# Introduction

# The Merchant’s Revenge

## Intro

wwwwwwdwwwdwwwawwww - takes me through the darkneess

Just as Wizardry is the granddaddy of all merchants and stores. Boltac is the granddaddy of all merchants and stores in CRPG. To understand how magnificent this character (really store, we never learn much about the man himself except (he’ll sell you his arms)) his character is merely imputed from his actions (as everyone’s is I guess.)

Boltac is then, a perfectly ruthless market. Arbitraging his monopoly privileged fully and perfectly every single time. In economic terms, he had perfect knowledge of the elasticity of demand. Something companies would give their eyeteeth to have perfect knowledge about. Perfect knowledge does not exist. And the whole of useful, durable knowledge about pricing can be summed up

If you’ve ever negotiated a salary or a project payment or for the purchase of a brightly colored statue, then you’ll know that feeling – that awful lingering feeling that you might have left money on the table – but that’s just the thing with Boltac. He never left money on the table. And he never lost a sale because he asked for too much.

– In short, he must have been the greatest Merchant there ever was.

What’s a story about that guy like?

To be honest, I have this predilection for telling ordinary tough-guy tales with people who are cunning rather than strong as protagonists (see also, How to Succeed in Evil) I also like business and know something about it. Where most writers seem know very little about how a market economy functions and like the idea of it even less.

But this time was a little different. This magnificent character was lurking there all the time. And to have the fat merchant be the guy who turns out to be the hero – well shit – that’s unexpected at every turn.

So I just had to write it. # The Merchant Adventurer

# Chapter 1 - The Bad Penny/A Plague of Heroes

Boltac decided, this was the day he was finally going to get that damned coin. He heaved his bulk off the stool, slid his dirk free of his sheathe, and grunted as he lowered himself to his hands and knees. His knees made explosive popping noises. Not for the first time today, he thought,“I’m old.”

In what little light that penetrated beneath his thick, oaken shop counter, He could make out the copper coin gleaming at him from the gap in the floorboards where it had been lodged.

He hadn’t remembered dropping it. But as long as he could remember, it had been there. Likely it was back from when times were good. There were a lot more coins to drop back then.

He had let it sit there for many years on the basis that tearing up his floor and having it repaired would cost more than one copper coin. A store was in the business of making money, and wasting good coin on a floor repair that a customer would never see didn’t make good sense.

Even though this was true, the coin had still worried Boltac. And in return, he had worried it. As he sat at his stool, or stood at the counter, conducting trade, he would rub the coin with his foot. As one might absent-mindedly tongue at a loose tooth until it came free.

But this coin never loosened in it’s socket. If anything it seemed to be burrowing deeper and deeper into the floor. And years of obsessive rubbing had left the top of the coin as bright as if it had newly minted.

If it was a constant reminder of what a profit was, and underscored that Boltac had not turned one for many years. Not since things had turned bad.

He placed the point of the dirk into the grain close to the side of the coin. Of course, this would leave an unsightly tear in his otherwise prisine shop floor, but Boltac didn’t care. Even though he didn’t have the money it would take to fix it, he was sick of the penny’s constant taunting.

Even rubbing it had cost him money. Three times he had his boots resoled because he had worn out the right toe rubbing that damned penny. And he needed to get them resoled again, but things had gotten so bad, even the bootmaker had left town. A sad, yet succinct commentary on the state of the town of Robrecht.

Boltac didn’t know what fresh disappointments the future would bring, but today, he would have his revenge. He raised the knife. He squinted as he took aim. He imagined the shock he would feel along his arm and the satisfying thud he would make as he dug out a chip of wood.

But before he could deliver the coup de grace, he heard the front door open.

“Nnnnngh,” Boltac said with obvious disgust, “A customer.”

He rose up from behind the counter, still clutching the knife. He tried, but failed in his effort to untwist the scowl on his face as he asked, “Can I help you… sir?” The only sincerity in whole display was in the knife. It was reassuringly and unambiguously sharp.

Near the door, looking unsure of himself, was a young man with broad shoulders and an unruly mop of long, blonde hair. He stammered, “I, uh, uh, I” he said eyes locked on the knife.

Boltac replaced the blade in his sheath, clapped his hands together as if to dispel evil spirits. He smiled with such effort it made his face hurt and tried again, “Welcome to Boltac’s General Store and Dungeon Outfittery. We have everything that a strapping young adventurer like yourself could need to loot your way to fame and glory.”

“We?” asked the lad, with the kind of farm-fresh innocence that comes from hard work, clean living and getting kicked in the head by livestock.

“Yes, the Royal We, or, in this case, the Shopkeeper’s We.”

“But there is only one of you,” said the lad, obviously confused.

“Yes, but,” Boltac ground his molars together for a second. “I am very eager to help you. What do you need?”

“I am about to embark on an adventure of high purpose and consequence.” With this last phrase, Boltac’s hopes lifted. These fancy words sounded like coin. Perhaps this was the customer – the one that would break the shadow of bad luck the store and city had been under. Perhaps, perhaps, he had money to spend after all.

“Ah yes, well, you have come to the right place.”

“I hope so, sir. As it is the only place in town.”

“Yes, the Duke of Robrecht himself has granted me license to purvey. He has an eye to quality, his Dukeship does, and with his warrant of commerce he personally guarantees that this,” he indicated his dark, dusty store with an expansive gesture of his hands, “Is the finest merchandise you can buy in town of Robrecht.”

“But it’s the only merchandise I can buy in the town of Robrecht.”

“Yes, I see that you are a quick study,” said Boltac, directing the young man through the shelves. "I invite you to direct your keen wit towards my wares. Here we have an assortment of torches and oil bearing devices. If you notice this one, with the curved blade on the handle – particularly good when you are surprised coming around a corner.

"Here, of course, we have our major and minor healing potions. A must for any prudent adventurer. These potions are brewed by the finest Mercian apothecaries and brought in by mule train once a moon.

"Armor, a

“And of course, swords. There are, various schools of thoughts on weapons. Some prefer pikes, some care for bows, but I am a traditionalist. A good dagger on one hip, a good sword on the other, and there’s not much a man isn’t ready for. And this,” Boltact said with hushed tones of awe

“Well, that’s no trouble at all,” he said, “we have a number of fine weapons, made by lesser known craftsmen – most never tested, but the mores the glory when the blade becomes famous in your hand, eh?” Boltac swung and indicated the rack of sheathed blades that extended from ceiling to floor.

Again the young man winced. “Uh, I’m afraid…”

Boltac’s smile collapse in upon itself like the poorly constructed thing it was. He shuffled over to the door and kicked a barrel filled with swords – some still bloody, all of them nicked, none of which had sheathes. “There’s always our discount barrel.”

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i’ve been trying to save money to buy the sword, sir. Scrounging for herbs, seeing if anyone needs rats killed. But the countryside is bare for miles around… he trailed off

And, thought Boltac, there’s not a coin left among the good (or, more to the point, morally quesitionable folk of Robrect to pay for pest control – and worse, any rat that dare show it’s tail has been snatched up, cooked and eaten by any one of the horde of ill-prepared adventurers who have descended upon the land seeking fortune and glory. )

They died in droves. They died in hordes. They died on the roads. Some drank themselves to death. They came back horribly wounded or touched in the brain, cluttered the thoroughfare.

The wizard, perhaps, was an evil – but this was certainly a plague of heroes.

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“I need to rent a sword,” he said.

“RENT A SWORD?” Boltac shouted. “Do you not see the sign?” he asked pointing at the sign which clearly read “All Sales Final.”

“I can’t read, sir.”

“Oh, of course not.”

“Please sir, it’s so I can rescue the love of my life. She was taken, you see. By the evil wizard Oddna.”

“Oh well, that changes everything,” said Colbac, as his face grew hard. “Tell me more,” he said, as if it was a dare.

“Well sir, she is a priestess of Dar. And, well,”

“Aren’t they supposed to be virgins? Them priestesses of Dar.”

The young man blushed and said, “It’s more of a suggestion, than a rule, sir. If you know what I mean,” his face grew serious, “but if it helps, I was a virgin, if you catch my drift.”

“Help? How would that help?”

“She’s gone and got herself into trouble. In the underkeep I mean. And if I had a sword, I could go and rescue her.”

“Oh lad, if you had a sword, I’m sure you could. In fact, a big strong lad like yourself could probably manage it with your bare hands.”

The boy looked shocked, “No sir, I could never…”

“Well, then, I suggest you find yourself another Priestess of the Eternal Flame of Questionable virtue.”

“What are you saying? Look, if you are insulting the virtue of my young–”

Colbac slammed a club of knotty wood down upon his counter. “You’ll WHAT?” he asked with great relish. He secretly hoping the boy would do something stupid so that he could vent his spleen.

In a quiet voice the lad said, “I’m not asking for a discount. It’s just a loan.”

“It’s the worst kind of discount of all,” shrieked Colbac, “It’s a 100% discount.”

“But I’d bring it back. Maybe with a few nicks, but definitely covered in glory.”

“Oh Glory is it? That would enhance the retail value.”

“Yes, yes,” he said eagerly, unaware of the trap he was falling into.

“Because you are such a great fighter.”

“Yes, that’s it.”

“Powerful, strong,” Colbac prompted.

“Yes.”

“Well then, how about this?” Colbac slowly lifted the club off of his counter and held it above his head. He watched as the young “fighter’s” trusting, cow-like eyes followed the weapons movement. Then, without the any hesitation of remorse or conscience, he dropped the heavy, burlwood shaft down on the top of his unarmored head. .

As the lad collapsed to the floor unconscious, Colbac felt secure in the knowledge that he had done him a favor as well as a concussion.

No, thought Colbac, you’re no kind of fighter at all. Too earnest. Too willing to play by the rules. You won fights by cheating. And heroes cheated more than anybody. No, the young lad was better off unconscious, at least he wouldn’t get his fool self killed by running off in the the dungeon.

Colbac came out from behind his counter and dragged the boy outside. By the scruff of his neck. Colbac was not pretty, he was not graceful, but he was strong. He dragged the lad across the street and propped him up next to a drunk who was sitting on the bench in front of the Inn. Ah, what adventuring lies they would tell each other when they woke up.

Instead of returning to the store, he trudged into the inn.

Smell of wood smoke, roasting meat and fine ale wrapped his senses in a comforting hug. On the left was a bar running the length of the building. To the left a common room with tables. Mostly empty now, given the hour of the day and the state of the town. But in the far corner, five people sat at one of the large round tables and clanked there tankards together.

“Huzzah,” they cried, “To us, the conquering heroes!”

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Goes to bar. Asks asarah is he can borrow an ale.

“I hate to think what condition you’ll give it back to me.” She quipped. And the. She smiled. And just like that, gravity was a little lighter and he forgot the problems of the world for a little while.

“Don’t worry, it will be liquid.”

And then, miracle of miracles, she laughed. She she shook her head and as he long black hair rippled like waves through the water the crusty old merchant melted and for just a second you could see the little boy inside.

Then she broke the spell by asking, “but seriously ’Tac” what’s gotten into you?"

“Oh, he said, running a hand through his thinning hair in frustration,”this kid just came into my store asking to borrow a sword."

What? You mean like you’d borrow a cup of sugar.

Yes, exactly. Except when you borrow a cup of sugar, you don’t go off and use it to get yourself kills trying to save some damn fool… What?

Priestess of Dar.

“Oh, virgin love,” she said with a look in her eye that made Boltac realize, telling the truth about the less than virginal priestess was the wrong thing to do.

“Hmmm,” he said into his beer.

“So, did you loan him the sword?”

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Now her eyes flashed dark against the wave of her hair. “How *could* you?”

“It was easy, actually, I just took my…” he trailed off, realizing that he just waded too deeply into the wrong answer. It did not pay to upset the only licensed provider of ale for 10 miles around, so he tried again. “Look, woman,” realizing that he had gone even farther wrong as he said it, “What do you think monsters in that dungeon would have done to him. It’s no pink tea you know.”

“Wouldn’t you go?”

“No I wouldn’t”

“And you *do* realize what it means?” she asked, laughing at him.

Boltac didn’t say anything. He looked away and his eyes unfocused as the memories tried to come flooding back. He took a long pull on the ale, gulping down nearly half of it.

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He turned to his right and beheld Rattick, too large and too watery eyes trying to fool him with their great sincerity. The glowed like great moons of reassurance. So dazzling they were that it was difficult to notice the pale, dead face that never smiled around them. Or, Boltac assumed, the knife that was coming to slit the strings on your coinpurse.

“Ah Rattick,” he said, “Have you taken those poor fools last coin before they could drink it.”

“No,” Rattick sighed with great sincerity, "but if I had, just if mind you, would that be so terrible? So parasitic? After all, we are all suffering from an economic downturn of such proportion, such magnitude, that bringing coin here to Robrecht and keeping it here, why it is a matter of our very survival.

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“Yes, you see that one there,” Rattick continued, “The one with the pan for a helmet. Yes, he is the *chosen one*.”

“Ah, of course, sent to to free us from the awful shadow of the wizard who has occupied the nearby tower.”

“Cavern, actually. Rumor has it the old Matteschitz mine collapsed into a gigantic, secret cavern in the earth.”

“Oh, ah, of course. Cavern. How silly of me,” said Boltac.

“And even know, the great wizard Oddna searches beneath the earth for relics and powers of which man was not meant to know.”

“Which, will inevitably bring about the destruction of all of the Duchy of Robrecht,” said Boltac, filling in the next verse. And recognizing it for the lie it was. He had never met the Wizard Oddna, and hoped he never would – he hated magic in a way that only a trader with a lust for certain, right and ordinary commerce can. – but if a man wanted to dig for objects in the earth, why shouldn’t he? As for the tales of horrible things happening and monsters roaming the land, Boltac couldn’t help but notice that these stories, and the twisted corpses and wrecked adventurers who had retunred, had only started turning up after adventurers had gone out in search of Oddna’s loot. Boltac knew what he would do to anyone he caught robbing his store…

“Yes, but of course. But thankfully, the chosen one is here to save us.”

“Hmm, thankfully.”

“Only, there is one, unexpected problem for this auspicious young man on his world-healing hero quest.”

“Yes,”

“You see the tall one, in the Mage’s robe.”

“Yes, the one covered in silly mystical symbols as only a true mage can be?”

“Yes. Turns out, he’s the chosen one. Too.”

“Ahh, so the chosen two.”

