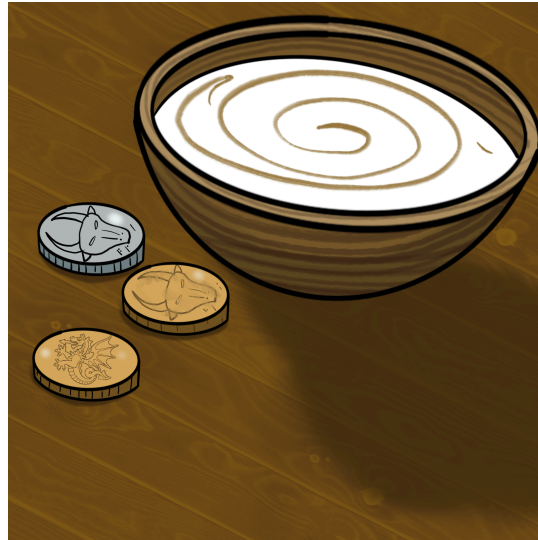


# Chapter 7 - Wind and Coins



The sonorous toll of the Dark Bell began in Cathedral Square that night. The mournful cry of the bells in the square towers flowed out and down the great gothic edifice, rushing down the narrow streets and echoing off of the canals. The sound carried down every alley, pursuing the silence like a wailing spirit unleashed. Awakened to action, the smaller bells of the neighborhood churches and monastery chapels joined the call as the Lightward bank of the Erz River erupted in sound.

By the time the Library of Gohard issued its response to the Cathedral's nocturnal challenge, Gwae already knew it was too late. The gates of the great city were being closed as the second ripple of bells carried across the city. Naoned was sealed off from its external layers. Until the crystalline chimes of the Lightbringer's bell signaled the first light of dawn, the great portcullises would remain locked. No one, save for those brave or foolish enough to chance the Undertown, would enter the city tonight.

The bartender, Haizea, a short haired woman from far off Asturias, reached up to ring the small wheel of fortune she had hanging above the bar. The 8 spoked wheel spun, the tiny bells of the ends tinkling with light chimes, completely unlike the deep calls of the Great Bells. But Haizea was determined that the *Ash and Hazel* would not shirk its part in her adopted home's great Battle of the Bells. As customary, all the regulars raised their glasses and boles, wood and crystal clinking together in poorly timed unison.

Gwae did not raise her own wooden bolee, a small bowl of cream and honeyed mead, a caramel swirl in the milk white liquid sitting undisturbed since it had been placed in front of her. Her slender fingers tapped nervously on the oaken table of the snug, a thin, complex pattern of

frost spreading out and receding with each momentary contact. She paid little attention to the patterns she was forming, an unconscious projection of Winter's deep hold on her soul.

The snugs were her favourite part of the tavern, a line of booths nestled between the gallery walkway on the first floor above and a raised landing with a few round tables overlooking the main floor. When Haizea had taken over the crumbling warehouse in Naoned's Mask District, the entire back wall had been taken up by boxy storage bays, massive square compartments to store the crates, barrels and whatever else had once filled the structure. Rather than tearing them out, the new owner had instead made them the centerpiece of her vision, cleaning them out and replacing the rotted boards with new wood, stained to a red brown. A table and two *bank-tosset* bench safes were placed in each, a round arch resembling an ash tree and a hazel tree entwined together at the top.

A banister ringed the little platform, raised about a meter above the main floor, the supports carved into the shapes of hops, grape vines and other vegetation, giving it the appearance of a ship's aftercastle, which most of the crowd referred to it as. Gwae personally found it closer to a carriage in the shade of the hedge, with padded seats atop the *bank-tosset* to look out over the "street" below. Past the gallery above, the space opened into a two floor atrium, while alchemical lightglobes filled the area with soft light, a massive chandelier of ashwood and hazelwood branches suspended in the center.

With the festival of Kalan-Goanv approaching and the crowds flooding into Naoned, the *Ash and Hazel* had brought in even more tables, supplementing the scattering of round platforms with old wine barrel, giving the always busy space an even more chaotic feeling that made Gwae think of the marketplaces in Place du Vin or Quai de la Fosse.

