

# End of a Dynasty

A petite girl called Maria struggled to get through all the people walking the packed, chaotic roads overflowing with foot traffic. Pushing past all kinds of people she eventually got out of the main streets, her short shoulder-length, umber colored hair<sup>1</sup> was made slightly frazzled and messy from the whole ordeal. The girl took some time to neatly push it down back down into shape. Between the bangs of hair curtaining most of her face, a pair of onyx eyes could be seen. Her clothes were a cut higher than the average peasant's that would draw unwelcome attention from the wrong type of people. As such, she wore a shabby robe over it to blend in with the commoners. Yes... this girl was of a noble descent. Wealth, power, authority she had everything, all in ample proportions. Born under the protection of the spirits, even the mystic arts of sorcery were subject to her whim. Her undistinguished features, by aristocratic standards, would be the only point of contention. Besides that small quibble that she now considered preferable, she had a luxurious life ahead of her that anyone else would kill for to be in her shoes.

And she left it all behind... Remembering that this part of town wasn't kind to innocent girls, she pulled a hood over her head and hurried on with her way. There was a time period when some people would come around looking for her, no doubt sent by her house. Despite having everything anyone could ask for, that life of an aristocrat was stifling... strangulating. Every lesson about etiquette, court manners, fine arts, dance, historical relationships, diplomacy, foreign language she naturally excelled at, yet they all felt empty... unfulfilling. Though even now she puts what she's learned to good use, in order to survive on the streets. A blooming smile naturally formed on her fetching face. Only her studies of magic and physical training along with weapons piqued her interest. It wasn't long after when her family learned of her fascination with the latter did they limit her time with the subject. Although irritating, it didn't discourage her at all as she continued the weapons training on her own in secret.

She had visited the town nearby for a leisurely trip and was away for a few weeks. Though far from being her home, Viveria had grown on her enough to evoke homesickness. After a few days of catching up, she had

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<sup>1</sup> burnt umber #635147.

discovered some intriguing information. Greeting familiar people she was in a great mood.

The last straw that made her run away from her home for good was the arranged marriage with a high profile heir of another prestigious house that was set in stone when she was only thirteen. Other girls of her age would be brimming with excitement and happiness like their fantasies came to life. For her it was different. She hated the notion of being tied down to someone. Frankly she didn't have any interest in no man, but just insinuating that notion would bring dire consequences, so she tolerated it as best as she could for years. Still her life was dull, gray and meaningless, the few things that brought her joy, forbidden. But eventually she decided to try something. Something that would change her life forever. A romantic rendezvous in the woods. Her fiancé, who was becoming somewhat anxious of their lukewarm relationship, quickly jumped at the invitation of this 'tryst'.

Their voices echoed through the desolate woods, blood rushing. A wet, sloppy mess of an encounter, it was the only moment she felt alive... and she ran away, as far as her legs could carry her. That was a long time ago... Picking through her pockets she pulled out a small pouch containing fibers of something, a memento of her first. Slowly she breathed in its lovely aroma, reminding her of why she chose this life. The thrill of her next date shot through her entire body, until she was reminded of her surroundings. Hired assassins, thugs and all sorts of scum dwelled in the streets, even some notorious big names prowling it nowadays. She picked up her pace to her destination, still a charming smile remained visible on her face...

After snaking through a few back alley streets she found the place she was looking for, a shabby inn away from prying eyes. Stepping through its doorway her nose easily picked up on the faint lingering scent of alcohol in the air. Despite its worn outwards appearance, judging by the interior she would have to say that it was rather well off business for being so far away from the mainstreets where most customers of an inn often travelled. Quickly she picked up on the man sitting behind a counter. Rotund physique and a grumpy mug that she could see from a mile away. She would have to see if he really was as stern as he appeared to be. While she was thinking of such things she was accosted by the barmaid. The diners' and customers' eyes followed her with a dumb look on their.

She quickly greeted and the wench left quickly afterwards to tend to the sheep. Despite the friendly greeting, genial welcoming she could easily see through the game the minx was running. Hollow flattery, pointless interest and the charm of youth, all working together to get the hopes up of the starving men that gathered here. Intentionally or not she was playing with them, deftly turning down their advances. The fools in turn extend their stay, thinking that they have a greater chance to woo their prize if they just keep at it. Either the girl was an experienced slattern or truly naive.

