Paladins

> **Most of these histories were taken first hand while the Hero still lived. Doubtless all are long dead by now.**

Acheron

Class: Paladin
Race: Dark Elf

Dil pulls his hood up, muttering, as he scurries along Elgin Street, through the slums of Nexus, the City of Allied Races. The rain is light for the month of Torrents, billowing in soft waves on the western wind, but it still serves only to darken his already foul mood. He is a man of middle age, thin, and beginning to gray. His face is strong, an aquilline nose dominating what some might call aristocratic features. He has the bearing of a learned man, but not learned enough to curb his apparent arrogance. His gait is frantic, hurried, as if he wishes to punish the road with the pounding of his seldom-used sandals.

Grimacing, Dil takes off his fogging spectacles, wiping them on the sleeve of his robe. Just then he slips, dropping the spectacles in a mud puddle.

"Great! Just what I needed!" Dil smirks as he slowly, painfully, bends down to retrieve the muddied glasses. Squinting, he flails around blindly in the puddle, his muttered imprecations growing louder and more violent by the moment.

"Excuse me, sir, might you spare a few marks for a poor and hungry soul to get a meal?"

Dil spins around, startled, tripping his right foot over his left, and falling face first into the mud puddle. He curses. Finally, he looks up at the cause of his clumsiness. It is a young boy, dressed in rags, the grime of his apparent lifestyle slowly washing away in the afternoon drizzle.

Dil shoots the boy a withering look. "And might you spare a few to clean a poor scribe's robe?" He gestures at his water-logged parchment, and his half-submerged quill. "Or, perhaps, to pay for new writing supplies?" Dil rolls his eyes.

The boy shrugs.

Dil shakes his head in exasperation. He rises to his knees, wiping himself off to little effect; all he accomplishes is to spread the stain. Dil sighs, and gathers his dirtied possessions. Slowly, he stands and turns, opening his mouth for one last biting remark.

The boy is gone.

Muttering, Dil sets off again.

Opening the surprisingly well-oiled gate, Dil steps through, into the cemetary. Twilight approaches, and Dil unconsciously makes the sign against the Evil Eye -- a custom of his almost-forgotten, often denied origins - at the sight of the growing shadows in the forbidding yard. A gravedigger eyes him askance as he walks past. Dil looks down at his grimy robe. He snaps, "Don't even ask!" The gravedigger shrugs, and Dil continues on his way, winding around and between headstones, mausoleums, open graves and piles of dirt to his destination.

The Cathedral of Twilight can only be described as an intimidating structure. Built entirely of the darkest violet marble, it looms over the graveyard -- indeed, over the entire southeastern corner of the City of Nexus - watching, waiting, commanding all who would approach to be wary. Two tall spires rise up into the sky, seeming to absorb the very light around them. Carved imps and gargoyles snarl, as if daring one to enter. The last rays of the sunset reflect from the onyx-set mithril roof, setting the whole building in an unnatural glow. Dil stops, looking in awe, until the sun sets, and darkness falls.

Looking over his shoulder, Dil passes through the open doorway. The light from a thousand candles greets him, dancing on the black and crimson walls. He squints behind mud-smeared spectacles, looking around in wonder. Finally, he turns, and spots a dark figure kneeling before the altar to the south. Dil opens his mouth, as if to greet the stranger, but suddenly closes it, his attention riveted on the Altar of Twilight, beyond.

It is exquisitely rendered. A mosaic so finely wrought, it seems the work of a master painter, and yet it shows with a brilliance beyond that dull medium. Gemstones form the image -- the finest ruby and obsidian, amethyst and diamond -- all of uniform hue and brightness. Every line is smooth, every shape seamless. The black gryphon rises on outstretched wings toward a large crimson moon. Stars wink in the gloom of a cloudless, violet sky. It is beautiful. It is ominous.

"Greetings."

Startled for the second time that day, Dil turns to see that the figure has approached him without his noticing. Standing before him is a drow male, tall for his race, and light of skin. A long mane of silver hair frames his elegant features - a long, straight nose, high cheekbones, an angular chin, and thin, gracefully curving eyebrows. He wears black leather boots and gloves, and a suit of gleaming black chainmail armor. Over his torso, and cinched at the waist by a black leather belt, is a tabard, bearing the very same symbol that appears on the Altar.

Emerald green eyes regard Dil curiously, twinkling in the flickering candlelight. "Is there ought with which I may assist you?"

Dil takes a breath, composing himself. "Yes. I wonder if you have a few moments to tell me your history. I have been assigned to record the story of a follower of Tilnar."

The drow purses his lips, as if considering. He glances toward a darkened wall sconce, then slowly nods. "Very well. I shall aid you in this. However, I must warn you, there is much I shall not tell."

Dil smiles, eager to get on with it, and get out. "I'm sure the library, and all of Nexus, will be the better for whatever information you can provide." Inwardly cursing the Elder of Scribes once again for this assignment, he readies his quill and parchment.

The dark-elf arches an eyebrow at the muddy parchment, and clears his throat. "I am Acheron, a servant of Lord Tilnar."

The quill moves along the page, recording this, and stops. A moment passes, then a minute. Dil looks up expectantly. Finally, he says, "Feel free to continue."

Acheron smiles faintly, saying nothing.

Rolling his eyes, Dil sighs. "Okay. How about this. I'll ask you questions, and you answer them."

The drow's nod is almost imperceptible. "As you wish."

Dil takes a deep breath, and shakes his head. "Okay. Let's start with the basics. Where were you born?"

"In the Under Dark."

The quill pauses again, waiting. Dil rolls his eyes. "Yes, okay. Where did you grow up?"

"In the Under Dark."

The scribe clenches and unclenches his jaw several times, restraining his growing frustration. "Yes, yes. Fine. Why did you leave?"

Acheron considers, the ghost of a wry smile playing on his lips. "The Under Dark is an evil place."

"Care to elaborate?"

"Nay."

Dil sighs, looking down at the sparse words on his page. Frowning, he says, "No elaboration, no explanation as to why you would betray your people, desert them, to join the enemy?" These last words are choked, angry.

The scribe flinches as a gloved hand wraps around his wrist, grasping it with such strength that he drops his quill. Dil looks up, into eyes smoldering with emotional intensity.

Acheron's voice is quiet but cold. "Allow me to disabuse you of your folly. I did not, do not, betray. The drow betrayed me, as they did my Lord. They are no longer my people, they are Kyorl's."

Dil gasps, nodding vigorously, his anger dissolved.

Acheron releases his hold. His voice is once again calm, almost bored. "Have you ought more to inquire?"

Massaging his bruised wrist, Dil shakes his head. "No ... No. I guess not." He frowns, his anger slowly returning. He pulls a small purse from his robe. "I will pay you this, because I'm done with this assignment. The Elder of Scribes will not be pleased, but there's no way I'm staying to look for another story." Muttering, he gingerly hands the purse to Acheron. "Really, I guess it's true what they say about you people. Would it have been so hard just to play along? How can you be so callous?"

Acheron raises an eyebrow, and gestures to the shadowed wall sconce behind him. A boy - the same street urchin, Dil realizes, who accosted him earlier - steps into the light. The drow paladin tosses the purse to the boy. Grinning impishly at Dil, the youth hastily bows, and scampers out into the night.

Acheron nods grimly. "Have a care, scribe, of whom you call callous."

With that, the drow turns on his heel, and once again kneels before the Altar of Twilight. "This audience is at an end."

Dil shakes his head in disbelieve. Turning to leave, he hesitates as something by the Altar catches his eye. A mithril sculpture, a set of unbalanced scales. Unbidden, the words come to his lips. He whispers, "Tilnar, Lord of Justice, Vengeance, and Mercy."

Hearing the scribe's departure, Acheron slowly traces the route of the scar on his chest, through tabard and chainmail. Looking at the Sigil on the great Altar, and smiling to himself, he bows his head, and resumes his prayer and meditation.

Angus

Class: Clerics
Race: Human

Ever since Angus could remember he had always been more concerned about others that he was about himself. He had grown up the third son of a blacksmith, a hard man set in his ways but with a certain degree of patience for his sons who were to carry on the family business.

Every day since his 13th birthday his father would require him to spend at least half the day in the shop learning the tricks of the trade and he would have the rest of the day to spend in whatever way he wished. Three years later on a winter afternoon he was taking a walk just after his turn at the forge when he spied a lone man wrapped in rags and badly beaten struggling to make it into town. He immediately rushed to aid him as best he could, the stranger was near death and was mumbling about a package and an attack that had come from nowhere. Angus, fearing for the strangers life carried him to his home for immediate tending.

Upon arriving at his home Angus and his mother began to undress the stranger to try to tend to his wounds and found that the stranger was covered in armor of a strange design and craftmanship, he was obviously a warrior or guard for someone of means. After a fortnight of constant care it was

evident that the wounds the warrior had sustained were too deep he would not live much longer, fortunately he had fallen into a deep sleep as fever had ravaged his body. They buried him the next day.

Angus's father went through the stranger's belongings that night looking for this "Package" the stranger had mentioned in his delerium but there was nothing to be found except a small bundle of papers nobody could read and a holy symbol from a long dead god. He directed Angus and his eldest brother Sean to go no more that two days into the woods to see if there was some sign of the struggle as the stranger could not have walked that far in the condition he was in.

Angus and Sean went out the next morning hoping to make use of as much daylight as the winter provided. After many hours of struggling over drifts of snow being constantly amazed that the stranger was able to make it this far, they came upon the scene of slaughter. Bodies were everywhere at least 15 humans had met their gruesome end at the hands of what seemed to be trolls as some of the bodies were partially eaten and many were simply torn limb from limb. It was also obvious something deeper was wrong as trolls did not usually mass in such numbers to defeat such a large and well armed band. After the initial shock, Angus made a more startling discovery, the Trolls were looking for something as evidenced by the contents of every bag and sack were scattered around the clearing, trolls were not usually that intent on looting, they were looking for something.

Angus and Sean returned telling their father of what they had seen. Their father, not knowing what else to do, told Angus to take the holy symbol and bunch of letters to the church the next day, to see if the priests could deceipher them. When Angus arrived he was taken to see the High Priest of the temple. The Priest could not read the letters, but from the description of the man's armor thought him to be a holy warrior of Pandora, whose temple could be found in the city of races, the Nexus. He suggested Angus take the bundle there, where there were people of many races who might be able to read the letters.

After much argument with his father who did not want him to leave, Angus set out on his trip to the Nexus. It took him 6 months to get there. When he finally arrived he did not expect what he found. The city seemed to be under seige. Magical barriers at the gates, bodies of strange creatures and humans along the way. Twice Angus was nearly discovered by a band of goblins. He made it to the gates, and was just pondering how to get inside when an armored figure approached. The symbols on the armor appeared to be the same as those on the armor of the man he had found. When the armored man came nearer, Angus approached him to ask help. The paladin looked down at him with compassion, he introduced himself as Nigel, a follower of Pandora. Angus told him of his quest and Nigel guided Angus through the gates and to Pandora's temple.

The priests of Pandora thanked Angus and took the holy symbol and bunch of letters from him. They looked in shock at the holy symbol, and asked him where he had found it. The priests payed careful attention as Angus related his tale. The priests told Angus that this holy symbol was of a Goblin God who had disappeared long ago, he was a particulary war-like god who had thought to assert the Goblins as the most powerful race on the planet, but he had failed. Over the course of several days the letters were interpreted. They were of various sources, obviously intercepted by the stranger Angus and his mother had helped. The letters indicated that the search for the lost

temple of this god may soon be found, and that the staff which could ressurect the god was already in their hands. If this God was resurrected, it could mean a great shift in the balance of power, perhaps allowing the Goblins to breach the Nexus.

Angus asked who the stranger he had found was, the priest said that they did not know, the man was not necessarily a recognised follower of Pandora, he could simply have been one who admired Pandora and worshipped her. Or the armor could simply have been stolen. The location of the lost temple was not found either. The priests then told Angus he should not attempt to return home. The roads had become much too dangerous of late. In appreciation for what he had done, Angus was offerred training as a holy warrior. They hoped he would accept, and when the time was right perhaps even petetion to follow Pandora.

Angus accepted the offer, he rose quickly in stature, always remembering the lessons of his mother, and in time he did become a follower of Pandora. Through the years the temple was never found, the identity of the stranger unknown. Perhaps someday .... after all, there was always hope.

Anterio

Class: Paladin
Race: Human

Although I am no bard, I suppose I do have a story to tell.

