Taken from here: <https://andorstrail.com/viewtopic.php?p=49598#p49598>

Credits to lakra

We should use this somewhere in Feygard. Needs some cleaning up, but it’s good material.

Investigation on escaped thieve's guild's inmate in Fallhaven

Chapter One - The missing Thief

My name is Goram and I'm a captain of the Feygard Royal Guard. I was sent to Fallhaven by our beloved Lord Geomyr to investigate the cause of an escaped member of the Thieve's Guild.

We hoped to get information about the high ranked members of this stealing scum because we recieved hints that they would support those rebels from Nor City, but unfortunatly he somehow escaped. This is my story.

I Fallhaven

Day I

Today I arrived in Fallhaven. Most of the people try to ignore me and are not willing to talk to me, especially around the chapel. Maybe my uniform is the problem here.

I wanted to speak to the local guard captain assuming that he should be able to tell me how the inmate could escape. The guard captain wasn't in good shape, even if he tried to pretend that he is a loyal and worthy member of our troops. I could smell the mead in the breath of the officer. None of his men could tell me anything useful, only that the inmate was gone during the night. They didn't remember who exactly was on duty that night. This whole garrison was a glowing example of shame.

I took a bed in the tavern and sent a message to Feygard. The guard captain would be replaced by another man, a man who is willing to do what is necessary to hunt down the members of the Thieve's guild, to upkeep the order in Fallhaven. Before I went to bed, I had a few drinks and thought about the condition of the local guard.

I could swear that I saw a man with a dark cape hiding in the shadows and watching me, but maybe the alcohol and the bad light cheated me.

Day II

I didn't sleep well. I heard noises outside my room and I thought somebody wanted to enter. When I headed to the door and looked outside, there was nobody there. I never slept well anywhere else then in my home, without my wife lying next to me.

I wandered around the town, and tried to hear some rumours. Usually rumours are just a bunch of lies and cinderella stories, but sometimes they can point a direction to you.

I asked a woman who just bought some stuff at the local clothes dealer if she heared anything about the fleeing inmate. She asked me why nowadays everyone searches for somebody.

'Well, you might want to remember and tell me, who searches somebody?' I asked her. She wanted to leave. I think she feared that somebody could see that she was talking to a Feygard official. 'You will remember a name or a person, or you might consider yourself having a look at the life of an inmate first hand' I said to her. There were two names she told me, before she ran away. Endor or Anor and a kid named Lakra. Maybe I should have listended more carefully, I never heard about names like that.

Before going back to the tavern, I had a look inside the chapel. I could swear I saw the local priest giving a potion to a praying woman. When he saw me watching him, he turned back to his altar. I saw those potions before. Bonemeal. The new guard captain would have a busy time here, cleaning up this sinnery city.

It seems the people down here don't expect authorites arm being long enough to reach them here.

A few drinks during the evening in the Tavern, I could swear I was watched again. I moved towards the shadow, but there was nobody.

Day III

Now I was sure that somebody had an eye on me. A notice lied infront of my door. 'Leave' was written in bloody letters upon it.

I headed back to guard house. I showed the note to the guard captain. 'Looks like you made an enemy' was his only reply. I started to ask him a few things about the night the thief escaped. I could see it in his dumb eyes that he was trying to hide something from me. I could smell his sweat. I decided to try something and assumed that somebody from the guard had to help the missing criminal with the prison break. And there is only one person who is responsible for the actions of the local guards. And that is him, atleast for now.

He told me a story, that one of his guards, he couldn't remember who, was alone on duty that night. The guard reported, that he heard a noise outside and had a look.

When coming back, the inmate was gone. I knew that he was a lier. That was one of the worst stories, I ever heard.

'So, there was a guard, having a look after a noise from the outside. Staying long enough away so the inmate could flee. But you can't remember who was on duty. I assume that you were the guard on duty, but I can't prove it for now. You might want to give me a hint or a name for my investigation. And I might want to look over the fact, that you are hiding mead in your desk. I can smell the mead in your breath, not even

the smell of your sweat is stronger than that.' I knew I had him. Simple people, so easy to manipulate.

'Lakra, a kid from Crossglen, he asked about the inmate on the same day he escaped, that's all I remember. Now leave me alone' was what he answered.

Then the other guards escorted me to the outside.

Crossglen... Not more then a hint from a fearsome officer who counted his last days. But I had no other clue so far.

I bought some civil clothes and switched my uniform for them. Another rest in the tavern and then I should see, what I can find out there.

Day IV

Hopefully the last night here. I bought some bread for the way and sharpened my daggers. I was never in for swords. You can't hide them in your clothes and people are intimidated by them. Intimidated people will offer you less information. No information, no investigation. No investigation, no success. No success, no head on your shoulders. Lord Geomyr really doesn't like unsuccessful investigators.

Leaving the town towards the West I stumbled upon a sad looking man, standing next to a grave and an entrance to something looking like an old mine. We had a few words and he told me his story. He told me of his fallen friend and how they were betrayed by a third man. How his friend was killed and he buried him. Then, and that became interesting, a kid helped him out to get his revenge. 'How did he do that' I asked. The answer was surprising. It seems, that kid killed the man named Irogotu. So not only could it be, that this kid Lakra was somehow involved in the prisonbreak, but he also killed a man, even if the man was a murderer. Well, unfortunatly I didn't have the time to climb down the ladder to have a look at the corpse of Irogotu.

I continued my way towards Crossglen. Between some trees I heard a loud noise of flys and a nasty smell was in the air. When I looked through the trees, I saw a bunch of eviscerated corpses.

The corpses were the remains of not just young wild dogs, but puppies. Disturbing. Finally I reached Crossglen and rented myself a bed in the local Tavern.

Crossglen

Day V

This village was a shady, little conglomeration of old houses, simple villagers and dirt. But if I would be lucky, I might have found the kid I was looking for and probably the boy could tell me where the thief was hiding. I reminded myself to be careful, maybe that the little boy wasn't so little at all, at least he might killed a man. But honestly, I didn't expect a simple villager could be a match for an Officer of Feygard.

How arrogant I was... .

