

# The Kingmaker Histories Chapter Fifteen: Run Rabbit Run!

**SOUND:** Typewriter sounds.

**HISTORIAN:** This instalment of the Kingmaker Histories began, as many great historical incidents do, inside a brothel.

**SOUND:** Ragtime music plays. Women talk and laugh in the background. Colette, Eisen, and Telesphore shift uncomfortably on a couch.

**COLETTE:** When I woke up this morning, I didn't think this was how today was going to go.

**SOUND:** Raucous cheering in the background.

**TELESPHORE:** Life is full of surprises, Colette. That seems to be its one constant.

**EISEN:** At least the decor is tasteful. Last time I saw curtains this nice, I was looting the castle.

**HISTORIAN:** The Ruby Rabbit Brothel had been an institution in the city of Hundekopf for almost thirty years by 1911, allowing a wide variety of discerning clients to fulfil an even wider variety of fantasies. While Maxim MorteZ was intimately involved in the systems of dark commerce beneath the surface of Hundekopf, it would be inaccurate to say that he had a stranglehold around all of the city's vices. The proprietor of Hundekopf's most popular house of ill repute was a man largely shrouded in mystery - Until his fateful run-in with Colette, Telesphore, and Eisen brought a number of ugly secrets to light.

**TELESPHORE:** Are you really quite sure this was a legitimate job offer and not some kind of practical joke, Eisen?

**EISEN:** The letter looked extremely official; I think he's one of MorteZ's friends. Anyway, trust me, we'll be the first men in history to walk out of here with more money than when we came in with.

**COLETTE:** I'm not sure how much faith I can put into a business that doesn't have a proper waiting room.

**EISEN:** Oh c'mon, Colette, don't brush off an opportunity to take in some of the local colour!

**COLETTE:** I think I saw a man go into one of the back rooms with a goat.

**SOUND:** Goat bleating.

**EISEN:** It takes all kinds to make a world.

**TELESPHORE:** How very tolerant of you.

**EISEN:** The promise of money brings that out in a man.

**SOUND:** Men laugh drunkenly. One of them wolf-whistles at Colette.

**COLETTE:** All I'm saying is, it better be a lot. Some of the men by the bar are looking at me in an unwholesome fashion, and I really don't care for it.

**SOUND:** Two women, Lotte and Anais, approach.

**LOTTE:** Ooh, I don't think I've seen you around here before.

**ANAIS:** Tall, dark, and handsome.

**COLETTE:** Were you describing just one of us or all three?

**EISEN:** [irritated] Hopefully, the first.

**TELESPHORE:** But if it was the second, am I tall or handsome?

**SOUND:** Lotte and Anais laugh.

**LOTTE:** These ones are funny.

**ANAIS:** Perhaps you'd like to leave your lady friend by the bar and join us in a private booth? Unless she'd like to join you.

**LOTTE:** For dancing and... Conversation.

**TELESPHORE:** While I'm sure you two are charming conversationalists, I'm afraid we're here on business.

**ANAIS:** Maybe just a quick session?

**LOTTE:** Five marks - A bargain, really.

**EISEN:** A bargain? For being beaten and robbed on the roadside, maybe. But, uh...no thank you, ladies.

**ANAIS:** Tsk. Cheapskates. Let's go, Lotte.

**LOTTE:** There will be others more appreciative of our talents. Anais does the dance of the seven veils.

**ANAIS:** But you'll never see that now. Never!

**SOUND:** The two leave in a huff.

**COLETTE:** I guess seeing her dance would have been cool. (beat) You know, if you're into that.

**EISEN:** To be fair, I am, but right now, I'd rather just keep my five marks and imagine.

**TELESPHORE:** That mentality is why we haven't had a nice night out in years.

**SOUND:** Heavy footsteps of DOLPH approaching.

**DOLPH:** Iyer, Winterlich, & Co?

**SOUND:** They rise to their feet.

**EISEN:** Aye, that's us! At your service.

**DOLPH:** Mr. Balek will see you now. You will laugh at his jokes. You will show great interest in his anecdotes. You will agree with any opinions he expresses. Right this way.

**SOUND:** They follow Dolph.

**COLETTE:** [Whispering] That seems like a bad sign.

**HISTORIAN:** It was, in fact, a bad sign.

**SOUND:** Urgent, adventurous orchestral intro music.

**HISTORIAN:** Jan Balek, the owner of the Ruby Rabbit, was a 52-year-old Czech businessman who'd immigrated to the Kingdom of Valor a few years before the revolution to make his fortune. In the ensuing chaos, Balek had set up a successful people-smuggling operation that allowed wealthy royalists to escape into Germany and Switzerland at extortionate prices.