“Yes, I fear it will not end well for their party, but enough of the misfortunes of others. I have a certain item that I have come into possession of a certain item which I am certain you will be interested.”

“Step into my office,” said Boltac, as he slid off the stool and made his way to the door. But not before casting a longing look towards the kitchen. What would

CH 3 – the problem with magic items

Asarah – but you see that’s how she knows he loves her. He comes for her, risks everything against all odds for the love of his life.

Boltac – that’s how she knows he’s an idiot.

Asarah – You’re a bitter, bitter man.

Boltac – What because I make good sense?

Asarah – Because there’s no romance in your life. No passion. No magic.

Ugh, thought Boltac. Magic that’s worse than romance

-Isn’t that right, Asarah?" but when he turned back, she was gone.

He’s zero mostel

Rattick is Peter Lorre

The kid is…

THe duke is the guy from Best in Show…

Oddna is Peter Guest

Boltac stands up to a guy much taller than he is.

Next bit – hates himself for getting his hopes up. – he knocks the kid unconscious – drags him across to the inn and props him on the bench.

Gets a beer, flirts with Asarah – talks about how bad business has been. They talk about heroes – he’s bleak, “Why if it wasn’t for you good Red ale and your mutton sandwiches, I might give up hope altogether” he said, shocked to hear the truth from his own mouth.

Rattick comes to sell an item – she says, see things are looking up.

They go across the street – Rattick leaves – Boltac watches him go – sees the boy – gives him the sword. Comes back, there is a handmaiden there. She seeks a dagger for protection.

As he enjoys his beer, Rattick bends his ear a little. Seed the heroes

the store is dark brown, age polished wood, with a fireplace providing what little heat there is. There are windows of hand-blown glass.

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It was not a large store, but every square inch of it was packed with merchandise of one kind or another. Here were torches or various grades and sizes, a lantern that glowed when it came into proximitity with danger

By the door there was a bucket of used swords. There were spears, just for show, for dungeons and treasure hordes were confined spaces – not the kind of space

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| --- |
| For all he knew it could have been there for years. Maybe it was back at the beginning of it all. Back when times were good and the money and goods had flowed freely. Colbac slid his dirk out of it’s sheath and placed the point beside the coin. As he did, he heard the door open. His heart leapt with the thought that a customer had walked in the store. But other, more practical parts of him loathed the kind of person who walked into his store these days. It is difficult to be a shopkeeper who hates his clientle. For Colbac’s customers weren’t what they once were. |
| He had devolved from a purveyor of fine merchandise to traders and noblemen, to an outfiter. |

For the the 15th time today, Colbac looked down at the coin wedged between the dark, oak floorboards of his shop. It was a [shilling], not worth much. And it was so well-wedged in between the floorboards that Colbac believed to get it out would damage the floor more than the coin itself was worth.

He remembered when that coin had found it’s way into that crack. Those were busier times. He had spent his days rushing to and fro, helping the constant stream of noble customers that formed his clientle. For some it was spices from the East. For others the luxurious garments of silk that were woven only in the South. The men of the North brought furs that the locals prized highly. And all the finest homes were furnished with the choices items from the west. In those days, many a coin found it’s way to the floor amidt the hustle of business. And he remembered stepping on this one and feeling it slip into the crack.

Now it gleamed at him from the darkness beneath his counter, a reminder of how good things had been, and how bad they were now. A dark shadow had fallen across the Kingdom of Robrecht. The once proud trading post nestled in the high mountains at the intersection of the North road and the West Road (as the population to the South and East knew them) or the South Road and the East Road (as those to North and the West named them)

But one thing everyone agreed upon. In those days, Robrecht was at the center of everything. And at the center of Robrecht had been Colbac’s store.

Now he was lucky if a new day brought new coins. Or customer’s at all.

Colbac had slid down the retail ladder. He purveyed goods of the highest quality for the most discerning of customers. But now he had become a purveyor, a mere outfitter.

A powerful wizard had taken up residence in an abandoned mine to the North. This, in itself, was not the tragedy.

He gives the kid a sword.

He takes the kid with him.

In the middle of everything there is a small kingdom known as Robrecht. That it is a very small Kingdom is a fact often overlooked by the history book, as it is a place which gained much of it’s importance from it’s placement. It is in the middle of the continent, in the middle of a mountain range – in fact, it even got started in the middle of a river.

But that is a story for another time, what is important right now is that Robrecht (pronounced Raw-brecht) is even the middle of a mess.  
# Chapter 2 – The Homely Inn

Instead of returning to the store, he trudged into the inn.

Smell of wood smoke, roasting meat and fine ale wrapped his senses in a comforting hug. On the left was a bar running the length of the building. To the left a common room with tables. Mostly empty now, given the hour of the day and the state of the town. But in the far corner, five people sat at one of the large round tables and clanked there tankards together.

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Asarah – Because there’s no romance in your life. No passion. No magic.

Ugh, thought Boltac. Magic that’s worse than romance

* She gives him a bit of handkerchief and lace to see if he can find more of it. He set’s it as a favor on his helmet. (the ugliest helmet anyone had ever seen. That has a powerful magical ability, uniquely suited to Boltacs unusual (well unusual for an adventurer) skills.

-Isn’t that right, Asarah?" but when he turned back, she was gone.

04-DealingWithRattick.md

As he gets to his shop, she thows them both out on their ear. Chosen one not strong enough to get defeat an Innkeeper – what was the world coming to these days

Then Rattick, the thief comes into the shop. Just when he is going to have his ale in peace.

Sipping his ale, surveying his wares. Loving his goods and lamenting that there are so few buyers. Oh in the days gone buy

But now just some seedy adventurer selling rope.

“I have,” said Rattick, “a magic item of great power, that I could be persuaded to sell you. But understand, I feel I am making a mistake parting with it. It’s just,” his smile looked like a wound that had become infected with teeth, “I have a sister in Blovatia, and she’s terribly, terribly ill.”

“Yes. I understand how hard that can be,” said Colbac, “Having your only Sister taken hostage.”

“Hmmm,” he lied, “and with the illness and the strain of confinement I need money for the journey and for medicines and, of course for ransom. So loathe as I am to part with it, I must.”

“It is a sad tale of woe you tell, brave adventurer,” said Colbac, laying it on as thick has he could, “I am just happy that, humble merchant that I am, I have the means to purchase such a magnificent item, paying, of course, more than it is worth, because your sad tale of woe has moved me – turned my heart of stone into flesh once more.”

“Yeah,” said Rattick, not quite comfortable with Colbac’s sudden enthusiasm.

“So, shall I shower you in gold now, or can I see the item first?”

“Oh, right. Or course. I keeps it wrapped away for safekeeping.”

“I’m sure you do.”

Rattick reached into his pants, underneath his tremendous codpiece and retrieved a wad of dirty rags.

“Yes, I can see the value straight away,” said Colbac. “My nostrils fairly burn with it.”"

“Look you,” snapped Rattick, no longer comfortable with being out bullshitted, “I come here in the interest of serious commerce. And you mock me.”

It was all that Colbac could do not to continue the farce. He strained to make, “No, no, please. I am serious. Show me the item.”

Rattick set the ball of rags on the counter and began to unwrap it with great caution. As layer after layer was peeled, back, Rattick became even more careful, to the point where he removed the last covering with his sizeable and much-sharpened dagger.

This was Colbac’s first clue that the item was magic, and quite probably cursed. For reasons more primal than profit (survival being the only thing that Colbac put above profit) Colbac was an expert on magical items. Or more correctly, he was an expert on Wizards.

Wizards, you see ran to themes.

Gauntlets of self-abuse

“Well, what do you think?” Rattick demanded. Colbac said nothing. He backed away from what appeared to be a fist-sized ruby slowly, never taking his eyes off it. With one hand behind his back he opened the cabinet that held his most prized possession – his gloves.

The popular name for them were Gauntlets of Negation, but the name was inaccurate. The Gauntlets did not negate magic, put rather, were perfectly magic neutral. Like a lightning rod conducts magic away from a house, these gloves conducted magical energy away from the use. They remained totally neutral to the effect of any spell, charm, hex or incantation.

For all there rarity and power (some even thought them not to exist) they looked like a gigantic pair of wool mittens. The kind that looked like they should be connected by a long strand of yarn to prevent them being lost or separated by an absent-minded or irresponsible child.

As Colbac donned his gloves, Rattick eyed them greedily. They were easily worth several hundred times more than the jewel on the counter. Colbac could see the thought floating in the thief’s eyeballs – *if only I could steal them*. Colbac thought little of it. After all that’s the exact kind of thought that should drift through a good thief’s mind. But there was something else about his glance. Something that bothered Colbac.

“So, where’d you get this magnificent jewel then?”

“Oh, I, uh, that is to say, I prized it from the deepest depths of the Lair of the Mad Wizard, Oddna.”

“You?”

“Yes, a brilliant bit of thievery, if I do say so myself.”

Colbac’s hand stopped inches above the jewel. The whole scene could have easily taken on an air of the absurd, if not for the obvious fear that both men had for the object on the counter. “You, yourself then?”

“Yes, the pride and prince of thieves I am.”

“Oh, I can well see that,” Colbac said with smile that got no farther than his lips. “But here’s the thing. If I was a thief…”

“Oh, don’t sell yourself short Gov, you should hear the things that are said about you around town.”

“… if I was a thief, instead of just a man with a deep and abiding love for negotiation, I wouldn’t waste my time or energy frittering around in some dungeon. I’d find myself a nice seat at the dungeon’s entrance.”

“You would,” said Rattick, playing along as if every one of Boltac’s words were cast from the purest fascination.

“Then’d I’d sit there until the last survivor of a party of adventurers came along. Battered, bedraggled, probably half-dead –”

“Or three quarters dead, if you really want to save yourself the effort,” Rattick offered.

Botlac nodded acknowledgment and continued, “Then’d I slip a knife in his kidney and go through his pockets for loose change and valuable magical items.”

“You’ve got quite an active imagination there, Gov,” said Rattick, looking more afraid than guilty.

“I’m sorry, did you say active or accurate.”

“I said, active.”

“Well,” said Boltac, with a shark’s smile, “It makes no difference to me, you see. I’m just a man who acquires useful and resalable items for the benefit of my customers.”

“Yes, I can see that,” Rattick said with great relief.

“So, tell me, this unfortunate man who bequeathed you this jewel with his dying breath.”

“Ohhh, I like that one better. And it sounds so good when you tell it.”

“What he in his right mind.”

“Yes, yes, right and generous he was.”

“Was he, perchance, muttering anything. Acting strange in any way.”

“Come to think of it,” Rattick said with a sheepish grin, “He was going on about some beautiful girl. And how he had to save her.”

“Ah, I thought as much,” said Colbac. “I will give you a gold piece for your accursed gem.”

“Accursed gem. Why Gov. you wound me. You really, really do. Do you think I would pass off accursed merchandize to a man of your standing.”

“Only if you thought you could get away with it.”

“I cannot take so little. That’s highway robbery, that’s what that is.”

“Yes, and you would know. If a gold piece isn’t enough”

“5 gold.”

Then just collect your stone and go. Rattick’s hand moved forward, then he checked himself. He knew what it was and he was loathe to touch it. One brush of a man’s skin and the mindstone would posesses his thoughts utterly. Inserting desires and thoughts into it as one might inject poison into a sausage.

No man would want such a fate. Even Colbac was wary of it ( as he was wary of all magical items. ) How much happier he would be if there were no magical items left in the world.

It was a mindstone. Anyone could see that. "

As Colbac waddled back into his store with all the grace of a hermit crab claiming a new home. He turned in the door way and then glared out into the early evening, as if daring any other adventurer to darken his doorway. From across the dirt road he heard laughter from the inn. His face twisted into a scowl as he thought of them in there. The boastful and the proud. The pretty and the brave. The one’s who thought they were heroes in the making, but would all, sooner or later, wind up in Colbac’s shop, broken and broke, asking for money.

Please sir, they would all say, just a little bit more for this amulet, can’t yous see the magic in it. I just need a little more to pay a healer to deal with this salamander bite.

Colbac slammed the door as hard as he could. The panes of glass in his shop window rattled perilously but they held.

He rubbed his leg again. These were the last days of summer and already he could feel the Winter’s storms approaching in his hip. He settled back onto his stool and had a sip of beer.

For a while, he stared at the door, as if daring the world to send another customer. But then his gaze wandered around his shop. To Colbac, of course, it was nothing special. It was his home and his store room all rolled into one. But for those broke and struggling adventurers across the street, Colbac’s shop seemed a treasure trove. Here were enchanted Mage Robes that were stronger than steel. Heavy plate armor that not even a dragon’s breath could melt. There were weapons of every imaginable size and quality. But the finest (displayed in the magically sealed case behind the counter)

She is a high southron woman, of great breeding. Her dark skin wrapped in furs against the cold.

1. Add the bits about magical items.

One could never tell with Oddna

1. Woman from the castle comes by. He mentions that he must come to the tower of mists to peruse the library.

“No wait! Don’t touch that!”

“But it is so pretty,” said the Lady-in-Waiting.

“Yes,” Boltac said, slamming a hand in a heavy woolen gauntlet over the top of it to prevent the gentle woman from whatever God-awful thing the stone might be capable of, “but who knows what else it is.”

“You mean,” she asked in the hushed tones of one who has live their entire lives behind large stone walls protected by brave men, “it’s magic?”

“Yes,” said Boltac, “It is most certainly magic, but what kind I cannot say just yet.”

“Black magic.” she in a nearly breathless whisper.

“No, all magic is the same color – and it’s all bad, no matter how helpful it might seem at first. But this gem, I have not yet been able to identify. I fear shall need to visit the library in the Misty Tower, before I can know for sure. Tell me, how fares the Duke today?”

With this question, her fascination with the mystery of the jewel disappeared. A dark frown blew across her face and disappeared into the blue sky of courtly manners. “Yes, the Duke, he is… well. Making preparations.”

Preparations, thought Boltac. When the Duke made preparations, it was almost always bad for business. But still

{Add river pouring out out of the lake.}

Robrecht was a city that had grown up around a place of fortitude. It was one of the great paradoxes that a city that was seemingly in the middle of nowhere could be at the crossroads of everywhere. And while it was lonely and remote, it had always been plagued by raiders and bandits and generals at the head of armies on their way to conquer somewhere bigger and with more resources but who figured, “Eh, while we are here,” we might as well soak up this little place.

