

# **PATHFINDER**

Meet the Iconics



The logo for Pathfinder, featuring the word "PATHFINDER" in a stylized, gothic font with a gold outline and a dark brown fill. The letters are interconnected, with the 'P' and 'A' being particularly large and ornate. Below the main title, the words "Meet the Iconics" are written in a simpler, serif font, also in dark brown. The entire logo is set against a white background.

# PATHFINDER

## Meet the Iconics

One of the many lessons we've learned in our tour with Dragon and Dungeon is that people like iconic characters. A lot. It seems like every day a new thread pops up on our message boards wanting to know more about the ill-fated Abelard the paladin, the tiefling fighter, or James Jacobs's notorious Tylandi Scrimm. As such, when we sat down to develop the iconics for Pathfinder, we knew going into it that what we came up with needed to be more than just easy art reference. These iconics needed to live up their name and represent our world, our ethos, and our whole idea of what gaming is about. Fortunately, with Wayne Reynolds onboard to design the visual elements, we knew that what we received would blow our socks off, which it has.

Along with representing our game world, however, these iconics pull double-duty as pregenerated characters in Pathfinder and the GameMastery Modules. Each adventure will be accompanied by four of our iconics, statted up to the appropriate level and ready for you to sit down and start playing with a minimum of effort.

James Sutter  
Assistant Editor, *Pathfinder*





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# Amiri – Female Human Barbarian

There are a million ways to die in the Realm of the Mammoth Lords. The natives of this brutal land are the nomadic Kellids, and they have made the best of this primal world. Amiri is one of these barbarians. Although she was blessed with a combination of independence and brawn, Amiri's childhood remained one of constant challenge. To the people of her tribe, the Six Bears, brawn, and bravery were not ideal characteristics for a woman to have. To the Six Bears, a woman's role was simple: raise children, tend to the sick, and forge bonds with other tribes. Women were resources. When a tribe wished to form an alliance, they would send gifts of meat, furs, treasure, and daughters. Amiri didn't see herself as livestock, and every chance she got, she tried to one-up her brothers and cousins. When a hunter went out and caught a caribou for the tribe, she would go out and catch two. When a party of orc raiders stumbled into their hunting grounds and a tribal hero killed four, she took it upon herself to kill six. Her constant sense of competition made her few friends, her brothers were both intimidated by her ferocity and enthralled by her beauty, while her sisters knew that each time she went against tradition, they would all be punished.

When Amiri finally came of age, her reputation had spread beyond the Six Bears. The other tribes took to calling her the "Soft Chieftain" of the Six Bears, a name that humiliated her almost as much as it did her kin, inferring that they were weak for allowing one of their women to grow so independent and strong. None of the other tribes wanted any part of her; her continued presence among the Six Bears caused much strife between once friendly tribes, and so the elders determined that there was but one choice, Amiri had to die. The only problem was the commonly held belief that murder of one's kin was the greatest taboo and the surest path to Hell.

The opportunity to be rid of their troublesome sister rose soon enough, when word came of a tribe of frost giants who had been sighted in the nearby mountains. The elders organized a warband to scout the mountains and to drive back the giants, and they made sure that Amiri was included in the band. Shocked but proud to have finally been chosen, Amiri didn't notice how the elders smiled at her eagerness to be on her way. The elders knew that Amiri's sense of competition would swiftly get her in over her head, and in secret tasked the rest of the hunters to goad her into just such a situation.

The warband headed up into the Kodar foothills, and it wasn't long before they found evidence of giants. One morning, the leader of the band rushed into camp, waving a dagger the size of a man's arm over his head. The warrior claimed to have single-handedly slain a giant and to have taken his dagger, and the others in the band congratulated him on his skill and bravery. Amiri took the bait, and announced that she would return by sundown with an even greater weapon. She could have no way of knowing that the dagger was part of the deception, that the warband incite her into a foolish plan.

What the warband themselves didn't anticipate was wandering the mountains, she came to an immense body at the foot of a cliff; the giant had fallen to his death weeks before, and at his side lay his immense bastard sword. Although Amiri knew she needed was his sword as proof, certainly her grand trophy. Yet, when she returned to the place Concerned, worried that they had fallen victim to with the warband halfway back to the tribal realized something was amiss, they were talking

Creeping unseen to the edge of the camp, she realized that she had not killed the giant, she also knew that all kin wouldn't think to dispute her claim with such a she had left her kin, she found the camp empty. the region's dangers, she tracked them, catching up camp. As she approached the camp, though, she of her, and they were laughing.

It was enough. With a roar, Amiri leapt back to her vision, and stole over her soul. Her immense sword they realized that death had come. The battle was swift that landed on her, simply stepping from one traitor to the

When her rage finally subsided, Amiri realized what she had deserved their fates, but they were still kin. That her reasons didn't change the ties of blood. She knew that she had cut the remains, trusting that they would be discovered by another headed west into the lands of Irrisen and the unknown reaches beyond, her heart was for the first time free, no longer was her future tied to traditions that would constrain her. She has come to value her oversized sword, and even though she can only truly wield it properly when her blood rage takes her, it has become as much a part of her as her fierce independence or her fiery heart. She no longer sees herself as a member of the Six Bears, but never speaks of the circumstances that forced her to flee her homeland. Some things are better left unsaid.



that she had been duped. She heard her kin and how even now she was likely cooking in a with her death was not what enraged Amiri. It that did it. Eyes blazing, Amiri stepped into even now she had bested them. The other laughter, pointing out that she could hardly wield the weapon and tried to adopt a menacing pose, but over, much to the other barbarian's growing

feet. Her rage filled her body, clouded her had decapitated two of the barbarians before and brutal, with Amiri not noticing the blows next and cutting them down.

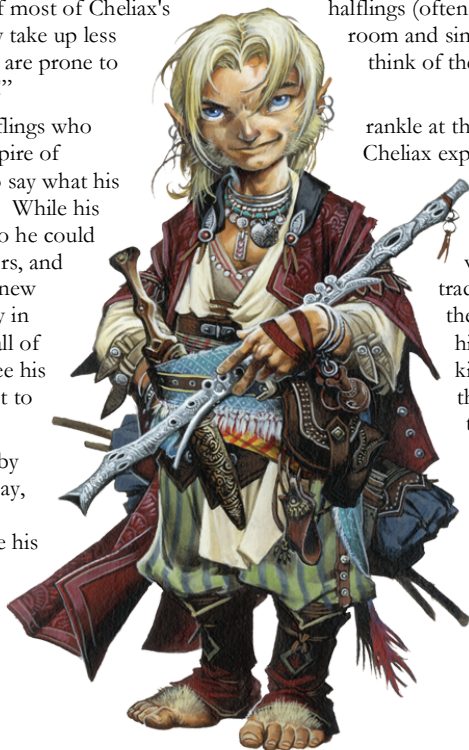
done. She knew that the hunters had certainly for murdering them were, to her, valid those ties, and so she turned her back on hunting party soon enough. As she heart was for the first time free, no longer was

## Lem – Male Halfling Bard

Although Lem was raised in the lap of luxury, his childhood was anything but comfortable. He had the unfortunate luck to be born into slavery, to a mother indentured to one of Cheliah's countless noble families. Lem was sold a half dozen times to different nobles before he reached the age of two. Such is the fate of most of Cheliah's halflings (often called "slips" by that nation's citizens). Halflings are much valued as slaves in room and since their inborn optimism, ironically, stunts escape urges. Halflings born into think of their lot in life as "lucky." They are fond of saying, "At least we aren't living in the gutter or starving!"

Nevertheless, halflings who devil-haunted empire of young age how to say what his less onerous jobs. While his to play the flute so he could brothers and sisters, and offering to seal a new increased mobility in then ensure that all of was shocked to see his As the place burnt to slipped away into

Lem left Cheliah by his childhood today, intolerance for powerful traits are his and impulsive day and his comedy material



rankle at the concept of enslavement do appear, halflings like Lem. Growing up a slave in the Cheliah exposed Lem to a shocking range of decadence and debauchery. He learned from a superiors wanted to hear, and as he grew older, these skills often secured him kin toiled in basement washrooms or tended hellhound stables, Lem was taught entertain at family gatherings. Yet Lem was not blind to the discomfort of his when he learned that a dozen of his kin were to be sacrificed to a devil as an trade contract, Lem knew the time to act had come. Taking advantage of his the manor, it was a relatively simple trick to light a few fires in secret corners and his halfling kin were safe in the slave's quarters. The manor burnt quickly, but Lem kin rush back to the manor in a hopeless attempt to aid in extinguishing the flames. the ground, and the halflings bemoaned their fate and the loss of their shelter, Lem the night, bitter, and distraught over this unexpected turn of events.

stowing away on a merchant vessel and never looked back. He rarely speaks of but one can see its effects in his high disdain for law and order, and his cruelty. Always quick to side with the underdog, Lem has learned that his most optimism and sense of humor, virtues that almost make up for his small stature nature. Lem's reasons for traveling with his current companions vary upon the mood, but he certainly values their strengths, and the never-ending supply of their antics provide him.

## Kyra – Female Human Cleric of Sarenrae

The priests of Sarenrae lead double lives. Known to her faithful as the Dawnflower, the Healing Flame, and the Everlight, she teaches temperance and patience in all things. Compassion and peace are her greatest virtues, and if enemies of the faith can be there are those who have no interest in redemption, who glory in slaughter and and fiends to the cruelties born in the hearts of mortals, Sarenrae's doctrines scimitar's edge. To this end, she expects her faithful to be skilled at swordplay, arts promoting centering of mind and body, and so that when they do enter suffer any longer than necessary.

Her priests are often categorized into these two camps: those who favor redemption as a enemy, and those who favor the blade. Kyra is certainly one of the latter. Born in a small parents, Kyra grew up in the shadow of one of the Dawnflower's shrines. She was taken at beauty of the shrine's stained glass, and the grace of the three priestesses who practiced nearby hill each dawn as they offered their morning prayers. When bandits attacked her watched as the priestesses did their best to reason with them, and when that came to them before they could do more damage. Unfortunately, the bandits were too strong, and burned. Kyra was one of the few survivors, and on the smoking ruins of the shrine she sword arm to Sarenrae, swore to protect those who could not protect themselves and to when the time for redemption passes.

Possessed of a fierce will and pride in her faith and skills with the scimitar, Kyra has trial by fire. She lost her family and home that fateful day, yet where another might be and a thirst for revenge, Kyra has found peace in the Everlight, and in the belief that, if one death at evil hands, her own losses will not have been in vain.



redeemed, they should be. Yet, remorseless evil of the undead justice delivered by the both as a form of martial battle, their foes do not

method to defeat the farming town to loving a young age with the swordplay on the small town, Kyra naught, to end the village swore her life and not spare the blade

traveled far since her consumed by anger she can prevent even

## Lini – Female Gnomish Druid

In her many explorations and journeys, Lini encountered numerous large animal predators, with whom she seemed to possess a certain affinity. More than once, Lini's traveling companions or enclave came under threat from some great bear or razor-clawed cat, but with a series of soothing noises and precise motions Lini always tamed the beast and sent it on its way.

Lini's success at calming animals came to an end one day when a snow leopard bound out of the trees and pinned her to the ground before she could react. Her friends scattered, leaving Lini alone to face the beast. Although fascinated by the cat's power and speed, and appreciative of its beauty, Lini trembled under its massive paw and tears leaked from her eyes. She knew she faced her doom, and she found it cruelly ironic how death came to claim her.

Yet the leopard did not strike.

"Your friends have abandoned you," a calm feminine voice intoned out of Lini's sight. "Despite the times you saved them, they left you to die." Although Lini could not see the woman, Lini knew of the Norn of the forest and suspected she was one of them.

"Please help me," Lini whispered, her chest struggling

"You do not need my help, little one. You need

Lini looked at the snow leopard, deep into its eyes. She saw neither hunger nor malice. Still struggling just eyes and asked, "Will you help me?"

Inexplicably, the snow leopard lifted the small gnome, and when she saw no sign of the Norn. She looked around scared, a small gnome in a large world.

"Come back," Lini cried. "Don't go! Please don't go. Don't leave me alone." afresh on her face, until she heard the

The snow leopard had returned. her cubs, the great cat licked gently at threw her arms around the leopard's neck. "You Droogami. That is what we call good friends."

Lini looked down then and picked up a stick side to perch on its back.

"Let us go, then, Droogami. We have no need

In the years since her departure from the Lands dozen sticks, one from each forest or wood she visits. In her Droogami's side and peels the bark from the sticks, smoothing and polishing them incessantly

intoned out of Lini's sight. "Despite the times you saved woman, Lini knew of the Norn of the forest and suspected

to rise under the great cat's crushing paw.

hers."

eyes. She saw neither hunger nor malice. Still struggling just eyes and asked, "Will you help me?"

its paw from Lini's chest. A coughing fit then overcame finally recovered, she looked around her. The

saw no sign of the Norn. She looked around scared, a small gnome in a large world.

go! Please don't go. Don't leave me alone." afresh on her face, until she heard the

With the delicateness of a mother tending to Lini's face, whisking away her tears. Lini are my friend, aren't you? I will call you

from the forest floor before clambering up the cat's

for this place."

of the Linnorm Kings, Lini has collected more than a resting time after long days of travel, she sits at





## Valeros – Male Human Fighter

Valeros was born on a quiet farm in Andoran, where he grew up listening to the tales of traveling merchants, soldiers, and dreaming of adventure and exploration. Though this longing only increased, as he grew older, so too did the demands of helping his aging parents run the farm, and slowly but surely the mounting responsibilities of agricultural life quashed any possibility of joys of married life), Valeros came to the realization that the door to a for good. Seized by a sudden, desperate need for a larger life left in the middle of the night with no more than a change of handle to discourage any ruffians who might seek to divest him would follow him for the rest of his life.

In the years since, Valeros has come a long way from the wide-of exploration (and maybe a pretty, worldly girl or three to regale seems, is much harder than the bards' tales, and adult Valeros has himself to be a deft hand with a sword, Valeros quickly fell in crowd, there learning the dirtier, grittier facts of warfare. prowess with a blade (or better yet, two), Valeros's association never seemed to last for long. There was his time as a guard ended when certain shipments kept coming in light under the exploited locals were dying for lack of grain, and only the winter). Then there was the stint as a freelance bounty discovered that it's a lot easier to hunt down escaped young woman on the run from a loveless marriage. And of incident with the Band of the Mauler, to which Valeros will leader had been crushed under that cave-in, or else he wife.

In the end, after acting as hired muscle for dozens of that the only way to keep from getting blamed for things go into business for himself as an adventurer, traveling with letting those who didn't fall by the wayside. And if some of women, such as a certain Varisian sorcerer or elven rogue,

While admittedly not the best at following orders, Valeros fighter, easily earning his keep in any group through the some might say thoughtlessness, with which he flings reputation as a bruiser and scofflaw, Valeros has picked travels, and can even read (something his "respectable" Cailean, the only god who properly understands the takes an easy-come, easy-go approach to life, wealth, only object he's never without is the tankard on his belt and fiercely loyal to those few who manage the considerable feat of establishing themselves in his affections, Valeros nevertheless hides such sentiments under a jaded and crass demeanor, frequently observing that there's nothing better than "an evening of hard drinking and soft company."

