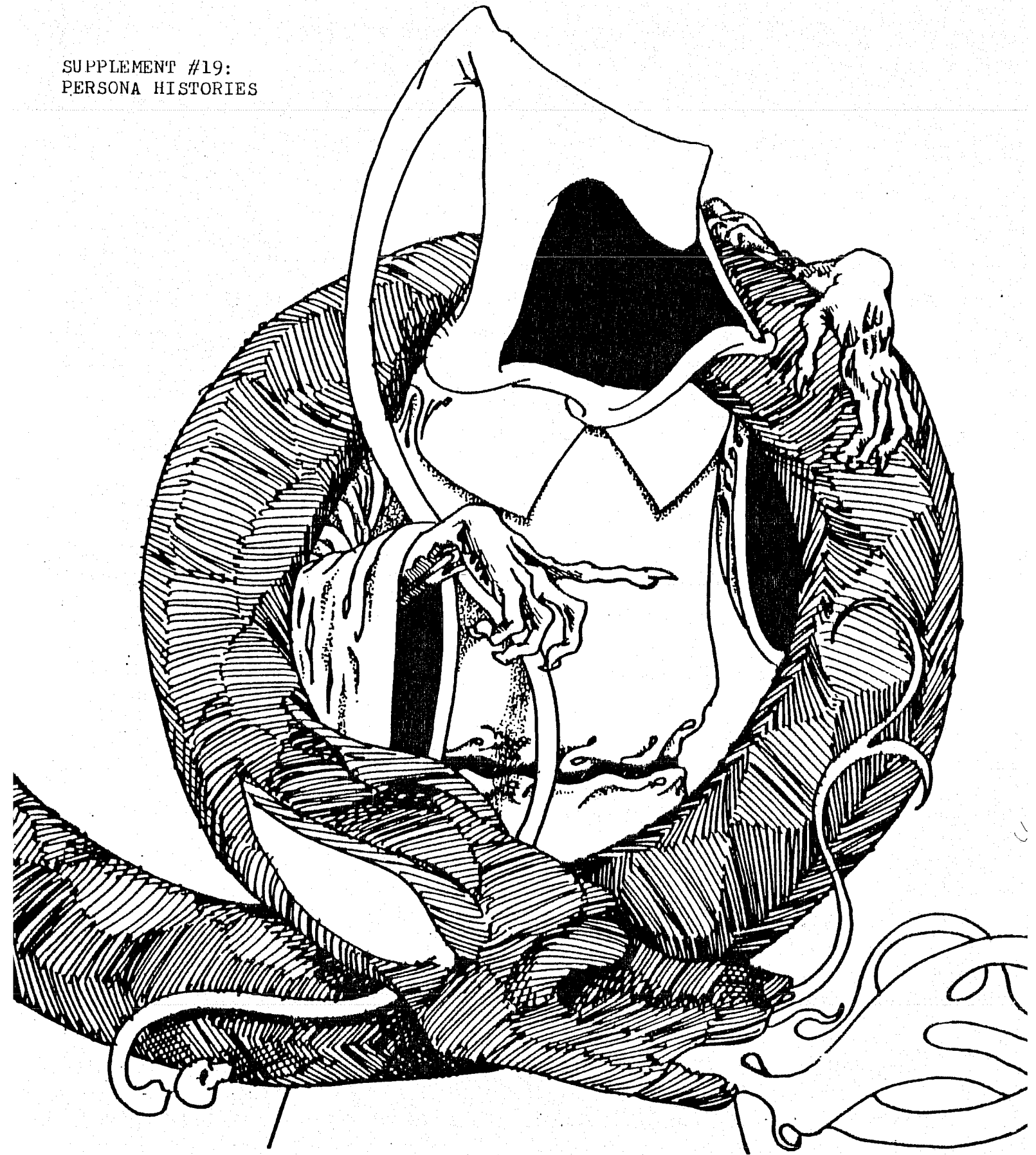


# AMT BARD

SUPPLEMENT #19:  
PERSONA HISTORIES



# AMTGARD

PERSONA HISTORIES--



Contents: a collection of examples of that literary artform unique to Amtgard, that being the "persona history".

Includes:

- \*Bhi Roc Bhren Ann- by Sionnach O' Ros Sidh
- \*A Legacy of Two Worlds- by Aramithris of Meadowlake
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- \*Through a Shaman's Eye- by Astrean Andaisa
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- \*Interview with a Barbarian- by Rufus of Grimmwulf
- \*The Lives and Times of Lord Aron- by Aron Nelsson
- \*untitled- by Ahrmaand Seregou

editor- Aramithris

cover- Sionnach

interior art (in order): Aron, Lauren, Gwynne, Aron, Aron, Alessandra

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# Bhi Ros Bhrea Ann

'vee rose vreak ahun' --  
'there was a handsome together'

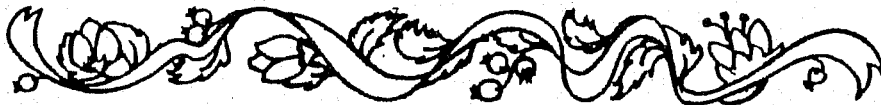
'Twas long ago, laddies and lasses, in Ireland  
Green, where I wandered the years of my youth.  
Bhi ros bhrea ann, by a magical grove, in a  
Circle of stones, and I tell you the truth  
When I tell you the story of faraway Ulster  
And how in a battle a warrior fell  
To an enemy's thundering chariot charge  
And died on a hill overlooking the dell.  
The essence of might was the blood of the soldier  
The essence of dignity, gallant and true; for  
His equal a swordsman the Ulsternen wanted  
And three score and seven that morning he slew.  
Alas, for the warrior fallen by numbers and  
Left to the care of the hawks and the crows.  
The blood of my father flowed down like a rambling  
River and rained on the rose.

Bhi ros bhrea ann, as I told you before, of the  
Rose in the magical circle of stones --  
A place where the fairies and leprechauns meet  
To abound in their aerial dances and eat  
Of the nectar and elven ambrosia they carry  
Away from invisible homes.  
Alone in the center the ros bhrea stood as a  
Monument marking the merriment donned  
By the Little Folk after the snow turned to green  
In the vale of the battlefield, after the Queen  
Of the Mayday declared that the Springtime at last was  
Unfolded and Beltaine was dawned.

Alone stood the rose, as a symbol, though silent, of  
Joy and of gaiety bounded by none; and  
Upon it appeared little droplets of crimson  
That wound from the wounds of the mightiest one  
Who had perished through glory in battle that day.  
And the blood and the rose in a magical way  
Through an alchemy older than anything written  
Created a miracle under the moon --  
In hours before the arousing of morn, the  
Enchantments of yore were beginning to bloom  
And when later the sunrise awakened the petals, a  
Child asleep on the rose, I was born.



