

## A Tale of Two Cities and the Road between Them

“Happy families are all alike; every unhappy family is unhappy in its own way.”

—Leo Tolstoy, *Anna Karenina*

“Call me Eli. I lived in Silverymoon for most of my life, where I was a scribe for Reginsky Morrison, a job I took after I studied under Farles Shay. I met your cousin, Millie, at the last harvest festival and we married shortly after. Having taken a good job at Eastgate, my plan for a simple life of making honest coin was interrupted by a great story of our day. I have traveled here after months of research to present a modern history of great interest and import to Ba-Bushka and introduce myself to The Family,” I said by way of introduction.

“All right, cuz,” said the scrawny guy leaning by the doorway of an upscale Neverwinter home, “remind me to never ask you a question if I have something else to do. She’ll be able to see you this afternoon, come back around two bells.”

Thus dismissed, I walked back to the tavern where I found Millie knitting by the fire. We had spent the extra copper for an inn with no roaches in the sheets or murderers at the bar.

“Second bell,” I told her. She looked up at me and nodded.

“Don’t worry, Eli” she said, her fingers moving ceaselessly across the yarn. “She loves historical epics, and your story is as good as any I’ve heard.”

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We were seated in the household’s overly upholstered antechamber with time to spare. After two cups of tea, an older man invited us back to the sitting room.

“Welcome home,” Ba-Bushka said to Millie, “give your grandmother a hug.” She stood swiftly for her age and greeted Millie with a vigorous embrace.

“And you, my child,” she said, looking to me, “welcome to the Karamazov family.”

“I have met many,” I said, “and met well.”

“Good,” she said, “and I understand you have an entry for the house histories.”

“I do,” I said.

“Sit then,” she said, “and let’s begin.” She rang a small bell, producing a louder sound somewhere deeper in the building. Moments later, two young Karamazov children appeared carrying familiar writing kits. They inked their quills and looked to me with anticipation.

“I have spoken to a great many people to assemble this story. This is not my story, but it touched my life, and it touched yours as well, though I doubt you know it. Let me tell you of the guardians of Eastgate.

“Some months ago, strange happenings began around Helm’s Shadow, mostly by Eastgate. The woods around there had always been dangerous, but soldiers were turning up missing as often as sheep. Major Wells, who commanded the garrison at the wall, wrote to Helm’s Hold to request a team of specialist investigators. Not long after, four soldiers reported to the command center. They were Osrik, Rooibos, Ash Hightower, and Bradislav.”

“Tell me about them,” Ba-Bushka said.

“Osrik was from Guantlgrym and was a well-respected fighter. He was a leader of the dwarven community, having been instrumental in the revolt against the duergar’s second occupation of the hall. He was the most senior of the group within the Neverwinter army, having led a mostly-dwarf squad for decades.

“Rooibos is a cleric of Helm. He was young for Helm’s third death, but the powers he was exposed to at that early age developed regardless in his adulthood. He joined the Neverwinter city guard intending to become chaplain but was quickly reassigned to a front-line unit on the account of his size (he is a dragonborn) and skill with an axe. He served with distinction for years, including special missions before this one, and was unsurprised to find himself summoned to Helm’s Hold once more.

“Bradislav, a half-elf, is also a career soldier. For years, he was a capable, stalwart sergeant in a unit at Eastgate. Once, on assignment in the Helm’s Shadow mountain range, he reported encountering a glowing pool. I speculate that pool was a drop of Helm’s immortal ichor, and his bathing in that pool gave him the powers that manifested soon after. An interview with a soldier formerly under his command revealed that he was obsessed with everyone’s safety, often going out of his way to make sure everyone wore lots of armor, and that his favorite power was his ability to shoot dark lightning bolts.

“I can’t say as much about Ash Hightower. He was a human, though the replacement was an elf. He is rumored to have been a proper warlock, though unwilling to communicate productively with his patron, who was some sort of fey. Some speculate that there was never a real Ash Hightower, though based on the records I believe there was.

“They met for the first time at Helm’s Hold. Coming from such similar backgrounds they integrated quickly. In what was essentially a training exercise, they cleared some troublesome giant centipedes from the storeroom in the command center. Thus proven, they were given their orders to Eastgate, as well as each granted the rank of lieutenant.

“On the road to Eastgate, they came across two newly-turned vampires feeding on the corpses of unfortunate travelers. After they dispatched of those, they encountered a young necromancer, Elron Gali, and his small cadre of zombies. After destroying the zombies, they captured the child necromancer and transported him to Eastgate. The necromancer, despite his age, was fairly powerful, and used magic to blast his way out of the prison shortly thereafter. Most likely, he rejoined his grandfather, Lanton Gali.

“At Eastgate, they settled in and met Captain Gnarlock and Major Wells, their commanding officers. To integrate with the unit’s schedule, Wells sent the group out for a standard patrol. He hoped that they could quickly begin to uncover what was causing such danger and turmoil in the area.

“The party spent most of the morning preparing. They visited the Smashing Axe, which happens to be run by one of Ornn’s granddaughters, where they commissioned a number of wooden stakes. They also visited the market and bought garlic. During these activities, Rooibos ate his first apple, which was intended for Osrik’s pony.”

“I fail to see how these details affect the story,” Ba-Bushka said.

“Ok I’ll move it along. They went out on patrol and after a good deal of wandering, they tracked down an isolated cabin by its chimney smoke. Intending to ask whoever was inside if they had any reports of danger in the area, Rooibos knocked on the door. Unfortunately for him, two vampire soldiers answered with violence.

“Remember at this point these were not the legendary heroes of their later exploits. Their foes were well armed and armored, and in the dusk inside the cabin, they could use their

formidable strength and regeneration. The party fought its way into the lodge, then broke several boarded-up windows to let in sunlight, which weakened the vampires. Bradislav conjured a crown of madness onto one, and after it destroyed the other, it was sufficiently weakened for the party to kill. While the party was recovering inside the cabin and dividing the deceased vampires' equipment, they heard another pair of people approaching.

"Rooibos again approached the door. He claims to have used visual trickery to convince the people there that he was the vampire they were expecting. How far that could have gone is lost to the unknown, as before any real interaction could occur, Osrik ambushed the man at the door with an axe attack launched from the cabin's roof.

"Unfortunately for the party, the other figure turned out to be a powerful spellcaster. He blasted Osrik back into the cabin, and in a second blast killed Ash Hightower. However, rather than continue the fight, he allowed the party to escape. They did, and saw him pursue his companion, who had run from the fighting after Osrik's attack.