I was raised in an orphanage since just after my birth. I never knew my parents, nor knew of them. Instead I had the Sisters of Mercy to guide and teach me. Strict, but fair, the Sisters never seemed to run out of new chores that needed to be attended, or new sermons to preach. I must admit that to this day I cannot recall all the little things they used to say, but I know the message was received.

"We are here to do what we can, while we can."

As the years passed, I watched other children leave with new parents. I myself was never chosen, never even spoke with any who would consider me. If I was not so busy all the time, I suppose I would have gotten lonely... I had few friends. After watching a few leave, never to return, I found that keeping to myself and my work also prevented any painful attachments to my fellow orphans. Why make friends when they are only going to leave you just when you grow to depend on them?

Although it was not the practice of the Sisters to name the orphans, after awhile they realized they simply could not call me "child" forever. One of them suggested calling me "the little ant" because I was always at task. Another suggested "restless" but it seems the original suggestion of Anterio was what stuck. It is as good a name as any, and better than some.

It is no secret. Most people want to adopt young children. Older children are not as cute, generally more stubborn, and can talk enough to disagree. By the time I was 13, the Sisters told me that I was too old to stay any longer. So I was orphaned again.

Left with no place to go and no place to stay, I found my home on a fishing ship. I worked for three years hauling fish and climbing rigging. I was the only one on board small enough to bail the bilge when we took on water, and the only one willing to climb the mast during storms to tie back the sails.

It was dangerous work. I always knew that, but I also knew that it needed to be done. I would rather risk death in the Sea of Tears on the boom, than meet certain death for not trying. Never the less, I still found time to sit in the Crow's Nest. While there watching for pirates I had time to think about my lot in life. There are worse jobs than being a fisherman, but I knew there was more I could be doing.

So I did.

After a cold winter sail, we put in at Rymek to sell our catch. While wandering the docks, I met a man selling fares to Falcion Island. I had completed my contract on the vessel, Lani Kai, so the only thing keeping me in Rymek was lack of elsewhere to go. I bought passage to the Island of Apprentices and applied to join the Paladin Guild.

I was quickly accepted and started on my training immediately. I was 16 years old. I was ready to begin again.

And again.

Asmira

Class: Paladin
Race: Human

During her childhood years, Asmira lived in a small human settlement called Aldonica. She was a typical child around the age of 7, but as she grew older, her father's profession began to influence her and she spent less and less time out with the other children. To fill her time, she would help her father out in the church with all of the daily deacon work. She felt a bit of responsibility to act more mature than the other children, being the daughter of the deacon. Every day she became more and more pious. She managed to find a few moments every once in a while to spend time with the few people she kept contact with. The day to day pressures were overwhelming, but she managed to keep her head straight and never made it known the feeling of being overwhelmed. Her friends admired her for this and even many of the adults and most of the church leaders even gave her praise.

One day, while Asmira was assisting her father as she always did, she heard screaming coming from outside the church. She ran outside hastily to see what was going on. To her surprise, were these odd, humanoid creatures wreaking havoc on the town. Houses were being pillaged and her ears were filled with screams of dying people. She called to her father and they went around to houses getting people to refuge within the church. After a rescuing a few people, she hurried to her friend Myra's house, only to find her lying on the floor in a bloody heap. Even though she was

saddened, she could not waste any time, for others still needed to take refuge in the church. After gathering a couple dozen people, she took refuge in the church herself and locked the doors. Asmira wept for her friend Myra, and prayed that Myra's father, Relam, and brother, Krono, who were fighting off the horrid creatures, would be safe. Her father tried to calm the people asuring them safety within the church but they would not calm down from their hysteria. After a couple of hours Asmira opened the church doors only to see corpses sprawled out all over the ground both human and creature. After taking a dozen or so steps outside, she saw Krono and Aayla, another girl in the town, step through what seemed to be a yellow hole in the air, and they disappeared with the opening.

In spite of the horrible ordeal, the townsfolk regrouped and decided to rebuild the town. Many mourned over their lost friends and family, and Asmira was terribly hurt by the death of Myra. Still she felt blessed that she had not lost any of her family members. People from the kingdom of Cigam came to help the people of Aldonica rebuild their ruined village, and the queen had a grand memorial built for Relam and his family as well as other memorials constructed for those slain. One evening, Asmira felt compelled to go outside to get some fresh air. She stood outside the church, and stared at the midnight sky. She thought about the terrible occurance and began to get teary-eyed, when she heard a violent wind blowing and the yellow opening that swallowed Krono and Aalya, opened just a few feet before her. Feeling scared, yet curious, she stepped into the opening and what seemed an instant later was in a wooded area. She looked around her and did not recognize anything. Soon she found a large wall and followed it until she came to a gate. Upon entering the city, she was baffled at many of the creatures she saw. Some were a tad smaller than humans, with almond shaped eyes and pointy ears, others were large and very ugly looking. She was surprised that these things were very pleasant and spoke the same tongue as she did.

After many weeks finding out all she could about the new place she was in, and not knowing how she was going to get back home, Asmira decided to put her piousness and the bit of knowledge of weaponry she knew to use and began training as a paladin.

Bandynhatari

Class: Paladin
Race: Human

I am Bandynhatari Bokonallian of Rymek, and this is my story so far.

My memories of childhood are very vague and disconnected. I remember images of myself sitting on grass outside my parents' house, while my mother, staring at the ocean, sat on a chair in front of the door. My father was a fisherman on a large fishing boat, and was away for long times at a stretch. He was away much of the time, but when he was home, he was the best father I could have asked for.

I was a quiet child, as we were punished if we ever got in the way of the adults' work. But still, we had our ways of entertaining ourselves. All this changed one day, when I was swimming with some

friends in the water. I was eight years old. A shark was circling us, and it attacked me. My voice hoarsened from my screams, and has remained rough to this day. Fortunately for me, a small fishers' rowboat was heading out at that time. They dragged me on board, but my arm was bleeding profusely. They say I was slashed down to the bone. I fainted on board that boat, and didn't wake up for a long time. When I finally did, I saw myself in a strange place I had never been before. It was the Tabernacle of the Healing Hand. My arm was wrapped in bandages, and a pungent odor was rising from it. Even after the ten years that it has been since this happened, my left arm is still much weaker than my right.

Growing up in Rymek, we were told stories of the Goblin Hordes and the Heroes that fought them. As I came to be 18, most of my friends became fishermen and sailors themselves. But I remembered the stories of my childhood. I wanted to become a Hero as well. My parents gave me their blessing, and I left to Falcion to become a Hero. And here I am today, a Hero of Nexus.

At this stage in my life, I look at who I am, and what I could have been had I become a fisherman, and I'm happy. I'm proud to be part of the defenders of the Allied Races. Until the Hordes are defeated, my work will not be done. But we must remember that there is still life outside the War. Everlasting peace must be our goal.

Bragnash

Class: Paladin
Race: Orc

I was left at a home for orphans right after my birth, so I can’t say anything about my parents. I was schooled in the principles of being a good man early in my life. I had many teachers in the in the different fields, but the one I spent the most time with was a very old man, named Delgor. He was my teacher in the history of Altin.

I stayed up many late nights with him to read trough old scrolls and texts. He taught me about the deities, and their ethos. He read to me about old heroes, and about the great city of Nexus. He explained the Weave to me, and how to use it to aid other peoples. And this went on for many years, but the time didn’t seem so long, because I had so much fun every day I spend with Delgor.

One night, the last night I spent with him, was the last night before I turned 14, he sat next to my bed and said that this lesson would be the most important lesson I would ever learn. And that was the lesson of mercy. He spoke for many hours about it before he blew out the candle and told me to sleep.

When I woke up the next day, the day that was my 14th birthday, Delgor stood next to me with a large backpack, filled with my items. He told me to get dressed and after a quick breakfast we went outside and followed the shore to a sloop.

"What is this, my friend?", I asked.

This is the sloop to the training island of Falcion, he answered, and you are to board it, for I have learned you all I can, now it’s time for you to spread what you have learned, and discover things on your own. Many adventures lies ahead of you now, my son.

I nodded slowly, and with my eyes filled with tears I hugged Delgor for a long time before I boarded the sloop.

The rest is not history, so I can not write it down for you. Bragnash Shargul.

Dean

Class: Paladin
Race: Unknown

I was born in the village of Lethyr, and was the third born of Nar'Sek and Gailindin.. At the age of 20 a band of Goblin raiders. attacked Lethyr.

I lay unable to do anything and cowered in fear under some bushes as I watched my father and brothers, and all the men of Lethyr being slowly tortured by the goblins. At the same time I watched as MY mother, along with other woman of the village, was repeatedly raped by Goblins. After several hour of this I was filled with hatred and anger. Finding a sword lying near me I lashed out at one of the Goblins as it passed by. He proved too strong for me and his sword found its mark on me, slashing my face through to my neck When the attack was over there was not a living soul left in Lethyr. I lay under the bushes for days, left for dead. To this day I do not know why I was not torn apart like the others. I was found by Glister the Half-Giant several days later..

For 15 years I was raised by Glister, and lived amongst Half-Giants.. Over time I developed a love for the Half-Giant people, and took them as my family.. For many years I held much anger and hatred for Goblins and the hoard in general.. I tend to at times allow this hatred and anger to get the best of me, a flaw that to this day is hard for me to break out of.. I am still to this day not truly aware of my true blood line.

After awhile there came a Dark Elf named Darkblade. He spent some time with us in the village and seemed to have a great interest in me for some reason.. Then one day he approached me and told me that he would show me the way of the Paladin, when I questioned him he slapped me, knocking me to the floor. "That was your first lesson, never doubt me again." Thus began my training. For years he would tell me of Tilnar and the darkness, but he also told me that I would have to choose what God I would become a warrior for.. During my training I thought that I was meant to follow Tilnar. Why not? I was being trained by one of his Warriors, I was being taught about the dark side..

When my training was nearing its end Darkblade came to me and told me that Tilnar was calling him and he had to heed his call.. I was choked, and said I would go with him for I was a Warrior of Tilnar and I'd fight by his side.. Darkblade looked at me and I'll never forget his words, "I am going to a place you can not follow me to, it is time for you to choose your path.. Your training is done.. Now get out of my sight for I do not want to look on you again." He turned and walked away. I sat

there for days wondering what I had done, I was once again lost, alone, and I made my way to Falcion the City of Apprentices. I took up my practices and honed my skills.

When I felt I was skilled enough to join the heroes of Nexus I left Falcion. In my head I heard the sweetest of voices talking to me. "Dean look into your heart and what do you see." I staggered for the voice was powerful. Again it said "Dean look into your heart". I looked inside myself and all the pain came back to me. I fell to the ground and wept. I wept like a baby. I felt Hope filling my heart. Pandora had spoken to me. I was for the first time in many years free of hatred, and filled with Hope. It was at that moment I knew what Darkblade meant when he had told me that I would have to choose my path. Although I still have the Darkness of Tilnar in me, I carry Hope in my heart, Thus I have found my path and I walk it with pride.

But what I do understand is that I was meant to be a Paladin, and I hold the oath of that Noble brotherhood above all else in my life, and I will remain true to that oath until my death.. And I will perform my duties with Hope in my heart and Pandora by my side..

Drae

Class: Paladin
Race: Unknown

I was born in the village of Lethyr, and was the third born of Nar'Sek and Gailindin.. At the age of 20 a band of Goblin raiders. attacked Lethyr.

Aye, my name be Drae. It been requested I write me story down, so here it be. I not be the best o' writers, so please bear wit me.

I was born in Chalon, a large Dwarven community far to the west o' here. Like everywhere, we be havin hard times, though we managed to avoid detection from the Hoardes fer quite awhile. We lived underground, an we managed ta keep our entrance hidden. Behind our home, there was a small mountain valley, the only way in was through Chalon, and so the Hoardes never found it. There we grew enough crops, an raised enough animals ta feed us.

When I was but a young lad, another Clan joined ours. They said the Hoardes had discovered them, an they fled from their home. We took them inta Chalon. Their leader, Ch'roth, he was somethin ta behold, an old dwarf wit a beard hangin way low, braided in the fashion of one who leads. Now our own leader, De'len, he started ta get sick, and when he died, Ch'roth took over. I must say, that while De'len was a great leader, we prospered much more under Ch'roth. He would take out parties ta hunt, an come back with much needed supplies, an tales of slaughtering Goblin patrols. He made sure most of us stayed in Chalon though, said we were surrounded by enemies, and that it was not safe ta leave.