**HISTORIAN:** After raising considerable capital with that business, he repurposed that same people-smuggling infrastructure to funnel in desperate refugees and asylum seekers from surrounding nations. Those who couldn't repay their smuggling debts would be made to work off their payments with service - Most commonly in the Ruby Rabbit. Though when Iyer, Winterlich, & Co entered Jan Balek's office, all they knew was that he was a man willing to pay handsomely for a favour.

**SOUND:** A door creaks open. The gang and Dolph enter. Balek is eating a large meat pie. His knife and fork scrape against the plate as he dines. Music plays on a gramophone. The scene is punctuated by footsteps upstairs and creaking bed springs from other rooms.

**DOLPH:** The contractors you requested, sir.

**BALEK:** Yes, yes, magnificent! Please, all of you, take a seat, take a cigar if you like.

**TELESPHORE:** That's very kind of you, Mr. Balek.

**SOUND:** Jan cuts a cigar for Telesphore. Telesphore leans over to take it, and lights it.

**BALEK:** Jan, please, call me Jan! Relax, get comfortable. I can get a few girls in here to play footstool if you'd like to put your feet up? [Laughs, uncomfortably sudden and loud]

**SOUND:** Everyone forces an uncomfortable laugh.

**COLETTE:** That's a good one, Jan.

**BALEK:** What can I say? I'm the life of the party. Sorry for seeing you during my lunch break, awfully unprofessional of me, I should be lashed to a cross for such crimes, haha. I'm a busy man. I can scarcely find time to blink these days. Rabbit pie is somewhat of a comfort food, still, feels wrong to dine alone. Dolph, drinks, get them drinks. Perhaps some pate. With apricots.

**DOLPH:** Of course, sir.

**EISEN:** That really won't be necessary, um, Jan. We're happy to get right into business.

**BEAT**

**BALEK:** [Deadly serious] My food isn't good enough for you?

**EISEN:** No, no, it's not that, it's...uh...

**TELESPHORE:** What my associate means to say is--

**BALEK:** Was I talking to you?

**TELESPHORE:** Well, I--

**BALEK:** Yes or no question.

**EISEN:** We ate before we came, is the thing.

**COLETTE:** Yeah, we're good till dinner.

**BALEK:** I invited you into my establishment. My guests. Do you have any idea how rude it is to deny a host's generosity? How embarrassing! Can you even possibly imagine what a TERRIBLE first impression that would be? And what an embarrassed host might be forced to do to regain his pride?

**BEAT**

**BALEK:** [Laughs hysterically] Oh, oh, I'm sorry, so sorry, just pulling your leg. Goodness, your faces! You looked like your lives flashed before your eyes!

**SOUND:** Balek bangs his fist on the table.

**BALEK:** Please, be at ease. Just my Czech sense of humor. We're all friends here. I'm happy to get down to business.

**SOUND:** He snaps his fingers.

**BALEK:** Dolph, the photo, s'il vous plaît. (he giggles)

**DOLPH:** Of course, Mr. Balek.

**SOUND:** Dolph passes Colette a photograph.

**COLETTE:** Who's this, Mr-- Uh, Jan?

**BALEK:** He may look like a man, but rest assured, he's a snake. That's Rudy Klein, a competitor of mine in the flesh business, operating mostly in Germany.

**SOUND:** Loud, sexual moaning from the next room, which underscores the rest of the scene.

**BALEK:** Of course, I have nothing against a little healthy competition - Keeps us on our toes, doesn't it, Dolph?

**DOLPH:** On our toes, sir.

**BALEK:** But Rudy Klein isn't a man of honour. He resorts to base tactics because he knows he can't win if he plays fair.

**EISEN:** What kind of tactics are we talking? Vandalism, whisper campaigns, predatory pricing?

**BALEK:** Ha! Try kidnapping on for size!

**COLETTE:** Yikes. I didn't realise this was such a cutthroat industry.

**BALEK:** You have no idea. This nasty little viper came in and stole away Nixie, my best girl. She's a fleshcrafter, you see. The things she could do with her-- (laughs suggestively) Woof! Well, suffice to say she was popular with some of my high-rollers. My top earner. I need her back, at all costs, before that thieving cretin can spirit her away to Berlin.

**TELESPHORE:** With all due respect, does this not seem like more of a police matter?

**BALEK:** Police? Those buffoons? Do you really think I'd be better off with those bumbling, corrupt apes meddling in my business, or have you just suddenly developed some pathological fear of money?

**TELESPHORE:** [Frustrated but staying polite] Just asking all the standard questions, Jan.

**BALEK:** [Laughs] Forgive me, just a little jape, I mean nothing by it. God, you people are so wound up tightly. I can only imagine the employers you've worked with before.

