I have removed the laumspur potions which were given to poor Sir Victor.

**Rules, Rulings**

Due to the security and peaceful rest provided by Makala, add your Constitution bonus (minimum of 1) as extra EP that you regained from uninterrupted sleep.

Note that this post is now approximately 24 hours ahead of Scene V. This will not affect their merging in any way.

The storage room contains no further supplies. It is basically minor things needed for desert travel, mostly depleted. The book that the scribe was working on was a ledger of inventory. It seems that recent ventures through here have drained the supplies that were once kept here. Aside from a few empty bottles, an almost dry inkwell, and sheet after sheet of parchment and paper, covered with maps and boring entries and scrawls, there is nothing here.

**The Enemy of My Enemy**

**Act IV**

**Opening: The Traitor and The Assassin**

Sir Victor was the first to awaken around noontime. Placing down the bone he had been eating the meat from, Makala nodded gruffly and smiled. "It is noon."

Before the knight could berate himself for sleeping so late, Makala held up his hand. "You needed rest. Besides, it is best for you to travel at night in the open desert. You are not accustomed to it as I am."

"You're leaving then?" Sir Victor guessed, reading the intent in the Telchoi's words–and noticing the packed gear beside the cave entrance.

"Yes," he said, offering no explanation as to why. "The concerns of Anari are no affair of mine anymore. I have updated you with what I found out, and now I leave for Cassio. From there, I think I shall visit your homeland to see just how cold it can get in winter."

The Telchoi noticed the others were waking. "May your gods watch over you." He stood and walked into the sands.

**--------**

For an hour after everyone woke, they talked about their plans and ate a meal. Either they could stay in the cave till nightfall in seven hours, eating more of their limited food, or they could strike out to the north and restock in Chahdan–four nights away...three if they pushed themselves.

Luckily for everyone, Korlaeth had been able to gain information from Paru's mind when they had been riding yesterday. Teph was where Amesha would be. He knew little of the city–how large it was, how fortified, how difficult to enter, etc. Once they left Chahdan, they could reach Teph in seven nights. If they pushed themselves to exhaustion, perhaps they could reach it in four.

After all, when they had been searching through the room, Arcadian just happened to notice a folded-up piece of parchment tucked in the back of the desk where the scribe sat. It was a crude map of uncharted oasis that would extend travel time if they visited, but would allow emergency replenishment of water–and possibly food (fruits, nuts, pods).

There were no dangerous spots indicated on the map, but as they were talking over lunch/breakfast, Simyn recalled stories about unusual creatures that dwelt in the deep desert–animals adapted to the harsh climate, animals that spent their time stalking territories between oases and rock formations that offered shade.

It was a dangerous journey ahead, but somehow the group seemed to sense that they were not just chasing after some psychhic heiress now. What they were doing was, in some way, larger...more important than it seemed.

When the time was right, they decided to leave.

**--------**

While Victor, Sol Hawk, and Korlaeth were a complete mess physically, Arcadian was nearly destroyed on an emotional level. He was beginning to find himself distrusting those of his own race, which is something no Vakeros should ever come to. Kamilah had abandoned him out of her own selfish greed. Did she expect him to just pick up and head back to Dessi?

No. Arcadian had an agenda. Not to save princess Amesha as the others wanted, but to find her. He still had questions to ask her, questions that only she would have the answers to. At least that is what he hoped. Until that time...there would be no returning to Dessi for Arcadian. There would be no turning back from this quest.

Part of Arcadian longed for there to be no return. He doubted the rest of the fellowship had noticed these past few days. In all actuality he hadn't completely realized it himself yet. He wanted to die.

Arcadian left the parchment with the map upon it to the others. Though he was quite skilled it geography he simply did not want to have any part with the others. The only one he completely trusted anymore was Sol Hawk. Every single other tie, every binding between him and another had waned if not broken. He could no longer tell what feelings the tall knight harbored towards him. And Simyn pretty much kept to himself. Korlaeth and Kamilah, the bonds that should be the strongest...they were self-explanatory.

Taking a whetstone from his pack Arcadian began to sharpen both of his weapons. Where they were going they would find Murdach and possibly this Egoliah. Though much time had passed and he had slept a great deal, Paru's blood was still on his hands. And it was mixed with the blood of Sol Hawk and Victor, testament that their foe was worthy. And that this quest would test not only the limitations of the pursuers, but it would test their very lives. Arcadian raised his head while still sanding the blade of his sword. He looked at the others and thought quietly to himself.

Not all of us will be going home when this is finished. Death surrounds us all. For some, it is just a matter of time.

**--------**

Simyn felt eager to travel again. They had found Sol Hawk and Korlaeth and they had a clue to the whereabouts of Ameesha. Simyn felt that he had learnt much about travelling during his time with the party. The seemingly hopeless tracking of Sol and Korlaeth had made Simyn feel quite confident that he would be able to spot easier tracks without too much trouble. Overall he felt better prepared for the dangers of desert travel than he did when he left Chahdan and had decided to travel alone. Now he had the company of able warriors, which was a comfort. The sage of Quarten was ready to once again enter Vassaginia.

**--------**

Sir Victor observed Makala's form receding in the distance, then came back to the cave. His rest had been very beneficial and Sol's cans had helped close many of his wounds, yet some aches remained, perhaps forever. He'd certainly carry many more scars after yesterday's fight.

He had been grateful that the others had offered the Laumspur found in the cave. It wasn't the freshest he'd ever tasted, but it felt wonderful on his numerous wounds, closing the smallest ones completely while ensuring the deeper ones wouldn't get infected. He still carried one of his own potions, which he had picked up in President Kubidul's own reserve, but he preferred to keep one in case of an emergency, perhaps to save one of his companions in an hour of need.

"We need to resupply, and Chahdan seems the likeliest place for that, since it's on the way to Teph. Let's just hope we're not greeted there by an army of Sharnazim, said the knight to the rest of them.

As the sun drew near the horizon, he started packing his equipment and saddled his steed, ready for the journey ahead.

**--------**

"I made a brief stop in Chahdan on my trip from Barraekesh. I didn't care much for that town," Simyn remarked. "Or its sharnazim inhabitants" he added.
Rules, Rulings

Act IV, Opening – The Traitor and The Assassin

Sol Hawk was just coming around - he saw Makala leaving the cave. Sir Victor watched him for a long time. Sol knew that this meant Makala was striking out alone once again. This did not leave Sol with the same sorrow as the last time Makala had left. This time Sol Hawk knew that Makala would be out there, on their side, watching.

As Sol Hawk rose, he felt the wince of lingering pain in his chest near his heart once again. But as the afternoon light penetrated the cavernmouth, Sol Hawk knew that the grace of his Lord was with him and he could feel his strength returning. With an ease of one who has no cares in the world, for the reprieve in the cave certainly had rejuvenated Sol Hawk’s spirits, the Kai Lord was able to restore himself to nearly full health with the innate healing ability that many Kai Lords possess.