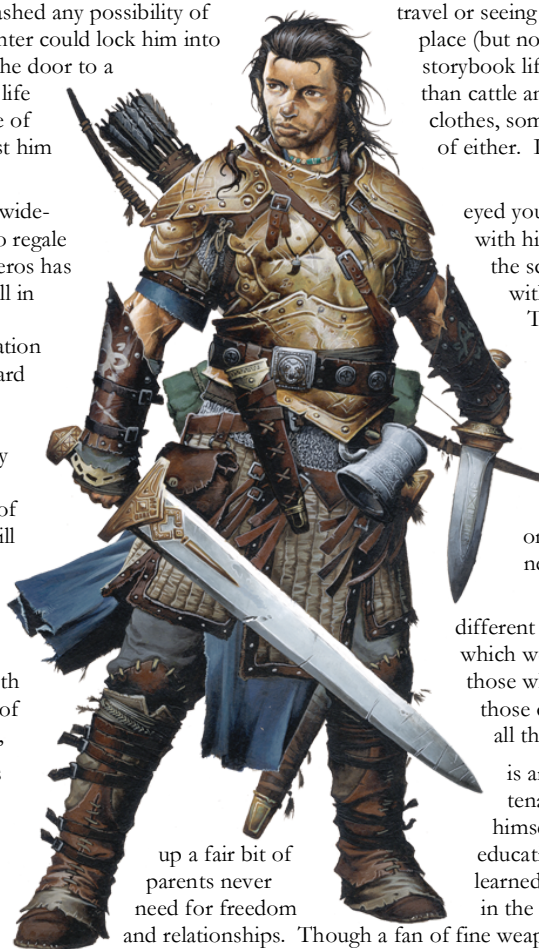
travel or seeing the world. Finally, just a month place (but not before he'd sampled a few of the storybook life of adventure was at last closing than cattle and corn, Valeros packed quietly and clothes, some pilfered food, and an old axe of either. It was to become a theme that

eyed young man who sought only the joy with his stories). Life on the road, it the scars to prove it. Discovering with the rough-and-tumble mercenary Though none could deny his with various mercenary groups for the Aspis Consortium, which Valeros's watch (never mind that needed a little to make it through hunter, during which Valeros murderers than it is to haul in a course, there was the infamous only say that he was positive their never would have touched the man's

different employers, Valeros finally realized which weren't his fault, not really, was to those who properly appreciated him and those companions happen to be pretty all the better.

is an extremely talented two-blade tenacity and absolute fearlessness; himself into combat. Despite his education here and there during his learned to do). A worshiper of Cayden in the common man's existence, Valeros

up a fair bit of parents never need for freedom and relationships. Though a fan of fine weapons and creature comforts, the (for you never know when someone might offer you a drink). Noble at heart,



## Sajan – Male Human Monk

Birthing to parents of the padaprajna caste of warriors in beautiful Vudra, Sajan Gadadvara and his twin sister Sajni learned to hold a temple sword before they could walk. Strict padaprajna discipline forged a tight bond between the twins, who spent even together, practicing the latest martial techniques taught to them. On their twelfth birthday, the twins were sent to live with the fighting men of the ghana padaprajna, while Sajni joined the battling women of the their separation, the twins continued to meet when they could, sparring and joking as they had in their

As the insightful narrative of the Vighrahi Patitraka states, “A warrior’s life is to war.” Thus, it was embroiled himself in a conflict with a neighbor. Most of the army fielded by Sajan’s lord consisted of tools of their trades, while the valuable padaprajna watched the battle in reserve. The warriors they stood on the losing side, but they were duty-bound to fight to the death when instructed. stole from them the glory of battle-death when he sued for peace after his conscripts fled the field. surrender, the lord gave over half of his sastra padapranja, including young Sajni.

Distraught, Sajan returned to his barracks in tears (for which he received severe beatings from father), and vowed that night to be reunited with his sister. Several weeks passed before he opportunity for escape. He fled into the countryside and slipped stealthily into the city of through whose gates Sajan watched his sister pass. After several days of clumsily seeking on his sister, he finally discovered that all the traded sastra padapranja were loaded onto distant Jalmeray.

Sajan quickly hired himself as a guard aboard a ship bound for the far-away island, later he found himself on its heavily guarded docks. Within a week, Sajan of most of the sastra padapranja, who worked as guards and courtiers for the island’s not among them. More weeks passed before Sajan learned that his sister had, like him, guard aboard a trading ship, hers bound for a place called Absalom.

Sajan knows he cannot return to Vudra, for the padapranja there would execute him as a cares not for his home country, however, and continues to seek out any clue that might toward his sister.

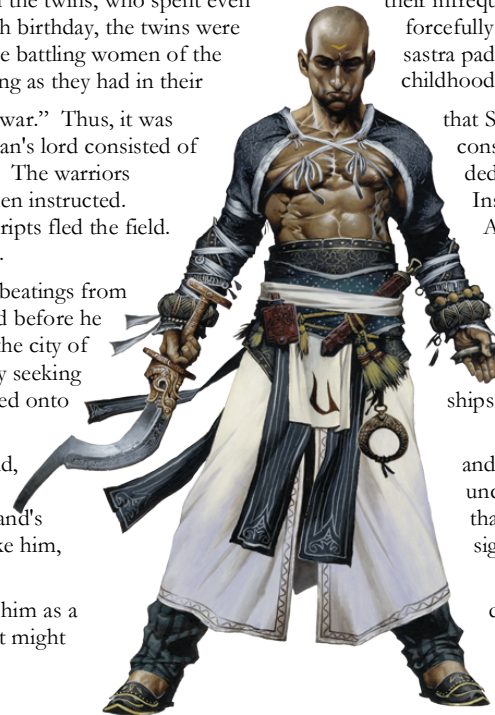
their infrequent times of rest forcefully separated: Sajan sastra padaprajna. Despite childhoods.

that Sajan’s lord conscripts wielding deduced quickly that Instead, their lord As part of his

his own found his Sumadhadra, information ships bound for

and several months uncovered the fates thakur. Sajni was signed on as a

deserter. He point him



## Seelah – Female Human Paladin of Iomedae

Although still viewed by many theologians and traditionalists as a newcomer to the world’s faiths, Iomedae the Inheritor seems poised for greatness among the divine. Certainly her numerous orders of paladins have risen swiftly to take on the vaunted role of paragon in many societies. Evangelical in their exuberance to spread word of her wisdom, Iomedae’s missionaries were pivotal in the defense during the fabled Siege of Solku. They sacrificed their lives saving the town from gnomish slavers, and although none of them survived the siege, their presence lived on, particularly in the eyes of young Seelah.

Seelah’s family came to the Unfortunately, they traded one Canyon began their infamous orphaned at the age of 14 in a pickpocketing and bullying and even arrived to defend Solku, Seelah hour she had stolen a something strange happened, over the act, trying (and Seelah realized that one of the battle without her mortal wound to the she died of her wound.

Wracked with guilt, They watched silently as onto the pyre aside her from the start that from collecting it, another few months. Acemi’s death, Seelah Iomedae out of guilt, but Inheritor.



walled town of Solku as pilgrims fleeing the atrocities of distant Geb to the distant south. peril for another, and within months of their settling in Solku, the gnolls of White pillaging. Seelah’s parents were slain in the first of these raids, leaving her strange town. She did what she must to survive on the city streets, hiring herself out as a mercenary. When a group of Iomedae’s knights was immediately taken with their beautiful, shining armor, and within an particularly fine mithral helm with a golden bird upon its brow. Yet, then, Seelah became overwhelmed with guilt at her theft. For days, she agonized (failing) several times to pawn the helm. During the Battle of Red Hail, the bravest knights, a woman named Acemi with hair in long braids, fought helm. This was the woman’s undoing; in holding Solku’s gates, she took a skull from a gnomish flail. The woman’s heroism carried the day, but that evening

Seelah approached Acemi’s body as her companions prepared for her pyre. Seelah placed the stolen helm over the dead woman’s head, and then climbed to join her in death. The paladins were moved beyond words, they had known Seelah had stolen the helm, but Acemi had forbidden her brothers and sisters hoping that the helm would bring the desperate orphan enough money to survive for The knights of Iomedae took Seelah in that night. Although she has come to terms with still regrets the theft that ironically brought her into Iomedae’s arms. She originally came to in the past several years, that guilt has transformed into a powerful love and faith in the

The young paladin wears her hair in Acemi’s style and is trained in the use of the longsword. In so doing, she hopes to carry on the good work that Acemi might have done had she not fallen at the Battle of Red Hail. It’s the least she feels she can do to make up for a death that she allowed to happen.

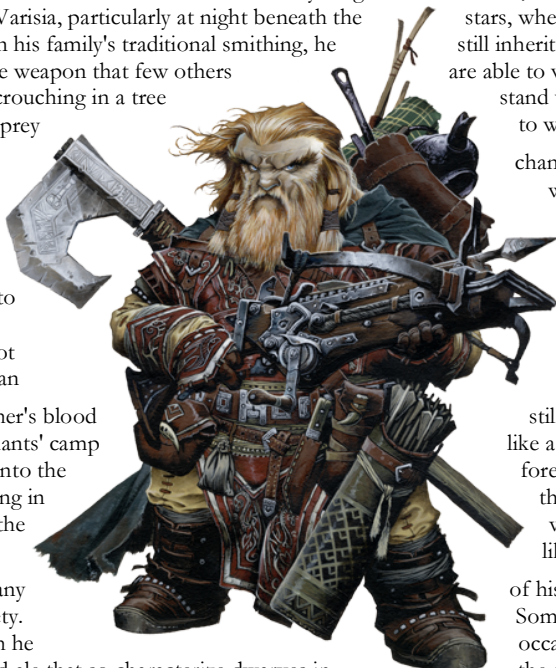
## Harsk – Male Dwarven Ranger

Not all dwarves are meant for the mines. As a young southeastern Varisia, particularly at night beneath the uninterested in his family's traditional smithing, he highly accurate weapon that few others happier than crouching in a tree deer or larger prey

That all a dwarven from the his less-chief scout down, failing to company had quickly, but not his band into an

With his brother's blood through the giants' camp melting back into the was left gurgling in to forever be the of noble men

Harsk, like many dwarven society. nature, though he in the beer and ale that so characterize dwarves in keep his senses sharp. While he never lets his brother's he wields it only as a last resort, knowing that his true skills lie in the hunt and striking from darkness.



dwarf, Harsk spent every spare moment outdoors under the wide skies of stars, where his keen vision made him a hunter without compare. While generally still inherited enough of their tinkering ability to construct his own crossbow, a heavy, are able to wind. Eschewing the company of his fellows, few things made Harsk stand with his bow, listening to the wind through the forest leaves and waiting for to wander by.

changed twenty years ago, when his elder brother, a fine captain named Sigur, led war band from Janderhoff against a small party of giants that had descended Mindspin Mountains to raid and pillage. Out of affection, Sigur offered experienced sibling the chance to come and prove himself as Sigur's and second-in-command. Calm and peaceful by nature, Harsk turned him see the honor his brother was doing him until several days after the departed. Traveling light and fast, Harsk caught up with his brother quickly enough. Misjudging the size and skill of the raiding party, Sigur led ambush, where it was slaughtered to the last dwarf.

still fresh on his hands, Harsk went mad with rage. That night, he stalked like a vengeful wraith, slaughtering giant after giant with his crossbow before forest, only to reappear elsewhere and take another victim. When the last giant the dust, Harsk took up his brother's axe and slipped off into the trees, vowing voice of justice in the wild places, to keep balance and prevent the sacrifices like his brother.

of his kind, is gruff and taciturn, but there ends most of his connection to Something of a loner, he prefers to spend his time outdoors, communing with occasionally travels alongside others whose goals match his own. Uninterested the minds of human society, Harsk instead drinks pot after pot of strong tea to

## Merisiel – Female Elven Rogue

The elves have a name for elven children unfortunate enough to be born and raised in human these foundlings or orphaned elves find loving homes with humans, although the fact that, one-time playmates become their effective guardians and foster parents results in a strangely Forlorn aren't as fortunate, they live on the streets as almost eternal urchins, watching alone move on to greater things.

Merisiel is one of the Forlorn, only now emerging from decades spent as a child of the ready to make her own way in life. A master at stowing away on ships, she's called dozens another when her companions outgrew her or she outlived them. Life has been hard for fact that she's always found it difficult to master skills that come easily to her companions. drawer, as the saying goes, Merisiel has learned to make up for this by carrying at least a When things go wrong with her carefully laid plans (as they almost always seem to do), needs to be done gets done. To date, Merisiel hasn't met a problem that can't, in one with daggers.

Merisiel's life experiences have taught her to enjoy things to the fullest as when the good times might end. She's open and expressive with her while she's always on the move and working on her latest batch of plots comes down to being faster than everyone else, either on her feet, or with She wouldn't have it any other way.



society, the Forlorn. In a few rare cases, over the course of their childhood, skewed sense of the self. Most as their companions age and

streets into a young adult of cities home, leaving one for Merisiel, made more so by the Never the sharpest knife in the dozen of them on her person. the knives come out and what way or another, be solved

they occur; it's impossible to tell thoughts and emotions, and for easy money, in the end it her beloved blades.



## Seoni – Female Human Sorcerer

Unlike the barbarians-gone-native on the eastern plateau or the colonial Chellixian immigrants of Varisia, a nomadic race whose closest real-world cultural analogue is the Romani. Or at least, be apparent from her otherworldly grace, there's something not quite human in her ancestry. any hard facts, Seoni herself has picked up on some of this, and is constantly pushed to search her heritage by strange dreams that she doesn't understand.

More than just ornamentation, Seoni's runic tattoos play a large role in her personality. Coming magic maintains a strong following, hers are simultaneously a manifestation of her power and The sheer number adorning her skin, as well as the similar patterns woven into her clothes, her tribe, though many of the so-called "civilized" residents of Varisia look upon such body

Despite being a consummate adventurer, Seoni is something of an enigma to her neutral on most matters, bound by codes and mandates that she rarely feels compelled keeps her emotions tightly bottled. Extremely detail oriented, what the more party call a "control freak," Seoni is a careful and meticulous planner, a schemer who frustrated by the improvised plans of her more impulsive companions. Despite her comrades through numerous tight spots, a fact that continues to who wonders loudly (although not altogether unappreciatively) about "the

As with so many things, however, if Seoni understands her motivations, she's herself.



the south, Seoni is a native she's mostly Varisian, as might Though she doesn't have deeper into the mysteries of

from a people where tattoo a tool to aid in her castings. are a mark of status among modification with distaste.

compatriots. Quietly to explain, the sorceress pugnacious members of her frequently finds herself all of this, Seoni has stuck by amaze and confuse Valeros, witch and her schemes."

keeping that knowledge to

## Ezren – Male Human Wizard

For many adventurers, wanderlust strikes at a young age when minds are impressionable and the urge to escape the doldrums of home life become too much to resist. In other cases, there's never a choice at all, being raised on the streets leaves few other options available for those who do not wish to become criminals. Rare are those who come to adventuring late in life.

This was Ezren's path to adventure. Born to a childhood was pleasantly safe. As the fourth therefore the one expected to carry on father's family, lived in a neighborhood relatively safe

That changed when his father was taken spurious to stick, and while his father business fell to pieces. Shocked, abandoned his future and spent his finally uncovered irrefutable proof of his evidence over to the church

At the age of 42, Ezren is forward to discovering the dissatisfaction with family, intellect; in fighting for his intellectual. Lacking the spry way with words of the tarnished Oppara, capital of to join one of several prestigious due to his age. No wizard seemed So, Ezren was forced to strike out

Over the next decade, as he traveled the wizard's trade here and there. first-hand experiences have given him eager to make names for themselves. you, but now he's finally begun to



successful spice merchant in one of Absalom's more affluent districts; Ezren's of six siblings, he never knew the responsibility implicit in being the eldest (and trade) or the freedom of being the youngest. He enjoyed the comforts of a well-to-do from crime, and seemed poised for a life of mediocrity.

away, charged with heresy by the church of Abadar. The charges were too escaped excommunication, the damage had been done; his father's dismayed, and convinced that his father was innocent; Ezren adult life trying to repair his father's ruined reputation. So, when Ezren his father's guilt, and he realized he'd wasted his life on a lie, he turned and said goodbye to his home, his family, and his life.

full aware that he's missed his adulthood, yet at the same time he looks world, and making a difference for a cause that he believes in. His religion, and government left him precious little to trust but his own father's redemption, he had become a gifted researcher, scholar, and limbs of youth, the trust in religion, the strong arm of the soldier, or the politician, Ezren felt he had but one option open. He traveled to Taldor and one of the oldest cities of the continent of Avistan, hoping schools of wizardry. Yet, time and time again, he was turned away to want an apprentice who, in many cases, was older than them. on his own once again.

Avistan, Ezren studied where he could, picking up tricks of The combination of arcane study mixed with his worldly an edge over young wizards fresh out of apprenticeship and Ezren knows about the many ways the world can trick and betray master the art of magic, giving him the tools to fight back.

# Daniel – Male Elven Alchemist

Flayleaf may ease your mind. Pesh may invigorate your humors. Yet, as any sage and scholar can tell you, knowledge is the most addictive drug. And once the quest for learning has its hooks into you, once your eyes have been opened, there's no tearing free.