As a result, Robrecht had developed some very interesting coping mechanisms. First, the citizens had no illusions about kings or crowns or cults or any such thing. Their allegiance was to themselves and their neighbors. And against any tax collector of any shape or size anywhere. In fact, the Robrechtians (seldom, if ever called that due to the awkwardness of the term) were famous for their apparent poverty amid great wealth. They had it, for sure.

As the citizens were realists, the city would allow itself be conquered at the drop of a hat. Only after the invading army had let down it’s guard, installed it’s local officials and had sent the soldiers away, would they commence to fighting.

Some of the resistance was passive. Not so much a refusal to collect taxes, but a general incompetence at it. “I’m sorry Guv, there’s been so many different people with their hands in the pot, I forget what gets taxed and what doesn’t.” And who could blame them. The average amount of time any one flag flew over the city was about five years.

Some of the resistance, however, was active. And the design of the city itself seemed to support this. Winding, inconsistently named streets that folded back in upon themselves with neither rhyme nor reason. Brain a guardsmen with a paving stone and you disappear into the winding, misty streets before the watch knew what happened. In fact, if you weren’t born and raised in this strange, bifurcated city, you stood virtually no chance of chasing down a native on foot. So it was that invading policeman grew fond of heavy helmets and tolerant of local customs.

The city itself was split into two halves. In the distant, storied past, there had been two towns, Ro and Brecht. Each on it’s own side of the deep chasm cut by the river Swift as it thundered down from the high mountains and into the capacious plains of the Southern Kingdoms. And while they were separated by the river, the were drawn together by the bridge. Or rather, bridges.

You see, in the middle of the chasm there was an island of rock too hard to be washed away by the River Swift. For centuries the river had tried. And the battle between the seemingly impervious stone and the certainly unstoppable river had waged longer then the memory of man. At the center of the city was constant roaring noise and a cloud of mist.

So a bridge was built from the east and bridge was built from the west. Initially, the inhabitants of Ro and Brecht only met in the middle to fight. Then to trade. Then, when faced with external mauraders

When bloodthirsty hordes

As Boltac walked the cobblestone streets from his store to the high, arching bridge, he could see a Tower rising from the cloud of mist.

there had been two towns separated by the deep chasm that had been cut throughout the centuries by the River Swift

So it was said that the City of Robrecht could only be truly sacked if the Tower of Mists was abandoned. As Boltac stood in the midst of an empty throne room.

Boltac stood in an empty throne room. Actually, it was worse than empty, from all outward signs it had been hastily abandoned.

The cushion was missing from the large walnut chair that served as, well throne, was perhaps too generous of a term. The chair in the raised place that let everyone else in the room know that the person who sat here was someone not to be trifled with. Someone who, no matter how small the Kingdom, or Dutchy (depending on the day) of Robrecht might appear to be to the casual observer

Someone had even tried to take the ornate tapestry that covered the west wall of room. Most of it was a ripped off the wall and in hung by only a handful of attachment points. He imagined a poor servant, perhaps the last man out, scared out his his mind, the last man to flee, pulling frantically on a corner of the great tapestry.

Perhaps he thought he could sell

Well, thought Boltac, th

But no one sat in the Seat. There was no justice in Robrecht.

Yes, politics was always in flux in Robrecht. It was the only place Boltac had ever heard of that manage to be simultaneously at the middle of everything and a long way away from anywhere. But still, this was a bit much.

So the Duke had run away, and his entire household with him. This boded not well for the smallfolk of Robrecht. Of course the Duke

“We deserve better than this,” muttered Boltac. There was a whistling noise, and Boltac watched fog blow through the room and disappear into the tapestry.

Hmm, thought Boltac, not failed theft, but rather failed deception. He brushed the remnant of Robrecht’s heroic and probably false past aside to reveal a secret door set in the stone. The heavy stone door swung noislessly on well-crafted hinges with the movement of the air through. Only the torn tapestry had prevented it from closing.

So that’s where they went. He hadn’t know that there had been a secret way out of the [misty tower.] A handy thing to to know. And an even handier thing to keep you yourself.

For a moment, Boltac thought about descending. About leaving the whole mess behind him. Sure he would lose his inventory, but it wasn’t like the store was selling much. On top of which, now that the Duke was gone, Boltac’s monopoly was by no means a sure thing. Whether he wanted to go out of business or not, it looked like that would happen.

But no. There might be a time to give up hope, but it was not yet. “Not yet,” he said aloud to the empty room, as if trying to convince himself.

One of the windows

In some ways, it was the heavy fog and mist that surrounded the

The keep was built on an island.

0x-The-Party

Mephisto - Mage \*\* chosen one Gwendolyn - Healer Taran - Fighter \*\* chosen one Alderbourg – Ranger

“But I am the chosen one!” proclaimed the man in a mail shirt so cheap the rings were large enough to poke a sword through.

“HOW DARE YOU!” shouted the man in the midnight blue Mage Robes, “You are merely a brute. A swinger of heavy implements. A bleeder of common blood. Chosen, perhaps, to carry my bags. But nothing more.”

“C’mon, guys, calm down,” said the bored looking man dressed in Lincoln Green. “We’re all on the same side here.” He was clearly a Ranger, and the only member of the party who had seen action

“Yes, please,” implored the stocky woman who wore white and smelled of incense. “The true chosen one is has not been chosen to spread discord, but rather to spread concord and peace throughout the land.”

“SHUT UP!” both of the “chosen ones” snapped at the healer. Who stuck her lower lip out and turned her offended sensibilities towards the wall so that no one could the tears welling up in her eyes.

The mage looked on the fighter with disdain. “How dare you talk to her that way. She is a priestess in the Holy Order of…”

“But, but, but, you…”

“Yes, words fail you, often don’t they. The blood that flows through your veins is coarse and common.”

“Oh yeah,” said the fighter as he grabbed the hilt of his sword and pulled, “And what kind of blood do you bleed? Chosen blood?”

“You dare to trifle with the great Mephisto!” shouted the Mage. He barked a word in the old speech and gestured with his hands. The fighter’s half unsheathed sword froze in it’s scabbard, and no matter how hard he pulled, he could not budge it another inch.

“Oh, son of a whore. Now you are going to pay.” The fighter advanced on the Mage meaning to tear him limb from limb with his bare hands. But he found that his right hand would not unwrap from the sword. With his right arm trapped across his body, he moved awkwardly and found it difficult to use his left hand. With his free arm, he lunged at the Mage.

The Mage dodged out of the way with a high-pitched laugh that sounded like the noise a small woodland creature would make when something unseemly was done to it.

“You cannot defeat the chosen one,” cried the Mage as he poured a tankard of ale over the fighter’s head. “Peace, brothers, peace” cried the Healer, “We are all on the same side,” she finished without much conviction.

“SHUT UP!” They both cried, and then resumed their confrontation.

In his flailing struggles to free his arm, the fighter tripped over a chair leg and knocked the entire contents into the healer’s lap. Drenched in beer, and pinned against the sooty wall of the tavern, she reached her breaking point. She looked down upon her temple robes, the sign of her profession, great purity, devotion to the continued sustenance of all life on Earth and the obscene amount of time she spent keeping them clean and free of stains. They were covered with mutton grease, red wine, mead and the yeasty trails of the Inn’s red Ale.

“THAT’S IT!” She shrieked. The whole room froze.

He looks like he’s about ready to ride his horse into a low-hanging tree.

Oh those lot don’t have horses. In fact, I’m a little bit worried about them having enough for the tab.

Cut them off then.

No, no, no, she said in a kind way that was largely inappropriate for an Innkeeper.

Boltac heaved his bulk up out of the chair and took a firm grip on his walking stick, “Well, if you won’t, then I’m happy to.”

“No, sweet friend, I don’t want any trouble.”

“Trouble? From them?” asked Boltac

For the first time, Asarah saw a glint in the merchant’s eye that gave her pause. “No, please, I don’t want to have to pay for the breakage,” she said.

“Hmm,” said Boltac, shrinking back into himself, “Makes sense. Have I ever told you about the coin in my floor?”

“Only every single time you come in here you sad…” she began, not unkindly, but was unable to finish because of a gigantic whooshing sound as the Mage lost control of his fireball spell and the far side of the common room was enveloped in flames.

With a gigantic whoosh, the other side of the room went up in flames as the Mage lost control of his fireball spell. In his defense, he wasn’t completely incompetent. His concentration had slipped because the healer had his him over the back of the head with a chair.

“Oh dear,” she said, as she watched the fire leap across the dry wood.

Set up Boltac talking to the wizard.

Have the wizard secretly cast a spell to quench the fire.

[when they face the troll, the mage tries the spell and it doesn’t work. He and the fighter look at each other – “It was supposed to work.”

“You’re an asshole,” said the fighter. Then the troll crushed him to the earth with one massive arm. The healer began screaming.

] # Boltac Plan

part one –

The kid he gives the sword too follows him.

Through Boltac defeats the Troll – Make it seem like Boltac is going to fight – honor and all that. But he uses trickery

part two – Oddna (if that is his name.)

jump to him dealing with trouble in the Dungeons. Finally he posts the troll. All he really wants is to be left alone.

Set up the bit about summoning the essence of magic to this world. Able to control it. To tap into the purest source.

He has matured. First he made trinkets. Second he made life. Now he has gone to the source of all his power. It was a fine progression for a wizard.

He has the innkeeper working for him. (I’m not going to have your children \_- don’t be rediculous. these are all my children. I made them.)

# Chapter Breaks

## Boltac Runs the store

Encounters, including  
  
Kid comes to "borrow" a sword  
  
Rattick sells a jewel ( a mind stone )  
  
Wealthy noblewoman's maid comes in -- turns out she's buying a small dagger for her nephew. Something seems strange -- need this quickly. Please, none of you chatter, my good man, just do it.   
  
 He checks her coins to see if they are creepers.

## Goes for Dinner and a Pint

Romance with Innkeeper.   
Conversation with stranger {actually Oddna} (says he's a trader)  
Boltac spills the story of the ruin of the town.   
  
The fight breaks out, "No, I'm the chosen one."  
  
Wizard says, If you'll excuse me.  
  
Well that one slipped", say Asarah. Boltac wasn't so sure. It looked like he had been poleaxed, but the little man had never touched him.   
  
Boltac goes to get Dinner -- flirts with \_\_\_\_\_\_ She goes away and he talks a myserious stranger (Wearing sunglasses?) who turns out to be Oddna. They talk about how delicious the sandwiches are.   
  
Some adventurers break up the tavern (in a fight over who is really the chosen one) Boltac gets the Innkeeper outside -- they call for the guard, but no guards come.   
  
He consoles her -- let them fight it out -- then we will petition the Duke in the morning. stranger says, "What a shame it is. You have such a nice place here." And then he leaves -- on his way to the door a man tries to strike him but suddenly his back seizes up.   
  
She comes in the morning and they have left.   
  
She cries on his shoulder. (She's stronger than I am, thought Boltac, I cannot unburden my sorrows. The rules of youth stayed with him.)

## Petition Duke – Orc’s attack

Adventurers have left without paying. "young and in search of glory," thinks Boltac, "What's beating the check compared with being late to saving the world?"  
  
Remembers the Duke granting him license to run the store. (hint at his younger misadventures)  
  
Something is wrong (guards are gone -- everybody is gone.)  
  
 Boltac says he will go to the Duke (who no one has seen in some time) The Duke is gone, the secret passage is open obviously the household has beat a hasty retreat. What the fuck is going on?  
  
 As he descends from the keep he sees the invading horde. Boltac calls the alarm. His spirit swells large -- he feels the blood pumping in his veins again -- he tries to run, but his lame leg trips him up. He falls in the street and rolls through the mud.   
  
  
Orc's riding in on wolves. He puts up Boltac's bar of warding -- puts a magical seal across the door. But through the window, he sees he Orc's converge on the Inn -- Asarah!  
  
Grabs a sword from the sword stand (a cheap thing, heavy and ill-balanced) but a young voice inside him, said, "You'll not need more to dispatch a few Orc's"  
  
He opens the door -- slays one Orc, slays the next -- then he feels something tear in his chest -- it is the old wound -- and he drops the sword. An Orc is about to smash his head in with a club -- when his captain barks -- Let's go. Over his shoulder he carries Asarah  
  
She cries out, "Help! The mace comes down on Boltac's head -- "  
  
Darkness. He is awakened by the rain. He has wolf prints on his chest. He crawls across the way to his store. Uses his good arm to pull the cork out of a healing potion -- takes a long pull and surveys the wreckage of his store.   
  
Bunch of shit has been stolen -- all the stuff in the display case -- the costume jewelry of weapons and armor. Someone tried to make off with the plate armor, but it was too heavy and they abandoned the task halfway through -- there are long drag marks in the floor.   
  
Looks at the coin still trapped in the floorboards.   
  
He bars the door -- even the rain is cannot pass the broken windows.

## Rattick on the road

"It was Rattick who had suggested that the adventurers leave without paying."  
  
Rattick guiding them on the road. Rattick knowing something of the world and how it works. Rattick feeding them to the troll.   
  
The adventurer's complain -- fine says, Rattick, we will camp.   
"Because we want to be rested for the adventurer ahead." Not that it will make a difference -- thought Rattick. Rested? For adventure? What were these children playing at. Adventure was a matter of being cold, hungry, tired on the verge of starvation and every so often getting rich, getting the girl and being able to see and do things that few people ever get to do.   
  
He feeds the adventurers to the Troll, collects their stuff and gets out.

## On foot, quietly, with a bag over his shoulder and his cane at his side.

He walks off the road, moving as quietly as he can through the brush. After a day of walking, he finds a hot spring. Has the last mutton sandwich, rolls himself in a blanket and goes to sleep under the stars. He almost feels good, but then he remembers that night so long ago.   
  
FLASHBACK -- the party under the stars around a fire grim Boltac, laughing, drinking, boasting. Vowing to defeat the PARLAC  
  
(Later it turns out that the PARLAC was Oddna's first creation -- a failure, but one that had a life of it's own.) Oddna killed all his friends -- then put a blight upon the land -- killing Boltac's parents.   
  
Sleep -- nightmares  
  
Oddna posted a troll -- but he doesn't tell him the full story. Like a master liar, he tells just enough of the truth to get him off the hook.

