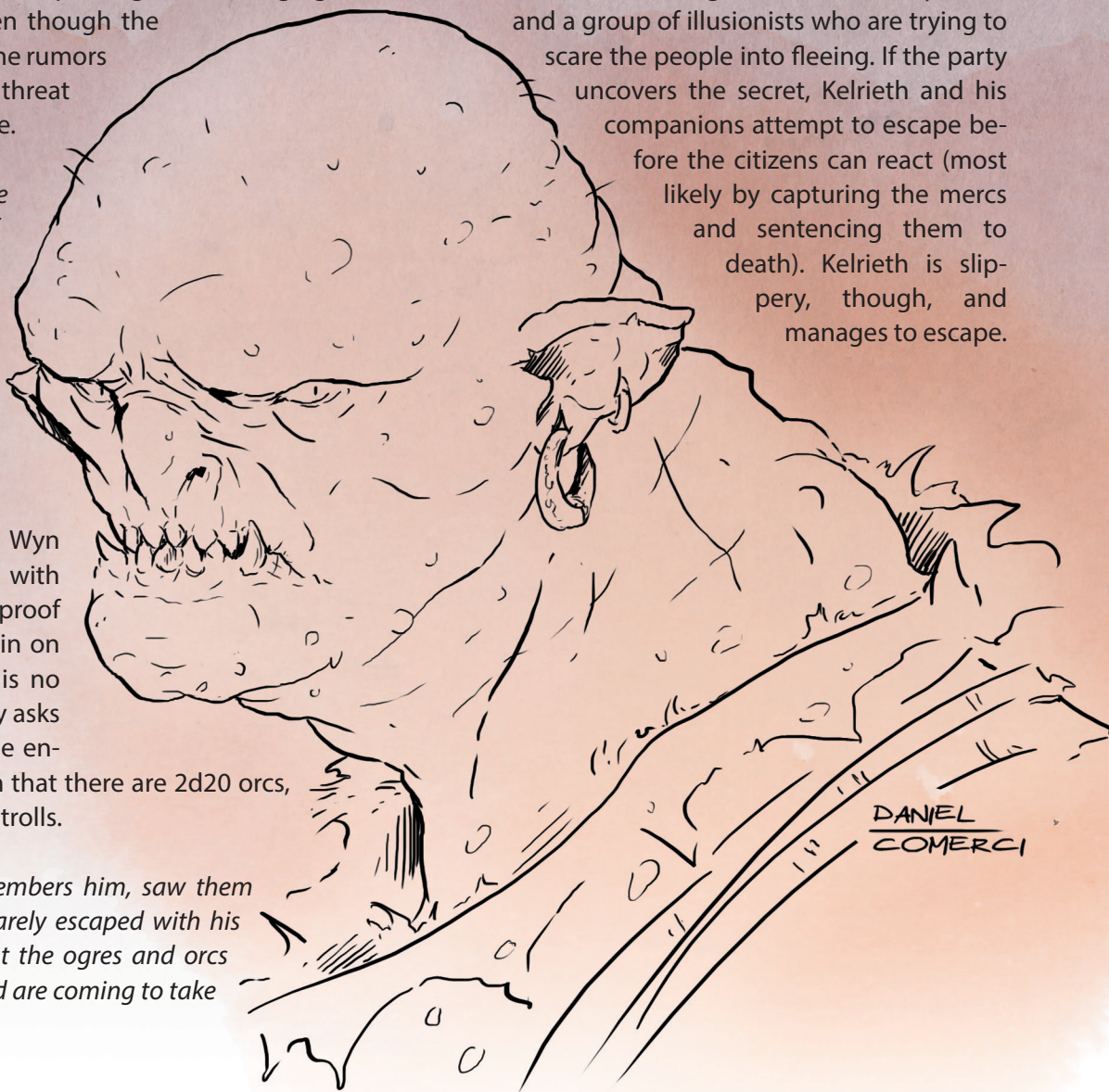
"I heard that the trolls were promised first choice of who they can eat. Unless you want to be a troll's breakfast, I suggest that you get out of here before the army reaches the city gates."

During the height of the panic, an elven ranger, Wyn Kelrieth, enters the city with the head of an orc, his proof that the army is closing in on the city and that there is no time to waste. If the party asks Kelrieth for details on the enemy forces, he tells them that there are $2d20$ orcs, $2d6+2$ ogres, and $1d4+3$ trolls.

"It's true! Rutger, ya remembers him, saw them with his own eyes and barely escaped with his life. He swears to me that the ogres and orcs have joined with trolls and are coming to take over the city."

True. There is an army moving quickly toward the city gates. At their current speed, the evil forces will reach the city within $1d4+1$ days . . . unless someone does something to stop them! The city council offers a reward to any brave enough to ride out to engage the evil forces as far from the city as possible. If the army is defeated, Wyn Kelrieth is rewarded and thanked by the citizens for bringing the proof that inspired the people to react fast enough to stop the invaders.

False. There is no army, and Wyn Kelrieth is no ranger. This scoundrel is working with a mercenary band and a group of illusionists who are trying to scare the people into fleeing. If the party uncovers the secret, Kelrieth and his companions attempt to escape before the citizens can react (most likely by capturing the mercs and sentencing them to death). Kelrieth is slippery, though, and manages to escape.



CAVERNOUS FEARS



"I've not seen it meself, 'tis true, but the woman swore on the life of her children that the mushrooms of the cavern were a valuable tool to wizards and witches. She says the wizards will pay a handsome price for as little as a handful of the stuff, and she even gave me the name of a few wizards here in the city who are seeking the mushroom."

The boy, maybe a dozen winters of age, is relentless in asking the party to help him grab a few baskets of mushrooms from nearby caves. He approaches them when they are at rest in the city, in an inn or tavern, and promises that he will share with them in any gold that they can earn by selling the mushrooms to the wizards named on the scrap of parchment that he clutches tight to his chest.

If they ask to see the names, the boy hesitates.

"How do I know ye won't rob me?"

The party could simply take the paper of names, but they are heroes and we can hope that they'll instead work with the child to convince him that it is best to ask around about the value of the mushrooms before setting off on an adventure. He soon sees the wisdom in such action and agrees to take them to every name listed on the paper. In total, there are $1d4+2$ wizards named on the parchment and yes, if asked, each is willing to buy the doomshroom.

The doomshroom, any arcane spellcasters in the party can tell you, is a powerful ingredient used in the creation of fear potions and is sometimes used as a spell component for wicked spells. Anyone seeking the magical mushroom is not looking to do good.

True. The wizards want the mushrooms that grow in the nearby caves. The caves are the home of various hazards, vermin, and beasts, which means that the party will face obstacles in their quest to collect the mushrooms. Adjust the exact number and strength of the inhabitants of the caverns to make the trek a challenge for the group, but don't make it such a dangerous outing that one of them may die. This is more of a chance for the party to do a good deed and help the boy than it is a terrifying adventure.

False. In the event that there are no doomshrooms in the caverns, it turns out that the boy is a puppet of a vile witch who has her eyes on the party. The boy has no idea that the woman who gave him the info was a liar; she tricked him into doing her evil work.

The witch and a small group of goblins she has paid are waiting in the caverns when the party arrives. She is after one random, mundane item carried by one of the adventurers. The player character doesn't know it, but the item in question is more valuable than it appears and was once in the ownership of a friend of the witch.