Rangers

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

Aragon

Class: Ranger
Race: Human

Aragon entered this world in a realm of much prosperity and peace. He was the youngest in a family of five. His two older brothers, Karan and Maldai, were very outspoken and entered the army of the kingdom. Aragon, being many years younger than his brothers, spent most of his time hunting and exploring the forests around his home.

During certain holidays and festivals Aragon's brothers would return home with exotic items and tales from far off lands. Aragon always rejoiced in listening to his brothers' adventures and experiences, knowing that one day he too would join the ranks of the royal army. But alas, his brothers would always have to go back to their duties as soldiers, leaving Aragon to his lonely wanderings through the forests.

Over the years Aragon became quite knowledgeable of the woodland ways. He could track even the stealthiest of beasts and remain hidden and motionless for hours upon end knowing that the steeds he hunted were keenly alert to danger.

One day when Aragon was following a particularly swift and stealthy steed, he happened across a hidden valley that very unfamiliar to him. Bound by his curiousity, he entered and explored the valley. Aragon saw a plume of dark smoke coming from within the valley, and quickly ran towards its source.

What he discovered was a horrific sight. There was a smoldering cottage surrounded by scorched earth and strange blackened corpses were strewn about. Aragon cautiously entered the remains of the cottage. As he entered he saw a badly battered and wounded old man lay dying on the floor. The man looked into Aragon's eyes, and Aragon saw in his mind the struggle that occurred only a few short hours before. The old man then vainly spoke Go, run, return home, for the Goblin Hoards have come'. Those words were the last the dying old man would speak.

Aragon, terrified by the images of the battle in his mind, swiftly ran in the direction of his home.

When he neared home, he discovered that he was too late, his village lay in shambles. He ran to his house and discovered his parents slaughtered. Great sorrow and anger swept over Aragon. In another room he heard the sound of a struggle. Aragon bolted into the room to see his brothers,

Karan and Maldai, fighting a huge green beast he knew must be a goblin. The goblin slew Karan in one deadly blow and then chanted something in an ugly and crude language as fire engulfed his other brother Maldai. Aragon, frozen by fright hid amongst the shadows, while the goblin, content with his slaughter, left.

Aragon rushed over to Maldai who was mortally wounded and gasping for air. Maldai simply said ‘Avenge us brother’ then died. Aragon consumed by fear and disbelief, fled to the forest until the hordes had completed their plunder of his kingdom. But fear passed and revenge stirred in Aragon’s heart. Revenge he would have.

He followed the goblin horde across many lands hunting the unlucky goblin that strayed from his group, until one day Aragon followed the horde to a city by the name of Nexus, where he discovered others with the same hatred for the vile beasts. Aragon knew that he had found the place where he would exact his revenge upon the goblins.

Azguard

Class: Ranger
Race: Human

Azguard walks quickly along the beach trying to find his favourite thinking spot. He spies it up ahead and gracefully sprints the rest of the distance. Sitting on a log located near the splashing waves, he sets his wolf skin pack down and begins to rummage through it. With a satisfied grin, he pulls out a book titled "Azguard's Journal" and quickly flips to the first page and begins to reads the first entry...

Dear Azguard's Journal,

Happy Birthday Azguard,

I start this journal on the day of your 15th birthday in memory of that fateful day that I found you, in that basket on the beach outside my cabin. You have been the joy of my life, and I wish to retell your life up until this point, and hope that you will go on writing in this journal and many others until the end of your days. And thus begins the tale of Azguard, my little tracker. On Malkur, the twenty-ninth of the month of Blossoms, a beautiful day it was, I was strolling along the beach outside my cabin, trying to find some sandworts to cure a deer of a strange disease. I went out deeper into the water, hoping to find more, but instead, I found a broken and tattered basket lying crushed against a submerged stump. I approached it cautiously, but was delighted to hear the sounds of a crying baby. "Bless my pointed ears, it's a baby!" I said. You looked up at me and giggled, and started playing with my magic pendant as if it were a toy. I looked deep into your silver eyes and decided then and there that you were sent to me by Pandora, for it was my hope always to have a child to raise, and here you were. I took you under my wing, and raised you in my secluded cabin. You were a smart child, and very gifted with the animals. We would go out on walks when you were younger and they would come to you like I had never seen before. My only regret is that you never met any other humans, or elves for that matter. You knew only me and the

forest. Well, Happy birthday, and remember how special you are.

Day 1:

Wow, my first journal, I don't know how to express my excitement. It was only last year that Gregorwyn taught me to read and write. Now I have a journal to talk to. Today is the first day of spring, and it is time to start preparing the garden. We went on one of our usual walks through the woods, Gregorwyn has been teaching me all about the healing arts, and how to use my environment to help me survive. He says that soon I will be ready for him to teach me some magic.

...Azguard sighs and flips ahead a few pages...

Day 52:

It's the day of mid-summer today, the garden is growing even more fruitful than last year, and we have been good in our hunting and trapping. We found a mutilated dear in the woods today, Gregorwyn knelt beside, gripping his staff tightly and tried to cast a spell on the deer, "detraumatize" he called it. It didn't help, the dear was too far gone. More and more we have been finding this sort of thing deep in the woods, Gregorwyn fears that a great evil grows nearer, but he assures me that we are safe. He has begun to teach me how to heal as well. I used some mouldy bread to help a wounded rabbit, and even cast an invigorating spell on a bear who had fallen down from a tree. No more time now, Gregorwyn signals a storm is coming and we must go inside.

Day 53:

I have been too busy to write to you in a while, it is now end of summer and we prepare for fall. Our crops were good, and I have learned much this summer. Gregorwyn promises he will teach me more during the winter.

...Azguard chokes on a few tears and shuffles ahead a few pages...

Day 178:

It's my birthday again! After a long winter of learning and exploring, spring has come again and we begin anew! Many strange things occurred during the winter. We found mutilated animals corpses all over, a raft went by one day in the water. It was terrible, the people on the raft had many arrows stuck in them, and they were bleeding all over. Gregorwyn was able to save one of them, but he passed away late one night. We found strange tracks in the snow, and some nights, strange noises could be heard far off in the distance. I am glad that spring has come to wash away the dread from the winter. I am sixteen now and Gregorwyn has promised to teach me to track and scout like a true woodsman. He may even teach me more of his powerful magic.

Day 179:

I write to you in the most saddest of circumstances. It is the month of the Phoenix and our crops grow well, Gregorwyn sent me to scout down the river to practice. I scouted all day and made camp that night. The next day I set out again making great time when I came upon a section of the

forest that had been completely cut down. My jaw dropped and a tear rolled down my cheek. The entire forest had been cut down for as far as my human eyes could see. I could see grotesque creatures cutting down trees and carrying them away on horse-drawn carts. I quickly ran my way back to the cabin as fast as I could and reported to Gregorwyn what I saw. With great dismay, he set off himself that night and told me to look after the cabin while he was gone. It has been two days since he left and he has not returned.

...Azguard closes the book on his hand and wipes the tears from his eyes. This was always the most painful part of the journal, but he must keep his promise...

(inked in blood)
Day 182:

The most terrible events have transpired since I last wrote you. On the day that Gregorwyn arrived, having teleported himself back through the weave, we were attacked in the night. Gregorwyn foresaw this and had prepared defences all day, with the aid of some of our close animal friends. We built a barricade around the cabin, and set many traps in the woods. In a a large oak tree near the beach, I built a perch hidden up high in the foliage. Gregorwyn, using great magic beyond my comprehension, created a hole and a wooden tower atop our little cabin. Many of our animal friends stuck around, Chesko the bear, Elenwell and her pack of wolves, and Wooshow the great owl. The night came fast, we were having our supper when off in the distance a drum could be heard, and the scratchy noise of many people scrambling through dense bush became louder and louder. Wooshow the owl flew back and we could see in his eyes that we were severely outnumbered. I grabbed my long-bow and darted to my perch. Gregorwyn headed to his wooden tower and began to prepare spells and spell components. Elenwell and her pack set off to intercept the enemy and kill as many as they could. I sat in that tree for many hours, waiting for the inevitable. Just as I grew relaxed and began to drift off into sleep, a flaming arrow came crashing out of the bush and struck our cabin. 20 more came flying out, many hitting the earth, some hitting the barricade. The barricade was soon engulfed in flames, and deeper in the woods, a battering ram could be seen. Gregorwyn had reinforced the barricade with magic, it was very unlikely that they would break it. I spoke too soon it would seem, for out no where, a fire giant came strolling up, followed by 20 or so goblins. He gave one look to the cabin, then back to the barricade. He raised his foot and kicked a giant hole in the barricade. Gregorwyn grumbled and reached for his staff. I could see him begin to chant the words to a spell. The hair on my neck rose and the air was filled with electricity. From Gregorwyn's staff leapt a bolt of lightning, and then another striking the giant first in the chest and then the waist. He died quickly and tumbled over, filling the great hole it had created. I was relieved at first, for the goblins had no way around this massive corpse. I let out a sigh of relief and set an arrow to the string. I let arrow after arrow fly, striking down many goblins. The horde grew larger, I estimated there were about one hundred now. Gregorwyn was casting furious spells striking down goblin after goblin, sometimes two or three at once. The goblins were striking the barricade with their ram furiously, when suddenly from amidst their horde, came a goblin dressed in arcane robes. I quickly identified him as a goblin wizard. He levitated the body of the giant out of the hole, and the goblins began to flood in. Many were killed by our local traps, and Chesko the bear struck down at least 20 before she fled to the wild. Gregorwyn was busy waging a massive magic war with the goblin wizards. and I was busy trying to keep the goblins from coming up my tree. There were 10 arrows or so that had almost hit me and were now stuck in

the trunk behind me. The battle raged on for longer than I can remember, the sun came up, and I could see there was no shortage of enemies deeper in the woods. Gregorwyn was growing tired, and the goblins had almost breached the cabin. Many dead goblins littered the forest around our cabin, and I had run out of arrows an hour or so ago. I was fighting hand to hand, and some offensive magic, but I was no match for an entire horde of goblins. Then it happened. I can sill feel the pain and emotion of the whole thing. The sky grew dark, and Gregorwyn let out a sigh and reached for his spell book. I fell scared to the hard wood of my perch and began to tremble. My hair went white and I could no longer think. The great black dragon dove low and blasted our cabin with the fury of its breath. The cabin exploded into a million shards of wood and stone, fortunately, Gregorwyn had already teleported himself to my perch and was casting an emboldening spell on me. I felt the effects right away. I sprung to my feet and drew my blade. Gregorwyn shook his head and told me telepathically to run for my life, he would catch up soon, "Never forget what has happened here, and remember me always" he told me. I didn't have time to think, reacting instantly to his words I grabbed my pack and darted down the tree, heading into the woods in the opposite direction of the advancing attack. The cabin was surrounded but I managed to sneak my way past the scouts and lookouts at this end of the woods. I ran and ran for many days, and finally came upon a road that I had never seen before, and here I am now, travelling on this road north, where ever it may lead.

Day 183:

I have come upon a great city. From what I remember from Gregorwyn's teachings, this is Nexus, the city of all Races. I was apprehensive at first about entering, but I saw many people entering and leaving, and even some who looked almost as lost as me. I couldn't believe my eyes. It was nothing like Gregorwyn had ever told me. Buildings everywhere, and people, lots of people, some elves like Gregorwyn, some human like me, and some I didn't recognize. Big ones, small ones, I couldn't believe. I made my way to the town hall, and asked some people for help. I told them in brief what had happened to me, and it was not long before they started asking me questions about myself and my skills. A kind fellow calling himself a member of the rangers guild said I should look there for help. I sleep outside the city tonight, but tomorrow I will go to this ranger's guild and see what they can do to help me.

Day 184:

I am on a sloop now heading to this apprenticeship island. This is the only time today that I have found time to write down the day's events. First off I went to the rangers guild, they accepted me after a brief interview, and gave me some gear and set me off to train on this island. I am looking forward to my training, and after having heard what Nexus is up against, I am even more excited about helping them rid themselves of those evil goblins and everything else that plagues them, as it plagues me.

...Azguard looks down at his Ranger's Signet ring and smiles. He slowly closes the cover of his journal. Leaning back and pondering the mysteries of life, he decides to share this with the rest of the noble heroes of Nexus and decides to write out his history in a new book. Keeping to his promise to never forget his guardian and mentor, and hoping to one day set out in search of Gregorwyn, who has yet to contact him. Azguard sets the book gently back in its place in his pack,

and replaces the back on his back. He sets off at a slower pace back to town and to continue on with his life.

Caerdh

Class: Ranger
Race: Half Elf

[This, the topmost of a sheaf of parchments, is written in compact black script]

Twenty-third Dawn, One hundred and thirty-second of the Empire.

Attention: Principal Archivist, Library of Nexus

Respecting: Next of Kin Notification

Sir:

An excerpt transcribed from a recent patrol report is enclosed. Omissions are in accordance with official procedure.

Please file to facilitate next of kin notification.

Regards,

Fsad Uyth

Records Clerk
Northern Operations

[Beneath the signature is the sigil of the regular army of Nexus]

[In red ink, across the bottom of the page is written in a flowing hand:]

Caerdh -- Ranger. Open file.

Meneluin -- Unknown. Open file; cf. Caerdh.

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[A seal in its top right corner declares the second parchment "Cleared". Again written in black ink, the text is fraught with gaps. It reads:]

led the patrol to a clearing in the northern foothills of the range, roughly leagues to the north and leagues to the west of the City. Within the clearing stood a small hut, the remains of a burnt-out cottage, and a small cairn. Ruined hides were strewn about the hut amid splintered timbers.

The claimed to have no knowledge of the ruin or the piled stones.

Task completed, the company bedded down for the night. During the following morn's preparations for the return trek, a faint inscription was spied upon a stone before the cairn. This led to the discovery of a piece of tightly rolled animal hide within a chink in the monument. Upon the skin was writ a message in Elvish. The hand was angular and the pigment had begun to smear in places. By my instruction a transcript was made and the hide returned to the crevice. Said transcript is appended to this report. The journey south was begun thereafter.