Daniel Morgethai was born, as so many elves are, in the nation of Kyonin. One of innumerable scions of the prestigious Morgethai family, he grew up in the picturesque town of Riverspire, where the southwestern border of Kyonin's great forest gives way to fertile, rolling plains. When finally old enough to pursue a trade, the exceedingly precocious young elf was loaded up with what funds his family could spare and packed off to the shining capital of Iadara, to study alchemy under several of the art's great masters. And it was here that the trouble started.

Daniel took to alchemy immediately, reveling in the idea of transmutation, the changing of one thing into another, by means chemical or arcane. "Alchemy," he was fond of proclaiming to his friends, "is pure magic, even when it isn't." Within a few short years, the brilliant and studious Daniel had learned enough from his instructors that they set him loose to pursue his own studies, becoming advisors and respected colleagues rather than true masters.

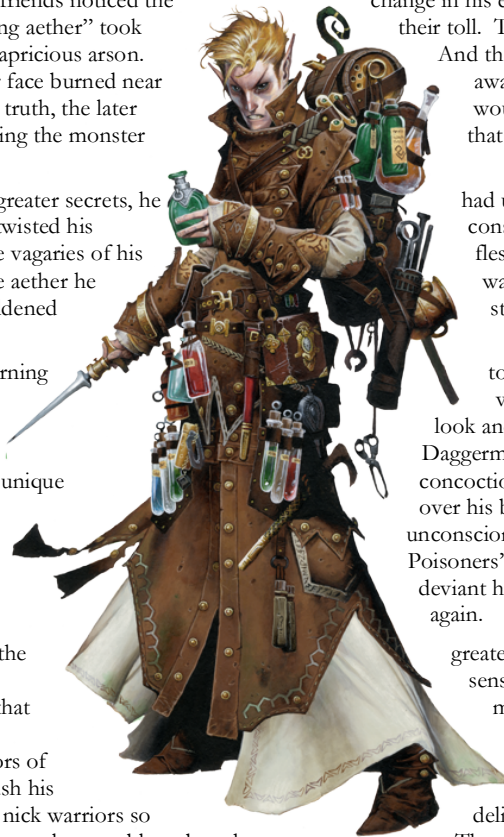
Yet, he had learned more than just strange formulae in Iadara. As cheerful and innocent as it seemed on the surface, Daniel's obsession with what he called "the Change" went beyond the simple curatives of an apothecary, beyond even the magical and explosive concoctions of those alchemists trained for battle. In his eternal quest to understand his theories better, Daniel gave himself literally to his studies, and began to use his concoctions on his own flesh, striving to unlock the full potential of his body. What emerged from those long, sleepless nights was someone new. Someone dangerous.

Officially, Daniel's banishment from Kyonin was the result of plagiarizing another alchemist's discoveries, or perhaps siring an illegitimate son with an embarrassed noble. The documents don't speak of the way his former friends noticed the increasingly wild, as lack of sleep and increasing amounts of "invigorating aether" took sudden rash of crimes in the districts he frequented, daring thefts and capricious arson. mention the young woman found in the alley behind his apartment, her face burned near successful attempt to hide her identity, and the identity of her killer. In truth, the later decipher anyway, as even the killer himself might have trouble recognizing the monster simply for seeing something she shouldn't.

Daniel was no longer the man that he once was. In his thirst for ever-greater secrets, he potential, strange tinctures that quickened his movements to a blur, or twisted his poison or malady. Yet, while he gained ever-increasing control over the vagaries of his their toll on his mind. He fell deep into addiction, deeper than even the aether he match. He would lose himself to the Change, only to wake from a maddened done terrible things. And worse, that he no longer cared.

Exiled from his homeland, Daniel wandered for many years, slowly learning addictions. Gone were the blackouts, the uncontrolled and senseless grew a hard and haunted-eyed young man, handsome save for his wild along his veins. Seeking to peddle his secret knowledge, he traveled to Kingdoms, joining up with that city's Poisoners' Guild. For a time, his unique celebrity in certain circles. But as the months passed, Daniel's control the old lust for the beautiful chaos of unconscious (and loosing the beast of the Change to walk the streets. In the end, the offense to Daniel's "exploits," and though the elf argued hard that his was none of the guild's concern, he was forced to go his own way once

Today, Daniel has grown further, into a man of two minds. The first, the the Daniel Morgethai That Was, truly repents for the arbitrary and caused, and attempts to keep his darker urges in check. The second is that Change, the mad and capricious soul that holds all other creatures in only to feel the heat of the explosion on his face or see the shifting colors of This latter comes forth primarily in combat, where Daniel's potions push his has any right to move, flitting through the fray to fling corrosive ash or nick warriors so injection-blade that many don't know they've been cut until they find themselves unable to breathe. gives his vile tendencies full rein, and carries himself well in social situations, most who look into those bagged and bloodshot eyes quickly understand the truth of his nature: unbalanced, unstable, unpredictable, and totally indispensable in a fight, which is why he still manages to fall in with other adventurers from time to time. And as he continues to mature, some of them even survive his companionship.



# Alain – Male Human Cavalier

Deference and respect are the privileges of noble birth. Few know this better than the man who calls himself Alain, yet equally well does he know that such things are not always freely given where they are due. And in those cases, it's the burden of the nobly born to correct the error, and to take by force that which is their right.

Alain was born in Taldor with the proverbial silver spoon in his mouth, son of a wealthy but relatively minor noble house. As a boy, he showed remarkable affinity for both physical activities, especially the martial pursuits, and the ins and outs of courtly etiquette and intrigue. Though both traits made him the quite popular with the peerage, especially the young ladies of the court, necessitating more than one woman being shuffled off to a nunnery on a nine-month "vacation," Alain's wealth and natural abilities also gave him an excessively healthy sense of self-importance, sometimes getting him into trouble that would have crippled a man of lower station. By the time Alain's father realized that the cane-scarred whipping boy might not be the most effective means of corralling his youngest son, Alain was already near grown, and thoroughly convinced of his own competence in all things.

Though Alain regularly dismissed such noble studies as literature and linguistics, "If the elves want to speak, let them learn a man's language," he could never get enough of bards' tales of battle and bloodshed, often keeping the minstrels at his favorite taverns playing late into the night. Excel as he might at the joust or the ritualized combat of the nobility, he longed for the primal exultation of war, where his mastery over his fellow men would not just be avowed or lauded, but proved undeniably by the blood on his sword, as clear as the red-dripping talons of an eagle. He had the nobility of society. Now he wanted the nobility of nature.

Unfortunately, for Alain, any serious clash of arms lay far beyond the borders of his father's expansive holdings, and neither his father nor his two elder brothers showed the slightest desire to sustain a blood feud with another house. All three men knighthood, a socially safe and proper outlet for his bloodlust, yet the idea of serving as a squire for someone else give him orders, was unthinkable to young Alain. At last, when he could gathered what funds and personal affects he could carry and the "crimson poetry of the fray."

True warfare has little in common with heroic ballads, and few unchanged. Certainly, this was true for Alain. Yet, where understanding the price of a life and the senseless ease with In the clash of spears and the screams of horses, the man became an elemental force of destruction, cutting down merely his opponents. Though he became rich patrons heaped upon him, Alain cared only for man whose worth was proven, in fire and iron.

Today, Alain wanders as he wills, taking embarking on his own expeditions when they warriors are often drawn to fight at his side, quite a knack for leading them, issuing companions are almost always cohorts of managing his troops and urging them on him that soldiers are a short-lived lot, and butcher's bill.

As much as his life revolves around the made him so popular (for better or another warrior or potential client, himself with a calculated aloofness an attractive lady is concerned, however, his highborn women who've fallen prey to the Son of House Germande, Bearer of the strike his fancy.

In truth, whether leading soldiers in a bed in the morning, Alain cares little love, or lust, Alain cares about his reputation, and whether as scoundrel or saint. Perhaps the only creature he having accompanied Alain for longer than any of his human compatriots, Donahan represents everything Alain looks for in a partner: absolute loyalty, absolute trust, and absolute obedience.



attempted to turn Alain to any length of time, of letting stand it no longer, the young scion declared him a sellsword, setting off for

who see its raw and naked face come back some men learn wisdom in the wrack, at last which it's taken, Alain learned something else. who had been a trumped-up merchant's son swaths of men who were never his enemies, but in his own right off of the heavy purses his what the rewards represented: that here was a

commissions when they suit his fancy and don't. Thanks to his prowess on the battlefield, and to Alain's secret surprise he's developed gruff and decisive commands. These rather than friends, though Alain does a fine job to ever-greater feats, long experience has taught hence he sheds few tears when it's time to pay the

battlefield, Alain still retains the social graces that in the courts of his upbringing. If greeting introduce himself as simply Alain, comporting increase others' opinions of his abilities. Where edges immediately smooth, and many are the knight" calling himself Alain Germande, Third Shielding Spear, and any other honorifics that

worse) may to rough "rogue

suicidal about the strives with truly values is his horse, Donahan. Exceedingly well trained, and

charge or booting serving girls out of his people around him. More than money, every encounter to increase his own legend,



## Imrijka – Female Half-Orc Inquisitor

Wails regularly echo through the eastern wing of Gravecharge, Pharasma's cathedral in the university city of Lepidstadt. Yet such aren't the breathless screams of the dead that so often ring through the corners of Ustalav, but rather the cries of life. Since its construction, Gravecharge has maintained a clean and well-supervised hospice for sick and orphaned youths. Just as the goddess Pharasma concerns herself with the transition of life to death, so does she cherish even the most tragic lives.

Imrijka came to Gravecharge in the arms of a city watchman, wrapped in a tattered uniform and held at arm's length. The guard claimed his patrol had found "the thing" during their dawn patrol to the Spiral Cromlech, a Kellid ruin overlooking the city that was notorious for ill fortune and mysterious disappearances—but never for mysterious appearances. Hearing a babe bawling amid the moon-bleached standing stones, the guards bold enough to investigate momentarily took her for some stray fiend-child and almost slew her amid the eerie ruins. Identifying her as a half-orc infant did little to stay the hands of those ready to mete out death, but the argument that matters of life and death should be left to Pharasma sheathed the blades of those not truly eager to spill a child's blood—regardless of the color of her skin.

Dubbed Imrijka after Gravecharge's first high priestess, Imrijka Castavelik, the pistachio-skinned girl was cleaned, clothed, and given a place among the cathedral's other orphans. At first, she terrified those youths, being larger, stronger, and more vicious in her biting than some children double her age. But only for a time. The priestesses of Pharasma explained the mysteries of their goddess's will and the vastness and variety of her creations, teaching the children that they were blessed to have such a unique new sister. For a time, behind the cathedral's walls, that was even the truth.

When she was old enough to understand and be understood, Imrijka reported to the offices of Jarlos Teym, Gravecharge's high exorcist, for the first time. He asked her a great deal about her life, how she felt about her studies, the clergy, the other children, and if there was anything he could do to make things more comfortable for her. A shy girl, Imrijka declined. Subsequent discussions bent toward the future, Imrijka's dreams, her prayers, and her vision for a long life. Finally, though, after months of building a rapport with the girl, Teym asked about her past. But for Imrijka, life began with the cathedral, priestesses, and other orphans. Teym pressed, insisting on answers, even verifying them with magic. After one particularly intense interview, a confused Imrijka finally started asking her own questions: Why did it matter? Why did Teym care? Couldn't what she might be outweigh what she might have been?

Deeming her mature enough to know, Teym explained his tenacity: someone had come to adopt Imrijka. Thrice. Every Kuthona for the past 3 years. First came a man dressed like a count's footman, articulate and with more questions than answers. He left after raising the clergy's suspicions with his too-pointed inquiries about Imrijka. A year later he returned, this time with a human woman of vulpine beauty who claimed to be Imrijka's mother—though her apparent age made that only the barest possibility. It was kept the strangers from Imrijka, and the unusual pair left with past—days before Teym's first meeting with Imrijka—the white and silver. The bold newcomer spoke as one used to over to him. Teym personally denied him, insisting to know man persisted. The high exorcist ordered them out of the the man in white smiled. "She's not like us," he said, eyes

Despite Teym's explanation, Imrijka understood only that her exorcist had sent them away. She held back both questions and her. But she didn't return to her room. Rather, she exited through the snowy streets—where someone waited.

A man in white sat upon the icy benches of the nearby the crows. Seeing Imrijka enter the plaza through the walked toward her. Wary, she approached. In his disk etched with barbaric symbols and a figure impaled

A merciless iron arrow shattered the man's hand, sending the strange across the circle, another arrow nocked in his bent hawthorn bow. crimson of Pharasma's inquisitors, woven flames that engulfed any "Back, girl," he commanded in a voice Imrijka had never heard him

The man in white might have been carved of ice. He had never away, a tangle of disjointed fingers and bloodless flesh-ribbons Imrijka. Her small tusks clattered against her teeth, but she didn't

"Another time, dear," the man whispered, just for her. Then the moment, he seemed to be one with the cold, a blizzard-born prince. and frightened—but not alone. High Exorcist Teym's cloak around her was tobacco and dust—what Imrijka imagined a grandfather should smell like. It

Until Imrijka reached maturity and was fully able to defend herself, she rarely left Gravecharge Cathedral. When finally she did, it was in the crimson and black of an initiate inquisitor of Pharasma's faith. Even after the retirement of High Exorcist Teym, she continued to serve the church and the man she'd adopted as her grandfather, assisting him in his more scholarly pursuits as a consultant on religious antiquities at the University of Lepidstadt. She's traveled much of Ustalav and beyond—guarded an expedition to the boney towers of Kalexcourt, spent a night in the haunted hotel known as House Beumhal, been shouted off the porch of retired monster hunter Ailson Kinder (but not before getting her copy of *Hunter's Moon* signed), and had numerous other adventures. She regularly returns to Gravecharge, where several of her childhood companions have grown into positions within the church's sphere of influence—including Brel Vhalsik, an argumentative Kellid theologian with whom she shares a complicated relationship. But increasingly her interests and Teym's research send her beyond Ustalav's borders, where she treads with her goddess's blessing, bringing judgment to all who would violate the laws of life and death. In her travels, she's faced significant prejudice, but tales of Pharasma's "monster monster-hunter" and Imrijka's ever-present arsenal convince most bigots to keep their fool mouths firmly shut. Through it all, she's never seen the man in white again—at least, not with total confidence, as there have been far too many shadows and half-recognized faces to be sure. She recovered his strange gift on that snowy day and wears the disk openly, hoping that someone someday might recognize it and lead her to some hint of where she came from and who she was. But for now, the future holds far greater promises for Imrijka, and she strides into it boldly, confident in her faith, where she's going, and who she is.



## Alahazra – Female Human Oracle

Only those who refuse to see truth are truly blind. Such is the verdict of Alahazra, bride of the sun and prophet of the burning sands.

Alahazra was born in a small Rahadoumi town east of Manaket, one of the many way stations on the caravan route known as the Path of Salt, which leads from Azir all the way to distant Sothis and takes its name from the waves of the Inner Sea and the dried tears of the slave chains that march along it. The daughter of a wealthy and widowed wainwright, Alahazra wanted for nothing, growing up with the best tutors money could buy, all the time being groomed for a potentially lucrative marriage, or perhaps even induction into the Occularium, Manaket's prestigious wizard's college.

All of that changed on the morning when sixteen-year-old Alahazra woke to find herself suddenly and inexplicably blind, her eyes clouded by a white mist that gave her only vague outlines of her surroundings. Beside himself with grief, her father called in the best healers to be found in the godless land, only to discover that the situation was worse than he could have imagined. For when the bards with the healing touch reached out to the fevered child, they were suddenly cast back by a blast of flames that burned the girl's sickbed but left her magically unharmed. Yet even this might have been bearable, had the fleeing bards not revealed the rest of their discovery: that the girl's flames bore no hint of sorcery or arcana. Though Alahazra's staunchly atheist father could scarcely believe it, his proper Rahadoumi household harbored a burgeoning cleric.

