

## Gathering Intelligence

Individual missions by members of the team

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Cori

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Early in the morning, before the rest of the group is up, you quietly take a horse from the stable and make your way to Radagast's copse just outside of town. Only the fishermen are up this early and they're all busy getting out to sea, so the only person who sees you leaving town is the watchman at the north tower. He gives you a silent wave of acknowledgment but says nothing. His mind is clearly elsewhere.

When you reach Radagast's home he is sitting on a fallen log outside his hut, just as he was when you first saw him. Next to him is a brown bear. The wounds are gone, but you are sure this is the bear that your group allowed to retreat after Velana escaped the battle. When the bear sees you it immediately moves behind the druid, watching you with clear eyes from over the man's shoulder.

"Relax, Elias," the druid says, reaching back to stroke the bear's fur. "This man is not your enemy." The bear grunts softly but stays behind Radagast, watching you carefully.

"He came here a few hours ago," the druid explained, "bleeding and burned in a dozen places. It seems a party of armed men very much like your group attacked his companion's grove yesterday and killed his friend Tobin, among many others." His eyes grew cold for a moment. "You are alive now because I know you had strong reasons for starting such a fight, but that doesn't mean I condone the innocent blood you people spilled. Perhaps you should tell me your side of the story. Not just yesterday, either. I want to hear it all."

Cautiously, you tell Radagast the broad outlines of your adventures. You tell him about Silas Rook's bandits, the kidnapping, and the battle at Bainard's Keep. You tell him about the Dark One and his plan to steal the priceless artifacts of the major cities. You remind him about the wagon attacks on the road that prompted your group to seek out Velana again, and describe the battle sequence for him. And you tell him about the robbery and murder at the Castle, raising the possibility that Velana was actively involved in luring you away so the Dark One's henchmen could steal Marcellus Gore's armor.

Radagast listens intently, nodding in all the right places, interjecting a minor question here and there. His face grows grim as you describe the combat in the grove. "You need to reign in that sorcerer," he observes. "Using fire indiscriminately like that is not going

to earn your group any respect or good faith from woodland folk." The bear growls from behind him in a way that sounds like agreement.

When you finish, he nods a few times and pats the bear gently. "And why have you come to me today, Ranger?"

You explain it to him in basically the same terms you used with me (but probably leaving out the part about maybe being hot for her). As you mention the feeling of responsibility, you see an added measure of respect creep into the old man's eyes.

He sighs deeply as you finish. "I'm not sure this is a good idea," he says, "but I have to respect your courage and honor. Elias, fetch my bowl please."

The bear bounds into the druid's hut and returns with a wide darkwood bowl held gently in his teeth. Radagast motions for you to sit beside him and sets the bowl on the ground between you. He waves his hand with a practiced motion, utters an incantation in a language you don't understand, and within a few seconds the bowl fills with pure, clear water.

"We'll let it sit for a minute to get still," the druid says. His eyes look far into the distance. "Velana was a student of mine in my teaching days," he begins. "A very sharp young lady, as you've doubtless noticed. Very good with spells, and fiercely loyal to Nature. I was proud when she went off on her own and settled into the Tanglewood. One of her early successes was in dealing with some of the farmers up there who wanted to expand their fields by cutting into the forest. She negotiated a deal with them whereby she made the land they had more fertile, allowing them to grow more crops in the same amount of land instead of taking more land. But I digress.

"By the time all the trouble started, Velana was well established in the forest. The animals loved her, the villages respected her, and though she could be a little overzealous in her protective duties nobody that I know of considered her malicious."

The druid's face fell a little. "About eight months ago, this Dark One you speak of appeared, as if from nowhere, wandering about in the northern woods and hills. The animals are instinctively afraid of him; wherever this man goes, animals, birds, even aberrations give him a wide berth. They say his soul is evil. I haven't met him, so I can't say one way or the other, but in my experience animals are far better than people at sensing a man's heart.

"You can't go around frightening the wildlife without attracting some attention. So it was inevitable that Velana would hear of this man and seek him out, if only to make sure he knew that the woods were under her protection. He told Velana that he was an exile from the South looking for a new home. He knew a lot about the land, she told me, but almost nothing about the settlements. As the weeks went by I started hearing from her less. I know this Dark One visited her grove more or less regularly, and that she helped him to assemble a force of outlaws -- followers, she called them -- to establish a new settlement.

Then she took up with the outlaw Silas Rook and became his lover. I could sense the harshness in her mind when we communicated, which was seldom, and I heard disturbing things from the migratory creatures who passed through her wood. I think this Dark One of yours is the cause of that harshness. This obsession with revenge may be a reflection of his nature as much as hers."

Radagast regards the bowl on the ground. The water was absolutely still. "It's ready." His hands move carefully, precisely, as utters another stream of secret words. Clouds form in the water and swirl, filling the bowl with a cottony whiteness that seems to move below the surface while leaving the top perfectly smooth. The clouds recede to the edges and a picture comes into focus.

Velana lay in an improvised hammock tied between two trees, her body motionless and relaxed. A small yellow bird is perched on the rope near her feet, just watching.

Her eyes open almost immediately. She looks up, seeming to look through the water. "Radagast?"