**EISEN:** So, just to be crystal clear, you want us to find this Rudy, and get your Nixie back?

**BALEK:** Precisely. But it won't be easy. Rudy is a mentalist, and a good one. Power of suggestion, you see. If you hear a word coming out of his mouth, it could compromise your efforts. I'll give you a five hundred mark stipend to assist in the investigation, and another fifteen hundred upon completion of the job.

**TELESPHORE, EISEN, AND COLETTE:** Fifteen hundred!?

**BALEK:** Upon completion, yes. Hopefully, that will provide sufficient motivation to do the job and do it right.

**SOUND:** They begin to shuffle out of their seats.

**EISEN:** (To Colette and Telesphore) Holy shit. (to Jan) We'll get right on it!

**COLETTE:** Good jobs, done quick, that's our motto!

**TELESPHORE:** It's been an interesting experience meeting you, Mr. Balek.

**BALEK:** Oh, and before you go, one more thing, just a bit of fun, really. I love to tell this story. Do you know why I call my business the Ruby Rabbit?

**COLETTE:** Uhhh, no?

**SOUND:** Telesphore clears his throat and elbows Colette in the ribs.

**COLETTE:** (fake eager) But I'd like to!

**SOUND:** The background noise fades out. Unsettling music plays.

**BALEK:** It's a tribute to my father, the greatest man I ever knew. He was a hunter and a butcher back in the old country, and I apprenticed under him as a lad. He taught me everything I know about business.

**EISEN:** That's very sweet, so we'll be going--

**BALEK:** But that's not all he taught me. He taught me salesmanship, he taught me the value of grit and hard work. He also told me the best way to skin a rabbit. He was good, oh so good. He'd skin them so quick that they'd still be alive for some time afterwards, he'd throw them right into the salt barrel after that. They'd wriggle around, all ruby red, and salt themselves. I always found that to be a striking image. It took me forever to learn his technique, an awful lot of practice, you know. But now, I dare say I'm even better at it than he was.

**BEAT**

**BALEK:** Look at me, rambling on! Good luck with the job. You have my full confidence.

**HISTORIAN:** And with that unpleasant anecdote concluded, Colette, Eisen, and Telesphore were on their way, looking to find the kidnapper Rudy Klein, and his victim, the missing woman Nixe. The trio returned to their van to plan the next steps.

**SOUND:** They get in the back of the van.

**TELESPHORE:** What a truly ghastly man. It felt like talking to a drainage vent.

**SOUND:** Eisen flops onto the couch.

**EISEN:** Be that as it may, he's clearly flush with cash, so I say we swallow our pride and get it over with. We won't feel so bad when we're counting our marks, eh? (miming counting coins) Ching-ching-ching!

**COLETTE:** I don't know... Didn't something about that seem fishy to you?

**EISEN:** Like what?

**COLETTE:** He's got money, he's got people like that big scary guy working for him, why hire us?

**EISEN:** Because lady luck is finally smiling upon us, Colette, don't overthink it! If we let a little sleaze distract us from a payday, we might as well all go to the poorhouse now.

**TELESPHORE:** Where shall we begin a search for the Mysterious Mr. Klein, then? He practically only gave us a name and a photograph.

**EISEN:** It's not like he could have given us a photo of the fleshcrafter girl. She could look like anybody right now.

**COLETTE:** Didn't Balek say something about Rudy sneaking Nixe back to Berlin? The army has all the borders locked down right now, if they wanted to get out, they'd need to forge papers, right?

**EISEN:** Aye. You've got a point there, Colette.

**COLETTE:** So it's simple. You two have been doing crimes around here for years, who do you think they'd go to in Hundekopf to forge some papers?

**BEAT**

**EISEN and TELESPHORE:** Leipzig Paul.

**HISTORIAN:** Paul Holst, better known to his friends and associates by his moniker Leipzig Paul, was another German immigrant and a pillar of the Hundekopf Criminal Community. A skilled artificer specialised in the field of paperwork, Leipzig Paul was one of the finest document forgers anywhere in Europe - It was a lucrative side business he ran out of his seemingly legitimate front business, "Holst's Photography and Camera Repair." So naturally, that particular shop was exactly where they were heading.

**SOUND:** The bell over the shop's door jingles as it opens. The team enters.

**PAUL:** Well, well, well, didn't think I'd be seeing Valor's most wanted darken my doorway anytime soon. You must really be desperate now.

**TELESPHORE:** Lovely to see you again too, Paul.

**SOUND:** An industrial printer runs in the background.

**EISEN:** It's really been too long. Last time must've been when, y'know, I needed that birth certificate for the Prussian Mint Blag.