Confronted by her inside her skin, by what he saw as a daughter a final kindness and her to run before the Pure new family, for she no longer

Blind, weak, and weeping with seeking what meager shade and put distance between herself and at last she collapsed in the lee of

It was there, staring up through bury her in the hot sand of the vision of debilitating color suddenly would be, strong, proud, and fierce. was a force of the desert, a voice of they were ready for it or not. Baking know herself, and in doing so first

With the aid of her newfound abilities, following the Path of Salt until she through the great cities and barren fire to the wicked. In time, her notoriety whispered that she made consorts and the court of the Ruby Prince. Alahazra the future is of concern, and her duty is disdains sight.

Now a grown woman, and still attractive enough to turn the heads of slaves and rich men alike, Alahazra is kind but distant, often letting conversation drop in favor of taking in the sounds and smells of her environment. When she does speak, in her low, throaty voice, her words have the weight of command. Alahazra has little patience for fools (most notably those who let money or pride blind them to truth and justice), yet also has a soft spot for orphans, and in her own stern way often sees herself as the mother to her adventuring companions. Though she maintains that she has never worshiped a god, the cornerstone of her bitterness toward both her father and her homeland, she has come to respect a wide variety of deities, whom she refers to as "powerful and strategic allies." And while her detractors might call her cold, in battle Alahazra's burning rage, especially toward injustice and intolerance, still comes roiling out in a wall of divine flame.



enraged father and frightened by the new abilities that she felt burning Alahazra protested her innocence loud and long, but to no avail. Sickened betrayal of both his trust and his national pride, Alahazra's father did his cast her out with no more than the clothes on her back, instructing Legion arrived to take her into custody, and let her gods be her had one in Rahadom.

frustration and rage, Alahazra stumbled southeast into the desert, water the badlands had to offer. For days, she wandered, seeking only to any pursuers who might still seek revenge for her presumed heresy, until a dune, dehydrated and dying.

milky cataracts at the burning ball of the sun and letting the wind slowly dunes, that Alahazra had her first revelation. Behind those ruined eyes, a exploded. In it, Alahazra saw herself not as she was, but as she, one day In that moment, Alahazra understood that she was more than just a girl. She sun, sand, and flame, and she would bring its truth to the people, whether slowly in the hot coals of the great Garundi desert, Alahazra came to harnessed the magical flames that had been building inside her.

Alahazra moved steadily east, crossing into Thuvia and finally came to rest in Osirion. There she roamed as she willed plains, offering wisdom, healing to the righteous, and cleansing grew, offering her passage into higher social circles, and it's admirers of several powerful men, possibly even entering herself, however, speaks little of her past. For her, only to defend it as best she can; with clarity of vision, that

## Balazar – Male Gnome Summoner



The final decade of the Age of Enthronement brought hope and innovation to the people of the Inner Sea region. In the north, Chelish explorers from Korvosa founded the city of Magnimar. In the east, Taldor and Qadira reached an uneasy peace after centuries of antagonism and open warfare. In the treacherous Mana Wastes of the south, refugees fleeing persecution in Nex settled the Duchy of Alkenstar as a beacon of light and progress in a sea of magic-warped madness. And not far away, in Nex's capital city of Quantum, the Arclords adopted an orphaned gnome child named Balazar into their most prestigious school of magical instruction.

Diligent students of the scribbles and writings of the long-lost archmage who founded that nation, the Arclords deciphered codes and texts from the margins of newly discovered spellbooks and concluded that "children of the First World" would play an important role in the magical administration of the departed wizard's kingdom. In the years before the death of Aroden, prophecy was a much more valuable currency in the lands of the Inner Sea, and in 4601 the tradition-obsessed Arclords scoured the gnome communities infesting their beloved cities for young gnomes to press into service. To prevent their great works from falling victim to what they considered a chaotic and untrustworthy race of childlike anarchists, the wizards culled only the youngest (and thus in their minds least corrupt) gnome children from their parents, imprisoning or destroying families with the temerity to go against the marginalia of the wizard who had founded the nation and declared the city open to creatures of all races so long ago. To the Arclords, any gnome resistance was a revolt against the ideals of the nation itself, akin to treason.

By 4606, the human god Aroden was dead, the power of prophecy was broken, and the Arclords' eugenics experiment was veering toward abject failure. As the gnome orphan brood developed into maturity in the decades that followed, they brought chaos and catastrophe to Quantum's magical academies. And at the center of that chaos stood Balazar: an impulsive youth with a temper to equal the bright red ferocity of his prodigious mustache, a burning match on a bed of tinder.

In the early years of his instruction, Balazar revealed almost no magical acumen whatsoever, preferring to spend his days conducting merry pranks on his fellow students and instructors instead of absorbing himself in the meticulous study of the Arclords' curriculum. When one such prank resulted in the transmutation of an instructor's tower into a living being of elemental stone (thanks in part to a mysterious glowing rock pilfered from the school's vaults), Balazar and three gnome associates found themselves expelled from the academy, exiled from Quantum, and sent on the first wagon train to Ecanus, the sprawling southern city whose world-famous fleshforges churned out a legion of horrors to bolster Nex's armies and terrorize its squalid countryside.

The Ecanus assignment was intended exclusively as punishment, but the city's masters welcomed the gnomes with open arms, eager that their unconventional attitudes, boundless creativity, and unpredictable obsessions might aid them in conquering one of the most enduring mysteries of the monumental fleshforges. For deep within the dungeons below the military complex, in a room designed by the Archmage Nex himself, lay an extraplanar rift known as the Void Chasm, a shaft of sheer sides and cloying, multicolored mists that had driven insane all who had previously gazed within it.

One by one, Balazar's gnome associates gazed within the abyss, and one by one they lost their tenuous grip on reality. Balazar watched in horror as the color drained from their hair and skin, as if the whole of their life from birth to bleaching transpired within the span of a few moments. When the emotional strain grew too great and the gnomes cried out in anguish, the pitiless fleshforge instructors pushed them into the trench, where their howls soon faded beneath the swirling mists. If the gnomes could not discover the purpose of the Void Chasm, the administrators reasoned, perhaps a sacrifice to the unknown powers below would do the trick.

As he stood on the precipice of the Void, Balazar wondered if perhaps he should have studied more diligently in the relative comfort of Quantum's academies. Reluctantly, he cast his gaze into the miasma and felt the weird energies of the Chasm worming their way into his mind. Worse, he heard whispering voices in the mists, calling out to him and begging him to step over the edge. At first he thought the voices to be those of his lost fellow gnomes, and called back to them one by one even as the color drained from his hair and he felt his mind slipping away. But the voices were not those of his friends. They belonged to... something else.

It took all of Balazar's limited concentration to sift the many voices from each other. Some were angry, demanding to be left alone. Others beckoned with honeyed words of sweet oblivion. But one voice among the tumult spoke softly and plainly. "I will help you," it said in reassuring tones. "Give me form and allow me to leave this prison, and you and I will become as one."

With the hands of the fleshforge administrators on his shoulders, about to give the final push that would send him into nothingness, Balazar tried to imagine what the voice would look like. He dreamed of a creature with a vast serpentine body, with grasping talons and horrifying scales. And, perhaps because he had not eaten that day and was growing hungry, he imagined the voice speaking through the beak of a monstrous chicken. And then, just as he felt the muscles of his captors tense for the final push, the creature he had imagined emerged from the Void Chasm fully formed and fully real, screaming a hideous avian cry and weaving through the air with serpentine grace. Its claws tore at the necks of the administrators, its hideous beak making a mess of their unbelieving eyes. And all along, in reassuring tones only he could hear, it spoke to him. "Do not be afraid, little one," it said. "We were meant to be together."

Somehow, Balazar and the avian entity that called itself Padrig managed to win their way free of the fleshforges, of Ecanus, and even of Nex. As he fled up the eastern coast of Garund on a succession of merchant and smuggler vessels, Balazar and Padrig grew closer and closer to one another. Padrig explained that he was a bodiless being known as an eidolon, and that only Balazar could give him structure and form due to the affinity of their minds and souls. As the gnome made his way from Nex to Katapesh to Absalom, Balazar grew more and more adept at shifting Padrig's form to add more legs, terrible wings, or other features fitting the dangers and situations at hand. When things got too dangerous to be seen with a magical creature or when discretion was more important than protection, Balazar dismissed Padrig to some extraplanar hidey-hole, only to call him once again to his side when needed.

Although a great deal of the young Balazar's mischievous spirit remains, the horror of the Void Chasm remains with him to this day. Other gnomes often confuse his stark white hair for a symptom of the insidious bleaching that threatens all gnomekind, but through his constant and relentless travels Balazar remains as engaged and full of life as any of his healthy gnome brethren. When other gnomes inquire about his "condition" with the best of intentions, Balazar sometimes flies into an impatient fit of grumpiness, chastising his would-be helpers and instructing them to mind their own business.

Privacy is very, very important to Balazar, for the Nexian wizards he betrayed have not forgotten his singular mastery of the Void Chasm. Agents of the Arclords of Nex dog his travels at every stop, pushing him further and further away with each season. Balazar knows that each new stop—however temporary—will provide him with ample opportunity to learn new things and meet new people, to master the magical craft that always eluded him in Nex, and to do honor to the friends and colleagues he left behind. Despite occasional moments of maudlin reflection on all he has lost, Balazar takes comfort in his enduring friendship with the eidolon he recued from oblivion so long ago. As long as he travels with Padrig, he knows he will never be alone.





## Freiya – Female Human Witch

Born in a small village north of Trollheim in the Linnorm Kingdoms; the child who would come to be known, as Feiya was the daughter of two Tian merchants from Minkai who had come over the crown of the world to Avistan to start a new life. Travelers by nature, they spent the short northern summers making slow loops through Hagreach and the Thanelands, facilitating trade. What few memories Feiya has of that life are happy ones: the jostling of wagons, the smell of campfires, and wandering alone through fields and forests, marveling as the wildness closed around her.

That happiness came to a sudden halt on the fateful day that brought her to the attention of a recently sundered coven of witches who dwelled on the border with Irrisen. Led by a particularly cruel green hag named Nysima, the coven had lost its youngest member to a squad of Blackravens from Trollheim and was still reeling from its sudden loss of power. They witnessed the child as she skipped away from the caravan stop, following a family of deer deep into the woods, and immediately set upon her.

There's no telling what cruelties the witches would have visited upon the another, no less horrific, fate awaited young Feiya. The two crones seized cackling drowning out the young girl's terrified screams. By the time they had given the child a new name and were already envisioning

The next twelve years were a blur of pain, terror, and misery as her their dark craft. Alternating between tutelage and torture, the instruction. For while the young girl showed unmistakable promise the harshest of punishments could suppress. On numerous occasions, be tracked down and captured after no more than a few attempts have scarred her body and mind in ways that no

One brisk autumn day, after being beaten for failing to properly Feiya was sent off to gather herbs. While harvesting more whinnis a large rime-covered rock. Unlike the region's typical arctic and orange coloration that stood in stark contrast to the endless the creature watched her that beckoned to Feiya. She his calm and focus. As she neared, the fox trotted a small look that was clearly an invitation to follow. This process was before she knew it, Feiya was following the fox on

By sundown, the two witches had realized Feiya's set off in pursuit, confident that, as with all hunt would be brief. This time, however, Feiya her along trails never before seen by human nor out of reach. When she needed nourishment, the When she needed rest, it stood vigil while she elude capture for more than two weeks.

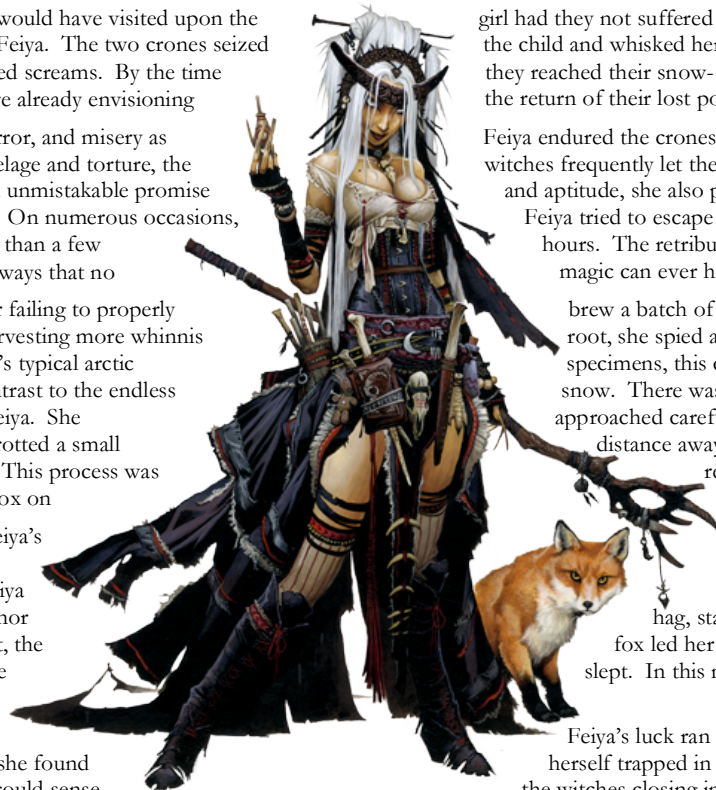
One particularly cold evening, however, on her trail and the fox nowhere to be seen, she found three sides by impassable mountains. Feiya could sense of pain on the chilling wind. She took shelter in a shallow far wall was emblazoned with a crude carving of a butterfly. Like an animal run to ground, Feiya steeled herself for the coming confrontation. She had come too far this time to surrender without a fight. She determined then and there that her days of living under someone else's yoke were over. She would have her freedom, either in this life or the next.

It was at that moment that the fox reappeared. Only now, there was something different in the way he approached her. He had always shown a preternatural intelligence, but as Feiya stared into his eyes, she saw a consciousness and a determination that would have frightened her had she not come to trust the animal so implicitly. As she watched him, Feiya was startled by a sudden and overwhelming flurry of sensations invading her mind. She sank, dazed, and to the cave floor as the feelings slowly crystallized into coherence. Less a voice than a series of emotions, the promise it offered was unmistakable. Feiya said nothing, but her acceptance was as clear as it was quick.

What followed will forever haunt Feiya's dreams. Raspy promises of pain and suffering rose above the din of the waterfall as the witches drew near to cave mouth. Feiya could see the outlines of their hunched bodies just beyond the blanket of cascading water, but before she could act, another sound arose. It started as a low rumble, then quickly gained volume, drowning out both hags and water and sending tremors through the cave floor. Then the valley erupted with the screeching and roaring of what could only have been a forest's worth of wild animals, punctured occasionally by the shrill curse of a hag.

Long minutes passed as Feiya stood, too frightened to move. Then, as gradually as it began, the noise subsided until all that remained was the crash of the waterfall. Feiya crouched down behind a rocky outcropping, afraid to leave the shelter of the cave. As the minutes turned into hours, exhaustion claimed her, and, despite her anxiety, she succumbed to a fitful sleep. When dawn finally arrived, Feiya stepped out from the cave, not quite sure what she was expecting to see. A fresh blanket of snow had covered the land, hiding any clues she might have found concerning the events of the previous night. Yet, the feeling of relief was palpable. The fox crept up and paused at her side. She was finally free.

Feiya never discusses the events of that night, or the particulars of the strange pact she entered into. She may one day try to track down the parents she barely remembers, but for now she is content to roam the world, relishing her freedom, seeking new experiences, and developing her newfound power. Though she desperately desires the company of others, formative years spent away from civilized society have left Feiya lacking in social graces, and her awkwardness often leads to unfortunate misunderstandings. Nevertheless, her inherent good nature tends to win out, and her occasional flares of temper are countered by her steadfast loyalty to her friends. Feiya relishes travel, and having identified the butterfly carving in the waterfall cave as the found-mark of a Desnan priest, she gladly embraces that faith, hoping that her wanderings may cast more light on who she really is, and what entity fosters her magical abilities.



girl had they not suffered their recent loss. As it was, the child and whisked her away to the east, their mad they reached their snow- and thatch-covered huts, the return of their lost powers.