On the lightward side of the space was Haizea's pride and joy, the long bar that took up most of the wall. A long window-like slit separated the bar from an upper section where the glasses were stored. The lower half was filled with removable panels, painted with scenes from the Lethaned songs, while the thinner upper part had delicate carvings of foliage. Behind the facade was a wall of glittering crystal bottles and great kegs, all filled with ale, cidre, mead and wine. Haizea moved through her domain without a slow in step despite the press of customers that never seemed to wane. Near the door, the massive fomorian bouncer Krogstad sat in the same spot he always did, an upturned barrel that gave him a commanding presence and view of the entire space. Sizhail, the little Teuz server girl who clung to Morgiana like ice on a lintel, occasionally popped into view as she navigated the room with a tray precariously balancing what always seemed like one too many cups and mugs.

And yet, despite the familiarity of the space and the faces within it, Gwae felt her "carriage ride" was far from the pleasant experience it normally was. It felt like one of those terrible sunny days, with the stifling warm breezes and not a single grey cloud promising to turn the day around. She kept glancing upwards towards the door, but despite the constant movement of people through the portal, her bodyguard had not returned, and with the gates now closed, was unlikely to do so until dawn.

She half expected Kathalia to stride in, with that stupid grin that she adopted when she thought she was being exceptionally clever. She would throw her entire body into the snug, as if diving into a moving cart, her emerald eyes glistening with mischief as she energetically laid out her latest complicated scheme. Gwae found it hard to look away from those eyes, which seemed to transport her to a field of clovers deep in the memories of her homeland on Emain Ablach.

Gwae continued to tap the table, occasionally lifting her finger to send the delicately crafted snowflake spinning into the air to vanish. Across the cozy booth, Marie sat with her back against the wall, with a single foot up on the bench, plucking out single notes on her lute, *Fleur d'Illyria*, composing a melody only she could pick out from the seemingly standalone bursts of music emanating from the vibrating strings. Neither had said much since returning to the tavern.

Morgiana emerged from the crowd, gliding up the stairs onto the raised landing, effortlessly weaving between the round tables and their patrons with a dancer's grace. She slipped into the snug, placing down a small bolee of fruit-water so deftly that the red liquid didn't so much as ripple.

"I sent the guttersnipes to the Erzherz bridges, but none of them saw Red cross the river. A few of them will stick around, but I doubt we'll see anything tonight, unless she tries something stupid. Brassarm's got the Black and Whites out in force tonight."

"Did we really kick up that much of a wasp's nest on this one?" Marie looked up from her lute, momentarily pausing her errant stringwork.

Morgiana shook her head "A little riot down at the Andennspire? Hardly news, even with my own involvement. No, I imagine she's trying to put the blue bloods at ease. Can't have another well-to-do dandy dead in the canal again. Damn killer is making things mighty inconvenient for honest thieves."

Gwae frowned "I imagined she would have been back by now. She knew that the gates were going to be locked down tight tonight."

"It's a long walk from the Andennspire, and her sense of direction... isn't the best." Marie offered. "Kathalia has never met a map she couldn't misread in some way."

"Aye, if she's not on a deck, she cannae tell Speckled from Pale." Gwae replied with a rueful laugh.

"On the subject of Red's planning skills..." Morgiana began.

““We might want to take this conversation elsewhere...” Marie tilted her head out at the crowded room. While the snug was private enough and merged with the low rumble of the conversations and clinking mugs, it was hardly ideal to discuss the more sensitive nature of their day.

“Nae, I’ll deal with it.” Gwae said dismissively, dispelling the snowflake of frost. She made a quick signal to Sizhail. The Teuz girl scurried over, her goatlike hooves clicking on the wood as she approached.

“A pint o’ the black.” Gwae asked. Sizhail gave a quick nod, vanishing into the crowd before popping up again near the bar. She returned with a wooden mug full of a rich brown liquid, a frothy head of creamlike foam wobbling on top as Sizhail made her way across the landing. She plopped the heavy mug down on the table and then, without invitation, slipped into the booth next to Morgiana.