## Tale from Rattick’s perspective

Unto his deathbed Rattick swore that as he took his first steps back into the cave he had no expectation or knowledge of what would happen next. His only, as he would explain in all the thousands of times he told the tale, was whether or not the Troll had room for another course. He had never known a troll to become full, but  
  
"Now, shhhhhhh, his lair is up ahead and"  
  
"TROLL!"  
  
"What Why would you do that? You're crazy. You want to be a hero just like the rest of those idiots!" and Rattick ran away. A short distance, at the first bend, his curiousity got the best of him. Sticking to the shadows, he moved backwards to where he could get a good view.   
  
He describes the fat man waddling forward, pulling a mace from his pack (seemingly too large to fit into the bag, but no matter) He hears the snuffled breathing of the troll. As if the creature had bushes growing in his nostrils.   
  
Looks rediculous, a little man with a club in his hand facing a giant abomination of rock hard muscle held together by gristle and appetite.   
  
The troll opened his maw and roared down at the fat merchant. Colbac was not fazed in the slighest. He flipped the Mace around and lofted towards the Troll handle first. The Troll thinks nothing of it and catches the mace. A moment later the Troll collapsed to the ground as if crushed by a great, invisible weight.   
  
 As it flew through the air, Rattick had just enough time to think, "What kind of idiot spots a Troll a weapon. Who does this man think he is. The second coming of the Great Shapoinon?"[^1]  
  
He watches Colbac waddle over and kneel down by the Troll's gigantic, misshapen head. He can hear that Colbac is speaking to the creature, but he cannot understand the words. The Troll moans something.   
  
Rattick draws closer. "What are you asking him."  
  
  
  
They descend

## The Orcish ceremony

## Wandering Monster

Colbac is very heroic and leads them off after him. "Run, I'll draw the rest. "  
  
They get separated.   
  
Rattick returns. With a gladness in his heart. Expresses gratitude.  
  
"You are my employee. I take care of those who work for me."

## Finds girl in Oddna’s Court

You shouldn't have come to rescue me.

## Rattick Betrays him

Taken before Oddna.

## He tries to buy the Girl

So he goes into the dungeon. The woman tries to get him to leave -- You've come to fight for my Honor. I thought you were smarter than that!"  
  
"No, I'm not here to fight for your honor. I'm here to buy you."  
  
"BUY ME! What do you think I am, some kind of whore!"  
  
"Keep your voice down," said Colbac, but by then it was too late.   
  
Monsters sprung up from all corners of the room. The menagerie scuffled and howled as their master rose from his couch and waved light into the room with a wizarding gesture.   
  
"What have we here? Why it is my fellow mutton lover. Tell me, what brings you to the depths of my lair."  
  
Colbac could see no percentage in lying. He jerked a thumb at [THE INNKEEPER] and said, "Her."  
  
"Oh really, is it true love?" asked Oddna with great relish. When they both blushed, he laughed. "Oh my, it \_is\_ true love. And I thought it was rarer than unicorns. But wait, no it can't be true love, because you told me you had no interest in her. Or don't you remember. I admit, I was in disguise, but I would think a sophisticated man of commerce, such as yourself, would remember."  
  
"I said she wasn't my \_\_\_\_\_, that doesn't give you liscense to steal her."  
  
"I don't care for being stolen, Roderick," said [the INNKEEPER]  
  
"Roderick?" asked Colbac with a snicker, "Well no wonder you've turned evil in your dotage. Was it all those children who taunted you in school that turned your heart to evil?"  
  
Oddna looked at him for a long time. Long enough for every creature in the room, except the strange, powerful wizard to grow uneasy. Mostly it was his smile. It seemed to grow and grow, stretch endlessly under those dead eyes.   
  
"Yes, you are right. I have stolen her, fair and square, and she is mine. And you have come to fight for her. Take you pick of the creatures you see here before you. You may fight any one of them for her hand. Then, if you win, you may fight the rest of them. And then, if you defeat all of them, you may do battle with me."  
  
"No," began Colbac.  
  
"No? What do you mean no? You have come here as an adventurer -- as the Hero -- to rescue the damsel in distress. You must fight? You must. That's how these things work."  
  
"I'm not here for a fight. You stole her, fine, she is your property, but I thought perhaps we could make a a deal."  
  
"BUY ME!" protested Sarah, "is that your idea of chivalry. Buying the woman you love back from..."  
  
"I never said anything about Love or Chivalry," Colbac snapped in that way that you can only get angry about someone you really, really care about. "You know how many men have tried to defeat the great Oddna? You know how many have succeeded?"  
  
"None," said Oddna with a great swelling of pride. "I'm entirely too powerful to be defeated by any but the chosen one, if he even exists. And if he does exist, I'm sure he's not a short, grubby, lame merchant from the backwater town of Robrecht."  
  
"Yes, yes, mighty Oddna -- you are a rich, wise and powerful man. Quick to perceive your own advantage and capitalize on it. So I offer you a lucrative trade."  
  
Oddna's red eyes narrowed, "A trade you say, tell me more..."  
  
Colbac reached into his bag of holding and withdrew a large coin purse that he showed to be overflowing with gold. "I offer 100 gold pieces for the girl."  
  
"Girl?" Oddna snorted, "A handsome woman, certainly, but not a girl."  
  
"The offer stands, a 100," he hefted the purse and reconsidered, "A hundred and two gold pieces, for [THE INNKEEPER]"  
  
"But I have such a love of her mutton sandwiches. Crisp and fatty and delicious."  
  
"I cannot compel one so powerful as you to do anything, but my offer presents you with a clear choice -- mutton sandwiches, or the gold."  
  
"Oh that word. I cannot abide that word. Or. So harsh on the pallet, so cruel to the ear. I do not accept ors."  
  
Colbac nodded his head deeply in recognition. I understand Great Wizard. I understand. But all life is trade-offs. You can't have your cake and eat it too. Surely you understand this. The money or the girl."  
  
"No, I'll take the and."  
  
"And," asked Colbac.  
  
"And," asked [THE INNKEEPER]  
  
"Unh?" grunted the Orcs

## All is lost

Boltac tells him not to open the bag with the gold. There are forces in there that are too powerful for you.   
  
What? Let me tell you how powerful I am -- boast and brags. Source of all magic.   
  
You see this smudge the Kolbolds are cleaning here. Yes that a retainer of mine who sought to channel that power. Burned him to a crisp, instantly." He kicked the giant oaken bucket and slopped water out on the poor, wretched creature scrubbing the floor. "Put your back into it, or I'll make your cousin's clean up a black spot that it you!"  
  
I have to be very careful -- what I do here, what I put through the portal has tremendous consequences for magic everywhere and at all times. If this flame goes out -- the portal between our world and the next -- the conduit through which the magical energy flows would be shut off. Magic itself might disappear!  
  
"Ah,"" said Colbac, "The antikathetiton,"  
  
"You know this arcane device?"  
  
"Yes, first attempted by Myglorg the One-eye, the great Orcist wizard of the Methorian age. I thought it was a myth."  
  
"So did I. But you can see my genius has brought it back to life. But how do you know of such things?"  
  
Explains about identifying magical items. Reading books in the Duke's library. Asking questions.   
  
So, you can see that I am more powerful than any wizard that has ever been.   
  
"Well, you've certainly got the ego for it," said Colbac with a smile.   
  
"Alright, tear him from my misery -- "  
  
Colbac warns him again. And then he whistles.   
  
Oddna, sends up a warding spell, very quickly then asks, "Was that all? I mean really, a whistle. Not even a spell of Darting Death. A teleportation? A magic missle. Nothing? Just a whistle?"  
  
"Just a whistle."  
  
"Ahk!" cried one of the Orcs. He beat  
  
Coins devour his minions. Chaos ensues.   
  
"YOU!" thundered Oddna. He raised his hands and pointed his fingers, no doubt to cast some terrible spell. But quickly the finger spread in supplication.   
  
Colbac hefting the bucket.

## Rattick escaping, time to head to the South – to warmer climes

Back to Rattick’s POV – he escapes with his gold. He heads high into the mountains to a little village where he has a girl (he ha a girl in every village)

He figures things have cooled down, so he’ll head South with his gold, to the Kingdoms of the Sun – enjoy the life of luxury to which he can easily become accustomed.

He actually makes it there (medieval Miami) and he is hit over the back of the head. Thrown in the back of the wagon. (the fog blowing through the wagon windows would have given it away if nothing else.)

He’s caught at the border and hauled before the King

“Wash yourself, you are to appear before the King.”

“King of Robrecht? Everybody knows Robrecht doesn’t have a King.”

Ranger cuffs him and tells him to be quiet.

## Colbac reveals what happened. He makes Rattick his minister.

Colbac hires two legions of soliders

"No Rattick, I don't want to trust you. I want you to try everything you possibly can. If I'm safe against my friends, I will be safe against my enemies."  
  
"My Lord, I am at your service."  
  
"And remove the sarcasm from your voice Rattick. I actually am a Lord now." He unfolded four sheets of paper.   
  
He had gotten all the kingdoms to recognize him as king in return for a treaty that allied Robrecht   
  
"You will go to war with everyone?"  
  
"No. We will be neutral."  
  
"Neutral," asked Rattick, "you mean as a ruse?"  
  
"No, I mean we will be neutral."  
  
  
And you are Lord Colbac?  
  
"No Rattick, I have adopted a new name consitutient with my new station in life. I am the first Lord Robrecht. Now kneel before me and accept your knighthood."   
  
"Knighthood?"  
  
"Yes Rattick. What's the matter? You think Kings shouldn't have a sense of humor."  
  
"This is going to be a very different sort of kingdom, my liege," Rattick said without a hint of sarcasm."  
  
"Yes, Rattick, it is. There's no magic anymore, Rattick. Who knows where the progress will stop."  
  
"Progress is magic, my liege."  
  
"Well spoken, Rattick. I distrust your flattery, but well spoken."  
  
"You are right to do so, my liege."  
  
"Just so."

Rattick is stopped at the border. He is dragged before the King – turns out to be Colbac

The Merchant Heroic. The Bourgeois Heroic. The Burgher Heroic.

## Rattick at the end.

At the end he asks the guard why he serves a merchant, oh, well me, when there's no fighting to be done, I serve gold. But when edge meet edge, I follow courage.   
  
Courage, but he's a merchant, a particularly cunning and greedy one, who drives a hard bargain.   
  
He's the King -- but before that he was a hero -- do you know what he did before he became a merchant -- saved blah blah blah.

Oddna throws him into the land of misfit toys

1. Adventurer’s ruin everything. I’ll go for the guard. They can’t find the guard. Boltac says, let them sleep if off and we’ll sort it out in the morning.
2. Boltac up early, looking for Shaftro, Captain of the Duke/King’s guard. But the barracks are empty – the castle gate is unmanned. Asarah comes to him crying – the adventurers have left. Boltac says he will go to the Duke (who no one has seen in some time) The Duke is gone, the secret passage is open obviously the household has beat a hasty retreat. What the fuck is going on? 4.Rattick on the road with the party. Flashback to them hiring him. They talk tirelessly. Hiding from the Orc rush. Brings them into the dungeon. They get eaten by the Troll. (oh, yes, easily vanquished by the chosen one) They all rush forward. (Leave your packs, I will guard them) Rattick hides in the shadows. Then he goes forward to fork through the goo – for now, he eats an apple he stole from the Inn.
3. Boltac completes a transaction, orcs attack, he stays in his shop at first, but then he sees them go for the Inn. He grabs a sword (old wound) and tries to save Asarah, but is knocked unconscious. He is awakened by the rain on his face. Grabs a healing potion, goes to bed and gives up. Passes out on the floor. In his heart he held to the secret hope that he might still be the fighter of his youth. But he realized that it was a dream.
4. The morning light someone comes to check on him. Pay what you want, Loot what you must sign is up. He’s walking to adventure. That night he beds down and has a nightmare. He won’t be fighting, he’ll be peddling. Meets Rattick.
5. Gets ratticks story, “hires” him, defeats the Troll. (from Ratticks perspective)
6. Orcish ceremony (buys them off.) Wandering monster. # Boltac Scene Breaks

Boltac in the Shop

Kid comes to borrow a sword -- hint at adventurer past -- he gives the kid a sword.   
  
Rattick sells a jewel ( a mind stone )  
  
Wealthy noblewoman's maid comes in -- turns out she's buying for her nephew. Something seems strange -- need this quickly. Please, none of you chatter, my good man, just do it.   
  
 He checks her coins to see if they are creepers.   
  
 Oddna is the wizard who makes the monsters and magical items.

Boltac goes to get Dinner – flirts with \_\_\_\_\_\_ She goes away and he talks a myserious stranger (Wearing sunglasses?) who turns out to be Oddna. They talk about how delicious the sandwiches are.

Some adventurers break up the tavern (in a fight over who is really the chosen one) Boltac gets the Innkeeper outside – they call for the guard, but no guards come.

He consoles her – let them fight it out – then we will petition the Duke in the morning. stranger says, “What a shame it is. You have such a nice place here.” And then he leaves – on his way to the door a man tries to strike him but suddenly his back seizes up.

She comes in the morning and they have left.

She cries on his shoulder. (She’s stronger than I am, thought Boltac, I cannot unburden my sorrows. The rules of youth stayed with him.)

The next day the Duke is gone – this is not good. Then the town is sacked. She is taken – Boltac runs to his store, flips the closed sign and the looters cannot get in.

Change perspective to Rattick guiding the party on the road

Hiring Rattick as a guide – uh, we are, uh, financially challenged

Rattick and his adventurer's on the road, he hides them as the raiding party goes past -- That was a large one -- I don't know where they are headed  
  
The party that destroyed the inn sets out to defeat the Wizard -- Rattick is not with them.

Boltac sits in his store, watching people go past all day. Buying things that they need to leave.

Orc’s riding in on wolves. He puts up Boltac’s bar of warding – puts a magical seal across the door. But through the window, he sees he Orc’s converge on the Inn – Asarah!

Grabs a sword from the sword stand (a cheap thing, heavy and ill-balanced) but a young voice inside him, said, “You’ll not need more to dispatch a few Orc’s”

He opens the door – slays one Orc, slays the next – then he feels something tear in his chest – it is the old wound – and he drops the sword. An Orc is about to smash his head in with a club – when his captain barks – Let’s go. Over his shoulder he carries Asarah

She cries out, “Help! The mace comes down on Boltac’s head –”

Darkness. He is awakened by the rain. He has wolf prints on his chest. He crawls across the way to his store. Uses his good arm to pull the cork out of a healing potion – takes a long pull and surveys the wreckage of his store.