A wandering will-o'-the-wisp was the first to  
 Discover the babe in the redflower crib.  
 The gnomes and the leprechauns quickly appeared  
 And the Elders of Elvendom, stroking their beards  
 With their willow-root fingers, announced to the fairies  
 Assembled that all were to give  
 Of their time and their love to the baby of ros sidh, whom  
 Gods of the Earth had delighted in making,  
 The art of the sword, and the craft of the spell,  
 And the rhyming of lore, and the chiming of bells  
 In the petals of buttercups far in the fields, and  
 The secrets of elf undertakings,  
 And every trick in the leprechauns' hat was I  
 Taught by the fairies who called me their own.  
 Alive in the kingdom of glamor and gold  
 I grew to the singing of ballads untold  
 To the ears of the mortals beyond all magic  
 That flourished 'round Oberon's throne.  
 Alone would I sit while above and about me  
 The brownies and pixies in their song  
 Emblazoned before me in poetry tales  
 Of champions of yore who unfurled their sails  
 To the winds of enchantment that sped them to glorious  
 War that is due of the strong  
 And the blades of enchanted rapiers and the spears of  
 The heroes that conquered the Isle of Man  
 And the giants who prowl in the gullies below  
 And the dragons afoul with their fires aglow  
 In their bellies, asleep in the pools of the stygian  
 Pits which bespeckle that land.  
Clutharachan heroes, Old Puck and Cluddonn and the  
 Other adventurers championed their lord  
 In the songs of the elves. In a magical bliss, in  
 Ethereal revelry lost did I listen  
 And glistening brighter and brighter inside me  
 My father's intrepid blood roared  
 For the lure of the road and its perils and treasures  
 Beyond the luxuriant, leprechauns' dell.  
 So girded and avid and armed with a blade,  
 In a golden and lavish, enchanted parade  
 I, a nameless, young elf with an eyeful of tears,  
 To the sidh o' an ros said farewell.



'Twas wondrous a place, all the lands that unravelled  
Around all the lanes through the Island of Eyre.  
A gallant and innocent image was I as my  
Footsteps uncoiled the roads and the fire  
Inside my blood pulled me on like the banshee  
Of legend awail with concerns of the dead.  
Adventure I saw, in the glory of battle  
In love and in conquest I knew lay ahead.  
A name for myself was the treasure I sought  
And I found it at last when we fought to his ruin  
The sorcerer over the tumbling sea  
Who had conquered the hillsides around Barad-Duin.  
"And who," asked my comrades-at-arms, "is this elf  
With a quickness and cunning befitting a fox?"  
The tongue of the Ulstermen came to my mind  
And in Gaelic I echoed them: "Ta me Sionnach  
O' Ros Sidh," I added, acknowledging fondly  
The flower that nourished my youth like a mother.  
In Amtgard, beyond my old circle of stones,  
Companions I found were as sister and brother  
To one who had grown with ethereal elves  
And was now, among mortals, abundantly shown  
That even in colorful fantasies never  
Again need adventures' dreams be alone.

And that is the story, my brethren in fancy,  
Of just how came Sionnach O' Ros Sidh to be.  
The origins, tragic or magic, of others  
In future, like mine, I hope greatly to see;  
For we each have a spirit that cries for adventure  
And out of this we to each other belong  
In a circle of souls, 'round a fire of gold,  
And deserve to ensorcel our stories in song.

*The Ballad of Sionnach O' Ros Sidh  
(Fox of the Fairy Rose)*

*As told  
by  
himself*

## "A Legacy of Two Worlds"

### Part 1: Oblivion

She couldn't feel the pain anymore, an ominous occurrence, but a mixed blessing in the mounting flurries that obscured a ruddy sunset. Through the haze of exhaustion, a deeper chill had begun to set. Orange knew that she must find shelter soon. The alternative was permanent solace in the arms of the Dark Mother, and Orange was not ready for that kind of peace. First were the immediate priorities. Lost and wounded in the semi-arctic reaches of the Karst, her odds of survival were slim. With her ambushers and pursuers still looking for her, the odds plunged to almost hopeless. And Mother, she was so tired. It would be so easy to rest for just a moment...just for a bit. The curtain of snowflakes eddied and whirled, and then the cloak of white below rose up to claim her.

It was the persistent itch, and the sense of something undone, that saved her. Runoff, melt from slush warmed by her diminishing breath, trickled down her face, into her nose...Orange sneezed, and awoke face down in the snow. Like mush her thoughts sluggishly congealed, and then came recollection and purpose-- the enemy, and revenge. Briefly the image, unwanted, of her cousin slain, came to mind. Orange again saw the gloating faces, the mountain bandits covered in the gore of the caravan merchants, Lerrys calling, slowly running, then cruelly struck down. Lerrys-- her wandering mind fixed on his happy face, a sunny visage claimed by this land of rock and ice. Lerrys, again his image, and the stain of tears on her cheeks, and rage. Anger, a smothering heat that washed away all weakness. "Cousin, you will be avenged." Orange staggered to her feet.

Seasoned as a warrior, Orange Culanga sa Alasia knew that the adrenalin would not last. At best, a few minutes of strength, a false dawn in this wilderness, and then fatigue and weakness, a certain demise in the deepening gloom. Also, there was the unresolved problem of the bandit scum close behind her.. She could hear snatches of their grunted shouts as they followed the trail of crushed snow and blood. Her blood, she thought grimly, surveying the ruin of her useless left arm. No place to make a stand here, but if she could reach the pass, then only one could come for her at a time. Orange wiped at the tangled bronze mass that was her namesake, now plastered with wet to the back of her skull, and set a dogged pace for the summit. The smile she wore was the first to be seen in many hours, but there was no humor in the emerald ice of her angry eyes.

The Rift pass, at 18,000 feet, is not the highest pass in Jomadon, but it is one of the most difficult. For seven passes of the two moons it is closed in the embrace of winter, and even midway through the other six cycles, in the midst of the drought season, the passage is difficult at best. The ill-fated caravan in which Orange and Lerrys had hired on with as guards had departed in early Tiras, first of the fertile months, in hope of getting a jump on the merchant's competition. It had been an uneventful journey until the party entered the hostile climes of the Runestead wastes. There, within sight of the Rift pass, the caravan had suffered the dual catastrophes of a

freak storm and the ambush of a local band of brigands. Owing much misfortune to the latter, she cursed at her stupidity in underestimating the former. The wind had risen as the sun went down, and the resulting swirl of blinding powder hampered her efforts to assail the ever-shifting drifts. Increasingly opposed by the elements, and at the end of her strength, Orange knew what she must do. Finding a spot on the crumbly ledge only some five feet across, she turned and waited for her tormentors. Almost masked by the storm's crescendo of fury, the sound of their gabble fluctuated, the excited whine and snarl of beasts on the hunt.

So intent on the chase was he, that the first bandit to stumble upon Orange never saw her. Leaping from her crouch, she dispatched the luckless ruffian easily. He slid off her blade with a sigh. Orange had no time to savor her victory, her next two opponents stepping into view in unison. With a great cry, the two charged, a husky fellow with a great, bladed axe in the forefront. Ducking his clumsy attack, she lashed out with her right foot even as she turned to meet the advance of his partner. Staggered, the axemen lost his footing and tumbled over the precipice. The storm took him, his shrieks trailing him to the bottom. The second bandit, a thin, wiry man with a broken tooth, closed rapidly and grappled. His fingers grasped her useless left arm, and Orange screamed in agony. In desperation she lashed at the leering face with the pommel of her sword, feeling bone and cartilage shatter. Broken tooth choked and collapsed. Then the rest were upon her, too many to count, and Orange had no time for thought. Slashing and parrying, all the while retreating, Orange remembered Broken tooth's prone body too late. Her ankle turned on the unconscious form, and flailing wildly, she went down. Shouts of triumph from the brigands, a blow to her mid-section, and suddenly the earth was no longer under her feet. Orange's good hand automatically grasped the wrist of her closest assailant, yanking him off the edge with her. "So this is how it ends," she thought, "Dark Mother bless me, and receive your daughter in your warm embrace." And indeed, then there was darkness.