Sightings during the return included

By my hand,

Ixen Vrelma

Patrol Leader,
Eleventh Survey
Northern Operations

SCRIBE'S NOTE: Not a true copy

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[The final pages of the document have been penned in the same rounded script as the previous one. They read:]

SCRIBE'S NOTE: A true copy, transcribed from the Elvish translation.

Meneluin,

To this I set my hand in order that, should reason or conscience at last hold sway over thee, thou wilt know of the horrors visited upon our kinfolk -- and thy hand in them. Mark well that which I now write hither and learnest, fully, the dire consequences of thy vainglorious follies in the South...

Thy departure didst open wounds which were not to mend. Surely twas plain as thou didst stand there, at the sward's edge, with thine arm aloft. Stood there, smugly beaming, whilst Mother's eyes filled as she trembled. Her firstborn and best-loved. Never again would they be fully dry nor she fully whole.

With the first snows there came for her a dire urgency. Nigh unbroken was her vigil there before the shrine as the days darkened. Slumped and motionless, would she beseech He by Whose Grace thou wert first delivered to spare thee once more. When she could be led away, she passed desperate hours hunched over the table before the hearth, weeping as she turned the cards and anxious to descry what she could of thee. When to weariness she would at last succumb, her slumber was fitful and troubled. And even those nights when she would wake, keening and shaken, naught would she speak of the swevens which haunted her. And so twas that she grew ever more gaunt and forlorn.

By the fifth turn of the moon after thou hadst cast thy duties aside, warm winds were descending from the heights. Ere long, the passes were open once more. Twas clear that it should be I to make the trek to Talmet for she would now take food only at Father's behest. And so twas that I set off southward with the best of the past season's pelts at my back.

Each night, my last waking thought was of what might befall her should my return be deemed overdue and I made what haste I might through the muddy highlands. When at last the trail fell before me and I came upon the trees of the village, scant time did I squander during the barter. Twas then to the gaming house, the inn, and the tavern, for she had bade me to return bearing naught if not word of thee. Thy pretensions were, for once, a boon as a serving woman recollected thy passage months previous. Ere nightfall, I was upon the trail once more.

The return journey was swift. No rain had fallen since the eve ere mine arrival in Talmet and the ascent was more readily trodden. I had met mine objectives in the village and would see home two days in advance of expectation. My spirits had begun to lift somewhat. And then, not a league distant from the cabin, I spied it. A familiar snare, left untended. Some time before, a fox had met his end within and now lay rotting, half-consumed. Further along was found the entangled carcass of a hare, maggot-ridden and foul. The blood coursed chill in my veins.

As I rushed toward the clearing I could see the chimney, blackened and bereft rising before a heap of charred timbers. I drew up at the limit of the wood as the breeze turned to meet me. That which it bore could not be mistaken. I glanced feverishly about, a roar rising in mine ears. And found him. He lay just without the threshold, his nightshirt tattered and stained. His head, severed... lay a pace beyond. He had been defiled by wolves -- and he was alone.

I delved until I was as dark as one of the Vein, but she was not to be found amidst the ruin. Along the leeward side, there lay tracks. Two sets, mayhap three, well shod and one heavily laden. Each led back to the curing shed, which yet stood. Most of the frames within had been hewn apart and removed. At the base of the linden there behind, a pyre had been raised. Within its cold embers lay blackened remains, a shackle of iron, and her stone.

Behold the ruination which thou hast brought upon our home. Thou that wouldst recast remembrance as prophecy! He that claimed boon was birthright! That put his selfish pursuits above all else! Grieve now for those that are forever lost to thee! To thee, indeed, to us! How dear the price, brother? He spoke of the folly of thine ambition, but thou didst hear him not. Her heart was rent by the prospect of thy leaving, but it mattered not. And, hence, naught now remains.

These are the tidings that I shall bear unto thee. I, bereft and a caird of thine own making... So shall I, as Caerdh, make myself known in the South. Twould behoove thee to pray that thy knowledge of what hath passed hither is gleaned from this missive rather than our next meeting.

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Cath

Class: Ranger
Race: Half-Elf

Cath awakens in a cold sweat, breathing heavily. Wiping his brow, Cath looked out towards the graying skies. Quickly he readied himself for the day, grabbing his pack before making his way down the branch to face the early morning. He headed through the Courtyard of Hope and up a set of long winding stairs to the peak on top of the rocky outcropping. Sitting down at the edge, overlooking the sea of tears, Cath marveled at the rising suns as they began to peak over the horizon, creating a glistening cascade of orange and red hues over the sparkling sea. Sighing slightly, Cath reached into his pack and withdrew a traveler's journal. "The same nightmare...over and over again." He mumbles to himself as he takes up his quill and starts to write down what he remembered from the dream...

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A hazy form of shadows fade in, then out to darkness again. The picture fades back in more clearly and the scene of a man and woman walk slowly along side a cart. A young child sits happily at the head of the cart as it makes its way down a cobble stone road. The man has a head of shaggy brown hair with bangs falling over his eyebrows, fair skin and of strong build, with deep blue eyes set in a firm but kindly face. The woman is a vision of beauty - long pointed ears tipped through her silky golden hair which tumbled down her sides, bouncing lightly with each step - her skin a creamy white, with forest green eyes. The boy has spiky light brown hair poking out in all directions, a round face with two slightly pointed ears, his eyes bright sky-blue. All seemed tranquil with this happy family - but alas, nothing is ever as tranquil as it seems.

As the cart draws near the dark alley, three men sprint from the shadows, dressed in dark hooded cloaks, their faces hidden by the shadows of their hoods. A look of surprise quickly turns to one of horror as the three men unsheath their weapons, muttering some kind of chant as they start to draw closer to the terrified family. The man looks to them with pleading eyes, pulling different trinkets from the cart offering it to the approaching men...but they did not stop. "Celia, run away!" The man yells to the elven women. The man's pleading stopped when the sound of a shrill scream disturbed the air. "Drayral, help!" Celia screams. Drayral turned to see another cultist donned in the same dark cloak but with a strange symbol sewn on the front. The figure held Celia by her hair, an ornamented dagger at her throat. With a crooked smile, the figure holding Celia spoke as Drayral listened, a growing expression of fear on his face. "Drayral is it?" the figure said teasingly, "Well Drayral, you are about to become part of a greater cause. Consider yourselves lucky!" Drayral's expression turns to one of rage as he yells at the figure restraining Celia. The figure looks over to one of the dark cloaked men and say's, "Brother Bariaeth, if you could?" The one called Bariaeth starts a different chant and faces Drayral. Thrusting his hand forward as if trying to push Drayral, Drayral's movements freeze as he was reaching for his sword. The dark figure turns to the other two and orders, "Brother Aeth, Brother Driodef, if you would be so kind to hold him in place." The two cloaked men, Aeth and Driodef were upon Drayral instantly, restraining his arms behind him. Driodef brought his face close to the Drayral's ear. Drayrol suddenly tries to force himself free but to no avail. The dark figure grins sinisterly, "Very good Brothers, hold him tight! Brother Ara'tainth, we need to work quickly." Bariaeth hissed. The one called Ara'tainth began chanting that ominous chant...Celia's eyes wide with fear, tears rolling down her cheeks as she looks into the

Drayral's eyes, her eyes seemed to say goodbye.

What happens next seems to last forever...each agonizing moment, each twisted sound, each morbid movement slowed down to a trickle. When the final word was uttered, Ara'tainth slid the dagger across the Celia's throat, blood instantly spraying like a dark mist from her as the ornamented dagger moved away from her neck. She falls forward in front of Drayral, twisting and gasping as she struggles to find sanctuary on the ground, leaving a trail of bright red blood. As Celia reaches Drayral's feet, Ara'tainth moved upon her again, turning her on her back. Smiling at Drayral, Ara'tainth started the chant again, a final gasp was heard through a moment of tensed silence as the ornamented dagger plunges deep into Celia's breast. Time seemed to return to normal then, Drayral stopped his continually lashing against his restrainers, his strength finally waning away. Ara'tainth plucks the bloody, ornamented dagger from the Celia's chest and walks slowly towards Drayral who was brought down to the street, chanting the same thing over and over again. Always chanting in the same drone tone. Ara'tainth moved forward, a smug smile on his face. Drayral's eyes moved to Celia's bloody body, tears rolling down his cheek. Ara'tainth steps over Drayral, raising the bloodstained dagger above his chest.

As the dagger fell everything seems to slow to a dull tempo again, as if time itself was agonizing the moment. The dagger drawing ever so near, Drayral turns his head to see the boy looking on in wide eyed terror, his eyes swelling with tears as a look of dread covers his face. Drayral screams out as the dagger finally plunges into its mark causing his voice to become nothing more then a raspy whisper as a trickle of blood trails down his cheek. Reality returns, the cloak figures mumble to one another and turn to leave when Aeth notices the boy still sitting in a state of disbelief on the cart.

The boy looks around in a form of panic as Aeth and Driodef stand in front of the cart while Bariaeth and Ara'tainth approach from behind. "Make sure he does not try to run, Brothers!" Ara'tainth snarls. He climbs up on the cart, Ara'tainth brandishing the crimson ornamented dagger, he smiles and says, "Come boy, join your family in the greater cause!" As Ara'tainth stands poised over the boy, lifting the dagger high in the air, an arrow that seemed to come from the shadows themselves fly straight through the Ara'tainth's throat. Bariaeth rushes to Aeth and Driodef's side, brandishing thier weapons again, looking around for the source of the arrow. A man in a dark green hooded robe prowls up over the side of the cart in one swift movement. He bent his head close to the boy's ear, then scooped him up in his arms, and leaps from the cart in one quick bound. Everything fades to a blur . . . then to blackness.

That dream has been haunting me over and over again. Ever since I could remember as a child. I was thinking it may have been a sign of something I may have to do later in my life - the cloaked figure alone is what drove me to follow in the footsteps of the rangers when I was of age to go under their guidance and leave the orphanage. I wanted to protect others - like that figure did so boldly in my dreams, I wanted to live that kind of life. The dream's effects have loosened its grasp over me, but I still think they play some kind of part in the dream that now follows it. It had just started but a few months ago. The images are all a blur and covered in darkness...but one vision is clear - the dark glowing eyes of a monstrous demon. I try to struggle but my body will not answer. Before I wake, the only thing I hear is the scream of a young girl...

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Cath looked up, his ears twitching as he heard footsteps running up behind him. He looked over to see a beautiful girl; a bright red bow holding her black hair in a ponytail ran towards him. "Sorry Cath, I slept just a little bit too long this morning." She said, gasping for breath. "There will always be another rising of the suns, don't worry." He told her, with a bright smile on his face, looking up as the suns crested over the Sea of Tears.

Dade

Class: Ranger
Race: Hobbit

Dade's life began in the hobbit town of Wineshire. He was an active and happy person until one day...

The town of Wineshire was under siege by the goblins. Dade's Grandfather and a few other brave men had an army that was dedicated to stop the goblins. They came back barely with their lives, some not even returning at all. Word rang out that Dade's beloved Grandfather was killed. Dade and his family did not want to believe, until they found his body impaled on a large stake in the middle of the town. Dade and his father were outraged at this, so they set out, with a few other men, to seek revenge. The lot of them were taken down quickly, but Dade and his father fought valiantly. Until the goblins fell back. They thought they had scared the goblins, but they were wrong. A very large goblin, bigger than the rest, came straight up to the two. Dade's father engaged in combat with this large goblin, knowing he had killed his father, Dade's grandfather, seeing how he was wearing his grandfathers trademark tunic. They fought for what seemed like an eternity, until the goblin made a lethal blow. Dade's father, Darian, slumped to the ground. Dade was over come by tears, and flew to his father's side. His father told him "Go back to-t...the town.. warn the others... free the tow *cough* town. Tell your mother good-bye..."He then became limp in Dade's arms. Dade ran back to the town, enraged at his Father's death. He warned as many as possible, and then got his Mother and brother, and began to flee the town. They were confronted by 3 goblins, the Large one, and two of his closest men. The 2 guards held Dade, back, forcing him to watch the horrific scenes. The large goblin grabbed his younger brother's throat and squeezed until his body became limp... He then grabbed Dade's mother, kissed her, which made Dade furious, then he cut her head off, and tossed it at Dade's feet. Dade broke free and killed the guards in a rage of fury, and sadness. He rushed at the large goblin, the leader, and they brawled, Dade cut off a few of the goblins fingers, and broke his nose, the goblin ran away, fearing for his life. Dade ran from his town, blinded by rage and fury. He wandered for a long time, sometimes confronted by some Assasins of the goblins, but he quickly killed them. He wandered until he reached the town of Falcion, where he trained. He ventured to Nexus, and adopted it as his new home where he now dwells, with a troubled brow...

Daneka

Class: Ranger
Race: Human

Daneka Branere walked through the woods to the north of the cottage where her parents lived. She had wanted to go with her father, but he still would not allow her to come on the long journey into the city. He claimed a girl of ten was too young to make the trip yet, but someday she would come along. Her father, Erid, was a trapper, and often made the trip into Nexus to sell his furs. It would take him three days to go there, and another three to get back, checking and resetting his traps on the way.

And so her mother, Marene, had sent her out berry picking to get her out of the house. Not that Daneka minded, she loved to walk in the woods. She had a bad habit of wandering farther from home than she was allowed, and her mother would scold her again and again. However, when she stayed inside she would just pout and flick pebbles about on the floor with her fingers until her mother gave in and pointed to the door. It was a beautiful day, so of course Daneka went further than she was supposed to, wondering if she would push it and try to hide when her mother came looking for her again. Oh how she hated when Daneka did that!

Daneka giggled to herself, and spent the day picking and eating berries, and wandering entirely further than even she had intended to go. Soon she realized it was getting dark, and she was not entirely sure of where she was. She started to worry a little, but picked the direction she thought was right and began to make her way. When she reached a the side of a cliff she had never seen before, she knew she was lost. It was almost dark.

Daneka was raised in the woods though, and did not panic. Instead, she did what her father had taught her, and tried to find a place to settle down for the night. Trying to find her way home in the dark would only get her more lost. In the morning she could find a way to the top of the cliff and probably see something familiar enough to get home. She'd done this once before. While her mother had been angry when she arrived home, her father had quietly held her mother back, calming her, and reminding her that Daneka had done the right thing.

