

Key:

Originally Highlighted-Unedited

Clear- Edited

Highlighted- “You should consider editing this again”

Blue Letters - Completed All Editing

A note about clauses:

Keep in mind that relative pronouns (who, which, that) and subordinating conjunctions such as “after, because, since, while” introduce subordinate clauses, and not independent clauses.

Relative pronouns and subordinating conjunctions can be omitted in an “elliptical clause,” however, it must be abundantly clear what purpose the clause serves.

If it is an adjective clause that CANNOT be removed from the sentence without changing the entire meaning, it is a “restrictive clause.” If it enriches the sentence but can be removed, while the sentence keeps the same meaning, it is a “unrestrictive clause.” Please keep close in mind that “who (whom) and which” can introduce both restrictive and nonrestrictive clauses; however, “that” can ONLY introduce restrictive clauses. I.e. if it is an adjective clause and you use “that,” it had better be a restrictive clause!

Please pay attention to this while reading and point it out to me in the comments, because I tend to forget this convention a lot.

A note about modifiers:

Please be especially mindful of dangling modifiers and squinting modifiers:

A Dangling Modifier is a phrase that either has no word in the sentence to modify, or is placed in such a way that it appears to modify unintended words in the same sentence: I.e.

Dangling: Making a flying tackle, Sam’s shoe came off.

(the participial phrase is *making a flying tackle*, but the subject of the clause that follows is *shoe*. *Making a flying tackle* cannot possibly refer to a shoe.)

Improved: Making a flying tackle, Sam lost his shoe.

A Squinting Modifier is one that is carelessly placed so that it appears to modify both the words preceding and the words following it. The reader has to stop reading to figure out what is being modified: i.e.

Squinting: The man who shoved his way to the platform angrily addressed the crowd. (what does *angrily* modify? The way the man made his way to the platform? Or the way he addressed the crowd?)

Improved: The man who angrily shoved his way to the platform addressed the crowd. OR The man who shoved his way to the platform addressed the crowd angrily.

Thanks! -Matt

SHIP ANATOMY AND PERSPECTIVE

Please Feel Free to Enlarge images at your leisure, be sure to shrink them down when you are finished.

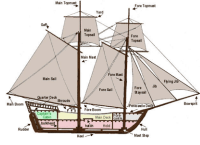


Figure 1



Figure 2

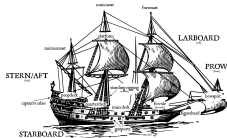


Figure 3

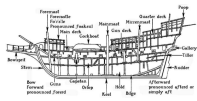


Figure 3.5



Figure 4

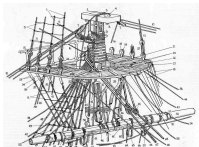


Figure 5 (as shown)

Here are three images of two types of tall ships. The first two images are of your typical merchant ship, otherwise known as a Schooner. Keep in mind that the high class merchant ships were schooners, and the lower class ones were sloops, which were smaller than the ones shown. Captain Callahan, the merchant that Shadow and Gavner gain passage to Dheathain on, is one of the extremely well off merchants that sail the seas, as he is one of the only ones that make regular trips to the Port City of Davensport (reasons on this alluded to more later in the story). The voyage directly from Beinost to Davensport- Raiaera to Dheathain- is not a lucrative journey, as it is damn near a 1.5 month journey. This is why he plans on making a stop at Radasanth in Corone first. But if he wanted to, he could because he is in a frigate which, if manned correctly, can make such a voyage.

The average merchant vessel was a schooner, which was smaller and faster than an average warship. Figures 1 and 2 show the cargo holds and the general view of a merchant schooner. Figures 3 and 3.5 show the cargo hold space of a war frigate. Captain Callahan's frigate was a repurposed war frigate into a merchant ship, so all of the ammunition and magazine holds were converted into cargo holds. Any pirate ships from organized factions, however, were ships of the line (Figure 4).

In the age of sail, there were 2 types of warfare: *Guerre de Course*, and *Guerre d'Escadre*. *Guerre de Course* means "war on commerce." Essentially, enemies tried to strangle out their opponents' shipping industries in order to drive their economies into the ground, and starve them into submission. *Guerre d'Escadre* was fleet-on-fleet action where ships would line up and fire on each other. Ships that partook in this type of warfare were badass 75-120+ gun "ships of the line," basically the battleships of the era. These were the huge man 'o war ships that you see in Figure 4. Captained by a seasoned Master And Commander, or a Commodore, the experience of these ships matched none, and the men aboard composed the finest crew.

The key to a good crew was drilling. They would drill, and they would drill, and they would drill on fire times to ensure that they could outfire any enemy. The goal was to match the enemy's fire rate 2:1 that is, for every 1 cannonball the enemy battery fires, your crew fires off 2 in the same time. This was the key to successful *Guerre d'Escadre*. You couldn't always outmaneuver your enemy, as the winds may not always be on your side, but you could always grapple his ship, pull close and blast him to smithereens before he gave you significant damage. Such was the goal of Captain Callahan in his previous commandships.

Captain Callahan was a war vet, having fought in the Corronian Navy, and a separate faction as well. Although his colleagues thought him stupid, and that he should just use his battlemages to help him outmanuver his ships, he always drilled it into his crews to up their rate of fire. Pirates on the other hand were not so intelligent. Any pirates encountered was much more likely to have a slower fire rate; however, in the days of sail, the crucial part of the battle was not the firepower that the guns could dish out. The cannons and carronades were fired at ships from a distance, but as they closed in, both ships would grapple each other and send boarding parties over. Every sailor was also a swordsman, and the primary fighting in the age of sail was hand to hand combat.

Calahan, however, was in a frigate. Frigates were better than the average

As battle would be raging on the weather decks, marines would be stationed aloft firing at the enemy officers and sailors. The crows nest was actually not what is portrayed in cartoons. It was not a little cup up at the very top of the main mast for

somebody to stand in, rather, it was termed the “fighting tops,” which was a platform located about halfway up the mast for a squad to hold up in (figure 5).

[insert edits here]

Post # Character Reason

Gavner #2 Rewrite

The sun barely peeked over the horizon as Gavner drew near his destination. As he stepped out into the clearing, the soft rays of morning sun gently sneaked into the atmosphere, stinging Gavner's pale, exposed skin. He quickly withdrew into his cloak, pulling his hood up to shield from the sun. Creatures of the night had no place amongst the daywalkers.

Gavner would have camped in the woods that day, but the message entreated urgency. The pale skinned vampire, now completely unprotected from the sun, made his way down the red clay-ridden dirt path with a new found vigor. Now, only his thick traveling cloak rained between Gavner and the sun. The deadly rays cared not, however, as they penetrated anything weaker than canvas. Looking up Gavner squinted at the horizon as the sun burned his eyes, but he found what he was looking for not too far off in the distance.

Not far ahead, Dead Man's Drink lurked off to the side of the path; it eluded most who hadn't previously visited, or learned of its location. Gavner gasped for a breath, already wet with copious amounts of perspiration as the tavern grew larger on the horizon. The sun enveloped the vampire, suffocating him in a blanket of heat. His heart raced, and he grew faint, and dizzy. Gavner knew this sequence of events all too well, but each time it occurred, he never found it easier to handle.

Reaching the door of the pub Gavner burst through and slammed the door behind him. He stood there, head against the door for a few seconds, as he tried to catch his breath. Looking over his shoulder, he found several roughians staring drunkenly at him. The vampire bared his sharp, black teeth in an angry sneer and the nosy onlookers quickly went back to their business. Wooden tables and chairs littered the tavern at which customers could enjoy their drink. Several travelers and vagabonds inhabited a few tables and the occasional barstool, but the tavern remained vacant for the most part. Several men lie dead, eternally resting, on the bar and various tables- glasses still in their hands, completely full except for one or two sips. The Dead Man's Drink claimed all the faint of heart.

Hanging up his traveling cloak, Gavner ordered a rare venison steak, and a tankard of Dead Man's Drink. He chose a spot in the corner of the tavern, and his cape swished behind him as he walked swiftly to the table. After a belly full of venison and half his tankard of Dead Man's Drink, Gavner drifted off peacefully in his chair for the day.

The creature of the night woke up to the sound of a bar fight. Two vagabondes were going at it; one pinned the other to the floor and was repeatedly punching his face. Gavner lifted his head and uncrossed his arms, wiping the sleep from his eyes. The tavern had gained its regulars, as well as a few travelers for the evening, but the most important guest sat directly across the

table from Gavner. Garbed entirely in dark clothing, the figure wore a black mask of silk and sported a magnificent bow slung across his back.

"I see you have found me," Gavner chuckled. "Thank you for watching my back while I slept. The journey was a long one"

The man in black gave a cool nod. The vampire stared into the cold, dark eyes of the archer with his own blazing red irises. The two sat, frozen in silence for several moments as the ambient noise from the tavern died down.

Suddenly a bowl crashed to the floor; the vampire and archer engaged each other in a blur. Gavner leapt across the table, and the dark archer grabbed the vampire and threw him over-shoulder with catlike reflexes. The archer sprang to his feet before Gavner even made contact with the ground, but the vampire swiftly rolled once and poised low to the ground. The creature of the night performed a leg sweep on the archer, sending the man in black backwards through the adjacent table and onto the ground. The vampire instantly leapt into the man's mount, Gavner's razor sharp fingernails pressed against the Archer's throat. He froze, looking down to see a dagger drawn, the tip pressed firmly to Gavner's heart.

"Black Shadow!" Gavner exclaimed jubilantly. He grinned from ear to ear and helped his friend to his feet. The two friends embraced lovingly, and Black Shadow gave the vampire a hearty slap on the back. The two approached the tavernmaster with the same order as Gavner had that morning, Shadow ordering a cup of mead and a medium rare venison of course, as opposed to the nearly raw steak that Gavner preferred. After an earful from the owner, an extra sum of gold and a promise not to break anything else, the two friends were sharing dinner together.

When they finished eating, Gavner waited several moments for Black Shadow to finish his mead. The vampire offered his friend the tankard of Dead Man's Drink, which was still half full from the morning. Gavner smirked as his friend took a deep draught from the tankard, and offered the rest to Gavner who drained it.

"It is nice to see you again my friend." Gavner said. "Please tell me, to what utmost urgency do I owe the pleasure?"

Post # 2 (Black Shadow post 1)

Throughout his life in exile, Dead Man's Drink made itself a special place to Black Shadow. In this bar he received his first lead starting a long chain of assassination missions. Here, he was forced into a bar fight nearly killing thirteen people. And here, he would once again meet his friend, Gavner. He learned of important information for his friend to know, and a mission for him to partake in.

Black Shadow entered into the tavern, music softly playing over the sounds of drunk men shouting at each other over their latest murders. The place was just as it had been Black Shadow's previous encounters with Gavner. Dead bodies scattered the floor while the notorious "Dead Man's Drink" claimed another victim as he took a sip. The ale was crafted to be so strong that few men could take more than one shot, and those that did took their last breath.

[/i]Poor fools. Why must you do this to yourself?[/i] Black Shadow thought to himself as he scanned the bar for Gavner. It took time, but Black Shadow's eyes finally met his friend's. Gavner sat alone in a booth at the far corner of the tavern, fast asleep, his eyes wide open. The dark archer made his way through the crowded bar to his friend and took a seat. He stared at the hooded vampire intensely, waiting patiently for him to awaken.

Gavner was a heavy sleeper. As time passed, the already loud bar echoed louder with angry voices and laughter at the spoils from the day. None of the extra noise stirred Gavner from his slumber. Black Shadow reached over and grabbed the vampire's mug to see how much he had to drink. Half the mug was downed, and Black Shadow suspected Gavner would not awaken for some time.

Another hour passed by, Black Shadow not taking his eyes off his friend. He learned patience at a young age, and that came in handy in times like this. He continued to watch the vampire closely as the sun set and the tavern darkened. The bartender walked the tavern lighting candles and lanterns, illuminating the bar with a dim orange light. As the sun set entirely, Black Shadow saw the vampire stirred and came to his senses

"I see you have found me," Gavner chuckled. "Thank you for watching my back while I slept. The journey was a long one"

Black Shadow and Gavner stared at each other for a moment, each eyeing and studying the other. Black Shadow and Gavner both moved at the same time. The bowl resting on the hard wood table flew across the room, smashing against the wall on the other side of the bar. The two moved so fast they were but a blur to anyone around them. The skirmish was short, but ended with Black Shadow on his back, Gavner on top of him. The Vampire's dark nails pressed against Black Shadow's throat, and Black Shadow's small dagger poked Gavner's chest.

“Black Shadow!” Gavner exclaimed as he embraced the dark archer. The two greeted each other properly, then apologized to the owner for the damage they caused. They ordered their dinner, Gavner ordering a nearly raw, bloody slab of venison, and Black Shadow having his medium rare.

“It is nice to see you again my friend.” Gavner said. “Please tell me, to what utmost urgency do I owe the pleasure?”

Black Shadow had a difficult time believing what he had learned the past few months. He paused for a moment, trying to find a way to tell Gavner. He lowered his head and took a deep breath.

“Shadow, is everything alright?” Gavner asked with a concerned look on his face.

Black Shadow had taught Gavner sign language throughout their friendship, the best way for the two to communicate. Black Shadow lifted his hands and began to sign.

“I believe Espoir’s family may still be alive.” Black Shadow said, in regards to his daughter. Gavner’s eyes widened and he stared back in disbelief.

“That is impossible, they died on that ship!” Gavner exclaimed.