One day I was tending tha sheep when I heard a sound from above the likes I had never heard before. I looked up an saw a sight such as I thought I would never see, huge winged figures in the sky, fightin. They could only be Dragons, an I watched with awe as they fought. There was a lot of

colored ones, blues, greens, and one huge red. I knew from me teachin's that the colored ones was bad, and ones with scales like the metals we mined, were good. Now, I could see that the ones up there, the silver hides, the mercury hides, they was outnumbered and losing. Tha sky lit up as fire, lightning, all manner of fury erupted from the Dragons throats. Them metalic ones, they fought somethin fierce, an I cheered as a big blue one fell outtta the sky, an cried when the last of the mercury ones fell. Then one of the silver ones fell, but I could see twas not dead, it had a broken wing, an was trying ta slow it's fall, but twas in bad shape. A blue dragon dove ta finish it off, but I cheered as a big Gold Dragon attacked the Blue, and turned it ta nothin but pieces. Then the big Red one an the Big Gold one started fightin, and none of 'em up there paid much attention to that falling Silver.

I realized pretty quick that the Silver was headed straight taward me valley. I ran taward where it was fallin, and the earth flew up as it hit. Tha poor thing hit hard, and was breathin really raspy when I got there. I tried ta ask it what I could do ta help, an one of it's eyes opened a crack. I glanced up and could see there was now much more colored hides above than metal ones, though that big Gold an tha big Red were still goin' at it. When I looked back, I was amazed agin, that big silver dragon was changin in front o' me eyes, an shrunk right down an became a human! Though I gotta say, she looked in bad shape as a human too. Now me mother, a Priestess, had given me a gift before she died, said it could save me life one day, a little bottle, half full of this creme. So I took it out, an slathered it on the poor human in front o' me. It helped her some I think, some of the wounds closed up a little, but she was still in really bad shape, an passed out.

I looked up again, and could see that the big Gold was the only one of the metalic ones left in the air, an the 5 or six colored ones was gangin up on him. I figured I better get this one ta safety, less they come lookin ta make sure she was dead. So I took her up to a small cave on the side of the hill, an put her in. I took some branches an covered up the side of the opening, and watched from inside. I cried again when that beautiful Gold Dragon was killed, incinerated, from a big belch of flame from the mouth of the big red one. Then the colored ones began flyin low over the country, a couple swept down the valley, an stopped where the silver had fallen, with all the crushed trees an Dragon ichor on the ground, twas pretty obvious she had fell there.

Then I got the shock o me life, them Dragons, they flew around the valley a bit searchin, then they landed. An when they landed, they started ta shrink too, I figured they'd be turnin ta humans, same as the Silver, but no, they turned ta Dwarves! An that big Red one, he lands, an he turns ta a Dwarf, one I recognized well, Ch'roth! Our new leader, was really a Red Dragon! Them other Dwarves, I recognised them too, they was ones Ch'roth had brought with him, ones he always took out on his hunting parties. No wonder they had no trouble getting supplies.

I was enraged, I wanted to run and scream ta me people, ta fight against these imposters who was leadin me people ta who knows where. I wanted justice for me people, I always had a strong sense of justice, and it was flaring now somethin big. Then I felt a hand on me shoulder, the woman, or dragon, had awakened, and had saw what I saw. She spoke to me, coughing blood at the same time. "You are not safe with your people any longer, he will kill you for what you may have seen." I looked at her and immediately jumped ta help her sit down, as she had started to fall.

I did na have any idea where ta go, and told her so, and she looked at me agin, "Far to the east, there is a city that stands against the hoardes, there are some of your kind there, and I think you would fit in. Come nightfall, we will leave." I'll admit I did nae want ta be leavin', I wanted to confront Ch'roth, but I figured he had placed all his own people at the head of our guards, and pain me though it did, I agreed ta leave.

When nightfall came, we went down into a clearing, I worried somethin big about this, the woman, who called herself Chalice, she didn't look ta be in shape to travel nowhere. She tole me ta put me arms around her neck and ta hang on wit all I had, which I did, an den she changed back inta her true form, expanding beneath me. I hung on somethin fierce, now sitting on the back of a Dragon as I was, and we sprang up inta the air. The flight was shaky though, I could tell she was havin troubles, and I thought ta meself fer a moment we would nae clear the tops o' them mountains surrounding the valley, such trouble as she seemed ta be havin climbing up. But she did it, though when we got to the other side, I could tell she was losin' height, an she faltered a few times, I nearly fell off her back. She was doin hardly more than gliding, tryin to get some distance from tha valley. I could see campfires up ahead, an she seemed to be making for em, but I could tell she would nae reach them at the rate she was going. As I feared, she told me ta hang on, an we landed, or more like crashed, right inta the ground, mebbe a couple miles away from tha fires.

I was shook up, but not really hurt, I climbed down and went up by her head, her breathing was very erratic now, but that huge eye looked at me with compassion. She spoke, barely a whisper, "Go now, there is a group up ahead that can help you. May Aalynor guide your path." Her eye never closed, but I could see tha life leave it. I stood there for awhile and wept, and vowed justice for both her and my own brethren. Eventually, I made me way forward, and found a party of people at tha camp. They were from Nexus, and I told them me story, and that I needed ta get ta Nexus. They said they were on their way there as well, and offered ta let me come with em. One of em was a Cleric, I had but begun clerical training in me village, most of tha Priests had died of tha same disease which killed De'len, and lookin back on it, I wondered if twas really a coincidence. Tha human priest taught me of Lord Aalynor, and I knew me path lay that way, but not as a cleric. With my sense of justice and faith he told me, I would be better off seeking to train to be a Holy Warrior.

When we got back to Nexus, I learned of Falcion, a training island run by Metallic Dragons, wit a Dwarf Warrior in charge o'training. I knew twas where I had ta go then, and went there and applied ta Kragesh ta begin me trainin. Now, wit the rank of Holy Warrior finally bestowed on me, I seek ta join Aalynor's Church, for I think it has always been my path. I still carry my sense of justice, and my pledge to free my people from the grasp of Ch'roth the Red. But I know I have a long way to go before that day comes...

Darkblade

Class: Paladin
Race: Dark Elf

Darkblade returned to his apartment at Kalim's as the sun began once more to light the sky. He passed through the common room, weariness rippling through him. As he did, a small man, balding, in white robes approached him, calling out his name. Darkblade's combat senses instantly dismissed the man as a threat, seeing his feeble limbs, and not sensing the aura of magic around him. Irritation crossed Darkblade's face, and he turned to face him with a slight snarl.

"What do you want, scribe?"

"I am with the Archives, and I have been sent to gain your story. We had an appointment several hours ago."

Darkblade's mind began to think back, slowly bringing the memory of this appointment to the forefront through the heavy blanket of exhaustion. At that time, an archivist, as wormlike as this one, had approached him on his way to the Midnight Service at the Cathedral of Death. The only way to make the fool leave him alone was to agree to his stupid requests, or to slay him. Not wanting to be late at the service, and considering the man beneath the honor of a duel, he mumbled his agreement.....

"I keep my own schedule, and my own council. It is mine to say when and where I am, and not yours, scribe." he challenged.

"Indeed, Master Darkblade. I do not mean to scold, simply to have our interview."

Darkblade studied the archivist carefully, examining the pathetic human who would dare interrupt him. His fear was obvious, but still he stood before him... The worm earned a degree of respect in Darkblade's eyes, who then directed the scribe to a corner table, deep in the shadows.

"You wish my story, scribe, I shall give it to you. I was born, as are most of my people, in the dark undervillages below the surface of the world, deep within Tilnar's Vein. I was born into an intermediate noble house, one filled of ambition, and hate, as are most. I had a name then."

The scribe began to look up, and Darkblade dismissed the unasked question with a wave.

"My name no longer matters - it is gone. No interruptions, scribe. I return from killing historians, and may add one more to the count before I sleep this day."

Seeing the reaction he desired, the color draining from the scribe's face, Darkblade waved to Kalim to bring them drinks. Two flaming glasses were placed upon the table, filled with thick violet liquid. The scribe eyed the drink strangely, while Darkblade raised the flaming glass to his lips and drank.

"A delicacy of my people, though it is becoming rarer and rarer in Nexus. Do not extinguish the flame, lest the drink become poisonous. It will not burn you.... much."

"Nearly from birth was I trained. Cathechisms first, describing the evil and tyranny of the surface elves, and of their pathetic allies, such as yourself, human. I was shown the Dark Light of Tilnar, Lord of Darkness and Death. I was taught to hate, and I was taught to destroy. I chose to train in sharp swords, thinking to the tales of the greatest Darkelven heroes weilding magical blades,

blessed by Tilnar. I was 6 when given my first weapon, when I was sent off to train. At age 9 they began to integrate our training with that of the magi and priests, to make sure that we would protect them in combat. We were to obey their commands without question. I suffered many beatings to reinforce that lesson."

"I knew myself different from the others during this time. While I dwelled in Darkness, I would not strike down my enemies from behind during tests, though they did not extend a similar courtesy. I would not toady up to those in higher social positions in an attempt to gain favor. In fact, once, I was nearly expelled, as I killed a mage from a lower House who was giving me suicidal orders. I stood before a Council, proud, ready to die for what I had done, knowing it was the right thing. Fortunately, my family intervened, it's influence greater than that of the late mage. I was publically scarred for the act, but I was not killed. Cathechisms meant more to me, to the point that there was talking of removing me from the Warrior's Hall, and making me a priest. However, my family wanted a warrior, and so, a warrior I became. However, I kept in contact with people at the church. We were 500 pupils when I began my classes. 8 years later, when we had mastered our weapons, only 43 of us graduated. Through the years, some students would vanish as their Houses were destroyed, more were killed in training. The tests we had were somewhat lethal. It is our way of weeding out the weak."

"I returned to my home, with my scars and my swords. As a noble dark elf, I was now able to use the name of my House as my own. I was now an adult among my people, and a commander of the troops of my House. Noble sons, after all, are not so expendible as to treat them as common footsoldiers. However, as we skirmished and raided other houses, it wasn't long before conflicts came. I carried honor, and carried that honor as more important than my life itself, and far more important than the good of my House. The conflicts were minor at first, when the plan called on me to strike down an opposing noble, I would not ambush them, instead, I would call upon them for fair combat. The ego of dark elves allowed this to work, with little problem, however, my reputation grew as this continued. Opponents would attempt to flee, or raise an alarm when I challenged them. I would kill them anyway, having given them the chance to draw their weapons, and having orders to follow..."

"My House punished me, beatings mostly, administered by elder siblings. My mother even beat me once, with a darksilver mace, for I was not learning the lesson. The last punishment I received was a public scarring, by my mother, in front of all the assembled trash that swore allegiance to my house. To compound my dishonor, my family did not even administer the punishment. I was scarred by one of the darkelven footsoldiers under my command. I still feel the rage burning within me when I think of that - how my family allowed a commoner to inflict such a punishment on me. I was dishonored that day, in a way you could never understand, human. I cursed my family, and prayed to Tilnar. My wounds healed, magically, and no scars were formed. My family took it as an omen from Tilnar that I had repented."

"Then it came, the day. My family was ambushing to destroy a greater House. To absorb its assets and take its place. My family's faith that the last punishment had taught me my lesson, combined with my skill at single combat, I was to decapitate their forces, by killing all of the Noble Sons and Daughters who came out to lead their army. I snuck into the compound, waiting. I found a target, and lept down to engage them in battle. I melted from the shadows, standing close to my target,

and issued a formal challenge. The coward was a mage, and she shouted an alarm even as he teleported away. The battle was furious, and four of my siblings died that night. We were repelled. Our compound was attacked several times over the next weeks, each time we turned back the opposition, eager to strike at us, weakened as we were. The sixth attack was from the House that we had struck, trying to seek revenge upon us. We captured their eldest daughter, that same cowardly mage, and she was interrogated to learn why our attack failed. I was walking through the battlefield, looking for survivors that could be healed, or corpses that could be looted. The truth came to light. My eldest brother and eldest sister approached me in the carnage, to comfront me."