She collected enough wood for a fire while she still had enough light. She was just getting it going when she heard rustling in the trees nearby. A man stepped forth into the firelight. He was oddly dressed, wearing bits and pieces of attire which didn't seem to match. An elven cloak, hunter's boots, and pants which were like someone from the city might wear. They were thin and not made for walking the forest. Still, whenever she had been with her father on an overnight trip, he would always share his fire with travelers. Daneka thought it would only be right to do the same. She smiled up at the stranger, "Hello, did you want to sit and warm yourself? Sorry, but all I have to offer to eat are berries."

The man walked up to the fire, smiling, his face was odd in the light, his skin was a bit pale, and Daneka wondered if he was sick. The man spoke, "I would if you do not mind. Are you alone out here?"

Daneka blushed a little, not wanting to admit she was lost, "Yes, I'm used to the woods, I'm just out for a trip for the night. Are you hungry?" she asked, offering the bucket of berries.

The man stood over her, "Oh yes, I am indeed, but not for berries." and as he grinned she could see a pair of pointed fangs, and her whole body screamed danger at her. She stumbled back, trying to move away from him, but he advanced on her. The fear overcame her, she grabbed a burning stick from the fire, holding it in front of her at the man. "WHAT ARE YOU?!?" she screamed. The man smiled, "What indeed, I think you know what I am. I am eternal! I am beyond life, and you.... you are what I need right now." He lunged at her as he finished speaking.

Daneka screamed again, thrusting the burning end of the branch into the man's face. It seemed to hurt him a little, and she ran, bolting to the cliff, trying to find somewhere to hide. She knew he was following her, but she ran because her life depended on it. The light from the fire was fading rapidly, but she spied an opening in the cliffs, and ran toward it. It was only a small opening, but she squeezed into it, trying to hide. She could hear the man coming, calling out, "Oh come back little one, it will only last a moment, and then you will feel no more pain." She tried to push farther in the tight opening, and as she did so, something gave way in the rocks. She fell into a cavern.

Unable to see, she blindly made her way inside. She then realized he... it... had heard the rocks fall, and was coming after her. How he got through that small opening she did not know, but she knew he was coming. Farther and farther into the cliff she went. There were tunnels going this way and that. She just kept going by feel, trying to keep moving away from the thing following her. Then she was confronted by her worst fear. She had arrived at a dead end. She huddled in a corner, behind a small outcropping, trying not to cry too loudly lest he would hear her. From time to time she heard the echoes of his footsteps coming closer, and she would hold her breath. He would then move in another direction. Now and again he would yell out, "It's only a matter of time! I will find you! And now I will make it painful!" When he yelled loudly, the sound would reverberate through the cavern. Twice, some rocks fell from the ceiling as the sounds echoed loudly through the caves.

Then he found her hiding spot. She was whimpering in the darkness, unable to help herself. He spoke, his voice cutting her like a knife, "So there you are, at last. He lifted his head and cried out, "Now you will suffer!" As he did so, the echoes again reverberated through the narrow tunnels, and rocks began to fall. A roar hit her ears as a tunnel collapsed, and the resulting vibrations resulted in more damage. The man turned, "No!" he roared, as the cavern was filled with the noise of collapsing rock.

Somehow, the portion of the cavern in which they were located survived the collapse. Daneka was left alone as the man disappeared, crying openly now in the corner. Oh why had she not listened to her mother? Then it returned, standing over her, "You bitch! It will take me a year to get out of here now! Simple death is no longer good enough for you! You will suffer for this! Oh how you will suffer!"

It reached down grabbing Daneka by the arms, lifting her from the floor. She tried to struggle and kick, but it was strong, oh so strong. One of it's hands grabbed her hair and yanked her head back. She screamed one last time as she felt it's fangs sink into her throat, then she mercifully fell unconscious.

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Inarin called the group forward, "I think I've picked up the trail again. It leads off to the northwest." Talynin nodded. Inarin was one of the best trackers available in Talmet. If anyone could track this demon, it was he. Talynin said, "Let's get going then. Best speed you can Inarin, we want to find this thing before nightfall." Talynin looked behind him at the rest of the group. Quite a fighting force the elders had assembled to fight this creature he thought. Still, it all depended on Inarin to find it first.

The Elves moved onward, and Talynin again mentally reviewed what he knew about the mission. Elves were dying, and for once it wasn't the Goblins responsible. What was taking his people was draining their blood, and the telltale marks on their throats gave away it's nature, a vampire.

Talynin spoke as the elves marched, "We may not find this thing before dusk. If night falls, we keep moving. The last attack it killed 12 of our people. We stop it from killing again, no matter what." Talynin grew silent again, thinking. Twelve elves, but not just that, ten were Elven Guards, some of the elite guards which patrol the area around Talmet, and two were Paladins who were joining them. And yet, Inarin had examined the area and proclaimed that there was only one enemy. Just one.

Talynin stopped in mid-thought as Inarin reappeared and returned to the group. Inarin said, "Just ahead, looks like a hole in the ground, but it leads somewhere." Talynin nodded, looking at the sun, already half set. Talynin said, "Alright then, ready yourselves quickly!"

Tirion began casting a few spells, blessing himself and Olysia, the Mage. Then aiding Olysia and Daelin in protecting the group against poison and disease. With no further time, Inarin led them to the entrance.

Inarin disappeared inside while the others waited. Presently a voice spoke in the minds of the Elves as Inarin reported, "Hmmm, it's more than one we are dealing with. There is an empty cavern at first, but there is a hidden passage beyond. I'm inside, looking at 6 sleeping vampires."

Talynin said softly, "OK, let's get this done. Get your stakes and hammers ready, and lets take them out as they sleep. Dusk is almost upon us." With that the group headed inside. Each took a position over a sleeping vampire, positioning their stakes. At a signal from Talynin, they struck simultaneously, and five vampires died. Olysia had positioned his stake a little badly though, and only grazed the heart. The vampire screamed and jumped to it's feet, knocking Olysia to the ground. The others drew their swords and the vampire was quickly defeated. Talynin looked around, this was a little too easy. "Inarin, is there anything beyond this?"

Inarin moved about the underground cave, stopping behind a small stone. "Here." he said. Talynin came over to look at a hole in the ground, hidden behind the stone. "Go, Inarin. Find out what's in there."

Inarin nodded and disappeared into the hole. Presently he reported back, "Ah! Got another one in here. A bit odd though, it's strapped down. Also, there are signs another one was sleeping here, but it's gone. Let me see if I can figure out where it went." There was silence for a moment, then Inarin

spoke again in their minds, "A small tunnel in the ceiling, leading up."

Talynin swore, and as he turned to the others to decide what to do, the Vampire dropped among them from above. It landed behind Olysia, ripping into his back. "You've killed my children!" it roared, "For that you will pay!"

The Elven battle group sprang into action, drawing their blades and approaching the beast as it casually flung the body of Olysia against a wall. Tirion began to summon the magics of Aalynor to turn the vampire as the rest fought it. The thing was strong! It tore into the Elves, ignoring the damage the Elves were inflicting upon it as if it were nothing.

When Tirion finished his recitation the vampire only hissed and charged at him, taking advantage of Tirion's weakness to tear his windpipe from his throat. Tirion dropped. Daelin approached him, but Tirion was beyond aid. Talynin struck a vicious blow to the beast, and it turned to face him. Daelin took to healing the elves as they fought, but the beast was so fast! A strike took down Talean. Talynin was injured, the beast about to finish him. Suddenly Inarin appeared as if from nowhere behind the beast, striking a strong blow and distracting the beast long enough for Daelin to heal Talynin, even as Talynin circled the beast to draw it away from Inarin again, keeping it confused.

Daelin was expending his magic quickly. While the beast was obviously feeling the damage now, once Daelin's healing magics were exhausted the battle would almost certainly be lost. The wounds on the vampire were regenerating as it fought, almost as quickly as the Elves were damaging it. Daelin looked again to Tirion, laying dead on the ground, then back to the others. He had made his decision. When he could no longer cast renewal, and finally, exhausted cast the last detraumatize he could, he began reciting a prayer to Tilnar, focusing his energies. Talynin realized what he was doing, and yelled for him to stop. However, he could not take his attention from the beast before him. Instead, he parried the claws of the vampire and whirled, focusing all his strength into the attack. Talynin's sword bit true and deep, but still the beast laughed! Still, it did not fall!

As the beast moved to strike Talynin, Daelin finished his recitation. A bolt of white energy, pure as sunlight, shot from his Holy Symbol and struck the vampire. It screamed, "NO! I am ETERNAL! I cannot die!" The light emcompassed the vampire, burning it. Finally, the creature was consumed by the holy fire, falling to ashes on the ground.

Daelin collapsed, completely exhausted. Talynin took a look around. There was nothing to be done for Talean or Tirion. The others were taking out cremes and potions, and healing their wounds. By the Gods, what manner of Vampire was this? He had fought many in his time, but none with close to the strength of this one.

Talynin walked over to Daelin, "That was foolish, you could have gotten yourself killed." Daelin looked up weakly and nodded, "I had nothing else left, I had to try." Talynin nodded, clasping Daelin on the shoulder, "And you did well. Rest up now. Inarin, show me where this last one is and we will finish this and go home."

Inarin led Talynin into the smaller cavern. Talynin readied his stake and hammer. The last vampire lay on a stone slab, sleeping. A young human girl. She couldn't be more than fifteen or sixteen he

thought. Her hair was long, wild and dirty. Odd that she was strapped down though. Talynin readied the stake over the vampires heart, and swung down with his hammer. He suddenly stopped his swing, the hammer just shy of striking the stake.

Inarin watched, sword at the ready, confused as to why Talynin had stopped. Talynin said, "The stake moved slightly. She's breathing, I think she's alive." Inarin looked at the girl, her skin was very pale, like a vampire, "She has bite marks on her neck, she's definately been bitten."

Talynin said, "Go get some Holy Water. Inarin left and came back with Daelin. Daelin took some Holy Water and poured it slowly on the girls hand. "Nothing happened, it didn't burn. She's alive, not undead." Talynin nodded, "Lets get her back then, who knows how long she's been here."

As they untied the girl, her eyes popped open, and she screamed. They tried to restrain her, but she was clawing, kicking, biting at them. The fury of the girl was incredible, they were unable to restrain her without harming her. Finally Inarin had to strike her with the flat of his blade, rendering her unconscious. Talynin sighed, "OK, she's human, best to take her into Nexus and see if they can do anything for her there. At least they may be able to find her family."

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Andrion sailed to Falcion. He looked back at the girl, sedated and tied up in the rear. A guard sat on either side of her. It was so sad they had to do that, but every time she was fully awake, she tried to escape. She was a danger to herself, it was for her own protection.

The transport docked in Falcion. They proceeded up to the city, and straight to the Hand there. The Master Healer came out to meet Andrion, shaking his hand. Nathen spoke, "So, this is her?"

Andrion nodded, "We just don't know what to do. You've had a lot of experience, and we've tried everything we can think of. As near as we can piece together, she was used by this vampire for years to feed on. It's driven her completely insane I'm afraid. She goes crazy when she's fully awake. She got away several times. Every time she took off straight for the woods, and we've had to call in the Rangers to find her each time.

Nathen nodded, looking the girl over. He ran his fingers over the marks on her neck, frowning. "These neck wounds are still open sores, why didn't you heal them?" Andrion sighed and sat down, "We did. Mend wounds won't affect them, detraum either. Renewal helps a little, and heal will close them up completely, still leaving the scars though. However, the next day they are always open again. It doesn't seem to harm her, but it's an oddity. This vampire they found her with was very powerful. The Elves say it could be one that's been in that area for hundreds of years, popping up from time to time, and going into hiding when it is hunted too much. Of course, there's no way to know. It's possible that a vampire that old and powerful could have abilities or methods that younger ones would not have."

Nathen was looking her over, "Probably fifteen or sixteen years old. No luck finding her family?" Andrion shook his head, "None at all. No one knows who she is or where she is from." Nathen stood, "Well, there is something we can try. I've had the opportunity to work on healing research down here, with the aid of the metallics in some cases. There may be a way to heal her troubled

mind. It's not guaranteed, but it is worth a try." Nathen called for some acolytes to take the girl away. Nathan spoke to Andrion, "It may be some time. I will call for you when I have some news."

Two weeks later, Andrion returned to Falcion to meet with Nathen. Nathen again shook his hand and offered him a seat. "It was a difficult process, but I think we have succeeded. I need to cast one final spell, and hopefully we will have some results. There was a lot of trauma, more than I would have thought possible for her to bear, but this final spell will show what the final result will be. Come, let us finish."

Nathen led Andrion into the inner halls, to a small room where the girl waited, lying asleep on a table. Nathen took out several bottles, and laid them next to the girl on the table. He opened one and lifted the girls head. She awoke, wide eyed, and Nathen encouraged her to accept the contents of the bottle. She drank it fully. Nathen then stepped back and began casting his spell. It was a powerful spell, Andrion could tell that. It took Nathen nearly a half an hour to complete, and at the end he sat down wearily next to the girl. After some time, she shuddered and her eyes opened.

She looked at everyone present, and sat up. "Where am I?" The girl began crying, "Where's my mommy?" Nathen looked at Andrion, and the two tried to comfort the girl. She balked at first, and then finally embraced Nathen and wept. When she finally calmed down, and looked up, Nathen asked, "What is your name child?"

She glanced around the room, "Daneka. Daneka Branere. Who are you?" Nathen smiled, "I am Nathen, a healer here in Falcion. This is Andrion, a healer from Nexus." At the word Nexus, Daneka's face lit up. "Nexus? Oh, my father goes to Nexus! Can you find him please? His name is Erid, he comes into Nexus to trade his furs."

Nathen looked at Andrion who shrugged helplessly and spoke, "I do not know of him, but we will try to find him. Where does he live?"

Daneka wiped her tears, "We live in the Eldane, daddy took three days to walk there, but I don't know the way." Nathan frowned, "So far out? How do you avoid the goblins?" Daneka looked confused, "Goblins? Why would they bother us? Daddy comes to Nexus a lot, I'm sure you can find him."

Nathen frowned again, "This is very odd," he thought. Then he asked, "Daneka, do you know what year it is?"