Before asking around I developed myself the plan that I won't tell anybody that I'm a Feygard official. Maybe I should tell another story. Maybe I should be from Fallhaven, which isn't a real lie, because I acutally stayed there for some time. It might have been just four days, but it felt like 4 months. And maybe little Lakra owed me some money. Or maybe I should be a friend of him, who is afraid that somebody could be after him or he met the wrong people in big bad Fallhaven. The last version sounded like the best one.

So I started to ask around. Most of the villagers were concerned that little Lakra was in trouble and were more then willing to help me. They drawed a picture of two helpful kids. Both of them left some time ago. So I now had two kids, brothers as I was told. It seemed they both left towards Fallhaven. The younger brother, Lakra, helped the villagers out with their supply cave. He cleared it from rats, he had an eye on his old father. He was very popular here in Crossglen.

Could it be, that this little boy was involved in two crimes in Fallhaven? Could he be involved in a prison break and the murder of a murderer? I had to speak to his father.

The father didn't hear of his two sons for a long time now. He was sad about that and feared that both of them could be lost or worse. He wanted me to find his sons, to bring them home. I wanted to yell at him, that he would see his sons in a Feygard prison, maybe hanging on our market place for the crimes they did. But what proves for crimes did I have? There was nothing. And I wasn't really after two kids.

I wanted that thief back under our control. But the best trail I had so far, was to find one of the kids. Better both of them. Atleast until I could get a better hint, a better trail.

I went back to the tavern to make my mind. I had a few drinks with some locals. They told me about a cave, which they called the snake cave. Rumours said that cultists seemed to have it occupied. Lakra was there very often, killing snakes to offer their meat in town. Suddenly the cultists left the place, they were not seen again. What was disturbing was that the kid not only offered snake-meat, he even offered dog meat. The puppy-corpses came in my mind. Could it be that...? How would it fit in the picture of a helpful young kid, offering meat, helping people out, that he was also a puppy slayer? Maybe imminent starvation turned simple, peaceful villagers into dog eating hillbillies.

Could it be, that we had a bad and good brother here? Maybe one was the little hero in the family and the other one was not.

Day VI

I planned to have a look in this snake cave. Well, let's say I found the reason for the disappeared Cultists. I needed to go back to the tavern. I never saw anything like this before. There were corpses over and over. Their priest lied infront of his altar. His head, it was placed on the unholy table, looking straight into my direction like somebody prepared this scene for any curious intruder.

I needed to make my mind. I needed to take a breath before continuing my chase.

Who ever did this was a very dangerous person. I had to inform the Lord Geomyr. Decisions had to be made.

Day VII

I discarded my plan to inform the Lord. What should I have written? 'The best Officer of his Royal Guard is scared and becomes insecure because he saw some corpses in a cave'? No, I just couldn't do that.

In fact, my goal was to catch a running thief. Who am I to search for Kids or mass-murderers of cultists? I should not even care about those fanatics. And who am I to be distracted by an, what do they call that? By an optional quest? I am an Officer of the Feygard Royal Guard, one of the best investigators Feygard can send. I'm not one of those ridiculous adventureres, getting lost on side tracks, losing their goal.

But where should I start? What could a fleeing thief do in our country? Where could he hide? Fallhaven and the guildhouse, and there has to be a guild house of those scumbags, would be too dangerous for them.

Maybe he hides in the woods, I thought. Or maybe there were more caves, like the snake cave. Maybe the thief killed the cultists on his search for shelter?

I asked for hiding places in Crossglen.

The villagers didn't know any, but then I heard rumour of an abandoned prison to the south. That would be ironical, I thought. A former inmate, a wanted person, hiding in an abandoned prison. I would have a look.

I used the rest of the day to refill my supplies. I even looked out for some weapons visiting the local smith. But honestly, none of those hillbillies could forge weapons even close to monuments of craftsmanship from my beloved Feygard.

Flagstone Prison

Day VIII

The way was longer then I expected. I went too far to the south. Damn villagers, not even directions they could provide. 'Just go straight to the south' I heared them say.

Well, they might didn't know any better. If I asked them wearing my uniform, I doubt they would have dared to offer wrong directions to me. Well, when I think about that, they might didn't talk to me at all.

The muddy streets ruined my shoes, which I bought in Fallhaven. For some reasons a lunatic traveller dressed a boar with leather boots. Maybe he thought that this would look funny. Lucky me I could kill the boar and the boots were my size.

At the entrance of Flagstone I met a former guard of the prison. He stood there, loyal to his duty, guarding the entrance. It got late and I was tired from walking through the mud and hunting the boar.

So I rested at the fire with the guard and planned to examine the building tomorrow. I still had two bottles of mead with me, which we drank sitting around a bonfire. The guard told me about the misfortune of the inmates. They dug a tunnel, but they dug too deep. Something awoke in a dark passage they discovered. The former inmates were mostly turned into undead creatures, some of them were imprisoned by the creatures to get tortured or even eaten alive. The guard stood his ground to prevent the undead to leave this place and attack the nearby villages. Then, on one fine day, a kid appeared.

That made me curious. The thief I was looking for wasn't a kid for sure. I asked him, what the name of this kid was, but I already knew the answer. The kid crawled through the dark tunnels and finally killed the source of the undead population, an ancient demon. Oh, what a scary demon it must have been, getting killed by a kid, I thought to myself.

He came out with a powerful artifact, a sword which was worn only by the best of the Flagstone Guards. An old and powerful relict of the glory

days, when Flagstone was not just a prison, but a fortress. It sure was, until Lord Geomyr wisely decided, that we wouldn't need a strong military presence down there anymore.

The guard also told me, that he saw the kid pass from time to time. He headed to the direction of the lost cities of Prim and Blackwater Mountain and came back after a few days. He did not talk to the little adventurer again and lately it seemed that he not even noticed the guard anymore. Even if Lakra did not even cheer to him he could see changes in his personality. In the way, he behaved, the way he moved. His clothing changed, he wasn't wearing the dusty hardened leather shirt anymore, he had a new one. A piece of craftsmanship never seen before.

The last time he saw him, Lakra even wore a strange looking helmet. There was an aura of something evil around the helmet. The guard was concerned about that changes and felt threatened by the kid even if he didn't know why. But we always felt better when the kid left his sight.

A good story I thought. Especially the part with Prim and Blackwater Mountain. The last thing we heard from the two settlements were that they would be attacked by monsters. Then, the messages stopped.