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Part 2: Life

The mind is a funny thing. Numbed by stress and shock, the conscious mind pushes the negative events of the recent past into the background so that healing with catharsis might take place. Thus, there was no fear, no stress in her demeanor when Orange woke. Rather, her initial impressions were of a faint tinkling, perhaps wind chimes, and somewhere near, the faint chuckle of a brook rasping over water-worn stones. Her first sight on awakening was cause for wonderment. The room in which she was housed, if room it could be called, was a mixture of garden and bedroom. Sunlight dappled a stone floor, lightly screened from the elements above by a roof of hanging, white blossoms. Everything in the chamber seemed to be alive, even including the live vines that twined to form the hammock on which she lay. The overall effect was very tranquil, and Orange almost, but not quite forgot to look for her sword. It was, of course, not there. She sighed and lay back. It was not likely that any potential enemy would have been so thoughtful as to put her to bed. She could rest, and wait.

Encumbered by the bandages swathing her arm and waist, she soon

found her wait and see attitude to be a wise one. The hammock was comfortable, but the slightest movement caused a dull throbbing in her left bicep. Patience was not required however, for her unseen benefactor chose to make his appearance just as Orange was exploring the extent of her injuries. If her surroundings were cause for wonder, then she was stunned by his entrance. He was the most beautiful creature she had ever seen. A lithe torso tapered up to slender shoulders, these obscured under a cascade of fine, silken hair the color of winter frost. The pale eyes, too large for the face, were soft and expressive, and tinged with humor; And looking directly into her own. Startled by this frank perusal, Orange's uncertain smile was rewarded by his broad answering grin. Suddenly she laughed. Everything was going to be all right. Accepting the steaming wooden bowl he proffered, Orange got down to alleviating the gnawing emptiness in the center of her stomach.

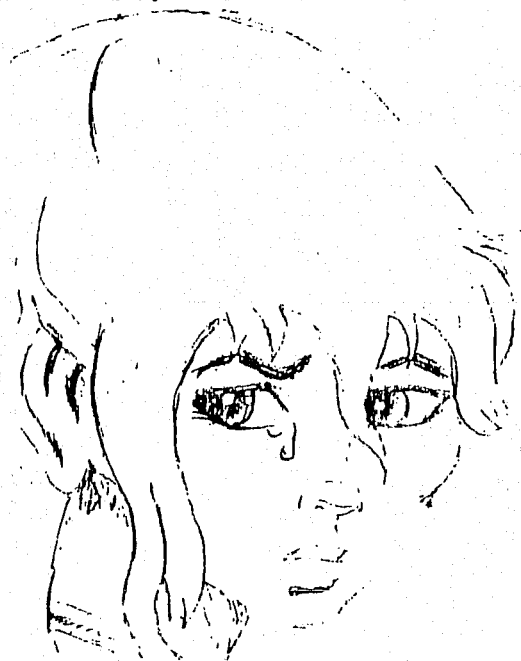
The weeks passed swiftly, the wounds mending cleanly. For Orange, these were the most peaceful times of her life. Her friend and his people seemed to have no names, and for that matter, no language or speech of any sort. At least, no words were ever spoken in her presence, though when their eyes met, then Orange had the uncanny feeling that they communicated, and spoke with one another. Almost, when straining to hear, she could imagine a fragment of conversation, but it eluded her. And if she could not speak with them, then there was no lack of understanding or love. Frost's people (she had taken to calling him this in a whimsical moment, and he had not seemed to mind) were considerate and attentive, and in less than a ten-day she was up and about. Orange had many questions, and most of these seemed to answer themselves. One nagging uncertainty that had tugged at her attention was the circumstances of her miraculous escape and salvation from the bandits. Orange had remembered falling off an icy cliff, and had wakened safe and already healing, in her garden chamber. Where there had been ravaging brigands, there was Frost's gentle tribe, where there had been wintry waste, there was the calm of this summer country.

Understanding came abruptly on the evening of her first day out of bed. Luxuriating in her regained freedom and mobility, Orange had shared a light meal of fruit with Frost, watching the sun set in a glory of golds and crimsons. With languid contentment she watched the first stars appear over the grassy gnoll they occupied. The darkness thickened, a faint blue orb lifting over the eastern horizon, and a second silver crescent joining it soon thereafter. Moments later a third moon, ochre in color, hove its sallow visage into view. A third moon-- something froze in Orange's veins. In the next half hour fear shifted to disbelief and finally to weary acceptance; Four more motes of light had risen to join their brothers and sisters in the early evening sky. Orange looked to Frost, who nodded sagely. She was a long way away from home. Utilizing the laborious process of sign language, it took the rest of the evening for Orange to extract from Frost the basic fundamentals of her situation: firstly, she was nowhere on Jomadon; Frost's people had somehow "removed" her when she fell from the cliff, thusly saving her life. Secondly, she could return, but only at the proper moment. Evidently movement between their worlds could only be accomplished in certain rare interludes. If she understood Frost correctly, the next possible passage would be in eight ten-days time. Orange resigned herself to a long stay.



Life was not unpleasant among the grey folk (all of Frost's people had hair ranging from white or silver to silver gray) and Orange's impatience to return to her homeland was in large measure mitigated by her blossoming relationship with Frost. Attired in the calf-length tunic universal among her hosts, Orange merged into the mainstream of their lives. Frost showed her their ways of counting by the stars, their skills in conversing with the beasts of the earth, and eventually, their art and rituals of love and companionship. They made love under the seven roaming moons, slept with the stars as their canopy and cover, and woke in the mornings, drunk on each other and the power of the earth. Days blended and passed in a blur. Orange would later recall isolated incidents: her awe when he called the wolves and ran with them on their hidden trails; her yelp of surprise when in a flurry of passion, her probing hands found the tufted points of his ears under his silvery mane (he had laughed at her astonishment and interest); the lilting croon of the crop-singers as they brought the grain from seed to harvest in a single day. It was a good time, and like all times, perhaps especially so in this land of music and magic, it must pass.

Frost gave her no warning, perhaps to spare the pain, or perhaps it was the way of his people. One night, instead of retiring to the haven of their private little hillock, he took her to a clear pool of water that sprang forth in an isolated glade. Gesturing for silence, he pointed. Orange watched the mirrored surface shimmer and waver, it clearing to reveal a familiar vista, the forested ridges of Alasia. She turned and hugged him but briefly, for he was stern, and loving, and urgent. There was little time. She lept, feeling the kiss of the cool water soothe away her tears. Orange kicked and then broke the surface. It was midday, and the known environs of Lake Alasia were about her. The hunting cry of a woodfalcon broke her reverie, and Orange set out for the shore some hundred yards distant. Through the pain of loss, she felt another kind of pain, a brief twinge, this followed by a sad smile. Frost she had left behind, but his gift had come with her between the worlds. Orange would bear her lover a child, a son she thought. Already she knew the name, one that would hasten his claim to his heritage. In the common tongue of the Southern Kingdoms it translated to "friend of the gray elves," but among Orange's people, the woodsmen of the Esperai, the word was "Aramithris". Aramithris, son of Orange and Frost. She liked the sound of that. Orange smiled.



city of Visclo. Her life blood flows through the great trade routes carried by her caravans. Since the first memories of the scribes, the Merchant Princes have decreed that the third born of each family be war trained, so that the caravans be well guarded.

So it was that my elder brother Roth, third-born, thereby Truar, returned not from his apprentice journey. Wandered from camp, the caravan master claimed. My family's honor demanded of my father that he give another of his children to the city-state, so blood would wash away blood's stain.