Throughout the afternoon and evening, Sol Hawk looked after the other members of their company. He changed the bandages on Simyn’s leg. Thankfully, its condition had improved markedly. Korlaeth had made nearly a full recovery and Sir Victor was also well on his way. Sol Hawk had left his armour and weapons packed away. For this day apart from all time, he would have nothing to do with war. There were no more battles, no more hunts, no more deception, distraction, dissuasion. The Kai Lord almost sprinted and leapt about the cave, his chest bare, a makeshift headband tied about his forehead. He was very talkative and engaged the others in conversations of various kinds.

"Holmgard is a beautiful city," he would say, "the walls are so white that the entire surrounding countryside appears brighter and more vivid. There’s a saying in Sommerlund. Never a dark day at Holmgard.

"The sun on the sand here," he told Sir Victor as they lazily watched out of the cave’s mouth that afternoon, "has much the same effect. Everything is brighter. Warmer, yes," he laughed in spite of himself, "but brighter."

He even managed to get some words out of Korlaeth - that Vakeros had been mostly sombre the whole of the day, obviously still remembering his clash with Arcadian. "That’s a beautiful blade," said Sol of his blue-veined dagger. Korlaeth had it out, and it was also looking at the second one that Simyn had discovered. "Is it true that only a Vakeros Warrior is allowed to hold such a blade? Or to possess one? Do they always have that blue hue, or can they be other colors, such as red?"

Arcadian was the most difficult of all to read. He clearly did not want to talk to anyone and responded to most questions with grunts or mere silence. Cade was obviously hurting badly, but Sol Hawk could not really figure out why. The confrontation with Korlaeth had certainly angered him, but this seemed like something more. Sol Hawk had managed to find some time with Sir Victor and had asked what had become of the Vakerine and where she had gone.

Sol tended to Arcadian and could see that his body had healed completely. He was in superior physical condition - the fight in the cave had left no marks. But Arcadian unconsciously winced whenever Sol Hawk went anywhere near his right calf. That was where Arcadian had sustained his first wound on the night the princess had kidnapped at the hands of that first denizen of the dark. But the wound was gone. In fact, no mark even remained. Sol took the time instead to wash Arcadian’s hands and arms instead, since these were still stained in blood - his blood and Sir Victor’s.

Arcadian had apathetically continued to wear the now dark red paint over his palms, his wrists, his forearms.

"Methinks you’re made of stronger stuff,” smiled Sol, “and you are not a stranger to the healing arts as I have seen it. You would have made a good Kai Lord and you may well have been, had you been born in the Land of the Sun. Tell me,” said the Kai, “Where did you come to acquire the healer’s hands?”

The sun was setting toward the horizon, the lights were coming out. Sir Victor was tending to Bright Lance and Korlaeth was taking stock of his equipment. Soon, it would be very soon now.

* * *

Arcadian shrugged, "to be honest my friend, I have no idea. At the school of Daernath we were given only basic training in the healing arts. Staunching open wounds, applying sprints, stitches. Nothing more, my abilities are not supernatural as yours.”

Sol Hawk and Arcadian were seated by themselves, away from the others. The young Vakeros did not mind this and of Sol did he showed no sign of it being so.

“Have you many questions, Kai Lord. Questions that have nothing to do with my healing abilities and yet you do not ask.”

Arcadian looked deep into the blue eyes of his companion. “Do you trust me, Sol Hawk? What to you see when you look into my eyes?”

* * *

Korlaeth groaned at his healing injuries as he came inside from preparing Avatre and Wind. He patted the second bluesteel knife now on his belt and silently thanked Sol for giving it to him, for it needed to be returned to its rightful place. Korlaeth would carry it until then.

He glanced over at the Kai and Arcadian and frowned. He’d been doing far too much of that lately. First at the Kai’s ill-timed actions while hiding amongst the Talions, then Arcadian...he sighed and shook his head. His fellow Vakeros still had much to explain, but it wouldn’t serve to inflict the problem on everyone else any more than he already had. He forced a smile to his face and sat down, ready to move as the others decided.

* * *

"You’re in so much pain,” said Sol Hawk finally, almost in a whisper. The Kai Lord studied Arcadian, wearing himself a face of compassionate concern. "Your concern is appreciated, and your trust is something I will hold close to me. If we both survive these next few days, and whatever they choose to bring us...”

Arcadian’s head lowered, “I hope you will still have that trust. For in the end we will remember not the words of our enemies...”

His gaze fell upon the form of Korlaeth, who was brooding in silence, sharpening his weapons. The invisible lines of tension between them were adamant, and Sol could sense them.

“But the silence of our friends.”

* * *

Sol Hawk smiled and nodded, and he considered Cade’s mysterious answer. Was he being hunted? Had he hidden enemies? "May the days that come bring us victory," he said, "I expect I had better make preparations for our next ride. Here’s to the open road ahead - we ride it together.”

Sol Hawk returned to his horse, cared for it, watered it and fed it, then donned his weapons and armour in the light of stars. All his waterskins were refilled now.

Chadan awaited.
Simyn, if you accept the weapon its range increment is 20 more than a normal crossbow's.

Ahlers, able to post again.

Believe me, I know how the characters feel. Slight breezes were most welcome a couple of weeks ago....

Date: Ra'dho 30 (I think)
Time: Two hours past midnight
Weather: Broken clouds, slight wind from NE
Terrain: low sand dunes, rising higher to the east where the foothills are

I continue to examine the wagon with my spyglass.

Is there any way I could have grabbed some arrows before we left the cave?

Sure... it has no bearing on the story or characters.

Rules, Rulings

Act IV, Opening – The Traitor and The Assassin

Arcadian nodded. He sheathed his shortsword and hefted the larger blade over his shoulder. It took some deliberating but eventually he decided to wear his armor while riding. You never knew what you could run into in the depths of the sea of sand.

*Night is here and we have Ishr's light to guide us.*

The words were spoken, but not felt.

* * *

Simyn suddenly spoke to Sir Victor. "I might have misjudged you at first, sir Victor. Being used to the nobles of my own country, I mistakenly believed that all nobles were selfish, power-hungry, petty thieves that have forgotten about their duty to protect the common people of the land. Since you and Sol Hawk are the only Sommendings I have met are all members of your people as honourable! What you did in that cave impressed me, although I must admit that I thought it was a bit foolish. I wish that my own countrymen could learn from your shining example." Simyn patted Starfall gently.

"Why is it that Sommendings seems so different from other people? Is it your neighbours in the west who have made you into the people you are or is this an inborn quality?"

* * *

"Arcadian," said Sol Hawk, "why not give us all another look at the rendition of Ameesha that you received from Kubudei? I for one could use a second look. We must be wary," he said also, "for the desert is the homeland for the Talons and perhaps other unsavory creatures. Chadan has seen its share of travelers, but we will want to be on our guard since we journey now to Aymodani's own city, one he ruled only just recently. We would do best to keep ourselves inconspicuous if that is possible. We want to attract as little attention as possible since those loyal to Aymodani no doubt also dwell in that place. I would not wish to venture there, but this risk is necessary for as dangerous as it is, we shall be venturing to places far more dangerous soon. We need supplies, and unless we return to Anari, there is no other place we can obtain these. I had hoped that this cave as a stopover for the Talons could have provided more and spared us this dangerous trip. But no, we are granted only so much fortune."