"I denied nothing. 'What I did was right in the eyes of Tilnar, and Tilnar will protect me.' I said. As the usual in darkelven society, that was the extent of my trial, as my eldest sister said 'Then He shall protect you in His realm.' As she did, she drew her darksilver rapier, and my brother began to chant. I stood, ready to accept my judgement, and my death, knowing that I died with honor. My sister waited for the spell to be cast, and seemed quite shocked that I simply stood proudly before them. The spell was cast, an iceblade, from what I saw next. A corpse rose to stand between my brother and I, taking the iceblade spell meant to kill me. My brother was an archmage, and had the spell aimed to pierce my brain and skull. The newly-raised zombie's head was pierced in 4 places before disintegrating completely, as a deadly blade formed within it's skull. My sister called an alarm, as she closed in with her blade. Though she had seen more battles than I, she followed a more standard darkelven tactic of attacking from advantage, while I was accustomed to a fair fight. Every time my brother attempted to intercede magically, another corpse would rise to stop him, until, finally, two corpses rose and pinned him to the ground. My sister was a skilled warrior, her attacks were quite effective in opening wounds. However, her defensive skills were lacking. My blade struck home, and as she fell, the zombies released my brother. Rather than face me, as I seemed to have a strange magic, he teleported himself away. I banadaged my sister's wounds, as the rest of the family came to join into the fray. Against their magical might and numbers, I was sure to die, except all the dead rose to hinder them. A voice in my mind, one I am very familiar with, bade me to leave, and so I did. As I did, my mother shouted out the ritual words of exile, disowning me from my House, stealing my name."

"No place for me in darkelven society, I left, to the surface. The goblins, having faced heavy losses trying to take the vein from us sent only expendible kobold forces into the area. They were nothing to me, not able to stop me, and too cowardly to attack in number. I made my way to Nexus, guided by an unseen hand. I was in the city less than a night before visiting the Cathedral of the Dead. As I did, a shadowy form bade me to follow him, up the stairs into the Vampire's Fang... And so I did. A demon there smiled as I entered a dark room, and drove his long claws into me. There was no blood, despite the claw stuck into my head, and I felt my memories and feelings joining together, showing me the path my life had followed.... I had become a Paladin of Tilnar. As the realization struck me, the demon pulled his claws from my mind... I began to collapse into unconsciousness, and the demon said only one word... 'Darkblade'..."

"So here I am, scribe. Devoted to Tilnar, and to myself. You asked, now you know. I will not repeat myself."

With that, Darkblade stood, turned on his heel, and left, as his cloak hid his face from the sunlight streaking into the room. The scribe sat, puzzled, and looked to his sheet of vellum, somehow full of

the Dark Paladin's tale, even though he spoke too fast to keep up with....

E'omer

Class: Paladin
Race: Ogre

"Well you can call me an accident." E'omer said to the Lord as they road on horseback to Trista's tavern. They galloped swiftly towards it with only the sound of wind breaking through their ears. The two armored figures dismounted and crept towards the tavern. Once inside the lord removed his helm and placed it on a stool. "Now that we are in the Lady of Wine's shrine please give me your name and a short overview of your life." said the Lord. I replied, "My name is E'omer and my last name has not been revealed to me yet. My story begins with my mother...so here it goes:

Well in the quiet mountains surrounding the northern part of the City of Heroes, Nexus, roamed my mother. She was an ogre, but the only features that made her resemble any other average sized race was her height. She was very short and out of shape. Don't get me wrong she wasn't fat she was just not muscular. To call on her for help would be a very bold yet ignorant move. She was not too reliable and to call on her meant you were quite desperate and would soon suffer, as great misfortune would fall upon you. My mother was well known throughout the village as village "whore". She had no husband, but slept with almost every man that would come there.

One day she realized she was pregnant and fled the village to a small cave very far away. By the time she arrived at the cave she was almost due to give birth. There in the cave were tiny bones of ogre children scattered about.

During the period before my birth, my mother collected tools that would be used for the procedure. The birth was done correctly and my mother set me down and covered me with a blanket. Free of a major load, my mother set out towards the village in hopes that I would die and she'd never be discovered, but little did she know of the miracle that would save my life."

"How did thou knoweth of the birth details?" interrupted the Lord. "That is further in my story." I replied and the Lord said, "Proceed."

"In my earliest memories I remember being accepted into a wandering group of missionaries who said that they had stumbled upon me on a return trip to Nexus. They said they were burying the remains of the other bodies and found me set on a rock crying. We stayed there for approximately two weeks and then marched onward towards Nexus.

Quite a few years later we were still wandering the trail. But now there were many other inhabitants including: trolls and orcs. Although there were few of these beasts in number, I was one of the biggest people there and had to take care of them. I received many scars from our trip, but it was worth it because we arrived safely at the city of Nexus.

Upon arriving I was safely taken to the cemetery where their god's church is located. There I learned of my mother's location. I immediately felt obliged to go there and the missionaries agreed with me.

We set out a few days later with great haste. We traveled many leagues a day and on the eighth day we arrived at the valley. Upon entering the village my mother knew exactly who I was surprisingly. She charged me with a short acute dagger. I grabbed her wrists and held her back. She was growling, but tears were gently trickling from her eyes. She kept chanting, "Go away!! Leave me alone!" I replied, "You left me alone for this long and now I want to know why." After a few long drawn out minutes of silence she agreed to tell me her story. We followed her to her house and she made dinner for us and we discussed the matters over dinner. She said, "I was not able to carry a child in this village without a husband. I could not afford to support you even now." Those were the main phrases that "mattered". She said, "You should leave before the chief sees you." She quickly pointed us to the door and said our goodbyes.

Suddenly a thunderstorm struck and huge tidal waves washed the mountain cracks. I was washed away with the sudden wave and stranded all alone elsewhere. I killed many animals for food as I wandered the trail aimlessly until an armored figure, you, showed up, clothed me, and escorted me here to the tavern."

"So that's it, eh?" said the Lord as I nodded. "Well that seems like a pretty impressive tale there. Here." The Lord hands me a purse full of gold. "Go stay at the inn. At dawn we shall discuss future placement on a training isle."

Korin

Class: Paladin
Race: Human

"Come on!" yelled Jim, "The bartenders starting another one of those Nexus Hero stories!"

A crowd soon fills the bar, drinks are bought, deals are made and then as the crowd quietens down, a tall, wiry, elven man enters upon the stage. Dressed in simple clothing, brown leggings a small cotton shirt, and holding a gleaming lute, The bard began his tale...

Twas the night of the 17th of Chrysalis, that the hero of this tale was brought about. Named Korin, no last name was known for his parents were dead and he lived with his foster family, who were a close freind of his real parents before they were killed. But that part comes later. He had many freinds and was rather popular among the people and had one friend in particular, named Keswick. Keswick was a half-elf and Korin human, but still they got along splendidly. Of course they would bicker back and forth occasionly but they were still friends to the end. They played together, dreamed about wealth together (as both families weren't very wealthy at all) and were the best of friends. Then came the day where news was brought, from a messenger of Nexus, news of the approaching goblin hordes. Korin knew from the look of the man he was a ranger and saw the look on Keswick's face too. Keswick had long awaited being able to do battle and, with the permission of

his parents, accompanied the ranger back to Nexus, leaving poor Korin without his best freind. But all was not lost for our friend you see. The very next day as Korin was out in the orchard picking apples for his family chores a light was seen in the sky, shining down next to him in a patch of grass. Korin leaped down from his perch in the tree and went over to investigate.

Upon reaching the spot to his utmost suprise, the light suddenly vanished. After a careful inspection he found a small piece of parchment, bearing shining golden letters. The note was a message from who knows where, but the message was this...

Dear Korin,

Twould be my greiat desire for you
To join your frend Keswick at the
training Island of Falcion
I belive your help would be of great
assistance.

Sincerely,
AA

As it goes Korin stayed with his family for another week, upon which, to his surprise, his friend Keswick had been sent home. Keswick, who seemed to favor a ranger's status, had been sent home in search of some master whose name he could not reveal. Upon hearing this and remebering the note, he ventured off to Falcion...

But alas, tis not the end of the lads story, no no!

Upon reaching Falcion after many weeks of rigorous training, Korin was allowed passage to Nexus, where he could help turn back the goblin hordes. After a short while he recived a letter from his home requesting he return immediatley. Korin rushed back only to find famine, plague, and death. His foster mother breathed out her last words giving him a special small amulet. After her death the amulet began to glow with a bright radiance, and a magical message was sung in his head.

Dear son,

Your mother and I, your real mother and I, have sent you this message as to inform you of something vital This amulet is the last thing you have of our memory and may only be played once, so listen and listen well. Twas we were slain be the hordes, they threw you into hiding and shipped you off to our friends, who must now have given this amulet to you. They were to raise you, and I hope they did well. Korin Evitain, you must continue the family legacy, and help those who may also be slain by the hordes.

After finishing the message, Korin started off back towards Nexus and Falcion, with a solemn vow to avenge his parents...

"Bravo! Bravo!" yelled the men
"That was the best yet!"

"Keep up the drinks!"

In the back, after paying his tab, a dark armored figure leaves the tavern, the bard takes his final vows and winks at the figure who bows and then and quick as he was seen, departs.

Mordakie

Class: Paladin
Race: Half-Elf

Hi, I'm Mordakie; you might want to get to know me better before I start writing. Lets see.. where to start ... why not the beginning ...

I never knew my father much, I don't want to anyway. My father left me, my Mother and my older sister Meg to pursue other opportunities. He left about 2 seasons after I was born, leaving my family to fend for ourselves on our small farm. We didn't care, we lived on, and we were happy with each other. As I grew older, my love for life grew as well. Even though we had very little, we cherished what we had.

My mother had deep green eyes, along with my sister, while I had gotten my blue eyes from my father. My eyes seem to be a constant reminder of my father, and that I am his child no matter what he did. My mother's hair was a golden color, tied up in a bun with only a few strands lose that dangled down the side of her head. I always thought my mother seemed young with her hair like this, even if she was much older than me. My sister had deep black hair; it was neatly combed and just passed her shoulders in length. I always thought she had beautiful hair, she would spend hours at a time just combing it. My sister always seemed to be happy while she combed her hair.

One day while I was tending the fields my sister ran up to me gleaming from happiness. As it turns out she had been asked to marry and she was overjoyed to have a husband! I was very happy and supportive of her, but my joy turned to sorrow when I learned that they would be traveling the world together. Then, sooner then I hoped, that day came. I smiled and waved wishing her luck, but inside I wanted her to stay.

Then it was just me and my mother, on a small farm. Yes, we were happy, but I missed my sister. It had been maybe a year past my sister leaving. A small group of travelers came by our small plot, they claimed that there we fleeing from the Goblins hordes. The were travel weary, and hungry. We gave them food and a night's rest, then they set out again fearing the goblins cometh. But no goblins came, and we were relieved.

But then, something terrible happened. My mother had become bedridden with a strange illness, one that robbed her of her youthful sprit. And there, in her bed with me by her side, she died.

Then came a seen that shall always be implanted in my mind, I was hoeing my tiny plot of land; it was quiet, too quiet. I looked up and a little distance away I saw the golden suns set, shining brilliantly. And there, standing solitary was my mother's freshly dug grave. It had a single flower

sitting on it, and that sight there was too much for me.

I dropped my hoe right there and headed for the house, packing some supplies I immediately left, not looking back. there was nothing left for me on our small farm, I had to get away. Maybe I could find Meg, I thought to myself as I walked down the path. I wandered for almost a full year, living off the land and takeing in all the sites I could until I ended up in Nexus.

And here I am today ... writing in you, maybe I'll go find my small farm one day. Just to see what has become of it. Maybe see if that old hoe is still there, or see my mother. Yes, I still hope to find my sister Meg someday, even if I don't like how I find her. Yes, my father might be out there somewhere too, and I have thought about looking for him too. Finally, yes I have that image of my mother's grave still in my mind. I use it as a message to my self:

"Life is short, make sure to enjoy it"

Nethra

Class: Paladin
Race: Half Elf

In darkness I was born. In darkness I spent my childhood. Mother was a pleasure-slave of a monster I took to be a daemon, named Teslek Varvool. She gave birth to dozens children before me. Each was taken from her at birth and trained as Teslek's elite officer corps. As my time drew near, however, unbeknownst to all, I was second of a twin birth. My twin was taken. They left her then, and alone, in the darkness, she gave birth to me, without a cry, or a whimper. She cast spells of silence and invisibility on me that I not be discovered.