Then her attention shifted to the grumpy man behind the counters, though seemingly idling the entire time. His eyes were keen on catching any wandering hands and now that she looked at it a little closer, he was also ready to jump out at any moment to swat those hands back into their places. It was obvious what model they had adopted; 'look but don't touch... or else'. Walking up to the man she pulled down her hood and put on her best smile and asked for a room. The cost was little over the average but not excessively so. She ran through all of her pockets to scrounge up the just the right amount of funds, though it was all an act on her part...

- "One night, that's it. Ye get me?"

His accent was quite thick probably of some dwarven descent, from the dialect she guessed that he was an immigrant from the empire...

- "Of course, sire. Just a night!"

- "Cheh, what do they call ye?"

- "Filia... I uhm... don't know my father's...-"

- "Dun'n care, oe'r there, dats your room.

The stout man quickly pointed to a room to the side after he quickly scribbled down her name into a ledger.

- "You be sharing it wif two blokes. Keep an aye your stuff. Dun care if some of it goes miss'en. Do scream if them try something."

Although she tried to play ditzy to earn a little favor it was clear that was not going to happen. 'Tough as they come...' she thought to herself. Her date would be here, she just had to find them and be patient... After briefly checking into the room, she walked around for a bit looking around the inn and from the outside. She spent most of the day observing the people coming and going in and out of their rooms until only one room was left unaccounted for. No one had gone in or out the entire day, she was growing anxious. It was when the night arrived, someone came out and all was good in this world, again...

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Something stirred within the blackness of night when every honest person was lost to a deep sleep. If there was anyone awake to see it, pearl-like white teeth could barely be discerned from the shadows. A black edge took life... and another... so easily as if snuffing out a candle. Slipping past the door and slinking through the building like a shadow on the wall they swiftly reached another door. Even the creaking floorboards seemed to be asleep with a hush. Earlier they had meticulously studied the locks of the inn. They were above and beyond most of its competitors yet it was no deterrent for them. A leering smile appeared on their face as they carefully picked at the hole and the lock clicked open. Though their mood quickly soured when they saw what was waiting for them.

- "Who... are you.....?"

A question voiced with a strange and cold timbre came from the figure donned in a green cloak, standing in the middle of the room. Their short white strands of hair could still be seen through the darkness.

- "Oh my... I did not expect someone to be up at this hour... Oh well... the name's Elfi."

They put on a theatrical bow and when they took an upright posture, a needle-like pair of daggers came flying at the hooded figure. From beyond the darkness, they were hardly discernible having been dyed black with some sort of substance. They were easily flicked aside by the cloaked person's blade but that was far from the end as another pair of knives with curved edges were bared against them, narrowly blocked with their blade. 'Elfi' had closed the distance in the instant when the daggers were deflected. Tongue clicking in frustration could be heard from right after the clash of metal. Realizing that they couldn't win the contest of strength they retreated before retaliation could arrive. In an almost acrobatic backwards roll the tip of *Elfi's* leg missed the cloaked figure's head by a whisker but it managed to tear through the front of the hood enough to have it slide back. Piercing gaze of deep scarlet eyes looked back at them now.

- "Alice..."

- "Oh... is that your name?"

Faint nod was the reply. From the rush of wind that whizzed by her, Alice knew just how much force was behind that seemingly harmless roll backwards. And just now she picked up on a unique smell lingering in the air. She couldn't tell what it was, however...

>Olfactory profile identified. Byproduct of multiple potent toxins. Exercise caution.

From the showy curtsy as a distraction, thrown daggers, leading up to the pre-emptive strike, they were all calculated killing blows. Just a scratch from the poison laced daggers, without even needing to draw blood, was enough to send the average person to their eternal slumber.

The skirmish was hardly a quiet one and from the commotion... golden haired young scion of the house Valtima woke up.

- "W-What's going on?!"
- "Assassin... run....."
- "But...-"
- "Now...!"

She seemed like she wanted to ask 'but how?' as the assassin *Elfi* was blocking the only exit, but they didn't have time to calmly think things through and come up with a plan. *Rosalia* quickly grabbed her cloak from her bedside and attempted to pry open the window behind her.