It is time to leave the cave. Geared up and ready to go, the group began their trek into the desert wastelands. The night is a dark one and Sol Hawk makes use of his tracking skill, asking Simyn also if one learned in the ways of astronomy could lend him a hand in verifying the way.

"Korlaeth, your powers could be life and death for us when we arrive at Chadan. When you faced Paru, you were able to change your form. I realized later that it had been a mind trick, but could you also hide our foreign features in a strange town? Do you have the power?"

* * *

Arcadian showed the scroll to Sol Hawk who passed it to the others. When the piece of parchment made its way back to him he refolded it and placed it back in his backpack.

"Simyn," Arcadian walked up to the red-headed man and handed him Murdach's crossbow. "I'm afraid it is of normal quality, yet it has a longer range than any of its type I have seen. You would be much more proficient in its use than I."

* * *

Korlaeth shook his head even as Sol was asking, "Would that I could my friend, but my powers of enchantment are effective on only one person at a time." He flipped back the flap on one of the saddlebags on the mule and indicated his disguise kit. He smiled at Sol then, "However, as they say, there's more than one way to drown a Foran."

* * *

"A fine gift, Arcadian, which I gladly accept. Perhaps we can sell my old crossbow in Chadan."

* * *

The group gathered up what they wanted from the remains of the dead and the meager recesses of the storage room. Deciding wisely to travel by night, the five set out into the open desert, heading west until they came across the markers that denoted a vector in the sand. Simyn confirmed that the markers followed a rough north-south path, and the group headed northward to Chadhan.

After so much excitement in a short time, the men were all thankful that nothing happened that night. Dawn heralded its approached with a slight lightening of the sky to the east. An outcropping of rock in the nearby foothills of the mountains would have to serve as a makeshift shelter from the sun.

The day passed by slowly for those on watch, quickly for those resting. Thankfully there was a slight breeze to help relieve some of the sweltering heat.

After eating, the men began traveling northward again as the sun set. Those who tried to communicate with Arcadian found him to be slipping into a dark quiet mood. He sighed a lot and stared down at the sand much of the night as he rode. Whether his mind was full of thoughts or devoid of them was a mystery to everyone. At length, they left him alone, attributing his silence to something to do with Kamilah. As long as he was handy when needed, they could tolerate his social isolation.

In the middle of the night, Sol Hawk spotted a faint light in the distance. Simyn used his spyglass to discern that the light was from a mounted lantern, swinging back and forth on a wagon that was racing toward them from the north.

As they discussed what to do, Arcadian merely sighed and rubbed his neck.

Simyn lowered his spyglass. A wrinkle crossed his forehead, a wrinkle that always appeared there when he was troubled.

"It seems we will receive company. I can't say more than it's a wagon in this distance, let me check it out further. Be prepared for anything."

Korlaeth grips the hilt of his dagger tightly, eyes fixed on the approaching wagon.

Simyn watched as the lone wagon raced closer. He saw what appeared to be a flag of the Vassagonian empire with white trim flapping wildly from a post near the driver. That meant someone important was inside. The wagon was much closer now—perhaps a couple hundred yards away. It detoured slightly to one side as Simyn watched.

"We need to know who is onboard," said Sol Hawk, "that flag means that the passenger is someone of importance - it is a Vassagonian symbol. If Ameesha is onboard, we must know. But if she is, Murdach likely is, too. Korlaeth, with me. It might be a good time for your disguise spell. Fellow Vassans may not be a threat to them. In the dark, maybe I will seem so as well." To the others, he said, "Cover us!"

Sure...it may not be a threat to them. In the dark, maybe I will seem so as well."

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**Act IV, Opening – The Traitor and The Assassin**

Sol Hawk moved toward the wagon through the dark. As he came close, he called out to the horses telepathically with the power that had served so often before. Easy, he intoned, Slow, That’s it, that’s it. Stop. Sol Hawk did not come too close to the wagon, but he was close enough to peer into the window.

Is there a human woman inside? he asked of the horses, even as he strained to see for himself.

* * *

Korlaeth pulled up his hood, following behind Sol Hawk on Avatre. He stayed back slightly from the side of the wagon, ready to react in support of Sol’s actions, whatever they turned out to be.

* * *

Hearing the Kai’s calming ministrations, the horses slowed a bit, but the crack of the barbed whip over their rumps quickly nullified whatever soothing the Kai could muster. However, he did get an answer to his question as they thundered past: 

No woman. Fat man.

The wagon raced past the group in a cloud of sand that quickly settled after its passing. Simyn took note of the flags on the side—it was some sort of diplomatic envoy bearing the seal of the Zakhan.

They all watched it vanish into the distance. All except Arcadian. He sighed and kept rubbing his neck.

For the rest of the night, that was the only event that was noteworthy. They speculated on what the wagon could mean, given the information that Makas had shared with them. Somewhere, miles south of them, the entire Anari army was marching across the sands. And somewhere, miles east of them, a huge contingent of the Vassagonian army sat about in the mountains. Simyn remembered his little excursion vividly, wondering if that army was still there and whether or not they were an “escort” for the Anarans.

* * *

Three days passed. Arcadian said perhaps ten words a day, his mood either dour or oblivious depending on who addressed him and why. He picked over his meals, barely eating or drinking. In a way, his lack of appetite helped out, for had the rest of them not divided up his rations as they went along, they would have run out of food and water a day ago.

As it was, they had just enough to get them to Chahdan.

The city was visible on the horizon as the sun rose. Rather than stop, the companions pressed onward, knowing their goal—well, their first goal—was at hand. Perhaps the only one among them that did not look forward as much to entering the city was Simyn. He knew it could be a rough place, and he had never in his wildest imaginations thought that he would be coming back here so soon.

A couple of hours after sunrise, they had made it inside the city walls. It was bustling with activity. A road heading straight north had several vendors on it, but they were dropping their canopies and packing up shop for some reason.

* * *

“Why are the merchants closing? There is still a lot of business to be made. Perhaps there is some sort of curfew?” Simyn patted Starfall affectionally. He didn’t even mind the smell anymore.

* * *

“If Murdash and his warriors have arrived here before us,” said Sol Hawk, “We will be spotted for sure if there is no daily traffic. We had better do our business fast, or else we will have to find a place to stay for the night.”

As they passed the first merchant, Sol Hawk spoke with a convincing Vassan accent and in the native tongue of the area. “The shops are closing - why? My friends and I wish to be ready for travel when the sun sets again. We need food, water, and a place to stay. Can you tell me where?” Sol Hawk also took notice of exactly which shops were in this area in case one of them sold a commodity they were seeking.