Mother's elven beauty got her kidnapped and brought her a life of eternal suffering without even the grim hope of escape through death's doorway, for he had cursed her with eternal youth. She was fed nothing but blood, which might have been some part of the process that made her ageless. Mother was mad, and beyond mad long before I was born. Throughout my youth I knew only her and her tormenters. When her milk ran out, I too lived on blood as well as there was nothing else. Teslek is a shape-shifter. His favorite game was to appear before Mother as a handsome prince, swearing to free her. Then, in the midst of their coupling, he became a hideous monster, savoring her helpless terror. Often, during such times, unable to help, too sickened to watch, I sneaked out as he entered her cell, and explored his stronghold. In all those years, I never once saw a window, and there were just two doors. I found other slavegirls beyond counting though, from every race.

During our private moments, Mother often looked at me with demented glee. I never understood its meaning till I approached my full adult size and she confided in me that she wanted me to kill her. I knew nothing of right or wrong or law or crime, but she was the only person I knew. She was my whole world. I could not imagine doing what she asked. I wrestled with her horrible hope. Knowing what I did of her life, I could not refuse her. She lay down upon the floor before me, trembling, so slender and fragile, arms behind her back, cruelly belted to each-other across her tiny, corsetted waist. She smiled at me then, imploring me. I had no weapon. So I dropped my entire weight onto a

single knee to her throat. I shall never forget that gruesome sound, or the feel of her soft throat being crushed. The crazed light never left her eyes, even when her soul fled her body. I prayed that she find peace at last, though it be in Tilnar's realm. When next her cell was opened, I sprinted out, never glancing back, into a portal I knew of. I had no idea where it would take me. It brought me here, to this Nexus. I had no concept of the outside world. I had never seen the sun, or stars, the blue sky, or a tree. These wonders astounded me, and there were people. I learned of freedom and trust and friendship. I became a paladin hoping that some day I might bring justice to my father. I met Dragonslayer. From him I learned to smile, to laugh, what a song was, of kindness and of love. I fell hopelessly in love with him, and I believed that he loved me. We were engaged and I wore his ring with pride. But a day came when I was shocked to learn that his love was no longer mine, but belonged to another, and my heart was torn from my chest and burnt to cinders. It took me months to learn how to smile once more. I do not know if I can ever love, or trust again. I no longer trust even my own judgement. If I could be so wrong about him, how can I be certain of anything or anyone? But I still have hope, and freedom, and the glory of the sunset, and the midnight sky, and loyalty to My Lord Erisar whom I follow and serve as faithfully as I am able.

Until today, I believed Teslek to be a true daemon. That I myself was half-daemon. But My Lord Erisar has told me otherwise. Teslek though evil beyond my understanding is merely a mortal, and I am not half-daemon as I had always thought, just half-elf.

Nigel

Class: Paladin
Race: Human

Nigel was born into a family of warriors. His father had risen to the rank of Lt. Colonel in the Branston War. His oldest brothers and sisters already served in various local armies and mercenary groups. He as certain to follow in the family mold.

Nigel was not unlike most of his family, as he relished the pursuit of arms, fighting, tactics, and warfare. He spent countless hours of his early years studying old campaigns and practicing with various weapons.

From a very early age he had been inspired by a local friar, whom he talked to often about honor and duty. All warriors know the importance of honor and duty to King or Lord. This friar, however, was talking about honor for life and duty to one's Deity.

His discussions with the friar did not begin to show their impact on him until his first campaign. He was serving in the army of a local lord. He regiment had just captured a large farming community, but the forces of the lord could not hope to hold the gain.

The decision was made to burn the crops and farms, and to withdraw to a more strongly held position. Watching the faces of the farmers as their livelihood went up in flames, the words of the friar came back to him. These people were being deprived of their very hope for survival.

Nigel ordered his men to stop the burning. Nigel was soon in a heated debate with his commanding officer. The argument nearly turned bloody, as Nigel was well liked by the troops for his fighting skills and generous nature. Soldiers follow orders though, and Nigel had broken that rule.

The farms were saved, but Nigel was expelled from the army in shame. As his family could not house a shamed warrior, Nigel went to the friar and found refuge there.

He did all manner of work at the small abbey the friar ran. During this time the friar taught him the history and nature of the deities. He also completed the training of an acolyte, learning to heal, pray, and how to use the force of light to turn the undead.

When he had learned all the friar had to teach he decided to set out on his own to find out more about the one deity who intrigued him the most: Pandora the Mistress of Hope.

His travels took him far and wide, eventually ending in the city of Nexus. Once there he found the path his life would take from then on and became a Paladin. One of the first people he met was Rika, a mage and follower of Pandora. Rika was kind, teaching him spells and showing him around the city.

He soon advanced to the status of Warder defending the peoples of Nexus. During this time he made many friends and helped many less fortunate than himself. He helped close the gambling den and prepare others for a secret move against goblin HQ, by finding and giving away the necessary equipment for the mission.

Upon advancing to Holy Warrior he sought the attention of Pandora herself to pledge himself to her cause in an official fashion. The great lady of Hope smiled on Nigel and made him a follower.

Now Nigel continues his quest to make sure the people of Nexus do not lose hope in these times of troubles. Lending an ear, a shoulder, having a spare weapon or shield, and healing and blessing whenever needed.

Noranne

Class: Paladin
Race: Human

Gawain enters a bedroom with bucket and rag in hand, and spots an openned letter on his daughter's desk. Naturally curious he reads:

The Library of Nexus humbly requests
a detailed personal account of your
history and experiences before reaching
the City of Nexus proper. Please
contact a Master Scribe for further
details.

-Junior Scribe, Krenna

Gawain chuckles softly, "Oh, she'd never..."
Gawain considers the letter for a moment, then sits at the desk, putting pen to paper.

Until she was about eight, Nora lived on a small farm with myself and her mother. My name's Gawain, I'm her father if you hadn't guessed. We raised goats, chickens, and our land was productive enough to feed us all, livestock included. There was no shortage of work, but we were knit tight like a winter scarf, so we didn't pay it much mind.

One spring morning I heard Nora bustling about in her room, preparing to set to her chores, I rolled over to wake my wife and found her ill with fever. I did my best to keep her nourished and break her from the fever, but our little farmlet was two days' ride from the nearest healer, and she passed that afternoon despite my efforts. I can still remember it...the sun was bright and there was a slight breeze...

Excuse my digression, thereafter the house was sorrow-filled and we struggled to keep the farm afloat. With only two of us, it just couldn't be done and the loss of Nora's mother weighed on us heavily. I decided to sell the farm and move to the village. We had enough money from the sale to keep us clothed and fed until we reached the coastal village, I don't think it even had a name. Occasionally a merchant vessel would dock when weather or a shortage of supplies would force them to land. We waited about 9 days before a large fishing crew pulled in with a spring storm on their heels. I managed to book passage for us to Rymek.

When the ship put in, I settled with the captain and we stepped into a sea of people the likes of which I'd never seen, I can only imagine how my little girl felt as she stood among them. I held her hand in mine and sought out the local inn. The keeper proved a fine chap and was willing to let us work for room and board. I served as an assistant cook while Nora eventually found her place as a serving girl.

For six years we made our lives the High Seas Inn and Tavern, my little girl sprouted up quickly, at twelve she was taller than most of the other waitresses twice her age. She had her mother's angelic face too, which caused me some consternation as the patrons' eyes tended to linger more than I liked. I decided to contact the Drillmaster of Falcion, and perhaps secure her a spot amongst the trainees. After a week or so his response came and I rushed to tell Nora the good news.

After the day's work I took her aside.

"Nora, I want more for you than this. I don't want this tavern to be your life twenty years from now, saddled with debts and children."

She looked at me, and I was mildly surprised to find us eye to eye, "Daddy...," smiling she said, "I'm sure I'll meet someone, why there's this merchant Reginald, he said-"

"Noranne. Listen for a moment, you're fourteen now, your whole life is before you. There's much more to do and see than is in this tavern." I paused a moment, gathering my thoughts.

"I've written Kragesh, the Drillmaster of Falcion. He's agreed to take you as an apprentice, if you're willing to work hard."

I could see resistance building in her eyes. She started, "But Dad, I-"

"Nora, this is a tremendous opportunity for you. You're no stranger to hard work. Why not put that effort into something beneficial? Your mother and I knew you were meant for something special. She'd want you to at least try. You can always return, if it doesn't work out."

Perhaps she saw what it meant to me, or heard the urgency in my voice, whatever it was, she relented. She kissed me on the cheek and smiled.

"Alright Dad, I'll go. For you and momma...I may even have an idea for a profession."

I can still feel the dumb grin spreading over my face from that moment, I hugged her close. Somehow I knew her mother would be as proud of her as I was.

Pottsdam

Class: Paladin
Race: Unknown

I was born in the city of Ornovia, located miles west from Nexus. Ornovia was a prosperous city and the center of trade in the land. Unemployment was low and most citizens enjoyed their lives. I remember the city being extremely well-defended, with tall city walls, guard towers, and a huge army of knights and guards. The majority of Ornovia's population consisted of humans although a small fraction of dwarves and elves lived in this city.

My father was a warrior of the Chaos Knights, a travelling band of assassins and mercenaries. He was known as Ulrich Doomface, and was one of the highest ranking members of this clan. During the majority of my youth, Ulrich was away from home, questing in far away lands. He was sometimes away for years. Each time coming home from travelling and fighting, he would bring enough cash a peasant would earn in a life time. At times, my father would wish that he could settle down and live his remaining years with his family.

My mother, named Tanara, was wed to Ulrich at the age of 18. She gave birth to Gegel, my older brother, three years later. Five more years past and she gave birth to me. I was named Pottsdam, after a great orcish hero. Ulrich believed that Gegel was to lead the next generation of Chaos Knights and started to train him in the ways of combat. Years past, and my father had become extremely proud of Gegel. I felt he was neglecting me. While my brother was usually training with Ulrich, I was helping Tanara with household chores, and studying books about weapons, siege and war. I had an interest in these sort of things. War became reality when I reached the age of seven.

Ornovia was a peaceful city until hundreds of goblins settled in the Dreadwood Forest, near our magnificent city at that time.

This news struck our city with fear. New weapons and armor were forged and the knights of our land were preparing for battle. The Chaos Knights were called to assist in defending our city. The goblins had been preparing for war also. More of their kind from other lands joined the masses in Dreadwood.

They armed themselves with their axes, halberds and other crudely constructed weapons. Marching towards our city, their terrible warsongs could be heard throughout the land. The noble knights and guards of Ornovia stood in wait, blocking the way to the south gates of our city.

It was the largest battle our knights had ever faced. We had problems with the goblins before, but not this kind. The goblins had us outnumbered, but we had them outclassed. They had either been killed or fled back to Dreadwood. Fortunately, my father survived the battle and my family was overjoyed to see him back alive.

Many citizens of Ornovia travelled to other cities, including Nexus, where they would be safer. The goblins had been defeated, but many of them remained in Dreadwood. Many clerics and priests arrived at our city to heal those wounded and injured by the goblin battle. My uncle, who I had never heard of until then, was among them. He unpacked his possessions at our house to stay for a month. He would teach me some basic healing spells and chants, which I became very good at. I certainly impressed my parents, with my new-found ability. My uncle suggested that I should become recruited into the paladin's guild. I had heard of paladins from my father. They were group of warriors who valued honor, truth and justice. I pondered at the thought of me becoming one like them, and agreed to it. I was at the age of 10, and it was not until then I held my first sword.

I attended training classes with other students. 6 years later, I had mastered the use of most weapons and became an official member of the paladin's guild, but I was not a true knight yet. It was also the time for the second goblin battle, one which we were not prepared for. The goblins had snuck past the city walls, hooting and holloring, setting fire to any building they saw.

The city's guards charged into battle, protecting the citizens from the wicked creatures. Goblins were everywhere. My mother rushed to lock our house's doors and windows while I quickly scampered into our cellar to retrive my crossbow until I heard a thud, followed by my mother's scream. I panicked.

The goblins had broke into our home. Rushing out the cellar door, I found a trio of them standing before my mother's corpse. With feelings of hate, anger and rage, I grabbed a dagger sitting on a table, and charged at one of the goblins. It took a few moments for them to realize what was happening and I managed to thrust the dagger into one of the goblin's eyes. Blood trickled down it's face and it fell dead. I had realized the danger I had put myself into as the goblins cornered me, stroking their blood-stained axes. I closed my eyes, wishing for a quick and painless death, until I heard the hissing flight of steel-tipped arrows. I opened my eyes and discovered that 5 guardsmen wielding longbows standing before a few goblin corpses had saved me from either imprisonment or death.