- "Aahhh, my dear...! Where are you heading to in such a hurry?"

Elfi's voice turned strangely sensuous, severely shocking Rosalia who was so deeply shaken to her core that she briefly forgot to work the window in spite of the mortal danger presented.

- "Come, we have a date, you and I..."

A manic if somewhat unhinged series of giggling followed after the declaration, and when she tried to leap after Rosalia, a flashing glint of a fast approaching blade dissuaded her from continuing any further. Coming to her senses Rosalia managed to open the window and jumped out.

- "Ah- wait for me..."

She caught a glimpse of Alice's overall appearance and built a brief profile of her, the result; she was a minor threat. She possessed an exotic, attractive face but dressed herself in a strange promiscuous, yet fine attire fit only for harlots.

- "Hey you. Alice right? As much as I want to play with you, right now I'm not interested in toying with some abandoned courtesan. So make it easy for both of us and step aside and wait for your turn on that bed over there, hmmm."
- "Refused....."

It was the expected answer of a bodyguard. As much as she wanted take her time running her daggers through their tender skin. But if she did, she was guaranteed to lose her grand prize. Alice's swings were wide, heavy and

slow, she had no trouble evading them, however, when she went on the offensive Alice proved to be quite the tricky foe. Despite her graceless, clumsy haymakers, she could show speed and finesse previously unseen from her when she defended herself. *'If she could apply that same swiftness to her attacks I could have been in trouble.'* she thought, *'not quite ripe but full of sweet nectar... you're better than most, but not the best I've faced. Ah... if I hadn't had such a titillating little flower to attend to.'*

With her evaluation complete, *Elfi* attacked once again with a rush of speed, this time outmaneuvering her, enough to bypass her and jump after the fleeing girl. She hadn't gone far, her distant yells of help she could still be heard. Unfortunately for her she was running towards the slums where patrols were rare, and decent people to offer her help even rarer. Her heart was racing, blood racing through her veins, the thrill of the hunt. She was gaining on her as now the sounds of Rosalia's feet frantically striking against the paved road became louder and louder. Her huffing breath, intermittently cut off by sharp gasps, became audible before long.

- "Hm hm hu hu hua hahahahaa!"

Laughter filled with madness resounded through forlorn streets. *Elfi* could traverse these streets by just smell and touch alone, and like a hound herding livestock to their pens she threatened Rosalia from one side and another, manipulating her movements without her knowing, corralling her into a corner. In a little while this wild chase inevitably ended in Rosalia being trapped. Desperately looking around the dead end for any hope for escape, but alas her pursuer was hot on her heels, proudly walking up to her from behind with strutting steps, twirling the deadly daggers between her fingers.

Her captured prey stood with her back against a wall panicking but still trying to maintain her composure, stirring a peculiar excitement within her. To hear her euphonious screams when her blade ran through her flesh supple like butter. How she would adore her untarnished face will twist from pain as her body. Realizing that escape is not an option, Rosalia prepared to protect herself, quietly starting to chant, an action that provoked more unsolicited lust from *Elfi*. She couldn't hold back any more of the exhilaration, in a blink of an eye she had already pinned Rosalia's hands up against the hard stone bricks behind her before she could finish her chant, or even respond and she could feel her hot breath on her nape. *Rosalia* tried to turn up and away from her, exposing her neck in the



process. To the excited Elfi, it was like an invitation. Muculent and sultry tongue sensuously tracing her neck from the clavicles to the carotids, leaving behind a trail of saliva. The arteries thumping rapidly against the tip of her tongue only further kindled her desire. She was in no hurry, for in her mind she had gotten *Rosalia* right where she wanted her to be, and when her clumsy lap-dog crawled back to her she would take all the time in the world tormenting her in front of her to see how the hope fades from her eyes *deep purple*<sup>2</sup> eyes. In reality... it was *Elfi* who was being tangled deeper and deeper into the web, soon to be inescapably trapped.

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- *'This was stupid idea! This was stupid idea! This was stupid idea!-'*
  - *'...almost... done... wait...'*
  - *'Hurry! I didn't think the butcher would be like this... or what she was a lesbian or something!'*

Few hours beforehand Alicia had caught wind of a suspicious person loitering around in the inn. She learned of this rather late as the person in question initially slipped past the attention of her Hex crawlers stationed in the inn, meaning they had stealth related talents even though the Crawlers had up to sixth rank of Presence detection, not something common among the general populace. Even some veterans of the Devil's crown didn't have that high of a stealth skill.