And so did the tax payment. But if the kid could have reached those villagers, then a tax collector could do the same thing I guess. I would write to Lord Geomyr about that, as soon as I would reach a tavern again.

I slept well under the roof of the stars. There were no clouds this night, just some noises from the nearby woods.

Day IX

The entrance hall of the prison was a mess. The remains of dead prisoners, and now not-so-undead-anymore undeads lied on the floor. It reminded me on the dead cultists I saw in the snake cave. The light, which shined through one of the old windows was lightly reflected by an item, which was placed on one of the corpses. I found out, that it was a gem, a ruby. When I picked it up, I saw that something bit in the arm of the dead zombie. Was that an animal?

I had a closer look at the bite. It was too small for an animal, like a wolf or a dog. It looked, like it was... could it be human? Maybe some undeads could hide from their nemesis and filled their stomach with some of their own meat. But the bite was so small. It looked like

the bite could be from a kid. I shivered about what came in my mind. I looked at another corpse. The same here. I saw a big dead rat (I never asked myself why rats became so big in this country) -another bite.

I pulled out my daggers, even if I knew that I was fast. But better be careful, maybe the hungry thing was still around. Then I ransacked the former offices of the guards upstairs, but I only found more bitten corpses, some old notes.

This place was empty and filled with the silence that only death could spread.

Downstairs, something was moving in one of the cells. There was what used to be a prisoner. He hardly identified me as a human being. When he heard my voice, he started shivering and crying. He begged me to let him out. I offered him, to consider it, when he would tell me, what happened here. And if he saw a member of the Thieve's Guild passing by (honestly, how could he know what a member of this guild would look like. Did I really expect, that a former inmate would continue to wear his prison clothing? I had my doubt he ever heard about them as well).

I also asked him, what caused all the bites on the corpses. The answer was unsatisfying. And unbelievable. So I left him where he was. The day I would free a prisoner, would be the day hell freezes.

The prison guard awaited my return and I stayed with him another night, discussing the things I saw in the prison. He was disgusted by the story of the inmate.

Day X

Horrible night, I dreamed. Dreamed of being lost in a dark cave. I was running, something was after me. I could see the scheme of a kid following me. I stumbled, felt to the floor. I turned around unable to move.

The scheme was over me, I could feel a blade entering my stomach, the scheme showed its theeth, they came towards my face.

I woke up, sweating.

The last time I started dreaming was while investigating in an uncertain cause of a bunch of lost people in Feygard. The dreams started, when I was after a suspect, but was unable to find proves against him. The whole investigation was a clear mess. We never found the remains of the lost people, nor did we find any proves against the suspect. Even if I knew I was right. He even smiled at me, when I ransacked his house, his bedroom. He even kept smiling, when I cut off his head. I had no evidence against him, but I knew I was on the right trail. And nobody was missed again, when I judged the suspect. So I guess, I had the right man. But the authority was not so happy. There were no proves against the man, so how could I kill him? What would happen, if people started to ask questions to cause? Of course nobody asked any questions. Questioning the faultless investigations of the Feygard Bureau of Investigation was your entrance card to the dungeon under our imposing head quarter.

Anyways, the degraded me for not acting close enough to their rules. So catching the little thief from Fallhaven was my chance to restore my reputation as an investigator and to get my old rank back. I would try to play the game with their beloved rules this time.

I decided to go back to Fallhaven, to send messages to the Feygard Bureau of Investigation and await the response. Maybe we had a bigger problem here, then the Thieve's Guild. Maybe I should turn my priorities. Maybe, I was on the best way to get stuck in a side quest... .

Day XI

I chose an indirect route back to Fallhaven. Maybe I could find a hint on the running thief somewhere in the surrounding woods. Maybe I just needed some time, wandering around in the peaceful wilderness to sort out my thoughts, sort out the trails I had, sort out the facts.

I passed an abandoned house, examined it, but there was no thief, no kid, straight up nothing.

While evading some wild animals I crossed the path of a stranger, dressed in a simple leather armor and equipped with a sword. Well, I think that rusty piece of metal wished to be a sword.

The man rudly cut off my deep thoughts, asking me for my directions and my profession. He slowly pulled out his sword, to substantiate his demand for my money. I was in a generous mood. I answered his

question for my profession with taking his sword arm, answering his question for my directions with cutting off his right ear, answering his demand for my money with introducing myself as Goram, Investigator of the Feygard Royal Guard, member of the Feygard Bureau of Investigation.

He cried and begged me to let him go. He didn't want to share the destiny of his compagnon. What happened to him, I asked, maybe a bit bored, maybe a bit tired.

The robber told me, that his friend was nearly cut in half by a kid. The sword, the kid used...

He never saw anything like this before. He had to watch everything, hiding in the nearby trees. Everything happened so fast. But the kid didn't stop when the roque hit the floor. He bit in his neck and it seemed that a little wound in his young face, maybe from another encounter some hours ago, just disappeared.

So I found another clue to the bites on the corpses I recently found in Flagstone Prison. Of course I brought justice to the shady bandit, before leaving the place.

Fallhaven came in sight a few hours later. I went straight to the tavern, even if I knew my follower from the past would possibly await me there. This time, I should be luckier, this time I reached him in the shadows of sinnery barroom.

Well, not really did I reach him. One of my daggers did. It didn't just reach him, it nailed him through his shoulder straight on the wooden wall behind him. He stared at me, looking surprised and scared. I completed his note from some days ago -'Leave' was written on it - with letters from his own blood and the words 'me alone'. Then I stuffed the sheet of paper in his mouth and went to my chamber.

I wrote to my master. I gave an update on my mission, the thief was still missing, but I found out, the he might got help by a dangerous kid, or maybe two brothers, being extremly dangerous and violent. I wrote, that those two kids seemed to be a threat to the safety of the country region around Fallhaven, maybe even to Feygard if they could get there unidentified. Then I decided to stay in Fallhaven, behaving like an ordinary resident of the town and waited for a response and orders. Maybe I could use the time to have a look at the Thieve's Guild in general, maybe I would use the time to gather the thrust of some locals here.