Feiya endured the crones' sadistic attempts to teach witches frequently let their cruel natures impede their and aptitude, she also possessed defiance that only Feiya tried to escape her imprisonment, only to hours. The retributions for these failed magic can ever heal.

brew a batch of poisonous blue whinnis, root, she spied a fox watching her from atop specimens, this creature had a striking red snow. There was something about the way approached carefully, and was astonished by distance away, turned, and gave her a repeated again and again, and another escape attempt.

intentions. Furious, they previous instances, their had guidance. The fox led hag, staying always just ahead and fox led her to game and fresh water. slept. In this manner, Feiya was able to

Feiya's luck ran out. With her pursuers hot herself trapped in a river valley surrounded on the witches closing in, could hear their promises cave behind the waterfall that fed the river, a curious little grotto whose

# Seltyiel – Male Half-Elven Magus



Born from a dead mother amid screams and disgrace, this sickly half-elf would never have survived had he fallen into his stepfather's waiting arms. In a cruel trick of fate, his half-sister's tears stole the infant Seltyiel's chance for a mercifully short life.

The bastard son of the duped Lady Phiaura Bhrostra and the brigand-sorcerer Lairsaph, the so-called Feign Prince of Cheliah's Whisperwood, Seltyiel was never meant to survive. Through guile and illusion, the half-elf was conceived as a living disgrace to the sonless Bhrostra family, stern, martial-minded traditionalists who had long hunted the woodland bandits. The tragedy of his wife's death in childbirth, compounded by the dashed promise of a male heir, nearly drove Lord Ghran Bhrostra mad, and only his daughter's sobs stayed the lord's blade. For the next 12 years, a continuing river of tears ensured the young bastard's life.

Raised by his sister Sioria, young Seltyiel lived a humiliating fiction. In words, he was Lirt, an adopted waif who lived in the light of the Bhrostras' boundless charity. In the truths whispered from servant to mocking lord, though, he was living proof of Lord Bhrostra's failure as a husband, a lord, and a man. Keenly aware of his family's disgrace, Lord Bhrostra frequently reminded his wife's son of his loathing with beatings and broken bones.

Two weeks before Seltyiel's 13th birthday, with the bedridden youth already nursing a thrice-broken arm, a drunk and enraged Lord Bhrostra rampaged into the bastard's attic room. The boy could scarcely fight against the burly lord and took a fierce beating before reflexively lashing out. Catching the unsuspecting lord below the steep attic stairs. Seltyiel his sister; the bloodied, the waist, the boy's blow sent Lord Bhrostra stumbling backward and tumbling down stared down at his stepfather's unconscious body in terror. Without a word to and crippled, half-elf fled into the Whisperwood that night.

For days, the boy and pushed to the brink three scowling brigands heard Lord Bhrostra curse a dragged the boy to his father.

Lairsaph laughed for nearly an hour his whelp, and in cruel amusement the boy the name Seltyiel, a corruption mind to finding a use for the youth. In several cruel attempts to coax forth Despite his efforts, though, it swiftly lord's sorcerous blood. Disgusted, Lairsaph sycophantic followers.

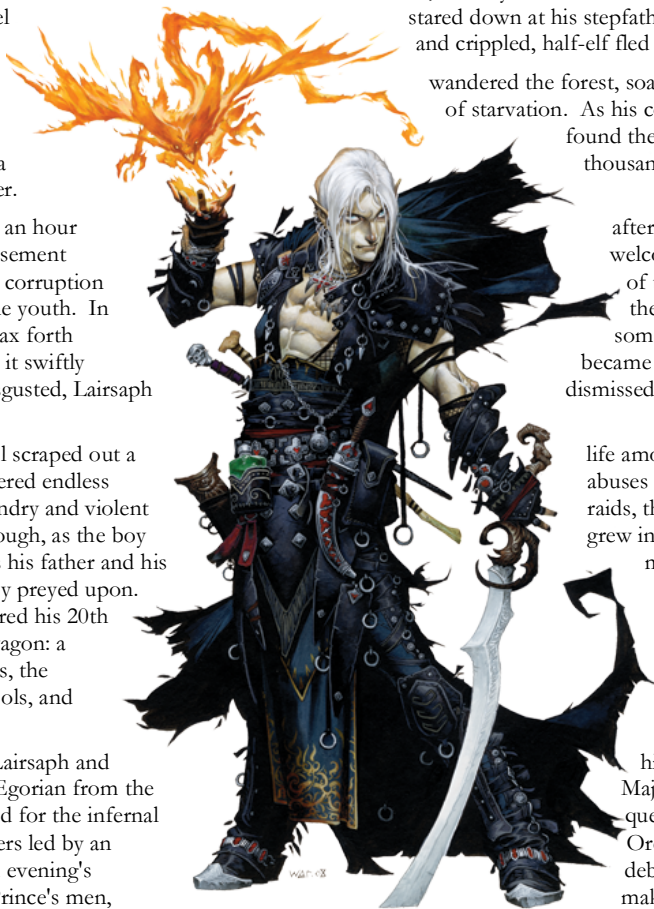
For the next decade, Seltyiel scraped out a and slight of frame, he suffered endless his men grew rich off brigandry and violent from scraps. Gradually, though, as the boy began collecting the objects his father and his books of the merchants they preyed upon. other languages. As he neared his 20th treasure-stripped caravan wagon: a became obsessed. For years, the runes, memorizing its symbols, and cantrips within.

In the half-elf's 23rd year, Lairsaph and tax wagon headed back to Egorian from the brigand lord was unprepared for the infernal half-legion of Chelish soldiers led by an hidden camp and turned an evening's attack scattered the Feign Prince's men, a blur of shouts and slashing blades, Seltyiel found himself war hounds and the tenacious Hellknight pursued the father and son. Lairsaph exhausted every spell he could conjure attempting to stymie the ironclad hunter, but still the infernal knight came. Finally, knowing his capture would mean a lengthy torture followed by a dramatic execution, Lairsaph turned to his son, drew him close, and, with the butt of his spear, shattered Seltyiel's kneecap.

Knowing only that the criminals of the Whisperwood were led by an elf, the Magistrix's men drug Seltyiel back to Egorian in chains. For weeks, the half-elf suffered constant tortures and arcane assaults to his mind. Gradually, though, his captors accepted that he was not the brigand lord Lairsaph, but merely the Feign Prince's dupe. Dismissed as just another bandit, he was thrown into a dank Chelish dungeon and, for nearly 5 years, left to rot.

During Seltyiel's imprisonment, the whispers came. Seemingly drifting from the darkness in the depths of his reeking cell, they were a cool balm to the fires of his angry wounds and smoldering hatred. They reminded him of his fear, his violent youth, his loathing, and betrayal. They also told him much: tales of magic more ancient than the gods, paths to lost treasures with feckless guardians, and the names of beings who could teach him secrets unknown to men. For long years, he listened, and his soul turned to steel. If he were to ever have anything, he would have to take it himself. He would have riches and influence like Lord Bhrosta. He would have respect and fear like Lairsaph. He would have revenge.

In 4707, Seltyiel was released. Cold and determined, he walked from Egorian to Westcrown, murdering two thieves met along the way with arcane fire. Using their twice-stolen coin he bought passage on a ship with no clue as to its destination. He would kill his fathers, he would have revenge, but first, he would have power.



wandered the forest, soaked by rain, slashed by vipervines, chased by a boar, of starvation. As his continued merciless fortune would have it, though, found the youth. Terrified, Seltyiel repeated the name he'd thousand times over: Lairsaph. Bemused, the scoundrels

after discovering that Lord Bhrostra had actually raised welcomed his son into his camp. The Feign Prince gave of the elven word for malicious humor, and turned his the weeks following his son's arrival, the sorcerer made some evidence of the boy's inborn arcane ability. became apparent that his son possessed none of the brigand dismissed Seltyiel, relinquishing him to the ranks of his craven,

life among the thieves of the Whisperwood. Pale, morose, abuses at the hands of his father's gang, and as Lairsaph and raids, the half-elf performed menial tasks and scavenged grew into a young man, he cultivated a quiet intellect and men discarded, typically the letters, ledgers, and Slowly he taught himself to read, first Taldane, then birthday, he made his greatest discovery amid a tattered tome, a book of simple magic. Seltyiel bastard read the tome over and over, learning its gaining some measure of control over the

his men made a daring robbery, stealing a fully-loaded Majestrix's eastern holdings. Although cunning, the queen's swift reprisal and the skill of her hunters. A Order of the Rack Hellknight tracked Lairsaph to his debauchery into a night of fire and blood. The swift making them easy pickings for the merciless soldiers. In fleeing, to his shock, at his father's side. Through the night,



## Liriane – Female Half-Elven Gunslinger

Shieldmarshal Dahmok's greatest failing was teaching his middle daughter to read. After the loss of their mother, a lively but capricious elven explorer who viewed ten years and three children as a “fling,” he had hoped to rear homebody children. Even with their halfblood status stretching the years he spent with his treasured children, the old marshal shuddered at the knowledge that one was already slipping away.

While older Suzeressa took to the practical household arts and younger Milliceene pursued a love of natural sciences, middle-born Lirianne lost herself for hours at a time in tales of shining knights, devious fairies, and mighty dragons, all subjects absent from her life of ever- Raised among bricks, smoke, and bureaucracy, the young half-elf dreamed of the promised by the collection of fairy tales left by her absent mother and her own dreadfuls. Naturally, she aspired to follow in her father's footsteps and become a girl safe at home, Dahmok calmly explained she could never become a the first excuse he could come up with, that her beloved long hair would become mechanisms. To his surprise, he awoke the next morning to discover Lirianne long tresses roughly chopped, eagerly packed, and ready to follow him to

For twenty years, the little half-elf pushed herself to meet ever more down by her aging father. Schoolmates nicknamed her “the often to practice her quick draw or memorize technical volumes. thought her adle-brained as she sat staring, redrawing engineer's than follow her lessons. Even before she was old enough to she had mastered the construction and firing of a rifle, and could by eye alone.

An old man and long since retired by the time his daughter Dahmok could no longer forbid her entry into the patriot's influence lived on in his successors, and to assigned Lirianne to a quiet domestic position, along the secure Alkenstar-Martel road. Ten years and mediating water rights, eating away at her father's disapproval never could. Her childhood Lirianne's steely eyes dulled with the tarnish of a

It was kismet when a storm of wild magic blew off the and into her jurisdiction. The rampant arcane energy, warfare, warped space and time around it. The magical boiling sand into glass, and calling forth bizarre only marshal at hand, Lirianne leapt into service. buildings crumbled into twisted forms of green lightning lashed out, striking the half-elf even abominations.

Lirianne awoke soaking and half-drowned on distant shores. forests and green hills, plant life like she'd never seen. Wandering by malicious fey. In a heartbeat, a childhood's worth of stories since forgotten. The grateful caravan loaded her with all the supplies and information she could manage, confirming that her inexplicable odyssey had deposited her cleanly in the midst of those same shining knights, devious fairies, and mighty dragons who had occupied so much of her youth.

Now a wanderer in the strange land of Avistan, Lirianne struggles to balance her resurgence of childhood wonder and adult dedication to justice, all while confronting her long-ignored elven blood. While thoughts of family and the familiar industrial life of Alkenstar occasionally tug at her roaming heart, sights remain unseen and people remain unsaved, and Lirianne will be damned if she'll fail in either.



homeland of Alkenstar. adventure and fantasy growing library of penny shieldmarshal, protecting Preferring to keep his little shieldmarshal, running with entangled in firearm grinning like a fool, with her work.

insane requirements laid Phantom” as she vanished Tutors and governesses schematics in her mind rather entertain her first romance, reckon complex trajectories

reached womanhood, shieldmarshals. But the old honor his service they safeguarding farming settlements of her life passed rounding up drunks passion for adventure in ways her dreams eventually forgotten, thousand mundane details.

Spellscar Desert, past Alkenstar, fallout from centuries of wizard swells lashed out, reshaping hillsides, creatures from the dawn of history. The As townsfolk huddled in their cellars and misbegotten wood and bone; a bolt of as she confronted the storm's

The bizarre country was flush with thick inland, she soon encountered a lumber caravan beset welled up inside her, and she rushed into battle with a passion long

## Reiko – Female Human Ninja

Situated on the western coast of Minkai, Reiko's hometown of White Wave was a quiet fishing village, little more than a collection of shacks and cabins clinging to a steep cliff face overlooking the harbor. Crushed under oppressive humidity in the summer, the air thick with clouds of stinging flies and gnats, and subject to dangerous storms in the winter, White Wave had little to offer any lord, and thus little was demanded of it.

All that changed when Reiko was twelve. Due to bureaucratic disputes and shifting borders between noble fiefdoms, White Wave fell under the control of a new lord, Entobe Hisashi, and this one had grand plans for the holding. The sea cliffs would be the perfect place for a new shrine, a series of shining towers that would please the gods and bring favor upon the Entobe family for generations. An ambitious project, it would take many hands to complete. And Lord Entobe knew precisely where to find them.

When Reiko thinks of her childhood, she no longer remembers searching through tide pools, up the dangerous cliff walls to the sounds of her mother's laughter and her father's anxious. Instead, she remembers the smell and taste of rock dust in her mouth, her fingernails bleeding from hauling rocks. She remembers the long hours of toil in the cruelly hot sun, for the townsfolk forced to cut stone in the quarry, their fishing dories left to rot in the most of all, she remembers the faces of her parents growing steadily leaner as they made rations of rice and soup.

For many months, the people toiled. Lord Entobe's enforcers brooked no laziness, as when the old or young keeled over from exhaustion, and punishments were severe. The graveyard filled quickly, and soon bodies began to wash up on the shore as townsfolk too dig graves cast their deceased loved ones into the sea.

And then, seemingly overnight, the gods turned against the project. Shortly after dusk one tower foundations collapsed, killing one of the crueler taskmasters. Though it meant the people secretly took joy in the irony, and that joy sustained them as they began to clear rebuild. Yet, strange things kept happening to the necessary supplies. Tools were broken, rotted. Stone turned brittle, and rope frayed and snapped. Guards died in mysterious ways, seemingly accidental. The fury and fear of the overseers and the architects was a wonder to common folk secretly toasted whatever kami were responsible.

Only one house did not share in the amusement. Though they said nothing to her, Reiko her parents were tense, and the arguments that came through her walls after they thought she ran late into the night. And then one painfully hot summer evening, unable to sleep despite her Reiko left her room and found a black-clad figure crawling through a second-story window.

Before Reiko could scream, the figure was at her side, hand covering her mouth. And then the cowl was removed, and Reiko was looking into the solemn eyes of her mother.

After that night, many things changed. Reiko learned that her mother was no shepherd girl she had always been told, but had instead grown up in the mountains as part of a clan of ninja, of assassins and spies with a history going back hundreds of years. On the run after an ill-fated ambush, she hid out in the fell in love with a simple fisherman, Reiko's father. Despite her husband's concern and disapproval, Reiko's mother began to daughter some of the secrets of the clan. Though she flatly refused to take Reiko on any of the solitary raids with which she Entobe's people, the two spent many hours together in the darkness, climbing the cliffs of White Wave, practicing with the swords her mother kept hidden in their rafters, and moving silently across rooftops and ship rigging. Reiko proved a capable student, and at last, there was something to look forward to after days of backbreaking labor.

And then Reiko's mother went too far. Caught in the act of sabotaging a stone-hauling cart, she killed several of the overseers before escaping back to their home. Immediately she hid her gear in the midden and put an end to her and Reiko's midnight activities. But it was too late.

Furious, Lord Entobe himself came to the site, arriving in a grand procession of warriors, spellcasters, and investigators. The afternoon after his arrival, he halted construction and ordered the townsfolk to assemble. Reiko and her mother, both assigned to the task of serving tea to the guards for the day, stood at the back of the crowd, watching Entobe take the makeshift stage that had been erected in his honor.

Addressing the crowd, Entobe announced that the person behind the attacks had been discovered, and that the treachery in their midst would be ending. Then he held up a familiar object, the black mask belonging to Reiko's mother, still damp and stained from the trash heap.

That was when the guards parted ranks to reveal Reiko's father, bound at wrists and ankles. There was no mistaking the gash across his throat, or the red stain trailing down his shirt.

Reiko shrieked and rushed forward, but her mother caught her shoulder and spun her around. Their eyes met.