“Don’t you have to work?” Morgiana raised an eyebrow.

“I’m on break. Did Lady Bisclavret come home yet?” The young girl asked, looking up at Morgiana with wide eyes. “Is she ok?”

Morgiana closed her eyes in mock concentration, muttering nonsense. Gwae rolled her eyes at the performance, but Sizhail sat enraptured by every word and gesture, her lavender eyes wide with wonder.

“The wise Morgiana can see many things, but the mists of Saraharadan cloud her mind’s eye. The secrets of the night remain out of reach, even to her prodigious insight.” She opened her eyes with a sudden dramatic jolt “Besides, you’d know better than us if she came back, Snips. No one gets past you when tips are at stake.”

“I’m the best at the *Ash and Hazel*.” Sizhail brightened up with pride. “Haizea says I made a whole sous in tips last night!”

“I bet you did. And how much did you make in total?”

“Haizea says I can’t pick pockets in the tavern and certainly not while I am working. She says ‘You can only mess with Jacques or those four idiots’.”

“Glad to know where we rank in Haizea’s graces. Still, it’s good advice. Don’t work in your own house. Can only end badly.” Morgiana turned to Gwae, who had placed the mug squarely in the center of the table. “I didn’t think you drank this stuff.”

“Oh it’s not fer me. The black stuff is like water to me kith and kin.” Gwae gestured lazily to the bolee of milk “If I wanted te get drunk, I’d just down a few of these.”

Gwae placed the stout down on the table, waving her closed palm up and down in a fanning motion, then a spinning one. She let out a shrill whistle, then began to whisper.

*For the black within this mug,  
Let not a word escape this snug.*

A subtle breeze began to blow around the enclosure, rustling the hair of the women seated around the booth. A smooth smell of coffee and chocolate, mixed with a deep scent of roasted barley and subtle fruits filled the space, rising from the stout sitting in the center of the table.

Sizhail stared wide eyed as Gwae's hand stilled. The girl, being much more used to seeing Morgiana's illusions, glamour manipulation and fabricated stage magic, had rare occasion to see a proper *huderezh* casting, but was always enthralled when she did. Of course, Morgiana's flashy showmanship tended to have a more immediate payoff, and she tilted her head in confused disappointment.

"What did you do?" She asked, glancing around the booth for the payoff of the casting. Aside from the pronounced fragrance of the beer lingering in the air and the slight feel of a cold breeze, little seemed to have changed.

"A wee contract with a friend who me mums taught me to call." Gwae replied "I asked the Speckled Wind to keep our conversation private in exchange for the aroma of Haizea's finest black stuff."

"You . . . asked the wind?"

"Of course. One of the easiest places to draw *druidecht* from, outside of the feth fiada." Gwae sent a glare towards Morgiana, whose preference for drawing her power from the ever-present mists was well known. "The 12 winds are a reliable way to tap into the flow of the *hud*."

"You can't just ask a wind to do something for you."

"Ye can if ye use its name." Gwae replied dismissively.

"One of the four parts of *Huderezh* is called *Fis*, Sizhail." Marie stepped in. "*Fis* is . . . like a name. But more than that. It's not just one. It's all the names that a thing has. The more central to that thing, the more powerful the *Fis*."

"She didn't say a name though."

“Course I did. But the winds like their own names more than the ones the tuath give them.” Gwae let out another soft whistle. The breeze picked up slightly, the aroma of the beer becoming stronger. “That *fis* is the sound the Speckled Wind makes as it passes through O’Donnell’s round tower. I only needed a lock o’ wind, not a gale after all.”

“Can you talk to the 12 Winds?” Sizhail turned on Marie and Morgiana. Both nodded.

“I play notes on *Fleur d’Illyria*.” Marie played a melodic strum on her lute. “It’s easier on a wind instrument, but it’s the same principle.”

“The great Morgiana needs no words or sound.” Morgiana gave a dramatic move of her arms, moving her arm from the tip of her finger to her shoulder like a wave. “She knows the movement of the 12 Winds and can mimic those movements in the dances of two continents.”

“Can Lady Bisclavret use magic?”