“I thought so too, but I had to look into it. The ship we commandeered to speak with Clan Haldritar arrived into port three weeks ago. I snuck aboard after sunset and took a look at the manifest. Espoir was on the manifest as a child, and the one she was with...”

“The one we killed?” Gavner interrupted.

“Yes, the one we killed... She was a caregiver. I believe her parents may be alive.”

Gavner gave a blank stare, trying to process what he had just heard. “Are you sure about this?” He asked, still in disbelief.

“I am not sure, no. I did some digging, found the caregiver’s place of origin. She is an elf from one of the kingdom’s in Dhethain.”

“Dhethain? That forsaken land is an impending death sentence.” Gavner said, leaning back in his chair.

“I know... But I have to know, Gavner.”

Gavner gave a long sigh and rubbed his chin. “very well, when do we leave?”

Drake # 4 Rewrite

[I]This is where we part ways, Drake. On your journey you will be tested many times and undergo many trials and tribulations. Stay true to yourself and you will always know which path to take.[/I]

Drake happily walked down the dirt path, taking a deep breath of morning air. He couldn't help but to smile upon smelling the musty air of the rainforest floor. Dead leaves, moss, lichen and dirt made such a beautiful combination, and composed Drake's favorite scent. When the half-angel first returned from heaven, he found himself in fertile farmland under the moonlit sky. Now he joyfully trekked through the forest. What wasn't to love about Dheathain?

He came to a cross section in the roads and stopped for a moment to look around. Vines casually hung down from the canopy ceiling, about

halfway to the forest floor. Colorful birds fluttered from limb to limb overhead while monkeys swung amongst the vines. Baby trees sprouted amongst the vegetation on the ground, while bright green little plants grew knee high. Colossal ferns, too large to support their own weight, leaned over to the side, some against trees and some into the path.

The young angel closed his eyes and spread out his arms, peacefully breathing as he imagined himself taking off and bursting through the treetops and into the sunny sky. Drake couldn't wait to learn how to use his wings.

"Do not move, or we will kill you." A voice hissed behind him. Drake kept his eyes closed, humoring the aggressors for a moment.

"Sir, what should we do with him? He is just a boy." The soft draconic voice came, now from in front.

Drake opened his eyes and saw a green, scaly man with yellow eyes and black slits for pupils. He bared his teeth, revealing sharp canines and a forked tongue.

"We treat him no differently," A harsher, sharper voice said. "He is trespassing, and unwelcome here." A taller humanoid with red scales clad in a leather cuirass stepped into view. He sported a long two handed sword across his back and had long, sharp claws on the end of each finger. "Why are you trespassing in Drakari territory, human?"

"I'm just passing through," Drake said, "I'm sorry. I didn't know I was unwelcome."

"Wrong answer," The red scaled figure hissed.

Figures jumped out from the vegetation- at least six of them- all coming at him from different directions. Stepping left and preemptively crouching down, Drake exploded into a blue scaled figure. He shoulder checked the humanoid and bashed him under the chin with a forearm, sending him to the ground. All Drake needed was enough time to escape...

Shifting his focus to the yellow scaled Drakari from the right, Drake knocked the wind out of him with a powerful sidekick to the stomach. As the figure doubled over, Drake took off running down the path. He made it no more than ten yards before a Blue Scaled Drakari tackled him to the ground. Five of them all pounced at once.

"Hold his arms and legs!" One of them shouted. Drake began to kick and squirm to no avail.

"Let him breathe," the leader said as he approached the half-angel.. "Now, give me one reason why I should let you live."

"I do not negotiate with the likes of Evil," Drake said, and spat on the ground.

The drakari's face contorted in rage and he punched Drake in the face. He then drew his long claw down the side of Drake's face, leaving a deep cut.

"I'm going to beat you to a bloody mass, and then I'm going to cut off your head," the enraged Drakari hissed, "Then I will take your body to our shaman to incinerate with his breath."

Drake simply smirked, and began to hum a simple hymn that he learned in heaven. He continued humming as the entire band began a massive beating on the young angel.

Koli #5 Edit

[COLOR="#A9A9A9"]Sweet nothing.

Koli had spent countless hours practicing the way of the brotherhood. To completely fill one's mind- occupy it with everything in existence- and overload. Overloading the mind to render any form of concentration impossible remained a beginner meditation technique which brothers learned soon after they were old enough to talk. Many other adept techniques of truly altering one's consciousness and frame of mind existed, but Koli enjoyed the calm isolation of the degree of nothingness attainable through this technique.

Koli sensed somebody projecting a warm, heartfelt intention into the universe. It reflected off of Koli's own energy, refreshing him and comforting his heart. Koli's consciousness reflected the same energy back into the universe. Jalaphar, his blood brother, approached to share fellowship and knowledge.

Koli egressed from his state of isolation and turned himself to face the door of his dormitory, waiting for his brother, when suddenly a feeling of mischevity came about him. He concentrated on his surroundings and started breathing in a distinctive pattern; in for four counts, out for three, nothing for three, in for two, out for six, in for three... He felt his heartbeat slowing down to almost ten beats per minute, and his very existence seemed to fade away from his own presence.

The door opened and a tall, young athletic monk with a handsomely cut face and dark hair walked in. He had deep blue eyes and wore the white robe that the brotherhood issued as uniforms. Koli opened his eyes and watched his friend whom he had spent years training and learning with- honing their skills, studying the ways of the world, and their brotherhood's ethics together. The comorodory that they shared held a special place in Koli's heart, which only multiplied as they grew up together.

A look of confusion spread across Jalaphar's face as he looked around the room. "Koli?" he said, astonished. "Abbas Amo said he hasn't come out of his dormitory all day." Jalaphar said this as he looked directly at the spot where Koli sat.

Koli glanced down at himself and noticed that he had become invisible in his rhythmic and methodic meditation. Instantly he burst out laughing and Jalaphar jumped with a shriek as Koli's form faded into existence once more, his heart rate returning to normal.

"Wha- how- wha?" Jalaphar stammered as Koli fell down on his cot laughing.

"You should have seen the look on your face!" Koli gasped

Jalaphar's astonished look changed to disbelief, and then he started to smile. Soon, both of the monks rolled on the cot laughing together. "You became invisible just to pull a prank on me?"

"[I/]Koli! Jalaphar![I]" A voice hissed from the hallway, and instantly Koli and Jalaphar were on their feet in front of the cot, standing at attention. That tone of voice only came where big trouble followed.

“What is the meaning of this?”

Abbas Amo, the head priest of the brotherhood heard all of the commotion and was now smartly striding into the room with his hands behind his back. His tall, plump, grandfatherly figure misguided most, for as he loved the two boys dearly, he remained firm and harsh when warranted. He stopped in front of the two young monks, and glared at them, his gaze moving from one to the other. Silence rang out through the room as the two held their breath in front of their mentor, unsure of what doom impended.

“I found out that I could become invisible, Abbas Amo, by mistake,” Said Koli, unsure how to explain the odd phenomenon. “Jalaphar was so confused and I found it humorous,” he hesitated. “I couldn’t contain myself.”

Abbas’s eyes softened upon hearing Koli’s young, innocent voice. Much of the world still eluded Koli; he did not yet have the scars that most monks of age sported.

“Koli,” he said in a gentle voice, “your powers grow stronger by the day. You see this. You may not know the full breadth of what you are capable of, but this fact makes it even more important that you are fully in control of the aspects you are capable of manipulating-“ he glanced over at Jalaphar.

“Such as discipline, and control over your emotions,” Abbas Amo said in a sharper tone. “Both of you should have known better- especially you, Jalaphar. You are almost eighteen years old, both of you! You know what that means.”

“We will be eligible for our combat comprehensive,” Jalaphar said in a somber voice.

“That is right. You will both be eligible to go on missions for the brotherhood. There is no room for undisciplined, childish shenanigans.” His tone changed from scolding to teaching. “That sort of behavior will get one of you killed.”[/COLOR]

Koli peacefully sat atop the canopy in the Dheathain rainforest as he meditated. The sight of an endless carpet of treetops as far as the eye could see with the dawn sky in the background brought relief to Koli’s troubled mind. After renunciation of his previous life, he had no clue what to do or where to go. He sought the most desolate, hostile lands and lived there simply to prove to himself that he could overcome hardship in the face of grave consequences. Someday he hoped to live in Fallien, and eventually walk the Tular Planes. Eventually he would find a peaceful mountaintop in the Alerarian Mountain ranges to live out the rest of his days. The world didn’t need him, so why did he need the world? He survived in every climate for extended periods of time. Nobody would miss him, so he would continue to live undetected by the world except to nature.

And then he heard it. Pain. Distress. A simple cry for help. Perhaps he heard an auditory hallucination- his mind, playing tricks on him.

But then it came again.

Koli roused himself from his meditative state and slid off the branch he rested on, swiftly snatching the canopy cantilever, and using his momentum to swing himself away from the tree. The monk grabbed a green, fibrous vine and used it to slow his descent, as he swung towards the direction of the distress. He continued for about a minute until he saw the source of the commotion. Ten humanoids occupied a small clearing where two paths crossed, one man on the ground, cuts and bruises all over his body, and nine other lizard-like men around him. He slid down the bottom of a vine and launched himself at the nearest thug, falling about fifteen feet and breaking his fall whilst still undetected.

Koli noted where each attacker stood, conjured himself a long staff, and engaged. He worked swiftly and silently, picking the assailants off one by one; they looked like some sort of draconic species, but they still had pressure points like every other humanoid. Thanks to sensitive nerves and soft spots, six of the lizard men lay unconscious and 2 had fallen into an eternal sleep in a matter of seconds. Their leader beat down with hell and fury on the young man in a sort of blood lust, completely unaware of his surroundings. He sent a flurry of strikes and blows to the young man's head in particular, and stomped down on his limbs. Koli looked at the draconic figure and studied him, looking for a weakness. His scaly skin peeled up around his neck showing open wounds.

Koli raised his staff and brought it down on the open area in his neck, knocking him to the ground. The drakari rolled over and sent a kick up towards Koli's face. Koli took a quick step to the side and grabbed the leg of the leader. He lifted his elbow and brought it down on the knee of his enemy, snapping it. The drakari screeched in pain, the scream ringing out throughout the forest. Koli lifted his foot and brought it down on the leader's head in a vertical stomp. The leader joined the unconscious.

The monk looked over at the boy, laying almost lifeless on the cold hard ground. His body was beaten, scarred, and bruised. He felt pity for the young man groaning in pain. Koli walked forward, stepping in front of the boy.

[Gavner #6](#) (Gavner's 2nd post due to Shadow's 1st post rewrite)

"Uncle Gavner!" Espoir shouted as she ran down the walkway to Black Shadow's house. About five years ago, the vampire and his friend acted as diplomats between a warring kingdom of elves and dwarves. On the journey, an unfortunate event occurred and the two adventurers found themselves with responsibility over an orphaned baby. Black Shadow adopted Espoir, and both he and Gavner raised her. Gavner traveled much more frequently than Black Shadow, however, so Shadow was her primary guardian.

"Espoir!" Gavner exclaimed as he scooped her up in his arms. "Wow you are getting so big! Did you miss me while I was gone?"

"I missed you so much!" She said with the biggest smile on her face.

"So what are we tonight?" The vampire asked.

"I'm a dragon!" She shouted.

"A dragon!" Gavner shouted. "Ahhhh! Look out it is a dragon!" He picked her up and held her over his head by her hips as if she weighed nothing. She spread her arms to the side and held her legs straight. Gavner ran around with her, making swooping and swishing noises as she excitedly squealed in delight and flapped her arms and pretended to breathe fire.

"Let me hear you roar!" Gavner said.

"Roar!"

"Let me hear you roar!!"

"ROARR!!!"

"Ahhhh so scary, we are all going to di-"

Gavner stopped in his tracks as he looked down and saw Black Shadow directly in front of him with his arms crossed, and the biggest look of disapproval in his cold dark eyes. The vampire quickly put down Espoir who hid behind Gavner's leg and peeked out from behind with a loud giggle.

"Espoir," Black Shadow signed, "You should be in bed."

"I'm sorry daddy, I just heard you guys coming back and I got excited to see you!" Espoir replied. "Can I stay up with you? Please daddy?"

Gavner looked at Black Shadow. "Please daddy?" He pleaded.

"It's past your bedtime," Black Shadow insisted, "But since Uncle Gavner is home, ten more minutes." Espoir squealed in delight and the two continued to play, Shadow joining in as well.

After ten minutes had passed, Espoir was too tired to continue and she let Gavner carry her to bed. The two adventurers tucked her in and said goodnight.

"We are going away for a few months, just like I was telling you earlier," Black Shadow signed to Espoir, "You have your bow, right?"

"Yes daddy."

"And you know where Uncle Mavrik, Uncle Gavner's brother lives, right?"

"Yes daddy."

"You are going to be staying with him while we are away. He will be here tonight to look after you, and he will take you back to his place tomorrow. If you miss home you can ask him to come back here, and you guys can live at home for a few days, he knows and is okay with that."

"If I miss you can I sleep in your bed?." Espoir asked, visibly sad but trying to look strong.

Black Shadow's posture declined. Seeing Espoir visibly unhappy at his leaving always hurt him on the inside. He faced Espoir and removed his black mask. Gavner quickly averted his gaze as not to see his best friend's face. Shadow had made it clear that he didn't care if Gavner looked on his face, but Gavner still refused to do so out of respect for his friend. The vampire took several steps backwards so that only the back of Black Shadow's head was visible.