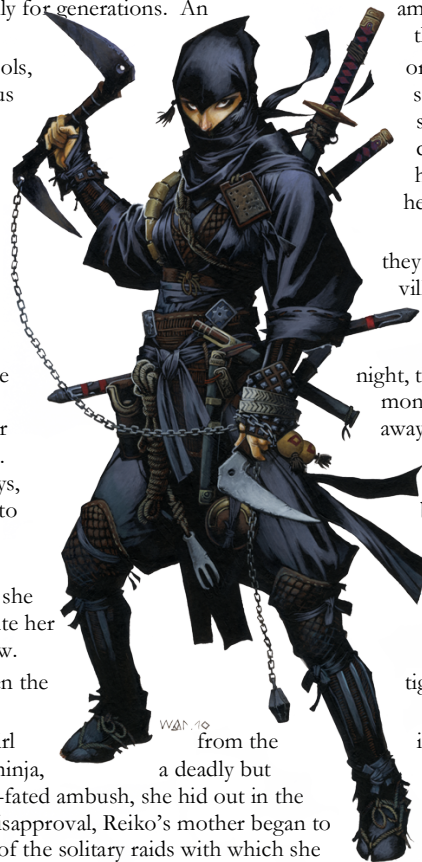
"Run, little spider," her mother said. Then a hidden blade dropped from her sleeve into her hand, and she leapt for the mob of guards on the stage.

Reiko ran. Using all the skills, her mother had taught her, she slipped out of the village and away down the cliffs, evading Entobe's guards, and dogs. For days, she ran along the sea's edge, keeping to the stones at low tide to leave no prints or scent trails, until she was sure that she was far from Entobe's holdings. Then she turned east, into the mountains, in search of her mother's clan.

In the end, she found them, yet not in the way she expected. For Entobe had also uncovered her mother's clan allegiance, and in a fit of pique had hired them to hunt down any remaining members of her family. One again, Reiko found herself on the run. And this time she didn't stop until she was far, far to the west, on the shores of a strange land called Avistan.

Today, Reiko is a grown woman. Cool and aloof, quick with a cutting remark or withering glare, she's nevertheless managed to get along for nearly ten years in a land where Minkai itself is a legend, and ninja are little more than exotic fairy tales. Though she's studied with the most capable thieves and assassins in the region, Reiko has yet to find the carefully codified engagements of honor and subtlety that her mother spoke of, and grows tired of Avistan's seemingly endless collection of brute highwaymen and lowbrow killers. Still, the lack of corrupt lords like Entobe in places like Andoran, her new nation of choice, is a small comfort, and she's heard whispers that a secret branch of the Eagle Knights may be exactly what she's looking for. Regardless of whether such rumors pan out, and despite a decade on foreign soil, Reiko still views her time around the Inner Sea as a training exercise. Someday soon, she'll retrace her steps back to Minkai. And when she does, both the Entobe family and her mother's traitorous clan will finally learn

the magnitude of their mistake.



ambitious project, them.

or climbing high scolding. smashed and carrying water harbor. Yet her take their

they deemed it village's tiny exhausted to

night, three of the five months more work, away rubble and Timbers always behold, and the

could tell that was asleep exhaustion,

tight-fitting black

WAR 10 from the a deadly but

inland fields, as honorable band tiny village and teach their plagued

## Hayato – Male Human Samurai

Honor is strength. It is a maxim that Nakayama Hayato has known since birth, and one whose barbs he still feels deep in his flesh. Yet Hayato also knows a deeper truth: that just as a sword must bend to avoid breaking, so too must honor. And the more rigid the steel, the easier it shatters.

Hayato was born a retainer on the estate of Lord Nakayama Hitoshi, just a few days' ride from the great city of Oda in Minkai. The son of the chief falconer and his wife, Hayato, whose name means "falcon," quickly proved just as proficient with the dangerous birds as his father, emulating their proud and fierce natures.

It was while accompanying his father on one of Lord Nakayama's hawking outings that he first came to the lord's attention. At eight years old, Hayato was assigned the honor of being the personal attendant to the lord's son, Masao, assisting the privileged child with his falcon. All went well until the noble son, still new to the sport, mishandled his bird and nearly lost an eye for his trouble. The furious lordling prepared to kill the falcon then and there, but Hayato interceded, explaining the boy's error. Enraged even further, Masao began beating Hayato, drawing the attention of the rest of the hunting party. Though Hayato bowed low and accepted the savage blows of his master, he neither cried out nor begged for mercy. When Masao finally tired, Lord Nakayama himself addressed the bloody servant child, asking him why he had been so bold as to correct his superior. Without faltering, Hayato bowed to the lord and said simply, "Because it was the truth."

From that point on, Lord Nakayama took the young Hayato under his wing, frequently assigning him duties within the manor house, engaging him as a companion for his son, and seeing to his education in matters both martial and intellectual. In time, Hayato grew to become a powerful warrior, rising to the position of head samurai of the Nakayama holdings. When Masao died in a drunken duel at the age of twenty, thus depriving Lord Nakayama of an official heir, the bereaved lord began to look more and more to Hayato as a son, even allowing him to take the family name.

Yet, Masao's death was only the beginning of the Nakayama family's misfortune. It was shortly after this episode that Kaneka Yoshiro, a traveling lord and government official with a position high in the Imperial Court, visited the Nakayama estate. With considerably more prestige and official sway than Nakayama, Kaneka was received with full honors, yet it quickly became apparent that the guest was interested in more than just hospitality. Within a few days, Kaneka's cunning insults, and lewd advances toward Nakayama's wife, and barely concealed challenges to Nakayama himself left Hayato's lord with no choice. Honor forbade him from allowing the slights to stand unanswered, yet challenging a governmental superior was as good as a death sentence.

In the end, honor won out, just as Kaneka the talented swordsman. In recompense for holdings to Kaneka. Nakayama's widow, peasants, had no choice but to accept position.

Though the Nakayama samurai were and plied with substantial gifts by their later, having watched Kaneka's crept into his former master's with his new wife. Though Kaneka option was to fight. Taking up he could to kill the samurai bleeding from several terrible his short-lived dominion over the

As Kaneka fell to the floor, pink froth beside it. Knowing that to attack any considered his rightful master, would honor intact.

A hand on his shoulder stayed his blade. Kaneka, in her dressing gown, its yellow her eyes, she thanked Hayato for avenging next breath, she condemned him forever. familiarity, the noblewoman forbade into a carriage bound for Oda, with only a morning sun rose, it found Hayato on a caravan there on to the mysterious lands of the Inner Sea.

knew it would.  
the “insult” Kaneka

Nakayama challenged Kaneka to a duel, and was quickly slain by her. Having had suffered, the Imperial Court allotted all the Nakayama family's lands to Kaneka. Faced with the prospect of a dishonored existence among her people, Kaneka accepted Kaneka's proposal of marriage if she wanted to retain her

bound by direct order of the court to honor their new arrangement, new master, Hayato saw the theft for what it was. Several nights celebrating guards drink themselves into unconsciousness; Hayato bedchamber and confronted the usurper even as he lay sleeping screamed for his retainers, in the end it became clear that his only the sword that Hayato tossed onto the bed, Kaneka did everything quickly, yet Hayato would not be denied his revenge. At last, wounds, Hayato succeeded in getting past the noble's guard, ending Nakayama estate in a fine spray of blood.

spilling from his lips, Hayato dropped his sword and knelt  
lord in this manner, let alone the man the government  
bring sure execution, he drew his tanto and prepared to die with his

When Hayato looked up, he beheld Lady Nakayama, now Lady silk stained with the blood of her most recent husband. With tears in Lord Nakayama and returning the estate to her control. Yet, with her Taking his hand in her own, an undreamed-of show of affection and taking his own life. Instead, she snuck him out of the manor and his armor, and a command to live as best he could. When the bound for the icy reaches of the Crown of the World and from

Now in his mid-thirties, Hayato is a hard man who keeps to himself. Though he has long since learned to speak Taldane, he remains terse by nature, feeling that everyone in his new home speaks too much but says too little. He operates as a fearless and talented mercenary, or ronin, as he terms it, for those whose cause seem righteous, yet refuses to bow to anyone regardless of status, saying only that he has had his fill of masters. Hayato is loyal to those few friends who can get past his stone-faced demeanor, yet remains secretly tortured by his conflicting senses of honor. To continue living as a masterless samurai, let alone one who has committed a great crime, is shameful, yet to deny Lady Nakayama's command would be equally shameful. With no clear answer, Hayato has temporarily shelved the problem. Yet deep in his heart, he harbors a secret hope: that perhaps one day he might raise an army of champions and take it back over the Crown of the World, rooting out the corrupt politicians of his homeland and restoring the honor of himself, his adopted family, and the samurai code he was born to uphold.







## Crowe – Male Human Bloodrager

When Crowe was a young man waiting to depart on his first horse gathering, he had the same dream every night for five weeks. It always started and ended the same way. Each time the storm came. Each time the stampede thundered out of the canyon to the south. Each time his body was trampled to pulp before he woke up soaking with sweat.

Every night.

Crowe was born under an auspicious sign during a thunderstorm that scoured the Storval Plateau one burning autumn evening. After generations of uncertain prophecy by the tribe's shamans, the holy ones were reluctant to predict much about the newborn aside from foretelling that he would one day become a significant force.

From a young age, Crowe was trained to be a perfect groom, and it was clear that in time he would become a good trainer. He learned from his mother and father, as well as from his aunts and uncles, for even among the animal-loving Shriikirri-Quah, his family had a way with horses. They even supplied many a burn-rider of the Sklar-Quah with their signature steeds, and foreigners came from miles around seeking to trade for the family's fearless stallions.

Crowe's father was known throughout the Storval Plateau for his skill at capturing and breaking wild horses, and his mother could read the face of nature as if it were her own child's. Together, Crowe's parents trained their horses, content with their lives. But their son was becoming unruly.

As a youth, Crowe often got into fights then claimed that he didn't remember how the scraps had started. He would feel his heart beating against his ribs. He would hear the blood thrumming in his ears, and that would be the last thing he recalled. People in the tribe grew cautious around the boy. After far too many of these sorts of scuffles, his mother began asking him why he was so angry. Crowe claimed again that he didn't remember, that the last thing he had heard before each fight broke out was the storm.

As Crowe grew stronger of frame, he learned the traditional ways of Shoanti warfare. He trained with the weapons of his ancestors and learned how to protect his people and their way of life. Crowe learned the klar, mastered the earthbreaker, and also studied the natural world and the ways of magic that his mother followed. Throughout his tutelage, he challenged his elders and was challenged by his not-so-infrequent gaps in memory. Some in the tribe thought this was simply an excuse for his misbehavior, and many blamed his parents for his violent outbursts.

Though Crowe was still considered to be too young for a long outing, his father decided that taking his son on his first horse gathering would teach the boy discipline. The herds would be funneling through the canyon in a matter of weeks, and Crowe's father hoped to gather a few more horses, the most prized of which were the foals of Bright Star—a stallion that had eluded him for the past five years. Rounding up even one or two of the foals would be a major boon to his family's stock.

Crowe, his father, and seven other men and women from the tribe traveled for three days. Horses are predictable beasts, and the Shoanti knew where the herd moved in the uplands. The herd would race through the canyon until it leveled out to a dry riverbed that cut through the blistered land. When the herd came through, the hunters would be ready with ropes and snares.

In order to test Crowe's patience, his father sent the youth ahead to the canyon's mouth. He wanted his boy to wait, to listen to hooves and snorts echoing down the canyon. He wanted him to throw the loop around a horse that he could call his own. He wanted Crowe to concentrate on his task and listen past the distraction of the storm.

Crowe crouched upon a flat umber rock, trembling with terror. All he could hear was the storm in the distance, a low, rolling rumble that thundered in his eardrums. He was sure what he heard was his fear, his rage. This was the canyon. This was the night he would die. Why couldn't he just leave? Just walk away from it all?

Tradition.

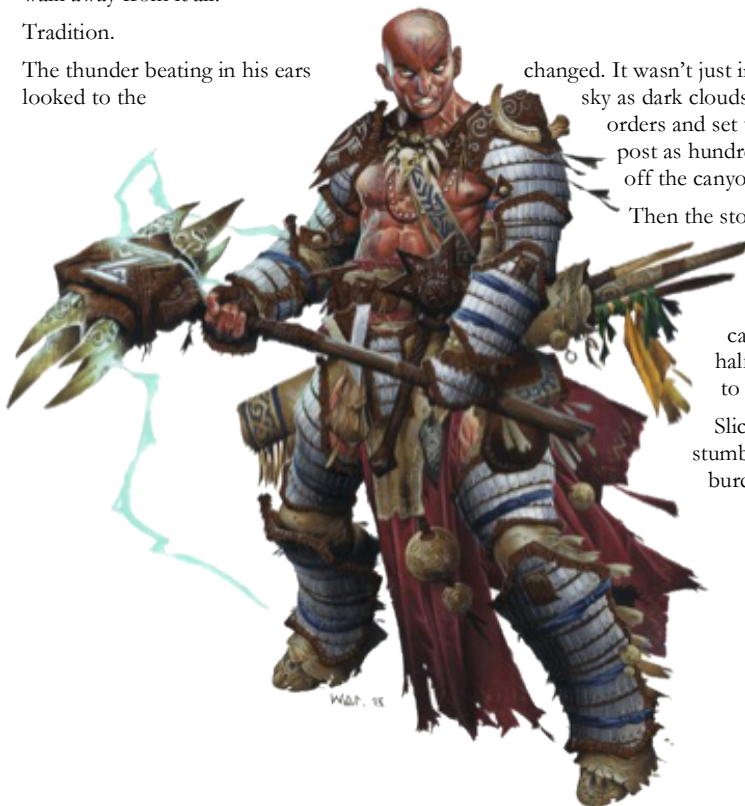
The thunder beating in his ears looked to the

changed. It wasn't just internal; it was echoing through the canyon. The herd was coming. Crowe sky as dark clouds rolling in from the south obscured the setting sun. The others shouted orders and set up positions with their snares. Crowe scrambled back to his designated post as hundreds of horses filled the canyon, their hoof beats driving a pounding echo off the canyon walls.

Then the storm broke. Thunder rumbled and crashed through the canyon and lightning bathed its rusty walls in flashes of white.

After the storm had passed, Crowe awoke to find his cousin sitting on his chest and slapping his face, claiming that he was to blame for the carnage spread all around him. More than a dozen horses lay dead, and half of the hunting party lay trampled in the riverbed. They said Crowe was to blame. They said there was no storm. They said he had done it.

Slick with blood, confused, and full of no uncertain amount of shame, he stumbled through the night. The dawn broke on Crowe's new life—a life not burdened by tradition, a life that was numb to fear.



## Kess – Human Female Brawler

She was raised to be Lady Kessilandrie Anicia Vlastos, but the thousands of cheering fans that fill the arena's seats when she fights shout her preferred name—Kess the Bull.

Kess never squared herself with the life of pomp and nobility. As a kid growing up in an estate in the Westpark District of Oppara, she spent her time in opulent gardens, tipping over rocks to look for bugs, climbing the massive oaks, coordinating mock battles against imaginary monsters with her sisters and brothers in the plum orchard, and generally getting into trouble.

It was during these pretend adventures that she started learning how to fight. Her brothers and sisters were snobbish, bullying brats that never left the awkward young girl alone. Never one to just take abuse, Kess ended many of those make-believe bouts in flat-out fistfights. It wasn't the wooden swords and staves the kids played with that she mastered in these brawls, but rather a solid left jab, a well-placed kick, or a leg sweep. Her height gave her good reach, letting her even get in a good strike at her oldest brother to silence his bullying.

After too many busted lips and bloody noses, Kess's parents tried to send her to dueling masters in order to teach her the art of swordplay, hoping to channel her energy into a safe and respectable form of combat—something of which nobles could be proud.

As far as Kess was concerned, fencing was for dandies and duels were just tiresome ego dramas. This affluent instruction just didn't stick. After losing too many matches by dropping her training rapier and socking her opponent in the jaw, she was nearly expelled. An older student, sympathetic to her fighting style, tipped her off to an underground fighting ring in a seedy part of the city.

Her first night in the pit was exhilarating. The organizers paired her up with a brawny farm boy whose jaw jutted out as far as his forehead sloped back. He hit hard, but he didn't know a thing about technique. Using her skill and rangy frame to her advantage, Kess had him mewling on the ground in less than a minute.

