

Chapter 002 – Strangers

12 Calistril 4708
Korvosa, Varisia

Scene #1 – Zellera's House

When you all arrive at the designated address, you find a rather unassuming house with the front door open and unlocked. On the interior of this small, humble home consists of a single cozy chamber filled with a fragrant haze of flowers and strong spice. The aroma comes from several sticks of incense smoldering in wall-mounted burners that look like butterfly-winged elves. The smoke gives the room a dreamy feel. The walls are draped with brocaded tapestries, one showing a black-skulled beast juggling human hearts, and another showing a pair of angels dancing atop a snow-blasted mountain. A third tapestry on the far wall depicts a tall, hooded figure shrouded in mist, holding a flaming sword in a skeletal hand. Several brightly colored rugs cover the floor, but the room's only furnishings are a wooden table covered by a bright red throw cloth and five elegant, tall-backed chairs. A basket covered by blue cloth sits under the table. In a basket on the table partially covered by a blue cloth sits a few pieces of bread and a bottle of wine. On top of the cloth sits another small note weighed down by a small paperweight.

The salty air permeating through East Shore today had a slight chill today. In response, Brack donned his hood and pulled his cloak tighter as he readied himself to act upon the harrow card's invitation. His hands next reached into a side pocket, to which he removed a small pipe and packet. Saying nothing, he began to stuff the pipe with a mixture of tobacco and ash from the hearth. Sticking the pipe in his mouth now and lighting a match, he cups the other end and puffs until it lights in a dull glow. Breathing out, the smoke he produced was rather unremarkable save for the ash lending it to smell reminiscing of a forge.

He began his walk to the docks, saying nothing and leaving only his pipe hand exposed to the elements. Once nearby, he flagged down one of the nearby laborers handling a small dinghy lashed against one of the smaller piers.

"Oi Brack, you looking ta' cross, yeah?"

"Yeh."

"Man o'big words today, heh?" No response from the Dwarf at the jest, **"Right on then, hop on in."**

Brack boarded the boat and waited for the laborer to finish his preparations before the two of them made way to Midland. All the while, the dwarf said nothing though the rapid fumes from his pipe gave look as if it were smoldering...

"Oh this is... silly," Mazour said to himself with a sigh. He smoothed his robes, brushing imaginary dust from the deep blue shades of night that were his robes. After adjusting the spiraling comet that was the symbol of the Lady of Graves, he stepped forward and knocked on the door. It was unassuming, possibly quaint from the front. Low key for a fortune teller, but it was a pleasant enough place. The door jolted and creakily swung open. Mazour stepped forward with a raised eyebrow. *Nothing suspicious about this. Not at all.*

"Hello? Is anyone home?" Pushing the door open he stepped inside. High backed chairs, the table, and those tapestries. *We've gone from suspicious, to travesty. Surely it would not be rude to burn them right?* Making himself comfortable, he strolled in like it was his own home. Mazour leaned down to pluck the note from the table. With a sigh, he draws out the Harrow Card and holds them next to each

other. *Handwriting looks the same.* Looking around he decided there was only one thing to do. Reaching down he grabbed the basket and placed it on the table.

With a practiced grace, he uncorked the bottle and poured himself a glass. Taking a sip, he strolled around the room. Whisps of burning incense rose up in smoky pillars waving to and fro in the slight breeze from the front door. The scent was thick in the air with a heavy mix of flowers and almost cloying to his nose. It was cozy in a strangely formal way, as the high-backed chairs seemed almost out of place in their elegance.

He stood there, regarding the tapestries. Almost regal in his bearing, as elves tend to be. His posture ramrod straight, cutting a striking appearance in his robes made of various shades of blue. The contrast of his white hair, pale ashy skin and his sapphire-violet eyes against the dark colors gives him an almost ghostly feel. He considered sitting, but the chairs did not seem as comfortable as he would have liked. Loathe as he was to admit it, there was something entrancing about these hideous tapestries.