"They made it back to the garrison at Eastgate after nightfall, it was slow going because the magician and his companion had cut their horses loose before approaching the cabin. Thus, it wasn't until the next day that they could debrief with Major Wells. Right after they informed him of Ash Hightower's death, Ash Hightower himself entered the room. Wells recalls that he thought they were playing a joke, but the three surviving party members were shocked.

"They rode new horses out to the cabin, where they were able to retrieve Ash Hightower's mostly intact body. Rooibos communed with the body and discovered that it had not been disturbed during its rest, and that Hightower's soul had successfully passed from the plane. Further mystified, they confronted the man presenting as Ash Hightower. Privately, he revealed to them that he was in fact an elvish rogue from Silverymoon who was looking to take a new identity to escape his companion, who had killed the original Ash Hightower. As he had a device that gave him some manner of disguise abilities, he was able to successfully impersonate Ash Hightower. The party agreed to the deception, as they believed their interests aligned, and the imposter had the orb that he and the spellcaster had stolen in Silverymoon.

"Their plans to return the orb were put on hold by the arrival of an injured dwarf. He had traveled from Grinnelltylgrym to seek aid in overthrowing a duergar invasion of the small

crafting community. Though Major Wells had just finished reprimanding the party for their joke involving Ash Hightower, he realized they would be perfect for the job, but due to the unknown circumstances around the operation was unwilling to order any traditional soldiers to their aid. The group was able to recruit two dwarves who had escaped Guantlgrym with Osrik to their cause, as well as Ivan and Boris, two older soldiers who had been assigned watch over Ash Hightower in case of further spontaneous death and rebirth.”

“Remind me,” Ba-Bushka asked, “what color shirts do Neverwinter soldiers wear.”

“Red,” I replied.

“I thought so,” she said, “carry on.”

“They were waiting for morning to go to Grinnelltylgrym, so Osrik sat vigil with the dwarf messenger in the medical bay. He saw suspicious movement outside the window and went to investigate. The person he saw was near the stables, so he threw a small axe to try to trip the person. He connected perhaps too hard, sending them sprawling. The figure was in fact Captain Gnarlock, who claimed to be headed to Neverwinter on urgent and confidential business. He left without levying charges against Osrik for assaulting a superior officer, as he did not want his activities publicly announced.

“The next morning, the party and their recruited allies rode for Grinnelltylgrym. They arrived at the cave entrance without incident and stashed their mounts away from the view of the two guards at the mouth of the cave. As usual, they chose the direct option, and assaulted the entrance directly at full force. To their surprise, there was an additional pair of guards hiding just within the cave, but they were able to quickly, but not quietly, overcome this first round of resistance. One duergar soldier, grievously wounded, escaped the conflict and ran deeper into the tunnel system.

“The party moved carefully into Grinnelltylgrym, taking stock of side chambers and passages as they went. When they were in the barracks, they were pinned by over a dozen duergar soldiers. Rooibos and Bradislav blew the incoming column apart with their spells, the impacts shattered stalagmites from the ceiling and left cracks in the walls. The others mostly stayed clear, picking off stragglers as they came through. The group proceeded through the

tunnels and rooms in the same fashion, encountering no further resistance, until they entered the great hall.

“At the end of the hall, Mahked the Greater sat upon Grinnelltylgrym’s ancient throne. Between him and the party, Duergar soldiers stood among the prisoners to prevent the large-scale destructive spells that the party had cast earlier. When our heroes entered the chamber, those soldiers activated their ability to enlarge into giant dwarves, forming a towering blockade between their king and the party. As they advanced, our heroes in the middle, their recruits at the flanks, the duergar sprang their final trap. A dozen soldiers dropped their invisibility and attacked, surrounding the party. The ambush met stiff resistance as our party formed a circle to protect Rooibos.

“Rooibos called great and terrible powers into that cave. He called them his spirit guardians. They swirled around the party and struck down duergar in droves, leaving allies and prisoners unharmed. Thus bolstered, our heroes were able to fight through stiff duergar resistance, though at the loss of the soldier Boris. To deal with the king, Bradislav used his then-favorite incantation to cast madness upon Mahked the Greater, twisting his crown and his mind, causing him to attack his fellow duergar.

“They quickly worked to free the prisoners and assemble an entourage back to Eastgate. They brought the dwarves of Grinnelltylgrym to the mouth of the cave, where they discovered that the duergar had called for aid from their allies, the necromancers, who had answered with a massive horde of zombies.

“Poetry has been written of that moment. I could recite a piece if you would like.”

Ba-Bushka held up her hand. “That won’t be necessary,” she said.

“In that case, I’ll continue. They retreated to a safe room that they had found in the earlier exploration of Grinnelltylgrym and barricaded the door. Having expended themselves against the duergar, the party was wary to enter such a pitched battle. Exploring the room, they discovered that it led to a secret passageway out the side of the mountain, away from the undead. They proceeded slowly on foot, as some of the escaping dwarves were injured, and their horses were long since devoured by the zombie horde.

“During the escape, they came across a ranger from Neverwinter. This man, who goes by Bud, had also been recruited for the task force, but had been on a separate mission when the summons came. He had arrived at Eastgate earlier that day then immediately set off for Grinnelltylgrym to reinforce his new comrades. A master of woodland navigation, he led the large group along the swiftest route through the forest without using known game trails.

“Proceeding in this fashion, they made it several miles away from the cave, where they had the misfortune of encountering a pack of roving werewolves, as it happened to be the full moon. The accompanying Neverwinter soldiers were unable to harm the beasts, as their weapons were non-magical and without silver. Our heroes, equipped with the spoils of their exploits thus far, enacted great violence upon the werewolves, cleaving through their defenses with magical attacks.

“While the party was busy fending off the werewolves, the necromancers were able to redirect their horde and catch up. Just as the last werewolf fell, the first zombies burst into the clearing. Again, our heroes formed a line between their charges and the danger, and Rooibos summoned holy violence against the creatures of the night. His spirit guardians swirled around him, and he raised his hand, turning the undead. Those zombies ran back into the bulk of the horde, causing chaos. As Rooibos was focused on his spells, Osrik and the remaining soldiers held the ground in front of him, protecting him against surviving undead.

“Meanwhile, Bradislav noticed Lanton Gali, the young necromancer from earlier. Remembering the acolyte’s previous escape from captivity, Bradislav blasted Gali with eldritch forces, killing him outright. This caused greater disorder in the zombie ranks. Similarly, Bud and Ash used their bows to target the older necromancer, whose identity they didn’t know. After chasing him up a tree, where the necromancer fired spells back at them, Ash disabled him with a sneak attack and took him prisoner.