* * *

Sir Victor had been travelling without his armor, for to do so in this sun would have been tantamount to suicide. It was packed neatly in one of his saddlebags, within easy reach had trouble shown itself over the horizon.

The ride to Chahdan had been hot, dry, dusty and more than a little uncomfortable to the Northlander. However, his strong physique and stoic demeanor meant that he wouldn’t be complaining throughout the ordeal, even if his wounds were still fresh on his body. Of more concern to him, though, was his mount, which needed to consume large amounts of water. Travelling by night helped. Talk was kept to a minimum, in order to preserve moisture. It was with no small relief that Chahdan’s outline finally drew itself over the horizon.

“Finally, that’s a welcome sight!” boomed the knight to his companions as they drew nearer to the town. First order of business would be to shop for supplies: foodstuffs and water for them and their mounts, and any Laumspur potions that they could find, if any were available of course.

Curioulys, the merchants in their alley started packing their wares as they rode through. Sir Victor followed Sol as he rode up to a merchant and addressed him in his native tongue.

* * *

Korlaeth again stayed with Sol, a silent, relaxed presence at his side. His hood was still drawn low, this time mainly to nullify whatever soothing the Kai could muster. However, he did get an answer to his question as they thundered past: 

No woman. Fat man.

The merchant Sol Hawk spoke to jumped in fright—he had not seen anyone walk up to him. He listened and looked past the Kai to his other companions, noting that they were likely not to have any clue what was happening.

“Bad time to travel, lads,” he said, narrowing one eye and spreading his arm toward the south. “His eminence, Kubudei the Great;” (this said in mocking tones of respect) “is leading his horsemongering army northward to Cloeasia. He is personally passing through the city to thank the current ruler for his nation’s help and this city’s resources.”

The merchant scowled. Apparently this was a sore spot. “Best buy what you can while you can. All provisioners are to buy what you can while you can. All provisioners are to put their wares out and stockpiling it through the desert along the trail northward to Teph.”

He looked at his wares—different types of pouches, containers, and such—and scowled. “b_stard*. If it weren’t for them, I’d be able to eat next month. Now;...” His voice trailed off at the lack of profit that was probably used to support himself and purchase more materials to make his goods.
If anyone wants to buy anything equipment-wise, let me know and I’ll quote you a “best price”. You can roll Diplomacy checks to drop this price by 10%.

If anyone wants to sell anything you’ve acquired, let me know and I’ll quote you what the best rate you get is. You can use either Diplomacy or Bluff checks to influence the selling price: +1% for every point that you beat the vendor’s Sense Motive check by.

Sir Victor: If you want your armor repaired (where that sandblast hit it), it’ll cost you 20 crowns, and you’ll have to leave it overnight in the shop.

Rooms are as follows. Choose what you want and deduct the gold:

- Each night at a fair inn (The Dry Mainroom):
  - Bed, 2 meals, stabling a horse - 4 crowns
- Each night at a normal inn (Udai’s Inn):
  - Bed with cold bath and 2 meals, stabling a horse - 7 crowns
  - Bed with warm bath and 2 meals, stabling and grooming a horse - 9 crowns
- Each night at a quality inn (Oasis Bed and Grill):
  - Bed with cold bath and 2 meals, stabling a horse - 12 crowns
  - Bed with warm bath and 2 meals, stabling and grooming a horse - 16 crowns

Yes, where you stay determines what happens. You can split up in different inns if you’d like. Be sure to let me know where you stay.

Date: Ansus 2
Time: Mid-morning
Weather: Clear and sunny, a bit cooler than a few days ago

**OOC: Not sure what inn we will choose, but let’s say it was chosen before Korlaeth took off. I put in a vote for a Warm Bath at Udai’s Inn.**

**Arcadian will purchase 6 meals and refill his empty waterskins if possible. How many meals did I consume in three days? Three?**
I was exceeding the load limit of my donkey. Trail rats. Sol's extra money will pay for, not Chahdan more memorable.

You could actually appraise them if you they may have for sale.

Diplomacy check: 22

I'm buying another waterskin and a total amount of water that corresponds to one and a half waterskin.

I'm also thinking of the Udai's Inn, BTW. Cold could be good for us right now, in the desert...

Ah, come on guys! The Oasis bed and grill sounds so nice right now! I just remembered I had a ring and a bunch of unappraised gems on my character sheet. Perhaps Simyn would have had time to appraise them along the way to Chahdan? Just wondering...

I'm also sleeping at Udai's parlor of all things relaxing.

I'd also like to purchase a pack horse or camel to carry all the food and water that will be needed for the trip to Teph. How long should that trip last KL, just so we know how much supplies we'll need?

Before I forgot Simyn visited the water merchant and asked to buy an extra waterskin and to fill up the one he already had. Desert travel was really fattiguing and the sage really wished for a bath at Udai's inn.

The man smiled and looked at his new charge. "Why is Egoliah doing this?" he demanded of the messenger, a Sharn known as Kavan.

Spreading his hands and lowering his head in respect and truth, he answered, "I know not, my lord. He bade me deliver that to you the instant you arrived here."

Murdach scowled and thought of killing the man for no better reason than to have a victim for his rage. It wouldn't do to kill him, not in front of his fellow soldiers. "Get up and tend to my horse. Prepare us for a two day journey."

He dismounted and turned to one of his captains, "You are in charge of Ameesha. If her voice begins to bother you, gag her. If she will not comply, cut off another fingertip."

The man smiled and looked at his new charge. "I'll take good care of her."

Murdach read his intent and sprang up to grab the man and pull him from the saddle. The two crashed to the ground, and instantly Murdach's blade was at the man's throat. "If she is defiled, bring the blade in care of her."

Surprise turned to anger and quickly to fear. "Yes, Myr-alish. Yes I understand."

The assassin stood and sheathed his blade. "Prepare to go. Bypass the usually roadways and cities. Take a legion and supplies for deep-desert travel. Cross the road at night and replenish at K'avi Oasis, then head on to Teph. The Talons shouldn't bother you if you come across them in the desert."

He spent the next half hour finalizing what he'd wished for his journey to Chahdan to assassinate Kubudei. As an entourage, he chose three Sharnazim bodyguards—one of them being Kavan. Murdach found a moderately skilled apothecarist to care for his health, and a slave with his wife and family will suffer a living death a hundred times worse. Do you understand?"

Water is 4 SP for a skin refill.

Tailoring/Mending Underleathers is -115 GP (pick them up in the morning)

Mount's water is -27 GP, 100# total weight (this is a water cask with crude tap)

Your water is -18 GP, 56# total weight (includes extra waterskins)

Food is -63 SP, 14# total weight

Kubudei is coming through town, leading his generals in a parade through the streets of Chahdan.

Kubudei is coming through town, leading his generals in a parade through the streets of Chahdan.

The former ruler Aymodani has been missing for weeks, and the current ruler does not have the respect of the people for his aloof style of government.

-Kubudei is coming through town, leading his generals in a parade through the streets of Chahdan.

-Kubudei is coming through town, leading his generals in a parade through the streets of Chahdan.