Bunch of shit has been stolen – all the stuff in the display case – the costume jewelry of weapons and armor. Someone tried to make off with the plate armor, but it was too heavy and they abandoned the task halfway through – there are long drag marks in the floor.

Looks at the coin still trapped in the floorboards.

He bars the door – even the rain is cannot pass the broken windows.

Boltac can’t stand it any longer. He knows that

He tells himself that it was the mutton sandwiches that made life worth living, but deep down, he knows it’s not true, and that’s what scares him most of all.

Big fight, the shop is broken open.

He goes home and goes to bed. Realizes why he hates the adventurers. Because he tried and failed.

The next morning he and the woman petition the Duke, but he’s left town. (cause he knew the invasion was coming) Like the secret passage is still open.

Orc’s on Wolves roll into town and sack everything. Boltac’s store defends itself – Boltac talks to one of the orcs Maybe the Orc grabs the mace of encumbrance. Leaving Boltac free to question him.

He goes across to the Inn to see if she’s okay – but she’s gone. Kidnapped.

The men burned an O glyph for Oddna in the floor.

## That night he doesn’t sleep at all.

Realizes how lonely he is. Where are the heroes? The real heroes. Why don't they come. Perhaps the Duke has gone for help -- but in his heart he knew that wasn't the case -- the Duke with his fleshy children had abandoned his duchy -- and why not? Robrecht had always been a raw deal for a ruler. Native inhabitants as sly and cunning as any in the world when it came to getting out taxes, a land infested with Wizards and the kind of beasts that would cause an army to be raised if they were even mentioned in the lowlands, Trolls and Wendigo and LizardMen and now even a rumor of Dragon's to the east!  
  
Not that the monsters matter much to the Duke himself. He was no hunter nor outdoorsman. But on all sides of Robrecht were kingdoms wanting to claim her difficult tax revenue, mineral wealth and strategic position as a crossroads for themselves.  
  
No it was a dubious honor to be lord and master of Robrecht, and Colbac couldn't see that any nobleman he had ever known had the skill for it. It did not require high-mindedness or nobility or even the trappings of heroism. It required a cunning mind and a calculating hand to steer the ship of Robrecht. The Duke simply hadn't been trained for it.   
  
No, more like he had emptied what were left of his coffers and pulled up stakes and headed South to one of the Kingdoms of the sun. Where he would buy an estate and soak the sun and the wine until he met his end like all men one day must.   
  
But what of the people of Robrecht. What of him, and his dreams of selling the store, becoming unshackled from it at last. Was there no one to set the ship of state aright. Were all the people of this troubled region doomed to crushed under a wave of feckless adventurers on the one hand and a plague of powerful and malicious wizards on the other?

## Later that morning a customer comes by

-- peers in the window. looks like the store is the same, it's just closed. But it was nearly lunchtime. No one had ever known Colbac to take a day off. But every thing looked as it should be.   
But what he couldn't see was -- coin pried from the floor. A few of the more expensive articles   
  
coin pried from the floor.

## He “hires” Rattick

At the entrance to the Dungeon, he catches Rattick coming out with a sack of valuables and the Dragon helmet from the night before (he jokes to himself, I am the chosen one.)  
  
Boltac slips the helmet down across Ratticks face, bashes the helmet with the pommel of his dirk and backs him up against a tree with the point of the knife.   
  
"What could I do, they were chosen. They chose themselves."  
  
He gets the story from Rattick. Explains that the Wizard has gotten so sick of adventurer's disturbing his work, that he posted a troll at the highest level of the dungeon to keep them away. The troll on the inside -- I guide them  
  
"Ah, you're right," said Boltac, probably did the world a service. "You want half a sandwich."  
  
Tries to hire Rattick -- rattick says no way -- I tell you what, why don't you just guide me to this troll. If I succeed, maybe you'll have the faith to join me all the way. If not, well, you'll get everything I have.   
  
"My liege, I am in your service."  
  
"Good man."  
  
Boltac could trust a man who was in it for himself. You knew what he was going to do. It was the holy men and the altruists, the heroic-minded and the magic mazed you had to watch out for -- they could do anything at any time for any reason.

## Finds girl in Oddna’s Court

You shouldn't have come to rescue me.

## Rattick Betrays him

Taken before Oddna.

## He tries to buy the Girl

So he goes into the dungeon. The woman tries to get him to leave -- You've come to fight for my Honor. I thought you were smarter than that!"  
  
"No, I'm not here to fight for your honor. I'm here to buy you."  
  
"BUY ME! What do you think I am, some kind of whore!"  
  
"Keep your voice down," said Colbac, but by then it was too late.   
  
Monsters sprung up from all corners of the room. The menagerie scuffled and howled as their master rose from his couch and waved light into the room with a wizarding gesture.   
  
"What have we here? Why it is my fellow mutton lover. Tell me, what brings you to the depths of my lair."  
  
Colbac could see no percentage in lying. He jerked a thumb at [THE INNKEEPER] and said, "Her."  
  
"Oh really, is it true love?" asked Oddna with great relish. When they both blushed, he laughed. "Oh my, it \_is\_ true love. And I thought it was rarer than unicorns. But wait, no it can't be true love, because you told me you had no interest in her. Or don't you remember. I admit, I was in disguise, but I would think a sophisticated man of commerce, such as yourself, would remember."  
  
"I said she wasn't my \_\_\_\_\_, that doesn't give you liscense to steal her."  
  
"I don't care for being stolen, Roderick," said [the INNKEEPER]  
  
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Oddna looked at him for a long time. Long enough for every creature in the room, except the strange, powerful wizard to grow uneasy. Mostly it was his smile. It seemed to grow and grow, stretch endlessly under those dead eyes.   
  
"Yes, you are right. I have stolen her, fair and square, and she is mine. And you have come to fight for her. Take you pick of the creatures you see here before you. You may fight any one of them for her hand. Then, if you win, you may fight the rest of them. And then, if you defeat all of them, you may do battle with me."  
  
"No," began Colbac.  
  
"No? What do you mean no? You have come here as an adventurer -- as the Hero -- to rescue the damsel in distress. You must fight? You must. That's how these things work."  
  
"I'm not here for a fight. You stole her, fine, she is your property, but I thought perhaps we could make a a deal."  
  
"BUY ME!" protested Sarah, "is that your idea of chivalry. Buying the woman you love back from..."  
  
"I never said anything about Love or Chivalry," Colbac snapped in that way that you can only get angry about someone you really, really care about. "You know how many men have tried to defeat the great Oddna? You know how many have succeeded?"  
  
"None," said Oddna with a great swelling of pride. "I'm entirely too powerful to be defeated by any but the chosen one, if he even exists. And if he does exist, I'm sure he's not a short, grubby, lame merchant from the backwater town of Robrecht."  
  
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"And," asked Colbac.  
  
"And," asked [THE INNKEEPER]  
  
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## All is lost

Boltac tells him not to open the bag with the gold. There are forces in there that are too powerful for you.   
  
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"So did I. But you can see my genius has brought it back to life. But how do you know of such things?"  
  
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"Just a whistle."  
  
"Ahk!" cried one of the Orcs. He beat  
  
Coins devour his minions. Chaos ensues.   
  
"YOU!" thundered Oddna. He raised his hands and pointed his fingers, no doubt to cast some terrible spell. But quickly the finger spread in supplication.   
  
Colbac hefting the bucket.

## Colbac hires two legions of soliders. He makes Rattick his minister.

"No Rattick, I don't want to trust you. I want you to try everything you possibly can. If I'm safe against my friends, I will be safe against my enemies."  
  
"My Lord, I am at your service."  
  
"And remove the sarcasm from your voice Rattick. I actually am a Lord now." He unfolded four sheets of paper.   
  
He had gotten all the kingdoms to recognize him as king in return for a treaty that allied Robrecht   
  
"You will go to war with everyone?"  
  
"No. We will be neutral."  
  
"Neutral," asked Rattick, "you mean as a ruse?"  
  
"No, I mean we will be neutral."  
  
  
And you are Lord Colbac?  
  
"No Rattick, I have adopted a new name consitutient with my new station in life. I am the first Lord Robrecht. Now kneel before me and accept your knighthood."   
  
"Knighthood?"  
  
"Yes Rattick. What's the matter? You think King's shouldn't have a sense of humor."  
  
"This is going to be a very different sort of kingdom, my liege," Rattick said without even a hint of sarcasm."  
  
"Yes, Rattick, it is. There's no magic anymore, Rattick. Who knows where the progress will stop."

Rattick is stopped at the border. He is dragged before the King – turns out to be Colbac

The Merchant Heroic. The Bourgeois Heroic. The Burgher Heroic.

Oddna throws him into the land of misfit toys

Bo

Coins as pets and living things. Tried to train them to respond to a whistle, but couldn’t get any useful responses. At least not any responses that people would pay money to watch

Boltac is a merchant - A long time ago he was an adventurer and he failed. Bitterly and all his companions died. While he was out adventuring his family was killed by raiders. (he bears the guilt – maybe he could have saved them.) Still doesn’t want to be a farmer so he becomes a merchant.

Goes seeking his dead, but he is washed down the river and winds up at the docks of Robrecht. The duke himself fishes him out – he saves the Duke’s life. Taking a wound to the leg in the process. Duke offers to make him Captain of the Guard – Boltac refuses – but what can I give you? He wants to be a shopkeeper.

He is given a license to open a shop and he is the official procurer for the Duke.

Years pass. A shadow falls across the land. Each year seems to bring more wizards and more monsters. The flourishing land of Robrecht starts to fade because trade falls off. Now, the only people who come to Robrecht are adventurer’s. All the good ones fail to root out the Wizard Oddna. They don’t come back.

Meanwhile, the bunch of also ran’s choke up the dying town, and wear on the Innkeeper a lovely Red-Headed lass named \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_. She’s in love with Boltac, and has been for years, but Boltac doesn’t think himself worthy of happiness after all. – He’s a failure (he doesn’t give himself any credit for being a successful merchant.)

Some adventurers break up the tavern (in a fight over who is really the chosen one) Boltac gets the Innkeeper outside – they call for the guard, but no guards come. He consoles her – let them fight it out, then we will petition the Duke in the morning.

She cries on his shoulder. (She’s stronger than I am, thought Boltac, I cannot unburden my sorrows. The rules of youth stayed with him.)

The next day the Duke is gone – this is not good. Then the town is sacked. She is taken – Boltac runs to his store, flips the closed sign and the looters cannot get in.

The party that destroyed the inn sets out to defeat the Wizard – Rattick is not with them. Boltac sits in his store, watching people go past all day. Buying things that they need to leave.

Orc’s riding in on wolves.

Boltac can’t stand it any longer. He knows that

He tells himself that it was the mutton sandwiches that made life worth living, but deep down, he knows it’s not true, and that’s what scares him most of all.

So Boltac set’s out. On foot, quietly, with a bag over his shoulder and his cane at his side.

He walks off the road, moving as quietly as he can through the brush. After a day of walking, he finds a hot spring. Has the last mutton sandwich, rolls himself in a blanket and goes to sleep under the stars. He almost feels good, but then he remembers that night so long ago.

FLASHBACK – the party under the stars around a fire grim Boltac, laughing, drinking, boasting. Vowing to defeat the PARLAC

(Later it turns out that the PARLAC was Oddna’s first creation – a failure, but one that had a life of it’s own.) Oddna killed all his friends – then put a blight upon the land – killing Boltac’s parents.

Sleep – nightmares

Jump to Rattick shadowing the party. He knows they don’t stand a chance, hopes to look them. But by the time he gets ther

A figure shilohetted against the darkness of the dungeon. Rattick is terrified for a moment and then realizes it’s the merchant.

Jokes with him, asks him where he’s going.

I’m going to rescue my girl.

“Ho ho ho, that’s very noble I’m sure but to do that you’d have to first get past the troll, the one I just saw bolt down and entire party.”

“I want to hire you.”

“What, to go in there? But I told you, the troll.”

“A gold piece for a day, for however long the adventure lasts.”

“But I’m a thief. Like a thief, thief – a good one. I can’t be trusted. Even if you could get past the troll.”

“If I can get pass the Troll, will you be my retainer?”

‘Yes’

Defeats troll with mace of encumbrance.

Down they go.

At the middle he has lost all his gear, all his gold, has been defeated by Oddna and thrown into the land of misfit toys.

Boltac has an encounter with the Evil Wizard in the Tavern – as they both enjoy a mutton sandwich. (she has cast a spell on me.)

She certainly seems to like you

–No, no, I am just a good neighbor.

Suit yourself.

But he left without making any kind of advance to the innkeeper. Boltac thought it strange.

Finally, upset with constant interruptions to his work, the Wizard Oddna razes the town of Robrecht. And he steals the Innkeeper.

## # Old

Setting: In the store

Action: Boltac’s deals hard with the wretches that come in. he takes one for the a magic stone, but the stone turns out to be a message. (he test stone using magic protective gloves – magic was such a hazard in the world.)

+/- : He’s cynical – he had purpose

|><| : Boltac wants the best price, they want a deal

## —

Setting: Boltac in the Wagon

Action: He is attacked by bandits

+/- : Boltac is screwed because he’s defenseless. Turns out that cunning beats stupid

|><| : They want to kill him and take his stuff, he doesn’t want that.

Setting: Boltac in the Dungeon Lvl. 1

Action: The thief who brought him the stone comes running out.

+/- : Thief is leaving. Then he’s working for Boltac.

|><| : Want’s thief to help him. Thief wants to flee.

Setting: Boltac versus the Troll

Action: Boltac faces the troll who wants to tear him limb from limb. He tries to buy the troll off, but troll want’s nothing to do with stuff. Throws him a sword of encumbrance.

Gets information from the troll (What are you doing? why don't you kill him?)  
  
 leaves him trapped on the floor. Doesn't engage in commerce, doesn't have any material needs -- gah, the world has no need of creatures like that.

+/- : Boltac is going to die. Boltac overcomes troll and gets information out of him.

|><| : Boltac vs. unreasonable troll.

Setting: Orc Sacrifice

Action: Orc’s are about to sacrifice a luckless adventurer. Thief urges them to go on. But when Boltac hears them talking about how it’s just a job, he steps out.