"Well, I can't say much for your choice of wall decorations, but at least the wine is passable. Wonder who the rest of the chairs are for. This should be... Interesting."

A Pharasman Cleric? Unexpected... Redii thought to herself initially as she watched the pale elf in blue robes enter the home from a ways off. *But I guess I shouldn't be... Gaedren really did have the unique ability to make almost literally everyone he's ever met want him dead.* She paused her train of thought as she realized that she was already thinking of Gaedren in the past tense. She shook her head and laughed to herself before shrugging and making her way towards the home. *Maybe I'll get to watch him get smited by his god right in front of me!* she added joyfully before laughing to herself again, right as she opened the door and entered the home.

"Interesting decor..." Redii said out loud to no one in particular as she strode into the home and looked around, her long hair tied in a loose bun bouncing slightly as she spun around; doing so as a way to quickly verify if the elf was actually the only one inside. Satisfied for the time being that he was, she moved towards the table and took the chair with the best view of the front door.

Youthful, average height and garbed mostly in dark colors - shirt, gloves leggings, ankle-high boots - outside of her forest green jacket and matching mid-thigh apron skirt, Redii leaned back in her chair and gave the room a second look while eyeing the elf. *A lot lankier in person,* she thought to herself. Bringing the chair back to the ground, she leaned forward and read the note on the table before grabbing the basket and bottle, sniffing at each before returning the bottle and grabbing a piece of bread. It was definitely stale and she had to work to break off a chunk before and she could actually begin eating.

"So... I'm assuming you're here for the same reason that I am? Or are you here to buy one of those?" Redii asked the elf nonchalantly between bites as she pointed towards one of the tapestries.

Reaching the outside of the Esmeranda residence, Brack heaved a heavy sigh. Removing the pipe and tapping the remains out off to the side of a nearby gutter on his boot, he replaced the pipe and wiped his hands off on his cloak. Bringing his hand to his beard now, he gives his entire face a long pull as he approached the door. Giving one final deep breath, he opens the door and is caught off guard immediately by the two figures within. Standing at the doorway, he hears one of the inhabitants at the table inquire about to the other figure about some sort of purchase before he unassumingly interrupts the conversation.

"Both of yeh are not Zellara." he says then mutters to himself impatiently under his breath, *"Don't got time for this..."* before stepping further inside.

He steps inside and shuts the door behind him. Removing his hood now to allow his eyes to adjust to the light, he takes in the two figures: one sitting, one standing. Eyeing them both, he continues from where he had butted in, **"For what it's worth, I ain't 'ere t'buy one of those either. Assuming yeh**

both are 'ere on account of the card, eh?" he questions back to the two as he draws his harrow from his pocket and holds it up, picture facing forward with the mocking handwriting staring him in the face.

He walks slowly into the room, eyes adjusting now to the darkened chamber and fragrant smells replacing that of forge and smoke. He takes in the two other figures, saying not a word, then turns his gaze all about. Ignoring the refreshments at the table, his attention is instead swept up by the tapestries blanketing the walls with visions of grand fantasy. He studies them intently as he waits for the others to respond.

"Is that whose house this is? I had no idea." Redii replied to the cloaked dwarf who had just entered. *He strangely looks familiar but I'm unsure why...* Pulling out her own card, she flashed it in the dwarf's direction before examining it over again. **"She's the fortuneteller right? I guess that would explain the cards and the theatrics, though I'm not particularly fond of mine. Perhaps I can convince her to give me a new one."** She added jokingly before adding silently to herself, *and have her tell me how she knew who I was and where to find me...*

"Buy one? Oh dear, no. I'd was thinking more like," Mazour pauses and tilts his head slightly regarding them both, **"burning? They're hideous and yet entrancing."** He sipped his wine as he stepped forward, producing his own Harrow card from his robes. **"She left a note, some wine, and bread. Apparently, something drew her away. There is a note."** Mazour waved his hand toward the table, motioning to the note, basket of bread, and the wine.