"Yes, of course you can," Black Shadow signed, as he leaned in to hug his daughter. "Hey, it's going to be okay," he signed, rubbing her back. "Uncle Gavner and I will be back before you know it."

"I know," she said trying to hold back tears, "But you've been gone for so long, and you just came back. Now you're leaving again."

"I know," Black Shadow replied silently, "But after this journey, it will just be you and me for a long time. Nobody will bother us except for Uncle Gavner."

She sniffled, large tears now rolling down with Black Shadow's black shirt sucking them up into a dark wet spot. He rubbed her back, letting her cry for a few minutes. He pulled away and looked down into her little eyes as he continued to rub her back.

“Remember how much fun you always have at Uncle Mavrik’s?” Shadow signed with one hand. “You can go shoot your bow with him, and climb trees, and even play with Gavner’s baby wolf cub Eva.”

“Eva is going to be there?” Espoir said with a small smile.

“Of course,” Gavner chimed in. “She has actually learned telepathy, so you can talk to her and see things she feels.”

Espoir smiled and the color returned to her face.

“I love you,” Black Shadow signed as he gave her a hug.

“I love you too daddy,” She said. “Uncle Gavner?”

“Yes Espoir?” Gavner said with a smile. He came to the side of the bed and leaned closer, taking care to not look in Black Shadow’s direction.

“Why are your teeth black?”

Gavner chuckled and kissed her on the forehead. “I will tell you when you are older.”

“Okay,” She said, “I love you Uncle Gavner.”

“I love you too little one,” Gavner replied as he gave her a hug. He said goodnight and left Black Shadow and Espoir alone for a while, waiting out in Black Shadow’s kitchen in the meantime.

Black Shadow came out of Espoir’s room after a few minutes, and Gavner kept his back to the door until he felt a hand on his shoulder. Looking behind him, Gavner saw that Black Shadow had his mask on once again.

“Thanks,” he signed to the vampire.

“Do not mention it,” Gavner said with a warm smile. “So what is the plan?”

“I told her that I would spend the day with her and leave tomorrow night for Beinost,” Black Shadow replied. “She was pretty upset.”

“You are always a pushover for her,” Gavner said, giving his friend’s shoulder a playful punch. “Daddy’s little girl.”

Shadow gave Gavner a playful shove, but forgot his own strength and pushed Gavner through the kitchen wall and backwards onto the ground. In an instant, Black Shadow helped Gavner up and back into the house.

“Yeah, I’m gonna fix that tomorrow...” Shadow signed as he gave the wall an embarrassed look.

“Very well,” Gavner said with a smirk, brushing himself off. “I will meet you in Beinost, and we can look for a voyage then.”

“I’ll see you there.”

[HR]/[HR]

“Are you sure this is the place?” Gavner asked as he and Black Shadow walked through the wooden door to see a small bar to their left, and a staircase to their right. “It looks more like a whorehouse than an inn.”

Shadow raised his eyebrows at Gavner and shrugged. The tavernaster pointed them in this direction, and he didn’t think that man lied, especially since they tipped him so well.

The dark elf who tended the bar looked at the travelers as they approached him. “Need a room?” she asked. “Or two?”

Gavner and Black Shadow looked at each other. “No,” Gavner said, “It is not like that, we are not... together...”

“Mmmhmm,” the bartender said, pursing her lips.

“We are actually looking for somebody who has a room here,” Gavner said.

“Really,” The dark elf said. “Who are you looking for?”

“A captain Jack- er... Callahan...” Gavner hesitated.

The dark elf stared at the two adventurers and raised her eyebrows.

“No, it is not...” Gavner stumbled.

“Look, what you guys do in your free time is none of my business,” She said shaking her head. “The captain is in room 213.”

“Thank you,” Gavner said awkwardly. He tossed a few marks her way and the two adventurers went upstairs.

They made it to the captain's room just as a tall human brunette exited, buttoning up her shirt. She looked at Gavner and Black Shadow and rolled her eyes as she pulled out a handful of marks and counted them on her way out. Gavner hesitated, reluctant to touch the door. He rubbed a spot on the wood with his sleeve before knocking.

"Back for more I see?" Came a gruff voice from within. "Just couldn't get enough of the ca-"

The door opened and a tall shirtless man appeared. He had black hair with streaks of gray, and copious amounts of chest hair. He was clean shaven, and stood about six foot four.

"Sorry," he said upon seeing Gavner and Black Shadow, "I'm not into your.. Type."

"No," Gavner said, "We heard that you captain a merchant vessel? The RS Eluriand?"

"You heard right," He replied, "Only the finest ship to sail the seas."

"And you make the voyage to Dheathain?" Gavner asked. The captain hesitated.

"Why don't you gentlemen come in for a moment?" He beckoned the two travelers in and shut the door. He asked them to sit down and retrieved a pipe which he lit and started puffing on.

"What business do you two have in Dheathain?"

"We- er..." Gavner hesitated, looking to Black Shadow who nodded his approval for Gavner to continue. "We are looking into geneology of a family member, and we have a lead to Dheathain."

The captain raised his eyebrows. "This family member must be important to you."

"She means the world to us," Gavner replied.

"You know that the inhabitants of Dheathain are not in the least bit tolerable of outsiders, right?"

"Yes, but-"

"I don't think you do," said the captain, looking at Black Shadow. "The locals attack all foreigners on sight. The Drakari are extremely territorial and Xenophobic."

"Yes, we are aware." Gavner replied.

"Dheathain is exceptionally inhospitable to... your... kind," The Captain said, looking at Gavner. "The sun's rays are five times stronger than normal in Dheathain."

Gavner narrowed his eyes. "How do you know..."

"Please," The captain scoffed. "You think I don't know a vampire when I see one? The cape, the fangs, the black teeth, the sharp nails? Your blazing eyes are the first thing I saw. I know how to spot one of you."

Gavner shifted uncomfortably in his seat.

"You needn't worry," the captain added, "One of my very close friends is one of your kind. I've taken him on this voyage many times."

"So we can pay for a voyage?" Gavner asked.

"Well, I do have a favor to ask of you," The captain said. "One of my sailors is intrigued by your... gift."

"You want me to blood one of your sailors?" Gavner replied.

"Honestly, no. I would see that the lad stayed human. But this is his choice to make. Will you talk to him, and help him see if this is the way for him?"

Gavner smiled. He remembered when he first gained the gift of vampirism. "Of course. I will talk with him."

"Thank you," The captain said. "We get underway to Corone after we finish unloading the cargo. The ship should be stocked by midweek, so in about three days. We sail at dawn, so show up at dusk and we will make final preparations."

"Corone?" Gavner asked. "I thought we were going to Dheathain?"

"We are," The captain responded, "But it is not [I]lucrative[/I] to go directly from Raiaera to Dheathain. Raiaera has more exports sought after by Corone than Dheathain, and Corone has more exports sought after by Dheathain than Raiaera does."

"Xzcunge," Gavner cursed under his breath.

"Take it or leave it." The captain said.

"We will take it."

"Good!" The captain exclaimed standing up. "We will see you midweek then."

Black Shadow #7 Edits

Black Shadow stared into the horizon. The deep blue sky seamlessly transitioned into the cool blue ocean, not a cloud in sight. The view captivated Black Shadow's eyes. The sound of waves always calmed Black Shadow. As a child his older brother would take him sailing, teaching him how to navigate the ocean. Shadow's brother was more a father to him than his own dad. His father blamed him for his brother's death, and his own father ordered his execution.. Black Shadow spent his days searching for relief from this pain, but it never would dissipate from his mind. The memories burned their way into his mind, never to be forgotten, always to resurface when he least expected.

"Excuse me sir." A voice called out, catching Black Shadow's attention. "Are you the one traveling with the vampire? Vir Fortis has asked for his attention."

Black Shadow turned his head to see a man walking towards him. The man was tall, about 6 feet 6 inches tall and at least two hundred fifty pounds. The man clearly kept himself in shape, ready to fight at a moment's notice. A scimitar gleamed at his hip, polished and well taken care of, but clearly used many times. He wore a white shirt, long brown pants, and black boots.

Black Shadow was unsure about where Gavner was, but the vampire often took refuge below deck out of the sun. The sun scorched Gavner's skin, leaving massive burns on the vampire, and too much sun would kill him. Black Shadow simply pointed towards the stairway below deck and turned back towards the ocean, his way of telling people to leave him alone. Most men rarely left Black Shadow alone after his silent gestures, but to Shadow's surprise the man disappeared as quickly as he showed up.

[I]Hopefully this Vir guy doesn't have an issue with Gavner.[/I] Black Shadow thought to himself.*[I] I don't want to have to save him again. [/I]*Black Shadow paused a few moments, taking another deep breath, smelling the unforgettable scent of the ocean. Salt water and seaweed comforted Black Shadow in an odd way.*[I] He's a vampire, he can take care of himself. [/I]*He thought as he continued to stare into the unknowns of the open sea.

The ocean waves roared against the hull of the ship, drowning out the busy sounds of the crew around Black Shadow. When he returned from this mission perhaps he would purchase a boat of his own, and teach his daughter how to sail. Espoir loved adventuring, seeing the world, and learning about new people. She possessed a natural ability to remember and recreate experiences, excelling at anything she sets her mind to.

[I]Oh Espoir, I can't wait until i return home.[/I] Black Shadow thought to himself, his mind drifting off into another daydream.

Drake #8 edits

“Uuuuuuuuhhhnnnn,” Drake groaned as he rolled onto his side, blood oozing from his nose into a sticky quarter sized pool below.

Drake's body ached all over from the beating, and his head throbbed in splitting pain. The scene around him darkened and flickered back into view as Drake faded on the brink of unconsciousness. He kept replaying the attack in his head over and over again. A whirl of green from the forest floor flashed as he was taken to the ground. His vision flickered black and red as the Drakari kicked and bludgeoned him until suddenly, everything stopped.

A pair of feet settled directly in front of his face. Drake winced, closing his eyes in anticipation of the blow. None came. Drake opened his eyes and followed the basic moccasins up the person's legs to see the gaunt, short face of a hooded man. He had a red cross branded on the center of his face, the top of the symbol trailing from the apex of his forehead down to the bottom of his chin, and the cross beam extended from cheekbone to cheekbone. He wore a dirt stained white robe, and had irises of pure white light, almost as they glowed with starlight.

Drake rolled onto his back, but this only aggravated his wounds. When he drew in breath, his lungs seared. He started to cough; something stuck in his throat. Perhaps mucus? This mucus tasted bitter and metallic though. He turned his head away from the mystery figure and coughed out blood which dribbled from his mouth and onto the ground. The young angel gave a shudder, and faded from consciousness into the icy abyss.

Koli # 9 Edits

[COLOR="#A9A9A9"]Koli lay on his cot, staring up at the ceiling. Commotion from the mead hall in the nearby town carried through his window, echoing off his stone walls.

“Poor fools,” he muttered to himself. “Only living for the weekend... What kind of life is that?” These men didn’t know if they would live to see next week, and so they indulged in sinful pleasures- always seeking satisfaction, but never finding any. They incessantly threw pleasures into a bottomless pit in attempts to fulfill themselves- to achieve some form of completion before their departure from this world...

But even they didn’t know they felt that way.

Koli simply understood people-even as a boy. He specialized in reading motives, thoughts, feelings, subtle body posture, and diction. Most of the time, he knew more about his friends and colleagues than even they knew about themselves. He always knew how to make others feel better, and others loved him for it. His fellow monks in training always sought his advice-even the senior 17 and 18 years. Koli’s age mattered not, for Abbas Amo said that he had wisdom far beyond his years

So why couldn’t he help himself feel better?[/COLOR]

Koli looked down at the boy who lay at his feet. The monk shook his head soberly to himself. This boy, not much older than 19 years old, now lay on the ground, beaten on the verge of death. Bending down, Koli picked up the youth and gently slung him over his shoulder. He had heard of a port city not too far away, and he could seek refuge there to tend to this boy’s wounds.

The priest took a deep breath and closed his eyes, grounding himself to the world before starting on his journey- absorbing the energy that the environment offered him. He breathed in for three counts, held his breath for two, and exhaled for four. The second time he breathed in, his chest and mind swelled in satisfaction- a third breath, and then a fourth. Koli felt as though nature was dumping pure, clean water on him from all sides, which his spirit drank in voraciously. His spirit merged with the world, the environment manifested in his mind as though he truly looked upon his surroundings. The green canopy above, the loamy dirt path beneath his moccasins, and the vines hanging down from the canopy. Everything gleamed with shimmering beauty and vibrated, teeming with energy. And in that moment, Koli too vibrated in the same way, finally charged and ready for his journey.

Gavner #10 edits

"Xczunge!" Gavner cursed out loud. He loathed the sea. "I swear this damn ship will be the end of me!"

Gavner hunched over a waste barrel with a splitting headache. Another wave of acid hit his stomach and he felt the last bit of lunch make its way into the barrel.

"Great," the vampire seethed as he retched, gouging new grooves in the side of the empty oats barrel with his fingernails, "Juuuuust great. A mighty general who has commanded a legion of vampires in battle- now reduced to a seasick fool who cannot even raise a fist," he grumbled to himself. "Can this day get any worse?"

Just then the ship listed almost 45 degrees, and splashed the mixture of partially digested dark elf blood and clam chowder from the barrel all over Gavner's face.