KILL HIM! No, take him to the boss. Them’s the orders. They start fighting, as Orc’s will. Boltac smiles. Nods to the man strung up on the Orcrist. Makes a comment about it being a lovely specimen to the narrow-eyed Orc Shaman.

Then he hires the Orc’s

Fighter asks him how he did that – Boltac says he’s done an illicit trade with the Orc’s for over 15 years now. “But everyone knows they are untrustworthy!” Not untrustworthy, profit minded.

+/- :

|><| :

Uses creeping coins.

Hires the Orcs

Creeping coins – and he took every coin in the shop. Even the one he had to pry out from between the floorboards (he wants the coin, but doesn’t want to pay to have his floor repaired – which would cost more coins.)

In the final confrontation, The Great Werdna regains the “loyalty” of all his followers and has them attack Boltac and his (they have to be) four companions. Boltac activates the coins – they never responded to training – they only became violent at the sound of the little silver whistle.

The coins attack everyone and they all die. Money under the skin. Sated by blood, they went to sleep.

Then Wernda powerless, he rescues the girl –

She asks him to steal the artifact. It has great power – you could be a great sorcerer – Ah you were after the power.

Werdna grabs for the fabulous mace protruding from his spilled bags of artifacts – wham, Mace of encumbrance - enchanted by the jokester mage –

Smashes the artifact – all the magic in the world is gone. All the creatures drop dead – woman turns out to be a succubus and falls over dead

He takes a traveling companion of his to wife – the age of sorcery is over. Merchants have power.

Left the creeping coins in a pile.

End of the story – destroy all magic? That sounds like wonderful idea.

What about the Wizards and the wonderful magical creatures and the elemental forces that hold the world together. It would all disappear.

The Troll had ingested three normal-sized humans, and as such, was a little bloated. He dragged himself along the dark stone hallway as best he could, but the strain in his abdominal muscles and the inherent sleepiness that comes after a heavy meal, slowed him greatly. The bump in his distended, warty stomach was so big that he had to move his left hip around lunch, rather than walking straight through the natural arc of motion.

A few minutes into his retreat into darkness, he began to feel a nauseous. That always happened when he ate too fast. The strips of leather kit and armor never agreed with him. Many of his relatives thought him weak, but none of them had ever accidentally eaten and passed a codpiece.

The Troll grabbed the stitch in his side and thought eagerly of this bed that lay but three levels below in the catacombs. When the TROLL had moved in, this had once a thriving district. But since then much of the dungeon had moved away – and more of it had fallen into decline.

The entrance to the Wizard’s lair was three days into the mountain. As he walked up into the mountains, the years fell off him. By the second day his limp had disappeared and he felt better than he had felt in ages. He thought his body had grown infirm from the weight of the years, but it weak and pained from neglect rather than strain.

He bent to drink in a mountain stream and felt something wild stirring within him. He was unfettered, free. And not in the least because he believed himself going to his own death. But he was going as a free man, unencumbered. He was somewhat ashamed to admit, for all the disdain he had heaped on others, on an *adventure*.

Start with him limping out of town? Start with the thief, Rattick, running for his life?

The bag always looks half-full, but get’s heavier

* he recognizes some of the fixtures because he sold them to the wizard

[Colbac went out in his youth. He was quite the warrior, not because he was the strongest, but because he was smart. But when he came back, he was lame. And he never told anyone the story.

He’ll tell the story on the journey, to bring people together – or to help keep them alive (it’s an awful story that he tries to tell as a pep talk, but it just scares bejezus out of them.) At the very end, he finds out that Oddna was responsible for his leg. When he started off. Oddna was a maker of fiendish traps — but they took too long, didn’t breed on their own. ]

– And for all the trouble. All the countless bands of adventurers who had laid waste to the countryside – the Wizard was still there. Growing more powerful by the day.

The Duke had raised a tarriff on the tunnel to raise revenue for the army

Historically, the ruler of the land called Robrecht had two choices. First, to declare himself a king and then in some way or another fight all four neighboring kingdoms. Or take the more humble title of Duke and then declare allegiance to one or more of the four neighboring kingdoms – thus gaining support against the others, and fighting less.

It was a tenous position in the best of times, but when the fucking wizard showed up – forget about it.

A mage accidentally lit one of the King’s forests on fire during the dry season.

Fights in the street between adventurer’s

Fights in the Tavern.

Eventually the Duke just split. – We don’t know that, as Colbac goes to petition the Duke. He wants to sell his warrant of sale back to the crown and depart. – But the Duke has abdicated. It’s just one dumb guard and him

“No,” said Colbac, “I’m sure they will be back soon. Just stand your post and I’m sure you’ll be rewarded”

“Of course,” said the guard, “Of course, I knew that. It’s just some… times my… brain, yes, brain! thinks too much and I get confused.”

Buys items from adventurers. Sells items to adventurers Buys items from travelling agents. Sells items to travelling buyers. Sold luxury items, salvers, spices, to high-tone customers. Something of an unofficial “procurer” for the Duke.

Robrecht

## Chapter 1

Colbac was eating a mutton sandwich from the Inn across the street. The Inn, which was the only Inn in town, in the same way that Colbac’s was the only store in town, was justly famous for a full range of mutton dishes. Quite improbably these included a mutton tort with a honey glaze that was one of the chief reasons Colbac was as wide as he was tall. Well, that and the Ale.

Colbac lifted a tankard of the good red ale and washed down a mouthful of greasy meat. There was a time when he would not have eaten and drank alone at the end of a working day. He would have come out from behind his thick oak counter, flipped the sign in the window, activated the charm of warding and gone across the street to sit by the roaring fire, eat, drink and otherwise be merry. But those days were past. Now Colbac opened early and closed late. And the only time he saw a serving wench was when she brought him dinner. It was the adventurer’s who had ruined it all. This had been such a nice town. Colbac had had such a nice store. But when a foul and black-hearted wizard had taken up residence in a nearby complex of underground caverns, things had started to turn.

A wizard was bad enough, what with the destruction of crops, the mutilation of cattle, the disruption of weather patterns, the disappearance of virgins… a whole host and swarm of villainies were blamed on the nearby wizard.

At first, Colbac suspected that the wizard might have been little more than a convenient scapegoat for the troubles of the simple-minded villagers. But as time passed, he realized that he had been wrong. Every Wizard worth his salt has a gimmick, you see. A signature theme to the magic that he does. Many great and powerful wizards have never amounted to much in the wizarding world because they could never find a proper of consistent theme for their oveure.

For example, Venario, an enchanter who had installed himself in a tower far to the North, had found a theme in his strange and sinister sense of humor. He created some of the finest magical items the world had ever known, but the power and perfection of his enchantments were each directed into a completely counter-productive, ironic and often embarrassing purpose.

It was not enough for the Great Giambanista Venario to cause a sword to be less likely to cut it’s foe or an arrow to be less likely to find it’s mark. God’s no! That was the stuff of village witches. Merely parlor tricks compared to the great body of work that Venario had dedicated his life to enchanting.

The new Wizard had taken an unusual and fairly destructive theme. He was a breeder, keeper and trainer of all kind of creatures. In his massive underground lair he kept a managerie of such variety and horror that, in the end, all the blame heaped on his name turned out to be deserve. Never let it be said, that Oddna didn’t earn his terrible reputation.

But as bad as Oddna was, he was less damaging to the town than the plague of adventurers who descended upon it. They ruined the pleasant life in the otherwise quiet town. And they angered the wizard and his minons with their countless, pointless, hopeless forays into the Wizard’s demesne.

Angry minions, of course, lash out in greater and greater numbers for greater distances. Which, of course, calls forth bigger idiots who imagined themselves bigger heroes. The whole thing escalated in a vicious cycle until all of the outlying villages has been raised.

Of course, the other townspeople didn’t see it that way. They thought themselves beset upon by great an sinister forces. And those who came to aid the town in it’s time of trial were great heroes. They were to be toasted, to be fete’d to be treated as the last great hope for the redemption of the town. No matter that what few virgins were left in the vicinity disappeared at an alarming rate. No matter that each party that set out, no matter how promising they seemed, they all met with slaughter.

One night, deep in his cups, Borlag, the innkeeper had confided in him, “It’s not like”

Colbac found the whole thing ghoulish.

But of course that wasn’t the real reason

And it didn’t hurt that they were such a stimulus to the local economy. The Innkeeper, Borlag, grew fat and rich off his sale of fermented grain. He even changed the name of the place from “The Flaming Sparrow”, to “The Adventurer’s Inn”.

All of this was good for Colbac’s business, but bad for his soul. Everyday he saw

Why no one commented

As much as he hated them, they had been great for Colbac’s business

Halfway through his sandwich, the bell on the door rang, signifying that a customer had entered. Colbac grumbled through his dinner, washed it down with a swig of ale and mustered his signature brand of customer service.

“What do you want?” he demanded of the poor specimen who now clogged his showroom.

“Please sir,” the man in the cheap armor began.

Colbac held up a hand and said, “No.”

“But you don’t even know what I am going to ask.”

“And I don’t want to know. Do you see that?” He pointed at a sign on the wall that read, “No Discounts”

“I can’t read…” said the young man, looking at the floor awkwardly.

“’Course not,” said Colbac, “and why should you put the effort into acquiring such a useless skill?”

The young, almost-fighter ventured a half-smile.

Colbac was not charmed. “I mean, wearing armor like that, you’re life expectancy isn’t long enough to finish a magazine, let alone a proper book.”

“Pleas sir,” the young fighter tried, attempting to make up with perseverance what he lacked in rhetorical skill.

“Boy, go back to you your hovel,” said Colbac.

“But, I need to borrow a sword, sir. Just for a day or so.”

“BORROW? A SWORD!” Colbac said in such a voice as to make the strong, but poorly equipped young man flinch.

“Y-y-y-yes sir. It’s so I can rescue the love of my life.”

“Oh well, that changes everything,” said Colbac, as his face grew hard in the harsh light of his cheap torches. “Tell me more,” he said, as if it was a dare.

“Well sir, she is a priestess of Dar. And, well,”

“Aren’t they supposed to be virgins? Them priestesses of Dar.”

The young man blushed and said, “WIt’s more of a suggestion, than a rule, sir. If you know what I mean,” his face grew serious, “but if it helps, I was a virgin, if you catch my drift.”

“Help? How would that help?”

“She’s gone and got herself into trouble. In the underkeep I mean. And if I had a sword, I could go and rescue her.”

“Oh lad, if you had a sword, I’m sure you could. In fact, a big strong lad like yourself could probably manage it with your bare hands.”

The boy looked shocked, “No sir, I could never…”

“Well, then, I suggest you find yourself another Priestess of the Eternal Flame of Questionable virtue.”

“What are you saying. Look, if you are insulting the virtue of my young–”

Colbac slammed a club of knotty wood down upon his counter. “You’ll WHAT?” he asked with great relish? Hoping the boy would do something stupid so that he could vent his spleen.

In a quiet voice the lad said, “I’m not asking for a discount. It’s just a loan.”

“It’s the worst kind of discount of all,” shrieked Colbac, “It’s a 100% discount.”

“But I’d bring it back. Maybe with a few nicks, but definitely covered in glory.”

“Oh Glory is it? That would enhance the retail value.”

“Yes, yes,” he said eagerly, unaware of the trap he was falling into.

“Because you are such a great fighter.”

“Yes, that’s it.”

“Powerful, strong,” Colbac prompted.

“Yes.”

“Well then, how about this?” Colbac slowly lifted the club off of his counter and held it above his head. He watched as the young “fighter’s” trusting, cow-like eyes followed the weapons movement. Then, without the any hesitation of remorse or conscience, he dropped the heavy, burlwood shaft down on the top of his unarmored head. .

As the lad collapsed to the floor unconscious, Colbac felt secure in the knowledge that he had done him a favor as well as a concussion.

No, thought Colbac, you’re no kind of fighter at all. Too earnest. Too willing to play by the rules. You won fights by cheating. And heroes cheated more than anybody. No, the young lad was better off unconscious, at least he wouldn’t get his fool self killed by running off in the the dungeon.

Colbac came out from behind his counter and dragged the boy outside. By the scruff of his neck. Colbac was not pretty, he was not graceful, but he was strong. He dragged the lad across the street and propped him up next to a drunk who was sitting on the bench in front of the Inn. Ah, what adventuring lies they would tell each other when they woke up.

His good deed done for the day, Colbac rubbed his mouth and decided he had earned another tankard of ale. He steeled his nerve and pushed though the door of the inn.

The inside was dark and smokey. The smells of beer and body odor jockeyed for position in Colbac’s nostrils. In spite of himself, he winced. As his eyes adjusted to the darkness of the common room, he saw a band of adventurers he had not yet seen begging for change around the town. Adventurer, of course, was a polite synonym for broke with no prospects of employment.

In the far corner of the room, Shanallanon, the local excuse for a bard was doing

Ah, Ethline, you’re a sight for parched eyes. When are you going to come to your senses and get rid of the vagrants so we can enjoy our quiet talks together."

“And, by quiet talks you’d mean you sitting on a stool, muttering into your pint why I”

“As long as they’ve got coin.”

“Yes, as long as they’ve the coin,” she conceded.

“Which, judging by the poor quality of their equipage, shouldn’t be but for one or two more rounds.”

“Oh, leave them be. They’re young and off in search of adventure. Besides, you’re just jealous.”

This turn of conversation made Colbac nervous, and he attempted to head it off by saying, “Another pint of the Red, if you please.”

“Yes, no denying it Colbac. D’ye remember when you went forth in search of adventure.”

“When are you going to come to your senses and make an honest woman of me?” she teased back. It was

[at the end he settles down and marries Etheline]

Blattick

He thought about dragging the lad down to the Temple so a healer could take a look at him.

into the middle of the street. Someone would drag him off to the Temple soon enough. And who knew, perhaps another pretty Priest or Priestess would take an interest (or pity) in him.

As Colbac waddled back into his store with all the grace of a hermit crab claiming a new home. He turned in the door way and then glared out into the early evening, as if daring any other adventurer to darken his doorway. From across the dirt road he heard laughter from the inn. His face twisted into a scowl as he thought of them in there. The boastful and the proud. The pretty and the brave. The one’s who thought they were heroes in the making, but would all, sooner or later, wind up in Colbac’s shop, broken and broke, asking for money.