**PAUL:** And now I see you have a guest. Who's the charming young lady?

**COLETTE:** Colette. Pleasure to meet you, Leipzig Paul.

**PAUL:** Wish I could say the same. You three are red hot right now. Frankly, you're putting my life and livelihood in danger just by being here. Can't say I appreciate that.

**EISEN:** Don't worry. We won't trouble you for long. You wouldn't happen to by any chance know this fella?

**SOUND:** Eisen pulls out the photo of Rudy and shows Paul.

**PAUL:** Hmm. My memory isn't what it used to be.

**EISEN:** [Sighs] Hundred marks.

**PAUL:** Now that you mention it, I think he was in my store yesterday. Yeah, him and a lady friend. A real looker - Not that I make value judgments on that sort of thing.

**COLETTE:** Did they give you their names?

**PAUL:** Honey, people come to me to get names, not give them. And they seemed to be in a real hurry, even by my clients' standards.

**TELESPHORE:** Did you give them what they came in for?

**PAUL:** They couldn't afford what they came in for. With all the new measures that stuffed-shirt Holzmann put in, my prices have had to go up. They added four new watermarks. Four. And I suppose I have you three to blame for that.

**COLETTE:** But this guy's a mentalist. Balek said he had the power of suggestion, couldn't he have just compelled you to give them the papers?

**PAUL:** You think if anyone could just compel me to give them papers, I'd still be in business? This store is warded out the wazoo, I've got sigils like you wouldn't believe under the wallpaper. The strongest fire mage you know couldn't outshine a damp matchstick in here.

**COLETTE:** Then what happened? Did you just send them away?

**PAUL:** He told me he'd come up with the money and head back in a couple days. I don't expect to see him any time soon, but that's no skin off my nose. The way things are going in this country, I think my business is about to be booming.

**TELESPHORE:** Glad to know that some people are weathering the storm.

**EISEN:** Aye, while the rest of us are drowning.

**PAUL:** Also, maybe I just misheard you, but did you say you're working with Balek?

**COLETTE:** Yep. He's paying us top dollar to track down this guy and his, um, lady friend.

**PAUL:** It'd need to be top dollar to work with Jan Balek. He and I had an agreement back in the day; someone in his line of work needed good papers on the reg. But some of the stuff he and his friends got up to... Well, let's just say I stay clean these days. Keep your wits about you.



**EISEN:** I'll keep that in mind. So, where could our good friend Rudy be now?

**TELESPHORE:** I'll answer your question with another question - If you needed to make money quickly in Hundekopf, where would you go?