“Suddenly, a figure dropped from the sky into the middle of the swirling mass of undead. He was buried under a score of zombies, but burst free, scattering limp corpses. With the necromancers incapacitated, the party quickly destroyed the rest of the zombies, reaching this new figure. He stood up unsteadily and introduced himself as Dasai Rambutan. He inquired as to the location of great evil in the region. The party directed him towards the rumored

location of the area's most powerful vampires and necromancers, a castle about a day's journey away. I'll get to that story in a moment."

"How exciting," Ba-Bushka said, "I loved *The Tales of Sir Rambutan the Gallant* as a child."

"Then, let me say in brief that the party returned to Eastgate by morning with the dwarves, who took refuge with the survivors of Guantlgrym. The triumphant success of the mission smoothed over any issues reported to Major Wells, and the party was invited to accompany General Neverember to Silverymoon as his honor guard for the diplomatic mission that would take place during the peacekeeping mission. They agreed, Ash told me that he went despite reservations of returning because the orb had disappeared from his rooms sometime before they had left for Grinnelltylgrym.

"Now let me divert this story to a tale of Sir Rambutan. While this is an entertaining tale and historical footnote in its own right, it has later significance to the main story as you will surely see."

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"Sir Dasai Rambutan woke up in the inner courtyard of a castle, confused and alone. Fortunately, a rotating cast of friendly voices appeared in his head to aid in his mission, whatever that mission would be. He investigated the courtyard and found a familiar-looking box in one corner. This box was made out of cardboard, which you doubtless know is the signature magical material of Arthur Underdown. Sure enough, when Rambutan entered the box, he emerged into Underdown's cardboard realm.

"He and Underdown spoke briefly, as they had already said so much to each other. Rambutan asked if evil lived in the castle. Underdown, by his argument for caution, confirmed there was. Rambutan asked if Underdown was affiliated with the evil beings. Underdown, by his situation, confirmed he was. Thus disillusioned, Rambutan left Underdown behind to face whatever he could find in the castle.

"The castle was Carthage Hall, home to a great many evils. The main ward was held by Olivia and Bernard Carthage, with their staff and soldiers living throughout the outer ring. Nearby, Elron Gali kept his zombie hordes, and lived with the small clan of necromancers in

homes abutting the castle walls. Given his position in the inner courtyard, he set out for the nearest worthy opponents: the two Carthage vampires.

“They found each other quickly, as Rambutan made as much noise as a madman in plate mail could. They fought in the courtyard, two against one. Rambutan would have been an even match for either but struggled against them together. He wielded a sword, SoulSipper, that left grave wounds on even vampires as powerful as the Carthages. Though wary of his attacks, Bernard and Olivia were able to quickly overwhelm Rambutan.

“When it seemed all hope was lost, Underdown emerged from his cardboard portal and rescued Rambutan. He left through the portal, and he returned Rambutan to Waterdeep. I suspect this was the end of his involvement with the vampires and their allied forces, and that he intended to retrieve the orb once more, but for himself.”

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“Each member of the party woke up at the same time, having experienced that story as a first-person dream. Before they had much time to consider it, they were summoned to prepare for departure as honor guard for General Neverember during the harvest festival in Silverymoon. However, Ash was able to share that he recognized Underdown from the dream. Arthur Underdown had worked with him to steal the orb in Silverymoon, and was the same figure as killed the original Ash Hightower back at the cabin.

“Still reeling from this revelation, the party set out at the head of a large procession, heading between the guard towers of Eastgate onto the seven-day road to Silverymoon. Before they had halfway crossed the public grazing fields outside the wall, a flying figure halted them in their tracks. From the dream, they recognized him as Bernard Carthage.

“Carthage shone in the rising sunlight. He was encased in plate mail, isolated from both attacks and sunbeams, and carried a longsword and aegis emblazoned with a gorgon’s head. He skirmished briefly with the party in an effort to push past them. When he did, they followed, with Osrik and Rooibos in pursuit and Ash, Bradislav, and Bud providing ranged support. Quickly, it became clear that he was intent upon reaching General Neverember.

“Our heroes engaged the vampire while soldiers dragged the general through the gates and barred them shut. Eyewitness accounts say that the vampire fought well but was no match

for five hardened adventurers. Injured, he fled the fight and vaulted the fortifications at Eastgate, snagging General Neverember. However, in his weakened state, he was forced to land on a parapet under a barrage of ranged attacks from the party.

“Osrik then produced an expandable pole from his bag of holding. Rooibos and Bradislav lifted Osrik on the pole, then he extended it to its full thirty-nine-and-a-half-foot span, reaching the top of the turret. There, he staked Bernard Carthage, killing the ancient vampire once and for all. Bradislav, who by that time had taken to using two shields and only casting spells, requisitioned the aegis and Carthage’s superior armor for himself.

“After that exciting beginning, the journey to Silverymoon was fairly uneventful. They camped along the well-travelled route, and the large, well-armed official contingent attracted plenty of tagalong travelers but no trouble. They arrived and made camp at Silverymoon on the second day of our harvest festival.

“Our heroes quickly discovered that, as honor guard, it was their duty to stand outside the doors of the diplomatic conference hall and look impressive. They did so for a day, to their great boredom. This is where I enter the story. They came to me after that first day of talks and asked if I wanted to make some money. They were large and well-armed, so I said sure. They paid me a small fortune in gold and silver and sent me drinking with some fantastic men who are now my cousins. I had a very enjoyable harvest festival, though I don’t remember it well, except for meeting Millie here. From there, we took a honeymoon to Waterdeep, and even caught sight of Sir Rambutan telling his most recent story at the yawning portal. Hearing of his encounter with those very same men, I figured there was more to the story than I knew. So, Millie and I moved to Eastgate, where she is from, and I was quickly able to get a good-paying job as an aide to Major Wells, which is how I came to uncover the rest of this story.”

“I remember that festival quite well,” Millie said, “I remember a handsome young lad with a boot full of gold and a silver tongue who charmed me to the seaside and halfway back.”

“Back to the story, as I understand it, they sent in the replacement Ash Hightower, using his same disguising magic to appear as me. He had a hard time staying awake through the proceedings and gleaned very little information beyond the overall nature of the negotiations. They were discussing how to defend and tax the trade route between Neverwinter, starting at

Eastgate, and Silverymoon. The group began to operate out of the unoccupied women's restroom in the town hall, which they turned into their operations center.