I entered the Hall of Bloodrite as fourth-born, not Truar, honor-given, not birth-rite, and paid for my family's honor, first with my blood, then with Truar blood. So it was that my place was grudgingly acknowledged, and warhonor sang it my soul.

Then Roth came again into Visclo, bearing tales of barbarian wizards, trials of strength and wit, and scars that swore truth to his words.

Never had there been two sibling Bloodrite, so there was not. I was not and have never been of Bloodrite, forbidden to remember, and returned to my father's house. My father arranged, in haste, for my marriage to a merchant lord of a distant city, and sent me forth with the next caravan after the arrangements were made.

Poor Father. His children have a bad habit of wandering into the desert, and not being found. Sometimes I wonder what his honor demanded of him this time. Someday, remembering the secret ways beneath the city that sheltered me from the Truar as I learned, remembering their strengths and weaknesses, perhaps I will return.

by Ryah



## AN AMTGARD HISTORY

Born the bastard child of an American Indian who was raped in the prime of her youth, the tribe of my maternal forefathers shunned both my mother and myself to the point of suicide on my mothers' part. After her death, the Tribal Chieftan sold me to another barbaric tribe to save embarrassment on his clan. I was shifted from tribe to tribe, learning the art of clothing, until finally I was allowed to wander on my own in search of my destiny. For many years I have wandered and searched for the fair-haired, fair-skinned cause of my heritage - namely, my father. I have been accompanied by my trustworth cur - Pollyfinkle. During my ageless search, I have finally come across a Kingdom of acceptance, where I can finally dwell in peace.

The dank, dark, night was pierced by the sound of thunder rolling in the distance. I lay awake, thinking of things to come. Just as I was about to drift back to sleep a glowing light appeared in the middle of my chambers. The light grew brighter, then disappeared, the Royal Shaman standing in its stead.

I stood up in bed, astonished. "You are not to enter my chambers without permission." I was intent on getting my sleep, the court was to go hunting the next day.

The shaman stood, unmoved by my display of anger. "You know I would not disturb your sleep unless a grave situation were upon you." His raspy voice had an alien strength to it, one that foreshadowed doom. He continued in that same voice, "I have looked into your future, and seen great disaster."

"What disaster could possibly befall me, the realm is in the midst of peace!" I argued.

"Do not ridicule me, I gave such a warning to your sister, and did she not die? I gave a similar warning to your brother, and was he not assassinated. Never, even in your wildest dreams, jest at my power to see the future." The shaman had an anger in his voice that I had seldom heard.

"If what you say is true, then what is the use of telling me? The future can not be altered!" Even as these words parted from my lips I realized that I once again was countering the shaman's words. "Forgive me,"

I quickly inserted, "I should have learned not to doubt your words."

"No apology is needed, my ways are not yours, and I do not expect you to understand them. Now listen, and heed my words. You have strayed into the ways of those who are evil. You must sanctify your soul, but evil does not like to give up what did belong to it. They would rather see you dead!" His voice had a strange power in it, and an aura formed about him.

"Tell me, how do I avert this disaster, how do I save my soul?" I was intent upon his words now, and eager to hear the answer to my appeal.

"You must find the servant of all that is good. You must find Kalias, the tiger."

"How am I to do this, there are no tigers here. How am I to find one?" I pleaded for an answer.

"You must go far away, to a realm of fire. There you will find Kalias."

"How will I know it is she? What if it is just a regular tiger I find, what if it takes a fancy to devouring me!"

The shaman's composure was faltering, I knew then that I was annoying him with my questions. "You will know Kalias when you find her, for she has no stripes. When you find her you must beg forgiveness, and you must be sincere or she will turn from you, giving you to evil. And trust me, evil is not kind to those who attempt to turn from it!"

The sound of thunder punctuated his last words,

making me shake to my foundation. Screams could be heard in the distance, and they were growing nearer.

"Do you hear that," the shaman inquired of me, "it is the Bahlia, the good faries, fighting the Grosh, the faries of evil. They are buying you time, but they cannot last forever, even the Bahlia become exhausted." He seemed in a rush now, sweat streaming down his face. "You must depart at once!"

The Royal Shaman then collapsed from exhaustion, for he was an old man. I stayed only long enough to see that the shaman was taken care of. I then rode off into the cold night air. Drow swarmed around me, but my steed ran with a fire in its soul. When I reached the port city of Porta Potens I clambered aboard a vessel just setting out to sea. It had been four days since I left my palace.

I let my faith lead the way to my final goal. My heart had an ache in it, but I let it not hinder me. I later learned that the ache was the death of the shaman, who was a good friend, one who saved my life.

Months later, I reached a vast desert land. I stopped a peasant who passed me on the road and inquired as to my locale.

"You are in the Burning Lands, you have been for quite a while now if you came by this road." The peasants voice shook, yet it was from laughter. I was amazed how well fed the peasant was, especially in this arid land.

"Could this be the land... the land the shaman spoke of?"

I repeated this question to

myself several times, as thought it were a wish which might just come true. Just as I passed over a bridge in the middle of a slightly wooded area, which seemed to be rare in this land, I heard a low rumble. I immediately looked to the sky, yet it was bare of clouds. My gaze then wandered to a tree. A tiger was laying below this tree, my eyes grew wide as I noticed it had no stripes.

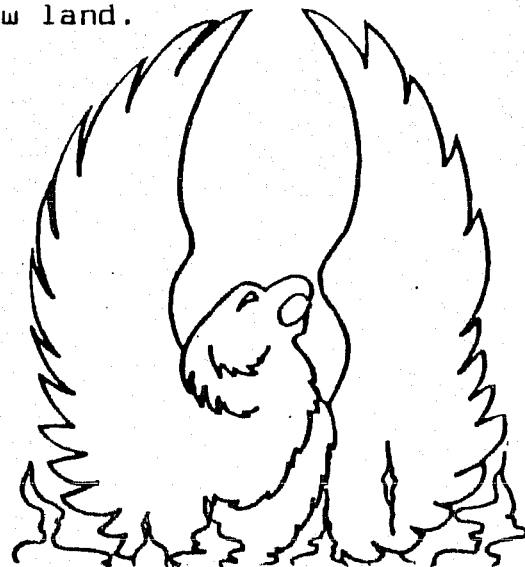
"Yes, I am the one for whom you search. And you have indeed completed your mission, you are sanctified. Never stray from the path of good again, you will not be given another chance."

I stood with my mouth agape, astonished that the tiger could speak. I tried to assure Kalam that I would never stray, but my words made no sense.

"I thought you would say that." Kalam said this with a slight hint of laughter. She then sprouted wings of flames and rose into the dry air.

I then made Kalam my personal symbol, and decided to spend much of my time in this wondrous land of fire. My kin followed me here.

I never did choose a new Royal Shaman, although I ought to. A healer worthy of the position may just be found in this new land.



## *The Crystal Wizard*

In darkness born lay the child, a silence, strange, steeped the heavy air. The woman hollowed, lay taut in the very stillness of that final victory, thrusting life from the jaws of death, only to fall herself into that consuming void. Unheeded by marble flesh, the babe did not stir when the silence shattered into ebon crystal shards.