**SOUND:** Jazzy music plays. The roll of a roulette wheel, gamblers clink glasses and cheer.

**DEALER 1:** Place your bets please. Place your bets please.

**SOUND:** A man slams down some chips. The music fades into the background.

**MAN:** Put it all on red! Red's my lucky number!

**CROUPIER:** I think you've had too many, pal.

**BARTENDER:** For the next hour, two-for-one drinks for high rollers, only at the Lucky Dogrobin!

**GAMBLER 1:** Hit me!

**SOUND:** The dealer deals Gamber 1 another card.

**GAMBLER 2:** Eyyy, now you're playing like a man, Hans!

**DEALER 2:** And you, sir?

**RUDY:** Hit me.

**DEALER 2:** Are-- Are you sure?

**RUDY:** I'm feeling lucky.

**GAMBLER 1:** Ha. Someone likes to live dangerously.

**RUDY:** I never gamble anything I'm not prepared to lose.

**GAMBLER 2:** What'd you say your name was again, buddy?

**RUDY:** I didn't. Hit me.

**DEALER 2:** If you insist, sir...

**SOUND:** The Dealer deals Rudy another card.

**RUDY:** How about we make this interesting? I'll double my bet if you double yours.

**GAMBLER 1:** Double? Ha. You crazy?

**RUDY:** No, just bored. And you are too. You want to double my bet.

**SOUND:** His voice reverberates with creepy whispers.

**GAMBLER 1:** Okay... All in.

**GAMBLER 2:** Yeah, screw it, all in.

**RUDY:** Good. Now you're playing like men.

**GAMBLER 1:** The poker face on this guy...

**GAMBLER 2:** Why so confident, asshole? You know something we don't?

**RUDY:** I imagine I know a lot of things you don't.

**GAMBLER 1:** Smart mouth. How'd you feel if it had a few less teeth?

**RUDY:** Fewer.

**GAMBLER 1:** What?

**RUDY:** Fewer teeth.

**GAMBLER 2:** That's it, I'm gonna snap this guy in half...

**DEALER 2:** Gentlemen...

**RUDY:** You don't want to do anything violent.

**SOUND:** More mentalism sounds.

**GAMBLER 2:** You're... You're right. I don't want to do anything violent.

**RUDY:** In fact, I think you both feel like folding and going home.

**DEALER 2:** Sir--

**RUDY:** And you don't feel like doing anything about it. I've won big tonight.

**SOUND:** Mentalism whispers.

**DEALER 2:** Good game, gentlemen.

**GAMBLER 1:** Guess I'll go home.

**GAMBLER 2:** My wife is gonna kill me...

**SOUND:** The people around the table disperse. Rudy collects his chips.

**RUDY:** Too easy...

**SOUND:** Eisen and Telesphore approach. Telesphore cocks a gun at Rudy.

**EISEN:** Rudy Klein, I presume?

**RUDY:** Shit.

**TELESPHORE:** It behoves you to come quietly, Mr. Klein.

**RUDY:** I think there's been a misunderstanding. I--

**EISEN:** I really don't need to hear any excuses from a kidnapper. Where's the woman?

**RUDY:** Kidnapper? Of course that's what he told you. Sick bastard.

**TELESPHORE:** Delaying tactics won't help you here. If you cooperate with us, we'll---

**RUDY:** You both want to let me go.

**SOUND:** Mentalism whisperings.

**BEAT**

**EISEN:** On your way, sorry for troubling you, mate.

**RUDY:** No problem.

**SOUND:** Rudy quickly runs away, his chips rattling in his arms.

**BEAT**

**EISEN:** What the hell just happened?

**TELESPHORE:** The Power of Suggestion. Come on, after him!

**SOUND:** The two of them begin running after Rudy. The jazzy song becomes non-diegetic again and finishes.

**HISTORIAN:** Meanwhile, Colette was outside the Lucky Dogrobin casino, performing the much-maligned task of lookout duty.

**SOUND:** Colette takes a drag off a cigarette.

**COLETTE:** God, I hate lookout duty. Why am I never allowed to go into the casinos and confront people? I can be confrontational when I want to be!

**SOUND:** Rudy runs past, tokens jangling.

**RUDY:** Excuse me!

**COLETTE:** Sorry, sorry, sorry! [beat] Oh my god... Was that...

**SOUND:** Seconds later, Eisen and Telesphore run in, out of breath.

**EISEN:** Rudy! Damn it, he got away!

**SOUND:** Eisen throws down his walking stick.

**TELESPHORE:** His Power of Suggestion is a lot stronger than I'd imagined. Next time, we really can't let him get a word in.

**EISEN:** IF there's a next time! Somebody who was meant to be on lookout duty let him go!

**COLETTE:** You guys let him go first! This failure is on all of us!

**TELESPHORE:** If he has any sense at all, he won't hit a casino again after that. We'll need to rethink our entire plan.

**EISEN:** With casinos out of the question, we don't have any more leads! He's a ghost, Telsie!

**COLETTE:** I think your ghost might've dropped something...

**SOUND:** Colette leans over and picks something up.

**COLETTE:** A matchbook. Huh. Three Frogs, what does that mean?

**TELESPHORE:** [Perking up] Three Frogs? That's what it says?

**COLETTE:** Yeah, on the back.

**TELESPHORE:** That must be a matchbook from the Three Frogs Inn! That isn't far from here!

**EISEN:** So you're saying we have a lead?

**TELESPHORE:** The best one yet, in fact!

**SOUND:** Eisen artifies up his walking stick and grabs it.

**EISEN:** Ha! Put that in your pipe and smoke it! We might be seeing that fifteen hundred marks after all!

**HISTORIAN:** Encouraged by this sudden break in the case, the trio didn't waste any time in finding the Three Frogs Inn, and talking to its innkeeper about the matter at hand.

**INNKEEPER:** No vacancies.

**COLETTE:** We know, we're not trying to book a room.

**INNKEEPER:** Then why are you here? To admire the scenery?

**TELESPHORE:** One of your guests, Rudy Klein, is a friend of ours, and we'd like to speak to him.

**INNKEEPER:** Then what's his room number?

**TELESPHORE:** Well, we hoped you'd be able to help us with that.

**INNKEEPER:** If he didn't tell you his room number, he probably doesn't want you visiting.

**EISEN:** Look, we get it, you're a professional. You've got ethics. You don't want to tell us anything that might violate your guests' privacy, so here's what I'm going to do.

**SOUND:** Paper rustles. Eisen puts something on the desk.

**EISEN:** A piece of paper, a pencil, and two hundred marks. In case writing it is easier.

**HISTORIAN:** After money did indeed prove the key to warping the innkeeper's sense of professionalism, Colette, Eisen, and Telesphore quietly crept up onto the second floor of the Three Frogs Inn, ready to confront Rudy and rescue Nixe.