Groaning in defeat, Gavner wiped the sick from his mouth and face with a rag he found laying around as he withdrew from the barrel and slunk back to his rack. The passenger berthing was relatively unoccupied; apparently not many people were making the voyage to Dheathain this time of year. Or ever. Collapsing into his hammock Gavner stared at the ceiling. He attempted to sleep in vain; his pores were oozing with toxins and he felt worse than death.

Footsteps echoed on the deck, and Gavner glanced through the dark towards the noise. Even though the sickness dulled his vampiric senses, he could still make out the sound of boots against wood about thirty yards off. Gavner distinguished the figure of a tall, muscular, clean shaven sailor approaching Gavner's hammock. Lacking the strength to entreat the sailor, he simply laid in his rack until the figure towered over him.

"Sir, are you the other vampire on deck?" The man said in a deep voice. Gavner hesitated, and looked puzzled at the sailor. Callahan failed to mention that the entire crew knew of his vampirism. "It's okay, the only thing we care about on this ship is coin. We would give voyage to a Demon Lord, so long as he was peaceful and could pay his way."

"I am," Gavner managed to croak out.

"Vir Foris wishes to speak with you. I am afraid his last moments draw near." Gavner thought for a few moments.

[I]Vir Fortis,[/I] Gavner thought, [I]That name sounds familiar...[/I]

"Very well," Gavner said, "Where might I find him?"

"He is in the outboard most hammock on the starboard side of the berthing. I suggest you hurry sir." The sailor said as he turned and departed.

Gavner stirred and forced himself out of his hammock, stumbling over shoes and trash on the floor. Gavner made his way through the empty hammocks to the starboard side of the ship until he spotted an occupied one. As he approached Gavner heard shallow, ragged breathing coming from the mass.

"Vir Foris?" Gavner said as he approached the vampire. Vir turned his head with great effort and looked up at Gavner.

"Come closer, my boy." He wheezed. Gavner knelt down beside the hammock and looked at the dying vampire.

"You requested my presence, sir?" Gavner asked in his weakened voice. He was making every effort to remain stable in spite of his throbbing head.

"Indeed. Tell me, what is your name?"

"I am Gavner Nahs, of Clan Anoterish. What might I address you as, sir?" Gavner replied.

"Nice to meet you, General," Vir replied and began to cough. "I am Vir Fortis, Prince of Clan Durus."

Gavner felt stupid as the information set in. Clan Durus remained the only vampire clan in Dheathain, and one of the most renowned, senior war princes of the clan had entreated Gavner's company.

"Sir, I am at your service." Gavner said as strongly as he could.

"Please, call me Vir," The perishing prince said. "I am a mortal, just as you are. We are not on the battlefield, nor are we in the clan. We are equals here."

"Very well Sir- Vir," Gavner corrected himself.

"Now to the task at hand," Vir said weakly. "I am going to die before we make port, and I want you to send a message to my clan in Dhethain. With me gone, the clan needs another prince to fill my place. Tell the other princes that my vote goes to Wester Yirvik. He may seem small, but he is wise far beyond most in the clan."

"Very well sir," Gavner said. "As a general gives his oath, it shall be done."

[Black Shadow #11 edits](#)

Time evolved into an illusion upon the open ocean. Black Shadow felt an utter blissfulness known to him only upon rare occasions. As the high sun of the day slowly set. What felt like mere minutes turned into hours. The sun which previously hung high above the ship now rested along the horizon. The blazing orange sun cast the most beautiful streak of fire across the shimmering surface of the waters. Sunsets like these captivated Black Shadow in a way only he understood. Nothing would ever compare to the multitude of colors spread across the sky. From red and orange, to yellow and even purple, Black Shadow would never forget this sunset.

Black Shadow refused to tear his eyes from the sight before him. The pure beauty captivated him, clearing his mind and focusing him on the moment. He hadn't thought of the mission yet to come or what they may face - just this single moment that he could tell his daughter about when he returned home.

He already missed his daughter. Despite her size and age, Espoir hunted exceptionally well, and she understood how to barter with traders for supplies. Black Shadow trusted Maverick with her life, but a part of him always worried for her. He still did not know her lineage other than that she was elvish, but Black Shadow hoped to change that with this trip.

Black Shadow closed his eyes, drew a deep breath, held it for a moment, and then released it. This slow breathing calmed Black Shadow's mind, a luxury he had not known in months. After a moment, he opened his eyes. A shadowy figure now encompassed the center of the blazing sun. Black Shadow focused his sight, looking far into the horizon to make out the shape. What appeared to be a large warship headed straight for them, dwarfing the R.S. Eluriand.

Black Shadow quickly snatched a telescope from a passing sailor's belt. He extended the telescope and looked through it at the ship headed their way. The forty cannon ship was preparing for battle. The ship's gold trim gleamed brightly against the dull black of the hull while the black sails furled in the wind. A large black dragon skull painted the sails, and the same dragon figurehead glared off the bow with the mouth open.

Without a moment's hesitation, Black Shadow turned and ran for the captain's quarters. The R.S. Eluriand was a mere ant in comparison to the titanic pirate ship, but Black Shadow refused to give in without a fight. Two men blocked the door to the captain's quarters..

"You there, Captain Callahan wants to be left alone right now." One of the men said, raising a sword.

"Come back in the morning. He's... busy." The other man said, shooing Black Shadow away.

Black Shadow shook his head in annoyance and tossed the telescope at the larger man, pointing towards the horizon. The guardsman raised the telescope and looked towards the horizon

"We see tons of ships out on the ocean every year, this one is not different." He scoffed.

[/]I don't have time for this, we have less than an hour before that ship intercepts us.[/] Black Shadow thought to himself. He attempted to push forward, forcing his way into the captain's room.

"Where do you think you're going?" the one man asked, grabbing Black Shadow's shoulder.

In an instant, Black Shadow pushed the guard's arm up, twisting it over, and shoved the man's face into the deck. The other guard swung his sword at Black Shadow, but Black Shadow saw it coming. He kicked the second guard's chest with his left foot. The smaller guard stumbled backwards into a barrel, breaking it into pieces and struggling to remain on his feet. In one more swift motion, Black Shadow kicked the door open, half disgusted by the sight of the captain in his bed with two women, both wearing only their undergarments.

"What is the meaning of this?!" Callahan asked in anger. "I thought I said I did not want to be disturbed."

"I'm sorry boss, he just forced his way in." one of the guards started to say as he lunged at Black Shadow.

Black Shadow ducked and took a quick step to his left, sending the man into one of the women. He then picked up the telescope from the ground again and tossed it at the captain, pointing towards the horizon.

Captain Callahan pulled the telescope to his eye and looked towards the ship. His anger suddenly faded away as he saw the black sails of the pirate ship.

"All hands on deck!" Callahan shouted as he jumped out of bed and rushed to his wardrobe. "Man your battle stations!" He said, pulling an old war uniform from his wardrobe.

Drake #12 Edits

“Drake?”

“He still isn’t responding.”

“He must have gotten it really bad. Poor kid.”

“He is more than capable of handling himself, he is just too gentle.”

Drake’s teeth began to chatter, as a bone chilling shiver ran down his spine. He opened his eyes to see his two friends Gabriel and Seraphina staring down at him. Gabriel had a long thin face, emerald eyes, and short brown hair. He appeared nineteen years old, but actually had thousands of years of angelic experience. Seraphina, the most beautiful creature that Drake had ever seen, had long curly blonde hair, a longer, narrower face than Gabriel, and extremely feminine features. Her skin gave off a faint glow, and she had glimmering pink irises.

“And he lives!” Gabriel exclaimed with a large grin across his face as he extended a hand for Drake to take.

“It’s so cold here!” Drake grumbled as Gabriel helped him up. “What dimension are we in?”

“We were hoping that you could tell us that,” Seraphina said in her bubbly voice. “Your astral body took you here for a reason.”

“We felt your energy, and knew that we needed to come,” Gabriel said. “We are definitely in one of the lower vibrational planes, so keep your guard up.”

“I think I’ll be safe,” Drake replied, “I’m with two arc angels right now. I think you guys have us all covered.” They all laughed. “But seriously. Why are we here?”

“Well, you’re here for a reason,” Gabriel said. “We couldn’t take you out of this plane into heaven, your astral body just wouldn’t exit. So I guess we have to find out why you are here.”

“But what about my body?” Drake asked.

“You’re in good hands,” Seraphina said.

“We looked into the one who saved you. Koli is his name. He used to be a priest, but his monastery became corrupted and so he took his leave.” Gabriel added. “The man hasn’t sinned in over 20 years. You could really learn a lot from him.”

Drake looked around. Thick fog loomed in the air, making it difficult to see beyond 30 yards in any direction. They currently stood on a dirt path with grass and trees to either side. On one end of the path, light shone through the thick fog. To the other end of the path, the fog grew darker.

“I assume we have to go into the looming scary fog of doom?” Drake asked, motioning to the dark side of the path.

“Yeah, that’s usually how it works,” Gabriel replied.

“Then onward we go,” said Drake.

Koli #13 edits

[COLOR="#A9A9A9"]“Don’t slow down now Jalaphar, we’re almost there!”

“What do you mean Koli,” Jalaphar puffed from beside him, “The gorge isn’t even in sight yet.”

The sun peeked through the budding trees as Koli and Jalaphar trotted through a large wheat field, causing their shadows to stretch far into the horizon. Beautiful budding and blossoming trees lined the edges of the field, and a tiny treeline slowly grew larger and taller as they approached. The spring marked the beginning of training preparations for the combat comprehensive exam which the two teens would take at the close of the coming autumn. They still had plenty of time to prepare, but Abbas Amo designed their training plan to push them to their limits early to prepare them for combat rather than a test. The comprehensive marked the culmination of every youth’s life work at the sanctuary; it signified their rite of passage into the brotherhood. Upon completion of the week-long evolution each brother gained eligibility for deployment on missions.

This particular morning, the head priest sent the two brothers down to the gorge and upstream through the wilderness until they reached a colossal waterfall. The journey took about a half day’s trek. Upon reaching the waterfall, they had to meditate until sunset. Following their meditation, Koli and Jalaphar would return, but one had to carry the other on his shoulders the entire time. Koli could endure more out of the two, so he would carry Jalaphar for 30 minutes or so, and Jalaphar would carry Koli for about 15 minutes at a time. On top of it all, this was to be done under a Black Fast, meaning they could not eat or drink anything for the duration of their training mission.

“We’re almost there,” Koli repeated. “Look for the light at the end of the tunnel. If there is none there, you will create some.”[/COLOR]

Koli kept his breathing slow and controlled as each foot hit the dirt. Neither the weight of the young man on his shoulder, nor the urgency that drove him towards the port city bothered the priest. Koli always found a calming sense of structure in the face of chaos. After dropping the boy in an inn, Koli could search for medical wares from a vendor, or make them from ingredients in the wild.

As the sun set and the moon rose, a non-celestial bright white light illuminated the night sky. Something about this all too familiar light drew in Koli’s attention and attracted his spirit like a magnet. Its location detoured Koli slightly north of his westbound course.

As the priest approached this light, his energy rejuvenated, and his spirit began to swell, as if he teamed with power. Koli now traveled off the path and through the trees, pushing through tall vegetation and leaves. He sensed the energy nearby radiating life into the world. Without initiating it, his eyes changed into a shade of icy blue which sent him into an adrenaline rush. He accelerated into a dead sprint, as his heart started to pound in his ears. Faint chanting all around him grew louder and louder, and the icy phantom forms of 2 monks conjured next to him, sprinting with him on either side. Finally, he pushed through the last bit of vegetation and into a small clearing.

In the center of the clearing, a large geyser of some sort of magical energy spouted from the ground. Plasma-like energy that radiated bright white light with streaks of blue and red spewed up into the sky and dissipated into the atmosphere. The trees surrounding the geyser grew taller before his very eyes, extending several more feet in the air with each moment. New leaves grew back and the geyser blew them clean off with the power that emanated. Koli closed his eyes, and cleared his head.

Slowly, he extended his mind toward the geyser. As he drew closer, his spirit swelled uncomfortably so. The heat of the energy swelled in his body, and his mind clouded with trouble and discontentment. Focusing all of his willpower, Koli cleared his mind further and pushed on. In the split second before he touched the energy, time froze. Koli opened his eyes to find the entire scene halted. An eerie silence plagued the landscape. The auditory illusions of chanting that the energy created through Koli had ceased, both of the spectral monks had stopped dead in their tracks, and leaves had frozen in midair on their descent.

And then Koli's mind reached the energy.

Instantly, Koli felt the magical power channel through his entire being as if he was an extension of an endless pool of eternal energy that was left untapped for centuries. All of it attempted to escape at once, and Koli's head reared back in pain as he tried to shout. The magical plasma shot from his eyes and mouth, and his body became invisible. His eyes rapidly changed between many different colors and he took on the effects of all the different colors at once. Swords and staffs conjured without his doing, and illusions cropped up without his creating them. Wolves and buildings, monuments and spectral priests cropped up all throughout the clearing. Koli heard a thunderous beating of wings from high overhead, and the leaves of the surrounding trees all flew to the ground, leaving the surrounding rainforest bare. The illusion of a mighty ancient dragon flew overhead. It opened its mouth and let out a deafening roar, before incinerating everything on the other side of the clearing. The heat from the flames singed Koli's eyebrows, and burned the skin on his face.