Marie, who, enticed by the malty smell of the rich stout in the booth, had finally taken a sip of her mead, which came spraying out in a barely suppressed laugh.

“Erm... Not well.” Gwae admitted. She suspected that Kathalia’s status of a milliget should confer at least a basic ability to manipulate the *hud*, but even maintaining control of her own glamour seemed to be difficult for her friend. Her hair and eyes seemed to shimmer when she got excited, and she never seemed comfortable with the magic that was a part of her. It was something Gwae, whose own magic was so entwined with her very being, could not understand. She couldn’t even convince Kathalia to stop using the rotten iron key, a frequent source of argument between the two.

“So you called the wind and made it an offer. But I can still hear everyone.” Sizhail protested.

“Step outside the booth.”

Sizhail did so, lingering close by. Her ears twitched as she tried to make out the words of the group within. Unable to do so, she returned to her spot, entering the heavy miasma of malt and chocolate lingering in the air.

“It was like you were all the way at the other side of the Place du Bouffay!” she exclaimed excitedly “I could hear you, but couldn’t make out a word!”

“Aye, the Speckled Wind is good at mixing up messages. Me kin used it to disrupt Viking fleets from shouting across their ships at each other. Turns out the Speckled likes the aroma of black stuff better than smoked fish.”

“Oh!” The Teuz girl brightened up “Why not ask the winds where Lady Kathalia is!”

Gwae shook her head “That’s a bit trickier. The wind wouldna know what to look fer. It cannot see, only hear and touch. So it wouldn’t know how te find her without a proper *fis*.”

“Isn’t her *fis* just ‘Kathalia’?” The girl asked. “That is her name, right?”

“It is... and it isn’t. A *fis* is more than just a name. A person and everyone around them has a slightly different idea of who that person is, and a different image comes up when one says their name. Or they use nicknames, or monikers, or even just slightly different pronunciations. Those are all *fis*. A casting like that is possible, but very difficult to pull off properly.” Gwae imagined that her own internal visions of her bodyguard alone would send the winds off in a dozen directions.

Before Sizhail could respond, all eyes turned to a cross looking Haizea, standing with her arms folded, a bar-rag slung over one of them. She glared down at Sizhail, with a mix of annoyance and bemusement.

“Sizhail, I don’t pay you to goof off during the Dark Toll rush. It’s our busiest time of the day.” Haizea declared in the distinctive accent of her homeland, far Whitewards in Asturias.

“‘On break’, eh?” Morgiana smirked, “Go help Haizea or we’ll both be in trouble.”

The Teuz scowled, but slid off, following Haizea back into the throng of the main floor.

“Magic lessons are great.” Morgiana said, dropping the pretense of her stage persona with her admirer outside of Gwae’s casting. “But we need to talk about this shitstorm that Red’s gotten us into.”

“We all agreed to the job.” Gwae snapped, a little more defensively than she meant to. Her bodyguard’s continued absence had her on edge.

“We agreed to get proof to take down the Cheesemonger.” Morgiana snapped back. “Not to get involved in whatever the hell is going on with those goons on the boat. They had enough armed thugs at the Andennspire that I bet they could have taken the old man from the Black Order and held it for a week. That’s not what we signed up for.”

“The Black Bulls were more involved than we were led to believe.” Marie interjected, more pensive than accusatory. “De Bries was a minor player in the grand scheme of things. Even the syndicates weren’t interested in what he was doing, and the gangs will go after each other over a shipment of strawberries on Quai de la Fosse.” She turned a glare on Morgiana, joined by Gwae.

“They were good strawberries!” Morgiana protested. “Not my fault that the Shells and the Cicadas each thought the other had stolen them and tried to kill each other. If they didn’t

want them stolen by an enterprising individual like myself, they should have tried to smuggle something less delicious. But I see your point. Complications arise. Still, Red's been taking a lot of stupid risks lately."

Gwae couldn't disagree. Even before the *Prince*, Kathalia had been acting erratically, taking on risky jobs, picking fights and making high stakes wagers at the boneparlors in the Forest. She even had her suspicions that her friend had returned to one of her more dangerous habits, but, lacking proof, Gwae hoped she was wrong on that one. Even with that though, taking on the ship should have been a simple job for the practiced thief.