And I prayed, prayed that the dreams would stay away... but deep inside me, I knew better. The dreams would be there as long as the kid would be out there. I knew what I had to do, even I would recieve other orders. I had to find this kid. I had to bring justice to him, to pacify the

country again. Evidence or not, I didn't need them in the past. I always did the right thing, even if nobody else could see it. Even if nobody else could appreciate that. Who were they to degrade me? Who were they to judge me? That's why they will always send me to special investigations,

why they will always need me. I'm the best, I'm the only one who knows, what needs to be done, I'm Goram.

Fallhaven

Day XII

Even if I knew I was still watched nobody dared to confront me nor did I recieve strange notes anymore. The villagers mostly ignored me. When I tried to talk to somebody, they seemed to be improperly polite answering my questions with only phrases.

I started to feel a bit lost in this place, waiting for orders and a reply on my letter which I wrote to Feygard.

Days passed by, nothing happened. The only notable thing was a group of men I met in the Tavern. They seemed to be different then the other villagers. At least they welcomed me at their table and we had a few drinks during one of those boring evenings I had to suffer the past few days. They shared some interesting stories with me.

What they all had in common was that they searched for their lost brothers. I was confused about that. Obviously the simple country families tended to send their oldest son away for some reasons and later send their younger brothers after them.

Maybe the people here tried to prevent their kids from getting bored this way. In Feygard, we created other ways to do that. Most common activity was a thing we called school. The children should spend their time with reading books and writing texts, some of them seemed to get pretty wise from this system. I never was in for that. Everything I ever needed I learned from the troops and the countless fights

I was in. But maybe this way was obsolete nowadays. Maybe I was, too.

Anyways, the guys were very solid men and if there weren't their strange names they could have been great compagnons.

One name I could still remember was rijackson741. I wondered why parents should name their kid like that. Maybe they were very simple people with lots of children. Maybe they merged two names here, like Rick Jackson.

Probably they were scared that they could forget his birthday, so they attached the number to his name. I guess he had a hard childhood with that name. But it seemed his childhood prepared him well for his adventures, even if it wasn't a lucky one.

The other guy, I think his name was Zukero, for somehow applied in orange letters in my mind. Maybe that came from the unusual sound of his name. A strange aura he had, like he could change this whole world somedays. He even moderated our whole conversation like we were in one of those pupblic talking rounds, which came up on the Feygard marketplace lately. Strange thing about those is, that they were usually held shortly after breakfast time and were extended until lunch time. If people wanted to waste their time, they could listen to a bunch of seemingly lunatic people who felt the urgent need to share their wisdom. The third one, Usirim, he held a large monologue questioning the motives of the group and even the motives and the moral of my person. He seemed very interested in my background, he even asked for my family.

That was, when I had to leave. An Officer of Feygard never tells too much about his background. And for sure he doesn't to a group of strangers, even if they seemed to be nice human beings.

Day XIX

I waisted seven days waiting. I didn't found out anything new and I didn't get new orders. One day I crossed the path of the Guard Captain and I could see his smile telling me that he was well amused with the missing progress of my investigation.

I smiled back to him not showing signs of weakness and knowing, that his days in the rank of a captain should be almost over if not his days in the Royal Guard.

In the evenining, a visitor came to the cabin I rented in the tavern. He turned out to be an Officer from the Feygard Bureau of Investigation for himself. So they didn't just send new orders, they also sent somebody to bring them, maybe to assist me.

How wrong I was.

He stared at me showing no emotions except being disgusted by my view.

He told me, that they started an investigation, an investigation against me. I had lost my goal, he said. I didn't catch the thief, he said.

I blamed the local guard captain for the participation of the prison break, he said. I lost the trail of a running thief because I became obsessed by the delusion of a child running around, searching his brother, murdering people, even eating corpses.

He was here to see if I became insane, to look at my mental condition. Where was my uniform, he asked. Why was I dressed like a local farmer, he asked.

I wanted to take my uniform, but he intervened. This is not your uniform anymore, he told me. He gave me a sealed depeche. I knew this kind of messages. I saw them before. But this message had another seal, not the one I was used to.

This message had the seal of Lord Geomyr himself. I should be lucky, that I was allowed to keep my head, because that would have been the usual penalty for failing so hard with an investigation. Powerful friends with great influence I had, he told me. Two soldiers came in, carrying a chest. I opened the seal of the message and read. Degraded. Out of the Feygard Bureau of Investigation. I was degraded to the common guard. All my privileges were gone.

From one moment to another I wasn't the best investigator of the Feygard Royal Guard and the Feygard Bureau of Investigation anymore. I only remained as a common guard. The chest was opened, a rusty guard armor was in it.

They made me pull it over. I saw their arrogant smiles. I didn't offer them the satisfaction to see me angry. My blood ran cold, my face showed no signs of any emotion, no signs of weakness.

My house would be confiscated as any of my belongings would be. My wife would be banned from Feygard but they would tell her, where she could find me.

New orders were in the message as well. I was sent to the Foaming Flask Tavern north of Vilegard. I would be on patrol to scan the area for any activities of the Nor City rebels.

The investigator ordered me to follow him to the local guard house. The guard captain awaited us. There was a man in one of the cells. I had to listen and stand there, witnessing the promotion of this incompetent piece of shame.

He catched the thief, they said. How should he? That was impossible. I had to appologize for the allogations against him. They sent me away without weapons, I should get a sword, as soon as I would arrive at the tavern. Maybe they wanted me to get killed on my way.

I left, without saying a single word. On the steps to the outside, the guard captain yelled at me to salute to him. I didn't turn around. They might took everything I was, everything I owned, but they won't be able to take my pride for sure.

I was concerned, if my wife would make it down their. I sent a message to a friend to look for her before I left Fallhaven.

Many questions ran through my mind. Why were they so fast with declaring my investigation as failed? Sure, the process got stuck and I didn't make any progress, but why degrading me, why kicking me out of the Feygard Bureau of Investigation instead of answering my messages?

And how could they get this thief back to prison? Did the Thieve's Guild sacrafice him to the authority, so nobody would look too close? Was that a conspiracy against me? And why didn't they write one single word on the cause of the dangerous kid running around?

I wouldn't give up so fast.

Being on patrol would help me to make my mind. Things needed to be sorted. And I needed to reach the Tavern north of Vilegard. Whatever or whoever was responsible for this, I would find out. I would find out why he or she did that.

And I would show the Feygard officials once again, that I was not only worthy to be a thrusted investigator, but to be one of the most dangerous men they had.