The slave market will be pleased, and some say it is because the new ruler condones it as a tool to keep people in check.

The current ruler does not have the respect of the people for his aloof style of government.

-Simyn paid the water merchant 2 gold crowns.

"Please, keep the change" he told the grateful merchant. "I will be thinking good thoughts of you when I return to the desert."
**Diplomacy:** 17

Right: potions purchases when the time is right; Diplomacy to lower the price of their goods.

Sol Hawk would make a roll vs. the apothecary's rolls to acquire some? Thank you, you are most kind.

Buying 4 potions of Laumspur -500GC
Buying 1 Rendalim's Elixir -275 GC

**Act IV, Opening – The Traitor and The Assassin**

The knight gratefully paid the armour smith, then went looking for supplies - food and water for the trek which lay ahead, potions for surviving the coming conflicts. It felt good to walk without his armour's weight on his shoulders, yet at the same time he felt strangely vulnerable without it. Unfortunately, the engraved Crown of Sommerlund would have to be repaired at a later date, when he eventually returned to his country - if this quest didn't claim his life first. Death was a very real possibility, but one the knight was always prepared for. Laying down his life on such a noble quest was second nature to him, his only regret would be not seeing his fair Sommerlund one last time, if it came to that.

He then remembered the gems and rings he had picked up in the cave. Perhaps he could use them to pay for supplies. He looked at the ring and thought it was worth around 230 crowns. The blue gems were a mystery to him, and he told himself to let Simyn take a look at them before parting with them, while he evaluated the value of one red gem to around 100 crowns. The other two looked similar enough to be worth the same amount.

After some time looking for an apothecarist, he finally found one who hadn't yet closed shop, and offered exactly what he was looking for: Laumspur. He gave Alether and Rendalim Elixir, the latter brewed by the famed Durenorian of the same name. He had never tried it before, and it was a lot more expensive than the Laumspur potions, yet he was willing to buy one, putting his faith into Rendalim's renown.

Sir Victor raised an eyebrow and politely refused the offer, but Sol Hawk approached and with the proper respect said:

"I thank you once again for the work you are to do upon my behalf. You seem to have some knowledge of herbs as well. Do you have any Laumspur or Alether? Or can you tell us where to find them?"

The apothecary then came close and whispered "Adagana Leaves" in his ears, while pointing at the back room with his thumb. The knight had heard about this combat-enhancing drug, yet couldn't justify its outlandish cost. It was illegal in Sommerlund, and probably here in Vassagonia as well, and for good reason - consumption of its leaves was highly addictive.

Sir Victor and Sol Hawk had their armour tended to, Sol Hawk heard the merchant offer Sir Victor some Agdana. The knight refused it, but Sol Hawk approached and with the proper respect said:

"I thank you once again for the work you are to do upon my armour. You seem to have some knowledge of herbs as well. Do you have any Laumspur or Alether? Or can you tell us where to acquire some? Thank you, you are most kind."

Arcadian was moving about the marketplace square, trying to get what items and provisions he could while there was still time. He looked around and happened to see the busy form of the Ruanese knight nearby, perusing some merchants' inventories in boxes they had already packed up. The Vakeros then heard a mule or something similar bray nearby. Odd. He had seen no animals in the marketplace, and the inns were a good bit north of here.

He looked around and found a donkey standing at the end of an alleyway. Sir Victor apparently saw Arcadian looking for something and came to stand near him. Cade showed him the donkey and saw that there were provisions packed onto it. In addition, there seemed to be a book on the ground and an open doorway—a secret doorway—in one of the buildings that flanked the alley.

---

The apothecary looked at the Kai and smiled. "You speak kindly to an old man," he said in Vasan. "Choose what potions you will. But ah, if I were you I would avoid the rest."

---

Arcadian didn't want to cause alarm in the marketplace so he made his movements slow. The young Vakeros bent down and quickly inspected the book. His curiosity got the better of him.

"Victor, I'll be right back."

Before the knight could reply with warning or with desire to follow Arcadian was through the doorway, his hand on the hilt of his shortsword. Two steps into the building and Cade began to wonder why he was bothering to enter this stupid building. Ah well, anything to get his mind off of Kamilah. Her face and words haunted his mind and tore down walls to memories that he did not want to relive.

Denial was bliss in Arcadian's mind.

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**Rules, Rulings**

*For anyone who is walking about in the main market area, roll a perception check at DC18. The first one to pass the check was the first one to walk by what I think was a natural 20.*

Got to get back to class. Talk to you all later.

P.S. I see that Ashly has decided to rejoin us.

---

**Perception:** 22

I am reduced to the following cash:

18 PT
19 GC
7 SP

This includes all purchases listed above PLUS I gave Korlaeth 9 GP for the room so he can catch up with us later. It also includes my room and also double the amount of animal food/water listed.

I decided to keep my horse (relegated to carrying duty) and I am also buying a camel (let me know how much).

**Perception Roll passed.**

 Rolled 26 on my perception roll with an extra 3 from my string of beads for a total of 29. Consider yourself beaten Cade! By the way is there some way to roll 1d4+1d20+bonus at the same time? The code doesn't seem to work for multiple different dice.

Okay, Cade was first to post his perception check. It passed, so he was the first one in the "area". I'm allowing SV to be close as well, due to the natural 20. The rest of you just go about your business wherever you are.

---

Sol, SV is at another merchant now—one that sells compounds and herbs and such. He isn't the same as the armer. And he decides to lower the price by 100GC for any potion you buy. This place is herbalish and alchemist heaven.

A camel costs 100GC. Given your ability with animals, I won't fix you up with a bad camel. The vendor calls him 'Namuva', but you can tell the camel doesn't care for this name.
Act IV, Opening – The Traitor and The Assassin

A donkey, here? That was odd. The knight stuffed his potions into his pouch as he approached the alleyway to find Arcadian already kneeling beside a book on the ground. Before he could reach the Vakeros to greet him and inquire about these circumstances, the cobalt warrior was already back on his feet and reaching for the secret doorway, only saying “Victor, I’ll be right back” before disappearing inside.

Sir Victor looked around and, seeing no one was paying any attention to him or the laden donkey, quickly followed Arcadian inside. If this meant trouble, he would make sure the Vakeros wouldn’t be facing it by himself. The young man was rash, impetuous and hot-headed, but it wasn’t too long ago that Victor used to be unlike that himself. Cade was also proving to be a staunch ally and quite formidable in combat, and until the princess was rescued and the current events came to an end, honor demanded that the Sommlending protect all those who accompanied him. Unsheathing his broadsword and trusting to its steel, the unarmoured knight walked through the door, unheeding of his current vulnerability.

* * *

Arcadian was moving as quietly as he possibly could. As he was not currently wearing any armor he was able to make his footsteps light but some stroke of bad luck fell upon him and his leg bumped into a stool. Cursing loudly he continued on, his face a mirror of anger.

He had almost made it to the end of the hall when suddenly a figure darted out in front of them from a side room. Arcadian recognized the colored robes instantly. He was a magician of Dessi!