Glancing around at the other collected so far, there was one open seat, and the mysterious host. He moved slowly, gracefully behind an open high-backed chair from behind and leaned on it. Mazour sipped his wine again. Glancing over to the dwarf he gave a sly grin. **"It's awful isn't it? You can't take your eyes from them. It is... horrifying."**

Having seen the dwarf enter the unknown house as he approached, Hutton stops in the middle of the street before approaching. He heaves a huge sigh and rolls up his sleeves as he steels his resolve and steps forward. He knocks loudly and waits.

As soon as the door begins to open, he pushes hard and swings it wide, barging in and nearly trampling whoever answered his knock.

Brack opens his mouth to object to Mazour's comment, though he is immediately interrupted by the boisterous entrance of Hutton into the small chamber. Shifting his attention to the massive individual, he immediately falls silent, taking in the sudden change in events.

"I don't know, I kind of thin-" Redii started in reply to the elf before the door barged reveal one of the biggest humans she'd ever seen.

By modern standards, the 50-year-old might seem at home as a former champion handing off the trophy at a World's Strongest Man competition. At 6'7" and almost 350 pounds, he could easily pass as a gladiator in an arena. Today, though, he's more akin to a clomping, bipedal battering ram.

Brash and hotheaded he sets in. **"Just who the hell are you people, how do you know my business? I've spent too much time and energy keeping my dealings to myself and I don't appreciate other noses poking around where they don't belong. If you want that sewer rat, the lines forms up behind me."** He jerks a large thumb over his shoulder. **"I don't know if any of you interlopers can help me... Hell, I don't care if you can help me. But I want to know where that walking pile of garbage is and I don't appreciate being lead all across town by the nose. So tell me,"** he says, eyes narrowing menacingly as he reaches into a pocket and holds up the Harrow card, **"What the hell is this supposed to be and why should I trust you?"**

Staying completely still - besides instinctively making a move for one of her hidden sai - as the man shouted in her direction, Redii waited until the man's rant was over. *Hotheads...* she thought to herself annoyed before replacing her sai and loosening up slightly.

"You're at least twice my age old man! Did no one ever teach you manners?" Pausing to sigh audibly, she continued, **"Clearly, none of us are Zellara. And clearly, based on the card in your hand and the fact that you read it like we all did and came here, we're here for the same reason as you. So calm down, have some delicious bread and wait for her like the rest of us."** She tossed a piece of bread in his general direction. **"And just to be clear..."** she added as she leaned forward onto her elbows to stare directly at the giant, **"...whatever grudge you have - you all have - does not match mine. So if anyone will be getting Gaedren first, it'll be me..."**

A blank stare meets Redii as the bread bounces off his chest and hits the floor.

"The hell's a 'Zellara'?" Hutton asks incredulously. **"Some kind of goofy club you weirdos put together to track down the bastard? I don't have time for that."**

He laughs. A low rumble like rocks in a landslide.

"Grudge? Grudge. Girl, what that rotting pile of refuse has perpetrated upon my house does not constitute a mere 'grudge' as if he'd cheated me out of money or insulted my heritage. No, my conspiratorial friend, I can't match any paltry grudge you may have. But I will see the life leave his eyes while my hands are wrapped around his neck. That I can guarantee."

He takes a beat and observes the group as a whole and takes in their surroundings.

Redii sighed. **"I don't want to turn our hate of the man into a competition. He doesn't deserve the satisfaction, and I know he'd enjoy it if he knew."** She scratched at her arm absentmindedly as she paused for a moment. **"While I'd love to be the one who personally dealt the final blow, as long as I'm there when that happens, I guess I will have to be satisfied with that. That is non-negotiable though."**

Hutton Crowcreek? Here? Mazour recognized the man as he burst in. Of course he had run across him at his pub before. No real direct contact, but Mazour knew him, or of him. Sure, there were wild rumors about his mysterious past and abilities.