With a probable candidate for the butcher identified Alicia started drafting up her plan. First of which was to secure Rosalia's safety. Although she didn't like it, this time she decided to keep her completely in the dark. Thankfully from her mushroom related incident and the sampling indigenous toxic flora, helped discover the perfect venom for the situation.

⟨Advanced Toxicology⟩

⟨ Somniferous Venom ⟩

A potent sleeping and paralysing agent without the fatal consequences of a conventional venom. Alicia wanted to deal with the problem as cleanly as possible in the most thorough manner. Stinging Rosalia, the target of the assassin, into a sound sleep, Alicia very carefully carried her away to a safe place outside the town near its edge. The location was provided by her new collaborators from inside the Crown, and secured by the brunt of her combat-capable Araneae and a Mirror image of Alicia for use of

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<sup>2</sup> [Bossanova #402E5C](#)

transposition to immediately return if anything happened. Staying out of sight on your own was easy, doing the same in the broad daylight was a challenge, staying out of sight while carrying around another unconscious person in daylight was a nightmare.

By being patient and taking her time, Alicia managed to safely reach the impromptu safehouse without an incident. Although Alicia wanted to dispatch the suspect herself, they were too alert, looking around for someone or something. Even as the evening approached and nightfall began, they '*slept*' as if they had one eye open. Alicia had multiple opportunities but each of them felt less than ideal. Being seen attacking an innocent person was not an option. She even tried sniping the suspect from afar with her bow but the angle never worked out. Regardless now that the victim was safe, away from the Butcher's reach it was time for a second step. Catching the assassin and minimizing the collaterals. If a confrontation occurred and their cover was blown, it was likely that the Butcher would flee to avoid the guards, only to strike again with more preparation, more caution. And if the Butcher somehow escaped them after realizing something was wrong or if they recognized that they were losing or about to it was the same. Effectively, returning to the drawing board with added difficulty. Secondly, a fight inside the inn might endanger innocent bystanders in the crossfire. Both of this could be solved in a single step.

Although highly demanding, mimicry combined with Mirror image could transform Alicia into an almost perfect replica of someone. Height, voice, physique everything. Though there were few imperfections such as eye color and obviously... mannerisms and personality was unchanged. Meaning that Alicia had to act the part as well. Thankfully the other party shouldn't have known much about Rosalia other than her looks, so there was some room for error. Borrowing her identity, Alicia could lure the Butcher into a more suitable place, away from townsfolk and a place where they felt confident. Slums were the best choice for both its proximity and the lack of people in certain areas. Still Alicia didn't know how strong the other party was and it would be strange for someone like Rosalia to go around on their lonesome, even if they were in hiding. That is when Alice came into play, she filled in the role of a bodyguard, who would not only gauge the Butcher's strength and delay them while Alicia, disguised as Rosalia, would run away and lead them to the intended location. Besides a few ad libbing added to the plan as it was executed, only one last step



remained. Closing off the web. Once the butcher was in the right place, Alice with the help of a few crypt weavers would create a massive network of reinforced webbing to make sure the Butcher could not escape. She only had to hang on for a little while until the webs were in place. And the plan went off without a hitch. Though Alicia would disagree...

- *'Oh god now she's rubbing her thighs against me! Stop dry humping me!? This was a terrible plan!!!'*

There was no way she could account for the *Elfi* deviancy...

- *'Why do I keep getting harassed by strange women?!'*
- *'...done... coming...'*

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As *Elfi* relishes the image of Rosalia's body, something jumps out at her. The attack took by surprise but she avoided it by jumping and rolling. When her eyes turned to where she was just standing, it focused on a familiar girl, pulling out an arming sword lodged in the ground where she stood. Something felt different this time, it was undoubtedly the same girl from appearance alone but an oppressive aura emanated from her. It felt as if hundreds of small pins prickled her whole body at the same time when they locked eyes. While she was shaking off the strange feeling Alice had disappeared from her sight and the next moment she was at the bottom of her peripheral vision the edge of her blade glinting from the pale blue light of the moon. Common response would be to look down but if she did the sword would find her neck with a clean cut. With all her strength she threw her head backwards and followed through the momentum into a flip backwards.