"Yes, my dear. Elias is with me as well." He signals you to remain silent.

A look of relief comes over Velana's face. "Elias? Thank Obad-Hai he escaped!" The relief turns to sadness as she continues. "I failed, Radagast. I had Silas's killers in my grove and I still couldn't destroy them. Tobin died protecting me. So did Ollonduin, the Old One. The butchers will pay for those deaths, so help me."

"And what will that do?" the old man challenges. "Will spilling blood over his body bring Ollonduin back to life? Will killing these people do anything to help Tobin or Silas? How many more innocents will have to die while you pursue this pointless quest for revenge?"

"We've had this discussion before, Teacher. Those thugs forced their way into Silas's keep and murdered everyone in the place. There was no discussion, not even a half-hearted try at negotiating for what they wanted. It was nothing more than a murder for hire disguised as a rescue. And now that I've gotten away from them twice, they'll figure they have a right to hunt me down until they kill me."

You tap Radagast on the shoulder and shake your head violently, silently mouthing the word "No!" to him. He nods and looks back into the bowl. "You may be surprised, my dear. Do you remember a ranger in that group? A dark-haired man in elven chainmail?"

"I remember," she confirms. "A ranger? He should be stripped of his powers, Radagast. That so-called ranger is one of the ringleaders."

"You should show more respect," the old man counters. "That ranger came to me this morning seeking my help precisely because he does not want to kill you. He wants to meet with you, just the two of you in a neutral place, to talk about settling this without

more violence. He gives his word you will not be attacked and asks that you do the same."

"It's a trick," she accuses. "While he and I are talking, the rest of his goons will circle around and put a half-dozen arrows in my back."

"I don't think so," he insists. "He seemed sincere to me. If I promise to protect you, will you talk to him?"

"I don't know," she answers. "I'll have to think about it." She waves with a hand while speaking a handful of words. The water in the bowl turns black, then clear again.

"Dispel magic," Radagast explains. "She'll contact me, one way or the other, when she makes up her mind. You're staying at the castle? Fine. I'll send for you when I know something."

"Do you know where she is?" you ask.

Radagast smiles. "Yes, I recognized the area. She's taken refuge in the Elven wood, outside the Alliance territory. But as I suspect you know, it would take you months to search that wood for her and the locals would not help you. Do not try to find her yourself. Wait to hear from me."

You start to thank the druid. He starts to accept, then interrupts. "I hardly need to tell you what will happen if this does turn out to be a trick, do I?"

You assure him again of your sincerity and take your leave.

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Elayna

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You rise and go through your morning prayers, as you do every day, then make your way to the kitchen for breakfast. Most of your friends are taking their time getting up and about this morning, so you fix some food for yourself and eat it alone at the big table. Then you gather up the infusions you collected from Velana's hut, saddle up a horse, and head for the wooded copse just outside of town where the druid Radagast lives.

The town streets are bustling with activity. You ride slowly through the heavy traffic, impeded even more by the fact that almost everyone you pass wants to wish you good morning and commiserate with you about the attack on your home. Bad news definitely travels fast.

It is late morning when you finally locate the druid's home. Radagast is there, straddling a fallen log, deep in conversation with another man. Between them is a brown bear, who gets one look at you and ducks behind the druid, growling softly and pointing in your direction.

Radagast stops talking and looks at you. For a second you wonder whether it was wise of you to leave your armor and weapons behind for this trip. Then the druid pats the bear's arm. "Relax, Elias," he says. "This is a good and holy woman. You've nothing to fear unless you attack first." Then he looks directly into your eyes. "I am correct about that, am I not?"

"You are," you concede. "Isn't that one of Velana's companion bears, though?"

The druid nods. "His name is Elias. He came here for healing and sanctuary after your party killed Tobin and forced Velana to flee. He will stay with me until he chooses otherwise. As you can see he is quite intelligent, and also quite gentle when he is not being attacked."

The other man clears his throat and turns to face you. You are struck immediately by his looks. He is as tall as a human, but his face has the unmistakable shape of the half-elven. His hair is fair almost to the point of colorlessness, and his eyes are a fascinating green/gray. He looks at you with a clear, confident gaze and tips his hat.

"Where are my manners," the druid says. "Priestess, this is Marucian Renascor, a friend of mine. I'm afraid I never got your name."

"Elayna," you tell them both.

"Well met, Elayna," the stranger says with a respectful half bow. You notice that he wears a studded leather vest and leggings, and that on his right arm is an ornate tattoo of a longbow and quiver -- the insignia of the Order of the Bow.

Radagast invites you to sit on a nearby stump. "I've heard Elias's version of yesterday's events," he says to you. "Now I'd like to hear yours. You may speak freely in front of Renn here."

Taking your time, you tell the druid about the events of the previous day, up to and including your arrival home and discovery of the robbery and murder in the castle. Both men listen impassively, nodding at the appropriate times. When you mention raising Simon from the dead with your staff, the men glance at each other quickly and then back to you.

"You have a Staff of Life, eh?" the archer remarks. "That must've set you back quite a bit."

"Not really." You explain the origins of the staff and how it came into your possession.