"Apologies my excessively large fellow. It seems our host had to step away. She left a note, some bread, and some wine." Mazour motioned again to the note and basket. His voice was calm and even as he spoke so matter-of-factly in that breathy way of his. **"As for the rest... You don't get to kill him unless I'm there to see it done. So I suggest you have a seat, perhaps some wine and join us while we all wait for the answers."** Plucking his own card from his robes, he displayed it between two fingers at the angry bearded mountain before him.

He raises one bushy eyebrow.

"So none of you sent this?" he asks, indicating the card in his hand. He sighs and removes a large earthenware mug with a stern face sculpted on one side from a bag over his shoulder. He pours roughly half the bottle of wine into it and takes a long pull before wiping his mouth with one sleeve.

As the others chime into the conversation, Brack continues to remain a quiet observer. Listening to the manner in which each individual went about their conversation, the dwarf seemed to be taking this all into account in a stoic manner. All the while, his face did not betray his thoughts save for a rogue eyebrow raising at the realization that everyone had not only been led here by the same note on a unique harrow card, but also that they all seemed to share the same objective. He scratched at his beard as the tensions introduced by the large man barging in seemed to fade.

After a moment of silence, Mazour finishes his wine, places down the glass and sits in the chair he was leaning on. With an impatient sigh, he speaks. **"I suppose we need to start somewhere. I am Mazour."**

"Like I said," he replies with a sniff, **"I've spent no small amount of resources keeping these dealings to myself. If we're here to work toward a shared goal, I'd appreciate a similar level of discretion. I've no desire to wrest the life from more than one individual if it's avoidable, but know that I will not hesitate to do so if my name should leave your lips in the wrong context."**

He takes a deep breath and pulls out a high-backed chair from the table, spins it around with one hand, and straddles it as if it were a regular-sized seat.

"Hutton Crowcreek," he says simply.

The dwarf clears his throat and speaks barely above a whisper, as if there were deep shame laced into the mere mention of his name, **"Brack Thrunhart."** He pauses, then continues, **"If it's all t'same to yeh, I'd appreciate t'discretion in kind."**

He looks to the final individual still in the room, the human woman with an air of mystery about her, **"Seems like we all have t'business with Mister Gaedran, eh?"** Skirting around the obvious question about his own business here, he switches the topic, **"But what about yeh?"**

Redii pondered for a long moment whether to give the group her name. In most other circumstances she would've given a fake name without a second thought – she had been fond of going by Queen Ileosa of late – but thought better of it. All of these men had seemingly been scarred bad by Gaedren in some way, just like she had. That brought a level of closeness or intimacy between them that she couldn't quite put into words. While that didn't mean she was about to share her life's story, it did make slightly more forthcoming (if just barely).

"Redii," she replied simply. **"And my business is the same as yours. To end the 'reign' of Gaedren Lamm once Zellera tells us where he's hiding this time..."**

Scene #2 – Zellera's Arrival

As the group of strangers conversed at the table, the sound of another person entering the home caused them all to turn and look towards the entrance where an attractive middle-aged Varisian woman with long dark hair and dusky skin entered the premises. She wore a variety of colored scarfs and robes that flowed as she moved as well as a simple red bandana on her head.



Confidently strolling into the space, she took the last available seat at the table and looked at each person in kind, giving everyone a nod before closing her eyes and drawing a Harrow deck from her pocket; idly shuffling the cards in front of her. As she did so, you all can't help but notice how the cards seemed to float and dance through her fingers, evidence of her incredible skill with a deck of cards. As she continued to shuffle, she began to speak to the group gathered in front of her.