* * *

Valestar stood ominously, raising his arms high, his robes flapping about him as he spoke in a booming voice:

“What is your business here? Do you come to deal in harm or in harmony?”

Wow, he thought, that was awesome! And the gods must have thought so too, for suddenly he felt his willpower expand beyond his years, and with a shiny clink of spiritual satisfaction, he was allowed to use one more spell per day.

* * *

Sol Hawk took a look through the potions, which were all of good quality. He turned to Simiy who was nearby. “I fear I have run out of money,” he said, “between supplies and the extra camel, it seems I’ve none left for Laumspur.” The young Kai shrugged and smiled. “Even so, the merchant has agreed to a small discount. Perhaps if you care to buy some, this would be the right chance we have been waiting for.” He looked across the street past his two camels to the shop where Victor had gone for heavy armour work. “Or perhaps Sir Victor.”

* * *

Kamilah meticulously dusted off her matted clothes and elegantly pushed her hair back from her face. Moving quickly she bent down and retrieved her blue-steel. The magician she recognized as a magic-user from Dessi, but this man in front of her was alien to her.

After a second glance she identified the green cloak to be the same texture, color, and trim as the Kai Sol Hawk had been wearing. He must be a Kai as well. Her first instincts, as always, exhibited extreme caution as she was in a strange place accompanied by strange people. At least with Arcadian at her side she didn’t have to feel alone.....

The man she assumed to be Kai stepped towards her and she quickly moved back into the corner of her room. She curled herself up into a tight ball, her legs brought up in front of her heaving chest. Kamilah held her blade in front of her, unwilling to trust her life to anyone, especially someone that she didn’t know.

“Please. Don’t come any...closer.” Her lips quivered, and her voice echoed with fright.

The near-death experience she had just escaped still haunted her and left her breathing heavy. As she waited for the cloaked man to respond her eyes darted around the room, looking for her other weapon and the rest of her equipment.

* * *

Arcadian was in no mood.

“I’m Vakeros you nitwit! What makes you think I come to harm you?”

The young Vakeros was about to give this mage a few more pieces of his mind when suddenly he heard a familiar, female voice coming from the other room. His heart fluttered and his anger cooled as the words reached his ears.

“Please. Don’t come any...closer.”

He knew that voice.

“KAMILAH!”

* * *

“Oh,” Valestar dropped his arms as the Vakeros rushed past. “Oh yes, a Vakeros. Ha, very well then! Oh, good indeed!” he cheered. “Well, if I were you I’d hurry up and buy some of their ethereal energies. He continued to stand in the hallway chuckling. Then he stopped suddenly. Wait a minute... what was a Vakeros doing here?

* * *

Kamilah rose slowly removing the hair from her eyes. She positioned her body against the back wall, her legs unable to support her weakened figure. Shouting filled the echoing halls, but became muffled before reaching her ears. Fearing the worst, the young Vakerine drew her only weapon. Suddenly a minor burning sensation engulfed Kamilah. Running her fingers across her burning area, her fingers struck blood. The cut was not severe and only the result of how sternly the blade had been held against the flesh of her neck. Her body ached and cheeks flushed, but her eyes remained fixed on the entrance to the room. Footsteps drew nearer, someone was coming. Her body tensed, and beads of cold sweat ran down her brow. Someone was coming, but her eyes remained fixed on the entrance to the room.

“Please. Don’t come any...closer.”

Hawkeye stopped where he stood, his hands put up to show her he meant her no harm. “Easy there, I meant you no harm. I just want to check your condition. Then once we are sure you are unharmed, we will go on our way. The only interest I have in you is to make sure you are safe, which is what you are now.” Hawkeye looked at the Vakerine and examine what he can see, “Hmm, she looks fine; no she’s not, she’s bleeding!” Hawkeye reacted instinctively, he stepped forward intending to help the weakened Vakerine who was using the wall on her back as support. “Please let me help you, you have no reason to trust me but know this, I’m here to help you. At least let me tend to your wounds.”

Just as he was about to take hold of her arms, he heard some shouting from outside the room and running footsteps where soon heard approaching the room. “What now!” The frustrated Kai Lord muttered to himself.

* * *
Rules, Rulings

Act IV. Opening – The Traitor and The Assassin

Simyn looked at the merchants’ goods and generally enjoyed himself. It was some time since he had been in a city before and even if he didn’t enjoy Chahdan very much, it was nice to be out of the desert. He looked for the others and saw Sol Hawk.

“Sol, have you found a herbalist around here? I think I should buy some laumspur.”

His movements frantic, Arcadian pushed past the magician and barged his way into the room. His eyes saw nothing but Kamilah and he quickly rushed to her cowering form. She was huddled in the corner, weeping. As Arcadian approached he watched as Kamilah tried to stand to her feet, her weapon held out in front of her.

Arcadian pushed past a man standing in the room, momentarily uncaring if he was friend or foe. His only concern was Kamilah, his startling… She held her blade out in front of him, as if expecting an enemy. Ignoring the blade Arcadian rushed to her and placed his arms under her own, giving her support to stand correctly on her own two feet.

“Kami? Kami it’s…me.”

“Yes, it would be wise,” said Sol Hawk, “We will surely be in need of additional potions. Food will also be required for the journey, so take care to save some for that.” Sol Hawk thought again of Makala, whose skills as a desert hunter would have been very handy on the desert sands. Sol wished that he, who was a fine hunter himself, had had the opportunity to learn those skills required to find sustenance upon the broiling lands.”

Sol Hawk considered also the last few coins in his own belt pouch and smiled to himself. Truth to tell, he was more comfortable carrying less money in any case - too much simply felt heavy to the frugal Kai Lord.

Simyn looked at the merchants’ goods and generally enjoyed himself. It was some time since he had been in a city before and even if he didn’t have the kit Varsuvial. Because but it’s with

And if this were Kai’s of Our Lives, Valestar would now exclaim “By God! This woman’s pregnant!”

Without the restraint of armor Arcadian was able to bring Kamilah’s head to his soft chest. Using the utmost care he meticulously pushed

His eyes under normal circumstances would have darkened and become dangerous. But Cade was exasperated, and he wanted nothing more than

Exhausted, traumatized and shaken her stomach turned. Kamilah’s eyelids fluttered and sealed shut; the last of her energy had gone. Her body lifeless, descended towards the dusty flooring.

Another man was there, standing above the bodies of two dead Shamanzim, and there was no mistaking his green cloak: a Kai Lord, here! Sir Victor wasted no time in addressing him, after sheathing his sword, which was obviously not necessary anymore:

“I’m Sir Victor of Ruanon, envoy from the King to the court of Anari. It warms my heart to meet another Sommlending so far from home. But what brought you here? It seems we are bound to run into trouble in this desert nation. You’ll be glad to know we are not alone here, for another Kai Lord accompanies our group on our mission. Have you heard of Sol Hawk? If you’ll follow us out of here, you’ll have the chance to meet him.