"Eventually, Ash's magical presence did attract the attention of Erno Styway, the archwizard of Silverymoon. He sent a messenger inviting them to speak that night at the Platinum Duck, one of the nicer inns in Silverymoon. There, he agreed on an exchange: he would work with them to create a favorable outcome to the negotiations and answer their questions about the orb if the party retrieved a family sword recently stolen by some area kobolds. The party agreed and, in their excitement, left the same night.

"They rode out to the cave that the kobolds were known to use as their hideout. They did not anticipate the trickery of the opponents they were about to face. By ten minutes after they entered the cave, their horses were fully converted into kobold-style classic barbeque. By then, our heroes were in too deep to do anything except keep going forward.

"Just inside the cave, they encountered several kobold archers, who shot arrows through slots while standing inside small niches in the walls. By returning fire through the slots and even breaking the walls, the party cleared that hallway just in time to find a pit trap. When they jumped the pit, they landed on the slick other side, sliding down into the second pit, which was full of oil. Only Rooibos fell into the second pit, and he was able to help the others across. However, before he could extricate himself from the viscous trap, a kobold opened a hatch on the ceiling and dropped a burning rag into the pitch. Rooibos, engulfed in flames, quickly used his ice breath to extinguish the blaze and escaped only singed.

"After a long descent, they found themselves in a well-appointed room, possibly a dormitory or barracks. They barricaded both doors to take a brief rest. However, as soon as they settled in, four pipes on the walls began pumping water into the room. The water quickly pooled in the small room, rising to cover the party's ankles.

"Rooibos plugged one pipe with ice breath, freezing it shut. Bradislav blasted another so that it spilled out into the tunnels beyond the room. Ash and Bud stuffed a third with bedsheets from the room. Osrik covered the fourth with the party's bag of holding and let the water drain into the bag. With the crisis averted, they were able to break down the door and continue their search.

“After another descent, our heroes turned a corner to encounter Dasai Rambutan. He charged at them, sword in hand, and began a bizarre flurry of attacks: kicks, sword swipes, and burning spells in series. The party fought back, quickly penetrating his defenses and destroying the illusion. To their surprise, they were not fighting Sir Rambutan at all, but three kobolds standing on each other’s shoulders, wearing a single modified suit of plate mail. The top kobold was a sorcerer and had been casting the illusion of being Rambutan.

“They continued to the end of the tunnel, where they found a large, cold door. Through the door, they encountered a fully-grown white dragon and fell victim to its icy blast.

“Fortunately, Ash and Bud mostly avoided the attack, Bradislav withstood it thanks to his ring of warmth, and Rooibos was immune to the blast thanks to his icy dragonborn heritage. Osrik took the brunt of the attack, but thanks to his strong constitution he was not overly injured. When the ice cleared, they saw the dragon across the frosted cavern. It crouched atop a pile of frozen treasure and ruined equipment and roared, filling the high-ceilinged cave with a thunderous echo. Using its claws and wings for stability, it charged across the ice at the party.

“Hesitant to engage the dragon in close combat on the icy cave floor, the party attacked it as it charged. Ash and Bud directed arrows into gaps between its scales, while Bradislav blasted it with eldritch lightning. Rooibos summoned a storm at the top of the cave, then called down lightning onto the charging monster. Osrik bravely met its charge, ducking swinging claws to batter the beast directly. Half a minute of intense fighting left the dragon staggering, wounded. It succeeded in knocking Osrik unconscious and sending him across the slick ice, but then Rooibos called another lightning blast from the storm cloud overhead, killing the dragon.

“The party took some time to loot the cavern, retrieving a large amount of gold and rubies, as well as the Styway family sword. The sword itself was a longsword with a four-headed dragon on the pommel. The different heads could be activated to coat the blade in acid, fire, lightning, or poison. They also found a set of five clockwork horses, relics from a forgotten inventor’s workshop. The distinctive mechanical noises of those horses quickly became the familiar herald of the party’s approach, though they soon covered the horses in large caparisons to hide their geared innards. This discovery ended Osrik’s unfortunate string of dead horses.

“They turned their attention to the dragon’s corpse. Using the weapons they had at hand, they pried out a dozen teeth and claws from the dead beast. Osrik emptied the water from the bag of holding, leaving the sack damp and the floor newly icy. He placed the newfound dragon teeth in the bag, saving them for later experimentation or sale. Having extracted every conceivable bit of wealth from the cavern, the party climbed back out of the tunnels without incident with the now leaderless kobolds.

“Our heroes rode back to Silverymoon, arriving at camp just past dawn. After washing the worst of the blood from their armor, they were headed for a rest when Captain Gnarlock intercepted them. He directed the party towards the command tent, as the negotiations were set to resume soon.

“They met with General Neverember in his tent. He asked them where they had been, and they described their battle against the dragon. To ensure his favor, the party presented Neverember with a dragon fang, and told him it could be fashioned into a sword. He immediately sent for his armorer to do just that. After gaining little insight into the plan for the day’s discussion, Bradislav noticed some papers strewn about Neverember’s desk, and surreptitiously collected a couple on the way out. He read them on the way to the meeting. I have copies to read here.”

Captain Gnarlock to General Neverember (2 weeks prior)

It pains me greatly to inform you that, having taken the orb to the sages and scholars of Neverwinter, as well as your brother our king, we are no closer to knowing its secrets. We believe that the spark lives within it, but we cannot access it. Further, we believe that the orb attracts untoward attention from dark factions, and while we are guarded by Helm's Shadow, we must exercise the upmost care in transporting this most treacherous possession.

Captain Gnarlock to General Neverember (2 days prior)

I am beginning to suspect that some among the elite of Silvermoon suspect our involvement in commissioning the theft of the Vox Rex. Two, though drunk, spoke freely of it in my presence, though it is supposed to be their most guarded secret. Indeed, Silvermoon may even be responsible for the recent rise in supernatural encounters near our borders. However, I refuse to stop short of our holy purpose. Indeed, I have secured a meeting with Erno Styway, the archmage of Silvermoon, whence he has promised to teach me to unlock the secrets of the orb and the shard within.

“As you can imagine, the party was shocked by these revelations, but did not have time to do anything about it before the meeting.