"Made by Bainard himself, eh?" The archer looked impressed. "You do realize that's a priceless piece of wood you're carrying around."

"Of course," you respond. "But all things considered, I'd say it's safer with us than left at the castle."

"You could be right."

"You've been very accomodating, Priestess," Radagast says. "Thank you for indulging us. Now, what is it that I can do for you?"

You pull out the infusions and place them in the druid's hands. "We found these in Velana's hut," you explain. "I thought you might be able to tell us what they are."

Radagast nods grimly. "The spoils of war, I take it?" Without waiting for an answer, he takes the first bundle and sniffs it gently. "Druidic infusions," he answers. "A druid with training in herbalism can create these. They are analagous to the potions you might create, Priestess. Each confers onto the consumer a spell effect." He takes the tiniest pinch out of the contents of the little pouch and touches it to his tongue. "Comphrey, thyme, and a hint of trollsbane. Swallowing this mixture of herbs will cause a person to heal wounds very quickly for a period of time."

He gives each infusion a careful sniff, inspects the contents, and sometimes touches a few bits to his tongue. In the end, he identifies two of them as infusions of Regenerate Serious Wounds (regenerate 4hp/round for 9 rounds), two as infusions of Endure Elements (able to withstand temperatures from -40 to 150 without discomfort or damage for 9 hours), and one as an infusion of Owl's Wisdom (+4 to Wisdom for 9 rounds).

"Velana is a very talented herbalist," the druid remarks as he hands you back the infusions. "You'll find those to be quite potent and helpful."

You thank Radagast for his help and get up to leave.

"One moment, Elayna," Renn says. When you turn to face him, he takes off his hat and stands as well. "May I accompany you back to your castle? I would very much like to meet your companions."

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## Gilead

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With some free time before you need to leave for the tournament, you and Renn teleport to Crossroads to do some more information gathering. You are in disguise as your cover persona (I'll leave it to you to define what name, appearance and background you use for this).

Since you have some familiarity with the place you start at Dodger's pub, the Broken Shield. Renn unobtrusively takes a seat where he can watch your back without seeming to be with you, and you take one designed to put you in the path of conversation.

Dodger is his usual jovial self. He doesn't show any sign of recognizing you.

In the space of about two hours, you pick up the following tidbits:

- If you want to establish a storefront in Crossroads you need a business license, which costs 150gp.

- Storefront or no, if you are going to do business with people in Crossroads you should be prepared to tribute 5 percent of your proceeds to Foulon's organization every week. Very unpleasant things tend to happen to those who don't.

- Adventurer types are tricky to deal with because even the honest ones have a habit of dying before they can pick up an order. Always get at least enough coin in advance to cover your acquisition costs just in case.

- The area between the Tanglewood and the West Road (the road connecting Crossroads and Gore's Cliff) is full of small settlements with farmland clustered around them. They're still pretty hospitable to merchants and traders, but adventurer types are finding it harder and harder to find a place that will feed or house them. The innkeepers, farmers, and such are being pressured by a bunch of bleeding hearts who call themselves the Sane to refuse service to anyone who carries weapons.

- The seedier adventurer types used to hang out at the Sounds of Silence, a third-rate pub on the south side of town, but that place blew up in flames about a week ago. Rumor has it that the owner pissed off a dark mage.

- The south side is a bad neighborhood. Not too long ago a nasty gang of hoods made the mistake of attacking an even nastier gang of hoods. Only one of the attackers survived, and none of the attackees was caught.

- The real thieves in Crossroads are the town officials. You can't get anything done in this town without liberal amounts of "political lubrication" (ie, bribes).

- The whole village of Elster, a tiny hamlet at the Tanglewood's edge, became a Place of Sanity last month. Not long after, a group of outlaws came through and slaughtered everyone, including several of the Sane. Apparently the outlaws weren't impressed by Elster's commitment to non-violence.

While you were getting business advice from those who see you as a fellow merchant, Renn made an acquaintance or two of a different sort. As your current conversation partner starts to wind down, he crosses behind you on his way out the door. "Outside when you're ready," he says quietly as he passes.

Outside, he tells you what he has. "A couple of people recognized my Order of the Bow tattoo," he explains, "and assumed I was looking for work. They told me the best place to get an ear to the underground these days is a hostel called the Oasis. I've got directions."

You go with Renn to the Oasis and settle down in the common room, which is crowded. This time you adopt a manner that suggests not all of the goods you deal in necessarily come with a bill of sale. A different flavor of murmurings comes your way:

- Two weeks ago a group of outsiders working for Foulon took out the Midnight Crew. As a result, other crews are making sure to stay current on their tribute obligations and several independents have joined the Guild.

- The black market is doing booming business in masterwork armor and weapons from Tiburon. Prices are great because the legitimate supply has slowed to a trickle in the past few weeks.

- Marcellus Gore's armor was stolen from his old castle recently, right under the noses of the occupants. Rich collector types are falling over themselves trying to make bids but nobody knows who to contact or how.

- The Deadly Viper Assassination Squad was spotted on the South Road a few days ago. A lot of local crews are lying low in case they were hired by a rival.

- A 400-year-old spell book was bought about a month ago on the black market by an anonymous collector for 250,000gp.