**SOUND:** The gang creep across the slightly creaky wooden floorboards.

**EISEN:** [Whispering] We probably should have thought of a better plan before we got up here.

**TELESPHORE:** [Whispering] I wouldn't recommend barging in. If he's taken Nixe as a hostage, a shootout could put her in danger.

**COLETTE:** [Whispering] She's a fleshcrafter, can't she just heal herself?

**EISEN:** [Whispering] You should know by now, Colette, not every fleshcrafter is Ariadne Culver.

**SOUND:** They all come to a stop.

**TELESPHORE:** [Whispering] Room 4.

**COLETTE:** [Whispering] Hold on, I have a plan.

**EISEN:** [Whispering] Can we discuss this plan?

**COLETTE:** [Whispering] No time. He doesn't know I'm with you guys.

**SOUND:** Colette knocks on the door to Room 4. Mysterious guitar music plays.

**RUDY:** [Behind the door] What?

**COLETTE:** Cleaning lady! Need to grab the sheets! Mind if I drop in?

**BEAT**

**RUDY:** Okay, just be quick.

**COLETTE:** Oh, I will be.

**SOUND:** The door opens.

**EISEN:** Oh for - hide!

**SOUND:** Colette collects up an armful of sheets and leaves the room.

**COLETTE:** Thank you!

**SOUND:** The door closes.

**TELESPHORE:** [Whispering] She's rather good sometimes, isn't she?

**EISEN:** [Whispering] She has her moments.

**SOUND:** The door opens, and Colette slinks out, carrying some sheets. She folds them.

**COLETTE:** [Whispering] He's alone and unarmed.

**EISEN:** Alright then!

**SOUND:** Eisen cracks his knuckles, uses magic to unlock the door. The trio storm in.

**EISEN:** Hello, Rudy!

**RUDY:** You don't—

**SOUND:** Telesphore cocks a revolver.

**TELESPHORE:** The only things I want to hear out of your mouth are very specific answers to our very specific questions. Understood?

**RUDY:** [Sighs] Yes. Understood.

**COLETTE:** Oof. It's always kind of scary when you get like this.

**EISEN:** Believe me, you really cannae give this one an inch.

**TELESPHORE:** Where is Nixe?

**RUDY:** He's not who you think he is.

**EISEN:** Not an answer, pal. Where is Nixe?

**RUDY:** He'll kill me, he'll kill you, and he'll kill her.

**COLETTE:** Rudy, this is going to be a lot easier if you just tell us where Nixe is.

**RUDY:** Okay. Fine. [Beat] She's behind you with a shotgun.

**SOUND:** Nixe loads a shotgun. The gang turns around.

**NIXE:** Hello.

**RUDY:** You don't want to take her gun.

**SOUND:** Mentalism whispers.

**EISEN:** Oh, for fuck's sake.

**COLETTE:** How did she get the jump on us like that?

**NIXE:** I guess you could say...

**SOUND:** Nixe shapeshifts into the Innkeeper.

**INNKEEPER:** I had a head start.

**SOUND:** She shapeshifts back into Nixe.

**NIXE:** Can't be too careful with Balek's goons coming after us.

**TELESPHORE:** What did you do with the real innkeeper?

**RUDY:** He's in the cellar. Tied up and okay. We've been keeping him fed. We were going to let him go before we skipped town. Nobody needs to get hurt here.

**EISEN:** We're not leaving without Nixe! We have fifteen hundred marks riding on her!

**COLETTE:** And I'm also against kidnapping, just on principle.

**NIXE:** I haven't been kidnapped. Not by him, anyway. And my name isn't Nixe. It never has been. It's Eva. Eva Klein.

**BEAT**

**COLETTE:** I KNEW SOMETHING WAS WEIRD ABOUT THIS JOB!

**HISTORIAN:** But Colette, Eisen, and Telesphore weren't the only ones experiencing a revelation. Across the city, Jan Balek was sitting in his office, eagerly anticipating a visit from his second in command.

**SOUND:** The door creaks open. 'Kiss Me, My Honey' by Billy Murray plays on the gramophone.

**BALEK:** Come in, come in, come in! Oh, I can hardly wait.

**SOUND:** Dolph enters.

**DOLPH:** Good news, Mr. Balek. Our men tailing Iyer and Winterlich seem to have struck gold. They're with Nixe and Klein at the Three Frogs out in North Hundekopf.

**BALEK:** Magnificent! Get the boys together, rifles, pistols, and petrol bombs. We'll go out for a spot of hunting, it'll be great fun! Oh, speaking of...

**DOLPH:** Yes, sir?

**BALEK:** Make sure one of them grabs my father's tool bag. I think I can make him proud today.

**DOLPH:** Of course, sir, I'm sure he'd be very proud of ya.

**HISTORIAN:** Completely unaware that a cadre of dangerous men was rapidly advancing towards them, Colette, Eisen, and Telesphore did their best to understand the exceedingly strange turn this job had taken.