Using the ruse of attending fencing class, Kess made her way to the underground rings every chance she could get. It was there that she discovered real honor—not that bogus social contract she grew up under. In those pit fights, she learned focus and found her calling. The roar of the crowd charged her, and she pushed her body, testing herself.

Kess learned a multitude of styles and forms from the various fighters and promoters that flowed through the ring, as well as the worship of Kurgess, god of bravery, competition, and sports. She also began to dream of bouts in the far-off nations from which many of her colleagues hailed. In particular, she focused on the gladiator nation of Tymon in the River Kingdoms, from which her coach had won a medal.

Yet everything came apart the night her older brother—eager to gamble on the fights—stumbled into the secret venue and noticed her in the ring. Her father was furious, and her mother worried. This was no way for a proper, highborn lady to act. What if she were hurt or killed? What would happen if other families were to find out? Which of them already knew?

For her own safety—and to quash a scandal—her parents threatened to send her off to their country estate, or even to a boarding school. In no way eager to have her destiny decided for her by others, Kess beat her parents to the punch and snuck down to the docks, boarding a Taldan merchant vessel headed up the Sellen River. With her wits, her skill, and a purse bulging with her winnings in the ring, she set off for Tymon. Once there, she fought enough bouts in the arena to get noticed by the masters of the Valknar Gladiatorial College, using the prize money from her Opparan fights to pay for tuition.

Yet Tymon is small, and Kess easily bored. While still one win shy of being considered “bloodied,” she was lured away from the city by the call of new arenas in distant locations, taking up the life of an adventurer not for treasure, but for the fun of it. Every so often, Kess attempts to alleviate some of her mother's worry by sending letters home telling of her adventures, yet has learned to obscure where they're sent from, lest her father send agents to track her down and try to bring her home.

Kess wears her bruises and scars as proudly as she wears the medals adorning her outfit—prizes from various fights, as well as a short stint with a mercenary company. Even though she tries to be positive and upbeat, she knows that she's often aggressive and sarcastic. Kess isn't afraid to say what's on her mind, especially when facing authorities that try to tell others what to do. She doesn't pay much mind to complicated bureaucracies and outdated social mores, and tends to live her life the way she wants. The only time Kess shows a strong respect for rules is during a competition—she doesn't tolerate cheaters. Kess is competitive, though she encourages others in their own tasks. She keeps her body fit, and trains every chance she gets—a crucial counterbalance to her love of good food, strong drink, and long nights of celebration after a fight.



# Adowyn – Female Human Hunter

There's always a need for a skilled hunter, someone who can track down a threat and put an end to it. And when a quarry is particularly dangerous or elusive, there's only one hunter the people seek: Adowyn.

Born to a pair of skilled woodworkers in the quiet town of Crowstump on the northern border of Nirmathas, Adowyn was always a wild child, more comfortable sneaking around in the mud chasing the town rooster than practicing her letters or learning to carve. She grew up surrounded by peoples from far-away lands, merchants and traders who had come to make deals with her parents. Fascinated by their stories, Adowyn was eager to see the world beyond, and when a journey with her father finally gave her that chance at the age of 14, she was overjoyed.

That joy was short-lived, however. Not a day after Adowyn and her father left home for the dark forest trails of the Fangwood, a diseased bear charged into their camp, savaging Adowyn's father before she could even cry out. Using the bow her father had carved for her, she sank arrow after arrow into the beast, tears streaming down her cheeks. At last the bear fell. The creature was dead—but so was her father.

Lost in the woods, Adowyn found herself in the Blight, an area of the Fangwood where the trees grew thick with disease and rot. Worse still, she found that no matter which direction she walked, all paths led back to her meager camp. She spent six months alone there, hunting and scavenging what food she could find and honing her skills at the hunt. The beasts of the Blight were cunning and deadly, and making her the prey nearly as often as she was the predator. Yet all of that changed when she found Leryn.

Wounded by a fight with a rotting treant, the lean gray wolf was limping through a clearing when Adowyn chanced upon him. She knew right away that the wolf was not from this place, but rather was trapped in the Blight like she was. She approached him with a scrap of meat from her most recent kill, earning his trust. Over the following month, she nursed the wolf back to health and named him Leryn, after her father. She soon found that she could sense his mood, knowing instinctively when he was hungry, angry, or excited. They shared much with each other in those first months. She exulted in his feral appetites, his thrill of the hunt, and he learned to calm his urges, gaining her patience and determination.

Years passed, and the two became an inseparable team, learning to anticipate each other's moves and hunting together as one. Now the whole of the forest was their prey, but still they could not escape the Blight. Indeed, the rot in the wood seemed to be growing worse by the day, and neither hunter could shake the sense of something just beyond their reach, stalking them but never revealing itself.

For months the tension grew. Adowyn and Leryn slept in shifts, keeping watch over their small hovel. Finally, in the dead of night, their mysterious watcher revealed itself, smashing the side of their home while unleashing a terrifying howl. Rolling out of the debris, Adowyn and Leryn rose to face the threat.

A gigantic bear rose up before them. Like the beast that killed her father, this one too was poxed, but it was far larger, with sickly green foam spilling from its lips. Leryn leapt upon it, clawing and biting at its flank while Adowyn drew forth her bow. Taking aim, she sunk a shaft deep into its left eye. With an agonizing growl, the bear shook loose the wolf and tore off into the woods, with Adowyn and her friend in hot pursuit.

The chase lasted until dawn, when the Leryn's fangs finally managed to sink into the bear's throat, bringing it down. The pair stopped over their kill to admire their work, and it was only then that they realized they were no longer in the Blight.

It was by sheer chance that they found their way to Crystalhurst, a community of druids in the southern Fangwood. They stayed there for a while, regaining their strength and sharing what they had learned with the Adowyn might make a fine disciple for their order, but her known. In the end, they were eager to study them. Crystalhurst was not a upon returning home

druids, who swore to put an end to the Blight. The druids thought that bond to Leryn perplexed them, as it was stronger than any they had ever excitedly concluded that the pair must be something new entirely, and Yet while Adowyn learned a great deal in her short time there, place she meant to stay. Soon, she and Leryn set out once more, intent to see Adowyn's mother and sister.

The young woman who returned to Crowstump was nothing like the girl that had left. The townsfolk kept their distance from her and the fierce wolf that padded along behind her. Returning to her home, she found only strangers. It seems that her mother and sister, heartbroken after the loss of Adowyn and her father, had left years ago to start a new life somewhere less troubled by painful memories.

In the years since that day, Adowyn has wandered the Inner Sea with Leryn at her side, working as bounty hunter. She's stalked a naga through the bleak wastes of Osirion, brought back a master thief from the sewers of Oppara, and even managed to recover the tail feathers of the elusive Jade Hawk without harming the reclusive bird. The only quarry she hasn't managed to track down is her own family, but that search never ends—one day, she'll be reunited with her loved ones.

Adowyn is never found without Leryn by her side. To others, she is quiet and brooding, but she can frequently be found having animated conversations with her wolf, as if he were responding in kind. She wears the armor and garb of the rangers of Nirmathas, a gift she was given after hunting down a patrol of Molthuni regulars that were stalking behind the lines terrorizing small villages. The bow she carries is her father's, a weapon she treats with reverence. In battle, Adowyn and Leryn single out their foes with grim determination.





# Quinn – Male Human Investigator

The rule of law is only as strong as the people who uphold it, and few know this fact better than Quinn.

The child of a former noble family of Galt, Quinn was raised to despise the chaos that had robbed his parents of their proper name and station, forcing them to hide as middle-class apothecaries. Yet for Quinn himself, trained as a legal clerk and never having personally known the aristocratic comforts his parents mourned, this was no true inconvenience. What frustrated him about his nation was not that power resided with the people, but rather that it was wielded in such a capricious fashion. His fellow citizens' constant false accusations and refusal to abide by court rulings—not to mention the Gray Gardeners' tendency to pronounce sentences completely outside the system—drove young Quinn to distraction.

When Quinn was 37, having recently lost both parents to an outbreak of plague, his simmering rage finally came to a head. After the ruling faction sentenced a man to death with flagrant disregard for due process, Quinn overstepped his usual role by investigating the matter himself, turning up irrefutable proof of the man's innocence. When his attempts to reopen the case were stymied, he returned the night before the scheduled execution and set the man free—only to run straight into a Gray Gardener patrol. The prisoner escaped in the ensuing fracas, and even as Quinn ran, he heard the Gardeners shouting his name.

Quinn fled for the Taldan border, knowing that there was now a price on his head. Yet despite all he'd lost, he found himself laughing—for here, in this tragic debacle, he had finally discovered a sense of satisfaction he'd been missing his whole life. He had upheld the law and defended the innocent in spite of government negligence and corruption. By working outside the legal system, he'd helped guide it back toward a righteous path. And he wanted more.

Thus began a new chapter in Quinn's life. Roaming the nations of the Inner Sea, he constantly keeps an ear out for allegations of unjust accusations or abuses of power. When he finds one, he investigates the case himself, using a lifetime of association with law enforcement agents and detective agencies like The Sleepless to help him ferret out the truth. If the legal system seems fair, he often shows up unexpectedly at the court proceedings, presenting sworn evidence and acting as defending counsel for the accused. If he finds a court to be corrupt, he takes a more direct hand in protecting the innocent. While he respects the law, he also knows that people are imperfect, and that breaking local laws is sometimes necessary in order to uphold more universal ones. Of course, his meddling is rarely popular with the opposition, and so Quinn generally moves along as soon as he's seen justice done and taken steps to ensure that the victim won't suffer further abuses.

Quinn is a genial, gentlemanly sort, quick with a joke and able to fit easily into both high society and low. His well-honed analytical mind is capable of astounding feats of logic and deduction, and he's fond of sharpening it still further with alchemical extracts learned from his parents and his own personal studies. While formidable in combat, he uses a sword cane so as not to unduly tip off his enemies to his abilities, believing that the best weapon is the one your foe never sees coming. He's loyal to his friends, and sometimes seems to have a connection in every town, yet is also wary of associating too long or too openly with his allies, knowing that his unpopular with various powerful factions. fight for justice has made him

Though now well into middle age, Quinn has no intentions of slowing down. As he's fond of telling companions, "a man needs only three things to change the world: a quick wit, a righteous heart, and a stylish coat."



WAT. 14



# Shardra Geltl – Female Dwarven Shaman

It's a sorry lot for a proud dwarven daughter to be raised a miserable dwarven son, but everyone receives one lot in life, and Shardra Geltl never knew to expect better. Childhood was kind, her sisters loved her, her brother protected her, and always she had the whispers of tools and books to keep her company. Adolescence, though, came bearing heavy burdens. Her siblings moved on with their own lives, replaced by harsh teachers and taskmasters. She weathered a staggeringly awkward first kiss as her childhood best friend grew into a handsome lad, followed by a painful arranged engagement to a lovely girl from the neighboring Dechl clan. But the mines and refinery of Xolgrit fed the war machine of Rolgrimmur far above, and militant efficiency demanded all citizen-soldiers accept and excel in their roles, no matter how miserable.

But Shardra still had the whispers to keep her company on lonely nights.

Books quipped bits and pieces of their tales, bowls jabbered gossip shared over breakfast, and picks stammered the poems of the rocks they clove. And while the odds and ends of Xolgrit kept her company, the stones of the Old Road, carved long ago by dwarves still hunting for the sky, sang legends. More and more often, the shy dwarf slipped away to wander the crumbling paths, learning the deeds of her ancestors away from the clamor of duty and expectation. She assumed the whispers were her friends, there to keep her safe and offer respite from the dull ache of life. Then one "trustworthy" stone crumbled beneath her feet, dropping her into darkness.

The fall was short. Her arm met stone with a wet crunch, but the ache from the shattered bone faded away as the whispers rose in deafening song. All around stretched an ancient cavern. Hot springs bubbled across its floor, while mosaics and beaten gold masks decorated the walls. Mundane beasts and fantastic creatures wandered past, unperturbed by her presence.

A single tuatara waddled forward as she cradled her limb. It borrowed a tongue from the whispers and spoke. "What are you?"

"I—" She opened her mouth to speak, borrowing too from those old, quiet chants. And although the whispers had a word for all things in creation, they had no words for the expectations of others. "I don't know."

From that day on, the whispers poured themselves through Shardra's reptilian friend, speaking louder and more clearly with a mouth to form the words. She soon named the creature Kolo—an old dwarven word for the beauty in everyday things—and told Kolo of Xolgrit and Rolgrimmur, and of the beauty of the stars in the night sky, and how to tell past and present and future apart. And Kolo taught her how to speak to spirits and borrow their favor to mend her broken bones, and of dwarven faith from long before they mingled their worship with the deities of the surface world. It taught her how to glean deeper secrets from the artifacts of the dead, and how to greet the Ladies of Crag and Ember—powerful elementals who laid claim to the hot springs and the surrounding tunnels. Most precious of all, Kolo taught her of the rivethun—dwarves who drew great power by embracing the disjunction between their bodies and souls—and she learned to brew the alchemical tinctures her past sisters used to quiet the rages of adolescence and bring their minds and bodies into harmony.

As Shardra's mystical skills and budding femininity began to show, her parents lamented their loss of a son and the addition of yet another dowry. Their irritation changed to joy as their daughter's dealings with the spirit world guided Xolgrit's miners to rich new veins of ore and long-lost treasure troves. The Geltl clan's fortunes reversed as Shardra's confidence, skills, and womanhood blossomed, and eventually clans from Xolgrit and beyond offered handsome bride prices.

Shardra's gifts attracted more than suitors, however. Lonely spirits and treasure hunters alike came to Xolgrit hoping to profit by the young shaman's insight. Neither settled peacefully into the community's rigid order. The string of lootings, possessions, drunken brawls, hauntings, and soured beer drew the attention of Rolgrimmur, and the city-state dispatched a squad of soldiers—under the command of Captain Itcel Dechl—to put down the ragtag mercenary gangs squatting in town. Shardra herself turned her magic on its source, driving the spirit invaders back to the hot spring and demanding the Ladies of Crag and Ember keep their subjects under control.

Unsatisfied by her easy victory over a band of drunken thugs and grave robbers, Captain Dechl and her soldiers traced Shardra's path through the Old Roads, and eventually claimed the sacred shrine (and the wealth covering its walls) as a cultural treasure for Rolgrimmur. The elemental Ladies raged at the presumption, swearing in turn to reduce Xolgrit to rubble. Both sides dwarf maiden a traitor and cast her aside as they charged into battle. Shardra lashed out, seizing control of an earth elemental and using its might to collapse the ancient shrine.

With nothing left to fight over, the opposing armies fled. Lacking any evidence of Shardra's actions but burning with frustration, Dechl used what remained of her authority to accuse the spirit-talker of heresy. Although friends and family staunchly defended her innocence, Shardra took the allegations as a chance to act on plans that had grown increasingly tempting. She left Xolgrit and her tutors, childhood friends, and family by paths only the stones remembered. Shardra reached the surface a guarded but curious woman, more interested in stories of the long dead than the bickering of the living. With Kolo the crag tuatara at her shoulder, Shardra now wanders the world, uncovering lost treasure and listening to the tales it has to tell. Permanent ties still chafe, even ones as shallow as a favor owed or an unpaid tavern bill, but her heart softens toward any who wander. Despite her love of the world's vast mysteries, a small part of the shaman yearns for the joy and companionship she once felt with her sisters, and Shardra corresponds with her family often, ever watchful for any discovery that might provide an excuse to write or visit her distant, glittering home.

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## Hakon – Human Male Skald

Past the Ironbound Archipelago, across the Steaming Sea, lies the Broken Bay, haven of scoundrels, raiders, cutthroats, and killers in the bloodiest Viking traditions of the Lands of the Linnorm Kings. As a youth, Hakon waited impatiently to come of age and join the seasonal southern raids of his countrymen, eagerly absorbing the tales of distant lands they brought back with the plunder. The proud raiders boasted of desperate battles at sea, of ceaseless storms and sea monsters and foreign towns cloaked in sheets of cascading flames. Hakon committed these stories to memory, adding his own embellishments to create an oral history for his people—vowing to one day make a place for himself within it.