- Something put a burr up the ass of the watch captain in Montagne House. They've doubled the guard both in the display hall and on the grounds outside.

- Some wacko non-violence cult is spreading all over the western farmlands. Any place you see sporting a "Place of Sanity" sign is an easy mark for looting, pillaging, or just plain mayhem.

- There's a new crew of adventurer types operating out of Gore's Cliff. Nobody knows much about them yet, though, except that they seem to be independents.

- This is a bad time to be looking for adventurer types. The best ones will be leaving in a few days to go to the annual Kensai Tournament in Sogenhal.

You regroup with Renn outside, who heard many of the same things while winning 20gp in a competitive game of darts. The two of you quietly slip into the tunnels and return home.



You rise shortly after the sun, meditate for a short time, and then begin to prepare for your trip to Crossroads. You collect your normal travelling gear plus a few extra days' worth of iron rations in case you feel a need to contribute to Templeton's "children" in the tunnels. Seeing that some of the others have also apparently gone out on early errands, you shoulder your pack and head for the teleporter room.

A few minutes later you open the hatch and emerge from the teleporter room in Crossroads. You pause a few moments to let your eyes adjust to the lower light levels, then start walking toward the center of town.

As you approach the area near the Guild headquarters, you spot one of Foulon's men standing guard in the tunnel, looking the other way. You approach slowly, with hands visible. At about fifteen feet, when he still hasn't turned around, you deliberately make a noise with your throat.

The man wheels around and lands in battle stance. You smile and hold your open hands outward, palms forward. "Sorry if I startled you. I need to see Guildmaster Foulon."

The guard relaxes and straightens up a little. "I remember you," he says. "You're one of the ones that killed Kroger."

You nod without showing emotion one way or the other.

"Businesslike," the guy says. "Just like us. C'mon, I'll let you inside."

He leads you around to the secret door you used on your last trip. This time he makes no attempt to distract you while he opens it. "You'll need to talk to Duvall first," he says. "Up the stairs, second door on your right."

Behind that door is a pretty young woman at an oak desk. "I need to see Guildmaster Foulon," you tell her. "I was told to come here first."

She looks you over with thinly veiled curiosity. "Is he expecting you?"

"Not precisely now, no. I've come from Gore's Cliff with news of some new developments. I would very much like to share this information with the Guildmaster in person, and to discuss the implications for our future activities."

She blinks twice and stands up. "Wait here, please." She leaves the room while you congratulate yourself on a skillful emulation of the Guildmaster's speech patterns. A few minutes later, she opens the door. "Come with me, please."

You follow her to the grand hall, where you met Foulon on your first trip. The Guildmaster looks impassively at you from behind his grand desk. Duvall, the consigliere, is also seated. Three bodyguards watch unobtrusively from corners of the room. "Perdue Banting, Guildmaster," you remind him.

Foulon nods, a faint smile on his face. "I remember you, my friend. My associate tells me you have developments to discuss."

"I do." You tell Foulon about the theft of Gore's armor from the castle, including what you know about Pritchett and the strange clerics who dropped him off and vanished. Foulon's expression grows increasingly grim as the details unfold.

"This disturbs me," he says at the end, glancing at Duvall and then back to you. "It goes without saying that I did not authorize this theft or the murder that took place in the process. Someone has been extremely disrespectful to your house and to my interests. This will not stand."

"Understood," you agree. "We wondered, my friends and I, whether you had any more information about the activities of that out-of-town gentleman. Especially about his hiring a new team of contractors."

"I do not," Foulon answered. "But if you can linger in town for a few hours, I will have my people make some discreet inquiries. Where can I reach you?"

You think fast. "The Battered Shield."

"A good place," Foulon remarks. "I will send word via Dodger when I have something for you."

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Gilead, Pyroh, Renn

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It is early in the morning. Gillead, Pyroh, and Renn step on the teleporter circle corresponding to Tavor on the floor.

You find yourselves in a rectangular room with masonry walls. The ceiling glows with a comfortable light. A wooden door with brass fittings sits in the middle of the wall opposite the circles. Hanging on a peg next to the door are several golden skeleton keys, each on a fine cord that would allow the key to be worn like a necklace (or hidden under a shirt).

You try the door and find it locked. Gillead takes one of the skeleton keys and inserts it into the lock. Before he can turn it, four symbols appear in a circle around the keyhole. On the left is a glyph of a book; at right, a tankard; at top, a gavel; and below the keyhole, a circle.

Gillead studies the symbols for a minute, then shrugs and turns the key to the left. The door clicks and begins to open. On the other side is a vast room lined with bookcases, all of which are full of bound volumes. There are tables and chairs in the middle of the room. You see two men and a woman, each sitting alone, apparently studying a large book. One of the men looks as though he is transcribing from one book into another.

Gillead pockets the key and you enter the room, closing the door behind you. Pyroh tries the door and finds it unlocked. Curious, he opens it and looks back. Instead of the teleporter room, he sees another room like the one you have just entered. An elderly man in scholar's garb sits alone at a corner table with about eight large tomes open in front of him. Pyroh taps Gillead to get his attention.