On his shoulder, two bright golden wings extended from the boy he carried. They shimmered and gleamed in the glow of the magical plasma. He started to convulse, and seized on Koli's shoulder. Koli heard the dragon beginning to swoop down towards him from above, causing a rising sense of panic to form in Koli's chest. Closing his eyes, he drew upon all the willpower he could muster and tore himself away from the magical energy source. All of the illusions faded as quickly as they came, and the conjured weapons dissipated. The magical geyser gave one last spurt of energy, and faded down into the ground. A massive remnant remained in its place, and a deafening silence rang through the night.

Gavner #14 Edits

Gavner took a deep draught from the bottle of rum in his right hand, enjoying the sting as it went down. Vir said that rum would take away the edge from his seasickness. Vampires metabolized alcohol at ten times the rate of humans, so one bottle wouldn't do much. Gavner sat on a chest that he had pulled up next to Vir's rack, and the two swapped stories for the majority of the day. He asked Vir about war strategy, and commandship, as well as leadership over an entire region. Vir told him all about the pitfalls of conflict, and the code of ethics that his clan followed. Overall he led a very noble clan of vampires. They kept to their territory, and aided their allies when necessary. The sun posed a major problem, as the atmosphere made its rays especially deadly in [Dheathain](#). The vampires combated this by living in the side of a mountain. They dug underground tunnels to the major hubs and cities where they could feed and carry out missions.

"Do you have any regrets?" Gavner asked.

"Countless," Vir replied. "But only a fool keeps track of that which he cannot change. Staying upset about the past only causes pain to me. Nobody else can feel your hurt, so it is better to be apathetic to it all."

Gavner noticed a growing sense of commotion manifesting on the weather deck. Footsteps and voices carried all the way to the second deck. "Vir," Gavner said, "I think the captain just called General Quarters. I will go and investigate."

"Be careful, dusk isn't for another twenty-three minutes."

"Very well," Gavner responded. Climbing the stairs aggravated his headache, and as he stepped foot on the weather deck, a searing pain hit his face. The final rays of the day flew over the waters and burned Gavner. He quickly drew his hood, but his face already sported a pink burn.

"General Quarters! General Quarters! All hands man your battle stations!" Somebody called out. The well trained crew scurried fore and abaft the frigate, carrying powder kegs and rolling carts full of ammunition. The boatswain's mates prepared the sheets for hoisting, and the Gunner's mates primed the carronades for battle. The marines carried grappling hooks and boards, while the archers were climbing aloft. Gavner slammed back the bottle of rum, drained it and threw it at the base of the mast, smashing it into tiny bits and pieces.

"Yaar!" he said, wiping his mouth before he rushed aft and climbed the ladderwell to the quarterdeck.

Upon arriving, Gavner saw the captain and the first lieutenant quarreling, and Black Shadow next to them listening intently. The major, off to the side, casually sharpened his saber, as the Quartermaster hoisted both the Beinost crest, and the Raiaeran colors. Young gunner's mates readied the two pound guns off the side of the quarterdeck, and the captain's servant boy scurried past Gavner with an armful of maps and navigation instruments.

“I don’t give a rat’s ass about your ‘allocations and triage’ Lieutenant, I need the Gunner down in the powder stores, and the Carpenter down in the bilge!” The captain shouted.

“Sir, respectfully, back the fuck down!” The first lieutenant shouted back, “If the carpenter is down in the bilge he can’t oversee mast and sail repairs should we need it. Send the carpenter’s mates and a few midshipmen down there instead, we can’t afford to lose the carpenter to flooding.”

“Fine. I need somebody to send word to the master to heat the chains and 5 pounds in the galley fires. I want the Boatswain amidships, and tell the Surgeon to take on a few extra midshipmen. We can’t afford to lose many more crew members, or we will be sub-operational,” The captain commanded. “MAJOR!”

“Sir.” The major replied, standing up and approaching the group.

“Have you found a suitable replacement for the Captain Aloft? I heard your marines lost a good commander.”

“Right now we don’t have a head archer to be the Captain Aloft.” The major responded, “But my marines are the sharpest bowmen on the seaward coast of [Raiaera](#). I’d put them up against any adversaries.”

“Actually captain,” Gavner interjected, “Black Shadow is a fine commander. He was a prince back in his kingdom, and he happens to be the finest archer that Raiaera has seen in centuries”

“Agh great,” The captain exclaimed in disgust, “Who let this blood sucker on my quarterdeck?”

“Sir, Black Shadow and I would like to help.” Gavner stated.

“And what do two backwoods Raiaeran adventurers like yourselves know about naval warfare strategy?” The captain said while rushing to the aft of the quarterdeck to the Navigation table. “You’re passengers, not sailors.”

“I am a General for my clan, and have commanded scores of infantry. Black Shadow has commanded an army at war. He can command aloft, and I can lead the boarding parties.” Gavner shot back. “We are here to help.”

The captain stopped and looked at Gavner for a moment. “Aye, well, I suppose we can always use more savagery, General. MAJOR!”

“Sir,” the major responded, still 2 feet away from the captain.

“Place the General in command of the boarding parties, and you assume command of the shipboard defense forces. Reallocate the infantry by 20 percent in favor of defending, the best

offense is a good defense. Am I right?" The captain said. "We'll give those Pirate bastards the fight that's coming to them."

Black Shadow #15 Edits

The sun set slowly on the horizon, turning the brightly lit sky into a black void. Dark clouds formed quickly, covering all forms of light in the still night as the temperature dropped rapidly. No moon lit the night sky. No moon, no wind, no waves, and the pitch-black ocean met the void of the sky so precisely that the two collided in a perfect canvas. You could not tell which direction your own ship headed without a compass.

Men moved quickly, gathering weapons, and manning their stations. Black Shadow took command of the ship's archers, quickly teaching them non-verbal commands. He directed his men to the fighting tops, bows ready for battle.

“Sir, take these.” One of the men said to Black Shadow, handing him a bundle of ten arrows. “They are explosive. These are all we have, make them count.”

Black Shadow nodded in thanks and placed the arrows in his quiver. The dark archer climbed the stays to the top of the mainsail where the crow's nest was located atop the yard. While this was normally a perfect spot for Black Shadow to take in the beauty of the ocean, tonight was a much different story. Tonight he would watch bloodshed - men hacking down men for money. Black Shadow could never understand the point of such fighting.

Night's all encompassing darkness obscured all vision; Black Shadow could not tell how much longer they all had until the battle started. The pirate ship had extinguished all lights on deck, sailing in utter darkness, only the R.S. Eluriand's lamps and torches to light the way.

Black Shadow looked out over the ocean. His keen eyesight allowed him to see into the darkness better than most, but tonight he saw nothing but the impending void. He squinted his eyes, trying to focus on something, no matter how close it may be. Then suddenly an orange glow appeared less than one thousand meters away, and began to grow rapidly. Just as Black Shadow suspected, a flaming cannonball, inbound from the dragon figurehead on the bow of the enemy ship, shot their way at supersonic speed.

Black Shadow strung one of the explosive arrows and let it fly. The arrow soared through the sky and intercepted the cannonball just before impact, sending a barrage of shrapnel and fire at the Eluriand's crew.

Cannonfire erupted immediately as the merchants attempted to fire upon the pirate ship. Cannonballs wizzed the direction the fireball came from. Explosions erupted in the distance signaling a clean hit from at least one cannon.

Almost instantly the pirate ship lit up with hundreds of torches, illuminating the entire ship. The dark black sails lit up, illuminating the dragon skull stitched on it. Pirates and merchants alike tossed their grappling hooks, savagely pulling their ships together. A rain of arrows came from the pirates onto the merchant ship, and the merchants raised their shields, ducking behind cover, attempting to avoid the onslaught of arrows. The pirate's war chant echoed through the night amidst the cannonfire. The merchants immediately answered back with a battlecry of their own, showing the pirates they were ready for a fight.

Black Shadow drew one of his steel tipped arrows and released it onto the pirate ship, hitting one of the pirates square in the chest. As his target clenched his breast and fell into the frigid ocean, a volley of arrows from the Eluriand's archers rained down on the pirates.

Both the pirate and merchant boarding parties continued to place ramps, and Gavner led the merchant sailors' attack. Gavner embedded his black fingernails deep into the throat of a pirate, ripping his trachea from his body crushing it. He dashed forward at another pirate, quickly slashing at his face, leaving the man unidentifiable. Blood quickly stained the decks as men slaughtered each other. The clashing of swords rang out in the night, and men chanting and screaming in pain became indistinguishable.

Black Shadow waited patiently for large groups of pirates to rush at once. One boarding ramp backed up with nearly eleven men on it, all attempting to cross at once. Black Shadow strung his second explosive arrow and unleashed it upon the boarding ramp. The explosion destroyed the ramp, sending the survivors into the frigid waters below. When Black Shadow decimated one boarding ramp, the merchant crew replaced it with their own. Black Shadow only had eight explosive arrows left and would have to use them sparingly.

The dark archer surveyed the battlefield, defending the sailors whom death nearly seized from this forsaken world, giving them the opportunity to live another day. The major swung his sword engaging in a blade lock with another large pirate of similar stature. The two stared into each other's eyes with an everlasting hatred, trying to overpower the other. Three pirates snuck up behind the major as the larger pirate distracted him and they pinned him down. The larger pirate raised his sword, ready to end the major's life. Black Shadow laced an arrow and landed a shot into the forehead of the brute, killing him instantly. The major reared his head back, knocking one pirate off him, and threw the other two to his side. He picked up his sword and beheaded one, while Black Shadow impaled the other two with one arrow.

Black Shadow unleashed Another three explosive arrows, each decimating a boarding ramp. The two crews no longer focused on replacing boarding ramps and instead drew all their attention on the battle at hand. Unless Black Shadow miscounted, which he never did, he was now up to twenty-eight kills. Black Shadow turned his attention away from the forecastle and towards the fantail. He noticed Gavner, attacking with deadly speed devastating the pirates. He made quick slashes with his long, sharp nails, killing pirates with ease. Black Shadow noticed a battered pirate bleeding profusely from his chest sneaking up on Gavner as the vampire dug his teeth into the neck of a pirate he had in a headlock. The man lunged at Gavner, going for the kill in vain as an arrow struck him in the chest. The arrow missed Gavner's face by an inch, and landed in the heart of the pirate. No man would smite Black Shadow's best friend so long as he drew breath.

Drake #16 edits

[I][FONT=Garamond][SIZE=4] When heaven's life shall end
And tear the world apart...[/SIZE][/FONT][I]

“Did you guys say something?” Drake asked Gabriel and Seraphina.

“No, I didn't say anything.” Gabriel replied.

“Oh, I must just be hearing things.”

Thick fog loomed over the plane, only worsening as the three angels trekked through the astral world. The dirt below their feet frosted over, and Drake's energy slowed down as his astral body grew colder. The plane darkened, and soon the landscape grew desolate, devoid of detail. Even Gabriel and Seraphina, who glowed brightly with their angelic light, faded beside him. Now, only Drake's intuition guided them.

The young angel strayed off the path to his right and through the grass upon noticing the sound of running water. Not far after, they happened upon a small stream which flowed with a glowing white magical plasma that illuminated the surrounding fog. He traced it back to its source, but stopped as he noticed its source.

“Is that a passage to a lower plane?” Drake asked, pointing to a spiraling eddie of black energy from which the plasma flowed into the stream.

“Yeah, that's a really deep descent,” Gabriel said, “There's bound to be some really nasty stuff down there.”

“Great...” Drake mused as he studied the whirling energy. “So I guess we follow the energy rather than going to its source.”

[I][FONT=Garamond][SIZE=4] *When heaven's life shall end...* [/SIZE][/FONT][I]

“What was that?” Drake asked, turning to his friends.

“What?” Seraphina replied.

[I][FONT=Garamond][SIZE=4] *And tear the world apart...* [/SIZE][/FONT][I]

“I could be sure that I heard you guys say something.”

“This is a very low vibrational dimension as it is,” Gabriel replied. “It's possible that the energy here is messing with you.”

“Right,” Drake replied, “The sooner we get out of here the better.”

Drake turned around and followed the magical plasma downstream. As the angels continued, the fog began to lift, and the stream started to flow up an incline. The landscape still contained very little; the hill extended in all directions with no contents or inhabitants other than the stream. Streaks of crimson red now stained the magical flow. After a while they reached the top of the hill, and the fog broke entirely.

“What does that mean?” Drake asked, pointing at the stream. “It turned completely red.”

[I][FONT=Garamond][SIZE=4] *To sate wicked’s demand...* [/SIZE][FONT][I]

“I’m sure it doesn’t mean anything,” Gabriel responded.

Far off in the distance loomed a large ominous tower whose figure stood out distinctively on the landscape. It radiated an unmistakable energy throughout the plane. A mighty storm plagued the sky, raining fire and brimstone down onto the landscape. Lightning strikes scattered the land, and great meteors and fireballs tore through the atmosphere, ravaging the ground below. The stream of crimson magical plasma flowed far down the horizon, directly to the tower. Drake began to follow the stream into the storm, but a massive lightning strike blasted the ground in front of him.

[I][FONT=Garamond][SIZE=4] *And mate with power’s heart...* [/SIZE][FONT][I]

To Drake’s left, a light shone through the thick fog. To Drake’s right, the fog grew thicker and darker. Drake looked at Gabriel and Seraphina.

“Follow me into the unknown?”

Seraphina smiled, and Gabriel nodded.

“You lead the way.”

Koli #17 Edits

It took everything within Koli to keep to his feet. The power he witnessed encompass his body was so immense it took his breath away and expended the majority of his energy. His arms grew weak and his legs wobbly. He dropped to one knee to catch his breath, taking several deep breaths in to regain a small amount of strength.