Chapter Two - There are no duties like guard duties

Road to Vilegard

Day XX

The way to Vilegard was more a path then a road. Well, at least the mud covered the rust on my armor. I had to sneak around most of the wild animals, because I had to leave without weapons.

Did they really expect me to get killed by snakes or wolfs? Maybe they just found it funny or they were satisfied in making things even harder for me. Maybe that was the receipt for the arrogance with which I sometimes confront other people.

I found another whole on the floor, maybe an old smuggler's cave, which offered me shelter for the night. It wasn't very comfortable, but I found a dry corner which would serve me as a bed.

The bandit I met on my way to Fallhaven came in my mind. I thought about my decision to judge him and immediatly carrying out the death sentence. He sure deserved it. Wouldn't he have been a threat to all travellers there?

Didn't he cause so much horrible things to peaceful people, robbing them, maybe killing them? Wasn't it enough, that I took his sword arm, marked him with a missing ear as well?

But would that really have prevented him from learning to use his sword with his other arm? Would that have changed him? When would a man deserve a second chance, a chance to change his life?

I got my second chance, even if I was degraded. But at least I was still alive and this was far more then other investigators recieved, when they failed. So why should I have a second chance, but people I assumed to be guilty wouldn't get one?

Who am I to investigate, judge and carrying out sentences? Of course, our Bureau of Investigation always did that. But wasn't that unrestricted power of our authority one of the reasons, the people from Nor City started their revolution?

Could it be, that I was a guilty man for myself? Didn't I abuse my power in the past? When I was judging Lakra for murdering a murderer, and I would kill him, then wouldn't I be a murderer of a murderer of a murderer? Which would technically make me a murderer as well?

I became tired over my thoughts. Maybe somedays, when this school thing would work, maybe people would start to ask similar questions. I felt asleep.

The nightmares came back, they would always come back...

I could see my wife, running away from me, deep into the woods. I ran after her unable to come closer. The trees around us, they screamed with the voice of the dead robber, howling that nobody would outrun justice.

A scheme overtook me, chasing my wife. While passing me, he turned his head towards me. I knew who it was, I could see his teeth and his evil smile. He came closer to my wife. When he reached her, both dissapeared behind a close standing group of trees into the darkness.

When I reached the place, my wife lied on the floor, her right arm was gone, her right ear was missing. The scheme finished its work with biting out parts of her neck.

I woke up, screaming. My stomach turned over. I left the place, running towards my destination.

I needed to go to the Foaming Flask Tavern, I needed to find my wife. And I needed to find this kid.

Foaming Flask Tavern

Day XXI

I reached the tavern early in the morning. There was no guard at the front door. I entered the building, no one was awake. Where was the garrison, I asked myself. The innkeeper came towards me, asking what I wanted. Then he looked at my dirty uniform and my empty sword holster.

If I was one of the missing soldiers, he asked. I wanted to speak to the guard captain but I had to wait until he woke up. I would not be dissapointed, he was in the same shape as the guard captain of Fallhaven. I reported myself for duty. He looked confused and made me sit down

at one of the tables. We had a breakfest and then he told me, what my first mission would be. A patrol was missing, a patrol on its way to the east. I would have to follow this patrol, until I would reach a trade house on the road. If I couldn't find them, I should come back.

I told him, that I was concerned about my wife. He looked at me with mercy and offered me to have a look on the road up north.

Then I got myself a sword from the weapon chamber. I looked at the sword and confronted the guard captain with the bad quality. For a normal soldier it must have been looking good, but I could see the porous steel it was made of. The swords came with a shipment which a kid called Lakra brought to them from the Crossroads Guardhouse. I didn't respond anything, but I asked the captain for his dagger. It should serve me better, I thought. Then I left for my first day on patrol.

I found the remains of a dead guard between some trees. A broken sword lied right beside him. So I was correct, the swords were of a shady quality, maybe the shipment was sabotated. I followed a little path to the north, which led me to the entrance of a cave. The rest of the patrol was there. They were all dead.

Then a gargoyle chose me as his prey and attacked. I killed him with the dagger and proved once again that I was a threat to everything dumb enough to attack me.

The first part of the cave was empty. Well, not exactly empty, there were dead gargoyles all over it. I crawled deeper and deeper and reached something that looked like a temple. The difference to a normal temple was, that you couldn't see the floor at all. It was a massacre. No, not just a massacre, it was a slaughter house. Hundreds, thousands of corpses. Something moved between the bodies. I stumbled across the bodyparts and catched the person. He tried to attack me, but you could see

that fear almost paralyzed him. When I dodged his attempted strike, he threw away his weapon. I could see, that this man or whatever it was wore a strange mask and a black cape. He pulled down his mask, staring at me. This whole scene on this place, I guess his sanity was nearly gone. Then he started to tell me the story of this place.

He was the last member of the Gargoyle Cult. We knew that a thing like that existed in the past, but we could never find a temple or anything comparable. Once, they were 14699 worshippers, spread across the whole country. They had a flat hierarchy only being devided in trainers and masters. For him, he wanted to reach the rank of a master.

There was a test for becoming promoted. You had to join a group of pilgrims, led by five masters and having nine trainers as servants and worshippers. Maelveon was the undisputed head of the cult. He tested and promoted the cultists. Only the best of them were rewarded with a legendary artifact, the Ring of Lesser Shadow.

When the group of the survivor arrived, they found this placed swimming in blood. All groups of worshippers were lost, no one returned home. They heard rumours about missing pilgrims, but they didn't expect them to be found in their holy temple. Had Maelveon made them fight each other, maybe to let only the strong survive?

They found the answer, Maelveon was dead as well. The ritual, all the dangerous travelling, and they couldn't proceed the ritual. Then they found out, what happened to their compagnons, their friends.

Something moved in the shadows. A kid stormed out of a backroom, ripping himself through his fellow escorts. They couldn't even strike back.

The cultist hided himself under a bunch of bodies watching the massacre in panic. The bloodthirsty kid killed all of them, then he looked at their hands. What did he hope to find? The cultist supposed that he searched for the ring. How did he know about this thing? Then he saw, that the kid already weared one of them, but

how did he find out, that there were more of them? Maybe one of the gargoyle trainers told him, when begging for his life. After that, the kid started to eat parts of the bodies and left the place. The boy looked frustrated, terrifying. That couldn't have been a normal boy, that must have been a demon, a plague.