Renn looks in the doorway and smiles. "Come on, there's Uncle Theo," he says softly and walks through the door again. You follow him to the corner table. The man doesn't seem to notice you until Renn clears his throat. "Mr. Gore, may we speak with you?"

The man sits up straight and looks mildly alarmed. "I don't know you," he says irritably, "and I'm busy."

"My name is Marucian Renascor," Renn replies.

You can see the man's white eyebrows rise skeptically. "What kind of name is that?"

"Elven," he responds. "My friends and I have a letter of introduction from your nephew Simon."

Gillead produces the letter and hands it to the scholar. "Seal looks right," he muses. He breaks the seal and reads slowly. Toward the end he nods slowly. Then he gives you each the visual once-over. "So you're part of the group he's got staying at the castle. Fat lot of good it seems to have done. My nephew could have been killed while you fools were out traipsing through the woods."

You remained silent. This didn't seem like the time or the place to argue.

Theo, seeing you weren't going to go away that easily, refolded the letter and slipped it into his pocket. "So now I suppose you expect me to introduce you around, as Simon asks?"

"It is a matter of great importance to the Library," Gillead points out. "Imagine if its most valuable treasures were to end up in the hands of a powerful evil."

Theo's face grows stern. "Don't talk to me about evil," he admonishes. "We Gores have seen more than our share of it and we've paid an unspeakable price. I'll help you because my nephew asked me to, but that's the only reason. I'm too old for this moralistic nonsense."

Before you can engage in any debate, Theo stands up and pushes in his chair. He leads you out of the reading room, through a pleasantly lit atrium and into an orderly office area. You stop in a corner room with a mahogany desk and cushioned chair. A man nearly the same age as Theo sits behind the desk looking out the window. Theo knocks on the doorway as you enter and the other man turns to face you.

"Barnaby," Theo says brusquely, "these men were sent by my nephew. They have some ugly news about a plot to steal Tavor's spell books. This one has an odd name, but aside from that they seem trustworthy. It would be a good idea to take them seriously." Without standing on ceremony, Theo turns and leaves you alone with the new man.

He shrugs and gestures toward chairs. "That's high praise coming from him," he remarks. "I am Barnaby, Chief Librarian for the City of Tavor. The security of the Founder's legacy, material and intellectual, is my responsibility."

You introduce yourselves. Barnaby doesn't seem to have a problem with Renn's name.

"I received your message through Phindal," Barnaby says. "I'm not sure why you felt the need to travel all this way. Appropriate security measures have been taken."

Gillead takes the lead and explains the substitution idea. Barnaby listens respectfully. "A very clever idea," he says, "but such an elaborate charade seems overly complicated to me. The books are quite safe. Only I and the Magister can open the vault where they are stored, and it is quite impregnable. Unless Artemis Tavor himself returns from the dead, nobody can get to those books without going through one of us. I'm sorry you came this distance for nothing, but please do enjoy the library while you're here."

His tone leaves no doubt that you are being politely dismissed. You thank the librarian for his time and return to the reading room.

Theo looks up as you approach. "You again? That was quick. Didn't Barnaby listen to you?"

"He listened," Pyroh answers. "He just didn't do anything about it."

Now it's clear you have the old man's attention. "That's very odd," he muses, "very odd indeed. Barnaby was a friend of Tavor's -- the man, that is, not the city. If anyone would want those books protected, it would be him."

"He believes that the current security is adequate," Gillead says.

"Otyugh feed!" Theo spits. "He's just too damned proud of himself to take suggestions from outsiders. I'll deal with this. Wait here."

Theo gets up and marches over to the nearest door. He takes something from his pocket, makes an action like turning a key, and steps through the door. Before it closes you can just catch a glimpse of a plush throw rug on the other side. You look at each other, all thinking the same thing -- that there was no throw rug there when you walked through that door a minute ago.

Just to be sure, you go back to the door and open it. The atrium outside looks the same as it did before. There is no throw rug anywhere nearby.

"I told you to stay here." It's Theo's voice, and it's coming from behind you. You look back and see him emerging from the other door. With him is a younger man, maybe 50, in shimmering silver robes. He carries a staff of a bright metal engraved with runes and topped with a clear crystal lens inside a metallic frame. You quickly look behind them as the door closes and catch a glimpse of wood-paneled walls. Not the walls you know to be in the next room. "Gentlemen," Theo says, "meet His Excellency, the Magister of Tavor."

You introduce yourselves with the proper amount of respect. At the Magister's suggestion you sit around a spare table. Since you are alone in the room you can speak freely and you do, telling the Magister of your mission and providing as much detail as you have about the Dark One and his plans. Then you tell him Barnaby's reaction to your plan.

The Magister expels a deep breath. "Barnaby is right; those books are extremely well protected. On the other hand, complacency in these matters often leads to failure. I think it would be wise to move the books to my personal library for a while. Even Barnaby can't enter that space."

He looks at you all, and then at Theo. "Would you like to see the books? Satisfy yourselves that they're still here?"

You agree with cautious enthusiasm. Smiling, the Magister leads you back to the doorway. He pulls a key from his pocket and inserts it into the keyhole. Gillead can just make out a circle of symbols appearing around the key. They wink out as the Magister turns the key and opens the door.