What was that? In all of his years, and all of the magic that he had dealt with, he had never experienced magic as ancient and powerful as the one with which he had just interacted. And the most unsettling part yet: Koli's spirit told him that he had only experienced a mere [I]fragment[/I] of the ancient power source. The geyser of magic held but a mere shard of the ancient power's capacity. No limit would be set on the evil- or good- that this source could be used for, if all shards united into one source like in the ancient days. But the longer Koli thought, the weaker he became. He could not go much farther.

But surely the nearest city couldn't lie too far away; Koli could carry the young man there and they could both hold up at an inn and recuperate. He drew another deep breath and rose to his feet, continuing his trek to a safe space. With every step, he could feel the weight of his new companion weighing him down. His vision blurred and faded away; Koli's monk intuition guided him now. A technique that he had learned as a boy, the priest drew in not only a breath, but also life from the surrounding organisms as he trekked. The priests had an understanding with the universe that they would freely share life force when in dire need; however, all that one borrowed, he would surely repay later.

The priest pleaded with the life around him; he couldn't make it by himself. He had the will; he had the driving force, although not his own, within him. He just needed the way. If only he could see... If only he could see. The priest lifted his head up, death nearly upon him as he slowly came to the realization that he would not reach his destination. Pure starlight came into focus amidst the black night sky, as the feeling of the ground's rhythmic pounding beneath Koli's feet reached his mind. He lowered his head to look on the horizon in defeat, and saw the gates of the city of Davenport ahead in the distance.

Farmland teeming with crops of all sizes, lie just over the fence that lined the path to his left, to his right, a rolling hill of grassland, littered by domesticated animals. Shanty shacks littered the base of the city wall just ahead, which rose about ten feet in the air. The gate barely remained in focus as the rest of the world blurred from Koli's vision.

"It's a traveler!" One of the guards on the wall said as Koli approached from about 30 yards off.

Koli slowed to a walk and continued without stopping, as he knew that if he stopped he would not be able to start again. He looked up in the direction of the voices, unable to bring them into focus.

"You there, state your business."

He used his green, soothing eyes on the men.

“He is a priest,” the first voice came back in a much more relaxed tone. “He carries an unconscious boy. Open the gates.”

As Koli reached the gate, a young boy took his arm and helped him to an inn, keeping him upright and preventing him from falling. There was a faint, spectral glow to this boy, yet he looked so real... Koli reached the door to the inn and looked to the boy to thank him, but he had vanished.

There was one room remaining in the inn. Koli sluggishly tossed the gold needed for a week’s stay at the innkeeper. His vision went black, and even with help he barely made it to the bed. He placed the young man he saved on the bed and was unable to lay his own head down before he collapsed onto the floor.

[COLOR="#A9A9A9"]“Jalaphar, you always push yourself too far. You know your limits.” Koli spoke softly, tending to his friend’s wound.

“But if I don’t push myself, how will I get better?” Jalaphar answered, rubbing a lump on the back of his head.

“There is a difference between pushing yourself to injury, and pushing yourself to your limits.” Koli responded, wiping the blood from Jalaphar’s wounds.

The two monks recently returned from a training exercise focusing on balance with precision and speed. A large river flowed down stream past the monastery, and the monks had built a stone path across that one would jump from stone to stone to cross. Move too slow and the current would take your feet off the rocks and into the stream. Move too quickly and fall into the stream.

Jalaphar always injured himself on these missions. He wanted to push himself to get better, but always went beyond his limits. Koli crossed the river first, gracefully jumping from stone to stone on one foot at a time, until he was across. He made it look easy, and Jalaphar always wanted to appear to be as advanced as Koli. He did fairly well at the start, but very quickly got ahead of himself. His foot slipped from one stone and he fell into the river. His head hit the rock he jumped to on his way down, and the stream carried him a long distance, smacking his body against sharp stones repeatedly.

“You are lucky you did not die, Jalaphar. You must be careful.”

“You always make it look so easy, Koli.” Jalaphar replied with his head down low. “I will never be as great a monk as you.”

Koli paused. Jalaphar never said anything like this before, and Koli could feel his body tensing in defeat. Koli lifted Jalaphar’s head and looked him dead in the eyes. His eyes glowed a bright green and he calmed Jalaphar. A sense of peace filled the room, and Jalaphar took a deep breath.

“You don’t need to be a monk like me, what you need to be is a monk like you. We need more monks like you.”[/COLOR]

Gavner #18 Edits

The cool wind of Shadow's steel arrow tousled Gavner's hair as it whizzed past his head and buried itself deep into the skull of the pirate behind him. The sweet sound of gunfire and chaos from the cannons below deck on the pirate ship beneath his feet, and the shrieks and moans of dying men brought a smile to Gavner's face. He bared his ebony black teeth in a twisted smile, as he smelled the blood in the air.

"Fantail squad advance amidships!" Gavner called out towards the aft of the pirate ship.

The creature of the night swiftly lunged at the pirate in front of him with supernatural speed, knocking the sword from his hand and grabbing the clothing on his hip and shoulder. Pushing the man back, the vampire swept the pirate's right foot out from under him and sent the landlubber to the ground. As the enemy crashed backwards, Gavner slit his carotid artery with his razor sharp fingernails.

"Amidships squad move starboard, fantail push forward!" Gavner ordered.

Shifting his weight low, the creature of the night performed a 360 leg sweep, knocking 3 surrounding enemies to the ground. He pounced on one of the fallen pirates and sank his teeth into the man's neck, tasting the salty forbidden nectar of the enemy's life. As he fed, the creature of the night sliced open his enemy's breast and plunged his hand deep into the pirate's breast. The feeling of his fallen enemy's beating heart against his own bare skin sent Gavner into a bloodlust. Time itself slowed down as all of his senses sharpened. Muscles contracted, pupils dilated, and a sudden surge of speed dawned on him. Gavner took a deep breath of cool, crisp air as a cascade of different savory smells dawned upon him- sulfur, steel, and carnage. The scent of nearly a hundred men's distinctly different blood composition dawned with the sudden awareness of Gavner's very heart, beating deep within his chest.

"Major!" Gavner called in a savage growl loud enough for both ships to hear, "Send half the platoon aft and 2 squads to port! Shadow, prepare the flaming arrows and be ready on my command!"

From the corner of his eye, Gavner saw the dark archer plain as day from the yard of the main mast's topsail about 30 yards away as he nodded in compliance. Gavner trusted that his friend would figure out the general's intentions soon enough.

"You better have a miracle hidden up your sleeve General, we're taking heavy losses!" The major called over from the merchant ship.

"Aye mates," Gavner heard softly from below, "I'll come at the beast from head on and you three grab him from behind. I got a wooden stake in me' belt!"

"Hold still you bastard!" Gavner heard far off from the direction of the merchant ship, "You lose your arm or you'll lose your life! Hold him down mates. Midshipman spencer, get my tourniquet..."

“Captain!” A very faint voice reached Gavner’s ears, “They can’t stop the flooding in the forward hold, the Carpenter had to evacuate!”

“Has the gunner moved the powder magazines?” Replied none other than Captain Jack Callahan.

“They couldn’t save more than 4 kegs,” the lieutenant responded. “The Gunner ordered the firing crews to report topside for boarding.”

“No!” Gavner called to the quarterdeck of the merchant ship from the forecandle of the pirate ship, “Have them bring the powder kegs topside and place them at the base of the boards and grapples. Order the Port Battery to take their powder stores topside as well.”

“Who was that?” Gavner heard the lieutenant say faintly.

“I think it was the General,” Callahan replied.

“How did he hear us? He’s over 50 yards away!”

“Just do as he says!”

Suddenly a pirate appeared out of nowhere and charged at Gavner from about ten yards away, making such a spectacle. He screamed at the top of his lungs with his sword raised high. Before the creature of the night engaged, he noticed a wooden stake on the man’s belt and stopped in his tracks. A twisted smile returned to his face.

“You fools,” Gavner muttered. “I can hear your breath,” he said, glancing to the pirate hiding behind the barrel to his left. “I can smell your fear...” he hissed to the man trying to creep up on him to the right. Taking a deep breath in, he turned around and leapt at the man behind him, closing the 15 foot gap in one swift motion, grabbing the man and placing him in a rear choke.

“THE SOUND OF YOUR TERRIFIED HEART POUNDING IN MY EARS MAKES ME THIRST FOR YOUR BLOOD!”

In one swift motion, Gavner spun around 360 degrees, lifting the pirate airborne and snapping his neck as the pirate soared, motionless through the air and over the edge of the ship. Gavner sincerely hoped that the man was simply paralyzed and would have to suffer a watery grave. With monstrous speed, the creature of the night savagely closed the distance between he and the charging pirate, snatched the wooden stake off of his belt and buried it deep in the man’s heart before he knew what had happened. The other two pirates ran away in terror.

Calling on a spurt of strength, Gavner leapt 30 feet in the air and landed on the yard of the mainsail, stabilizing himself with a stay. Here, he quietly observed the raging battle. He listened to the chaos of the battle that raged below. The merchant ship was visibly taking on water, and Gavner noticed the enemy captain sending a young Lieutenant below deck.

As the young lieutenant scurried down the ladderwell, Gavner noticed an increasing crowd of pirates surrounding the base of the main mast. "That's the monster, lads!" a voice said below. "He can't stay up there forever!" Gavner chose to ignore this and listen for the sound of the young lieutenant's voice below.

"Gunner," Gavner heard the lieutenant say from the gun deck underneath the weatherdeck, "Cap'n gave the go'head!"

The pirates below Gavner began to ram the mast with timber and fired the occasional arrow, which Gavner dodged. He still focused his attention on the conversation below.

"Aye sir! Kill!" A voice responded to the young lieutenant. "Starboard Battery, fire at will you scallywags!"

"Major!" Gavner called. "All forward forces push aft and flank the amidships hostiles!"

"Aye General!" The major called. The major began giving orders to the friendly forces on the merchant ship, and the invading pirates began retreating aft until they were clustered at the base of the Quarterdeck on the Fantail.

"Major, retreat to the enemy ship!" Gavner ordered. "Starboard and aft squads advance!" He called to the merchant marines on the pirate ship. They all began a mighty push forward, shoving the pirates to the forecastle and clearing room for the onloading merchant ship sailors.

"Shadow, NOW!"

Not one second after Gavner gave the command, Black Shadow ordered a barrage of arrows raining down on the consolidated pirate forces who all clustered on the aft of the ship. Fire and fury from above rained from the heavens and down onto the pirates all at once, killing men directly and setting ablaze the deck beneath their feet. Gavner noticed the pirates below, now swaying his mast back and forth. Calling upon another great surge of strength, the vampire leapt from his mast to the merchant ship's mast mainsail yardarm, closing a distance of over 25 yards, and stabilizing himself with the mast.

Unfortunately for him, however, he landed just as the Black Sails Armada vessel's starboard battery unloaded cannonfire upon the merchant ship. The payload of several cannons struck a direct hit on the base of the mast and sent it toppling over like freshly cut timber. Just as it fell into the ocean, Gavner leapt off and rolled onto the deck, breaking his fall. Several of the marines aloft fell to their deaths, and some bailed and jumped overboard. Massive chunks of splintered hull and shrapnel soared through the air, making contact with merchant marines, sailors, and pirates alike. Officer or enlisted, friend or foe, object or person - none mattered. The payload ravaged all to their bloody deaths.

"Evacuate!" Gavner shouted "Captain get everybody off this ship!"

“One step ahead of you, general!” Captain Callahan called from the pirate ship. Most of the friendly forces had already evacuated. “Avast resting ye scallywags! Make ‘em taste steel!!”

"I don't know how you do it General," the Major said with a smile. "The men have never been this organized! What happened to your arm?"

Gavner looked down and noticed a deep gouge in his forearm and pearly white fat peeking through. A small pool of sticky black blood formed below Gavner's soaked sleeve as hot, bitter smelling blood trickled down the back of his hand and stained his pale skin.

“Just a scratch,” Gavner said nonchalantly as he lifted his gaze just in time to make eye contact with the unfortunate officer as an enemy pirate engaged. An enormous mace made contact with the side of the Major's head, and he instantly crumpled to the deck in a lifeless heap.

“Major no!” Gavner shouted as he dropped to the deck to tend to his friend. Looking up, Gavner saw an enormous pirate who must have had the blood of a half-giant. Before Gavner could think, the pirate brought his mace down. His massive weapon swung in vain, however, as a shadowy figure leapt to the General's rescue and deflected the attack. The figure kicked the pirate in the chest, sending him to the ground. Swiftly, the shadowy figure jumped on the half-giant, sank his teeth deep into the neck of the fallen enemy, and sucked him dry. The savior stood up and produced a torch from the quarterdeck, and hurled it at the powder kegs on the edge of the ship, blowing every single boarding platform to smithereens.

Vir Fortis turned to face Gavner, chin and cheeks covered in the fallen enemy's blood, and bared his own ebony black teeth in a sick smile.

“You didn't think I would let you have all the fun, did you General?”

Black Shadow #19 Edits

Arrow after arrow released from the strings of Black Shadow's bow, each one taking a new target, defending a friend, and removing another meaningless life from this wretched world. Arrows lodged deep within the bodies of the dead, blood spilling across the deck. Bodies scattered over top one another, limbs and heads separated from their torsos.