**SOUND:** Mysterious guitar music plays.

**HISTORIAN:** I can say, with the benefit of historical hindsight, that Eva and Rudy Klein were siblings from Berlin, whose alienation from their family had left them adrift in the world. With no home for them in Germany, they instead made their way into the Valorian Socialist Republic - With the help of one Jan Balek.

**HISTORIAN:** Both had gone into magical academia at first, having been sponsored in their training by Balek's organisation, with Rudy cultivating his Power of Suggestion and Eva becoming an adept shapeshifter. Rudy would repay his debt as a petty hustler on Balek's payroll, and Eva would put in her hours at the Ruby Rabbit under the name Nixe. But both had a common curse - They were too good at what they did to ever be freed. Balek would forever raise the ceiling of their debt, keeping them in servitude. And what Balek had framed as a kidnapping was, in fact, the siblings' desperate attempt at escape. Balek had hired Iyer, Winterlich & Co to track down the duo on his behalf, believing they wouldn't see them coming, and it had almost gone exactly as he'd hoped.

**TELESPHORE:** I knew he was a dreadful man.

**EISEN:** Okay, okay, he's the devil, I get it, we can all lower our guns now.

**SOUND:** Eisen magics the guns out of Eva and Telesphore's hands.

**COLETTE:** It's always the ones you most suspect.

**RUDY:** We knew Balek would never let us go any other way. We'll be out of his clutches when we leave the country - If only we could get out of this damn city first.

**COLETTE:** I understand how you feel. I've kind of gotten weirdly used to dangerous people wanting to hunt me down by now.

**EISEN:** Nixe-- Uh, I mean, Eva, can't you change his face? It'd make getting out of here a hell of a lot easier.

**NIXE:** I'm not that kind of fleshcrafter. They only taught me how to change my own body - That's what made me the perfect asset back at the Rabbit. The girl who can be anyone you want her to be, so long as you have the marks.

**RUDY:** But we've got the marks now. If you three are willing to help us, we can pay for new papers from Leipzig Paul, make our way to the border, and finally get out of this--

**SOUND:** A sudden volley of bullets. Glass smashes. Some of the bullets strike Rudy. The others scatter around the room.

**NIXE:** Rudy! No!

**EISEN:** Hit the deck!



**HISTORIAN:** Jan Balek and his men had arrived. They were less concerned with retrieving their escapees than they were with punishing their disobedience, and as such, they opened fire on the Three Frogs Inn without discrimination. Rudy Klein was fatally wounded in the process.

**SOUND:** Nixe rushes to her brother's side. Sad operatic music plays.

**NIXE:** [Panicking] Come on, Rudy, we'll get you out of here, we'll find another fleshcrafter--

**RUDY:** [Choking on blood] Too late. You want to get out of here. You want to survive this.

**SOUND:** Rudy slumps and dies. Eva sobs over his body.

**NIXE:** I'll kill him... I'll kill that bastard...

**SOUND:** A bottle smashes against the building. It explodes. The building begins to burn.

**COLETTE:** They set the building on fire, we need to get out of here!

**TELESPHORE:** We're running out of time!

**EISEN:** Eva, come on, we need to go--

**SOUND:** Eisen grabs Eva and drags her away from Rudy.

**NIXE:** I'll kill him! I'LL KILL HIM!

**SOUND:** The fire spreads.

**HISTORIAN:** With Rudy's body sadly left to burn amongst the rest of the Three Frogs Inn, Colette, Eisen, Telesphore, and Eva Klein limped out of the wreckage, only to be surrounded by Jan Balek and his gun-toting henchmen.

**SOUND:** People rush out of the burning building.

**BALEK:** Damn it, Dolph, you and the boys must've shot Rudy. Shame, terrible shame. I have all these tools. I wanted to take my time with that worthless, backstabbing snake.

**DOLPH:** My apologies, sir, I'll do better next time.

**BALEK:** Still, we've got the rest of you to play with. And my darling little Nixe.

**EISEN:** I'm guessing the ship has sailed on the fifteen hundred, aye?

**BALEK:** Bet you wish you'd taken the pate now, hmm?

**COLETTE:** We don't want your pate, we don't want your money, we don't want anything to do with you.

**TELESPHORE:** I echo Miss Geise's sentiment. You are a truly repulsive little creep.

**BALEK:** Your words wound me. But these tools--

**SOUND:** Balek shakes the bag of his father's tools.

**BALEK:** These will wound you a lot more. I'm sure we can find a salt barrel around here, can't we, Dolph?

**DOLPH:** Anything you want, Mr. Balek.

**BALEK:** (laughs) Yes, yes, anything I want. You've been so quiet, Nixie. Aren't you happy to see me?

**NIXE:** I'm... So happy to see you, Jan. These... These brutes, and my idiot brother, they thought they knew what was best for me. They don't know what I know. The only person who knows what's best for me is you.