While the battle was still beginning, one of the guards took me to the castle to be equipped for combat. I was outfitted with a full set of plate armor and given a sword. I was to follow the guards

around the city as the battle raged on and do exactly as I was told. I could not think about anything other than my mother's death, and charged at almost any goblin I saw. It was as if my actions were being controlled by my anger. Hours past and the the last goblin had been slain. About a fourth of the city was in ruins. I stood before the burnt remnants of my home and thought of my mother. I nearly burst into tears until a knight wearing battered armor approached me. I stood silent. He took off his helm and I instantly recognized him as the leader of the paladin's guild. He drew his sword and motioned for me to kneel. "You have been brave in battle, boy.", the leader said. He gently tapped me on the shoulder with his sword. That is the day I became a true knight and was one of the proudest days of my life.

I had kept the sword given to me by one of the guards, and named it Goblin's Bane, since I had heard of many great heroes naming their trusty weapons from my father. He had not returned from adventuring with his fellow clan members, yet, and my brother Gegel was with him. That night, I was dressed in simple robes and taken to the church of Aalynor, where I spent the night in prayer and received a blessing from the high priest. This was custom for all newly-made knights.

Two years past and my father and brother came back to our city, only to find that their home was burned down years ago and my mother slain. We lived in the castle then. Ulrich was extremely pleased to hear the news of me being knighted. I had learned that Gegel had joined the Chaos Knights, and it was now my turn to go on an outing and prove my worth of the clan, and so I did.

Ulrich and I left the castle and met some of his fellow clan members at the crossroads south of our city to assist in a mission that was given to the Chaos Knights by the king of another land. We were to scout a goblin camp and bring back information to this king. We spent weeks travelling, and on the way my father would tell me about Novind, and how he fell in the godswar. The magic-users of the Chaos Knights travelling with us would also teach me of Novind's magic, how to call upon his powers. Scouting the goblin territory was a simple yet dangerous task, although all members came back in one piece, except one who's thumb was cut off by one of the goblin commanders in combat.

We were paid handsomely by the king, in silver and gold. It was time now to return to Ornovia and build a new home for ourselves. When we arrived, I had heard of Novind's return to the Nexus. I was excited to hear this news, and set off to this city. My father tried to convince me to stay and join his clan, but I refused. Ornovia was a peaceful city once again, and I harbored an unusual urge for battle and adventure. I had known goblins were still active in the area around Nexus, so I hoped to aid in the fight against the horrible beasts.

When I had arrived at Nexus, I saw many new faces I did not recognize. I had thoughts about turning back to Ornovia, where I could live with my family...but two especially kind souls, Lothar the dark-elf thief and an acolyte named Ungaboo, helped me in my first few days in the Nexus. In time, I rose to the ranks of warder, then holy warrior, given to me by my respective guild. At this time, I had decided to become a follower of Novind, for I was closely tied to chaos and I wished to align myself with his ethos further. Successfully completing his follower's test, I became one of his. Now, I am a lord of honor, and the goblins have started to attack Nexus once again. I only hope I can provide some aid to the city when it's help is most needed.

Richard

Class: Paladin
Race: Human

My fathers name was Jyrin Almasy, he was a strong Fighter and a noble warrior. He was born in the frosty Crystal Mountains. He grew up there as a child with very few friends. The only person he knew was my mother Garnet Wildy. She was an elegant Cleric that knew no fear. They spent their childhood years training as a duo and eventually decided to go to Nexus. They eventually became a close couple and I was born.

They decided to call me Richard for that was my grandfathers name. My father taught me how to fight in melee combat. While my mother taught me most of the healing spells that I needed to know. At the age of 14 they bid me farewell at the Falcion sloop. With only a bit of armor, a shield, and my favorite knife I started a new life. With my fighting skills and spell casting skill I became a Paladin. I met one person that I could call a true friend, Kuja. He was a thief so I couldn't trust him as much as I could trust a goblin. Yet their was a close bond.

We were always getting into trouble. We would sneak into Doca's tavern late at night and pull a little scam. I would always order an Elvish Few Wine and spill it all over the counter. Kuja would crawl under the counter and pick his pocket and steal a few pints of ale. By the time Doc and I had finished cleaning the mess Kuja had snuck completely out of the store and would hide in the training pavilion. One day a mage named Vivi caught on to our scam. He notified a guard and since I had not stolen Kuja was arrested for a short time. Those were days that couldn't last for me. I was almost becoming a thief.

That was the end of our twisted little friendship. Our twisted little scam and gave me a great wake up call. I had realized how bad I was and I was almost a thief myself. I had dishonored the Almasy name. It was time that I train, and train hard. With the past behind me I grew in tier and eventually made it to Nexus.

The first thing I did when I step foot on my homeland was visit my mother and father. When I arrived my father and was kneeled down by a marble cross. I rushed over to him to great him. When I gave him a big hug and he didn't smile back I got very worried. "What is it father?"�� I asked. All he did was brush off the dust from the headpiece. He began to speak. I could see the hurt inside him a he mumbled the word. D....r....a....g...o....n...s.

He said that one word with such a hellish yet retained rage that it sent shivers down my back. He explained to me that he left to go farm like he did every day. When he returned he found one slain Dragon that led up their scorched little cottage. My mother got one of the hideous beasts but there must have been more to overpower her.

When he was done talking he gave me a few things for me to cherish for ever. His darkleather backpack, his Dragonslayer, and Black Pearl Bracers. My father said, "With these you can get our families honor back son. Take care and train hard. I'll be here farming till the end of time. Come

visit anytime, but don't come back unless you're carrying a dragon's skull."

I now quest to restore my mother's pride and the Almasy name by hunting down the one dragon that could have killed my mother.

Saphrel

Class: Paladin
Race: Half-Giant

Saphrel looks at the large piece of fine parchment with a satisfied look on his ebony face. The parchment, colored faint blue, has four distinct images painted on it. In the first image, a large group of man-children is gathered on some rocky ground against a background of majestic mountains. The boys wield sticks and spar with each other as part of training for battle. A towering man watches over his students as they refine their art of killing. One of the boys is significantly smaller and is colored much darker than the others. The second image is of the dark-skinned man, now fully grown, hiking up a snowy mountain. Large flakes of snow fall from the sky, where the shadowy visage of a wolf, teeth bared in preparation for battle, appears in the background like a guardian spirit. The third image is one of a wolf, mouth bloody, licking a knife voraciously. The knife has nothing on it; no meat, no blood, nothing. He cuts himself with each carnivorous lick and swallows his own blood hungrily. The large man kneels in the snow, near the preoccupied wolf, head bowed, as if in prayer. The final image is of the giant, dreadlocks swinging freely in the thick mountain wind, walking toward the horizon. In place of the twin suns, a pair of golden hearts sit at the edge of the horizon, shining brightly as the suns would. Underneath the four painted images, several lines of glyphs are written in imaculate penmanship, a subtitle in the Giant's primative written language.

Saphrel takes out a sharp knife and cuts the parchment into a large, rectangular piece. He places a carved wooden rod along the short edge, and nails the wood onto the parchment with small, brass nails. He rolls the parchment on the wooden rod, takes the rolled-up scroll, and walks out of his bearskin tent. As he walks, he places the parchment inside a piece of fine cloth. He stops at a large bearskin tent whose hide is heavily decorated with runes and pictures. He clears the snow near the entrance to the tent, and places his scroll by the entrance. He then walks back to his tent, straps a bag to his large back, and walks out. As he walks down a snowy path, he looks to the descending suns; the suns are in the shape of hearts. Above the falling suns, a beautiful face appears. The face seems to look into Saphrel's eyes from deep, azure eyes, smiling reassuringly.

Trillen

Class: Paladin
Race: Not Known

Greetings fellow adventurers! It's a pleasure to meet you all, and now, please allow me to introduce myself. My name is Trillen , an Orc from the west of Nexus. I come from a very well-respected family back in my village. Both my mother and father are highly honored brave warriors, and they each carry within them, a valorous and revered line of lineage. My grandparents, may their souls rest in peace, were also outstanding warriors with many commendations and medals. To be succinct, I come from a family that's made up of soldiers, and nothing but soldiers...except for my grand-mother from my father's side.

My grandfather, or my father's father, like I mentioned before, was a great warrior. At an earlier age, he was often wooed by fellow female orcs for his exceptional adeptness at the arts of battle and his unusually handsome appearance. However, my grandfather never seemed to like the idea of having any of these warrior comrades who treated battle as a pleasure as a soul-mate. Thus, he kindly refused their generous offer. Then one day, my grand-father met my soon-to-be grandfather. As a matter of fact, their acquaintance was truly coincidental and, fortunately for me, they found love at first sight. Anyway, it was one day many years ago. After a long and strenuous hunting trip, my grandfather was heading home. Suddenly, before he could respond, he was confronted and attacked by as many as a dozen or more Astral Messengers because they mistook him for someone else! My grandfather dodged, parried, circled, and bashed. He fought as hard as he could and eventually, due to his unmatchable skills and years of experience, he was able to kill them all. However, my grandfather himself was also fatally wounded. According to himself, which was told to me by my father, he was going to bleed to death if it weren't for my grandmother's arrival, who is a HalfOrc priest. Just so it happened, my grandmother was going to the city of Nexus to run some errands that day. Luckily for my grandfather, she found him just in time to heal and mend his wounds, and of course, to save him from the realm of Tilnar.

What happened afterward I couldn't say, but you should be able to figure it out. Anyway, as I was growing up, my parents were constantly away, either on hunting trips or to act as diplomats to different tribes making peace or other necessary businesses. Therefore, the task of bringing me up was almost entirely left to my HalfOrc grandmother, who loves me VERY MUCH by the way. Throughout my years of growing up, I soon learned many aspects of being a warrior due to my parents' adamant determination of making me into a fine warrior to continue to bring honor and respect to the family. Yet at the same time, I also learned numerous things about being a priest. As I grew emotionally closer and closer to my grandmother, I soon felt that working as a servant for the deities was my pr-echosen destiny. That, I shall and must follow.

On the day of my 10th birthday, my parents decided to enroll me into the training camp for young, future warriors of the tribe, and eventually, would have me joining the warrior guild. Oh, how I cried and fretted! I whined, pleaded, and weeped. But alas, to no avail. My parents seemed callous and were being recalcitrant on the matter. As despair overwhelmed me, my grand mother intervened and asked my parents for a compromise. My father, who is a very good son, had no choice but agreed to what my grandmother offered. My grandmother felt that although it was important for me to carry on the duty as a warrior for the family, it was equally important for me to be able to do what I had wanted -- to serve the deities and aid the needy, like a priest. Therefore, my grandmother felt that by enrolling me into the guild of the Paladins would suit me perfectly. For as a paladin, the skills of both a warrior and a priest are learned and used, rendering me a chance of both inheriting the family values and fulfilling my dream. Without further objections from my

parents, I soon became a paladin a few years later....

Violet

Class: Paladin
Race: Not Known

Recently a scribe approached me while I was cleaning my blade near the square of Nexus. He asked for my time and told me he wrote the histories of the heroes of Nexus and placed them in the library. Flattered that he consider me a hero of our fair city I was only too happy to tell him what has happened in my life up to now. I told him that as long as he didn't mind my cleaning my weapons as we talked I was more than willing to tell him my life events thus far. He didn't mind and sat down opening a tome and pulling out a quill and a small bottle of ink. Thus I began my story.....

I was born the child of two mighty warriors of Fenwick's army Grosevner and Carra Carilsn. They had taken a leave and in such time I was concieved and ultimately born. Not wanting to abandon the army they thought of what to do with me. Surely war and travels was not appropriate for a newborn child. Luck have it they knew a lovely elven couple that for some reason had not been able to bear children thus far. They approached the two and asked them if they would consider adopting me and raising me. They assured Tshir and Saphil Hedda that they would keep in touch, after all I was there child and they loved me dearly. The couple accepted and made no qualms that I would know who my parents were. A few months later after my mother had recovered they decided it was time to leave. A few days before their departure they both had the exact dream, though I think it varies a bit. They dreamed that I had grown up and had become a mighty warrior of faith for Lord Erisar. In this dream I defended villagers and other allies, as I stood before them the symbol or Erisar appeared behind me and smoke swirled about my body. They took this dream as a sign from Lord Erisar himself as they were both followers and before leaving they burned the symbol of Erisar upon my right shoulder so I would never forget who I am and what I was destined to become.