Key to Hakon's youthful mythology was Hrolf Harfargr, one of the few honorable huscarls of Broken Bay's despicable King Ingimundr the Unruly. Hakon's account of Harfargr's victory over the ice troll Rimeclaw became something of a phenomenon in the Bay's capital settlement of Bildt. Other skalds tried to outdo Hakon's telling, adding ever more fantastic feats to the story, increasing Harfargr's reputation and influence. Nevertheless, even the embellishments acknowledged the original tale as Hakon's as much as that of Hrolf Harfargr, and the young storyteller became a minor celebrity in Broken Bay. When he turned 15 later that year, Harfargr claimed him for his crew and appointed Hakon as his personal lore keeper and legend-spinner.

Hakon composed epic poems of Hrolf Harfargr's encounter with the brine dragon Kelizar, his crushing victory at sea over Styrbjorn Threefingers, and his romance with his greatest rival, the Viking hero White Estrid. Hakon stood beside the two lovers as Harfargr and his men joined forces with Estrid on her legendary run through a Chelish blockade at the Arch of Aroden to find harbor in the distant city of Absalom, at the heart of the Inner Sea. On that months-long journey, Hakon recorded the tales of heroes like White Estrid, Runewulf the Unbeliever, Molgard Swordhand, and the twins Bolgi and Bjarni, slayers of the frost wolf Kuldinir.

To keep the memories fresh in his mind, Hakon embroidered representations of the stories into cloth badges sewn along the hem of his long coat. As he moved from badge to badge, Hakon added to the legend of his shipmates, who looked on in excitement with each of his tellings. The smiles and encouragement of heroes stung Hakon in his heart, however, and what should have been pride was instead replaced with regret and shame. For Hrolf Harfargr intended that his personal skald would survive to tell his legend, and thus kept Hakon as far from danger as possible. Over the years of his time in service to White Estrid, Hakon observed the great deeds of heroes triumphing over enemies again and again, but always as a witness, and never as the participant he so wanted to be.

Upon their return to the Lands of the Linnorm Kings from the extended Absalom expedition, White Estrid and Hrolf Harfargr had a falling out that separated Hakon from the band of heroes that had so inspired his imagination. As Estrid and her crew went on to defeat a linnorm dragon and claim the kingdom of Halgrim, Hakon followed Hrolf Harfargr back to the Broken Bay. Over the next several years, Hakon watched as Harfargr's legend faded. King Ingimundr openly undermined him and tempted the fading lord to strike against him. The final humiliation sentenced Harfargr to serve upon the crew of a long ship captained by a spiteful Viking named Girt Bearwearer, a hated enemy. Worse, the king ordered Harfargr to sea without his official lore keeper and the recorder of his legendary deeds. Instead, Ingimundr assigned Hakon's younger brother, Ostog, to his place at the oars.

Hrolf Harfargr, Ostog, and Hakon's old companions Bolgi and Bjarni set out on Girt Bearwearer's ship among a great armada of raiders with hungry eyes on the rich lands of the distant south. They never returned to the Broken Bay, but soon stories made their way to Hakon of a mutiny at sea in which Hrolf Harfargr and his allies attempted to take the long ship from its wicked captain. Their heroism was rewarded with sword thrusts and blood eagles. A victorious Bearwearer had his slain enemies thrown overboard, food for sea birds and the ravenous beasts of the deep.

But other stories made their way back to Bildt, too. Tales of a brash young warrior named Ostog the Unslain, a survivor of treachery at sea who somehow washed ashore in the Varisian town of Sandpoint and who immediately set about creating a legend of his own. Hakon had to know if the tales of Ostog's distant deeds were true, so he set off on a ship of his own to Sandpoint in an attempt to reunite with his brother. He arrived only to find Ostog had already departed, leaving behind him the mangled corpses of twisted monsters and wicked men. Hakon began work on a new series of badges for his coat in Sandpoint—the Saga of Ostog the Unslain.

Hakon and a band of companions followed Ostog all the way down Avistan's western coast, tracing his brother's footsteps in the drying blood of the young barbarian's dismembered enemies. His travels took him into the deepest deserts of Osirion, back to Absalom, and to a dozen ports in between. Though Hakon has not yet caught up with Ostog, the skald's journeys have brought him his own measure of renown. In Nisroch he slew the dark druid Roverud. His twin axes—Hagrum's Keel and Limbrender—struck down the marsh giant Fogulnur, gaining Hakon the legendary Horn of Valenhall, a mystical artifact he only partially understands. Tales of these victories fill his companions with unparalleled battle spirit and combat prowess, further cementing Hakon's growing legend. Now the badges of Hakon's own exploits stand beside those of the true heroes of the Broken Bay, but the skald knows that his journeys must continue until his deeds shine like those of Hrolf Harfargr, White Estrid, and Ostog the Unslain. Only then will the Saga of Hakon be complete, daring those who come after him to even greater feats of bravery and legend.





# Zadim – Human Male Slayer

Open hostilities between the kingdoms of Taldor and Qadira ceased more than 200 years ago, but subtle squabbles and sub-rosa schemes continue to the present. Often these intrigues take the form of economic influence or political stratagems, but occasionally, when the stakes are high enough, they extend to outright atrocities. Triggering these strikes (or answering them in kind) without sparking an open war requires an agent with particular expertise. An agent like Zadim.

Zadim, the so-called "Shadow of Sarenrae," travels the lands of the Inner Sea as an associate of Sarenrae's church, providing deadly solutions to problems the religion cannot resolve through diplomacy and forgiveness. The world of Golarion teems with misguided folk who can be turned from darkness, but it also contains multitudes that are beyond redemption, who revel in evil, wickedness, and selfishness. Zadim is one answer to their depravities, and his response comes with an unmistakable air of finality. Zadim was born into Qadira's influential Cult of the Dawnflower, a militant sect devoted to rooting out evil and spreading Sarenrae's light throughout foreign lands cloaked in the darkness of ignorance. His early studies at the great temple in Katheer distinguished Zadim as a dedicated servant of the cult. True, Zadim lacked the divine connection to the goddess that granted many of his fellow cultists command over fabulous magic powers, but his acumen in other affairs soon gained the attention of the cult's inner circle. Zadim excelled in battle training, easily besting his young peers in combat. He also proved himself an expert in observation and understanding, often taking advantage of personality quirks and tells among his fellows that they weren't even aware they had. The cult's leaders knew exactly what they had in Zadim—a weapon to strike killing blows against their enemies.

Zadim's masters began tempering their stories of Sarenrae's mercy and redemption with encouragement to bring justice to the irredeemable. They revealed the scope of their designs not just on familiar foes like the creaking "empire" of Taldor to the north, but also on places like Osirion, Katapesh, and Absalom. Zadim was trained to stand in the shadowy vanguard of their efforts throughout the Inner Sea region, clearing away enemies with blade and garrote long before the more visible elements of the Dawnflower Cult made their presence known.

As the depth of the cult's plan became clear to him, Zadim began to realize that his masters were just as interested in spreading the political influence of Qadira—and its distant puppet masters in the Padishah Empire of Kelesh far to the east—as they were in spreading the doctrine of the Everlight, but the revelation came too late to inspire a change in Zadim's direction. He had trained for years to become a killer, and kill he must, in the name of Qadira, Kelesh, or the cult. Sarenrae had blessed him with unique talents, and he intended to put them to use in the field.

Zadim's first assignment outside Qadira was meant to be easy, a clear-cut case of a true villain deserving of the cult's final justice. The noble Sir Gordreth Chrysolian—Gordreth the Butcher—had been an administrator in the Taldan caravan city of Yanmass when he publicly executed twenty clerics of Sarenrae about 30 years ago, during a particularly vicious Taldan pogrom against the Cult of the Dawnflower. Shortly thereafter, the Butcher vanished, escaping divine retribution for his unholy crimes. Recently, though, agents of the cult spotted the aging aristocrat in Yanmass, and Zadim was dispatched to put him to the blade.

Upon arriving at the caravan city, Zadim learned from his informants that the Butcher had sought asylum at the manor house of a respected paladin of Abadar named Jevantus, who had gained widespread acclaim in the city after using his god-given abilities to cure hundreds of children infected with the deadly dvezda plague. Further investigation revealed that the paladin Jevantus and Gordreth the Butcher were one and the same man. The decades in hiding must have taught the vile Taldan noble something of chivalry and honor, for Abadar himself blessed the one-time villain with miraculous powers of healing.

A chance encounter with a fellow servant revealed his role in the plot to the young Dawnflower Cult, rejected Zadim's over murderous tactics, no matter the directly violating the most holy values

Such an affront, she assured, would be the divine bond so important to the duty was not just to Sarenrae, but Padishah Empire of Kelesh. If wisdom? He assured Kyra that make the decision of whether of his character for himself.

That evening, Zadim crept him away with its thundering beautiful fountain. Statues as Zadim stepped silently expression of calm and many years, and knew

As he looked into the eyes made his choice.

of Sarenrae, an earnest young cleric named Kyra, triggered a crisis of faith in Zadim, and the killer woman. Kyra, who subscribed to a far less militant doctrine than that preached by the bloody tactics, reminding him that Sarenrae herself valued goodness, redemption, and healing quarry. If Gordreth the Butcher had truly been redeemed, killing him for past deeds meant of Sarenrae, erasing the man's redemption in an act of bloody murder.

enough for Sarenrae to withdraw her favor from a dedicated follower, stripping away servant's faith and work. But Zadim was not a cleric, and had no spells to lose. His also to his masters in the Cult of the Dawnflower, and to Qadira, and to the they decreed that Gordreth the Butcher must die, who was Zadim to deny their he would not strike against the paladin, but to himself he resolved that he could not his target would live or die until he could look him in the eye and judge the quality

into the private gardens of Jevantus, kukris in hand, his pounding heart nearly giving At the center of the garden he discovered the old paladin praying to Abadar before a of children rescued from the ravages of disease peered over the paladin's shoulder toward his prey. As he approached, the paladin turned toward Zadim, a strange acceptance marked upon his visage. It was as if he had expected such a visitor for that final judgment had finally arrived.

of his quarry at last, fists clenched around the hilts of his hungry blades, Zadim



## Jirelle – Female Half-Elf Swashbuckler

Jirelle may have been born and raised on a ship, and she might call the Shackles her homeland, but she never considered herself a pirate, even if only to distance herself from the darkest part of her childhood: her mother.

Today, Jirelle is a friendly sort with a biting wit and a charming personality. She makes new friends as swiftly as she strikes with her rapier, and while she has a flair for the dramatic (why merely attack a foe when you can make a show of it with a twirl of the cape or a somersault or two?), she never favors ostentation or glory over the opportunity to help a friend in need. Jirelle understands that the strength of one's relationships with friends, allies, lovers, and family make one strong. It was her mother's failure to forge such bonds that allowed a young Jirelle to escape from a life that would have likely seen offered as sacrifice to the shark demon Ovonovo before the close of her thirteenth birthday.

On the subject of her mother or her ship, the *Bloodcrow*, the typically light-hearted half-elf grows serious. Jirelle does not share the secrets of her childhood with just anyone. As such, few know how she engineered the sinking of the *Bloodcrow* and the death of her wretched elven mother off the coast of Tempest Cay. Jirelle often jokes that she befriends for life, with the playful, only slightly malicious glint in her eyes implying what might happen to those who would betray such friendship.

After escaping the *Bloodcrow*, Jirelle spent some time surviving as a street rat in the alleys of Drenchport. Armed with a fine rapier and clad in her mother's magical cloak (the only two things she managed to escape the *Bloodcrow*'s wreckage with), Jirelle kept every coin and bauble she earned in a thrice-locked chest she keeps well hidden and protected. At first, she'd hoped to save enough money to afford a move from the Shackles to distant Taldor, drawn by tales of a land where duels and extravagance and civility promised a better life. But when rumors of a strange, ghostly ship plying the sea-ways of the Shackles reached her—fearful stories of a vessel commanded by an imperious banshee and bound by undeath—Jirelle realized that in sinking the *Bloodcrow* she'd done the exact opposite of what she'd intended. Rather than spare the Shackles of a brutal pirate queen, she'd unleashed an even deadlier scourge upon the Fever Sea.

Today, Jirelle seeks the funds to someday finance a ship and crew of her own. She plans not to become a pirate—for a life of plunder and cruelty holds no appeal for the daring swashbuckler—but to finish the job she started on the eve of her thirteenth birthday. Jirelle knows she can't do this on her own, though. So she seeks true and able allies, knowing that only with bravery and trust will the *Bloodcrow*'s days be numbered.



# Oloch – Male Half-Orc Warpriest

Oloch has no memory of a time before pain—pain suffered, and pain inflicted. A half-orc of the Haskodar tribe in Blisterwell, Oloch was raised—if it can truly be called that—with the knowledge that his parents had been quarry slaves who died in the ancient mine's cramped tunnels shortly after his birth. Constantly forced to fight for survival against his larger, stronger tribe-mates, Oloch quickly learned that the best defense is a total lack of fear or restraint. Those who thought to casually bully the child soon learned the error of their ways, for in Oloch's mind, every fight is a fight to the death, and anyone who pretends otherwise leaves themselves vulnerable.

This fearless ferocity did not go unnoticed. As Oloch reached his teenage years, the tribe's leaders began harnessing the boy's abilities. Whether in the gladiatorial pits or in battle against the sometimes-allied One Eye tribe, Oloch shed blood on command—both his own and that of others. As his victories mounted, the tribe's priests of Gorum took control of Oloch's education, wrapping him in armor and teaching him the glories of the Lord in Iron. In Gorum, Oloch finally found someone he could look up to: a being of perfect strength, without the pathetic fallibilities of even the other battle-priests. More, Gorum looked into Oloch's heart and put to rest any nagging doubts the half-orc had about his love of violence. He saw the dark thrill Oloch felt as his oversized sword split the spine of an enemy—and rewarded it with magic.

As time went on, Oloch began to chafe at even the meager restrictions placed on him by his orc superiors. Who were they to tell him when and where to fight? And so perhaps it was inevitable that, upon learning the truth of his heritage—that he was no slave child, but rather the stolen son of a human adventurer—he took the chance to sever ties (and limbs) and strike out on his own, taking with him only his favored gear and a description of the fearsome warrior woman who bore him.

Fortunately for Oloch, the legend of a woman brave enough to adventure alone in the Hold of Belkzen—and rumored to tryst unashamedly with orcs—is a hard one to stifle. So it was that he soon found himself standing before the gates of the human settlement of Trunau, calling for its leader, Halgra of the Blackened Blades, to stand forth and meet her son.

To his surprise, she did, and Oloch found himself both shocked and vaguely discomfited by the warmth with which Halgra greeted her lost son, welcoming him into her house. There she told him the story of his birth—how he was the product of a short-lived dalliance with a powerful orc leader she refused to name, and how he had been stolen from her as an infant during a raid on her campsite. She introduced him to his half-siblings, and offered him a place as a defender of Trunau.

Yet a wolf can never be a simple dog, no matter how much it might long to wear the chain. To Halgra's horror, Oloch's lust for battle refused to be sated by simple raids and training bouts. Citizens who roused his ire were terribly injured, and in the end Halgra herself had to take up her sword and drive him from the town, announcing that she would always love him as a son—but that he would never again be allowed in Trunau until he learned to control his battle lust and turn his divine abilities toward a positive end.

Frustrated, the wilds, yet no that there might, as Urgir, where he quickly claims that his position Uldeth's half-civilized ways will man he was born to be.

Oloch is a quiet, brooding warrior those who pick on obviously right, and the whining of the moment; relishing god. He's not his equals, but pains to show him combat that truly then only if it's

feeling shamed for the first time in his life, Oloch left Trunau. For a time he wandered ordinary beasts could provide a proper challenge—nor remove the lingering suspicion Halgra claimed, be more to life than simple bloodshed. Eventually he wound up in found work as a government enforcer and champion. Though on the surface, he ensures him a steady supply of worthy opponents, in secret Oloch hopes that Grask help him puzzle out how to balance the orc and human inside himself and discover the

with a disturbing love of violence. Though not actively evil, and scornful of weaker opponents, he nevertheless takes it as a given that might makes those unable to defend their property means little to him. He lives in the red rush of battle and the communion it brings him with his opposed to working with—or even for—those he considers those individuals are few and far between, and must take proper respect. Perhaps the only activity other than brings him pleasure is making music on his drum—and sufficiently riotous as to echo the clamor of battle.



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