Please sir, they would all say, just a little bit more for this amulet, can’t yous see the magic in it. I just need a little more to pay a healer to deal with this salamander bite.

Colbac slammed the door as hard as he could. The panes of glass in his shop window rattled perilously but they held.

He rubbed his leg again. These were the last days of summer and already he could feel the Winter’s storms approaching in his hip. He settled back onto his stool and had a sip of beer.

For a while, he stared at the door, as if daring the world to send another customer. But then his gaze wandered around his shop. To Colbac, of course, it was nothing special. It was his home and his store room all rolled into one. But for those broke and struggling adventurers across the street, Colbac’s shop seemed a treasure trove. Here were enchanted Mage Robes that were stronger than steel. Heavy plate armor that not even a dragon’s breath could melt. There were weapons of every imaginable size and quality. But the finest (displayed in the magically sealed case behind the counter)

“Hullo!” said a rather dull-faced peasant boy who looked like he had been raised on a diet of oats and hard work. Innocence and honesty did not make sense to Colbac, so he distrusted him immediately.

Colbac was a shop keeper, but in a special kind of shop. You, of course, are accustomed to shops where the owner or the employees are eager to see you, willing to help and unfailingly polite. The maxim, “The Customer is Always Right” is never far from the modern storeclerk’s mind. But Colbac had no employees. And his clientle was very, very different.

If Colbac had gone in for slogans or clever sayings, if even the first business book had been made available to him, he would have had one phrase knitted on a sampler and hung on the wall next to the club that he kept in case of “customers” that wanted to “haggle” just a little too hard.

In courtly cross-stitch it would have said, “The Customer is always trying to screw you, Colbac.” Every time he had forgotten this maxim, he had lost money. And once, he had lost part of an ear and all the gold he had in his strongbox. Which, in a full accounting of things, wasn’t all that much. Business was never that brisk, and Colbac had never been all that handsome of a man. At times he thought the loss of the ear might have actually improved his appearance.

Although it had been many, many years since an Ogre had been seen in the Kingdom, Colbac would do in a pinch. In fact, as a schoolboy, the other children, in the cruel thoughtless way of young children, who imagine that they are invincible and no injury can last more than an afternoon, taunted him that he had teased him that his mother had be

To look at Colbac you would, in your heart, no matter how hard you tried, give some credence to the vile slurs of schoolchildren. To being with, he was lame, nearly bald, stout of chest and round of belly and one eye was larger than another. If you did not have to make a deal with him you could have been fooled into thinking he was dull-witted. But, as a person engaged in commerce, this belief would cost you.

You see, Colbac was not flee of foot, keen of eye or strong of thew. He had never won a fight

And, in a time when it was not unheard of for peasants to be conscripted just so they could be melted down into rendered fat for the cauldron’s of hot oil that were dumped onto those besieging the castle, Colbac was deemed unfit for service.

Where the was a need for pain and iron, Colbac was there. If you needed a thing, somehow Colbac knew a guy. And for a price, he could get it for you. The world was small enough, the professions were few enough and the cocktail parties rare enough that no one ever asked Colbac, “So, what do you do?” But if they had, he would have shown himself to be one of the few rare men who could answer, “What do you need done?” and mean it.

He had started small, with little more than a few rags he found on the corpse of a dead adventurer. These

Adventurer’s had been, as far back as anyone could remember, quite common. There were no shortages of ruins, dungeons and fallen cities in the Kingdom of Gygax, and each one was rumored to have it’s great treasure, powerful artifact or beautiful princess in need of rescue.

Most of the other boys he had gone to school with were dead now. There had been, of course, the war with Thrace and the

It was a lesson he could never forget.

You’d like to buy a shield, and you’d like to pay

Taming creeping coins and using them to his advantage.

Girl in chain-mail bra comes in to pay.

Thief brings in a gem – which is a message in a bottle. She is trying to find him.

Thief tries to kill him and take his stuff when he goes into the dungeon.

He takes cursed stuff into the dungeon. Gives a cursed sword to somebody who wants to kill him. The guy is over encumbered and collapses to the ground. Colbac then takes his stuff and leaves him there crushed to the ground. – at the end of the story he’s still crushed to the ground.

He gets the message and what? How much do you need to play up the beginning.

He knows some regular customers, sure. They all come back in the story – let’s say three of them.

Nattick – thief – brings jewel.

Blastum – world’s worst mage.

Aurelius – a real fighter?

[you need to describe this guy]

Picks the gem up with a protective gauntlet – you can never be too careful. He’d seen what cursed items could do to the unwary. All too well he remembered a man who came in with +4 gauntlets of self-abuse. Oh, sure, he had tried to pass them off as ordinary steel gauntlets. “Just try them on” he said – but Colbac could see the dark circles under his eyes and read the strain on his face. He knew something was up.

So he just kept him talking until the terrible nature of the gauntlets revealed themselves. And when they did, the man broke down crying and begged Colbac to help him. Colbact calmly asked if the man had anything to sell that wasn’t of negative value.

When the man said no, Colbac apologized and said he couldn’t help him. He wasn’t in the charity business.

As they had this conversation, the metal gauntlets were pawing at the man’s crotch. As he explained, with some embarrassment, any moment tha the wasn’t actively using his hands, the gauntlets were having his way with him. He allowed that for some, say young boys in the first grasp of puberty, this might be seen as a positive enchantment. But the thing was, they never stopped. And they never let him sleep.

He knew they were cursed because he could not take them off – or unequip them as he said.

Five days he had been trapped in these gauntlets. And he feared if he could not get them off that he would go insane.

Colbac face turned to stone, matchign the stone of his heart when he said, “I cannot help you.”

Colbac thought of it now and was glad of every penny he had spent on magic nullifying gloves and curse detecting wands. He had never understood the logic or sanity of magic. How much better off the world of commerce would be without all of it. How much more regular and sane. Ah well, it was here, he thought and so he would arbitrage it as best he could.

He placed the wand on it’s hanger behind the counter. The he stripped off the gloves and placed them in the workbench drawer on the far side of the room. Only then did he return to the gem which remained sitting, defenseless as it were, on his appraisal counter.

Colbac yawned as he straightened and tidyed his shop. There was little enough to look forward to. Mostly just a good night’s sleep between now and tomorrow’s work. Perhaps he could stomach the foolish adventurer’s at the Tavern long enough to squeeze in a pint and a glance at Lorna’s tits.

It was gem, like any other gem and then it wasn’t. He sneered as he watched Nattick go. Wishing, in his blacken’d shopkeepers heart that the door would hit him on the way out. But then he took his magic protective gauntlet off his hand

Once upon a time there was shop keeper named Colbac.

Everyday he bought low and sold high and was generally a miserable heartless bastard who hated everyone and thought that people who went into dungeons were stupid.

Until one day, a thief came along with a seemingly ordinary jewel. But when Colbac touched it, it turned out to be a telepathic appeal from the long-lost love of his life. The one who had left him so long ago. She reveals that she is trapped in the bottom of the Dungeon of the Crazed Overlord and begs Colbac to rescue her. She knows that she has done him wrong, but she also knows that the Overlord mows down strong men like so many blades of grass and that strength will not save her. She needs cunning and tenacity. And Colbac is the most cunning, ruthless and tenacious man she has ever known.

Because of this Colbac gathers the creme of his goods (a lifetime of them) and heads into the dungeon.

He runs afoul of Nattick who (true to suspicions, tries to kill him as he goes into the dungeon.)

He meets a very tough enemy who doesn’t want to bargain (first sub-boss) Let’s him take the sword of encumbrance.

After that word gets around – he starts saying, take whatever you like.

(maybe he goes and gets the gauntlets of self-abuse – Ouch)

Creeping coins. Sword of encumberance.

## Trade negotiations LVL 4

He goes deeper and deeper – buying his way out of trouble, converting a terrible monster’s hording problem into a stream of cash – come up once a month and I’ll trade you fair and square.

Excuse me if I'm wrong, but it seems that, if you kill me and take all my things, then you'll have more of the problem that's driving you crazy.   
  
"Food shouldn't be so confusing."  
  
I know, I know. And as an entree, I am ashamed of my table manners, but I think I might actually have a solution for you.

Who are you apprenticed too?

I need no apprenticing. I am too powerful. The natural magic is too strong with me to be bridled by a hidebound and

For, could an

“Yeah, well some day, I’m gonna be my own king. I’m going to get to the bottom of a that damn dungeon. Get that Amulet and then I’m gonna be the most powerful man in the kingom. Marry the princess, become the king!”

“After waiting a respectable amount of time for the current king to pass of natural causes, of course,” Colbac said with a wink.

“Well, some causes are more natural than others, if you know what I mean,” said Blastum the Almost-Mage.

“Treason! Sedition! Guards!”

And with that the stone-faced guards came to life and seized the Mage. The young lad screamed and kicked and generally pitched a fit. His spells of little fire danced harmlessly along their chain mail, barely warming the skin.

“Here, enough of that!” said one of the guards as he slammed a fist into his annoying prisoner.

As Baltac watched the guards drag him from his shop, Blastum’s face, contorted in pain, seemed to say “Maybe I should have been a healer.”

When the door had closed, Colbac picked up the multi-faceted jewel and placed it in the display case. Yes, that would fetch a pretty penny. And now he would surely be able to sell it well above his cost. There were many negotiation strategies, and Colbac knew them all.

To his credit, he felt no pangs of remorse at having cause a relatively innocent man to be thrown in the King’s Dark Dungeon. If he truly was the greatest Wizard of the Age, he would escape and if not, then it would be better for him to rot in the King’s Dungeon than to get torn apart by some horrible monster.

Besides, the only dangers in the world weren’t in dungeons and it was high time the lad learned that.

## Tavern Encounter.

As he sat, pulling on his ale.

“And I will be the one to defeat he great Oddna, for on my way here, a wise village elder foretold me that I was the chosen one, destined to life a great evil from this land.”

“But, but, but,” said the young man in Mage Robes.

“Yes, only by my hand can the Wizard be slain, for I am,” here he stood and finished with a flourish, “The Chosen One. Isn’t that right Rattick” The Rogue did not look up from sharpening his knife to say, “Yes, that’s right. Very true, I was there and heard the whole thing.”

[she returns and gives him the favor – as the fight breaks out, he covers his tankard of ale and leaves.]

As he gets to his shop, she thows them both out on their ear. Chosen one not strong enough to get defeat an Innkeeper – what was the world coming to these days

Then Rattick, the thief comes into the shop. Just when he is going to have his ale in peace.

Sipping his ale, surveying his wares. Loving his goods and lamenting that there are so few buyers. Oh in the days gone buy

But now just some seedy adventurer selling rope.

“I have,” said Rattick, “a magic item of great power, that I could be persuaded to sell you. But understand, I feel I am making a mistake parting with it. It’s just,” his smile looked like a wound that had become infected with teeth, “I have a sister in Blovatia, and she’s terribly, terribly ill.”

“Yes. I understand how hard that can be,” said Colbac, “Having your only Sister taken hostage.”

“Hmmm,” he lied, “and with the illness and the strain of confinement I need money for the journey and for medicines and, of course for ransom. So loathe as I am to part with it, I must.”

“It is a sad tale of woe you tell, brave adventurer,” said Colbac, laying it on as thick has he could, “I am just happy that, humble merchant that I am, I have the means to purchase such a magnificent item, paying, of course, more than it is worth, because your sad tale of woe has moved me – turned my heart of stone into flesh once more.”

“Yeah,” said Rattick, not quite comfortable with Colbac’s sudden enthusiasm.

“So, shall I shower you in gold now, or can I see the item first?”

“Oh, right. Or course. I keeps it wrapped away for safekeeping.”

“I’m sure you do.”

Rattick reached into his pants, underneath his tremendous codpiece and retrieved a wad of dirty rags.

“Yes, I can see the value straight away,” said Colbac. “My nostrils fairly burn with it.”"

“Look you,” snapped Rattick, no longer comfortable with being out bullshitted, “I come here in the interest of serious commerce. And you mock me.”

It was all that Colbac could do not to continue the farce. He strained to make, “No, no, please. I am serious. Show me the item.”

Rattick set the ball of rags on the counter and began to unwrap it with great caution. As layer after layer was peeled, back, Rattick became even more careful, to the point where he removed the last covering with his sizeable and much-sharpened dagger.

This was Colbac’s first clue that the item was magic, and quite probably cursed. For reasons more primal than profit (survival being the only thing that Colbac put above profit) Colbac was an expert on magical items. Or more correctly, he was an expert on Wizards.

Wizards, you see ran to themes.

Gauntlets of self-abuse

“Well, what do you think?” Rattick demanded. Colbac said nothing. He backed away from what appeared to be a fist-sized ruby slowly, never taking his eyes off it. With one hand behind his back he opened the cabinet that held his most prized possession – his gloves.

The popular name for them were Gauntlets of Negation, but the name was inaccurate. The Gauntlets did not negate magic, put rather, were perfectly magic neutral. Like a lightning rod conducts magic away from a house, these gloves conducted magical energy away from the use. They remained totally neutral to the effect of any spell, charm, hex or incantation.

For all there rarity and power (some even thought them not to exist) they looked like a gigantic pair of wool mittens. The kind that looked like they should be connected by a long strand of yarn to prevent them being lost or separated by an absent-minded or irresponsible child.

As Colbac donned his gloves, Rattick eyed them greedily. They were easily worth several hundred times more than the jewel on the counter. Colbac could see the thought floating in the thief’s eyeballs – *if only I could steal them*. Colbac thought little of it. After all that’s the exact kind of thought that should drift through a good thief’s mind. But there was something else about his glance. Something that bothered Colbac.

“So, where’d you get this magnificent jewel then?”

“Oh, I, uh, that is to say, I prized it from the deepest depths of the Lair of the Mad Wizard, Oddna.”

“You?”

“Yes, a brilliant bit of thievery, if I do say so myself.”

Colbac’s hand stopped inches above the jewel. The whole scene could have easily taken on an air of the absurd, if not for the obvious fear that both men had for the object on the counter. “You, yourself then?”

“Yes, the pride and prince of thieves I am.”

“Oh, I can well see that,” Colbac said with smile that got no farther than his lips. “But here’s the thing. If I was a thief…”

“Oh, don’t sell yourself short Gov, you should hear the things that are said about you around town.”

“… if I was a thief, instead of just a man with a deep and abiding love for negotiation, I wouldn’t waste my time or energy frittering around in some dungeon. I’d find myself a nice seat at the dungeon’s entrance.”