Ash shrouded stalked the mage into the hovel, seeking the source of song. Eyes ice pale lay brief on a face yet writ with shock at Fate's last jest. But corpse song he did not seek, it's chorus was too common for savoring. There, wrapped in utter silence, sang that pure and painful note, which had drawn answering cry from his own lost soul as notes tortured from a lyre. Sustained concert unwilling by him, impossible to believe, to bear. Yet there, new and empty and near devoid of life, lay the source of song.

He raised the babe from Death's hard and loving embrace. Cradling her against his pale, flat breast, he bade milk to come. From that charnel house he strode, captivated, into the gathering mists of dawn.

The child grew. She bathed in clear, still pools of secret power, fed on the essence of dreams, drank of Life itself and danced with Death. A blossom of singular purity, she flowered in the private garden. The ash cloaked mage fed her the milk of his breast and the blood of his heart and denied her nothing but his seed. His soul still groaned with that single piercing note which bound him to her so that he could not bear to stand apart.

The sable flower blossomed, rich, vibrant, ready for harvest. Draped in gauze of ash, trembling, he knelt at her feet and offered her the one gift he had ever denied her. Rapacious in newfound lust, that gift she took and more. From the ash mage she drew the milk of his breast, the blood of his heart, the seed of his loins, the breath of his lungs, and the song of his soul, till nothing was left but a husk. In gluttonous langour she blinked at the hollow shell by her side. She brushed the parted lips with a kiss, and he fell to dust.

Ash smudged, void of warmth, she found the pool gone tepid and rank. Hungry she fed, thirsty she drank, but dreams and Life could not blunt her need. She called out to Death to come and dance again, but the song was consumed and Death had run off with the ash mage.

In darkness waited the woman, a silence, strange, steeped the heavy air. Questing, she sought another song, another piercing note to sustain her. A source to feed her hollow hunger.

Stormfalcon rose from his wife's bed, a compelling, agonizing resonance drawing him out into the snow. Piercing, steady, unrelenting, it drew him foundering across the ice to the forbidden keep. Her lips were warm when they embraced.

Death came again and danced for a while, for there was a new song at the keep. At last she could not bear to tantalize with tastes of promised repast and feasted till Death ran away with the wizard.

She became a great composer, each song but one note, each note the tune of a grand ball. A masqued ball, with but three guests; a wizard, a hunger, and Death. At the end of the ball, the masks were removed, the hunger was sated, the song died, and Death ran away with the wizard.

Death is a fickle lover. He will dance with you all evening and leave with someone else.

Passion's greed fed reason's storehouse. Consuming only the transitory nature of man, she stored the essence of his power till she was fat with magic. Knowledge could hone the fat to muscle, forge the power into Power. With such Power she could compose one single song of many notes which would go on and on and on. All the world would dance.

Seeking knowledge she went into the world. Weaving knowledge and power like crystal threads she composes. If you listen with your soul you can feel the beginnings to the song. Listen closely, and you too may dance with Death. Perhaps he may even leave with you.

## INTERVIEW WITH A BARBARIAN

We visited this week in the urt (a round, domed, portable hut) of Rufus, Regent General of Barad-Duin. He agreed to do his best to answer our questions, as far as his memory would permit.

First, we asked when and where he was born, and about his childhood. He recalled days of his youth among the tents of the Great Khan (Ghengis), in whose armies his father held the post of tuaman (similar to our General). He was about eight when most of his clan (Grimwulff) was sent to conquer China.

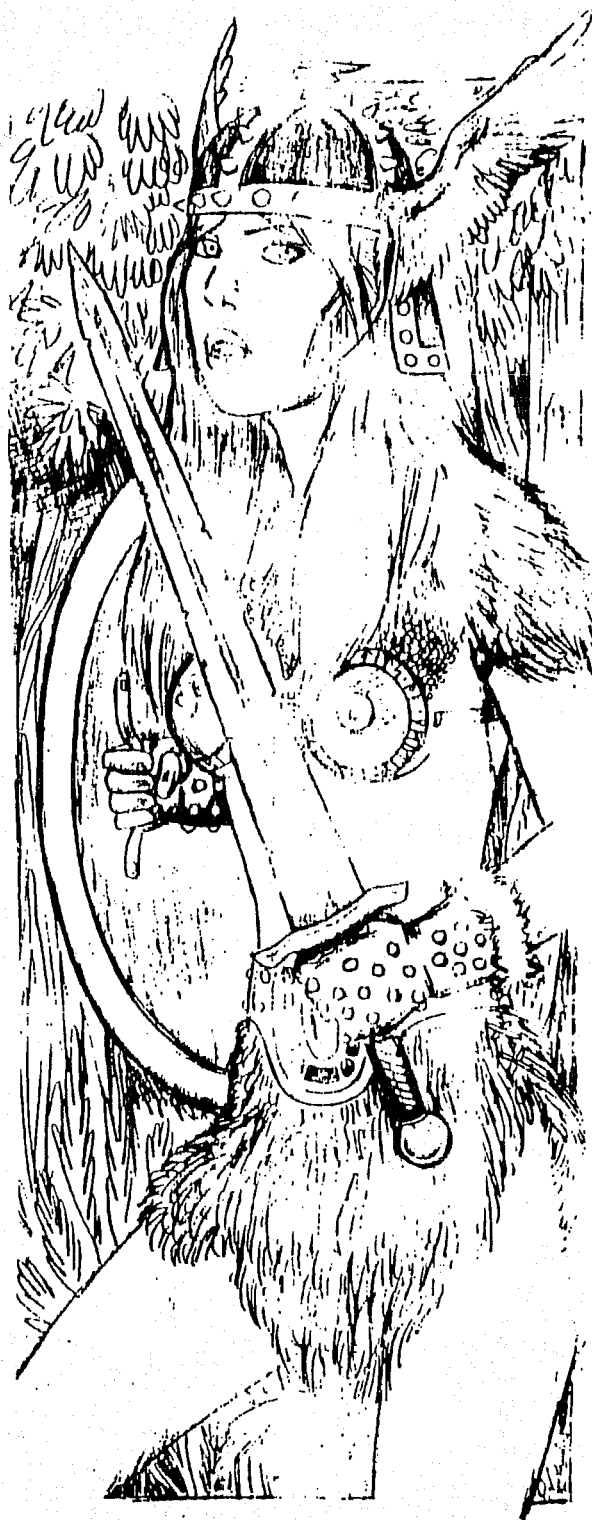
"So we did," he says.

After that, against the advice of Rufus' father and some other generals, the Khan sent a force to attempt the conquest of Japan. This was another kettle of fish altogether, and they were not able to succeed. Rufus laughed, though, at the memory of the astonishment and fear caused by the elephants and cannon. Because of his youth, Rufus was saved from the general slaughter by some monks. They took him and raised him; teaching him some of their methods and weapons, as well as an appreciation of the arts and sciences.

When he was grown, Rufus was told about another of his clan who had been rescued by monks in the South. He went to seek him, and found it was his brother Sufur. They managed to find and kill their father's old enemy, whose advice had led to the deaths of so many of their kin. In the process, Sufur was killed. Rufus spent some years in that area, both on land and sea. These are the years when he has trouble remembering, but he thinks he met Lynn Fletcher during these times.

There was an incident which is quite foggy in his mind, involving a mage and a "sending," which resulted in his arrival in Barad-Duin. He gathered about him a group of barbarians and fighters with the aim of helping in the fight against Kryton. After Kryton was killed, this Company called Black helped with clearing out the evil mage's minions.