Black Shadow's senses heightened. As he searched for his next target, he noticed another group of pirates gathered around a merchant, cutting him down. With one swift motion, Black Shadow knocked an explosive arrow and fired it upon the group. As the archers in the pirate's tops realized that Black Shadow was the head archer, they focused all their attention on taking him out. Newly fired arrows flew at him from the enemy lofts.

He reacted swiftly, grabbing one arrow out of the air, restringing it, and shooting another arrow out of the sky - a trick he learned when he was fifteen. A loud crack rang out through the horrific sounds of battle. Suddenly the mast lurched forward, nearly throwing Black Shadow off the crows nest. Several men stumbled off the fighting tops into their watery grave below, while others hung for their dear lives, frantically trying to climb back onto the crow's nest. Cannon fire directly struck the base of the mast, and the shears and stays began to snap. Black Shadow grabbed the edge of the crows nest and hung on as it plummeted towards the ocean. His senses heightened and time seemed to slow. He waited patiently as the mast gained speed, toppling over to his potential fate. At the last moment he dove forward, stabbing an arrow into the side of the pirates ship and preventing himself from falling into the frigid ocean.

Black Shadow reached into his quiver and grabbed another arrow - only two remaining. He pulled the steel tip and proceeded to climb the ship by gouging the arrows into the hull. As he kicked his legs over the railing, a pirate swung his sword at him. Without hesitating, the dark archer quickly threw the arrow at the pirate, his inhuman strength wizzing it at super speeds, impaling the fool in the chest.

Black Shadow took a breath and felt a sharp pain in his side, as though he had been stabbed. He looked down at his side and noticed a piece of 2 inch thick wood lodged into his abdomen. Black Shadow left it, knowing it may cause more harm to remove it himself. Instead he stood, the pain worsening with movement, and took the scimitar from the deceased pirate's lifeless hand.

[I]Gavner... where Is he?[/I] Black Shadow thought to himself, looking for his friend. He could not see Gavner on the pirate ship. Turning back to the R.S. Eluriand, he saw Gavner with an unfamiliar figure standing by the fallen mast.

[I]Damn it Gavner, This wasn't the plan![/I] Black Shadow thought. The two ships already drifted ten feet apart, and the distance grew exponentially with every passing second. Black shadow feared this would be the last time he would see his friend.

Black Shadow cultivated his fear of losing his best friend into anger at the pirates and blamed them for the loss of the only one who truly understood him. He sought revenge on the pirates responsible and longed for their sufferable deaths. Black Shadow saw three pirates attacking a single defenseless merchant. Black Shadow advanced on the group of pirates, sword in hand,

and engaged with a swift cut. The pirate let out a shrill scream as his forearm hit the deck with a loud thud, followed by the clanging of his sword against the hardwood. The sight of blood up close sent the dark archer into a trance. He no longer felt the pain of wood protruding into his body, only the sweet sensation of metal digging into flesh. With another quick slash of his sword, black shadow severed the head of the second pirate, and ran his sword through the third. The two pirates fell to the ground in a lifeless heap as blood gushed onto Black Shadow from their wounds.

The first lieutenant engaged a tall muscular pirate twenty meters in front of Black Shadow. Their swords deflected each blow with bright sparks. The first lieutenant struck with the power of a grizzly bear staggering the pirate backwards. The pirate threw a handful of gunpowder from a nearby barrel into the lieutenant's face and kicked him in the groin. The First lieutenant dropped to one knee, defeated. The pirate raised his sword to deliver the final blow.

“Pyle!” A voice rang out above the noise of the battle. The pirate froze and locked eyes with Callahan. “You never played fair.”

“Ah, if it isn’t the traitor. Finally ready to face your maker?” Pyle responded.

“You’ve never beaten me, Pyle.” Callahan countered.

“You’ve never taken me on in a duel! You destroyed my ship and left me for dead!”

“I wouldn’t let you take that cargo, you knew how fucked up it was”

“They were slaves, we sell them all the time.”

“Children, Pyle, they were children!” Callahan shouted back in anger. Pirates and merchants alike gathered around the captains listening intently.

“Enough talk Callahan, you’re mine.” Pyle said, raising his sword.

“A duel then. You and me, winner takes all.” Callahan responded. “You kill me, you can kill all of us. I kill you, and your men answer to me..”

“So be it.” Pyle answered, lunging at Callahan, wasting no time.

Drake #20 Edits

The fog thickened, and the grass grew stiff beneath Drake's feet once more as he and his friends continued through the astral plane. They came across a hooded shadowy figure, who hunched over, hissing and choking. Drake noticed the gray, clammy, scab-ridden skin, and long black claws protruding from it's fingers. He slowly turned his head and glared at Drake. Dark red skin with black streaks riddled the figure's face; he had glowing amber eyes and sharp yellow teeth. The demon lunged towards Drake, but stopped upon seeing Gabriel and Seraphina, who simply stared at him menacingly. He hissed savagely, turned, and fled off into the fog.

Once again, the fog lifted. A tall tree, bare of leaves, towered ominously at the top of a hill directly in front of the angels. Drake and his friends ascended the hill whereupon they found the charred remains of a corpse, chained to a chair with an ancient rune inscribed on the tree behind.

[I][FONT=Garamond][SIZE=4] *When heaven's life shall end
And tear the world apart...* [/I][FONT][SIZE]

Drake looked around, but neither Gabriel, nor Seraphina had said anything. He stopped asking them at this point. The blocky top of the runes curved in the center and gave way to flat lines at the bottom.

"This must have been from the ancient era, Before Time..." Drake marveled. "It's unlike anything I've ever seen before."

"Why do you assume that?" Gabriel asked. "It could just be something you're unfamiliar with. Or the ravings of a dying lunatic."

"No," Drake replied. "I can feel it. It's almost like this is connected... deeply connected to the heart of the world. As if it affected the very life forces of existence itself."

[I][FONT=Garamond][SIZE=4] *To sate wicked's demand
And mate with power's heart...* [/I][FONT][SIZE]

Drake and his friends pushed onward until the fog lifted again. Ahead of him towered a large, grandiose castle, with visible black hazy areas high in the plane. A large wall bordered the outskirts, and the inner structure stood about 14 stories high. The main tower, a direct addition of the main structure, rose 3 times as high as the main structure, and four towers, one on each side of the main hall, loomed about- the tallest one only 3 quarters the size of the main tower. The castle's rough, gray stone stuck out amongst the black clouds of energy that loomed about the lofts. Black energy nebulae floated around in the plane in front of him, and patches of fire littered the brown, dead grass. Drake felt a sinking feeling in his chest as he grew frightened.

"So we have to go in there?" Drake asked Seraphina sheepishly, with his eyebrows raised.

"Is that where your spirit is pulling you?" She replied.

“Yes,” Drake responded.

“Well, we can’t enter through the front gate,” Gabriel said, “That’s a Demon Lord Castle.”

“Great,” Drake said in horror. “Any ideas on how to get in?”

“Well,” Gabriel replied, “If your spirit brought you here, it has to know a way in. Close your eyes and think of an entrance.”

Drake closed his eyes and thought of the castle; at first he saw nothing, but after a few moments, the image of a wooden door in a stone wall came into view. “I see a door, with symbols on it.”

[I][FONT=Garamond][SIZE=4] *When heaven’s life shall end...* [/I][FONT][SIZE]

“Concentrate,” Gabriel said. “What do they look like?”

“They look like... Some sort of language. Scratches... Beautifully inscribed scratches in the door. So elegant, and they stand out at you. They’re so distinct.”

“Think of that door and imagine yourself standing directly in front of that door.” Gabriel said. “Imagine your astral body flying through the plane, and arriving at the spot in your mind.”

Drake concentrated. His brow furrowed, and he imagined himself so vividly in front of the door, yet nothing happened. “I can’t do it,” Drake said, opening his eyes and turning to Gabriel. Drake was taken aback, however, to find the three angels standing on a stone floor in front of the same wooden door that he had envisioned. He looked behind and noticed a very long drop off. The angels were on a stone platform close to the top of the main tower of the castle. Dark energy floated by, and the fog obscured the landscape out beyond the castle walls.

[I][FONT=Garamond][SIZE=4] *And tear the world apart...* [/I][FONT][SIZE]

Gabriel placed his hand on Drake’s shoulder. “Good job,” he said somberly, “We still must keep our guard up.”

“How do we open the door?” Drake asked, “It has no handles. Is there a secret locking mechanism or something around here?”

“You never learned to open doors?” Seraphina asked.

“Of course I know how to open a door,” Drake said defensively.

“You can open doors with angelic runes on them,” Gabriel said pointing to the door. “Didn’t you recognize them?” Drake looked at the door.

[I][FONT=Garamond][SIZE=4] *To sate wicked's demand...* [/I][FONT][SIZE]

The scratches looked very familiar, yet alien to him at the same time. "Don't you remember what that says?" Seraphina asked.

Drake looked at them, and focused. "What does that say?" He muttered to himself. "It looks so familiar, but I just can't seem to remember..."

An image of the stone tower, and blazing fireballs raining down from the sky flashed through his mind for a split second, and then he snapped back to the door. "Oh, yeah," Drake mumbled. "I don't know what came over me, I just... forgot how to read for a second." He read the words inscribed in the angelic tongue, and looked at his friends. "Now what?"

"You have to reach out to the door and receive the door's permission to enter." Seraphina responded. "Then it will open for you."

"Okay, here it goes," Drake replied.

He closed his eyes and reached out to the door with his mind. Once his mind met the door, he felt a magical seal on it- an exquisite ancient form of magic that the world had long since forgotten. A beautiful form of forbidden magic, which he yearned to be in the presence of. He spoke the inscription of the door's seal in the angelic tongues, and the door responded to his mind. Great fatigue plagued the door; centuries had passed since anything had interacted with it. It wanted to open for him, but it simply did not have the energy.

Drawing deep from his spirit, Drake opened a well of energy from his direct angelic tether to heaven, and fed the door energy from the divine kingdom. He also augmented this energy with his own astral energy, fed from the vibrations of the surrounding plane. The magical seal drank in the energy gratefully, and Drake opened his eyes to see the door swinging inward into the depths of the tower.

[I][FONT=Garamond][SIZE=4] *And mate with power's heart...* [/I][FONT][SIZE]

Koli #21 Edits

[COLOR="#A9A9A9"]“Koli! What is the meaning of this!?”

Abbas Amo paced in front of the young monk who stood at attention in the inner sanctum of the monastery- the holy of holies. Behind Koli lay the shattered pieces of a stone baptismal, and the sacred symbol of the brotherhood. Koli had not intended for this to happen. He simply felt closest to their God in the Holy of Holies

“Well?” Abbas Amo pressed.

Koli had sat on the floor meditating. The depth of his meditation brought him to the heart of his spirit, and in that moment he fell into complete unawareness of his physical surroundings. His body became weightless, as he dissipated into ethereal energy and began to rise. The young monk’s soul began to vibrate at the same frequency as his surroundings. Koli tuned his spirit until he synced in harmony with the world, and in that moment he attained the highest form of being that the creator intended. It felt better than Koli had ever imagined. Time stood still. Problems that plagued humanity remained a mere wisp of thought while he attained this form- emotions, pain, fear, attachment- none of it mattered.

And then came the high priest into the holy of holies, shattering Koli’s concentration. The young monk came crashing down into the baptismal and found himself lying on the floor amidst broken pieces of the cross and basin. Koli picked himself up and shamefully awaited his fate.

And now he could not bring himself to meet Abbas Amo’s gaze.

“What have you to say for yourself?”

Koli looked at the high priest and opened his mouth; but when he did, no words came for him to speak. Slowly he closed his mouth, and dropped his gaze to the floor. His fists tightened, and he tensed the muscles in his body to a sharper position of attention.

Abbas Amo’s eyes softened. “Koli... I didn’t mean...”

Tears formed in Koli’s eyes out of the sheer disappointment he felt for himself. How could he lose control like that? How could he be so stupid? Here he thought that his meditating benefited his training, but it actually benefited nobody but himself. How could he be so selfish? And now his selfishness caused him to destroy the holy of holies.

“Koli you cannot be so hard on yourself.” The high priest said.

Koli wanted to tell Abbas Amo he was sorry. He wanted to say how he didn’t mean to cause this, and it was an accident. But he felt the world closing in on him, and he grew cold and isolated. The young monk gave a shiver, and then he felt nothing.

“Koli, please...” Abbas Amo said, placing his hand on Koli’s shoulder. “Don’t shut me out.”

And in that moment, everything came rushing back. The hurt, the disappointment, the pain. It was more than he could bear.

Abbas Amo lifted Koli's chin gently with his forefinger and thumb. Large tears rolled down the young Monk's cheeks- his eyes growing gray and troubled, with specks of black darting around. His irises were growing and shrinking as his pupils dilated. Abbas Amo drew him close to his chest in a large hug.

"I'm sorry, I'm so sorry..." Koli sobbed. "I didn't mean to I was meditating and I didn't know what was happening and before I knew it I was on the ground and everything was broken and I-"

"Shhhhhh," Abbas Amo hushed Koli. His long silver hair tickled Koli's ears, and the young monk could feel the high priest's heart beating in his chest. Something about it soothed the young monk, and his eyes returned to a shade of white starlight. "Breathe, Koli. Just breathe."[/COLOR]

It took all of Koli's energy and concentration, just to inhale and exhale. He came to consciousness on the floor of the inn next to the young boy's bed. He opened his eyes to find blotches of his vision missing as he stared at the ceiling, and his eyes hurt so much that he could only keep them open for a few seconds at a time. Every inch of his existence ached. His face stung and throbbed, the flesh in his body throbbed, and his bones were on fire. His spirit felt bloated and torn, as if his very soul bled poisoned lifeblood into his body. His mind throbbed, fogged and cloudy- as if cracks in his mind impeded his concentration.