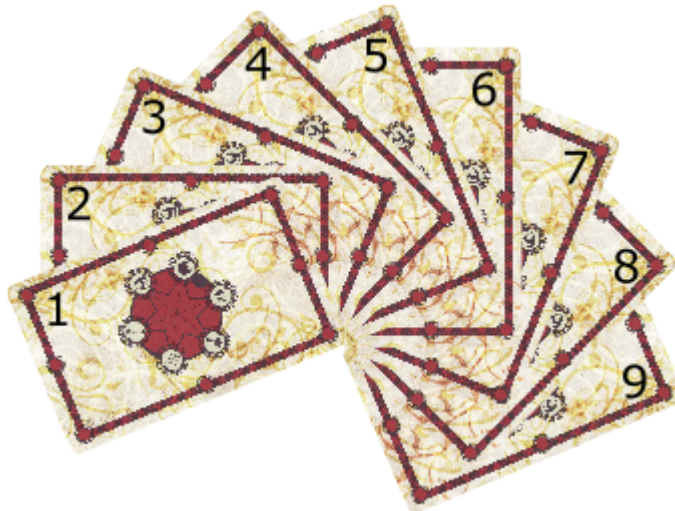
“Thank you for coming, my friends, and for putting up with my unconventional method of contacting you.” she begins. **“I have reason to remain hidden, you see – a vicious man would see great harm done to me if he knew I was reaching out for help. This man has done something terrible to each of you as well. I speak, of course, of Gaedren Lamm, a man whose cruelty and capacity to destroy the lives of those he touches are matched only by his gift for avoiding reprisal.**

“You see, a year ago, his thieves stole this, my harrow deck, from me. It is important to me, an heirloom passed down through a dozen generations and also my sole means of support. When Lamm’s pickpockets stole it, my son Eran tracked them down and returned my deck to me. But Gaedren had him followed, and soon after he left my home, Gaedren’s thugs murdered him.

“I sought help from the Korvosan Guard, but they turned me away. And so, I asked around. I paid bribes. I consulted my harrow deck for advice. And recently, I was rewarded – I found out where Gaedren dwells. He can be found in an old fishery north of here, at Westpier 17, where he trains abducted children to be pickpockets and counts his stolen treasures.

“But I need your help. I cannot hope to face this man on my own, and the Guard moves so slowly that if they were willing to help, Gaedren would certainly know of their coming well in advance. And even if they arrested him, what guarantee would I have he would be punished? This criminal has evaded the law for decades. But you know of these frustrations as well, for word on the street has it that Gaedren has wronged each of you, too. So, there we are. It is time for him to pay.”

Immediately after finishing her tale, she takes the deck of cards in her hands and places 9 cards in front of the party at the center of the table. **“To aid you all in this task, let me perform a harrowing for you. First though, we must complete the Choosing. All of you, please pick one of the cards in front of you...”**



Out of Character:

Scene #1 – Zellara’s House

Feel free to add anything else before Zellara’s arrival if you’d like. If you do, tag it with “Scene 1” at the top of the post for clarity

Scene #2 – Zellara’s Arrival

Feel free to ask questions and RP if you’d like before the Harrowing begins. In addition, everyone please select one of the 9 cards for the choosing. I’ll move things along to the next part after each of you have chosen.

Health Status

100% hitpoints: Healthy
75% to 99% hitpoints: Light Wounds
50% to 75% hitpoints: Medium Wounds
25% to 50% hitpoints: Serious Wounds
0% to 25% hitpoints: Critical Wounds.

Brack	Hutton	Mazour	Redii
			
10/10 hit points Inspiration	13/13 hit points Inspiration	9/9 hit points Inspiration	10/10 hit points Inspiration
1/1 hit dice; 4/4 Bardic Inspiration; 1/1 Joyful Verse; Spell Slots: 2/2 1 st ,	1/1 hit dice; 1/1 Second Wind; Service Tattoo: 1/1 Protect; 1/1 Heal; 1/1 Strike	1/1 hit dice; 4/4 Eyes of the Grave; 2/2 Blessing of Raven Queen; 1/1 Gifts of the Faithful; Spell Slots: 2/2 1 st ,	1/1 hit dice;
		20 Arrows	5 Sais

Items	Held By