Time past and I grew into a healthy child, recieving letters from my parents as often as they could write. When I was little my adoptive parents would read them to me, and as I grew I soaked up the all the knowledge that I could, I was an eager student and not satisified with the school in the village. My adoptive parents being well off financially finally hired a tutor of great standing to teach me and I was content. When I was ten I received a sword from my parents and a mentor was hired to teach me proper fighting techniques. I am a quick learner and I excelled in my studies of mind, faith, and combat.

Life went on happily enough. When I was not buried in my studies I played with the other children of the village. One might think it was a bit weird being I was the only human child, but we never thought twice of it for I am small of frame and you would easily mistake me for an elf. I grew close to one fighter in paticular, his name was Alderis but about four years ago he left the village in search of a wife. I missed him dearly but focused on my studies, playing with my other friends.

When I turned seventeen my parents wrote saying I was old enough now to further my training and put it to good use. I was instructed to travel to the city of Nexus and inquire about the island of Falcion. I was given strict orders to seek out the Lady Nethra or the Lord Anterio for they were great paladins and my parents wanted to make sure I would be instructed throughly. I did as my parents instructed kissing my adoptive parents goodbye and I was on my way to Nexus.

Vragdish

Class: Paladin
Race: Orc

Vragdish sat alone in shrine of Erisar, enjoying one of the few quiet moments of his day. He had spent many hours here, reading, thinking, or simply avoiding the crowds of Town Square. A slight smile graced his lips as he realized just a few years ago moments such as this wouldn't be important to him. He pulled out the small Orcish totem he had gotten from his adopted father, Fignus the war-chief, so long ago. As he rubbed the rough skin of his thumb over the smooth ivory the memories of his past came flooding in... Five years earlier, far to the west of Nexus, Vragdish stood in a massive line of battle-hardened troops. For months, scrimmages between the Goblins and Orcish guards had become more and more frequent. He gripped the rusted halberd tightly as a rush of emotions came over him. Excitement, rage, anger, and although he would never admit to such, an equal amount of fear filled Vragdish. The battlefield the stood out before the Orcish guard. Still littered with the dead of previous battles, they stood as silent monuments to Orcish passion in battle and Goblin thirst for conquest. The warriors were collectively known as the Grel'tarn, or bloodied fists. They had been in battles sweeping up and down the continent against the horde. The Goblins war drummers began their rhythmic pounding as the Goblin line lurched forward. Warriors, soldiers, and grunts made up the main line of the Goblins, assorted forces stood behind them ready to strike down any who fled in fear. Deep in the ranks of the Orcish line a low howl began, it traveled as wildfire up and down the line, till it became a single unison noise. Primal in its nature, it would best described as Orcish passion personified into a form. As the sound reached its peak in pitch it acted as a signal to the warriors. The Orcish line began a slow march across the field. Gone were the mages and clerics from this battle, this was to be a battle of force versus force; the strongest would stand in the end. Both lines picked up speed from a slow pace to a march, finally to a full sprint as they closed in on each other. Two walls of warriors hammered into each other with the force of tidal waves. A young Goblin who was running on more excitement than knowledge of battle charged Vragdish with his short sword raised over his head. That was the last mistake the Goblin would ever make as Vragdish thrust out his halberd, and with a powerful blow pierced directly into his stomach. Horror came over the face of the Goblin as he stumbled to the ground and let out an attempt at a scream but came more as a wheeze. Chaos and confusion took over as for hours the Goblins and Orcs cut each other down. Until, at long last the Goblins wavered, a few turned and ran, which caused a few more and on till it was a full rout. The Orcs gave chase as the fleeing Goblins slammed into their line of secondary forces. A single Goblin mage who had stood in the secondary line attempted to stand strong against the four Orcs whom Vragdish was following. The mage unleashed an arc of lightning at the first Orc, ripping him to pieces. The remaining Orcs quickly overcame the mage, striking him to the ground. As the battle came to a

close Vragdish surveyed the field of battle. More bodies had been added to the growing memorial. The younger Orcs were picking useful armor and weapons from the dead and the veterans were barking out orders. The thought occurred to Vragdish this would surely not be the last battle to take place on this blood red field. Vragdish took a seat on the hill that had served as the Goblin center of command. He dropped his weapons to the ground in near exhaustion and drew in a deep breath. Glorious. That was the only thought that crossed his mind. He peered out at the array of colors the made up the setting sun. As he peered across the horizon, at the very end of his vision he could make out a swirl of black clouds moving toward the camp. Years later Vragdish would curse that day; his stupidity had left him naīve to what was coming. He did not realize that would be the last victory of his clan. The constant squabbling of the leadership had grown to a boiling point. He did nothing to stop what was coming. Soon after open in-fighting broke out, the young warriors challenged the veterans for control. The Goblins spies took notice and soon they attacked, without a leader that had the total backing of the clan, the camp was quickly overrun, few survived. The survivors took to the mountains, trekking through the blizzards and fighting off the creatures that dwelled there. Days turned to weeks, weeks to months, as they pressed on - attempting to locate the town of Nexus, far to the east. The Clan broke into parts and scattered, vowing to reform when possible. Constantly harried by the Goblins, they made slow progress, their numbers dwindling by the day. Till they had fallen from their prime of over seven hundred, to just thirteen remaining in the group Vragdish traveled with. Several said they should surrender to the Goblins, ask quarter, perhaps work as battleslaves. Vragdish objected to such, calling them cowards, saying they brought shame to the honorable name of the Grel'tarn. Deciding his group had forsaken the ways of the past Vragdish set out on his own. What felt like weeks stretched out as Vragdish stumbled forward. He lost all sense of direction in the snow-covered mountains. All he saw was a blanket of white; his infra-vision offered no help to find his way. Till with weary eyes he came upon Nexus. As he slowly walked through the west gate, soldiers hustling past him, the voice of his old war-chief Fignus came as a whisper that echoed in his mind "Your fate lies here my son, return the old ways to your people, and live with the honor of Erisar"

The resounding crack of an arc of lightning overhead in the evening sky brought Vragdish back to the present day. He stood slowly, a few pops of his back reminded him of a few particularly hard blows he had received earlier that morn. As he walked out he caught his reflection on a pane of glass, the many scars that covered his exposed skin, each a story of his time here in Nexus. A slight grin came across his face as he gripped the hilt of his orcish battleblade, and set out in search of battle.

Zexa

Class: Paladin
Race: Not Known

Jaernol strolled casually into Trista's Tavern and glanced around. His appointment wasn't for a while, but he wanted to get a table and drink a few ales. He grimmaced as he saw Zexa seated already. "Oh well," he thought, "Atleast I don't have the task of interviewing one of those scary barbarians or thieves"

"I have nice handwriting ... so can I just use your quill and do this for you?" the dark elf volunteered, grinning.

Jaernol's one vice was laziness, and even though there was something rather suspicious with Zexa's winning smile, he gave in. "Be my guest."

Zexa waited for the half-elf scribe to set up his items, then grabbed a quill and dipped it in an inkwell. She began to write frantically, not even pausing to look up. Jaernol couriously looked at her parchment and read aloud, "After I became sole ruler of the lands out west, I came to Nexus, seeking a challenge..." Jaernol arched his eyebrows at Zexa. "Excuse me, but I find this hard to believe... Forgive my incredulity, but you must admit, this is rather farfetched."

"Well, I just wanted to embellish the story a little, make it interesting", Zexa countered.

Jaernol sighed and took the quill from Zexa. "Perhaps you should just tell me what you want known, and I'll write your story?"

Zexa nodded ruefully and Jaernol began to write...

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"Zerilexa! Pay attention!" the stranger said, while backhanding the young dark-elf across her right cheek. "The one who gave birth to you has given you to me, so I repeat, who is your mistress?"

The child blinked as her mother walked away and then turned to her inquisitor. "Matron Gristalk Phaedros, of the House Phaedros, mistress, and those who are priestesses in her house."

"Good. You are now of the house of Phaedros, so I will change your name given to you before. Zexa is what you answer to now, drowling."

Zexa bowed her head and thought of the exchange. She was young, but she knew that she was sold for a very meager amount of gold. She didn't understand why, though.

"Zexa! Pay attention!" her trainer said, while bringing a whip hard across her side. "You are such a fool, did you not just see the exchange between H'trevin and Firyr? Firyr was disarmed by doing that exact same move!"

Zexa looked down at her bleeding side long enough for her sparring partner, a rather too eager male, to close in and slam the pommel of his shortsword into her jaw. As Zexa was sprawled across the floor of the training area, she could think of only one thing, "Why?"

"Zexa! Pay attention!", the priestess slammed her mithril rod into Zexa's stomach. "It is the Daemon Kyorl who watches Lord Tilnar's hells, not Paelina! You are such a fool! How do you expect to learn spells of faith when you know nothing of our Lord?" As many of the other female acolytes were snickering, Zexa was doubled over in pain, thinking, "Why?"
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Zexa walked down the long corridor to her matron's audience chamber. She lowered her head when she passed fully trained priestesses, showing her respect. Each one that passed did not bother to hide her contempt of the young drow. She entered the chamber, and reported in.

Matron Gristalk glanced at Zexa. "Your project has arrived, Jerisst. If you ask me, that whore you bought Zexa from got the better deal. Tell your acolyte what we have discussed and get her out of here."

Priestess Jerisst bowed respectfully to her matron and turned to Zexa. "When I bought you, it was in the expectation that you would be of use. So far you have proven to be ineffectual in combat, and rather stupid in scholastics. You are now warned. If you do not improve, you will live with the kobolds and shovel rothe manure like the rest of them. You think being a slave is bad now? At least we treat you with the respect accorded to each female drow. We will not hesitate to make you a common slave, however. Dismissed."

Zexa bowed again, and hurried out. Finally, she was begining to understand why.

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Jaernol paused and showed Zexa what he had written so far. "How is this?" he asked.

"Good so far," Zexa grinned. "Eh, hey, wait a minute. You make it sound like I am terrible at fighting and that I have some sort of learning disability. Can't you change that?"

"Well, I am going off of what you are telling me. Fine, I'll go back and change it later," Jaernol said.

The scribe had every intention of keeping his word, it's just that it would be so much extra work...

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Priestess Jerisst summoned Zexa. "It has been noted that there is marked improvement in your studies and training. You may have the two week sabbatical that all the other students are taking. Do not let this lull you into thinking you can stop trying. Now go away." She waved her hand dismissively at the young dark-elf. Zexa left with a stoic visage, but inwardly she was beaming. Matron Gristalk's placed confidence in Jerisst relied totally on how well Zexa did while attending the academy. Zexa thought this all along, but this conversation finally confirmed it as fact.

During her small vacation, Zexa walked along the streets, curious what everything looked like outside of her home. She had been stuck in her training for at least nine years, and she was sure that some things have changed since she last saw them. Strolling along, she came across a very familiar looking building, and her heart nearly stopped. It was her first home.

"House of Pleasure, " she read aloud. Zexa puzzled over this thought a minute, until understanding reached her. Zexa was rather sheltered, but she had been exposed enough to know what went on in that mansion. She took a deep breath, and walked in.

"Ah, mistress, how can I be of service to you?" a male in a grey uniform said as she entered. Zexa almost forgot that the clothes she wore were screaming 'Phaedros', a name that meant power and money.

"At the moment, I am merely looking. I shall call you when I see something that catches my eye."

"Yes, mistress. Also, please note, that if you have a fancy for something new, we have females that will be willing to accommodate you also."

Zexa struggled to hide a blush at that last comment, and waved the servant away, even though something indeed had caught her eye. It was her mother. She cautiously walked over to her mother, and waited to be noticed. It took her mother half a second to recognize her daughter, and maybe even less than that time to form a plan to use her. "Zerilexa! Now of the house of Phaedros! Come here and speak to me."

Her mother was standing near a very young female wearing a black collar around her neck. The resemblence between them was unmistakable. Zexa had a sister. The small drow peered at Zexa, as if sizing her up. Her gaze gave Zexa a chill down her spine.

"You should know that my name is Zexa. You gave me away, so the name you gave me is no longer the correct one. "

"Gave you away? No, I had no choice but to sell you, child. Otherwise ..." Zexa's mother remained silent for a few moments, and her face looked sad. Drow can be terrific actors if it suits their needs. "You are in a better place than if you were to stay here."

Her sister nodded almost imperceptably, then grasped at the collar around her neck, as if tryng to fight a great source of pain.

"What does Phaedros want with me?" Zexa asked, "There are other places to get slaves and such. Why me? They didn't have to waste time trying to train me as if I were actually born to them."