"Well, second guessing ourselves won't do anything. Let's see what we're working with and try to figure out what in the White Plain happened today." Marie said, bringing the speculation back into focus. "Besides, I'm pretty sure that Kathalia made it out of Andennspire. If those idiots working for the Cheesemonger even got close to catching her, they'd be bragging about it at every bandage brothel in the city. They aren't the most tight lipped. We got the initial tip from the Beggar's Union for goddess's sake."

"I agree. I think that those bowsies would gab all over town. Either that Addereye has cut the cheesemonger out of the loop, or they dinnae know more than us about Kathalia's whereabouts."

"I had Jacques watching the island. He told me that since the Warrior's Bell, there have been a lot of boats leaving, overladen with piles of stuff."

"So de Bries got spooked. He's definitely leaving town." Marie surmised, placing *Fleur d'Illyria* on the table and finally sipping her mead. "That ledger must be even hotter than we thought. You dealt with that, Gwae?"

"Aye. I passed it along to Guildmaster Kerrick. Given how quickly de Bries is moving, I expect that Brassarm will have her Black and Whites on the island at the Lightbringer's first toll." She was grateful for the change of topic. Dwelling on Kathalia's absence, even if it was nothing, was not doing her any favours.

"He's probably scarpering off on the *Prince*, the idiot." Morgiana scoffed. "Might explain why Snake-eyes showed up so quickly at the Pilgrim's Docks."

"It would make sense. It's the only ship of his in Naoned right now. His merchant fleet set out for Port de la Lune a few days ago. The *Prince* is his only way out."

"He'll be selling his covers to Perez for a ride out of town. That cute hoor of a captain won't be chancin' his arm to get more involved in this mess."



“Well at least part of this fiasco was a success.” Marie sighed “de Bries selling the clothes off his back to make a mad dash out of town seems like a good sign his operation is shutting down for now at least.”

“But we’re still goin’ te have a handlin’ with this Moccus business. Do we have any more details to who that sleeveen is? That Free Company costs more than odds, ye know. We should see what we kin learn while we wait for Kath to get back.”

“We don’t know much” Marie explains “The Black Bulls are in her employ, but Perez was working for the Cheesemonger. He never interacted with her. I can’t imagine she’s on the Akitanian side of the network. Why bring the cargo all the way up here if that was the case. But it seems like Fortage is the contact between the two sides, so we haven’t found much.”

“We’ve got the coin the Black Bulls use.” Morgiana chimed in, twirling the faded denier on its chain “Red says she saw de Bries had one too.”

Gwae perked up, suddenly interested in the spinning coin. Morgiana noticed and wordlessly tossed it across the table. Gwae snatched it out of the air like a cat, spinning it in the light of the alchemical lamps, her ice-blue eyes twinkling with delight as she looked it over.

“Oh, I ‘aven’t seen one of these in a donkey’s years.” Gwae said excitedly. She stood up, not bothering to say anything as she exited the booth, running towards the back stairs, her silver-hair hair bouncing up and down as she bobbed through the crowd. Marie and Morgiana watched her go, then looked at each other.

“Do you think she’s coming back?” Marie asked

“Damned if I know” Morgiana shrugged “Our good neighbors in the Islands pull this kind of thing all the time, and Gwae’s even worse about it.”

“I hope she actually knows something useful and she isn’t just running up to put that thing in that box of hers. I swear that girl is part dragon. You know she actually paid Pierrick the Fishmonger a full gold livre just to get the change.”

“Fishy Pierrick?” Morgiana raised an eyebrow “The same one the Black and Whites sent to the Prison Island for passing out those counterfeit dragons like real money? Is she an idiot?”

“She said she ‘wanted a full set’, and that ‘the Arzhur II minting had an error on the sail’, whatever the Plain that means. She actually asked if he had any more counterfeits to exchange when he gave her a few real sets in the mix.”

“How has Gwae not been stabbed by a cagey counterfeiter in Port du Vin yet?”