“On his way in, Erno Styway gave a knowing nod to the exhausted, stinking honor guard at the door. Inside, Ash, still disguised as me, received a note from a messenger instructing them to meet at the same time, same place. Again, he tried to uncover the undertones and hidden agendas of the proceedings, but failed, likely due to his sleepless night. Fortunately, Lord Morrison was similarly disinclined to pay attention, or even stay awake, and he was not questioned for his lack of output.

“Again, the party met the archwizard of Silvermoon at the Platinum Duck. The tavern was crowded with the city’s wealthy and elite, but Styway sat alone at a table near the back. He greeted the party and accepted the sword, then dematerialized it up to his study. They spoke for a while about the state of the negotiations, mostly around the proposal that Osrik favored: the Guantlgrym dwarves would be hired to accompany caravans as mercenaries, subsidized by the cities.

“As their conversation turned to the contents of the letters they had stolen, Bud noticed two stunningly attractive couples walk into the tavern. They split up, one heading for the back of the room, the other towards their table. Enraptured by their beauty, Bud was not disturbed by their approach. In passing, the woman manifested a long knife and, in a surprise attack, cut Erno Styway’s throat, killing him instantly. The bar erupted into pandemonium.

“Our heroes leapt to their feet, drawing their weapons. Well-dressed patrons fled through the front doors, emptying the tavern. Surveying the room, the party noticed Captain Gnarlock and General Neverember were among the remaining customers. The couple who had killed Styway grabbed his body and made for the door. Rooibos froze the floor near the door, and Osrik intercepted the pair. As the fighting began, their glamour fell away, revealing demonic horns and leathery tails and wings.

“Across the bar, the other couple assaulted the captain and general. They briefly held their ground, but Gnarlock ran up to the second level. The female fiend flew and perched on the railing, blocking his escape. She enchanted him, lowering his defenses. From his bag, Gnarlock retrieved the orb that had gone missing from Ash’s quarters some days prior. He handed it over to the fiend, who upon receipt ripped out his throat and tossed him into the fireplace.

“Meanwhile, the party successfully dispatched the two fiends in their area, with Ash shooting his crossbow at the two across the room. They moved to block the escape of the demonic woman holding the orb. However, the other stepped into the fireplace, engulfing himself and his weapon in cackling flame, then moved in to break the party’s line. They held, rebuffing both fiends. In the end, they prevailed, and left all for slain on the tavern floor. In the aftermath, Osrik inconspicuously stashed the orb in his bag of holding while Bradislav saw to General Neverember.

“The next day, festivities were suspended for the joint funerals of Erno Styway and Captain Gnarlock. However, there was a planning meeting that morning to establish the content for the proceedings. Due to their involvement, our heroes were invited to speak at the meeting and give a debrief rather than standing guard. They arrived early and convened in the women’s bathroom to discuss strategy and what to do with the orb.

“They had already noted that the orb could communicate telepathically. It seemed to prefer speaking with Bradislav, so he did most of the talking. It told them that it was the Vox Rex, an ancient magical artifact that had resided in Silverymoon for centuries. Initially a recording device, it began to think for itself after upgrades from the first archwizard of Silverymoon. It had provided information and counsel to generations of rulers of Silverymoon,

and was one of the world's most comprehensive historical and factual records, all in a near-indestructible glowing orb not much bigger than a good apple."

"That sounds like a very useful thing to have," Ba-Bushka said.

"You're not the only one to think so. After all, Ash Hightower and Arthur Underdown had been hired to steal it, then it had been stolen from them, then nearly stolen again. With this in mind, the party debated on what to do with it. Both Neverwinter and Silverymoon wanted it, but they weren't sure who could be trusted with it. Ultimately, they decided to return it to Olom Ness, the ruler of Silverymoon, but to try to get something in exchange.

"Now, my sources may be wrong on this, but I believe that Ash Hightower suggested a ransom of one hundred and twenty gold pieces, or about twelve weeks of their officer's commission. Apparently, this sum was significantly in excess of what he had originally been paid to steal it. However, after a reminder of the value of the treasure they had just taken from the dragon's lair, he retracted his suggestion. Osrik insisted that they should use the Vox Rex as leverage in the negotiations.

"They then turned their attention to securing a meeting. Ultimately, they decided to reserve an appointment under a false name, then have Bradislav teleport himself and Rooibos in for the conversation. Ash left and, disguised as me, told Ness's assistant that Neverember wished to speak in his office before the council session. Thus assured that he was alone, Bradislav and Rooibos materialized in his office.

"Olom Ness was shocked to see two heavily armed, lightly disguised figures appear before him. I imagine he suspected an assassination attempt. Before Ness could react or call for help, Osrik produced the Vox Rex from his bag and set it on the table. He claimed that they were from the future and offered the return of the Vox Rex for a financial reward and concessions in the day's negotiations. Ness immediately agreed, retrieving a small bag of valuable gemstones from his desk and exchanging it for the orb. In theatric fashion, Bradislav dematerialized himself and Osrik, leaving a confused Ness holding the Vox Rex.

"True to his word, Ness agreed to pay for dwarves to guard trade caravans and to reduce tariffs on Neverwinter imports. He also called for a more hopeful mood around Erno Styway's funeral, a celebration of life in an older tradition. Pleased that they had accomplished

their goal, the party had an easy afternoon attending official events. They also found time to sell half of their dragon parts, as well as their gems, at the local shop specializing in rare and valuable items. After a good deal of haggling, they emerged with sacks of gold and a bag full of potions and magic items, including an enchanted canvas that could, given sufficient time, replicate the power of magical items, which becomes important later, as Bradislav immediately wrapped his aegis for copying.

“After Captain Gnarlock’s more formal, somber funeral, they were prepared to head back to camp when they saw a suspiciously attractive young man enter the wizards’ tower. Though unable to communicate with the Vox Rex from the base of the tower, Bradislav sensed its presence inside. Worried about another theft attempt, the party entered the wizards’ tower.

“By their account, it was bigger on the inside. Figuring the archmage’s workshop would be at the top, they began climbing the stairs. Fifteen minutes later, Rooibos snapped out of a trance, covered in sweat. He realized that the whole party had been climbing the same set of stairs the whole time and roused the rest of them from their mindless trudge. By skipping stairs, they made it to the top of the tower. There, they found the door to the archwizard’s study. Inscribed to the door was ‘speak, comrade, and enter.’ Undeterred, Bradislav said ‘comrade’ and the door swung open.