"Oh yes!" Daneka said brightly, "458 War's End. My mother taught me all about things like that." Nathen stopped still, and Andrion gasped. Andrion said, "But Daneka, it's..." but stopped as Nathen held up his hand. Nathen said, "Very good, what's the last thing you remember?" Daneka was about to speak, then frowned, "I was berry picking, but got lost. I built a fire, and I think someone came up to join me. But it gets real hazy then, was it you who joined me?" Nathen shook his head, "No, neither of us. If you will excuse us for a moment Daneka, I need to speak to Andrion, all right?"

Andrion and Nathen left, and Andrion proclaimed, "458 War's End?!? Not possible! That's over a thousand years ago! She's a young girl!" Nathen said, "Young, and old. I understand now why the healing took so long and was so difficult, and I think this vampire was older than even the Elves

believe. She's over 1200 years old. Yet listen to her, she speaks as a child younger than she even appears."

Nathen sighed, "We have much more work to do Andrion. We still cannot heal her wounds on her neck, always they open up again. Imagine this poor child, fed on by this vampire for over a thousand years! Somehow it kept her alive, and kept her young. Physically she's probably aged no more than five or six years. Mentally, she is a girl of nine or ten again. We had to suppress her memories. They will return to a point, but slowly, more manageably. We will aid her to accept these memories as they come, and teach her slowly of what has happened to her. Her family has been dead for a long time. We can't just blurt that out to her, it could drive her back over the edge. Let us work with her, healing her now will be a long process."

Andrion nodded, "I still find it so hard to believe. I'll call off the search for her family. You know, when she was young, before all this... If I remember my history, that was after the war of the races, when they were just rejoining again. It was a much more peaceful time. She has a lot of catching up to do. She's living in a different world now."

Nathen nodded, "Remember, she is more mature physically than mentally. The mind of a child has an enormous learning capacity. It has the ability to adapt. I have hopes that she will recover from this. I will keep you informed."

The process was very difficult for Daneka, over time some of the memories returned. With the patience and help of the clerics of Falcion, she slowly learned what had happened to her. After two years, Nathen again called for Andrion.

Andrion arrived once more in Nathen's office, Daneka was already there, and ran to Andrion and embraced him happily. Nathen smiled, "Daneka has done very well Andrion. I think she is ready to leave, and so does she."

Daneka nodded happily, "I think so, I've been looking around the island, and I know what I want to do." Daneka laughed, "When I found the Rangers training, I just sat and watched all day. It's what I know, I grew up in the forest, and I'd just love to join them." Andrion smiled, through the past two years he had visited Daneka often, helping as he could with her recovery. He was happy to see that she had finally learned to laugh again.

Nathen said, "When the Rangers found out that the girl who had eluded them so many times in the forest wanted to join up, they were thrilled with the idea. Daneka, you can go on now, you know where to go, they are waiting for you there to begin." Daneka stood up, looking back and forth to Nathan and Andrion, "Thank-you both so much for all you have done." She hugged them both, then stood back and said, "Whoops! I forgot! I'm not supposed to do that anymore!" Nathen laughed and pointed to the door, "Go on, can't be late on your first day!" Daneka smiled and ran out the door, heading off to begin her training as a Ranger.

Andrion turned back to Nathen, his tone more serious now. "Her skin is still pale, and I see the wounds still haven't healed." Nathen sighed and shook his head, "No, we ran every test we know of and more. She isn't a vampire, she had to learn to eat solid food again, but she does. She's a living breathing girl, she's aging naturally again. We can't keep her and test her forever, we have to let

her go. We'll keep an eye on her of course, but for now we have no way to know if there will be any long term effects which may come out of her experience or not. I hope not, she deserves a chance to finish her life, as normally as possible."

Andrion nodded, "Well, time will tell."

Elstrom

Class: Ranger
Race: Unknown

My life began on a windy day in the city of Crys, far south beyond the Sea of Tears. My mother's name was Ryna; she was a cleric and scientist. My father was Dracar, and he dealt in...shadowy business ventures. He wanted me to follow in his footsteps and join the "family business," but I was more like my mother. She worked for the Information Preservation Society, a coalition of learned men and women dedicated to preserving knowledge in the light of the war. She was a field botanist, collecting samples of new plant life and such. Going with her on her expeditions, I learned the lore of the forest. Arkani, the old Pathfinder that lived near Crys, took me in and refined my skills, and eventually I became a Scout.

I remember my graduation from apprenticeship well. Mother cried. Father said, "Els, I'm disappointed in your career choice." He flashed a roguish grin, "But I'm still proud of you, son."

Arkani presented me with a fine bow, and a quiver of finest tanned leather that I still have today. He also gave me a much more special gift: a magic Magma Bolt.

"Elstrom," he said, "I want you to take it. I found it long ago in the lair of a Dragon. Men died there. Good men..." His eyes took a distant look of pain, as though he were living it again. Then his gaze returned. "Never have I seen its like. Use it wisely. Use it for right." I didn't know how soon I would obey.

I was on a fungus hunt with Mother in a part of the wood I had never been. She saw a sample high on an oak, and asked that since I was a Scout now, if I would go and get it. I shimmied up, sample bag in hand, and just as I reached to get it, her scream rent the air into a million pieces. I looked down just in time to see a horrible beast spring from the bush. It was on my mother faster than I knew what happened. The sheer force of its pounce knocked her back five feet. I think I must have yelled out in confusion and protest, but the thing was so bloodlusted, it saw only its prey. I watched in horror as its head arced back, a shower of blood glittering in the speckled light of the forest floor. Anger and confusion crystallized into determination.

I lit from my perch as soft as a cat, as I got my first good look at the beast. It was shorter than a man, with two powerful legs with knees turned backwards, built for leaps. It had a tail like a wolf, and dun brown fur over its entire body. It walked half doubled, and had two long arms with horrible claws red with my mother's blood. I would have thought it a werewolf until I saw its head: it was a rat's, but in proportion to its body, with two fangs piercing up from the lower lip like an orc's. Its

gaze shot back to a bush behind it, and everything came together. There I saw a poorly hidden Goblin Alchemist, obviously trying out his newest mutation.

I reached back to the thin side quiver of purest silver, snapped it open, and withdrew my Magma Bolt. Its fletchings were of deepest crimson, and the heartwood shaft glowed a speckled red, like a dying ember.

The beast walked towards its master, with a bouncing motion almost a bird's.

I fit my shaft to the string. It was almost hot to the touch.

The Alchemist fed something to the creature.

A bead of acid sweat rolled into my eye. Arkani's words echoed, Use it wisely!

I waited.

Waited.

The beast took a step in front of its master.

NOW!

The bolt flew straight and true. It sparked and, with a flash, transformed into a streak of blinding white. With an unearthly shriek, the beast fell, and its creator behind it. Quite dead.

I turned back to my mother, but I knew it was hopeless. She laid there, her eyes locked wide with fear and agony, blood streaming from what was left of her throat. I covered her with my cloak and returned home.

My father was waiting there with some of the others.

"Ryna's dead, isn't she?" Arkani said. I could only nod.

"We all felt your anguish as surely as if you sent it to us," said Maryni, a cleric and colleague of my mother's.

I hadn't noticed, but my father was crying. He regained his composure to say, "Your mother spoke of a place called Nexus, beyond the sea. She said the healers there can claim the dead back from Tilnar's realm. You must go, my son."

On the day of my departure, my father gave me a bag of money. "I know what you think of my profession," he said, "but take it." He also introduced me to someone I'll never forget: Dystara, a blind prophetess.

"Young one," she said, "Today you are a man. Go out into the world. I see you standing among great men, with the fate of millions resting with you. Remember, young hero, follow always the

path of light, if you aspire to grasp what destiny has made for you."

The journey was many days to the port of Karmek, and weeks from there to Rymek. There I learned of the Hoarde's siege and the valor of the adventurers in Nexus. When I reached that city's great gate, I made straight for the Tabernacle of the Healing Hand. Two days and nights they wove their magic. Then, as the sun broke the horizon, a form coalesced. At first, my joy was so overwhelming, I ran to embrace her. I stopped short as I noticed a subtle change. She seemed older, not in body but in spirit. For an instant I feared it was not Ryna. My fear polymorphed into anger at the Healers for their trickery. Then, as quick as it set on, it was over, for I saw my mother's compassionate smile, and I knew it was her.

She was weak, though, and pining for her Dracar. She took the first ship home. She tried to convince me to stay, but I think she understood as well as I did. I was a Ranger. My place was there, shoulder to shoulder with the world's greatest heroes, protecting some little kid's mom from the twisted genius of a Goblin Alchemist; protecting the whole world from darkness. I understood what Dystara had meant. I had the power to make a difference. My place was in Nexus. Still is.

Felicity

Class: Ranger
Race: Human

Felicity Kaye sighed continedly, laying on the beach next to her fiance. It was the first day of spring and the suns were shining brightly, making it a perfect day to try out the new bikini Calvin had aquired through his trade of "quick fingers'. It were days like this that made her forget her past, and think of the beautiful life she would be having with Calvin, her fiance. He was a thief she had met when she was an aprentice to the island and he had instantly captured her heart.

As she looked up from laying on her stomach at the roaring ocean her hair slid to her right side, revealing a 4 inch long scar, with some burn scars surrounding it on the back of her left shoulder blade. The scar was barely visible but Calvin's keen eye caught it quickly. He had noticed it a time before in one of their intimate moments but had forgotten it.

Calvin ran his index finger down the length of the scar asking with a bit of mocking "Where did you get this scar?" Felicity automatically tensed as his finger ran the length of her scar, asking "What scar?". Hoping he had noticed something else. "This scar on your back silly" he replied as he leaned down to kiss it gently. Felicity sighed and rolled over. She knew this day would come, she just didn't want it to be this day of all days, her perfect day.

"I guess it's about time you learned of my past" she said reluctantly. Calvin looked up at his pretty bride to be and smiled, saying "Well I have been wondering if you just appeared at the fountain that day." He grinned then added "please tell me".

"Well I was the first born to my father and mother. Zarith and McKenzie Kaye. " She paused then continued. "My father was set in the "old ways" she muttered. "He believes that the first born of

every family should be male, to carry on the family name and traditions. So when I was born he couldn't hide his shame and disapointment. He wanted to drown me. Only my mother's pleading and begging saved my life." Calvin tensed up, smirking at the very thought of never meeting Felicity. Felicity looked at him and leaned over to kiss his cheek saying playfully "I'm here so no worries" then her tone went back to remembering.

"My gender was the reason of my punishment. My sister Julene was born not even a year after me, making my father ecstatic. His thinking was the second born was to be a girl. So Julene was pampered and I was criticized. Julene was the princess, I was the terror. I didn't detest my sister though, I knew and understood it wasn't her fault, I loved her and continue to love her very much." Felicity stopped looking back into the past, and layed her head into Calvins lap. He sighed and said "please continue".

Felicity took a breath and went on. "Ever since I can remember, which was probably from the age of four or so, I was beaten. In my father's words it was to "toughen me up, since I should be a male". Calvin smirked at this, his rage growing at the thought of anyone touching his love like that.

"When we got older it was evident that boys were finding me very attractive in our neighborhood. My father was outraged at this, he thought Julene should be getting all the attention, but my sister was very shy and underdeveloped for her age. Although she is a very beautiful young woman now, she hadn't bloomed yet when we were thirteen and twelve. The beatings became worse, Father forbiddening me to see any boys, because it wasn't proper since I was suppose to be one. I came to resent him for him beating me, swearing that when I got older I would come back and show him a thing or too. I became very rebellous, but kept it within reason knowing that I would be beat if I was uppity or anything unproper. I was beaten on a daily basis, toughening me up". Felicity paused thinking of the next thing she was going to say, she could feel Calvin nearly shaking from the anger he was feeling. She hugged him and said "are you sure you want me to continue?" He nodded holding her tight, running her finger along her scar.

Felicity took a breath and continued. "This went on for a while, I avoided the boys and played alone and with Julene, playing in the woods near our house, climbing trees and swinging about became a favorite pastime, protecting Julene from the woodland creatures since she was so quiet and feminine. We even had a swimming hole. On my fourteenth birthday this boy named Jemkise who helped my father around the house with chores took me back in the back yard. He told me I was the most beautiful girl he had ever seen. I beamed with pride. I had never had praise given to me, and here he was covering me with it. He then leaned in kissing me softly. My father caught us and jerked me away, slapping me across the cheek, calling me a tramp. He then took me to this stump and made me lay across it. He then took out this old horse whip and began beating me with it. Lashing out his disappointment onto my back. I wouldn't give him the satisfaction of hearing me scream in pain or cry. I lay there silently taking my beating as I had become use to, although this was the worst one I had ever received. Then he looked at a huge slash he had put into my left shoulder and took a stick from the fire and pressed it to and around the wound, saying "you'll remember this beating won't you?". Felicity stopped her entire body was covered in sweat and she was shivering, the memory of her family life vivid in her mind once again. Calvin say there shaking with rage saying quietly "If he ever sets foot in our home, I'll kill him."

Felicity finished her story saying "I ran away from home that night. I wondered around for a while, I found that my good looks and athletic body got me a lot of sympathy and people could be very kind, though I was still wary of boys. I ran into a girl from my home a few months later, she told me of Nexus, the city of heroes. She told me I could be anything I wanted there, and I would never have to worry of being beaten again. That's how I ended up here, choosing the class of Ranger since I loved the woods so much as a child, it was a noble profession."

Felicity sat up looking at her fiance. Calvin stared back at her, looking at her beautiful shimmering emerald green eyes, her long blond hair flowing down her back, and a few strands framing her stunning face. "How can anyone do something like that to somebody so beautiful" he whispered. Felicity blushed, still not used to praise from a man. Calvin took her into his arms saying "I will never touch you like that, nor will anybody else, or they will answer to me and this" he pulled out a magic flint dagger. Felicity smiled and said "well now you know my history"

Calvin smiled holding her in his arms once again, thanking the Gods for bringing her to him, she smiled, a huge wieght lifted from her shoulders.