“Well, some of Pierrick’s Shell friends did try. Kathalia threw them in the grand canal and Pierrick let Gwae search through his coffers for the dam coin. She was legitimately heartbroken when Brassarm finally sent him to Carrier’s resort.”

“What’s he serving?”

Marie shrugged “What do you think? The Viscount loves when he gets counterfeiters in. Didn’t wait a week for the execution.”

Gwae reappeared, bounding through the room with a small box, polished and inlaid with a variety of different woods in a geometric pattern. Breathlessly, she threw herself back into the booth, placing the box on the table with a wide grin. She slid a tiny silver key into the box, cracked the lid, closed it, and repeated the process several times. Finally satisfied, she spun the box around to show off the contents. Inside was a small pile of copper, silver and gold coins, emblazoned with the heads of forgotten nobles, as well as diamonds, gate houses and other symbols.

“This box” Gwae gestured to the open collection of coinage “are coins from the Fair Counties. The right to mint them was revoked by Konstanza I, so they’re very hard to get. And this...”

Gwae deftly moved her slender fingers through the piles, pulling out a shiny silver sol. Emblazoned on it was the head of a bull with curving horns, starker in relief than the worn copper coin, but clearly the same pattern.

“Is the coin of the County of Poher. The County was historically granted the right to mint coinage, but rarely did so. But in 1097, they minted a batch of copper deniers, silver sous and even gold livres to pay for a company of Akitankia mercenaries. I’ve never seen a Poher Livre yet, but I’d really like to get one. That and a Serenissima Ducat from . . . “

“Gwae. Focus.”

Morgiana interjected “I’m sure this is interesting to someone, but we already knew that the Black Bulls were active in Poher.”

“It would make sense to use the bull emblem, since that’s the standard of the Black Bulls. And the Fair County angle works with the Staunchists whole “purify the land” rallying cry. Nothing particularly new here.” Marie added.

“Nae, this is important!” She protested “The Konts minted enough to finance the whole donnybrook. They minted a rake of sous, like this one, but also golden livre for the commanders large expenses, copper denier. like this one, for everyday payment. But before the fleet arrived, their plot was discovered. Konstanza’s allies laid siege on their castles before the mercenaries arrived. They sailed into the Mor Bihan, but learned their that their contracts

were banjanxed, turned around and sailed home without ever setting foot in Letha.." She held up the two coins for emphasis as she spoke.

"A little more interesting, but I don't see who made the coins back in Konstanza's day being very helpful. That was what, 150 years ago? Plenty of time to end up goddess knows where and in whose hand." Morgiana said dismissively

"Nae, the opposite in fact. Those coins were an act of treason against the Dugez. Any they found in the Duchy would have been melted down. Most of the other coins from the plot were. But not Poher's." Gwae explained "One chest of silver Sous `left Gwened and arrived in the Free City of Karregennig. It was an advance to equip the fleet, but was neither the main payment or the quotidian payroll. A few sol coins from that chest were saved from destruction because they were spent in Akitania." Gwae exclaimed, her excitement betrayed by wild flailing "But unlike the other mintings, Poher's was never seized and melted down. Which means Moccus has access to that horde."

"Which you think is in the ar goat?" Marie asked.

Gwae nodded her head emphatically "Aye. Maybe in Poher, or somewhere close. We already knew they might be out there, given the attacks on merchant caravans, but I think this Lady Moccus is attached to one of the exiled noble houses from the Fair Counties."

"That seems like a stretch. Maybe she just stumbled onto it." Marie argued

Gwae shook her head "Nay, if she were a common thief, those copper coins would have been spent freely, not held to give a group of brigands a way to identify each other. But she kept them in reserve. That means she went in with a plan and knew that that horde was there untouched after all this time. And if the records of the other hordes seized from the conspiracy are true, it's quite a pile."

"So wait..." Morgiana's face lit up "You're saying that this Lady Moccus is sitting on top of a literal war chest of gold and silver?"

"Sure as a duck's foot drags weeds. Untouched since Kontanza was Dugez, unrecorded and with incredible purity of copper, silver and gold. Enough to fund a war."