“You would,” said Rattick, playing along as if every one of Boltac’s words were cast from the purest fascination.

“Then’d I’d sit there until the last survivor of a party of adventurers came along. Battered, bedraggled, probably half-dead –”

“Or three quarters dead, if you really want to save yourself the effort,” Rattick offered.

Botlac nodded acknowledgment and continued, “Then’d I slip a knife in his kidney and go through his pockets for loose change and valuable magical items.”

“You’ve got quite an active imagination there, Gov,” said Rattick, looking more afraid than guilty.

“I’m sorry, did you say active or accurate.”

“I said, active.”

“Well,” said Boltac, with a shark’s smile, “It makes no difference to me, you see. I’m just a man who acquires useful and resalable items for the benefit of my customers.”

“Yes, I can see that,” Rattick said with great relief.

“So, tell me, this unfortunate man who bequeathed you this jewel with his dying breath.”

“Ohhh, I like that one better. And it sounds so good when you tell it.”

“What he in his right mind.”

“Yes, yes, right and generous he was.”

“Was he, perchance, muttering anything. Acting strange in any way.”

“Come to think of it,” Rattick said with a sheepish grin, “He was going on about some beautiful girl. And how he had to save her.”

“Ah, I thought as much,” said Colbac. “I will give you a gold piece for your accursed gem.”

“Accursed gem. Why Gov. you wound me. You really, really do. Do you think I would pass off accursed merchandize to a man of your standing.”

“Only if you thought you could get away with it.”

“I cannot take so little. That’s highway robbery, that’s what that is.”

“Yes, and you would know. If a gold piece isn’t enough”

“5 gold.”

Then just collect your stone and go. Rattick’s hand moved forward, then he checked himself. He knew what it was and he was loathe to touch it. One brush of a man’s skin and the mindstone would posesses his thoughts utterly. Inserting desires and thoughts into it as one might inject poison into a sausage.

No man would want such a fate. Even Colbac was wary of it ( as he was wary of all magical items. ) How much happier he would be if there were no magical items left in the world.

It was a mindstone. Anyone could see that. "

This was his favorite time of day in the shop

The End – all the animate coins drop to the ground dead and have been converted to currency again.

Use to illustrate the dangers of being a shop-keeper – creeping coins – one of the many thousands of ways the humble customer seeks to rip you off.

## The Geography and Economy of Robrecht

But however you choose pronounce it, Robrecht had been a delightful place to be a shopkeeper. It was a bit ambitious to call Robrecht a kingdom, or if it was, it was the smallest kingdom on the continent, perhaps in the world.

If all of Robrecht were flat, it could be crossed by a strong-legged person in a two days. Some twenty to thirty miles square. Although, the true shape of the kingdom has changed with countless wars, invasions, treaties, marriages, births, deaths and pig raids throughout the years.

It’s fertile central valley is surrounded on all sides by mountains of daunting height. So it is that Robrecht is supplied with water, fertile growing land and, by virtue of it’s position in the world, a steady stream of trade. It is a curious fact that Robrecht has arisen not because of one mountain pass, but four.

So it is, the crossroads of the continent of Combari and a fantastic place to be an innkeeper or a merchant. Or so it had been.

Because, unfortunately, the

Colbac had paid a pretty penny to the King (more a of a duke really) to receive a royal warrant to open a store. While tinkers and shyster of all stripe and profession. Could trade from rolls spread out alongside the road, Colbac was the only merchant legally allowed to engage in commerce in the entire small, yet lovely kingdom.

When he had first received his permission and opened his store, business had been wonderful. The high passes that connected Robrecht to the rest of the world meant that, for all but the worst winter months, a steady flow of traffic. It was something of geographic magic – Robrecht itself was the middle of nowhere, but it was somehow on the way to everywhere. As a crossroads it flourished.

There were the haulers and the drovers and the merchant caravans, but there was also the carriage trade. A few continental nobles followed by endless trains of retainers, baggage, equipage and hanger-ons.

And when they would stop in Robrecht to visit the King/Duke, they would realize their lack of thread, or fabric or leatherworking tools, travelling cases, fine silverware, ladies daggers (for protection only) or any one of the many, many specialty items that Colbac took great pains to stock.

For several years, Colbac’s managed to put the past behind him and turn a tidy profit. He bought a fine house on the town’s finest hill and established himself.

Of course, there were so few merchants in those days, that no one quite knew how to treat Colbac. Surely he did not deserve the honors accorded to a knight, but he was something more than the serfs who worked the fertile plain. So there he was, invited to some events, banned from others, given a good seat at the temple, listened to by all men.

Yet the rich, scheming dowagers did not see fit to try to marry of their heavily dowried and heavily fatted, cow-eyed, sampler sewing daughters to him. As a man with a broken heart this suited Colbac.

And because no one knew exactly how to treat him, this suited Colbac right down to the ground.

But the salad days never stay green for long. And the things that made Robrecht a perfect trading outpost and a well-defended kingdom from the outside – it’s mountains, it’s abundance of mining wealth, the river and fertile plain. It’s large glaciated lake – it’s tiny secluded valleys – also made it attractive to another kind of

Wizards. And Dragons and all of the awful creatures of the earth.

What Colbac did not know, and perhaps could not know when he purchased his liscense to trade from the Duke/King was that the whole thing had been a raw deal from the word go. That the Duke/Kind had seen the writing on the wall from the very start. And now, in this relative calm, was looting the treasury, sucking up all he could and within a year would abandon his title and disappear to live in luxury in one of the warm, decadent cities of the far south.

within the year, the

If demography is destiny, then surely geography is something more. Something deeper and more primal. Geography is prophecy. Geography is a kind of gravity. The shape of place is a promise. Show me a natural, deep-water harbor and sooner or later, you will have a town. Oh, you can’t say when this will happen. And you can’t say that the inhabitants of the town will be tall and fair, and use sails to harness the power of the wind as the circle the watery globe as honest traders. Nor can you predict that they will we strong and swarthy, tattooed

But far from the sea, the easy way through the mountains

[[ Read the merchant book ]] [[ Look up the Frame/Timber Built housing style ]]

[[ Asheville is your Analog. ]]

call secure high in a mountain valley at the intersection of two passes.

# possibilities

The King runs the Dungeon so he can train his guards.

The King and the Mad Overlord are one in the same.

Colbac can be conned. Can be overcome in a negotiation. The jewel he stole comes to life and releases a thief?

Checks to see that someone doesn’t pay with creeping coin?

Guy selling his sword and gear and going home.

# The Unlikely Kingdom of Robrecht

On the banks of a lake and a fast moving river

Eelpout, and Steelhead are popular foods.

The tower is known as the tower of mist, as it rises amidt the mist of the falls. (in olden times it was said to have frozen so solid that you could walk across)

The sigil of the Kingdom of Robrecht is the Korvado Forest Dragon – a loathesome beast that attacks caravans like Air Pirhanas.

Boltac changes this to the Eelpout – a fish that is known for it’s great cunning (and looks like schools of silver pieces swimming though the water.)

(pronounced Raw-brecht)

Walled city – grew up around a central keep built on a rock in the middle of the fast running, River Swift. Alternating square and round towers.

Move from two-field system to a three field system

The invention of the plow.

The Town outgrows it’s original walls fairly quickly under Colbac’s rule.

Large mills are set up, harnessing the power of the river \_\_\_\_\_

Right from the word go, Robrecht (pronounced Raw-brecht) was a raw deal.

Bordered on the north by Mercia, Castonax to the West, The ever hungry and rapacious Bloviatian Empire to the East and Chalcris to the South.

A dutchy at best. A kingdom in the mountains in the center of the continent. Having a river, only navigable away from the keep (not big enough to be a castle in the time we set our story.)

A kingdom at a different altitude, a fiercer land where things not long for the world would retreat. A land known for great magical power, for Wizards and the heroes and adventurers who tried to stop them for the great good. Or, at least, loot their hordes for the good of their

Adventurer is what you call a hero who is not likely to succeed.

Adventurer is what you call a penniless hero.

Colbac the Merchant, destroys magic, abolishes the guild, lowers the taxes and turns Robrecht into a trading powerhouse.

It become so wealthy that con men (or a con man extraordinare develops) and, by playing off of people’s own greed, cons his way to the throne.

But Robrecht stockpiles money it becomes a target.

Later, his son, the prince, hires the greatest con man in the realm to save the kingdom from looting by the nearby Kingdom of Blovatia. (Maynard is the king)

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# Notes From Wizardry

Armor

Plate mail padded leather potions of curing, of sleep of fire, of harm

Blade of biting

Potions

Shiny Chain

Sturdy plate

Body Armor

Glove of copper

Anointed Mace

Anointed flail

Staffs. Staves

buckler

breastplate # Notes and Oddments

Add townspeople who show up as he tries to sneak out of town. The blacksmith gives him a \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_. The Baker Gives him some bread. The Candle maker gives him some candles.

They all know he’s a hero before he does. # ORCS

“Yes, do you like them?”

“No, I can’t say that I do,” she said, making a face a the horrifying, repellent creatures that clawed and tore at each other.

“I call them Orcs.”

“Orcs?” asked Asarah, not really wanting to know, but sensing that it would not do to upset a Madman already in progress.

“Organically Rendered Creatures of Servitude. Orcs. I’m quite proud of the name.”

“Organically Rendered?” asked Asarah.

“Yes, yes,” said Oddna, encouraged that someone was finally taking an interest, “I grow them in vats.”

“”

# Todo

* Merchant Adventurer
* The Merchant Prince
* The Merchant King
* He thinks about prohibiting merchants, bad for patrons, fewer patrons, but more merchants would be better of patrons >> more patrons >> more merchants >> More patrons (all-in-all, better for everybody)
* make the town more of a real place.
* put the keep in a small island in the river. walled with round and square towers – they spent money on the wall first. Seed the ground

Tell the royal warrant to sell given from the Duke prohibiting only one merchant in the town – as he’s walking to the keep.

make sure the Wizard owns up to running off the Duke at the end. (That’s what he was doing in the Town.) Foreshadow by having him say – I have urgent business with the Duke – it seems a joke, but we later realize…

The Kingdom of Robrecht and the Town of Robrecht

Add Boltac dealing with (or mentioning traders) Also has a relationship with the blacksmith.

Additional book “Merchant King” (magic comes back and the Merchant Adventurer has to put it down?)

Add the beacon of the King – dark as he walks up to the tower – but this is not unusual Robrecht does not have a King – There is an old proverb – to be King of Robrecht is to catch a falling knife – it may seem a prize when you reach for it. But when you get it, it is not at all what you wanted. Then end with him lighting the beacon of the king.

The story of Robrecht is the story of a few people making it to that spire, and then holding it as a strong point against all invaders.

# One sentence summary

After countless adventurers fail, a bitter old merchant uses his cunning and negotiation skills to defeat a dungeon full of monsters, defeat the Wizard and restore peace to the kingdom

# Paragraph Summary

“Three-Act structure, then the first disaster corresponds to the end of Act 1. The second disaster is the mid-point of Act 2. The third disaster is the end of Act 2, and forces Act 3 which wraps things up. It is OK to have the first disaster be caused by external circumstances, but I think that the second and third disasters should be caused by the protagonist’s attempts to”“fix things”“. Things just get worse and worse.”

First disaster – Asarah is kidnapped Second disaster – Rattick betrays him

# Major Characters

Colbac the merchant Oddna the Wizard (William Shatner?) Rattick, a terribly craven thief. () Asarah – Innkeeper

A very poor thief an idealistic young fighter The sneaky, savvy, tough young girl The world’s worst Mage A tribe of Orcs A very dumb troll Ven

Page Summary: (See DMscenebreaks)

One Page Character Synopsis: additional sheet

Four Page Synopsis: (take about a week)

Expanded Character description:

Scene List: Additional Sheet

Prototype first draft: (See DMscenebreaks) Super quick, rough draft. 1-2 pages a chapter. Like 50 pages. Optional

Real first draft: pound, pound, pound.

Rattick really should have put that Troll on the payroll. There were only two obstacles to that line of thinking. 1. Rattick never parted with a coin he didn’t have to. 2. Talking to Trolls is exceedingly hazardous to your health. And Rattick, as he was fond of saying, didn’t stick his neck out for nobody.

Academically he could understand how sad it was that three brave, if naive, underprepared and very stupid adventurers had just been turned into a fine red paste by the angry troll that lurked in the back of the first level.

After the fight died down, and all the parties had been thrown out in the street. Rattick made his move. He sidled up to the party and said, “You know, I wasn’t going to join you, but after seeing the ferocity and prowess”

“Our cause?” asked one of the chosen ones, still feeling the effects of his recent concussion.

“Yes, to rid the world of great evil,”

“And win fame and fortune, don’t forget that part,” said the young girl with the Raven hair and the chip on her shoulder.

“Oh, of course, I would never forget that,” he said, “But it is important for you to know that my motivation is much, much deeper than that,” Rattick said with all the sincerity he could manufacture. Rattick loved lying. It was, after all, stealing. And stealing nothing less than the truth.

Boltac until he decides to go on his quest, has flashback and wakes up.

Rattick telling the story of Boltac until they get to Oddna.

Rattick betrays Boltac to the wizard. Boltac is thrown into the deepest pits of the dungeon. Boltac can uphold his code.

He is seized, they drag him before Oddna. he tries to negotiate for the woman – she gets upset because he’s buying her (like a slave) he confesses his love.

Oddna mocks the woman – she’s the sandwich wench. How sad that you are in love with the Sandwich wench.

She looked hurt, but to Boltac’s eyes, he had never seen her look so beautiful before. I have made you an offer, do you decline

Oddna throws it open to the room – to his boys. They all laugh at Boltac. For coming here. For thinking he would get away with this with his life. You’ve been making a living off all of my fallen children. In essence, paying people to come kill them for their posessions and their teeth – in once instance for their body parts. Do you know in the far southern reaches of \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Orc Pizzle is believed to be an aphrodesiac.

Really, Orc Pizzle.

Yes, they dry it, grind it up into a powder and make it into a tonic.

How do they know it’s real Orc pizzle?

I don’t know. Perhaps it has an unmistakable flavor. I would think it would almost have to.

I’ve come shopping

Beasts of the Proving Ground

I call it a Lumber Hulk. Unfortunately

COINS - Everything alive needs to be able reproduce.