Cath

Class: Ranger
Race: Half-Elf

Deep within the Eldane woods, a sobbing woman scurries hastily through the woods, along with a small group of women and children behind her. Once deep enough, she pauses to rest, and collapses on the forest floor. Looking back towards what used to be a small, peaceful village, she sees only billowing clouds of smoke, and the cry of death. Hearing a distinct, sharp cry, she winces, knowing her husband is now dead. Standing, and gathering her courage and resolve, she begins to trudge deeper into the forest, but stops with a halt. Directly in front of her, stands a small group of warriors, each bare from the waste up save for camouflage paint and countless weapons of all types. The leader said nothing, but simple raised a hand, and made a fist, as his warriors surrounded the women and children, searching them from head to toe for anything of value. When they got to the woman carrying the bundle, they looked inside, and seized it, bringing it to the leader. He looked in, and with a nod, unwrapped the small child, stuck it in a sling around his arm, and darted into the woods, followed by his brigade of hunters.

And thus, Feril's real life began.

Raised by hunters, Feril was stolen at birth from his mother, who was fleeing from a city under siege. This life was far away from him, and is only known to him because that is what he has been told. Now Feril stands as the newest recruit from a select group of hunters for a small tribe of wild elves, deep within the Eldane woods. At the adolescent age of 65, Feril was sent out, and given a task to return a man, and a warrior. Sent away from yet another village, not out of spite, but out of tradition, Feril was forced to learn the ways of nature on his own, learning from the animals he stalked. From the snake, he learned the power of surprise and stealth. From the Cheetah, he

learned to harness his speed, greatly enhancing it for a time to wound his prey, so he can then take it at leisure. These were only a few of the things he was forced to learn on his journey, but none would prepare him for what the fates had in store for him. While stalking a young deer, Feril noticed he was being watched, no, followed. Tensing, he deftly climbed up into a nearby tree without a sound. Looking down, he noticed a few woodsmen, one a dark-elf, the other three light elves. Confused and caught off guard by the sight of a dark elf with light elves, his foot slipped ever so slightly, dropping a leaf down to the floor. This, unfortunately, was just enough to get the woodsmen's attention. Before Feril knew what was happening, he was surrounded, and somehow, on the floor, and could not move, as if held by a magic. Cursing himself for not being attentive, he noticed a figure in a deep hood step out from the shadows, but yet, he was tall for a mage, and covered in a thin fur. Figuring he hit is head, he looked around, noticing people of shapes and sizes that he has only heard about in stories. Getting thrown to his feet, one of the men threw test punch at his face. Feril deftly blocked this, and the man grinned.

"This boy has some good reflexes, perhaps he is a member of the house." Said one man

"Nay, see the look in his eyes, he has the killing instincts of an animal, he is a warrior, no doubt," Said a large troll in a heavy suit of armor, horns protruding from his helmet.

"Fools, do you not see the flicker in his eye? It is the sign of magical ability, he is being trained in the tower." Said the hooded figure.

"He was too easily caught to be trained in any guild," said the dark-elf.

"Y-yes, I'm not in any of these guilds you speak of," Said Feril, a bit flustered still, "I was just hunting a deer, nothing more."

"Well then you should come with us, we will get you assigned to a guild," Said one of them, as they begun to bicker among themselves under what guild he would be trained.

"Why not let him go free, and let him decide?" Said a voice from the woods.

The group quickly twirled around to see a man in simple brown and green garb, with a gleaming long sword in one hand, and a simple throwing axe in the other. The man stepped out slowly, into the middle of the group.

"It's their own choice, you know, they can chose what they want to train as once on the isle." Said the man, and began to take Feril aside from the group, without paying any attention to the rest of the group. The man handed him a small map, and patted him on the back.

Feril smiled a rare smile, and thanked the man for the advice, and trotted off into the woods, searching for this place where he could become a better hunter, a better warrior, and a better man.v

Florian

Class: Ranger
Race: Elf

Florian was born in a medium-sized elvin city, to Theorai, his Father, an elvin Monk and Raethia, his Mother, an elvin Ranger. His parents were well-known in the city for their explorations of the surrounding lands - his father having a penchant for studying the land's flora and fauna, and his mother for her unmatched knowledge of the surronding geography. His father, it was said, could actually talk with some of the creatures of the woods...and there were rumors, that he had begun to learn the language of the trees.

Throughout the years of his early life, his parents sowed in him the seeds of both of their callings - a fascination with paths and secret places from his mother, and a deep and abiding curiosity and respect for all living creatures from his father. His early life was uneventful, until a day when his parents returned to their home seriously injured, ashen faced, with a strange creature in tow. It was late at night and Florian was shocked to see his parents in such a state, Florian found it difficult to focus on the creature they had brought home...it seemed to him a blurry ball of light that would rapidly take on different physical characteristics...a wing would suddenly appear...only to be replaced by a talon, or an eye, or a beak. It hovered in the air above his father's shoulder, seemingly teeming with inner activity. His parents sent him to his room while they talked in hushed tones of their terrible discovery. Unfortuantely, they had taught Florian too well...he snuck from his room and hid nearby, consumed with curioisty.

"This is not worth our lives, Thoerai; as fascinating as it is, we have Florian to consider."

Theorai nodded, casting mend spells on both of them. "Yes, I agree, but what if the portals oepn in both directions? And who knows where they lead? It could be such a serious threat to the city...to our whole world...how can we leave it unexplored?

The glowing creature began making mumbling sounds, shifting shape even more rapidly than before. Theoriai fixed it with a curious stare. "And what of this?", he asked, indicating the strange being. 'You have been there a hundred times at least...as have I, neither of us have seen the portal until this...er...being...led us there. I doubt we could find it again without help from this creature. This creature is not from our lands...that much I can tell clearly...why did it lead us there?"

Raethia nodded. "I agree. But we should never have entered the first portal unprepared as we did. We must bring a cleric and a warrior at least, if we return. The creature within nearly killed both of us in the hallway. We were unwise to let our curiosity get the better of us."

"What -were- those things!? Abominations! I pray we never see their like outside the portals, a single one nearly anhillated us in seconds!" Theoriai shuddered. "I tremble at the thought of what havoc even a small group of them could wreak in the lands."

'Let us hope it never comes to that."

Theorai nodded. "I will take this creature...if it will come...to Praedil...perhaps he can assist me in my attempts to communicate with it." The I shall return and we will rest from this wretched day..."

Florian snuck back to his room, filled with questions...and fear...for he had never seen his parents in a state such as this before.

*****

"Father, what happened to you and mother last night?"

Theorai cocked his eyebrow at Florian. "Well, son, you know that we try to hold nothing back from you...but this is larger than just us...you must discuss it with no one, understood?

"Of course, Father, my word is my bond."

'As it should always be." Theorai smiled. 'In our travels, your mother and I came upon the strange creature you saw last night. And it lead us to a magical portal...which we could not see without it's presence. We were curious, and we entered the portal, and were immediately attacked by a terrible creature of great power. We were nearly killed. We were able to drive it off, but not destroy it. After that, your mother scouted a bit and showed to me some other creatures there. They were unlike anything I have ever seen, or heard tell of. Terrifying, draped in the scent of rapacious evil."

'I am glad you made it home alive, Father." Florian hugged his father, and held him close.

"As am I, but we may have to return. There are riddles there whose answers may reveal a hidden fate for our city."

'I do not want you to go, Father, can you not send others in your stead?"

'We would, but the creature will lead only your mother and I to the place...it will lead us if others follow...but not without us present. Even Calnion's magic does not reveal the portal..Only in the creature's presence can we see it. But we are planning amongst ourselves. We will not be unprepared the next time we venture in. Do not worry, Son...we shall be wary."

A strange apprehension gripped Florian, and he held tightly to his father.

*****

Six months passed. Florian did not ask again about the strange portal, and try though he might, he could not forget it. Nor apparently could his parents. Florian would often note them returning late into the night, and he would sneak out to listen...but they spoke only with their minds, and thus he could not hear. A few days later, he discovered a freshly penned manuscript, clearly in his father's hand, but in a code he could not break. One night his parents returned home badly injured again.

Florian's mother was weeping, and her face bloody...behind her, Theorai, stumbled through the door, soaked in blood.

"Soriel...I cannnot belive he is gone!" weeping wracked his mother's body as she began to cast healing magic upon herself and Theoria.

Florian's throat closed tightly at the horrible news. Soriel was one of the city's most powerful healers, if the creatures had taken him in battle, they were far more powerful than Florian had imagined.

'We will mourn him later...for now...we must hurry." Theorai began removing his blood-drenched robes, revealing viscious gashes and magical burns. He cringed with every movement. "That was a war party...a scouting party, yes...but clearly they prepare for war."

Raethia composed herself somewhat, concentrating on casting a healing spell. "Yes, we must wake the council I am afraid. We must go immediately."

"Florian...go to Thenna's house...await word from us there...take your shortbow and sword...and gear for a week in the forest...obey her instructions explicitly, understood? We will send to you if need be...but do not distract us with telepathy."

'Yes, Mother." Florian moved from the shadows of the room, embarrassed at having been discovered. He ran to embrace his mother, tears welling up in him. She held him silently for a moment. "You are a good son, Florian, and we both love you very much...but we must hurry...prepare your things." Florian, nodded quickly preparing his weapons and pack, then followed his parents out the door, into the deepness of night...all the blacker now for the mysterious enemy it concealed.

*****

Florian found his best friend Gariae awaiting him with wide eyes when he arrived at Thenna's house. Thenna was preparing packs of food and medicine. Thenna greeted Florian warmly, hugging him.

"Do not worry, young ones, the elders will take care of the threat to the city." Thenna smiled reassuringly. "You two run off to Gariae's room for a bit...stay in the house, though."

Gariea, a young ranger-in-training was Florian's only friend who had already chosen his path. His weapons and maps lay upon his bed. Florian unlimbered his own, which seemed impoverished next to those of his friend.

"What do you know of the enemy, Florian...hopefully more than I do...I know next to nothing...other than being able to tell that Mother's smile hides intense worry, and something I have never seen in her...fear."

Florian nodded. "Yes, I know that the things are powerful...I am certain that my parents were well prepared and accompanied when they encountered a scouting party tonight. Soriel is dead..." Florian felt his face grow hot with tears, as Gariea shock registered in his now ashen face.

"Soriel? that cannot be! Surely you have misunderstood!" Gariea shook his head in disbelief.

"Would that I had...had you seen the shape my parents arrived in, you would believe...they were both near death. Soriel would never have allowed them to come to such harm had he been alive."

Gariea was stunned. Florian could clearly see that he was fighting back tears, and that he was shocked speechless by the terrifying news.

*****

Two tense hours later...the sky lit with suddenly horrible greenish flash, and the earth trembled with a deafening roar. Thenna rushed into the room, prepared for hunting. 'Get your things, hurry." Her face was a mask of poorly hidden fear, but the authority in her voice woke the two to action. Florian and Gariea snapped out of their shock and gathered their packs and weapons quickly. They followed Thenna, then, again, into the dark streets, moving stealthily and quickly toward a part of the city they were unfamiliar with. The city was filled with sounds of battle coming from the direction of the gates. An ugly glow festered there amid shouts a death cries, and a dark shape the size of a building appeared now and then, spewing magic and fire down upon the earth. Lit by the lightning of its own power briefly...Florian recognized the thing from stories...and his heart sank within his breast.

"Florian! Come...now!" Thenna rushed back to grab him.

"Thenna..." Tears rose again in Florian's throat as he felt despair grip him with an unbreakable talon. "Is that..." he shook his head. Thenna grabbed him, yanking him along the road.

'Yes...it is a Dragon..."

*****

An hour later, as they hid in a basement storage room among many families, Saynwyrn, the Head of the council and leader of the city spoke to all in their minds.

"The gates have fallen and the city is razed, retreat now to the forest...those who are able...we will..."

That was the last they heard from him.

Thenna grabbed Florian and Gariae and led them quickly up the stairs. As they entered the street, Florian saw the enitre town afire. They hid then, sneaking when possible past the looming shapes of dread warriors, wrapped in shadow and elvin blood. Their faces masks of fury and murderous glee.

Finally they neared the rear exit of the city. Florian saw his parents waiting there, with the strange creature in tow. He ran shouting, leaping from the shadows and running to their embrace.

'We must away as quickly as possible. Use all stealth and may the gods guide our feet." The small party went to the gate...and onto the path into the nearby woods.

As they snuck through the woods, Raethia scouting ahead, Thoerai spoke in thier minds: "Those who survive the city will not last in the woods, the creatures can smell us...they will hunt us down. The being with us now has lead us to another portal...it tells us that we might find safety there, and

it seems our best chance...so we shall go through, and hope for a chance to survive."

The small group was running now, picking up speed to distance themselves from the city, when they heard the mindshout of Raethia: 'Ambush!' But it came too late...they slipped from the copse into the small clearing where the portal stood nearby.

Theorai lept to his wife's side as they stood before a group of six of the creatures, and attacked the three warriors already upon her. Raethia hasted, dealing a lethal blow to one of them as another, three times her size, smashed her with a club. It was then that Florian saw the mage preparing his deadly attack, and he quickly knocked an arrow to his bow, taking careful aim from where he knealt near the portal...but he was late. The mage let fly with a horrible icy blade that felled Thoerai instantly, just as Florian found his mark, and put an arrow in the mage.

"Father!" Florian screamed, dropping his bow and leaping, sword drawn toward the melee. But Thenna grabbed him, pulling him backwards. It was then that the mage turned to him, red fire in its eyes...seeking the source of the arrow...and it ripped the arrow free of its massive chest as though it were a toothpick, and let forth a mind-shattering laugh as it prepared another spell. From the strange being that led them, hovering near his mother, a white bolt of lightning shot forth...anhillating the mage...just as one of the warriors spit Raethia upon his spear...and Florian was yanked backwards and fairly thrown by Thenna...into the portal.

*****

Florian found himself suddenly in broad daylight in a barren field, the portal gone, alone. He scouted the area for days...praying for the arrival of his Mother, mourning his father...and missing his friends. The field was like no place he had ever seen...confusing every attempt to escape it. Finally, by leaving a trail of items, he found it's exit. He could find no evidence of the portal. His frantic sends to his compnaions went unanswered. After a week of waiting, he left along a path which led to a road. Soon he found the gates of a city, and a guardsmen.

'Who are you, young one? You should not be outside the gates!"