No mortal humand being could do something like that. I asked the cultist, what was so special about those rings. You'd become stronger by just wearing them and they even healed you. He then buried his face in his hands and started crying. I saw them. He wore two rings. I could hear the rings, whispering to me.

It seemed as they forced me to get them. I pulled out my dagger, the cultist stared at me. 'Your eyes, you have the same expression in your eyes' he yelled at me. His face became terrified. His body sank down to the floor and blood ran from my dagger.

What had I done? I didn't remember myself doing anything, but it was obvious. I just killed the cultist.

And I wore the rings. I inflicted myself a cut on my arm. The wound disappeared in no time. So the cultist was right, the rings were able to heal. I decided to keep the rings and leave this unholy place.

I would report back to the guard captain, that the patrol was lost. I wouldn't report of the graveyard of cultists I found.

On my way back I catched myself polishing my new rings. They seemed dangerous, but I couldn't undress them. The feeling that I would need them, that I had to keep them, was too strong. I couldn't resist.

Day XXII

I arrived at the Foaming Flask Tavern and was already awaited by the Guard Captain. I had to report what I found out, so I told him the story of the missing patrol and the broken swords. I even decided to tell him about the cave, or the slaughter house it was now. What I didn't tell him was the thing about my rings. I had to protect them, hide them... I would never let anybody get his hands on them. I was ordered to take a break for the rest of the day. Tomorrow I would be sent to the North, to the Crossroads Guard House. I should go there as a courier, to report the cause of the sabotated swords and to ask for reinforcements. The Guard Captain feared an attack of the Nor City rebels. Now, with the missing patrol and useless swords the local Feygard garrison would be an easy prey, even for the nearby villagers.

When the night came, the dreams kept coming, too. I stood in a cave, the only light came from the torch I held in my hand. There were no stars around me, no fresh air, only darkness. I could not even see an exit or even the walls. I could here water trickling into a puddle far in front of me. I tried to find something to orient myself. But there was nothing. Then a step behind me broke the silence. I quickly turned around, but I couldn't see anything. The light from the torch didn't reach out wide enough. And it was only one step. Maybe it was something else, maybe it was only my mind playing games with me and the fear of the unknown things hiding in the darkness around me. I moved towards the direction of the trickling water. After moving a bit I heard the noise from another two steps behind me. I turned around again... nothing. It seemed like the light from my torch shrinked with every meter I was moving. Darkness came closer and fear rose from my stomach. I started moving again. I came closer to the water, and the light from my torch became weaker and weaker. Or was it the darkness, that became stronger, eating the light to finally cover myself in the silent blackness of emptiness. The steps, they came closer and the one coming after me would reach me soon. I started to panic. I was a well trained fighter, but how could I fight something in complete darkness, how could I fight darkness itself? I ran towards the trickling sound of water drops. The light went out, I fell to the ground and lost the torch. The steps ended right next to me. I tried to crawl forward, unable to stand up. Finally my hands reached a warm puddle of water. Then I felt the breath of somebody close to the side of my face. A silent voice, more a whisper came to my ear... 'You want to find me? You want to catch me? For what? To restore your honor, get your house back, get your wife back? You want to judge me? You? Look at you, you won't judge anybody. You are guilty.' The voice started to laugh. The laughing became louder and louder. It sounded like a man, laughing about a dirty joke in one of those dirty taverns. Then, it turned into the voice of a giggling kid. 'You are lost' were the last words I heard. It sounded like a kid hopping away, still giggling, still laughing. The puddle started to glow in a dark red light. I bowed my head over the pool. It looked like it was deeper then a simple puddle should be. Something floated towards the surface. It looked like a body. Suddenly, I looked into the disformed face of the Foaming Flask Tavern Guard Captain. The water turned to blood. His arms reached out to pull me into the pond. I screamed and woke up.

I was surrounded by guards. Their swords pointed on me. I wasn't in my bed, I was in the middle of the bar room. My hands were covered in blood. The local Guard Captain or at least his remains lied in front of me.

'You bloody bastard, you are arrested for the murder of a patrol, which was sent to the east and the murder of a Feygard Officer. You will be brought to the Crossroads Guard House, where you will be sentenced to death by hanging.' I couldn't say a single word. I was still shivering, confused, scared. So I went to arrest without trying to resist.

Road to Crossroads Guard House

Day XXIII

I walked with a group of four guards. They applied handcuffs to me and tried to keep a little distance between me and them. I could see the fear in their faces. Well, I couldn't blame them. When I awoke from my dream, it looked like I teared the Guard Captain apart with my bare hands. But how could this happen? I did remember the dream I had, better to say the nightmare. But it didn't feel just like an imagination, it felt too real. The covering darkness, locking out all the light. The kid talking to me. Was it the same kid? Was it Lakra? I had his vision in other dreams, but he never spoke to me. I just couldn't describe the scene, it was as he was not just a vision in a dream, it felt like he somehow entered my thoughts. And then his demonic laughing. Was I about to lose my mind?

We had to complete a two day trip to the north, so I would have some time with my thoughts. The guards wouldn't talk a single word to me. The conversation we had was made with their gestures and their moving swords. When we came deeper into the woods, the shadows of the trees crossed the ongoing road. A strange feeling came over me. Everytime we stepped into the shadow, I could here a silent voice. It seemed like the trees were whispering something to me, something I couldn't understand. With the sun going down, and the shadows growing bigger the voices became clearer. 'The glow of the Shadow guides my path...' then I heard the giggling kid from my dream again. With every step we made, the voices got louder. I had a look at the guards, but they didn't seem to hear somebody speaking. At least, they didn't show any signs of hearing strange voices.

I started to see moving schemes in the shadows of the trees. The voice went louder now.

'The glow of the Shadow guides my path.

It follows me wherever I go, and aids me against the dangers that others might not see.

I am Shadow, and Shadow is in me.'

The voice was so clear, that it could be right from my head. And the giggling kid. It was accompanied by the giggling kid all the time.