As Regent to Grand Duke Derydlus "Elendil" of the Grey Stone, Rufus is general of the armies of Barad-Duin and the Dean of the Guilds of Arts and Sciences. With his lovely wife, the Guildmistress of Reeves, he has earned the love and respect of many of the populace. When you see him in Court, it is well to remember that this "belching, bearded barbarian" is also a canny and powerful fighter for right and the defense of our Duchy.



# aron

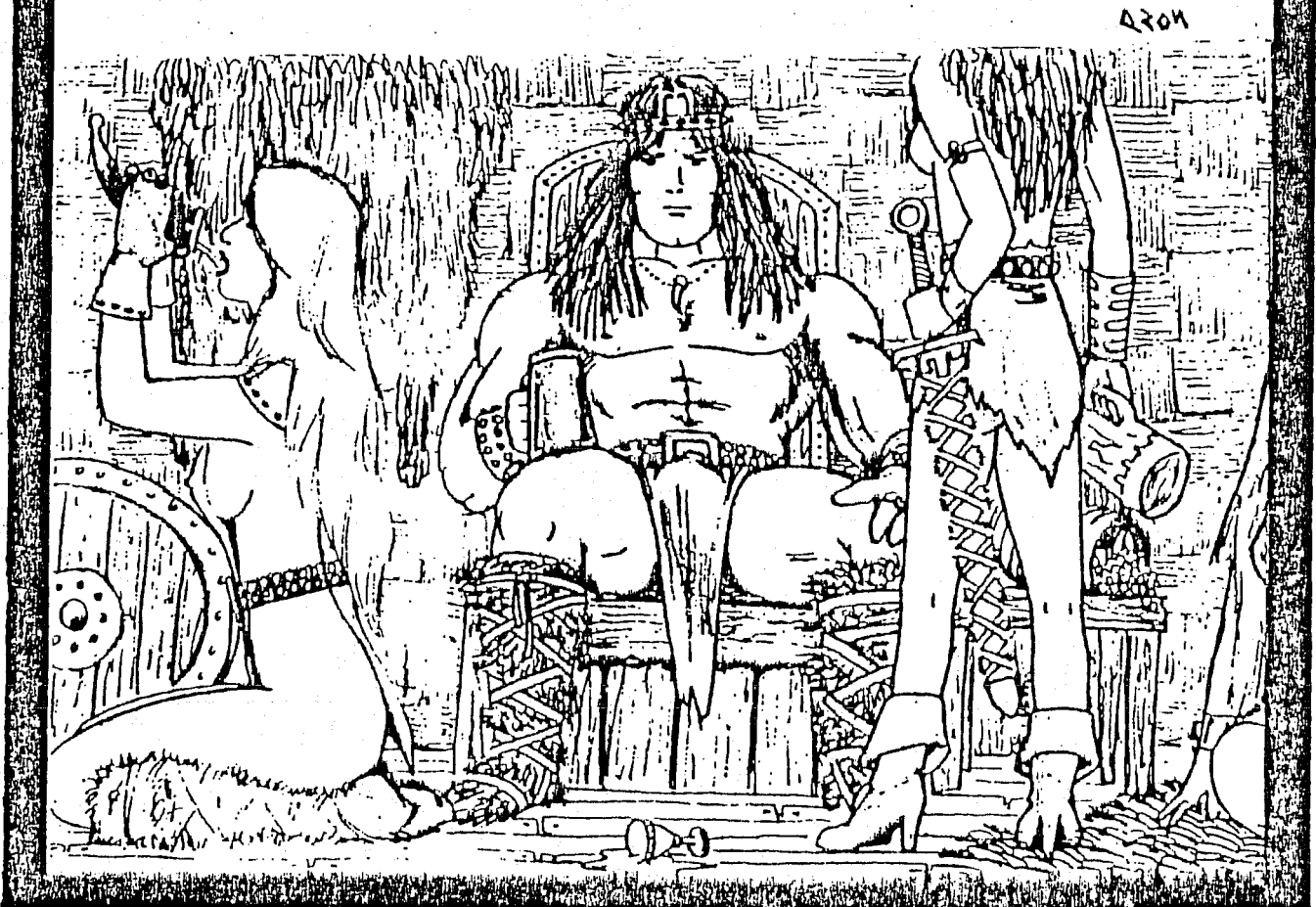
## The Lives and Times of Lord Aron

The lives and times of Lord Aron Nelsson the Bare, court fool, court herald, guildmaster of the barbarians, guildmaster of the college of artists, Captain and Lord of the company of the House of Thunder and Rock.

- 960 AD- Norwegian vikings raid a small coastal village in northern England. Among the captured slaves are young women to be used as concubines.
- 961- Old or crippled slaves and pregnant concubines are kept in a small independent camp, secluded from the rest of Norway.
- 962- Aron is born in the slave village to a concubine known as Nel of Manymen. Father unknown.
- 977- He is taken to a Norse town as a Norwegian native, but retains the accent of his people.
- 978- Joins the Viking raids.
- 979- Begins adventuring all over the known world of Midgard (Earth)
- 980- Becomes Lord of the Land of Black Ice and earns reputation as a savage, hedonistic, pagan mercenary.
- 981- Chosen leader of the Tiger nomads. Organizes sweeping raids worldwide.
- 982- Rapes, loots, burns, murders, pillages, and sacks most of Midgard.
- 983- Is banished from Midgard by the gods of decency. Ascends to Amtgard (aka Valhalla) where he engages in continuous combat with others of his ilk; the most infamous, bloodlusting fiends and valiant warriors of all space and times.
- 984- Establishes the company of the House and Thunder and Rock.
- 985- Appointed court fool. Elected guildmaster of the Barbarians. Awarded title of Lord. Journeys to the Kingdom of the Outlands frequently. Joins the Brotherhood of the Black Death Drinking Society.
- 986- Appointed court herald and guildmaster of the College of artists. Temporarily possessed by a demon from the entertainment industry.
- 987- Changed House of Thunder and Rock to Warlords of Valhalla; Crowned king of Amtgard; Knighted in the Anachronists; elected guildmaster of Dieties; lap boy to beautiful healers; and appointed court egomaniac.
- 1062- Dies in perilous battle with four score blondes and brunettes, all between the ages of 19 and 23 and a half, after a four day weekend of unarmed wrestling and perilous peril in the controversial Castle Anthrax. Banished from Valhalla due to questionable to fight, but ascends to Asgard due to extreme example of love for humanity.



- 1063- Requests reincarnation from sheer boredom but is denied.  
1066- Unable to assist dying comrades in the Battle of Hastings due to Norse conversion to Christianity.  
1962- Granted reincarnation due to perilous incident with a Valkerie, an Angel, and assorted dairy products. Born in America to his own descendants.  
1977- Moves to Texas (home of multiple medieval renaissance conventions).  
1978- Joins Dungeons and Dragons gaming group.  
1983- Joins the Society of Creative Anachronisms.  
1989- Publicly executed among D&D players, heavy metal musicians, communists, homosexuals, and other obviously satanic cultists in a televised stoning; (organized by Pat Roberts and the 700 Club). Wanders in the Land of the Dead.  
2020- Re-reincarnated in post holocaust Australian wastelands.  
2025- Becomes youngest warrior in barbarian tribal feud.  
2026- Begins training under Max Rokatanski.  
2040- Becomes chief of the Great Northern Tribe.  
2042- Settles wasteland for reborn civilization.  
2044- Converts to Christianity. Drowns in baptismal ceremony.  
Ceases to exist.