Florian was confused, for he had never seen a creature such as this guard. It was elf-like, somewhat, but not an elf...it's eyes and ears were different, and it seemed primitve. Florian drew back, frightened. But the guard quickly pushed him through the gates, and into the city of Nexus, and Florian found that he could not go back out.

It took Florian some time to adjust...the city was filled with races of beings that he had never seen...nor even heard tell of. Soon though, he began to make friends...a barbarian named Gryphon began to teach him the ways of war, and Lumina the ways of healing. He chose his path as that of the rangers, like his mother, and hoped desperately that someday he might find a way to contact her, if she still lived, and hoped further, in the deepest part of his heart...to avenge the death of his father and the destruction of their city.

Kieron

Class: Ranger
Race: Elf

I am Kieron Larethian. It has been many moons since I have thought about my past, for it is one filled with harsh memories.

I was the first born of a minor lord who ruled an island in the name of an Elven King. I do not care to divulge their names for reasons I will explain later. My mother, Anariel, was a princess with a lineage belonging to the first noble elves to come into existence. From an early age, I was groomed in the arts of swordplay and politics, since I was the heir to my father's lands. I enjoyed the many lessons on both swordplay and politics, since both activities are essentially the battle of the wits. The idea of outmaneuvering an opponent using nothing but sheer intelligence was fascinating.

Early on in my childhood, I loved to take breaks from the duties of nobility. Although I didn't mind training, it was nice not to have someone scolding me all the time. During my free time, I would roam around the countryside. I got lost often, but somehow managed to make it back home by dusk. On one trip, I stumbled upon a hidden grove deep in the middle of a forest. As I entered the grove, I was just amazed by its perfection and harmony to nature and excited by the raw magical energy trapped in this area. Although untrained in the magical arts, I felt my skin tingle as I slowly walked around in the grove. As I continued to wander aimlessly in the grove, a voice from behind said ... "Greetings ... you have arrived at last."

My training as a swordsman came into play and I instinctively went into a defensive crouch. As I turned around, I saw nothing but a shimmering blue light. Frightened by its presence, I turned to run, but could do nothing as the light reached out and touched me. I was expecting some sharp pain at that moment, but felt nothing but ... something hard to describe. It was like it touched at all my emotions at once. I could feel hate and love, fury and calm. All I can say is that it was an amazing experience. But just as abruptly as this encounter had begun, it had ended. After regaining my senses, I saw an old man standing before me. I looked up at him ... and then realized that I had stood up and ran away in fear. The reason I ran was because I saw his eyes. They were inhuman ... they were completely silver ...

I managed to come home before the sun had set, so I was not asked where I had been. However, I think that mother realized that I had encountered something. She did not ask me what had happened, but I noticed the concern in her eyes. I loved my mother dearly and I did not want her worrying too much over me. Besides ... she was pregnant.

A few days later, my mother gave birth to a baby brother. Ailmar was an interesting child. He rarely cried or complained about anything. Since he was the second born, he did not have an intensive training program in swordsmanship and politics like I had. He usually enjoyed reading about dragons and long lost tales. I saw that he was getting thin, so I dragged him a lot of my trips to the countryside. I knew he hated it, but I was doing it for his benefit.

I never took Ailmar to that grove. After that encounter, I tended to avoid going anywhere near that area. I was so frightened that day that even the thought of entering that grove would scare me. I had nightmares about it. Ailmar must've realized that something was wrong when we wandered

close to that area, but he would say nothing, as usual.

During one outing, I had brought my wooden sword. I loved carrying it around and swinging at imaginary monsters. I'll admit that sometimes, I used my brother as the enemy. He would run off and yell at me to stop hitting him. This is one of the few memories of my past.

We were roaming the hills when we ran into a bear. We had dealt with bears before and knew what to do if we ever encountered one, but this one was different. It was huge ... perhaps half again the size of a regular bear. Despite its size, the thing that frightened me was its eyes ... it was blood red and knew that there was no chance of running for it. It made its move against us, going against my little brother. I screamed in rage and struck at the beast with my sword, but all it did was grab its attention. I did not care that my strike was ineffective ... I just wanted to save my brother. I turned to me and took a vicious swipe across my chest, ripping my shirt and large amount of flesh with it. It tossed me back a good amount of yards and I started to lose consciousness, but I realized that it would kill Ailmar. I started to stand up, only to see that my little brother had somehow stunned the bear. The bear recovered quickly and charged at us, but then a hail of arrows hit it, killing it instantly. All I remember next was falling towards the ground and losing consciousness.

I woke up a day later. My mother had been worried sick and told me that what happened after the bear was killed. I looked at my chest and saw the nasty scar that remained after the brutal attack. I was lucky to be alive.

Later that evening, my father decided to send us away. He told us that he wanted us to live in a different community and learn how the other races behave. He also wanted us to improve our skills in combat by sending us to a better training facility. I was anxious to leave, for I was extremely bored with the island we were living on; I had explored every nuance of this place.

My mother decided to come with us to Falcion to ensure our safety. She was an expert archer and dedicated follower of Pandora. I felt safe knowing that we were in good hands. The skies were clear as we left the port and the weather seemed calm. We sailed for about two hours before it suddenly started raining. The rain started to pick up and started to come down so fast that visibility was reduced to about 2 feet. The winds at the time were also blowing like a fury. Suddenly, the ship rocked with such a force that Ailmar was thrown off the bridge. I cried in alarm to tell my mother, but then the ship began to break apart. Mother pulled me to safety as she grabbed a large piece of wood that was a part of the ship's mast.

A few days later, we were picked up by a few fishermen who recognized my mother and rescued us from the ocean. They took us back to port and left to return home. We both cried for hours about losing Ailmar. We both loved him so much ... we did not know what to think. Instead of acquiring an escort, we decided to cut across the forest to go home. On the way home, we ran into an armed escort. At the head of this escort was my father.

My mother and I were relieved to see him and we quickly approached him. The escort went into a defensive circle around us as mother proceeded to tell them what happened. Then I'll never forget what happened next.

Father says, "Don't you understand yet, you whore? All of you were supposed to die."

We stood there in shock. Then he ordered his men to kill us. This was easier said then done. They charged in, but mother cleanly killed 8 of them on the first pass ... 5 with a few well-placed shots and 3 using excellent swordsmanship. As she was just finishing off her next opponent, I saw my father charging at me. I could only stand there in shock … my father is going to kill me. Right before my father could impale me on his lance, mother threw me aside. She could not avoid the blow that was meant for me, and she screamed in agony as it pierced her chest.

I screamed. I screamed and felt nothing but anger and hate flowing through me. Without realizing what was happening, I reached for my mother's bow, created a magical arrow using the bow's magic, and launched it for my father. Father saw it coming, but he could do nothing as the arrow whistled into his eye, killing him immediately. Then I had turned and ran deep into the forest with a strange combination of anger, hate, fear, and sadness rushing through my body. I ran and ran until I had lost sight of the remaining guards when they attempted to pursue me.

All of a sudden, I had burst into the magical grove that I had not entered in years. I was not afraid ... I had just lost my mother and brother at the hands of my father and had no time to worry about this place. I collapsed on the ground and cried.

"Stand up ... do not be afraid."

I looked up at the voice and saw that it was the shimmering blue light. I had gone through too much to think about being afraid. The blue light came toward me and enveloped me. Once again, the strange combinations of differing emotions poured from the recesses of my mind to surge through my body. I did not know what to make of it. Then blackness overcame me.

I woke up to find that I was completely alone. Looking around to make sure I was safe, I grabbed my mother's bow and went to look for a stream to drink from. As I reached a small brook, I saw a reflection of myself. I fell down in shock ... my eyes had become completely silver.

I did not know what to think ... my eyes had become just like that old man I saw years ago ... who and what was he? A million questions raced through my mind, but I knew that I would never figure them out on my own. I then decided that only the people of the famed city of Nexus could possibly determine what had happened to me.

I had discovered that the Elven King wanted to eliminate my mother Anariel's bloodline. He promised my father that he would be given more land if he saw to eliminating us. I could not believe my ears. Has the elven race sunken so low to stoop to murder, bribery, and deceit to obtain power? I did not know what to think, but I knew I would never return to this island.

I managed to sneak aboard a ship heading to Falcion. When I arrived, I began my apprenticeship. I did know what guild to join, but I found that ranger's guild was the most appealing. It would allow me to combine my sword arm with my wit. I was also impressed with the guildmaster at that time ... Seoman the Wilderness Vanguard.

To my utter delight, I had found that my brother had survived the shipwreck and had managed to reach Falcion. Once we reunited, we trained together as hard as we can. I also heard that Elven king had been dethroned by a small group of revolutionaries. I only had wished that I could've been

a part of that group.

My past is filled with nothing but bitter memories ... but that's where they belong.

In the past.

Larkin

Class: Ranger
Race: Half Elf

"I'll never know the truth about where I came from. As a child I was raised by a man named Charles Celio. I've always assumed he was my father. I also do not know who my mother was, and do not think I will ever find that out. My assumption is that I am the product of a rape, and somehow came to live with Charles. I have no surname, as I have no real family that I know of.

"I was raised in the small community of Tilban, a human community consisting of farmers and thieves. It soon became apparent that my father was nothing more than a bandit and as much as he helped the village survive, he was evil to the core. He raised me in an image new to that town, that of the assassin. Hoping that one day I would be capable of bringing money to Tilban. The town was one of two things he loved and would do anything for them.

"I have forgotten to mention Charles' son. I claim him as my half-brother and wish that he did the same for me. Xiosis, my brother, is thing my father cared the most for. I always respected Xiosis too. He was the only person that was nice to me as a child. In fact, he was the only person I meet in the town till just before I left. I'll explain later.

"Charles trained me as well as he could in the arts of silent murder. His main teaching methods were fear and pain. Also he kept me separated from other people, convincing me that no one but him would leave me alive. Every time I mentioned my brother when he said that, I was struck hard across the face, and then kicked repeatedly. Don't think that he wasn't an inventive man, he had several ways to harm me.

"So I grew up a creature of the shadows. Never trusting anyone but Charles and Xiosis, and fearing contact with both of them. My training went well and I became quite proficient at sneaking around and in using daggers. I learned to love my exercises, simply being active and moving around was the only thing to bring me pleasure. Back then, I had never killed and always wondered whose blood would be the first my knife tasted. My soul had become dark and tainted. I had no choice, I knew nothing else.

"At this point I must tell you more about my brother. Xiosis was a year or two older than me, and a much better person. He grew to be smart and wise, but wasn't incredibly powerful physically. The people of Tilban held a high opinion of him, he was popular and revered by all. However, he never gained the strength to stand up to his father. He never did anything more then be nice to me. It wasn't the best he could do, but it was something.

"Speaking of what he did for all of us, he kept the household alive. I heard Charles say that his wife had died when Xiosis was young, before I was born. My father may have been the one to earn money, but my brother was the only good cook around. After he was old enough to take over the kitchen and cleaning up the rest of the house I began to wonder how our father had managed to keep us all alive.

"I'm rambling again."

Larkin coughs slightly.

"To continue, my brother would take care of me when our father left on "business". By this point I had not learned to cook at all, not even how to start a fire. Xiosis taught me several things about keeping a house in running order, and he was the first person to tell me a joke. It came to pass that my father beat me severely one day. I told him one of the jokes Xiosis taught me. When I refused to tell him who I'd been talking to, he thrashed me.

"The next day, Charles left on a raid. For the first time I realized how reliant I was on my brother. I couldn't even stand for two days and he took care of me during that time. He even took the liberty of introducing some of the other villagers to me. It was the village elder that surprised me, I suddenly learned that he did not even know I existed and would have gladly welcomed me to Tilban. Learning that my father had lied to me was like a physical blow. When I explained how our father had lied to me about the village, Xiosis revealed that Charles beat him too. It disgusts me that a man would beat his own son.

"I began to think at this point. My life has been a waste, mislead by a man of evil. I had to leave myself, but I did not wish to let Xiosis continue a tortured existence. Eventually, I decided to put my training to good use. It was shortly before Charles returned that I actually recovered from my injuries. He made it back to town, but he was not alive for long. When I saw him with the rest of the bandits from Tilban I could not resist my bloodlust. I broke the cardinal rule that he taught me - never be seen. All of his friends saw me thrust the knife into his body over and over again. I had never felt rage that like again. For the first time there was blood on my hands, and I reveled in it.

"I woke up in a bound tightly in the cellar of a barn. The ropes cutting off the circulation in my hands and feet. I didn't remember getting there. I didn't remember anything after I killed my father. It was two of the bandits that came to get me, they didn't untie my feet, they carried me. Of all things I didn't expect was to be brought before the elder to face judgement for my actions. No words exited my mouth while I was in there. I could not bring myself to speak. Soon I was sentenced to death. It was no great concern to me at the time, I would have liked to live out my life, but saving

Xiosis was more important to me.

"In the end, he saved me though. Even though I did not speak for myself, he spoke for me, after I was given a death sentence. He was right when he said that I should recieve their pity, for I was truly miserable then. My brother was an eloquent speaker and swayed the hearts of many, but not the elder. In the end I was banished from Tilban.

"To top that off, Xiosis was forced to remain. Nothing hurt me more than seeing him turn his back on me.

"I wandered for at least a year, and eventually came upon Nexus. I don't remember how, but I decided to train as a ranger. The year or so in the wilderness had gotten me accustomed to being there. I guess that's why I am what I am.

"For a year I so I trained in Nexus and Falcion, and became a decent ranger. During that time, my mind ruined itself. Somehow, I made myself believe that it was my brother that had killed my father. I had forgotten all the kindness Xiosis showed me. My memories became flip-flopped, my father was loving and caring, and my brother the devil that killed him and turned the town against me. So I returned to Tilban.

"I am no longer sure of what happened when I returned to my old home. There was a fire that destroyed the village. Not many survived, if any. Xiosis died by my hand. At least, that is what I believe happened. Since I returned to Nexus, I have forced myself to recover my memories. Now I am at peace with myself, living in the city of all races.