“The room was unoccupied but crowded with equipment and curios. A brief exploration led them to the Vox Rex, in a place of honor in the middle of the tower. First, they asked it who the person who entered before them was. The orb assured them that it was Rubyn, a longtime student, who was returning to his chambers on the first floor. The Vox Rex was acting somewhat strangely, speaking in two different voices, but instructed Bradislav in how to contact it regardless of distance. As Bradislav and Osrik questioned the orb, the others explored the room. Bud discovered a letter, which he later allowed me to copy, and I have with me.”

Olom Ness to Erno Styway, months prior

It pains me greatly to learn of the theft of our peoples' most precious historical artifact, that guiding voice of my ancestors and their ancestors otherwise lost to time. The Vox Rex must be regained at all costs, though the measures I

instruct within this letter do place a great burden upon my soul.

You say the thieves fled in the direction of Neverwinter, and that one among them was a being of incredible stealth, and another a mage of great power. We are aware of a variety of vampires, werewolves, necromancers, and other such unsavory factions in the area that they will no doubt be hiding. I would have you engage these groups to find and retrieve the Vox Rex, trusting that you will be circumspect about its powers. Dark forces have before conspired to corrupt the artifact to their own purposes, but it has grown to be our most precious citizen and cannot be lost forever.

“With this damning evidence in hand, they left the tower, unsure of their future course. Clearly, the leaders of Silverymoon had conspired against them, but for good cause. Furthermore, with the orb returned and the negotiations closed, it seemed as though peace had been restored. They decided against doing anything rash and prepared for the return to Eastgate.

“The journey back was uneventful. They focused on crafting during their downtime, both copying Bradislav’s shield and forging short swords from the dragon teeth. However, on the last day, they found two dead travelers on the road. Their cart was smashed apart, their bodies mangled, and their donkey mostly eaten. Alert, the party proceeded down the road ahead of the rest of the delegation, scouting for danger. After a mile, they encountered two vampires.

“The vampires were also dead. They were both heavily armed and armored, and their corpses were similarly grisly as the ones before. The party waited for the delegation to catch up, then proceeded again. With the Helm’s shadow mountain range looming above them, they found a grotesquely mutated werewolf. It had been killed by an incredible blow while halfway between human and wolf forms. Wary, the party escorted the delegation back to Eastgate.

“Once there, General Neverember informed the waiting merchants that, until the source of the killings was found and destroyed, he would not send guards beyond the wall. However, our heroes saddled their clockwork horses and prepared to return to Silverymoon to intercept any trading caravans and keep them off the road.

“Before they left, Bradislav contacted the Vox Rex and asked it to pass along a message to Olom Ness about the new powers in the area. It said that they had not spoken in several days but promised to do so at the next opportunity. Thus, the party traveled with haste to Silverymoon, covering a distance that had taken the delegation six days in two and a half. As their horses did not need rest, they could ride as long as they could stay in the saddle.

“There, near Silverymoon, they encountered a group of merchants heading towards Eastgate. They greeted the group, introducing themselves as a patrol squad from Eastgate, told them of their recent discoveries, and offered to accompany them back to Silverymoon. When the group turned around to head back, the party split up and canvased the merchants for information. After a few conversations around the weather, remarkably large wolf tracks, purchasing drugs, and other such niceties, Osrik discovered something significant. In the ten days since they had left Silverymoon, a newcomer had entered town, proven his abilities to the wizard’s council, and become the new archwizard of Silverymoon. The man in question was Arthur Underdown.

“The party discussed what to do as they rode along. Bradislav contacted the Vox Rex, who confirmed the information. Again, the orb spoke strangely, as if it had two voices with differing opinions. The more helpful voice suggested that Underdown had been communicating with demons operating near Eastgate. On this, the party decided to send the caravan back to Silverymoon while they went to scout and camp by Eastgate. Before they parted ways, the party bought a small donkey cart from the traders to use as a disguise.

“As they rode off, they contacted the Vox Rex again. Bradislav requested that it tell Underdown that a large trading party would be halfway between Silverymoon and Eastgate in two nights carrying whatever cargo would make it attractive to the demons. The Vox Rex agreed to relay the message, and later confirmed that it had heard Underdown communicate based on it.

“The party once again made haste along the road and decided to rest at night on the side of the road. In case of early demon arrival, they set up their fake trading cart with their horses as a false trading group. They divided up watch and slept on both sides of the road. Ash, during his watch, heard marching and roused the others. They waited in tense silence as the sounds grew steadily louder, until a column of vampires, led by Olivia Carthage, crested the hill. They slowed as they approached the fake caravan, quickly realizing it was empty. They looked around, suspecting a trap.

“A pair of vampire soldiers heard something and moved into the woods towards Rooibos. In a panic, he climbed a large nearby maple, then cast fog around himself. He got as high as the old tree would support then encased the lower part in ice, making it impossible to follow him up. Olivia rose in the air to investigate, which prompted Bradislav to step out from the bushes.

“He hailed the marching vampires and introduced himself. He asked where the vampires were going. Olivia replied that they were searching for Arthur Underdown, as he had broken their trust and helped Sir Rambutan escape, which had led to her husband’s death. The vampires had heard that he was the new high wizard of Silverymoon, and they were on the warpath there.

“Bradislav assured her that they were not aligned with Silverymoon. In fact, he said, they were also trying to destroy Arthur Underdown. The wagon setup was intended as bait for some of Underdown’s allies, who were understood to be demons of great power. He suggested that they leave in peace, aligned in their mission against Underdown. Olivia was about to agree, then hesitated. She asked if they were from Eastgate, and Bradislav confirmed. She asked if Bradislav had killed her husband, Bernard. Bradislav lied, saying that he had been at the back of the column that day. Why then, Olivia asked, did Bradislav carry her husband’s shield?

“In a moment of inspired insight, Bradislav offered her the shield to inspect. He declared it a replica, which it was, as the original was safely under the item copier in Osrik’s bag, generating a new replica. The replica was wood bonded with iron, not pure metal, and the face was disfigured from Osrik’s efforts to mend the shield. Olivia, convinced, led her column onwards towards Silverymoon.

“The party’s relief at evading such a deadly encounter quickly faded when they realized the magnitude of what was happening. Not only were the vampires, at their pace, two nights from raiding a major city, but they would surely overtake the trading caravan the next night. While the small force had parlayed with our heroes, they would be more likely to simply attack such an attractive, defenseless target. They estimated the vampires’ position by the next night, then contacted the Vox Rex and asked it to tell Underdown whatever it had to for him to send demons to that location.