Ahrmaand grumbled up at the sky and the sky grumbled back at him. He knew that the change was about to overcome him, and had taken himself out to the moors where he would not "disturb" anyone. The first few months after defeating Kryton he had agonized over the curse which had seemed to place him lower than even the wizard whose tower he and his cohorts had "liberated." Now, after over a year had passed, he looked upon it as an unavoidable inconvenience.

Ahrmaand looked upon many things as unavoidable inconveniences.

The yoke of being head of House Seregon had become a mighty inconvenience, but avoidable in the end. No use in having his entire household suffer under his curse. Officially cut free from having his behavior seen as the behavior of his household, he spent more time travelling to the far kingdoms and securing Barad-Duin's place in the world.

The moon rose higher and Ahrmaand felt the customary pains as the change began. He didn't have to look down at his hands to know that the bones were stretching unnaturally. He didn't have to look into a mirror to know that his eyes were beginning to glow. Looking into a mirror would not have been very useful at all, since his reflection would have begun to wane the instant the change began. He certainly felt the added pressure upon his jaw as the usual teeth lengthened. How damn bloody clichéd, he thought as the first pangs of hunger hit.

Finally it was over. He checked himself over to see if anything unusual had accompanied the change (trousers too short - see tailor... hmm, my ears acquired points, that's new... must wear a longer cloak to accommodate increase in height... no, why wear a cloak at all at this point? An uncloaked Viscount? Ridiculous! Well, pragmatism before decorum in a situation like this... I just hope it doesn't rain.), and left in search of sustenance.

Anyone who tells you that a full-grown man can turn into a small flying mouse is kidding you. He can however turn into a large flying rat. Ahrmaand truly disliked this mode of transit - it was appallingly undignified - but it was the only way he could cover the distances needed to put dinner and reputation far enough apart. He flew toward the moon, to the east. Something, something innate, told him he would be able to feed to the east.

Taverns are usually good going, Kevish thought as he slouched outside the door to one. More than enough rich drunks emerge during the night... easy pickings for a rampsguard who's on his toes - and sober. He snickered. It's going to be too easy. He took a quick peek inside. A traveller ... pilgrim by the look of him ... obviously well-to-do ... and a stranger ... no one would miss him ... no one at all. Kevish almost laughed out loud. This one was almost certainly drunk, and even if he wasn't, this type of fop wouldn't be up to a struggle.

Kevish waited most of the night for his target to leave. Quite a few other potential financial boons passed through the door before the fop finally made his leave - quite wobbly, not at all self-conscious, a genuine helpless

chink. Kevish shadowed him for a few blocks then almost laughed out loud as his target suddenly lurched into what Kevish knew was a blind alley. Kevish almost let him sleep. Kevish even almost left him alone. Something about the peaceful expression on his face made him pause. Kevish had a whole minute of remorse before Ahрмаand snapped his neck.

Ahrmaand always felt remorse for his poor foolish stupid victims. He needed them, yes. He never took anyone who didn't prey on others, yes. He still felt sorry for these poor amateurs, struck down by someone with a far better motivation for preying on people than any of them ever had.

He wiped his face with the hem of the poor stupid foolish cutpurse's coat, and arranged the body in a state of repose not unlike the feigned slumber he had previously assumed. He thought about taking what little money the thief had on him, but dismissed the idea almost immediately. To kill out of necessity, out of a need for sustenance was one thing. Thievery was definitely below him. He walked calmly and sedately back through the town before assuming the form of mist and travelling back to his lands to the west.

Mathieu Berthold Simone du le Garet had the dubious position of court fool in the court of the current Grand Duke, Derydius. Little was known of Mathieu or his exotic consort, and Ahрмаand, like many others, was more at ease dealing with Ermi, the consort, than with Mathieu, himself. At this point in the evening, Ermi was busily attending to her duties as court page, while Mathieu appeared to be wandering toward Ahрмаand's table, a strangely bemused look on his face.

"Greetings to thee, O mighty Viscount," he executed a flourishing bow, almost a cartoon of Ahрмаand's own courtly behavior. Ahрмаand made a small gesture, one which would pass as polite. "Not at all like you to be so reticent, your excellency... unless you have a reason to be so quiet."

"My dear... fool, I could not possibly have any idea what you could be prattling about. Now if you'll excuse me..." he rose to leave.

"No, I guess not," he rose to let Ahрмаand pass. "I mean... so what if the criminal classes of surrounding towns find their number sharply decreased... couldn't be any business of ours... just chuck it up to vigilantes... or some new force in the townships. Certainly no concern of Ours, eh?" He raised an eyebrow quizzically.

"No. Of course not. Now, if you WILL, excuse me..." Ahрмаand left somewhat more hastily than he would have had he been observing his usual standards of decorum.

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Artigel Conion Alerias was sitting in the keep library reading when Ahрмаand returned from court. Books were stacked on several tables; but Ahрмаand knew that they would all be returned to their proper shelves by sun up.

"Good even," Artigel greeted his sponsor formally. Occasionally

Ahrmaand forgot that his ward was in fact second in line to a throne of his own in another plane; this was not one of those times.

"Good even. Might I ask what you are reading?"

"One of the histories of this land of yours. Very strange, fantastic reading this. Did you actually do battle with a wizard armed only with a shield and sword?"

Ahrmaand looked thoughtful. "Does it say who the writer of this history is, by any chance?"

Artigel marked his place and looked at the inside cover. "His Excellency the Baron Stommach wrote this one."

Ahrmaand allowed himself a small conspiratorial smile. "His Excellency the Baron has a tendency to... embellish the struggle. I was armed with sword and shield, true... but I was also armed with several charms and not a few companions. The battle for the Black Tower was not as simple as many make it sound."

"I know. You yourself told me of the... burden that foul sorcerer placed upon you." Ahрмаand thought he saw his ward shudder - just a little. He put a jovial expression on his face and lightened his tone. "But come now. This is not proper post-court conversation! Let us speak of light matters. How fares your education in this plane?"

"This is a very odd plane." Artigel's expression held confusion, imitation, amusement, and a little disgust. "Things here are stranger than the fairy realms, and less is what it appears to be... all the duplicity, the intrigue... it's positively..."

Ahrmaand smiled one of *those* smiles. "Evil...?"

"No. Chaotic." Artigel grimaced. "I can see why my brother loves this place."

They walked through the main hall speaking of matters in this way. When they reached the great dining hall Tanaide was quietly nibbling away on a rack of wild boar (part of which was Ahрмаand's by way of their contractual agreement - their *official*/contractual agreement). Ahрмаand and Artigel sat down at table and ate in silence.

Ahrmaand ate very little that night. He had much on his mind.

The next morning Ahрмаand sent a messenger to the Black Tower with an invitation to tea for the court fool.

It still surprised the Viscount that this fool could move so lightly for one of his size. Mathieu clearly cut massed him, yet sometimes moved so quickly as to appear to be on both sides of him at once (very unnerving - I mean annoying, he corrected himself). This morning Mathieu was dressed conservatively (for him), wearing plain colored pants and undershirt, his coat of motley a riot of color and texture, and sat (or perhaps slouched) in a chair Ahрмаand might deign to be far above his status. He sipped the tea offered contentedly.

"Well, my dear fool," Ahрмаand began.

"Mathieu. Call me Mathieu, please." Mathieu corrected, "when I'm not in court or on an official duty I find my title more of an epithet than anything positive. It is a living, but I'd much rather skip formalities when I am outside of the Tower."

Ahrmaand was slightly taken aback by the man's eloquence. "Well, Mathieu," he tried starting again, "I wished to speak with you about something you said last evening at court..."

