#### Sister Elain

Lain technically became a paladin at the age of seven, because of a loophole in the Laws of the Order of Devout Sisterhood. The Convent of the Charitable Protectors operated on a shoe-string budget, and could not typically afford the time, fees, or bother of dealing with lawyers. It was not their mission to do so anyhow; they had too many missions already.

Their Law, stated plainly, was and still is that a sister should set foot on the path to Paladinhood once completing a communally sanctioned Quest – that is, a mission well-intended in the service of the community sanctioning it.

There was a lot to unpack in that short Order, but the key to the loop - in young Elain’s case – was that, at the time her Incident occurred, while she was only seven years of age, she technically *was* a sister, because she had a brother. His name was Cobb, and his life is another set of stories altogether removed from this one.

The loophole concerned the capitalization – specifically the lack of capitalization - of the word ‘sister’. In those heady, early days of the Westfarian Isles, procedure and law ruled the Islands, and the syntax of categorization had an immense (and some would say unreasonable) power over the lives of the Islanders, depending upon the Isle they might happen to occupy. A *Sister*, to the Administrators in the capital City of Owl, was a member of one of several, properly-registered Convents. To the Order however, a *sister* could be a member of any convent which the Order deemed to be one, and they preferred – thank you very much – to neither capitalize that, either. They spoke in words of plain truth to one another, and to those whom they served, always. Books and tables could not do for human dialogue what could be better done with the heart and mind, when working toward a common good.

The loophole through which young Elain fell that day changed the fate of her small village-island, which in WoM 717, rested alone upon a rounded hill surrounded by a shallow bay that had once been its farmland, awaiting unknowingly its installation in the histories, legends and bedtime tales yet to come.

The inhabitants, self-reliant woodsfolk by long tradition, had turned from farming what could now no longer be farmed, being feet and fathoms beneath the tides, and in under a single generation, toward the cultivation and sale of Dark Iron Oak, known for its strength and mutability, which grew up here and there in great groves on many of the nearby smaller islands. This was traded for other things with other towns, in much the way as elsewhere in the Isles at that time.

Then the monsters began to arrive. Most, it is felt, did so somewhat reluctantly, for monsters, as it is well known, prefer to dwell in the darker places, in caves, caverns, and abandoned crawlspaces, and those were now largely underwater. For some monsters, this worked out quite well, and for others, not so much.

The Order of course had long ago abandoned the divisive language describing *monsters*, *animals*, *spirit*s, and *human* classifications, in pursuit of the revival of other languages – older and newer ones – to employ when speaking of living things with living concerns. To most settlers to the Isles, though, a monster was still a monster; some were good (the exception proving the Rule), and most were likely bad news. Some were, in fact, aggressively bad news to be truthful, though the Sisters chose to call those ones *problems*, not monsters. An animal, well, there were different kinds according to Men, falling into the general categories of companion, resource, nuisance, beautiful / awe-inspiring, and dangerous. Each of these categories had sub-categories (in some of the Isles, these were quite extensively categorized, and in others, allowed to mix and mingle more-or-less freely). A human was a human, at least according to the books. This had been figured out to most people’s benefit and satisfaction some time ago. At least, once the oceans started to come in more than they seemed to be going out.

Whatever the case, the living creatures who could not or would not return to the sea willingly began to find themselves upon the same ridges, hills, and mountains more than tradition had previously allowed for, and that ushered in (among many other things) the newfound concern of *monster encroachment*. Townships of all sizes were permitted by Owl Law to sanction defensive strategies to protect their livelihoods, for this continued to be the lifeblood of the kingdom, though the kingdom now was no more.

Some towns took this to mean that threats of all sorts to their perceived livelihoods were fair game for the sanctioning of solutions, and that is where things got quite out of control for a time. Neighbours of various kinds began taking increasing offense to the sanctioned defensive actions of one another, which created a number of spin-off trades and practices, and this, if one is to be completely honest, is where some of the best tales of adventure sprung, in that time between the Great Ages of Women and Men.

Elain’s town had been lucky as far as monsters went, for monsters did not tend to go there. What was there to steal? The trees on the grove islands were valuable to all – like silver at times – but the effort to remove them took a type of terrible tenacity few true monsters have, which was an interesting point to consider about the nature of monsters of men, in the opinion of some in the Order. Also, any monster trying to make a home in a cave or nook in those places was as likely as not to find it inhabited by other displaced animals already, and it is also commonly known that most monsters are afraid of other animals, and become monstrous as a kind of defense mechanism. So, Elain’s town was largely spared that whole drama. Then there was the whole need for boats to get to and fro in the region; earth-borne monsters had not been at the boatbuilding trade for very long yet.

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