「 Tremors 」

Though hitting the landing it felt as if the ground itself was trembling as it broke into smaller pieces putting her off balance.

« Sure Footed »

However Alice was unconcerned with the shaking or the uneven ground and pressed on her attack. Without proper footing *Elfi* desperately rolled on the ground to escape the attacks and made enough distance to put herself back on her feet. But that wasn't the end...

## 「Lithokinesis」

Pebbles and stones loosened by the prior tremors flew at her, at first she could avoid them and block the ones she couldn't, but their arrow-like speed and the sheer numbers intensified creating a veritable hailstorm of stone making it impossible to defend herself against every one of them. One stray stone hit her left ankle, throwing her off allowing enough to hit her square in the gut shortly followed by another hitting her in the chest. Causing her to collapse down kneeling into a fetal position. Blood dribbling from her mouth. Though *Elfi* herself seemed not to be bothered at all by the situation, she looked up at *Rosalia* and lapped up the blood from her lips smiling. And when she did, her coal black eyes lit up in bright crimson. She was right, she had never felt this alive since killing her fiance. She couldn't help but giggle with excitement, this was everything that she wanted.

She was born with a unique gift, an uncanny desire and talent to maim and mutilate. Spilt blood, be it of her own or others it didn't matter they all awoke something in her, filling her with energy, animating her still body with life. At first she managed it by watching animals be slaughtered for food, then she started to hunt on her own, an activity that was rare for women to partake in. But her family after seeing her disturbing interest in gore prohibited her. Repressing those strange desires did not quell them, it only laid there simmering until it boiled over culminating in the creation of the deranged assassin known as the Butcher... and the downfall of the entire lineage of nobility.

Tinge of lunacy could be seen clearly on her black pupils drowned in blood red iris. She sprung forth with unprecedented speed straight at *Rosalia*. She was the one using the magic, she had to be dealt with as soon as possible... regardless of what may come, she knew she wouldn't live to see tomorrow. But that didn't matter to her in the slightest, as though there was some reluctance to die from not being able to sample more fresh blood, she was sure there was nothing else in life was greater than the moment she was in living in right now, and she didn't want to spoil it with meaningless thoughts distracting her. The speed at which she ran at *Rosalia*, the one who gifted her with this wonderful opportunity was inconceivable. Even as she hurled herself headfirst into her in a crouching sprint, *Alicia* could not easily hit her with the stones due to her smaller frame, and the ones that did manage to land did not deter or even slow her down at all.

With an insane murderer barreling towards her Alicia had to think fast.



### 「 Void Vault 」

A crack in space formed, leading to a lightless realm invisible to the sane mind. Reality itself seems to shudder from its existence, of this gap, attempting to close it off and restoring itself to its proper state. From its bottomless mouth Alicia pulled out a black object with glassy sheen just over the halfway point, and let go of the stream of magical energy sustaining the opening. In a snap the opening collapsed in on itself, propelling the object out at extreme speeds. Dauntless flew through the air and embedded itself deep into *Elfi's* body, stopped from completely penetrating through her by the briary guards digging into the space between the ribs.

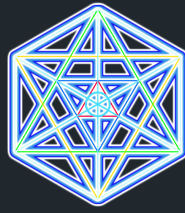
The blade had pierced and shattered a chunk of her lower spine, her chest leaned back while the rest of her body rested kneeling motionless, her body prevented from collapsing backwards by the blade itself acting as a support on her back. It seemed like it was over and a few moments later, relieved, Alicia undid her tiring disguise and walked over to her to pull off her blade from her body.

>Cautio-

When she came close to *Elfi* she used the last of her vigor to swipe her daggers at Alicia, despite being caught off guard she managed to back off but the small shallow swipe barely drew blood. A drop of it fell on her face and flowed down into her face and entered her agape mouth landing on her tongue. With the last of her breath she seemed to say something but it was never voiced... Only Alicia knew what it was through brief connection of telepathy.

- *'Ahh... how sweet... and rich... if only... I had more.....'*

When she gripped the handle of dauntless...-



「 Soul Echo 」

-...a rush of memories came through.