Oh, and by the way, these two have a history together, I understand it’s somewhat complicated, especially where matters of the heart are concerned,” he added for the benefit of the Kai Lord and his apparent companion.

“Ahuh…” Kamilah gasped as Arcadian’s arms folded around her delicate frame. Still quite distressed Kamilah’s breathing hastened. Her skin had grown quite pale, but her lips hardened with the color of crimson. She tilted her chin slightly, her golden hues catching those of Arcadian’s.

“Ca-de…”

Their eyes met, but only for a moment. The young Vakerine drew back her fingers from the wound and watched as blood dripped from them. Exhausted, traumatized and shaken her stomach turned. Kamilah’s eyelids fluttered and sealed shut; the last of her energy had gone. Her body lifeless, descended towards the dusty flooring.

Valestar watched as the scene unfolded. As the girl fell into what he hoped was a faint he was seized by a sudden desire to help her and her obvious companions. He pushed through the crowd of gatherers and bent by the woman’s side. “I’m practiced in the art of healing,” he said. “Let me see if I can help her.”

He gently pushed aside the Vakeros and ran his fingers lightly around the wound, inspecting it.

Arcadian suddenly pushed turned and pushed the mage, hard. The man stumbled away from the crumpled form of Kamilah and Arcadian once again took her limp frame into his own arms.

“Let her be.” He said to the magician of Dessi. “She is in shock and requires no medical aid. I also am practicing in the healing arts.”

His eyes under normal circumstances would have darkened and become dangerous. But Cade was exasperated, and he wanted nothing more than to tend to his old love in peace. His pupils were almost pleading, and then to the surprise of Victor he pleaded with words.

“Please…please leave her to me.”

As Sir Victor helped the aged man to his feet, to his surprise, Arcadian pleaded to be left alone with Kamilah. He nodded to the Vakeros, before asking the other two “Come with me, they need time alone, and there’s not much more we can do here. You can tell me what happened here outside. And if that donkey waiting out there is yours, I wouldn’t leave him alone for too long in such a town as Chahdan.”

As the Kai Lord and the robed man walked out, and Sir Victor was about to follow them outside, he looked back at Arcadian. “I’ll see you back at the inn. Take care…of her and you both,” he said before leaving.

Without the restraint of armor Arcadian was able to bring Kamilah’s head to his soft chest. Using the utmost care he meticulously pushed

His words brought forth no response. Arcadian lifted her head a little higher so it fit into the crook of his shoulder. He let her lay like that for a moment before looking down upon her. Her eyes were closed, her fiery, golden irises behind shut eyelids. Her skin was pale, cold to the touch, and her cheeks were rosy-colored.

“Wake up. Open your eyes, Kamilah.”
**Act IV. Opening – The Traitor and The Assassin**

She did not stir and Arcadian, for the first time in his life, began to truly despair. All of his young years he had pushed past all of the troubles and snares that had come across his path. He chose to simply ignore his problems and move on with his life. And now, in his lowest moment the past was catching up with him. There were consequences.

Silently, Cade wept. Unashamed. His eyes were heavy and dilated from lack of sleep and his sorrow. And despite his characteristic prideful demeanor he continued to weep and refused to wipe away the salty tears.

“I love you.”

Outside the closed door, Valestar brushed himself off with a disgusted look on his face. “Darn fool Vakeros,” he muttered. “Love... a greater power than we can ever hope to understand, let alone control. Best to leave it alone.” His eyes darkened and he bowed his head, as if in memory of some dark event.

Suddenly a loud braying was heard. “Varsuval!” the mage said, clapping a hand to his forehead. “And my books! My supplies!” He pushed past the others and ran outside to his donkey, who began making a contented sort of donkey noise at the sight of the mage.

“It’s okay Varsuval, I didn’t go far.” The donkey nudged his arm. “Ah yes, well I do seem to have hurt myself somewhat, haven’t I? But it will heal in no time. I’ll tell you all about it later, and I’ll read you another chapter tonight.”

Hawkeye and Valestar walked outside followed shortly by the knight, leaving the couple in the room. He thought to himself, “My job here is done, she is safe with him. That is all that matters. Love. Nothing is more complicated than love.” He turned towards the knight, while the mage tended to his donkey and checked his supplies.

“I am Hawkeye, Kai Lord of the Kai Monastery. And that is my... partner, Valestar, a Dossi mage. We haven’t known each other long for we met but just some hours ago.” Hawkeye nodded towards the fusing mage, prodding and nudging to make sure each of his items are secured and counted for. “I was just passing by Chahdan when I met him, when we decided we’ll travel together. And it is by pure luck that I have met.” Valestar interrupted Hawkeye. “We, you mean we, you can say I’m old but you can’t say I’m deaf!”, and he continued his checking. “Yes, I meant we. It’s by will of Kai and Isha the Azure who found her. You see, not while ago, the old mage was across the street looking for supplies, when I saw those same men, now dead, talking to a man, a slave trader, before entering this alley and into the room inside by way of this secret door. We followed them and found out that they were concluding a deal, the Vakerines called Kamihal and her bluesteel weapons, among other things. To cut things short, we interrupted their meeting and got all but one, the slave trader. He got away and I was just about to help the Vakerine when the other Vakeros and you arrived. And you said Sol Hawk is here as well? Hmm, I will have to ask Valestar about this.”

The Kai Lord walked over to his old companion and asked, “Mage, are you satisfied with that donkey of yours and the supplies? If so, we’d best be moving in now but Sir Victor here has invited both you and me to join him. I can very well speak for my own but not for both of us, less I have to endure yet another hour of your complaints. So what say you?”

“Well that’s not like you, Hawkeye,” the mage answered derisively. “I haven’t known you long, but to think you’re not interested in the girl’s fate? Not that I am,” he hurriedly added. “I can’t wait to get out of this striking desert. Best to leave well enough alone with love.”

But Hawkeye spat the word as he grabbed Varsuval’s rope and began to lead him from the square. “Well, I seem to be ready here. So I suppose if you are also ready we can be on our proverbial way. Farewell sir Knight.”

Satisfied with his purchases Simyn put the potions of laumspur in his already crowded backpack. So what now? Go to the inn? Simyn looked for the others. Arcadian and sir Victor seemed to be missing, but he could see Sol Hawk among the shoppers. Korlaeth probably also was around there somewhere. Simyn went to a stand where Sol Hawk seemed to argue over the price of his Bor Hairune. Simyn couldn’t put an exact figure on the value of the gun, but the sage could bet his rapier that the piece of dwarven craftsmanship was valuable.

“I’m going to the inn, Sol Hawk. Good luck with your haggling.”

After accepting a pouch of gold in trade for the gun (and silently promising to avenge the dwarf’s untimely demise) Sol Hawk allowed at last the gun to part from his grasp. “Hey, Simyn,” said Sol Hawk, “I shall go with you if you are ready.” Then in a lower voice he said, “Let us find the others before we depart- I am not pleased with the idea of splitting ourselves up in this particular place,” he said, then as he looked around, he saw that this had already occurred.