“At dawn, they rode hard. Fortunately, it was still early fall, so the days were much longer than the nights, and they caught up to the caravan without encountering any vampires. They hurried the caravan along the road and were near Silverymoon by nightfall. After a tense night, nothing came by. In the morning, the Vox Rex confirmed that Underdown had sent scouts, but none had returned. They made it to the city later that morning.

“The party headed straight for the wizards’ tower. Wary of its tricks and defenses, they made it to the top easily, bypassing the infinite stairway and the door’s riddle. Inside, they saw Arthur Underdown stuffing equipment into a bag of holding and immediately attacked. The battle was savage but brief. Our heroes had more than doubled in power since their last encounter with Underdown, and he was alone. They prevented him from retreating into his cardboard realm, destroyed the air elemental that he summoned, and knocked him unconscious and bound him. They decided to keep him captive until the vampires arrived at the city gate, then hand him over to ensure that they did not invade the city. To make sure he wouldn’t wake up and fight back, Rooibos tipped the drugs he had bought from the traders down Underdown’s throat. They took the Vox Rex and Styway’s sword from the tower.

“That night, the vampires arrived at the city gates. Olivia had a tear in one sleeve, exposing tight chain-link mesh below, and there were six fewer soldiers than before, but it was still an impressive group of 20. They stopped in a loose semicircle, facing the gate. The party stood together, Underdown in front of them, a cardboard box portal behind them. Olivia stepped forward and took Underdown. She identified him, then bit his neck and drained the life from him. Her eyes flashing in the full moon, she stepped forward and addressed the party.

“She declared that she found herself in a difficult situation: gratefully accepting the assistance of a group who had not only killed her husband themselves, but also lied about it. She had her suspicions at the previous encounter but kept them to herself in the interest of pursuing a greater enemy. On that night, though, our heroes were her greatest enemy available. She proposed a compromise: a trial of sorts by single combat, her against one member of the party.

“After a moment’s deliberation, Osrik stepped forward on the behalf of the party. The others gave him their blessings and haste, and he moved to engage Olivia. He fought well and died all the same.”

“Come now,” Ba-Bushka said, “that fight sounds legendary. Give a bit of description.”

“Very well. Osrik used his preferred combination of sword and spells to attempt to trip, trap, and otherwise disorient Olivia. He was wielding Styway’s sword, and activated the acid head, coating the blade with the insidious melting fluid of a dragon, which prevented Olivia from healing herself during the fight. For her part, she attacked with her sword and her teeth. She used powerful magic to weaken then charm Osrik, though he snapped out of it before she could take the kill, causing her to lose a tooth biting his helmet. However, she eventually overpowered the dwarf and drank his life away.

“With a solemn affirmation to the party, Olivia collected Underdown’s body and left with her soldiers. Rooibos blessed Osrik’s corpse to prevent it from reanimating from Olivia’s bite. Just then, the second voice from the Vox Rex spoke up and requested that Bradislav place the orb on Osrik’s consecrated body. From the body and orb lifted a golden cloud that condensed into a glowing dwarf. It introduced itself as a fragment of Helm, hidden in the Vox Rex just before Helm’s second death. It thanked the party for their service and ascended to the heavens.

“Our heroes traveled back to the wizards’ tower by cardboard box, but when they were in the realm, they heard a distant crumpling sound. As it grew louder, Bud realized that the realm itself was disintegrating with Underdown’s death, and they narrowly escaped through the portal to the wizards’ tower before the gateway collapsed.

“Uncertain of what to do next, the party slept the rest of the night there. In the morning, they went to the library. As they were trying to talk their way in, despite not having Silverymoon library system access cards, a young messenger came to the desk with a note for the attendant. Immediately, she directed them to the office of Professor Kermline, deep in the archives.

“Kermline is an elvish bladesinger, a secretive branch of wizardry whose practitioners are both powerful casters and deadly fencers. He kept his blades hidden under long wizard’s robes, presenting himself as a spindly caster in hopes of throwing off enemies. Kermline was an adjunct professor at the Silverymoon wizards’ school, but after hearing of his grandson Osrik’s death, he joined the party.

“Together, our heroes buried Osrik and returned to Eastgate. Once again, they conferred with Major Wells about opening the trade route between the cities, as there had been no sign of demonic activity since the vampire encounter. However, during the conversation, they heard a screaming sound overhead, then the ground shook. Outside, a large boulder had embedded itself into the main road through the city.

“The party ran over to examine the boulder. Kermline translated the abyssal writing carved into the rock: ‘Test Rock.’ As he and Ash argued over what it meant, Bradislav knocked on the stone, trying to determine its composition. The stone rang when he struck it, indicating that it was hollow. Bud and Bradislav carved an opening into the stone, allowing Bradislav to fit himself inside. Then, they summoned some nearby soldiers to bring a cart, then Bradislav levitated the stone into the cart. He declared that he would henceforth only do battle by shooting spells from within the stone.

“That opportunity came the next day. Just before dusk, a scout came through the gates and blew the emergency signal. The party and Major Wells gathered with the scout, who reported that duergar, werewolves, vampires, and zombies were amassing within miles of the wall. Major Wells ordered all soldiers to the wall. The party helped prepare fires along the wall, where the archers melted silver to dip their arrows and roasted garlic to ward off vampires. As night fell, the fires cast their light across the grazing field on the far side of the wall, where out from the shadows marched a column of vampires with an army of duergar behind them. The

fields filled with shambling ranks of zombies, and a pack of werewolves ran forward as the vanguard of the army. To the side, a pavilion descended from the sky. Aboard was the vampire Olivia Carthage, the duergar king Mahked the Lesser, werewolf packleader Ja'kob, and master necromancer Lanton Gali. They ordered their armies forward."

"Many of your new family were there on that day," Ba-Bushka said, "and to a man they refuse to speak of what happened, what terrible things they saw."

"I know what they saw," Millie said, "legends."

"From the top of the left tower, the party led the resistance at the wall. Kermline summoned a dog from the ethereal realm to guard the gates, Ash and Bud shot arrows at the approaching armies, and Rooibos summoned a storm of ice and lightning before the gates. Bradislav, crouched within his levitated boulder tied to the wall, shot spells at the zombies amassed around the walls.

"Early on, the attackers' plan faltered when the weight of a zombie horde collapsed a tunnel that the duergar were secreting under the wall. The zombies and duergar in that area turned against each other until Rooibos froze the whole area. Lanton Gali pulled the other hordes back, while the vampires and werewolves made a direct assault on the gates with a large battering ram.