[I]Breathe, Koli. Just breathe.[/I]

He tried to hold on, but an icy atmosphere descended upon him, almost as if a freezing blanket enshrouded his spirit before he faded from consciousness.

The next time Koli came to his body ached more, but his mind felt clearer, as if some of his mental wounds had healed. Koli forced himself to his knees, but found that he didn't have the strength to stand up all at once. He collapsed onto all fours.

[I]Breathe. Just breathe.[/I] Abbas Amo's voice echoed in his head. [I]You can do this.[/I]

Koli shuddered and nearly vomited on the floor. After several minutes of deep breathing, he mustered the strength to force himself off of his knees and onto his feet. He stumbled, half hunched over, down the hallway, using the walls to guide him to the restroom. A local merchant exited his room along the hallway with the sound of a woman's giggling hanging in the air as the door shut. The merchant looked at Koli, and horror spread across his face.

"Dear gods," he cried, "by the Divine Blood, whatever evil happened to you, let it stay away from me for all of eternity and into the afterlife!" The man ran downstairs, shirtless, and left the inn entirely.

After a long journey, Koli finally made it to the restroom at the end of the hall. He latched the door, fell to his knees, and began retching into the chamber pot. Nothing came out, save acid and saliva. Wiping his mouth he stood up, feeling the aches in his body with a vengeance, and used the washbasin. Slowly lifting his gaze, he looked at himself in the mirror.

Great purple and red circles surrounded his eyes, reaching his temples and eyebrows. Several areas where lesions rose and bubbled in his skin plagued his face and neck. His eyes themselves no longer had any whites, as the blood vessels had popped and colored them a deep crimson red. Dried blood crusted, caked underneath his nose, and his cheeks sported a red and splotchy color with small pits scattered throughout. Long dark purple and blue marks stretched down his neck and onto his chest, around his entire neck in irregular patterns and frequencies. Looking down, Koli found that the magical burns escaped no part of his body; dark red rings and circles plagued his palms and the back of his hands, and stretched up his arms.

Ashamed of his burned, distorted ghastly appearance, Koli drew his hood and exited the restroom. He needed to get food into his stomach. The priest descended the stairs and made his way to the bar.

“You look like absolute hell my friend,” said the bartender in a voice like wine being poured into a glass. “Whatever you got yourself into, it better not be coming after you here or there’s going to be serious problems.”

Koli simply shook his head and pointed to the bread and cheese meal that the man across the bar was enjoying. When the bartender went to pour mead into Koli’s glass, he knocked on the table to get the bartender’s attention. The priest shook his head and pointed to the glass milk bottles in the corner of the bar.

“Suit yourself,” the bartender shrugged, and flipped her long raven hair as she turned to the milk. “So how much longer are you staying?” The bartender asked when she brought Koli his meal.

Koli looked puzzled as he pulled out a gold coin and gently placed it on the bar.

“Rent is due tomorrow.”

Had Koli really been recovering for almost a week now? He shook his head and pulled out his bag of coins, counting out another week’s rent. He slid the gold towards the bartender and looked around. He had to find out what had happened to him. Koli got her attention and pointed to a business ledger below the counter at the far end of the bar.

“You want my business ledger?”

Koli shook his head. He pointed to the business ledger, and motioned grandly to insinuate lots of them.

“Oh, you mean you want a library?” She asked. Koli nodded.

“Why didn’t you just say so? There’s one that overlooks the ocean in the Nebulous district. Beautiful place. The architecture is incredible. I can show you if you want.”

Gavner #22 Edits

"You have to be more vigilant than that child, or you'll never live long enough to be a War Prince!" Vir said with a smile.

"What do you mean child, Sir? I am thirty-eight years old!" Gavner replied, switching back to the formalities of the battlefield. Gavner had been blooded when he was eighteen and vampires aged at one tenth the rate of humans. He was thirty-eight but he had the appearance of a twenty year old.

"You may be thirty-eight, but allow me to remind you that I am eight hundred and forty three years old. Compared to me you are a mere infant." Vir said with a smile. Extending his hand, the vampire prince helped Gavner up.

"Your Majesty, I thought you were sick. How did you manage to join the fight?" Gavner asked.

"I am still sick, my boy. I was simply needed up here more than down in my deathbed," Vir said. "I have little strength, but what little strength I have I will use. Now go, join the fight my boy. I will follow."

Turning around Gavner noticed that the fighting had ceased. The remaining sailors were gathered around a duel. As Gavner's bloodlust began to wear off, he and Vir inhabited the merchant ship alone, and the ocean slowly claimed the ship into more of its deadly embrace every moment. With no grapplings to tie the ships together, the Black Sails Armada ship had been pulling away. About fifteen feet of clearance remained between the ships, and they slowly drifted farther as the moments passed. Running to the edge of the ship Gavner leapt, clearing the distance between the two masses. Landing on the pirate ship, Gavner bumped into the ring of pirates and sailors who enclosed the duel. Still unable to identify the two contenders the vampire rushed to the quarterdeck, where he would have the high ground. Climbing the large wooden steps until he reached the top, Gavner stepped onto the quarterdeck to find Black Shadow and the First Lieutenant from the merchant ship spectating the fight intently.

"Shadow, what is happening?" Gavner asked his friend. He noticed a massive chunk of wood in the Dark Archer's side. "What happened to you!?"

But Black Shadow waved Gavner off, still not taking his eyes off the duel. The vampire looked more intently at the two fighters, and noticed the pirate captain battling an all too familiar merchant.

"That is not..." Gavner began, realizing the grave mistake that Captain Jack Callahan had made by taking on the enemy ship's captain.

"Captain challenged the Black Sails Armada to a dual." The first lieutenant said. "The winner takes both ships."

"The fool!" Gavner exclaimed. "He will get us all killed!"

“General,” the lieutenant replied, “With all due respect, stand the fuck down. Captain knows what he is doing.”

“Even if he wins, does he truly expect the pirates to honor the duel?” Gavner hissed at the lieutenant. “I say, to arms!”

“Captain was very adamant,” The first lieutenant said. “He said he had to do this, and to not interfere under any circumstances. Something about how this battle was different than the others, and he needed to tie up loose ends.”

Gavner without a doubt had faith in his captain, but the pirate captain lacked honor. Both men boasted massive, muscular figures and Captain Callahan was clearly the superior fighter in technique, but the pirate still boasted more muscle, and more savagery. He held his ground, and tried to sneak in a dirty blow every now and then.

And yet, as the duel raged on with the brightening morning sky in the background, Jack seemed to prevail over his stronger adversary in the coming dawn. The merchant captain had found his second wind as he forced his opponent onto the defense. Callahan’s upper slashes followed by jabs with his free hand, round kicks, and horizontal slashes almost took the enemy by surprise several times.

“You haven’t seen the last of me, Howland Pyle!” Callahan shouted at the pirate as the merchant nearly ran Pyle through. The pirate could not keep up with the newfound energy and intensity that his foe had gained. “You shall die before the sun rises!”

By this time Gavner remembered Vir; the vampire prince was nowhere to be found. Looking over his shoulder, he saw that the merchant ship, now over 100 feet away, and half of it was underwater. Straining his eyes in the dawning sky, Gavner’s heart sank as he spotted the vampire prince on the quarterdeck, watching the battle. A sense of disappointment and loss came upon Gavner as he realized that Vir had never intended to join them. Vir Fortis, the vampire legend of Clan Durus, planned on passing from the world in a watery grave out at sea on a sinking merchant ship.

Shifting uneasily, the pirate crew began to cheer on their captain as they noticed Callahan prevailing. Some shouted words of encouragement as others simply yelled phrases like “Aye Cap’n!” and “Yaar!” Pyle grew angrier with every blocked attack- more infuriated with each of Callahan’s blows. The merchant captain nicked Pyle’s shoulder, sending a small trickle of blood down his arm. Gavner leaned forward, and his pupils dilated as he licked his lips in sight of his enemy’s blood.

Desperate to get out of defensive mode Captain Pyle threw out all honor of a just duel and resorted to dirty shots. As Callahan thrust his blade at the pirate captain’s chest, Pyle feigned forward and closed his arm and torso against the hilt of Callahan’s sword, pretending that he had been run through. Callahan hesitated, about to give mercy to his opponent.

“Do you concede?” Callahan asked his enemy in a strong, just voice.

“Concede yourself!” Pyle shouted as he jerked the sword out of his enemy’s hand and kicked Callahan in the stomach. Callahan staggered backwards, defenseless, and Captain Pyle advanced forward, driving his foot into the crotch of the Merchant Captain. Captain Callahan fell to the ground. Letting his rage consume him, Captain Pyle rained down blows upon his foe. Kick to the stomach, kick to the kidneys, vertical stomp to the face, heel to the neck. Panting from exhaustion, Pyle grunted as he kicked Callahan, over and over again. Merchant sailors cried out in protest.

“Honor me’ ass!”

“No low blows!”

“Fuck off Pirate!”

“Keep that up n’ Ima come give yeh my steel up yer ass!”

“Get up Cap’n! Please!”

“You can do it Sir!”

"Enough!" Captain Pyle roared. As the Merchant Captain lay on the deck, bleeding from his nose and mouth and sporting several broken bones. "This has gone far enough!"

Captain Pyle bent over and hissed in Callahan’s face, “You were never more than a maggot! The Black Sails Armada is now the might of the seas. A feat we could not achieve when you sailed among our ranks!”

Captain Callahan weakly turned his face to the pirate captain. “Fuck off,” he said, blood spraying from his lips. “Your sister was the best damned bitch I’ve ever seen in bed.”

Roaring in rage, Captain Pyle stood up and brought down the final blow on the merchant captain.

But events do not always yield the expected results...

[HR]/[HR]

As Pyle brought down his sword, Vir Fortis landed beneath the strike. Being an ancient vampire with prince blood, Vir's abilities and attributes had developed far beyond those of Gavner's. The vampire prince probably had over ten times the strength and speed of Gavner; his nails were as strong as black diamond, and his endurance was superior to that of any living thing. Gavner feared what Vir could have done if he felt healthy. Catching the sword on the back of his nails, the vampire prince deflected the blow and glared at the pirate captain.

"Under my rule you would have been put to death for your deceit long ago, and so shall it be done now." The vampire said nobly. "I, Vir Fortis, War Prince of Clan Durus, charge you with dishonorable conduct in a significant duel. I hereby sentence you to death where you stand."

Never before had Gavner seen a vampire prince give a death sentence on the field. Simply Vir's posture intimidated all who looked upon him; his eyes blazed green with rage, yet his face held calm and cool. Wind blew through his long grey hair, slicking it back, and he looked like death's messenger himself. Friend or foe would unanimously consent that this being of nobility held supreme authority to all.

"Burn in hell from whence you came, spawn of Satan. Tell your father that he cannot have me just yet." Pyle said.

The arrogant captain thrust his blade as if to smite the vampire prince- Captain Pyle's last ever assault. With the prince possessing over eighteen times the speed of any human, the sword transferred from Pyle's hand to Vir's in a blur. Pushing the captain in the chest, Pyle stumbled backwards into Vir who had already moved behind the pirate to intercept him. Like a cat toying with a mouse, the vampire prince pushed Pyle from behind stumbling him forward again. This time appearing several feet in front of the captain, whereupon Vir Fortis ended the fight. Utilizing nearly all of the supernatural strength and speed available to him in his weakened state, Vir kicked the enemy in the chest with all of his might.

No eye caught any sight of motion whatsoever. One moment the captain was at the mercy of the vampire prince's foot, and the next he appeared slammed against the mast of the ship. He had not flown through the air, nor could anybody detect him as a blur. He simply transferred from one place one second before their very eyes. Extending his arm in the same manner, the sword vanished from Vir's hand and appeared in Pyle's breast, buried so deep that only the hilt was visible. The sound of a thousand cannons rang, out deafening everyone on deck- a sonic boom. Everyone stood back in awe. Vir turned to the pirate crew and roared in rage.

Some crew members dove overboard as others crumbled onto the ground in utter terror. Crew members from the merchant ship gave a mighty cheer before frantically tying up the cowering pirates who had remained. Vir Fortis smiled, and collapsed onto the deck.

"Your Majesty!" Gavner shouted as he leapt from the quarterdeck and ran to the Prince. Gavner held the prince in his arms, looking into the face of his fallen kin. "Sir, you did it!"

"No, [I]we[/I] did it, my boy." Vir said weakly. "It seems I have exceeded the amount of energy I had to give."

"No," Gavner said frantically, "We can fix this. You are going to be okay. Please, your majesty, tell me you are going to be okay!"

"We all have a certain amount of time in this world, Gavner." Vir said, "I expected to pass on the voyage to Dhethain. An unknown meaningless passing, but you gave me one last battle to be known by. thank you for that."

"Vir..." Gavner said softly, a twisting pain forming in his chest. "You cannot leave."

"But I must, my dear child." The dying vampire said, his breaths growing shallow. "A vampire who holds onto things of the past will never be strong for the future. Celebrate the past in remembrance, but never mourn, for the past cannot be changed. Learn from the past and push forward and you, my boy, will become one of the greatest vampires of all time. I'll see you in paradise."

So said Vir with a twinkle in his eye, and passed from the world of Althanas nobly; a fitting death for a prince.