Noxine Norilsk Romanov was a troubled individual since her childhood. Born into a prestigious line of aristocratic family, as their first child, she was drilled with an enormous amount of classes and lessons from youth and was burdened by grand expectations that often fell upon noble children. The House of Romanov by the time she was born was in decline, and they were eager to take back the stage. In spite of all the torturous lessons, she persevered but not for long, for she was both gifted and cursed by a particularly risky skill.

#### Sanguinary

Subject is infatuated with bloodshed.  
Able to use magical energy to enhance core statistical values.

##### ▷Bloodlust

Sight of spilt vital fluids triggers skill automatically.

##### ▷Bloodthirsty

Consuming blood restores magical energy. Natural magical restoration rate deteriorated.

##### ▷Overgorge (Magical energy)

Excess magical energy used to accelerate regeneration rate rapidly

##### △Bloodfrenzy△

Extended, frequent use of this skill may cause severe mental corruption and mental degradation

The skill gave her the means to succeed and keep up with the ever increasing demands of the family. It gave her focus, will, motivation and sheer grit needed to survive the brutal upbringing of an aristocrat. But it

ate away at her mind, with how corrosive the skill was to one's psyche, it is a wonder how she managed not to snap.

Rather than denying and containing it, she embraced the corruptive suggestions of the skill, it protected her mind, but forever tainted her. While overtime the tendencies of the skill would fade away over a long, long period of time, her lifestyle never allowed it for it. The nobility could be ruthless even to their own kin, brought up in that inhospitable environment shaped Noxine. Treated as a tool, just another piece on the board, instead of being a daughter made her think of others in the same way, an object to be used and discarded when it was of no use. She grew up lacking empathy and her training as noble, which included courses in hiding one's emotions as it was treated as a weakness within the circle, keeping a stiff upper lip only fed into the development of her psychopathy.

And when it was combined with her upbringing focused on the intricacies of social interaction, it resulted in a deadly combination of charming, charismatic being that created faces and identities and discarded them on a near daily basis to get whatever little advantage she could get. On the surface she was an endearing, well mannered girl, but as soon as you turned their back to her... she would gut them with the same, blooming smile on her face. To her life itself was expendable, only a means to feed her habit, entertain her. In her mind she was never truly doing wrong at all... She fully transformed into the heinous assassin known as the butcher when she decided to kill her fiance, her first victim; it was all too easy to trick people afterwards and it was then she realized she didn't need to hide behind a thin veil of society, of marriages, balls and dresses.

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>Vital signs negative. Nervous activity similar to sleep pattern. Complete cessation in 7±2 minutes.

- *'Sorry. I deal with practical problems, not psychological problems. You needed a therapist, I could only afford a blade. I hope you will find peace in your next life...'*

Pulling away Dauntless, without any surprises this time, she deposited it back into the void vault as the body finally fell to the ground.

- "Alice, could you go get Rosalia? It should be easy to bring her back to the inn without anyone around but... be careful anyway."
- "Fang... and claw....."
- "You like them...?"

There was no response but the answer was quite obvious to Alicia.

- "Sure... you can have them. Looks a bit like a karambit."

After picking up the blackened knives from her body Alice asked her counterpart:

- "What..... now...?"

She looked at the damaged street she herself broke down in order to use the stone underneath them. And some of the missed stones had punched copious amounts of holes into the walls of nearby buildings.

- "Clean up the blood, do some road work and find somewhere to bury the body."

Looking at Noxine, Alicia remembered to close her still open eyes shut for the last time, and silently waited in the street until Alma confirmed full cessation of brain activity where she put Noxine's corpse inside the Void vault as well, for safekeeping before burial.

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A certain small part of the pauper's district had gotten a pristine makeover of immaculate repairs to both the road leading up to and some of the nearby buildings overnight. The reconstruction was so flawless that some lower-middle-class people moved in for dirt cheap prices to some getting it for free, bringing jobs and finally businesses opened up along with it, creating a small bubble of order within the chaotic, abandoned section of the town. It helped people who resided in the area a second chance to get back up on their feet once more. Though it did not completely remove the rats and paupers in the town... it sure shrank their numbers considerably.