"That kind of coin would explain why Fortage's goons are so intense. Marie mused "And she can't just spend it, so the Black Bulls hit the caravans, and everything flows through de Bries to clean it up. But where does the *Prince* fit in? They weren't part of the normal operation and robbing a crypt in Akitania seems completely out of the picture."

"Ye say that they had a sword in the hold of tha' wee boat?"

“Yes, an old Fomorian style sword.” Marie clarified “According to Perez at least. And a shield and a torque, but the former was broken and the latter they didn’t seem as interested in.”

“Aye, its right quare.” Gwae puzzled “There’s something we’re missing still. Maybe Kathalia will be able to fill in the gap.” Her thoughts returned to Kathalia and her continued absence. The Dark Bell had rung what seemed like ages ago and she expected the second chime at any moment, and yet her bodyguard was nowhere to be seen. As she mused, Sizhail, once again ducking out of Haizea’s view, slipped back into the booth with the silence of a practiced pickpocket.

“Birou just got back from Victory Bridge. He says no sign of Lady Kathalia, but there were some riders he thinks are the bad guys. They seemed angry and he said the one with the eye patch was among them and asked the guards if she had passed by before riding on.”

“Sounds like Fortage is having a frustrating night.” Marie commented “That’s probably a good sign if they’re still looking for her. And if the riders are only getting in at the closing of the gate, that bodes well too.”

“It’s a small relief, fer sure.” Gwae sighed “But I cannae shake a rotten feeling.”

“A rotten feeling... What if it’s an *Envorad* blade?” Marie said suddenly.

Gwae blinked.

“Like a ghost?!” Sizhail exclaimed, equal parts apprehension and intrigue on her face.

“Erm, a wee bit like a ghost...” Gwae tried to explain “But not quite... An *envorad* can appear as a spirit, but it’s more like an echo or a memory... Ye know how wands work?”

Sizhail shook her head “Magic wands are just... magic.”

“A magic wand is created when a bolt of lightning strikes the tallest branch of an old oak tree. All of the power of the storm and all the wisdom of Dervenn combine into a powerful instance of powerful *druidecht*. Or me staff.” Gwae lifted her silversteel staff onto the table for the girl to see. The triple spiral pattern in the staffhead, trimmed with gold, caught the silver alchemical light and shimmered, adding to the luster of the deep blue sapphire in the center.

“The gem was cast out of a dragonfire mountain far to the Red.” She explained, turning the staff so that the deep blue stone seemed to glow from within “It was buffeted by the 12 Winds and fell into a great and wild river. By the time it was found, it had the power and the magical energy that flows as the *hud* through all those things, compacted deep into it. It’s not a dragonfire mountain, or a river, or the wind, but it has a memory of those things. An *envorad* is like that... but for a person.”

“But aren’t *envorad* see-through and floaty?”

“That’s one kind fer sure. But they can be just voices, like the *begou-noz* or even a lingering will on a place or object. They are the results of strong flashes of will and powerful flow of *Hud*.”

“That’s why the spectral *envorad* tend to show up after disasters.” Marie adds helpfully. “Lots of flashes of power and emotion. But over a longer, steadier period, they can leave impressions that still try to compel the world around them. It would explain why the sailor at the crypt went berserk. All that power looking for an outlet after rebounding inside that tomb for so long? It had to go somewhere.”

“Ok...” Morgiana said, drawing out her words. “So Moccus sends these goons to loot a family tomb in some country home in Akitania, and bring back a possibly possessed sword from a time when people still used Fomorian blades? If Konstanza’s war is history, this is positively ancient stuff.”

“Konstanza’s War wasn’t that long ago.” Gwae protested “I remember hearing about it happening when I was still in Emain Ablach. I’m not “history!”

“Sorry to side with Morgiana here, Gwae.” Marie blushed, “but... anyone buried with one of those swords is old. Far older than the Fair Counties or the Poher horde. But that only leaves me more confused. If Moccus is working with the Staunchists, why seek out a sword like that? That’s very specific.”

“The whole thing has me on tenterhooks.” Gwae replied. “It’s a rotten business.”

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