"As they were preparing to destroy the ram, the party heard an abyssal rending from behind the wall. Maralith, the demonic snake-woman with six sword-wielding arms, slithered from the crater left by 'Test Rock.' Balor, the huge winged demon with a fire whip and lightning sword, exploded from the crater behind her. Leaving Rooibos behind to hold the wall, the other four charged down from the tower to meet these new foes.

"Bradislav struck the first major blow of the battle, dropping onto Balor in his rock, cracking the rock and unbalancing the demon. Kermline and Ash held against Maralith, their dragon-tooth short swords doing massive damage against the demon. Bud engaged from a distance, firing arrow after arrow into weak points on the abyssal creatures. Our heroes kept moving, switching their engagement between the two demons.

"While Maralith kept the party back with its swirling blades, Balor exuded a fiery radius that scalded anyone who got close. Kermline cast a spell protecting the party, and they pressed

the attack. Thanks in no small part to the effectiveness of the dragon-tooth swords, they wounded the demons again and again. Then, in an offhand blow, Balor caught Kermline with its massive sword, knocking the elf across the road, where he lay unconscious. The demons bore down on the remaining party members, who were trying to navigate to Kermline. The elf was able to partially recover with his magic, but then Balor caught Bud with its whip, injuring him just as badly.

“At the gate, Rooibos unleashed holy fury against the forces amassed before him. With the help of the archers on the wall, he destroyed the entire werewolf pack and vampire contingent. A few archers stopped firing and simply stared, struck dumb by the awesome display of power that he maintained for several minutes. After a barrage of spells, no foul creature within a hundred strides of the gate was even able to crawl or roll away. Rooibos turned to check on the fighting within the city and saw his companions faltering against the demons. Using his ring of jumping, he took a running leap from the tower and surfed on a summoned current of wind into the fray, axe held high.

“From the crater, Bradislav struck the final blow against Maralith as it tried to flee the fighting. Ash stabilized Bud while Bradislav and Kermline re-engaged Balor. Before they could finish the demon, Rooibos’s leaping attack arrived. Twenty stone of armored dragonborn sailed over sixty paces and landed axe-first in Balor’s side. The demon exploded in a fiery release, scorching Bradislav, Kermline, and Rooibos. Battered but determined, the party staggered back towards the fighting on the wall.

“A strange but invigorating feeling flashed through Rooibos. Moments later, the rest of the party felt the same jolt of measured ferocity. They heard the voice of Helm say, ‘you have vanquished the demons, and for that I give you my blessing.’ Righteous might surged through them as they returned to the wall to finish the battle.

“As they climbed the tower, it shook. Ja’kob, the werewolf packleader, was a stone giant, and had just hurled a large rock at the gates, breaking though the weakened outer doors. From the top of the wall, the party tried to hit the attacking army’s commanders, but they were too far away. However, noticing the party’s actions, Lanton Gali navigated the pavilion towards the wall. Using the controls on one column, he slammed the platform into the wall.

“Specifically, the pavilion was a sophisticated piece of equipment designed by cloud giants working with dwarfish engineers and a reclusive wizard. It teleported between places, leaving those atop the platform unaffected by its movement, but it arrived at each destination with the same impact as if the twenty paces square of rock as thick as a man is tall had fallen from the top of an ancient oak. Thus, when the platform struck the Eastgate wall, the fortification cracked, and soldiers went flying. The party barely stayed on, with Rooibos catching the lip of the wall and dangling above the street.

“Ja’kob and Mahked squared up against the party, with Olivia and Gali behind them as support. Immediately, Kermline destroyed their plan by summoning an air elemental, which created a vortex that sent the villains flying in every direction. Ja’kob was thrown onto a barrack below, Mahked was pushed back to the edge of the platform, and Olivia and Gali were strewn directly in front of the party.

“Taking advantage of the exposed casters, Ash, Bud, and Rooibos engaged them in combat. Using their dragon-tooth swords, they dealt massive damage against their foes. The air elemental aided them, striking down Gali in seconds. Meanwhile, Kermline summoned a manticore, who helped Bradislav in his attack against Ja’kob, who had turned into a wolf large enough to see over the Eastgate wall.

“Bud killed Olivia with a sword then a stake through the heart. While he engaged Mahked, Ash slew the duergar king with stabs in the back. Bradislav brought fire and lightning against Ja’kob, but killed the giant wolf from its back, smiting it with his eldritch magic. During this calamity, Rooibos was injured and retreated onto the platform. After examining its controls, he turned it towards the still-advancing armies.

“Before he could move the platform, a figure rose from the massive zombie horde to the southwest. It flew towards the wall and landed amid our heroes. They immediately recognized the body as Arthur Underdown, but it spoke as Lanton Gali. However, standing alone against the party, its medley of powers was insufficient. Bradislav and Kermline blasted it with magic while Bud and Arthur engaged in melee combat. Ash killed Underdown with a decapitating strike, ending the warlock’s generations-long influence in the region.

“Rooibos was hundreds of feet away from the fighting on the wall. He piloted the pavilion directly into the zombie horde, where he channeled Helm’s power and spoke an incantation to destroy the undead before him. At his word, the hundreds of zombies fell, their necromantic sparks extinguished. Then, he positioned the pavilion above the outer gate and, before they could react, crushed the entire duergar army beneath the platform. The soldiers on the wall cheered with relief, for they knew that the party had reduced what would have been a complete sack of the city to minor infrastructure damage.

“From there, the story resolves. They returned the Helm-less Vox Rex to Silverymoon, where it remains an advisor to the city’s rulers. Rooibos set out on a pilgrimage to spread word of Helm’s return. He started in Waterdeep, which is how I came to hear most of this story. Ash took Kermline’s identity and returned to Silverymoon, where he quickly gained the promotion to full professor that had eluded Kermline for decades, despite Ash not knowing any magic. Kermline, Bud, and Bradislav each took high-ranking commissions in the Neverwinter forces. Kermline stayed at Eastgate as the commander of the mostly-dwarvish patrol group, which now protects the ‘Osrik Memorial Long & Tedious Trade Route.’ Bud is in charge of training in Helm’s Hold. Bradislav opened a school of martial magic in Neverwinter teaching the very popular flying turtle technique, which revolves around encasing oneself in rock and shooting spells.”

“That was quite the interesting narrative,” Ba-Bushka said, “welcome to the family, Eli.”

Millie smiled at me. “I told you she would enjoy it,” she said.

“If you’ll pardon one more question,” Ba-Bushka said.

“Of course,” I replied.

“Where did they leave that flying pavilion,” she asked.