The room you enter is round. It has marble floors and eight arched doorways leading out of it. In the center of the room is a life-sized statue of a man in wizard's dress atop a granite pedestal. The statue wears a real cloak and has a darkwood staff in its carved hand. "This is the museum level," the Magister says. "That's a statue of Artemis Tavor. The cloak and staff are Tavor's from his adventuring days. Don't get too close -- there's a Forcecage spell protecting it."

The Magister leads you through another door, this time without using a key. Immediately on the inside are two men standing at attention. You can see that they are wearing short tunics with pants and boots. Each also wears a belt with five or six leather loops on it,

each of which holds a wooden wand of a different hue. The men snap to either side when they see the Magister. "These men are with me," he says as you pass.

You take a wide, sweeping staircase down to a lower floor, then a confusing series of short turns until you reach a chamber some hundred feet square. Four more of the uniformed guards stand on either side of a huge iron door to a vault in the center.

"This, my friends, is the Library's vault. In order to enter the vault, one must convince these highly trained guardians that one is either myself or Barnaby. The guardians have True Seeing, so magical disguises will not work."

"What about a really good non-magical disguise?" Pyroh asks, semi-joking.

"That might get you to the door," the Magister answers. "But opening it is another matter." The Magister places a finger on the spot where the lock mechanism should be and begins to trace a design, mumbling words under his breath. A glowing symbol appears, then fades as the door clicks and opens. Both Gillead and Pyroh recognize the ritual as the casting of an Arcane Mark spell.

"Your personal mark is the key," Gillead observes.

"Exactly," the Magister says. "Impossible to forge. Only three marks will be honored by the door: the Magister's mark, the Chief Librarian's mark, and the personal mark of Tavor himself. Tavor created the system when the tower was built. The method of setting the lock for a new Magister is a custom spell that is recorded only in one of Tavor's books, which of course are in the vault."

The vault is 40 feet wide and 30 feet deep with walls of iron. Rows of freestanding bookcases fill most of the space. "Tavor's books are over here," the Magister continues, indicating a large wooden cabinet at the rear of the vault. "As you can imagine, there are a lot of them. Seventeen volumes, not including the arcane artisan spells."

He opens the cabinet and stands aside to let you see. Seventeen leather-bound books of varying thickness and apparent age stand on a shelf above a drop-down study desk. The spine of each book is bare. "Cast a Read Magic on yourselves," the Magister urged. "You'll see Tavor's mark on the spines."

Gillead and Pyroh shrug and cast Read Magic. The books begin to glow with a soft green light. On each spine an identical rune pattern glows white.

"I'm picking up conjuration magic," Gillead says.

The Magister looks perplexed. "On the marks?"

"No, on the books themselves."

"Me, too," Pyroh agrees. "When was the last time anybody opened one of these and looked at it?"

The Magister frowns. "Go ahead, do it."

Gillead reaches for a book and pulls it toward him. As soon as it clears the cabinet, the book's appearance changes. It is no longer old and worn. It looks a few months old at most. Gillead opens the book to look inside and finds that the pages are blank.

The Magister speaks an incantation and waves a hand over the lens in his staff. The image of Barnaby's face appears in it. "Come to the vault, please," the Magister says. "Immediately." Then he steps closer to the cabinet and casts Dispel Magic. There is a flash of white light and then all of the books change to match the appearance of the one Gillead is holding. They are all relatively new and appear unused. The wizard's mark no longer adorns the spines.

Barnaby's voice comes from behind you. "Excellency, what would you ..." You look back and see him staring openmouthed at the cabinet.

The Magister speaks softly and clearly. "Where is your cousin, Barnaby?"

Still staring at the cabinet's contents, the librarian answers in a slow stammer. "I don't know. He's been away for some time now."

"Apart from you and me, he is the only person who has been allowed in this room unsupervised. I strongly suggest you locate him. Now."

"Of course, Excellency. At once." Barnaby practically flies out of the vault.

The Magister's face looks grim. "It would seem that Barnaby's complacency has already led to failure. I wonder what else is missing from this vault."

"What else do you normally keep here," Pyroh asks.

"Artemis Tavor, in his last years, was an almost tireless researcher into the arcane arts. He was constantly writing new spells, improving old ones, trying different combinations of things. In the process he amassed a sizable collection of the rarest, oldest sourcebooks on the material plane. Those books, along with all of his research notes and spell formulae, are what we keep in this vault. Many of Tavor's efforts were innovative and safe to use, but some were highly dangerous. That was the whole reason for the elaborate security -- even Tavor himself knew that some of his knowledge needed to die with him."

Pyroh starts another question, but the Magister brushes him off. "My friends, it is obvious that I have an emergency on my hands. You were instrumental in bringing it to my attention, but the problem is now mine to resolve. Please avail yourselves of the

Library's resources all you like, but I have to take my leave of you now. Theophilus, will you walk them back to the reading rooms?"

Theo nods. "This way, gentlemen." He leads you back to the outer chamber, to the wooden door, and inserts his key. He gives it a quick turn, opens the door, and you step through it into the reading room again. "Transport key," he explains, noting the way you watched him use the key. "One of Artemis Tavor's innovations. You can stick it in any door and it will open that door onto any of the destinations it's made for. Mine opens to this room, the Magister's office, the exhibit hall, and my residence. The Magister's goes almost anywhere in the Tower and probably a few places outside of it. Not terribly useful unless you have a door to put it in, but very handy otherwise."