"You were not told, then?" She blinked. Perhaps she didn't have to try to guile Zexa anymore; it would be so much easier to blackmail her with the truth...

"I have spent countless hours wondering why they bother taking care of me. I know I am nothing in that family, yet..."

"Your sire is the eldest son of Matron Gristalk's mother. He is an archmage that was discovered to be plotting against his own sister. As a male, he could never be the head of the house. However, if Gristalk were to die, the struggle among her daughters for the new matron would be ample distraction for him to seize a sizable portion of the Phaedros wealth and magic. You, little one, were to be a preventative measure. They did not disclose to me the information on how...but I do know that it has to do with being his descendant." Zexa's mother leaned in closer, grinning. "Your worth to them would drop greatly if they were to discover something. I know for a fact that you are not his only daughter."

Zexa looked over at the younger drow. Dark elves weren't known for their fertility, but it was perfectly plausible for a female to give birth to two children within a five year span, even if the father is the same. Zexa narrowed her eyes slightly, preparing for the worst. If the Phaedros learned of this, it would most certainly mean bad news. She had to prevent this, and maybe her mother would keep the secret, for a price. "Well, then, perhaps they shouldn't discover it?" Zexa said, tentatively. Why was she going to play this game? It was obvious her mother knew about her troubles with training, so how did she have that information? Zexa was way too young for this, not even two decades old.

"Child, I could not agree with you more. I will make sure it is not known. That is, if you can aquire a few items for me..."

Zexa managed to steal the things her mother asked of her from her House. Everytime she would deliver the loot, her mother would demand more. It was odd how the magical devices were described perfectly, and how her mother knew exactly where it would be. The stresses of having to steal for her own mother and trying to not get caught betraying her own house were weighing heavily on Zexa.

During her short stays at the House of Pleasure, she got to watch her sister with her best friend. Though she never really talked to Kyona, she quickly grew fond of her sibling. Zexa admired her, in fact. As long as she could remember, Zexa spent her life feeling sorry for herself, and waiting to be told what to do. Kyona was the total opposite. Zexa lived in a wealthy house and was treated almost like nobility by the lesser servants. Kyona lived here with a collar around her neck, learning how to ignore pain.

How could she continue like that? Why did she seem content where she was? Zexa was baffled by her observations of Kyona. Everyday, she would watch her sister, letting her thoughts wash over her, pounding her mind, until finally...SNAP

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"Eh, Jaernol, I didn't go crazy. I don't like that word choice, can't you pick something else?", Zexa blurted.

Grumbling, the half-elf crossed out 'SNAP'. Then, with a malicious grin, he inked in "CRUNCH'.

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"Give me a drink, my mouth is dry," Zexa said.

"Yes, mistress. Water is ..." the grey uniformed servant began.

"No, not that, I want to try something else, " she interrupted. "I'll try wine, or firewater, or even a dwarven ale. Give me something with a kick."

The servant bowed as he left, returning shortly with Zexa's first glass of wine. She drank its contents in one breath and demanded another. As soon as the servant left, Zexa's unaccustomed

body started to feel the affects of alcohol. The world didn't begin to spin around her, but she did perceive everything was changing. She felt a great burden lifted from her shoulders, and she was able to think clearly for the first time ever.

Zexa understood now that her depression wasn't from her circumstances, but from herself. If she wanted to be happy, all she had to do was ... be happy. How could something so simple have escaped her all this time? She was searching for joy all this time, and never found it because she thought it had to be found. The irony wasn't lost on her, so another first happened; she giggled. But it wasn't a crazy person's giggle, because Zexa isn't crazy. Nope, certainly not crazy, that Zexa...

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"Jaernol, are you mocking me? I said I wasn't crazy, but you don't have to keep repeating it like that."

"Frankly, I was expecting you to say something along the lines of 'Oh, thank you, Jaernol, for trying to dispel those nasty rumors about my sanity...'"

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Zexa was never taught anything about the arts of stealth, so it was only a matter of time before the clumsy oaf got caught. Priestess Jerisst didn't have her killed like she would have done to anyone else. Instead, she was thrown in a dungeon cell. They obviously wanted to keep Zexa alive.

"Wow," Zexa called out in her now characteristic perma-giddy voice. "My cell is unlocked, who would believe the luck? This is the kind of thing that happens only in the bard's tales." She let out a really high pitched giggle.

A male drow who overheard Zexa talking to herself came to investigate. He looked up at the prisoner, thinking she was crazy, though we all know she is NOT crazy.

"Look, it's not locked, see?" Zexa pointed out.

The warden bent down to look into the crack between the door and the jamb, when Zexa's hand shot out and grabbed the male by his long hair. She slammed his head twice against the bars of her cell, dazing him. She reached into his leathers and pulled out the keyring and unlocked the door. "Told you it was unlocked," she quipped, while dragging his body into her former cell.

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"Okay, Jaernol, first off, what the heck is perma-giddy?" Zexa demanded.

"Well, how else would you describe your really high pitched goofy, yet lazy sounding voice? You know, if you'd just let me do my job and stop interrupting me, I can get this over with and I can go home."
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"Geez, it seems the more we continue, the more irate you get. It's quite obvious from reading this story too."

"Your story is taking too long, so of course I'm irate. Today is Dilur, isn't there some law against working on Dilur?"

"Oh, well, it's basically finished. I escape, wander around, get to Nexus, discover this wonderful tavern we are sitting in, and of course Trista. I live happily ever after. Put that somewhere in the story."

Jaernol nodded, hastily scribbled something down, then packed up his belongings and left.

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After her escape from her prison, it was obvious that staying with the Phaedros House was out of the question. Her mother could offer her nothing, nor could anyone else. She decided to leave forever and discover more about the realms and most of all, herself.

Zurox

Class: Paladin
Race: Human

The rain continued to splatter on the muddy grounds. The boy laid there, motionless, cold and hungry. He could not move a limb, for even the slightest effort to do so seemed to drain away his very lifeforce. The boy closed his eyes, and let images of the past flood his mind, distracting him from the pain and suffering that had shrouded his existence...

...Cabaria was a wonderful place.

Capital of the Great Weltlisch Empire, she was the largest city of her time. She held riches envied by the oldest of dragons, and dwarves marvelled at her mighty fortificat- ions. For centuries, she stood strong and proud, her power was unparalleled. It was said, perhaps only the fabled 'City of Brass' could rival her splendour.

In this great city lived a nobleman. He was a Duke, and married late did he. Only in his fifties did his wife, who was twenty years his junior, bear him a son. The child was named Zurox, meaning 'Prince of Winter', for it was on a splendid winter night he was born. The child brought instant joy to his parents, for the prime worry of the aging Duke was to die without an heir. In Cabarian traditions, to be heirless is a fate worse than the fires of the Nine Hells.

The child grew up to be a fine boy, taught in the best of everything, in the finest traditions of knighthood. The old Duke was a revered member of the Circle of Knights, and the son aspired to be like his father. The boy excelled in the study of warfare, and showed talents in the magical arts. The old Duke gleamed in pride, and waited in eager anticipation the day when the boy would
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become a man, and he could pass on his title.

Then came the Goblin Wars.

The threat of this dark force did not dawn on the proud Cabarians until the day the great city was besieged by an army of goblins, one hundred thousand strong - some said more. A long and bloody battle ensued, killing Cabarians by the hundreds and goblins by the thousands. It seemed at one time, Cabaria could actually hold, and the Great Weltlisch Empire would be safe! But Cabaria was doomed to fall, and with it the Empire. And it took more than goblins to bring about that destruction.

In the third year of the war, Emperor Andrew the Wise of Weltlischen passed away, all too suddenly, leaving behind him a state of chaos. Dark rumours abound of treachery within the palace, but no one could ascertain.

The palace was thrown into turmoil, as royals fought each other for the throne. The old Duke was one of the many unfortunates who fell to political manoeuvrings, and framed he was for treason. The trial was short and the sentence harsh: The Duke of Cabaria and his entire clan were to be executed.

Confronted with this inevitable fate, the old Duke made a desperate decision. Through the use of magical devices, he secretly contacted the most influential of Cabaria's Thieves' Guilds, and made a deal. For the price of his crown and sceptre, they would smuggle his only son and heir out of Cabaria and death's hand.

Tears rolled down the boy's cheeks as he recalled his father's parting words, when he was ushered unto the tiny wagon that night: "Take my son to the city of Nexus, many miles west of here. It is the one place that still stands strong against the goblins." Turning to the sobbing child, he said, "Take care, son. Do not return until the day you have mustered enough power and wealth to undo the wrongs done to our family. And never forget - your honour is your life."

With that, the tiny horsewagon swiftly departed the great city of Cabaria.

* * *

En-route to Nexus, the boy discovered the dark nature of humankind. One quiet night found him restless, and he awoke for a stroll through the woods. That was when he overheard one of his escorts say, "Hey! How many gold pieces do yer think he'll fetch?" Another replied, "Geez, I'll say no less than a hundred...maybe more, if the Galley- master's pleased." Amidst the hushed snickering that followed, young Zurox realised his escorts' betrayal.

They were going to sell him to some slave-trader for a hundred miserable gold pieces! Infuriated, the boy drew his dagger and slew the two men. For the first time in his life, the boy had shed blood onto the soils of the land.

Before dawn could reveal what he had done the night before, the boy fled. Due west he went, paranoid that the rest of his 'escorts' would catch up with him. The journey had taken its toll on

him, for when the boy eventually reached the city of Nexus, he was hardly distinguishable from a common beggar, and he received treatment as such...

Hungry, tired and bruised all over, the boy struggled to survive day after day, living from hand to mouth. Despite his hardships, he would never sell his dagger, for he was prepared that should one day the thieves arrive to enslave him, it would be his own hands that drove that dagger through his heart. It was this grim sense of honour that kept him alive, and it shall be his death, should the need be.

* * *

"Perhaps," the boy thought to himself as he laid in the rain, shivering with cold, "death is not such a frightful thing." Then he grimaced at the thought of leaving the world of mortal men, only to be banished to the Nine Hells. For he was dishonoured, and there was no place for one such as he in the gardens of the Gods. The boy felt true fear then, the fear of living in eternal torment, the fear of hopelessness.

Then a light shone from the skies, it was warm, pure of white. A soft, unseen hand carassed his hair. The light nursed his wounds, filled his hunger, soothed his heart, and gave him hope. Slowly, the boy got to his feet. A golden path appeared before him, and he walked on instinctively.

Step by step, he strided boldly towards the other end. When he finally reached it, the light, the hand and the path faded into nothingness. What stood before him was a huge temple built of massive stones, its gates wide open.

Through the gates he went, curious and cautious was he, his hand reached for the hilt of his pitiful dagger. It was a structure of the finest construction. Some sort of citadel, the boy concluded. All along the hallway he met no one, and the boy groped on in near darkness.

Suddenly he stopped, and listened intently. Was that singing? In this forsaken place? What a lovely song, he thought to himself. Serene it was, like the sylvan woods. The boy decided to follow the source of the singing.

The hallway came to a bend, and he walked on. At the end of the corridor was a pair of oaken doors, slightly ajar. Light shone on the boy's face as he tried to peer into the room beyond. He saw but one elderly man, deep was he in his prayers, soothing was his voice.

"Come in, my son," the priest spoke, "have no fear." The boy startled for a second, then boldly stepped into the prayer chamber.

"What be thy name, my good child?"

"I am Zurox. I come from Cabaria, east of here." The boy stated flatly, then pointed to the direction of the rising moon.

"And how old would you be, young Zurox?" The priest continued, without looking up.

"I was born twelve winters ago."

With a silent murmur, the priest concluded his prayers to the Gods and stood up. Turning around, he stared long and hard into the boy's dark eyes. Then with a gentle smile, he took the boy's hand into his own. "Follow me, child. Your sufferings are over. Henceforth, you shall devote your life to the glory of the Light. Remember this day, my son, for it is holy indeed."

Nodding slightly, the boy followed the priest back down the dark hallway. As slowly as he walked, the priest spoke, "And what about your aspirations, my young Zurox? What do you wish to achieve?"

The boy pondered, then looked up at the priest. "I want to be powerful, dear sir. Powerful enough to restore my family to nobility; to seek justice for all who are wronged."

"Well-spoken, my young Zurox."

The priest stopped in his tracks, turned to the boy beside him, and smiled. "And of that, I'm sure you'll be."

The boy smiled back.

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