Loial

Class: Ranger
Race: Reni

There he sat listening as the dragon, once so unpleasant, explained this morsel of knowledge to Raien. This Renis though interested in this dragons knowledge let his mind wander. He remembered when he first approached this cave knowing full well it could leave him a pile of ash for the slightest misstep. He wondered if he would have not been alive had he not held his quarterstaff so demandingly and spoke with a charisma that could only have belonged to a Renis in search of knowledge. He had been one of the few Renis who dared go out in search of knowledge, knowing the grave danger in the world. He however had taken his oath to the God Arskols memory very seriously, "...always in search of knowledge...uphold the light...." His mind wandered to his son, his precious son, Loial. He was becoming such a fine young man. Raien had watched his son take the oath before he had to leave in search of this dragon. He looked forward to seeing his son again soon. Three more months with this dragon and this quest would be complete.

"THUMP THUMP"

He looked up just in time to see the dragon fall to the ground, its green blood soaking the ground. He grabbed his quarterstaff and prepared to fight it, whatever it was.

He walked to the opening of the cave and peered out cautiously, not making a sound. As he stepped in to the sunlight darkness blacker than night flew towards him. He rolled out of the way just in time. It hit the cave where he had just stood and erupted into a massive ball of black fire. Before he could even stand up another ball of blackness flew towards him. He used his quarterstaff planted into the ground to flip over it and land facing the direction from whence it came. As he

swung to strike whatever was throwing this powerful magic he realized he was too late, he had just enough time to flatten to the ground, only being hit by the bottom of this dark thing. Searing heat followed by a cold unlike the worst winters he had known ate at his soul. He screamed in agony. As he lay there waiting for the thing to pounce he saw a human cloaked in shimmering white robes cast a ball of blinding whiteness at something behind him. He followed its path just in time to see a great eruption of sparks and flame followed by, silence.

This was how the man had told it to Loial and his mother. Loial had repeated his fathers last words, "Follow the light, Know the light, uphold the light...remember..."

His dad had taught Loial the staff at a very young age. He had mastered it quickly. Loial had always been curious and chased knowledge. Now he would carry the knowledge his father had searched for to the city of Nexus. Loial had heard it told in many a childrens tale, the goblin hoards being stopped by this great cities defenses. He looked forward to seeing this city and passing his fathers knowledge on to the generations to come. While in the forest he came across a very beautiful acolyte, Kerowyn. He spent several months learning her Way. His was the Way of Knowledge, while hers seemed to be the Way of Hope and Healing. He spent many nights at the campfire laughing with her before he remembered why he was out in that forest, Nexus, his father, the knowledge. Sadly he kissed her farewell and began to head off towards the great city. "Remember me always..." Those words rang in his head lead him to make an oath, an oath to remember, remember her, remember his father, remember all who followed the light. He walked several more months often forced to use his staff to defend himself. Though the staff seemed part of him, the killing he was forced to do wasnt.

Tired, ready to give up and sleep in the trees he saw her, the city of Nexus. He stumbled into the gates heading towards what appeared to be the center. He laid on the ground ready to sleep anywhere, but heard "Hello, you must be new here." Naranek was his name, guiding him in the ways of this city he smiled at Loial. He had finally made it, his father, the knowledge, everything would be fine. He just needed a little nap, just a little one.

Lucillia

Class: Ranger
Race: Elf

Born on Ruvur, the twenty-second of the month of Midnight, in the year one thousand five-hundred seventy six since the Godswar, and year one thousand one-hundred fifty nine of the Empire. This Sylvan elf never knew her real parents, and doesn't remember her real name. She spent the first ten years of her life growing up in an orphanage in the city of Tholm. On the second of the month of Twilight, she was adopted into the R'arakin family, a noble house of Tholm and given the name Lucillia R'arakin.

She lived there for about ten human years, in relative peace. In time however, she grew restless with city life and disgusted with the attitudes of her family members. One night Lucillia packed

some food, a few other essientials, preparing to leave. Before leaving she left a letter in her room saying 'goodbye'.

Lucillia left the city of Tholm, and headed into the wilderness. She lived alone, except for the company of wild animals. She survived from foraging, and hunting first with crude spears. In time she improved her ability to make weapons, and hunting became easier.

Many years past before Lucillia wandered near Nexus, the city of all races. She lived in the Eldane, collecting pelts from her kills to sell to leather makers. On one of her trips she learns of a place at which she can refine her skills, and enter a guild. Lucillia heads to the island of Falcion, there she begins her training in the Ranger's guild.

Lucilla excelled in her training, and quickly graduated from her apprenticeship. She returned to living near Nexus, using her talents in the guild to help those in need. Within two years, she left the city to explore north of the Crystal mountains. Spending four years wandering the wilderness. Until one day she returned to the city of all races...

Lyr

Class: Ranger
Race: Human

Lyr was born a son of peasants, a fifth child and the only boy among five. His parents, Eshla and Gundil, were plain folk, with no ambitions or dreams of their own. They were honest, practical, and worked hard the small patch of the land by the ramshackle house. They minded their own business and taught the children to be just like them. Lyr's arrival was much rejoiced, for they now had a boy in the family, who may grow strong and aid his father Gundil. Lyr's mother, Eshla, however, saw in the newborn babe something other than a life of a peasant. She didn't quite know what it was, but the baby's light-colored hair and slender built, unlike the swarthy complexion and the stocky statuture of herself or of Gundil, made her fancy that he might be a romantic: perhaps a bard. Eshla, uncharacteristic of her realistic self, told Gundil that she wanted to name the baby Lyric, for he will grow up to be a bard.

Gundil was dumbfounded. What put that ridiculous idea in his wife's head? Besides, this is the only boy they have. Granted, the girls are growing up strong and resourceful, and the eldest, Juonia, at the age of eleven, was already a full-fledged farmhand. But that didn't mean anything; they might all marry in a few years and leave. "We were blessed by the gods to finally have a boy, and you want him to become a bard?" he yelled at his wife. Eshla was resolute. "I don't particularly want him to become a bard, my dear husband. I just think he will be one." They argued for three days, and Gundil finally compromised. After all, he loved his wife and she did have good instincts. "All right," he said, "I don't think he will be a bard. And I don't want a peasant running around with a name like Lyric. But if it makes you feel better, we'll name him something like that; we'll name him Lyr."

It turned out Eshla was wrong. Lyr didn't have the gift of music. However, he certainly was not cut out to be a farmer. Much to Gundil's dismay, Lyr was terrible at farming and hated it. He was curious, adventurous, and restless. Often, overwhelmed by his four vivacious sisters, Lyr would slip out of the house and wander off into the woods and spend much time there, learning and observing. He loved the woods and solitude he found there. As a boy, he fashioned a crude bow on his own and practiced his shooting. When Gundil would get angry at Lyr, his sister Juonia would defend him, pointing out that he did help out the family by bringing rabbits he shot and mushrooms he found in the woods for supper.

Gundil and Eshla were not ignorant of the goblin invasions, but they figured there was nothing they could do. They accepted many things as fate, and this was one of those things. They had never seen a goblin, and they didn't care to. Lyr was different. He had seen tracks of them in the woods and had heard gruesome stories from the travelers he came across. More and more, he felt he wanted to find his role in this unfolding history. By the time he was 16, the young man's sense of adventure and curiosity was irrepressible. One night, he confided to Juonia his wishes to leave the family and join the forces to oppose the goblin hordes.

Juonia, now 27 and stronger than their aging father, gave him a hug. "Dear brother, go follow your path. Mother and I often talked about how different you are from the rest of us. Did you know she thought you would be a bard?" She laughed. "I will stay with our parents, and keep the family safe. These are perilous days. I am worried that the goblins may take over ... that is why I never married to have children. I fear for our future." Juonia looked into Lyr's eyes. "Most of us can only fend for ourselves. You may be one of the few that can achieve something greater. You were always good with the bow, and you know the ways of the woods. I'm sure the defenders can use those skills. I will miss you, Lyr, and do hope you will come back safely." Lyr saw his sister fighting back her tears, and squeezed her in his arms, so that she wouldn't see his eyes moistening. Juonia was surprised and pleased at the strength, realizing her brother was no longer a boy. He would be all right, she thought to herself.

Next morning before dawn, Lyr left to Rymek to catch the sloop to Falcion. He was soon to find out how little he knew, both about himself and the world, and to wish he could believe in himself as unwaveringly as his sister did.....

Matias

Class: Ranger
Race: Unknown

Half a century ago the Forest of Eldane saw the arrival of a new life. The name Matias was given to this child by his parents Kerstain and Stephan. He was born in a simple home far away from the disturbances of the busy world.

His father, Stephan, was a highly trained woodsman. Some even called him a master. He really had no job, he mainly scavenged the woods for what essentials he and his family needed. His mind was

only governed by a couple of simple beliefs. The first was that his main purpose in life was to care for his family and make sure that his child would grow up to be skilled in the ways of the woods. His second belief was that killing creatures for unnecessary reasons was a sin. The woods were to be shared by all of its inhabitants.

His mother, Kerstain, was a simple woman. She really did do much in providing the family with any rations from the forest, but it was at home where she provided for the family. She took care of all the cooking and cleaning while Stephan was away. She started the raising of Matias while her husband was out providing for his family. She thought that it was important for any child to learn respect of elders, so she put him hard at work around the home. Matias really didn't see much of the forest past his family's general living area, but he knew that one day he would experience it all.

At the age of 10, Stephan came home from a long adventure with a gift for his son. A simple amber bow and a quiver of arrows was waiting for him outside on the porch. Stephan told Matias that he was old enough now to start his training in becoming a man of the woods; a ranger. Matias and his father spent the next 3 weeks working on his skills with his new bow and arrows. It took that long for him to learn and master the basics.

The next thing that his father taught him was how to handle himself in the woods. "There are four things that a ranger must learn in order to become a master of the woods," his father said. Matias sat there waiting for his father to tell him what they were, but his father had vanished. He ran around the house looking for his father, but couldn't find him. Matias then decided to venture down a path deeper in the woods. He had never been this far away from home before, but he figured that he could protect himself from any harm with his new bow. Faster than he could realize it, Matias was lost. He yelled for his father, but there was no reply.

All of a sudden a Tiger jumped out from behind a bush and began attacking him. Matias drew his bow and fired at the Tiger. His weapon had no effect against this beast. Out of nowhere, Stephan jumped out of the woods and began fighting the Tiger. Matias had never seen his father move that fast ever before, and it didn't take long for him to kill the tiger.

After his father killed the tiger, he walked up to his son and asked, "What have you learned?" Matias replied that to wander in the woods looking for someone is not that good of an idea. He added that one has to be able to hide and sneak around without creatures spotting you. His father then stated that this is something that you will have to master as have I. As they walked back towards their home, Matias asked his father how he moved so quickly. His father remarked that this was another skill of a ranger called Haste. His father added, "You will learn it in time as did I." Though Matias was filled with questions, he asked his father one more. "But how did you find me father?" Stephan replied, "Once again this is something that you will learn to master..it is called tracking. A good ranger will be able to find anyone or anything by looking for its tracks."

When the two of them reached home, they were stopped in their tracks by the view of Goblins attacking their house. Stephan pushed Matias into the woods and told him to stay where he was until it was all over. Being so curious and impressed with his father's fighting skills, Matias crept up closer to the house, where he could see all that was happening. By the time he got a clear view of the house, there were no goblins in sight. He walked into the clearing where his house once stood

and began searching for his parents. He finally found the two of them ripped to shreds and tossed into the creek that flowed behind his house. Matias stood there in shock. He didn't know what to do.

After standing at his parents remains for 5 minutes crying, he heard the grunts of goblins approaching. Matias ran into his house and took all that he could find and ran into the woods. He didn't remember what his father had told him about hiding and sneaking until he ran into a raccoon. Though this was no tiger, Matias had never killed anything before. He clumsily ran about shooting countless arrows at this creature until its death. With only a few scrapes and bruises, he picked up the left over carcass and remembered what his father once told him.."Never kill an animal without using it for your survival or education."

It was here where Matias sat for days and pondered. He began practicing the things that his father had once taught him, but found it hard to concentrate. Day by day went by and Matias started to accept the death of his family, but a hatred for the Goblins started to grow inside him fast.

By the time Matias was 18 years old, he had become quite a good hunter and woodsman. A feeling started to grow inside him, one he had never felt and without a thought he looked up in the sky and shouted to the heavens, "I am finally a Ranger!"

This was to be the turning point in his life. Though he hadn't had contact with any other people in 8 years, he began making his way towards a city that he had once heard of.The Nexus.

He arrived at a large gate which was guarded heavily. He hid in the woods and sneaked by the guards, and into the city. Little did he know it, but this was to be his final destination. With his long dirty-blonde hair and pale clothing, he began to walk the streets of the Nexus until he reached the center of town. It was here that he fainted at the feet of many citizens. He awoke by a beautiful fountain and a lot of worried people around him. Matias did not know how to accept their hospitality. He stood up and ran away. For days he sat atop the town hall while watching and listening to everything. He finally built up the nerve to go speak with the people below.

After days of speaking with people, Matias began to feel at home. He voiced his anger at the Goblin Hoard and found comfort in the fact that there were others with just as much hatred as he. Realizing that the adventurers of this city were much more skilled than he, Matias began training his skills everywhere possible. It wasn't long after that when Matias was able to begin his quest in destroying the Goblin Hoard.

Norbak

Class: Ranger
Race: Elf

I have come to realize that through studying the past, and linking it with the present, we can better learn how to positively influence the future. I shall thus pen my history, in the hope that someday a lesson might be learned from it, and be used to spread The Brothers' light throughout the world.

It is important for the reader to know that the setting of my childhood is drastically different than the part of Altin upon which Nexus is situated. It is a warm, humid land, with a mixture of forest and jungle life. It is populated by humans, all kinds of elves, and dwarves. The species coexist in relative peace, with no wars having occurred for many years. A metal known as bluesilver is used as currency. Most remarkable, however, are the religious beliefs of the peoples. The gods have not been actively worshiped since the Godswar. The people held the belief that the deities had been mutually exterminated during their war. The continent exists without any form of faith magic. No resurrections are able to revive the dead, and no heal spells can repair the injured.

I was born and raised in a wooden mansion, built around a great oak tree. It has three levels of rooms, which were all finely decorated with the greatest items a craftsman could produce. My parents, both very successful merchants, owned a trade business, and gained high sums of profit each year. Not only were they skilled at their work, but they also enjoyed it greatly. They also kept plenty of time to spend with their three children, to teach us the ways of the trade. My elder brother, Elrisian, took quite well to business. By the time he was sixty, still an adolescent elf, he played an active role in their business. My younger sister, Lisasimi also showed ability when keeping books, and occasionally assisted Elrisian. I was also quite adept at the tasks in which they trained me, but I did not find contentment in completing them. I did not tell this to my parents however, because I did not want to offend them by suggesting I would not enjoy their trade.