Theo takes you to one of Barnaby's assistants. The assistant tells you the rules of the library, the fees for copying spells and for having an intern copy them for you. Let's assume that you spend the rest of the day happily researching spells. We'll deal with the results of that research separately.

When you're done, you have Gillead insert his key into the nearest door. The icons that appear are the same that appeared in the teleport room. On a hunch, Gillead turns the key to the circle. The door opens and you see the teleport room on the other side. You step through and teleport home.

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Groop, Dimdar, Cori

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Dimdar, Cori and Groop volunteered to go to Tiburon and work with officials there to protect Tiburon's shield. They begin by going to the teleporter room and stepping on the circle that corresponds to Tiburon's position.

You find yourselves in a similar-looking room with carved stone walls. Dimdar senses that you are now facing south and are about 50 feet below ground level in a mountainside cavern. The glow of a Light spell on the ceiling gives you plenty of light to see by.

The exit is not immediately obvious. After a few minutes of searching Dimdar spots a seam in the rock wall. She fiddles with nearby stones until she finds one that moves. There is a faint click and the wall section swings inward.

You exit the teleport room and take a moment to learn the mechanism for opening the door from the outside. The door is nearly invisible even to Dimdar, so you each take a turn opening it to make sure you can.

The room you have entered is dimly lit by ever-burning torches in wall sockets. Like the teleport room, its walls are carved and flow more like a natural cavern than a man-made room. Its dimensions are roughly 40x100 feet, and your secret entrance is in the NW corner where the light is worst.



This room is obviously a shrine. A huge granite slab casket sits in the middle of the long wall on a dais. Its sides are carved with images of dwarven warriors in battle. Ornate engraved writing on the front face of the dais says, "Here lies Dumont the Valliant, only son of Octavion, last of the House of Tiburon. Let all who pass through this city venerate his memory."

Carved into the wall above the casket is a bust of a grand-looking Dwarf warrior, presumably Tiburon himself. A highly polished suit of plate mail stands next to the dais on the left, and on the right a display case holds a greataxe and a large shield. Both the axe and the shield are exquisitely made. Dimdar examines both carefully and sees that they are made primarily of adamantite. Her eye is able to detect a multitude of minor dings and scratches, evidence that these pieces have seen plenty of combat.

Through an exit to the south you find another large room. This one is lined with wrought metal and glass display cases, each marked with a small sign indicating the item's role in the life of Dumont Tiburon. A massive tablet lists the dates and locations of battles and the names of fallen comrades.

Moving further south, you encounter a huge cavern filled with column after column of shelving. A massive stone-carved counter forms a circle with just one break allowing passage in and out and a smooth top. Inside the circle is the first life you've seen yet: a Dwarf man with grey hair and a long, multibraided beard. He looks up at you and frowns. "That is a restricted area. No one is allowed to be in there without an escort."

By prior agreement, Dimdar took the lead. "We are sorry," she says in Dwarvish. "We have lost our way. Can you perhaps tell me how to find the offices of the city guard?"

The dwarf's scowl diminishes a little. "Wandering through restricted areas is a good way to find them, though they may be less friendly than you'd like. Or you could try going out to the surface. First building on your right as you emerge from the main gate. Ask for Farzic."

Before leaving, you engage the old dwarf in some friendly conversation. His instinctive distrust of the obvious half-orc is tempered by an equally deepset liking for gnomes and respect for warriors of all types. He likes you.

His name is Bolubin, Keeper of the Archives. Within that cavern are the vital records of the city: births, deaths, marriages, contracts, historical records, you name it. The adjoining rooms, the restricted area, contain artifacts relating to the city founder and, ultimately, his tomb. "It used to be open to the public," he explained, "but recently the Council received a warning that a powerful wizard may be planning to steal the Shield of Tiburon. So now the Tomb is off limits without an escort. Personally, I think it was just a prank because nobody's tried to steal anything in here."

"Shouldn't there be guards of some sort?" Dimdar asks. "I mean, to keep people from just wandering in there as we did."

"There were," Bolubin explains. "But the watch is stretched thin right now because of the troubles elsewhere."

"Troubles?"

Bolubin looks puzzled. "Surely you know of these things. How long have you been in the city?"

"We've only just arrived," Dimdar explains.

"Still," Bolubin insists, "you must have noticed the extra security at the gates and by the mine."

"Yes," Dimdar lies. "We were wondering about that but didn't want to disrupt things by asking a lot of questions in a busy place."

"Considerate," he remarks. "I like that. It's been a difficult time in the city of late. First, about six weeks ago, we had the kidnappings. Master craftsmen, most from the clans Morheim and Dendel, just up and disappeared. Something like five or six of them in total over the course of a few days. No clues, no ransom demands, just -Poof!- they're gone. Nobody even saw them leave.

"Then the thefts started. Mithral, adamantite, hides, wood ... the raw materials our trades rely on started disappearing from guarded warehouses. Huge amounts of the stuff. It takes a craftsman half a day to round up enough adamantite to make a good buckler these days."