The guards decided to take a rest at a little forest glade, where something like a Crossroad appreared. To the West, the road would lead towards Crossroads Guard House. To the North, there would be the mining village of Charwood. Feygard didn't hear from Charwood for a long time now. Last message was, that they were asking for help against goblins, but Lord Geomyr decided not to help those villagers. Instead he sent reinforcements to Loneford, to prevent the Goblins from heading up North. Nobody heard of Charwood again, they were on their own.

First, the guards let me join them around their fire, but when they wanted to sleep, they chained me at a tree a bit outside from their camp. Maybe they feared, that I could attack them, like I did it to the Guard Captain. I tried to convince them to let me stay at the fire, near the only source of light. I hoped the light would prevent the dreams from coming back to me. But the guards refused.

I tried to stay awake, not to fall asleep. The laughing voice danced around my head. 'I follow you, wherever you go. I am Shadow, and I'm in you'. I shut my eyes, even if I tried to refuse.

I was in the cave again. But there was no torch. Just darkness. The tickling water was there, too. Then, the whole scene started to glow in a deep red. I could see the scheme of a kid, hopping in my direction. He was laughing and giggling.

'You are after me,

want to know where I be,

but all you will see,

is death on his way,

wherever you stay.

The fear in your heart,

will tear you apart.'

The scheme stopped right infront of me. Its face was hidden under a cape, I couldn't even see its hands. The apparition faded.

Then, just before only nothingness was left of the appearance, it turned its head towards me. 'Safe yourself' the demonic laughing came back. Then, everything went to absolute darkness. When I woke up. I wasn't chained at the tree anymore. I looked around me, trying to imagine where I was or what happened. I had the same feeling like I had in the Tavern. I took a glance on the scene around me. The four guards were dead. Something must have killed them, while they were sleeping I told to myself. But I knew, it was myself, who did this. I turned around. The chains were still hanging around the tree. But they were busted. How could I do things like this? And why couldn't I remember anything of the things that happened last night, except the dream I had? I took the raincoat of one of the guards and pulled the hood deep into my face. Where should I go? Crossroads Guard House to surrender myself? Back to the Foaming Flask Tavern to meet the guards of the murdered Captain again? No, I needed to collect some equipment and to find out, what those dreams came from. And I still had to reinstall my honor as the best Feygard Investigator, even if this seemed a bit difficult under the common circumstances.

So I left the main road and took the small path to Charwood.

Path to Charwood

Day XXIV

I followed the small path through the woods. My only companion was the silent voice, which got louder everytime I had to step through a shadow. I crossed the way of some wild animals, specially foxes and forest serpents. I heard stories of lone travellers, who were attacked by the local fauna and had some experience aggressive creatures myself. All the animals I met kept themselves in a safe distance to me, even if I didn't have any weapons with me. It seemed if something told them to stay away from me. The path ran its way through the forest like one of those serpents, turning left and right, fading behind trees only to appear back from the dark. When I arrived at another crossroad I could already see the sun going down. A wooden sign told me, that Charwood would be to the North, but I decided to the rest in the wilderness. As long as I had to assume, that I could be a serious threat to people while sleeping, I had to protect the simple villagers from myself. Best to do so with staying away from them during night time.

I made myself a nice little bonfire and gazed into it. The picture of my wife appeared in my mind. The warmth from the fire and the imagination of the beloved woman gave me some peace. I still relied on the message from my friend, that she would be safe and guarded. When I felt asleep, the visions came back.

This time, there was no tickling water. I was still in a cave but I could see the walls and the floor. It wasn't really a bright place, but the light was enough to get a picture of the scene. I could see schemes moving in the dark. They looked like the ghosts from the stories we told our kids, when the time was right for a little ghost story. I heard of those things in old legends. Hirathil Ghosts they were called. Once, they were powerful fighters, dangerous men who fought many battles and were feared. They travelled through this country as a scourge for the simple villagers and farmers. They were even seen as a threat to the safety of Feygard. And someday, they just dissapeared. It was, as if they had never existed. The memory of this terrifying army faded and people continued their lifes. Other conflicts were fought and the only trails the Hirathils left were stories and legends. One of those stories said, that the army obtained an old map, showing the way to a tomb or something like that deep in this god forsaken woods people call the Green Maze.

They seemed to ignore me, wandering around without any sign of making sense. Some of them just stood in passages like they were guiding the way. Others patroled without following any specific routes. I crouched through the cave, deeper and deeper to the inside of earth itself. The air around me was dusty and became warmer. Then I could see a ladder offering a way back to the surface. I stumbled towards it and then I saw the hooded scheme again. It sat right infront of the ladder, looking into my direction. Atleast I thought it looked towards me, as I couldn't see his face. Something prevented me from coming any closer. A droning voice filled the silence of the strange place.

'You're not a ghost nor are you a man,

you're not a threat or friend, what are you then?

Once, I wandered this land to fulfil a quest,

now the burden of the shadow, lies on my chest.

What makes me stay here, to slay all the ghosts,

I become stronger but have to stay lost.'

Then the scheme disappeared. The scene turned back to the dark red I saw before. The hopping child came back, I could here the demonic giggling again. I became terrified. The scene turned to pure darkness and it was, as the whole cave screamed in pain.

I woke up. Animals with glowing red heads and feet surrounded me. I saw their teeth and their evil eyes. They stared at me. I folded my hood back to get a better view and made myself ready to defend, even if I hadn't any weapons with me. The creatures started to shiver and bark, then turned around and ran to the trees. I looked around, it was still nighttime.

I put some more wood to my bonfire and kept staring in the flames, until I could see the sunrise behind the mountains where I would find Charwood. What were those things? And why did they just leave me?

Day XXV

With first flashes of sunlight I went on to follow the path towards Charwood. I reached a wooden cabin with some crates infront of it. It looked like a trading outpost, even if it wasn't in a good shape anymore. If there wasn't coming smoke out of the chimney I would have thought that the blockhouse might be abandoned. I sneaked around the area to get a view through one of the windows. I didn't want to to run into a Feygard Patrol even if I had my doubts they would come here. I could see four people in there -three of them were armed men and the last one was a woman dressed like a waitress. I decided to enter and ask for supplies, then I would continue to Charwood. When I stepped through the door, all eyes were on me immediately. Well, my appearance wasn't very thrustworthy to be honest. I didn't really expect them to help me out.