**COLETTE:** Eva, you can't believe that, can you!?

**NIXE:** Eva isn't my name. It's Nixe.

**COLETTE:** No, it's not, he's brainwashed you--

**BALEK:** Dolph, grab the one with glasses and cover her mouth. She's upsetting my Nixie.

**DOLPH:** Of course, Mr. Balek.

**COLETTE:** Get away from me--

**SOUND:** Dolph grabs Colette. She continues to yell in protest, but those yells are muffled.

**TELESPHORE:** I really wouldn't advise you to do that.

**DOLPH:** Shut up! Or I'll have you shot!

**BALEK:** Nixie, my dear, come, come, come.

**SOUND:** He hugs her and strokes her hair.

**BALEK:** Oh, I've missed you. You don't have to see the ugly things I have to do to these people. You're my number one girl. My top earner.

**NIXE:** I can't wait to go back to the Rabbit. It's like my true home. I just feel like I'm meant to be... Close to you.

**SOUND:** Nixe rubs Balek's chest.

**EISEN:** Och, I think I'm gonna be sick...

**BALEK:** Silence! If you'd just done the job that you were hired to do, everything would be fine! You'd have your money, I'd be back to business as usual. But you incompetent asses ruined it!

**SOUND:** The Kingmaker begins to power up.

**DOLPH:** Uh, boss, her head's glowing...

**BALEK:** Now you're back with us, my dear, it's like everything is right again.

**NIXE:** I'm all yours, Jan. After all, I can be whatever you want me to be.

**SOUND:** Fleshcrafting noises. Balek gasps in pain - As Eva stabs him in the gut.

**BALEK:** [Surprised; Hurt] But... My Nixie...

**NIXE:** I know what I want, Rudy. I want him dead.

**SOUND:** Rising tone from the kingmaker.

**HISTORIAN:** It's extremely likely that Dolph was about to order the others to fire on Eva, Eisen, and Telesphore, but we'll never know for sure, because seconds later--

**SOUND:** The Kingmaker explodes Dolph.

**HISTORIAN:** The Kingmaker blew him into smithereens.

**HENCHMAN 1:** Oh my god... She blew up Dolph!

**HENCHMAN 2:** And Nixe killed Balek!

**SOUND:** Enigmatic, quirky string music fades in and continues until the end.

**HENCHMAN 1:** Wait, that means there's nobody to pay us.

**HENCHMAN 2:** Let's get out of here!

**SOUND:** All the henchmen run away in panic.

**TELESPHORE:** Is everyone else alive?

**SOUND:** Colette groans and wipes blood off of her glasses.

**COLETTE:** Alive... But gooey.

**NIXE:** More alive than I've felt in years...

**EISEN:** I really could have used those fifteen hundred marks...

**HISTORIAN:** It had been a bittersweet ending for all involved. Eva Klein had gained her freedom and lost her brother. Colette, Eisen, and Telesphore helped her cash Rudy's chips, giving her enough money to purchase forged papers from Leipzig Paul, with enough left over to start a new life in Germany. Who Eva Klein became is, to this day, lost to the pages of history.

**HISTORIAN:** Iyer, Winterlich & Co had gained nothing from the venture. The Ruby Rabbit Brothel would be shuttered a little over a week later. And when the Hundekopf police

investigated the burning wreckage of the Three Frogs Inn, they discovered one Friedrich Reinstrom, the true innkeeper of the Three Frogs, tied up in the cellar, miraculously alive.

**MEG:** The Kingmaker Histories is a production of We Are Not Alive. This episode was written and executive produced by Henry Galley, with audio engineering by Meg Molloy Tuten, and foley design by Jam Wright. Our music comes courtesy of Vivek Abishek and TeknoAxe, and our theme was written and performed by Professor Shyguy. This episode featured, in order of appearance, David Ault as the Historian, Blythe Renay as Colette, Josh Rubino as Telesphore, Taqi Nazeer as Eisen, Danny Doyle as Dolph, Zane Schact as Balek and Leipzig Paul, Ron Guan as Rudy, and Eden as Nixe, with additional voices by Addison Peacock, Meg Molloy Tuten, LadyImperatrix, Charlie Green, ConnFlakes, EJ Smith, Jamie Douglas, Roscoe Braman, Matt Baker, and Joe Cliff Thompson. If you'd like to support the show, visit the links in the show notes. Thanks for listening, and we'll see you in two weeks.