On my fifty-eighth birthday, my parents gave me an expensive decorated accounting book, and a large sum of bluesilver. By then I was sure that I did not want to be a businessman, but I was sure it was too late to tell my parents. That night I left a lengthy note on their desk, and I left home for the first time ever. I ran the first few miles, and then walked for most of the night along the forest path. A few hours before dawn I climbed a good sized tree, and slept among the branches until dawn.

After I awoke, I walked for a few more hours, and then found a small human town in a clearing. I bought some trail food there, and a short sword for protection. I had never before wielded a weapon, but I thought that it would be safer if I had one. I again took to the trail, and walked until midday, when I sighted a wagon behind me, escorted by a human and an elf dressed in clothing that marked them as employees of my parents. I moved behind a brush beside the road, and waited. While they were passing me, I heard them talking about "Finding the boy", and "Getting the reward". My parents must have alerted everyone to my disappearance, and now people would be looking for me.

From that point on I began traveling in the forest, parallel to but out of sight from the road. I frequently saw people that appeared to be looking for me, and my trip became dangerous. I dared not travel into a city, so I was forced to continue on my own. That night, I had a meal of the food I had purchased, and fell fast asleep.

I awoke to the feel of wind across my face, and when I looked up there was a grizzly bear looking standing over me. I froze completely, never having faced a wild animal before. I looked about franticly with my eyes, and they finally rested on my sword, just two feet away from my right arm. As I considered my predicament the bear began to growl, so I was forced to act. In one swift motion I grabbed the sword and brought it up into the bears side. It let out a tremendous howl, and fell

onto its side, dead. Though I had not spent much of my life in the wilderness, I had enough common sense to know that I would need the bear to survive. I contemplated how I would be able to eat it for a few minutes, and then I began to skin it. The smell was absolutely horrible, and my shirt was permanently stained from the blood. I am not sure how, but I mostly separated the good meat from the other organs, and left it on the ground. I gathered some wood for a fire, and lit it with a piece of flint. I stuck a fair sized chunk on a stick, and stuck it into the fire. After a minute the stick burnt through, and the meat fell into the flame. A second attempt yielded the same result, but on the third I was able to cook the meat well enough without the stick falling apart. I left it in the fire for about ten minutes, and then pulled it out. I burnt my hands trying to grab the meat off the stick, waited a short while, and tried again. I ripped into the meat with my teeth, but it was very tough, and burnt on the outside. I grudgingly ate it, and vowed to do a better job the next time.

When I was finishing off that chunk of bear, I heard twigs snapping in the direction of the road. I quickly dropped the rest of the meal, and climbed a tree. Two humans stepped into my campsite, and quickly scanned the area. From their conversation I judged they had seen the smoke from my fire from the road, and knew of the reward my parents were offering for me. They also spoke of hiring trackers to use, because they had found my trail. As soon as the men left, I hopped down from the tree, and ran as far as I could. While running, I considered what would happen next. The trackers would certainly be able to find my trail, so I would have to be much more careful. I slowly moved closer to the road, and when I was sure no one was nearby, I crossed it. I hoped it would make it more difficult for those following me. Eventually I grew tired, a few hours after dusk. I slept in another tree, sword in one hand.

Over a period of three months I continued my journey northward, becoming more skilled in the ways of the wilderness. I was able to proficiently avoid the trackers, and hide my trail from them. I could hunt very well, and could best any forest animal. There were also less and less people searching for me, both because of the time I had been gone and the distance I was away from home. Eventually I came to the coast, and arrived in a port town. I was able to find work cooking at an expensive inn, and spent a few months working there.

One morning two humans arrived in the inn, and I actually recognized them as the men who had found my campsite half a year earlier. I listened to their conversation for long enough to determine that they had tracked me all the way here, and were still after the reward. I left the building, and went to the docks. A man had come in the tavern earlier, and mentioned that he was selling a personal boat. I was tired of running from my parents, so I found him again and bought it. He told me that it was a very fine boat, built from the rare goodwood trees. It was magically enchanted to better hold together under the stress of the high seas, and it had the intelligence to almost sail itself. I gave the man my entire small fortune, and immediately set sail. I went northward, with no real destination in mind.

The first month or so of sailing was perfect. I enjoyed the sea air, and I heartily ate the food I had stocked the boat with. After two months were up, however, I ran out of food. I was very thankful when I remembered, then, that the boat was constructed of Goodwood. It splinters your mouth and throat, but goodwood is actually a nutritious wood, and sustained me for the rest of my journey. After about another month of calm seas, I encountered my first hurricane. I lost consciousness

early into the storm; I believe it was when a loose rope smacked into the back of my head, with the full force of the storm window behind it.

When I awoke, I was lying in a bed, on stable ground. I looked up to see a fishwife tending to my head. She politely informed me that I was in Rymek, just a few miles south of Nexus. I had no clue what this meant, but spent some time learning about the locale I had landed in. I also learned the date, and it happened to be my birthday. It had been exactly a year before that day that I ran away from my home.

I learned that many adventurers and travelers to this area came to join one of the city's guilds, so I did as well. I took a short boat trip to Falcion, the City of Apprenticeship, and became a member of the Ranger's Guild. It was not until then that I realized how much I missed my family, and that it would likely be impossible to ever see them again.

With this I rest my pen, in the hope that someday one might learn a lesson from my writing.

Norbak Slisiath Lucrenian

Vanion

Class: Ranger
Race: Elf

Vanion’s small inquisitive green eyes peered out of his cloth wrappings, which were nestled tightly in his mother’s arms, at the beautiful world that he was to begin his life within. Even as a newborn child his eyes were always the one feature that held peoples' gaze. Born to a loving mother and father of pure Elven blood, Vanion flourished as he grew. Vanion’s home at birth, high above the ground in a large Elven treetop village, quickly became his playground. His need to explore took over as he aged. He often found himself hopelessly lost, among strangers who carried him back to his place of origin time and time again.

Vanion’s father was a seasoned woodsman with an intense passion for the forest and everything within it. It was from him that Vanion learnt of the world below him, the forest floor. Many an hour was spent by Vanion looking over the weapons used by his father in times of war, almost all of Elven make. His father overlooked with a troubled gaze, he knew for a fact that one day he would have to train his beautiful son in the use of weapons of warfare, as the threat of goblin invasion was a very real one. One day on a trip through the Eldane forest Vanion’s father picked up two sticks of equal length, handing one to his growing son. They regularly sparred for hours, Vanion slowly gaining skill. Vanion was versed in the use of the Elven Longbow, with which he showed an incredible amount of understanding. He possessed the ability to judge distance with accuracy, even on the move. Timing his shots well under pressure.

From his mother Vanion was taught the language of the Elves. It was she that instilled her son’s sense of right and wrong. She held her child fast to the things dear to him.

Vanion showed a lot of promise mentally and physically. Gaining a solid grasp in the ways of magic and forest lore. He possessed an uncanny ability to hide and sneak about undetected at will, which he often used to his advantage. He was recruited into an Eldane scouting party at an early age to make full use of his skills. It was there he learnt of the harsh outside world his parents had tried so hard to prepare him for.

Three seasons passed as a scout and Vanion was doing well for himself. Working in the woods, moving campsite every few days. Spending his time ever watchful and alert with the rest of his unit. However one winter morning things changed. Vanion had awoken early one morning to a chill. Getting up carefully as to not wake his companions he travelled down a small bank towards a nearby stream. Crouching on the balls of his feet he splashed the cool water over his face, his weary body refusing to awaken. A cold gust of wind blew down the valley; Vanion’s already cold body shivered fiercely, his senses snapping back to attention. A low growl sounded from the bank, directly behind the Elf. Vanion flinched, and flashed his head over his shoulder as a large dark form crashed towards him. Vanion's hand shot to his empty scabbard, realising now his mistake as his blade sat one hundred paces up the back towards his encampment. The Elf yelled a frightened call to his comrades as the hostile form struck down on Vanion. Catching him on the shoulder and spinning him one full rotation as he tumbled to the ground. The dark form stepped into the moonlight, tendrils of breath creeping from his nose and mouth. The monster moved forwards again, swinging in a full arc at the smaller Elf, in an attempt to crush him.

Vanion raised his arms to shield his head, trying in vain to cushion the blow any way he could. The form toppled forwards landing heavily on Vanion, two bloody arrows protruding from its back. Shouts erupted around the campsite as dozens of crazed Orcish barbarians broke their cover in the nearby bushes. Blood gushed from an obviously broken shoulder as Vanion rose quickly to his feet, running in aid of his friends. Screams of pain echoed through the valley as Vanion's eyes darted about in search of a weapon, his gaze resting upon a sheathed longsword hanging a few feet away from a rotten tree branch. A large axe whistled past his head as he ducked and rolled in the direction of his newfound weapon, hitting his broken shoulder square on the cold hard ground. Vanion regained his footing, ignoring the state of his shoulder and pulled the blade from the tree with his strong hand. Turning to meet his foe head on. The charging Orc engaged, his mouth foaming with wild untamed rage. Vanion feinted, the beast not bothering to adjust his shot, embedding his axe into an old tree. The opening presented itself and was exploited, Vanion's turning blade removing the Orc's body of the burden of its head. Blood covered everything, Vanion's frightened eyes absorbing all. Scarring his memory as he stood prone in a state of shock, his friends falling to these painless monsters. They didn’t stand a chance. A shrill high-pitched voice broke Vanion's trance, "... Flee!! Flee!! ..." screamed a dishevelled young elven man as he dropped his weapon and ran in pure terror from the battlefield. Vanion turned tail and ran into the woods blindly. His party had been slaughtered. This young Elven man ran for days towards his home, replaying the events of that terrible morning in his head, over and over again, until he finally arrived mid-afternoon at the once beautiful town where he was born. Nothing moved. An eerie silence had covered the land. Vanion darted from building to building, searching for someone, anyone. In a state of panic he finally reached the house that had been his own. His shaking hands reached up and slowly pushed the door open, petrified of what he might find inside.

The house, like every other was deserted. There we no signs of any form of struggle, but everything was gone. A wooden window shutter banged noisily against its frame as a strong wind blew about the trees. Vanion's weak form moved slowly to the window, his eyes brimming with tears. A piece of paper blew wildly about the window frame, and as Vanion closed the window this small piece of paper flipped over in the air. Revealing writing, almost all of which was indistinguishable. Something about a place named "Nexus". The city of all races which lay to the south of his home. Vanion folded and collapsed to the ground in an exhausted heap. He had nowhere else to go. Except this strange place called Nexus, where he might find his family.

Zindra

Class: Ranger
Race: Half Giant

Me wokes up one morning when me still small, not could remembers nothing, not even name. Me wander round long time, forests, maked small club from tree branch for weapon. Me hids from big aminals so them not eats me. One day, me find nice place call Nexus...was peoples here, them was kind to me. Pretty Goldmoon lady teach me how do curtsy. Me ates more foods learn how use weapons start get stronger, but still no gotsed memory. Was fraid maybe had family someplace what maybe need me, but me not was there...not knowed who..not knowed where. Me spokes on peoples in Nexus...try fix what them call amnesia...them not could do it.

When dark time comed to Nexus, big God war with Void, me runned away, goed to nother far place. Me was real surprise find twin sister there. Her look just like me! Me surprise lots more founds out her gotsed amnesia too! Me not big lots smart, but even me know us both gots amnesia not could be right thing. Us hear story say if got amnesia hits head maybe amnesia go way. Us tooks off helmets, tooks turns bash each-other on head. Sister, her name Howl...ams real strong!!! Us gots knocked out few times, scramble us brains, but memories comed back!

Us remember long time ago us wokes up in village in house of parents. Then, later in day, us see strange, green cloud outside village, even us parents not knowed what cloud was. Then cloud comed into village. When us breathe green cloud, us all gots paralyzed...not could moves. Papa, him were strongest what me ever see. Me watch him tear up whole maple tree once with bare hands, but him not could fights green cloud. Then, bad gobblin priestess name Drizzlegore comed in village. Cloud not bother her...her done lots big laughing on us...all lie on ground. Me watch helpless, them gobblins puts big chains on us parents, took all grown-ups away....me not know where. Them already had lots lots grown-ups in chains and lots kids from nother villages where them wents first. Drizzlegore laugh real hard tell us them kids was gonna be gobblin food for long time. Her said them had nuff food..not need us kids. Say us not big-strong nuff for be slaves, them not needs us for food...so them done nother thing on us. Her putsed bad-bad sickness in us, call insidius, make us what her call carriers. Her say us gonna kill thousands her emenies. Say when us gets oldre, try have childrens, do sex/blush, us gonna infest lots people and insidius gonna spread through whatever place us find like death-fire. Then, her brokes us memory somehow, so us not know what happen. Us not know that if us do sex then us kill all ones what us loves. Except Howl &

me us not done no sex yet....us am virgins.

Me tell Thelia about bad Drizzlegore, about insidius sickness. Her done some kind magic tests on me. Thelia say her think maybe is curse...not sickness. Her say is maybe chance can fix me one day. That was first time me had small little bit hope. Hope am much more bester thing to keeps inside heart than only live on hate.

Now, me got dreams about Drizzlegore. Me got two kind dreams. In first dream, me get real STRONG! Then, me go hunting for bad Drizzlegore with lots-lots friends from Nexus. After us kill all Drizzlegore gobblins, me rip out all Drizzlegore arms and legs. Them me put live rat inside Drizzlegore mouth, sow up lips. Then her not cast no more bad spells. Her die real slow death after that. But in nother dream, Drizzlegore know us coming. Her done planned for us come for more than twelve years....Her got thousands traps, and whole army what surrounds us, crush us from all sides. Lucky ones just die...Rest of us get captured alive when them use green cloud thing. Them puts us in big steal cage...us have to watch pieces be torn off us friends. Then them force us all captives eat stew make out of us friends...And all whole time us have to listen on Drizzlegore laughing on us.

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