Bolubin sighs. "And now, on top of all that, we have this rumor of a plot to steal the Shield. It's incredible."

You chat a few more minutes but nothing of substance comes from it. Finally you take the directions Bolubin gave you and locate the office of the city watch. Two serious-looking dwarves in plate man the entrance. Their shields are large and ornate, like Tiburon's. When you ask for Farzic they knock on the door. Two more soldiers emerge and instruct you to follow them.

You follow the troops to an office at the back of the building. Behind a simple desk sits a dwarf, also in plate armor but less the shield and helm. His eyes scan you quickly, lingering for just a moment on each of your weapons. "I am Farzic Elidain," he announces. "Why do you want to see me?"

Again through Dimdar, you explain that you are part of the group who sent the warning about Tiburon's shield. You explain your idea of placing a substitute shield on display and hiding the original, keeping the switch absolutely secret.

"I like it," he says of your plan. "Especially now, because I don't have the shields to maintain a proper guard on the place. The difficulty will be keeping the secret."

After some more discussion, Farzic agrees to keep two Dwarven Defenders in the library guarding the entrance to the relics room and the tomb. These men will not be told that they are guarding a fake, though.

As far as crafting a replacement shield and making the substitution go, Farzic has an ideal candidate to be your contact: Thorauk Tiburon, Elder of the Council, Leader of Clan Tiburon. Thorauk would be Dumont Tiburon's cousin if the hero were alive. Nobody in the city would have a stronger reason to work with you and to maintain total secrecy.

Farzic gives you directions to the Council Hall and a letter of introduction to get you past the guards. Both work exceedingly well, and within half an hour you find ourselves alone in a comfortable chamber with the very ancient-looking Thorauk.

The old dwarf listens to your plan, nodding occasionally. "This is a wise plan," he agrees. "Farzic clearly appreciates the difficulty in keeping such a secret. The question is, do you?"

He looks at you intently, but you have no answer for him. "In a society that lives as closely together as our people do, keeping secrets is a near impossibility. If I ask a craftsman to make a duplicate shield, his entire clan will know of this just by seeing him work on it. If I ask a mason to carve out a vault to store the shield in, the location and size of that vault will be common knowledge to his clan."

He pauses while the difficulty of implementing your plan sinks in. "Fortunately," he continues, "neither of those actions will be necessary. You know how to find the Archives, do you not? Meet me there in two hours and I will show you what I intend."

You take your leave of the old man and spend your free time in the adventurers' quarter, socializing and trying to put an ear to the grapevine. Most of the talk is about the missing materials and, to a lesser extent, the missing craftsmen. You run into a beaten-up looking fighter whose party was decimated by an ambush while exploring the mountains. "Bunch of snipers holding the high ground picked us off one by one," he complained. "Halfling bastards."

At the appointed time you return to the Archive. Farzic's guards are there already, looking dour. Bolubin looks surprised to see you again so soon until you explain that you're meeting someone here to get an approved tour of the relic area.

A few moments later Thorauk enters. He has changed from civilian's robes into plate armor. He carries the helm in his arm, and the drape of his purple cloak suggests a large shield strapped to his back.

Bolubin snaps to attention. "Elder Thorauk! How can I assist you?"

"My friends and I are here for a special purpose," he says. "Would you mind closing the Archive for half an hour or so and leaving us alone?"

You can see in the librarian's face that he wants to refuse, or at least to ask why, but dares not. "Of course, Elder."

Thorauk nods. "Thank you. And please tell no one of this."

The librarian and the guards leave, closing a massive iron door behind them.

"Please forgive the delay," the Elder says. "A man in robes carrying a shield is conspicuous; an armored man with a shield is nearly invisible." Thorauk reaches back and frees his shield. You all do a double-take when you see it. The markings look exactly like those on the shield in the tomb area. "The markings are family rhunes," the Elder explains. "Only a blood relative of Dumont's would have the same symbols on his shield. Mine is slightly more worn, but in the dim light of the tomb I doubt anyone will notice."

With Thorauk in the lead, you enter the tomb area and open the display case. Groop lifts out the artifact shield, and Thorauk places his own in its place. It is a near perfect replica.

"And now," the Elder says, "I must ask you to leave. I trust you, but in this matter security is vital. I will be the only one who knows where the Shield is hidden."

"You're going to hide it in here?" Dimdar asks.

"That is for me to know," he replies, "and for our enemy to speculate over."

Cori has a flash of insight. "You know about the teleport room."

The dwarf almost drops the shield in surprise. "I thought I was the last living soul who does," he replies slowly. "How did you learn of it?"

Dimdar explains how your group discovered the teleport room beneath Castle Gore, and that you used it to come to Tiburon in the first place. Cori walks to the corner and opens the secret door.

"I thought only the Five knew of these rooms," the Elder says. He takes the Shield and straps it on his back under the cloak. "I'm sure the Gore family and your friends are

trustworthy," he says, "but caution forbids using a place so commonly known. I will make another plan."

You argue respectfully, but the Elder will not budge. He wishes you well and watches as you teleport back to the Castle.