"Him? Oh, you mean the... commentary?"

"Yes."

"Well, I suppose I'm as ripe for assassination as the next innocent bystander..."

"But you are far from innocent, yes?" Ahrmaand gave him one of those smiles experimentally, and was surprised again to see that it did not seem to faze him in the slightest. In fact, Mathieu seemed to look inward on himself for a moment.

"No... not innocent." His face brightened suddenly. "You are about to ask me a question upon which my very life may rely. I love questions like that." He smiled expectantly.

"Um... yes." Ahrmaand was beginning to get used to being surprised by this strangely dressed man who behaved strangely. Perhaps an ally... perhaps an enemy... certainly a challenge. By acting a fool, he guaranteed himself at least nominal protection from reprisal. He seemed to possess more connections than most assumed of him, and of course, his consort was formidable in and of herself.

Ahrmaand phrased his question very carefully. "What do you know of my part in the war to liberate the Black Tower?"

After the fool left his keep, Ahrmaand spent a while rearranging his mental chart of who was where in Barad-Duin. The afternoon's conversation was varied after Ahrmaand finally broke the question, but through the course of it he was surprised to discover that Mathieu knew much more about the political situation in the Grand Duchy than most people would assume - nay, more than most people would actually know, even those who participated in the thick of things.

He understood Ahrmaand's "dilemma," he said. He travelled to the nearby towns while not at court and heard the news there, and the rest he could assemble from conjecture. He sympathized with the Viscount's problem, and didn't feel it necessary to voice his suspicions to anyone but the Viscount himself and Eemi, Mathieu's consort.

Ahrmaand bristled slightly. "How far is *sheto* be trusted?"

Mathieu answered simply, in terms the Viscount could understand. "She watches my back."

Then Mathieu said something which surprised Ahrmaand, genuinely took him aback.

"And I think you'd fare better if you had some help in dealing with your burden."

Mathieu returned to the Black Tower to find Eemi waiting patiently in their room, writing something on a scroll in her native language.

"I'm back," he said unnecessarily.

Eemi completed the last character and rolled the scroll up to a wall sconce and it vanished in a puff of jasmine incense.

"Message home?"

"To the priestess of the shrine," Eemi answered in the shorthand language they used occasionally. "Konnichi-wa, Matsu-sama."

"Konnichi-wa, Eemi-SOOOFF," Mathieu caught Eemi as she leapt up into his arms. "I've just had a remarkable discussion over tea with the Viscount Ahrmaand."

"Tea? What is 'tea'?"

"Cha. That's tea. We were talking about his... unusual situation."

"Oh. He is Kami, yes?"

Mathieu blinked. He had learned about the concept of Kami from the priestess at the shrine where he met Eemi. A "Kami" was an earth spirit, effectively a force of nature. To hear it applied to someone he occasionally made faces at in court gave Mathieu pause.

"Well, he is, uh, undead, apparently."

"What is... undead?"

"That means he can never die," Mathieu explained.

"Ah. *Kami*."

"Uh... he also has to drink... the blood of the living in order to survive."

"So?"

"I've offered to help him deal with this problem."

"What problem?" Eemi had the unnerving ability to look at one exactly as a cat would look at a person who ordered it to go fetch.

"Drinking the blood of living people is considered bad form around here." Mathieu said frankly. "Unfortunately that's the only thing which keeps him existent in this plane."

"Would it not be more honorable to cease existing in this plane, then?" Eemi had a habit of saying things like this, deadpan.

"It's not really his choice. He was cursed by the wizard Kryton in the battle for the Black Tower. It's instinct for him to continue to survive. It's not something he has a lot of control over."

"That is unfortunate. And you have decided to dedicate yourself to this Kami, also?" She was referring to Mathieu's ties to the Grand Duke, Derydus, whom Eemi also considered to be Kami.

Mathieu stared up at the sooty ceiling. "Well, he needs help. The knowledge here can't help him, and he has much riding on his existence in this plane. Although he's cursed, I see him as essentially a good man who has been placed in a bad situation."

"Hai. He is considered a good Daimyo by those who live on his land. I have spoken with Tanaiide several times."

"So... What's to be done?"

"Whatever need be done. Shall we go eat? It is time for dinner."

"Yes," Mathieu opened the door for Eemi and followed her out into the hallway. "There is a lot to be thought about, and I think better when I'm not hungry."

"Hal."

Ahrmaand stood on the moors once again. This time Mathieu was with him. Ahrmaand felt the change starting again, and wished for the thousandth time that he had dissuaded this fool from coming with him. He was so distracted by his annoyance at du le Caret that he hardly noticed that he had finished his transformation when Mathieu spoke up.

"You'd better give me your cloak, Viscount. It doesn't seem to fit this side of you very well."

Ahrmaand snarled and flung his cloak at the hapless fool. Assuming the form of mist he flew quickly to the west.

Mathieu picked up the cloak and produced a talisman from inside his shirt. He whispered to it, "follow," and his form became translucent. Quickly he sped after the mist, to the west.

Pubs are always good spots to find prey, that's what Johann had told Bork. Bork was now slouching in the shadows around the corner from a pub. With his mallet he should be able to convince people to give him money, no problem. After all, he was Bork, strongest mountain man in all these parts. He knew that because Johann had told him so. Johann had also told him how to arrange a body so it looked like it was sleeping after Bork had separated it from its money.

Someone was leaving the pub now, Bork saw. Well-dressed, but without any outerwear to speak of. Funny, thought Bork, but he's still rich. You can tell. Bork jumped out in front of this rich man without a cloak and was about to demand all his money when Mathieu broke the better part of a sea oar over his head.

Bork crumpled nicely.

Mathieu waved the Viscount (already very very very hungry) aside and produced some implements. He found a spot on the huge lumbering oaf's arm and placed something like a chalice to it. A few seconds later he was wrapping a bandage around the arm and handing the chalice to Ahrmaand. Ahrmaand drank greedily.

Mathieu dragged the unconscious, blooded, but still very alive Bork into the alley from which he had sprung. He looked over the sleeping form, shrugged, and belted him solidly in the nose.

After a few more adjustments (removing Bork's pants had been the most difficult), Mathieu arranged the body to look like it was sleeping, then rejoined the Viscount, who was staring at the chalice which Mathieu had handed to him.

"What did you...?" Ahrmaand was still visibly shaken by the events which had just occurred, even now that his bloodlust had been sated.

"He's going to wake up tomorrow with a bloody nose, one hell of a headache, and no pants. The simple victim of a drunken brawl - with a lavem wench, no doubt. You are going to be able to continue on for thirty or so days, until the curse overcomes you again. Me, I haven't had this much

fun since Prem, Ahmet, Ermi, and I shut down the waterfront at Bakaal."  
"But... why did you..." Ahrmaand gestured around himself vaguely.  
"Let's just say I did. Now go home before people start spreading rumors about an uncloaked Viscount."

"Yes. We will discuss this... in the morning." Ahrmaand was gone. Mathieu picked up the Viscount's cloak, took his talisman in his hand, and whispered "home." He also left.

For the next few weeks, scuttlebutt around Barad-Duin told of the fool making several trips to Castle Seragon. Always he came at teatime and left before supper. Occasionally Ermi accompanied him when she was not needed at the Tower. Sometimes they took books and scrolls with them. Sometimes they brought flasks and potions.

But always Mathieu wore a well-made black cloak with three small crescents imprinted upon the clasp.