My sight wandered around the room. It could have been a Tavern as well. There were beds to the right, a table with some served food and a some chairs infront of a bar. I slowly walked towards the counter noticing that two of the armed men coming in my direction. When I sat down they surrounded me. One of them intoduced himself as Kantya.

'We don't see many travellers around here nowadays' he told me. I explained that I wanted to go to Charwood and hoped to get some supplies. I decided to tell them a story, that robbers took my money and I couldn't pay them for food, but would appreciate a helpful hand.

'We don't have giveaways for beggars' was his reply. I folded my hands on the bar, which may was a fault.

'You could pay with one your rings instead of asking for free supplies'.

The whispering voice in my head became louder. 'I am Shadow, and I'm in you'

I told him that I couldn't do that and would leave but the woman had her eyes on my rings as well.

'I saw those rings before, where did you get them?' she asked me.

I tried to hide my hands in my coat even if I figured out that they could see this as a sign that I would try to pull out a weapon.

Her expression then became more friendly. She started to tell me, that I wouldn't find Charwood as a city, only as an abandoned collection of destroyed houses. She continued telling me, that the village was lost and the remaining people of Charwood where now living in this former trade house. They planned to rebuild the village in the future, but for now they waited for caravans bringing fresh supplies to them. They already sent out couriers to the nearby cities to ask for support. The three men joined the conversation, telling me that they digged too deep in the mine and an old evil awoke in the dark passages under the tunnels. Then, when all seemed to be lost, a kid came to them, fighting his way through an army of goblins, going to the deepest and darkest caves of the mine and killing an old dragon like creature called Thukuzun.

He gave hope to the people of Charwood. The ruins were still dangerous because there were still small groups of goblin marauders but they were looking forward to solve this problem in the future. Of course, the kid was named Lakra.

With all the evil things he did, why should he have helped those poor villagers? How did this fit with the corpse eating creature he was? Then, the woman looked into my face.

'You, you are carrying the same burden as the kid. The rings you wear, they are powerful artifacts, making their owners stronger. But the price is too high. They might enforce your body, your fighting skills, your health, but they are weakening your soul, destroying your mind. In Remgard, their used to live a woman. They called her a witch, an evil threat to the community. She studied all forms of occult rituals gathering knowlade of black magic and the old gods. But maybe she is able to help you, able to save the remains of your personality, your sanity before you get lost in the shadows.'

She then packed me some food and finally gave me a rusty dagger. I left the cabin wondering why the woman decided to help me. And why she knew so much about those rings. What did she see in my face? While I was still thinking about her motives and asking myself if I should get rid of the rings, I was already on the road to Remgard. It would cost me more then a week to go there and I knew that I would have to crawl through a dark passage, climb through the mountains and travel all my way around this big mountain lake. But what choice did I have? I knew the waitress was right, my soul already started to fall into the shadows, into the darkness. The whispering voices and the visions I had were warnings enough. And still I was unable to simply remove the rings. I would have to stay away from the villages, I would have to stay away from the Feygard Patrols. Best would be, to leave the road and just walk through the woods, but that would have meant to walk through the shadows.

Road to Remgard

Day XXVI

I travelled fast through the woods back on the main road. The woman in the Charwood outpost was right, it seemed as the rings enforced my body. Even if I had to walk long distances I didn't become tired, nor did I feel hungry. The only thing I recognized was another bandit, crossing my path. It was nearly the same conversation which I already had in the past. The only difference was, that I couldn't clearly hear his voice. I guess he wanted me to hand out my money or anything else what seemed to be worthy. The silent whispering chants in my head nearly drowned his demands. Then all noises were just stopped by the giggling kid again. The scene turned all black for just seconds. When I could see again, the bandit was not on his feet anymore. Blood ran from my rusty dagger. I didn't even searched the corpse for something useful, I just continued my path with haste.

Then I reached a strange formation of rocks which stood at the edge of the nearby forest. A little path tried to hide itself from curious travellers behind those stones. When I tried to pass by I was overwhelmed by noises and terrifying feelings. It was a mixture of laughings and screams. It seemed as I would leave my body to fly through the trees back into the cave from my dreams. The cave was still a dark place to be, with the ghosts standing their ground. I passed them as I was a ghost myself. When I reached the ladder where I met the scheme of Lakra before their wasn't my nemesis awaiting me -it was a woman standing there, looking at me.

'You are not him. You shouldn't be here and I shouldn't see you. But you have something in common.'

'Who are you?' I asked.

'That is not important for now. But you have my attention. I guess we will meet very soon, we will talk when you found me. Until then, I will have an eye on you. For now, you must leave this place.'

She lifted her hands and made a meaningful gesture. The darkness came back and I awoke on the street. It cost me a huge amount of strength to get back on my feet and to leave the rocky formation. It felt like something tried to pull me towards the path. As the formation went out of sight, the pulling became weaker and I could go on. I walked even through night time and when the morning came I could see the tower of Crossroads Guard House ontop of the trees. I moved in the shadow of the forest so the Guards would not see me coming.

Day XXVII

I sneaked behind the walls which surrounded the guard house to pass without being noticed. I would have to go through a wide plain with only grass and small bushes growing there. There was no cover where I could hide, but I couldn't stop. I had to hurry. Nobody went after me and when I reached another crossroad, which I knew very well I met a lone man with a depressive expression on his face. From the clothing he wore I would say that he used to be a shepard -but usally shepards tend to have sheep nearby. I asked him what would be the fastest way to Remgard. He pointed his finger to the East. Then I asked him, what he did out here. He started crying and told me his story. He indeed was a shepard. Some of his lambs were lost and he couldn't find them. Then a kid came by, offering his help to recollect the animals. The kid should apply some little bells at the sheep when he found them, so he could pick them up later. The kid, he reminded himself that the name was Lakra, did as he was told. He came back and reported the little task was solved. Then the weird thing happened. The shepard was happy to hear the ringing of the little bells from the far. The kid left and stormed towards the ringing bells. The shepard could hear his missing lambs bleat in pain and bells becoming silent one by one. This sadistic kid killed all the sheep as it killed all the joy of the shepard. He was a broken man now. A broken man who lost his faith in humanity. He even figured out drowning himself in the nearby river since life was without any sense anymore.

I left this pathetic peace of a human being. If somebody would have killed my sheep, I would have solved this problem wool for eye.