“Korlaeth had some personal business to attend to,” said Sol Hawk, “let us see if we can find Arcadian and Sir Victor.” As they walked through the streets, Sol Hawk passed an animal husband who seemed to be selling all manner of animals from livestock to mantis. Sol Hawk looked to his own beautiful horse, Blade. This fine stallion had served him well, but it was beginning to show signs of the heat and Sol Hawk knew that it was not right to drive it harder into the desert - an environment for which the animal was not best suited. After haggling with the merchant further over prices, at last Sol Hawk came away from the deal with two fine camels. Sol Hawk whispered kindly to Blade, his horse, as if to comfort it. May you enjoy your relaxing stay here amongst your new friends, intoned Sol Hawk to the mighty beast. It has been a pleasure to journey with you. Fare thee well until such a time as you and I may meet again. After passing one last carrot to the beautiful animal, Sol Hawk left with Simyn as he led both new camels through the streets in search of the others.

“I agree with you. This is not a place where I feel welcome. I wouldn’t like to see that someone of us got stabbed in the back, because I wasn’t there to protect him. Where can they have gone to? Were they interested in buying or selling something particular?”

“Sir Victor had to seek out a metalsmith to repair his armour. Perhaps Arcadian went with him.” The two found their way to the metalsmith. Surely, Sir Victor’s armour was there, awaiting its repairs. But not Sir Victor.

Sol Hawk conversed with the armourer briefly, describing Sir Victor and asking which way the large man had headed upon leaving the store.

The sun passed overhead, watching the activity below in the bustling city of Chahdan. Despite the harsh temperatures that were still prevalent, there was still a common--though somewhat more tolerable--people stayed active all day. The Sharnazim patrolled the streets of all sections of town, from the southmost gate that led to the market square, through the lower residential district, into the mercantile of town, and out through the northern residential and government districts. That path would take them far from the dangerous eastern side of town where the slavers and thieves held sway, but it would take them through a dangerous bottleneck: the Four Towers Crossroads.

Four Towers is located in the heart of town, in the middle of the warehouses and storage facilities of the merchants and the government. Each tower is manned by a contingent of guards, who on occasion one or more of the interaction houses a satellite guard house and makeshift prison. Still, the nature of the design of the district has caused increased Sharnazim activity to secure this section of town.
Rules, Rulings

From all over Vassagonia, smaller groups of Sharnazim entered the city in order to lend their services to security for their former enemies. Though some would love nothing more than to attack the coward offspring of Anar, they were under strict orders from their lords not to do so. Tensions were high, and it was visible, for while the Sharnazim could not raise their hands against the Anaran, they could rough the locals up some. And any foreigners they happened to come across...

----------

Arcadian and Kamilah held each other silently, sharing more in those few quiet moments than they could in days of conversation. At length, they decided the best thing would be to return to an inn and spend time in the relative safety of a room. Kamilah was strong and brave, but having an ignoble death so close at hand is more than enough to shake anyone up. She accepted Arcadian’s support, and the two ignored the others for the sake of themselves as they moved back through the market square to Udai’s.

Sir Victor gave Cade a knowing nod and gathered up the two Dessi’s gear, carrying it back to the inn so they would not have to worry about lugging it with them. He offered to help the Kai with a room at the inn if possible, but Hawkeye was resolute that he would be heading southward—with Valestar coming along.

Nothing lost, the Ruanese knight thanked them for their heroics and left.

----------

Sol Hawk said farewell to his horse mentally, expecting an equally respectful parting sentiment. Instead, he was met with a snort and twitching of the tail and ears. The animal was insulted to be traded for two camels. "They stink...and they’re ugly."

That was all the Kai could elicit from his mount. Sighing, exasperated that his horse didn’t understand the necessity of this decision, the Kai left the stables and entered the market square. He jumbled the two vouchers for his camels and the invoice for his supplies into his empty coin pouch. Unfettered by the urge to acquire material wealth, the Kai merely patted the light leathery purse and moved along back to Udai’s, searching for his friends as he did so.

Simyn was with him, and the duo made a rather contrasting couple compared to the native population. A trio of Sharnazim detached from a larger group harassing some merchants and intercepted the two.

"Hey," one of the said. "You two need to clear out of here. We are authorized to imprison anyone caught loitering or hindering the merchant’s movement from this area."

One of the trio shouted at someone behind the Kai and sage, then left to go fuss at some kids who were milling about in the area.

"We were on our way out, until you stopped us," said Simyn.

This caused raised eyebrows from the two remaining Sharnazim. "Big words from a small man," one said. The other laughed, and before the foreigners could reply, he added, "Well, then, keep going."

They moved away, and Sol Hawk narrowed his eyes in anger. Another time.

----------

Valestar listened to the explanation by the gate guard and his blood boiled. How dare they do this! The guards watched the elderly man sputter and fidget as he tried to come up with a reply. They got a bit edgy when the Kai pulled the mule aside and began talking to him. What were they planning?

Hawkeye, more free-spirited and carefree than the mage, tried to calm him down. "Look, it’s only for a couple of days, and that knight we met is staying closeby at some inn. We could room with them until the town lets people leave again."

"They can’t hold us!" he shouted. Then in a hushed tone, "I’ve got just the spell...I can bring a tiny fire spirit here to stir up some trouble—!"

"No!" snapped Hawkeye, wary of how much “help” Valestar could truly do right now. "Let’s go back to the inn. When was the last time you slept in a real bed and had food prepared for you?"

Reluctantly—in fact, being dragged more stubbornly than Varsuvial on a bad day—the Kai “guided” the mage back to Udai’s Inn.

----------

Koraeth did the most scouting, so I’ve kind of adjusted some info.

**Act IV, Opening – The Traitor and The Assassin**

As the sun set and the Sharnazim became more numerous, the Vakeros decided to return to Udai’s.

* * *

Back at the inn, Sir Victor checked in the stables to see that Bright Lance was getting the treatment she deserved, before he went to his room to stow his supplies away, and those of the two Vakeros he had brought back with him.

After making sure everything was in a safe place, the knight went back down to the main room of the inn, hungry for something filling and to catch up with what the others had been doing during the day.

* * *

Arcadian led Kamilah into Udai’s Inn, taking care for she was still instable. He sat her down at a table, kissed her on the forehead, and walked over to the bar. He spoke quickly with the barkeep, not wishing to waste time.

"Barkeep, I need a single room for the night. What do you have available and how much?"

* * *

Okay, I think that's everyone. Decide who eats in the common room at Udai's, and who stays in their room(s).
* * *

**Rules, Rulings**

Each night at a normal inn (Udai's Inn):
- Bed with cold bath and 2 meals
- Stabling a horse - 7 crowns
- Bed with warm bath and 2 meals, stabling and grooming a horse - 9 crowns
- Your room will be number 21 (third floor).

I really need to start remembering to put "*indigo*" in my color headings...

I'm waiting to see who is in the common room from the companions before posting next.

Valestar will buy the 7 crown room.

After that he will follow Hawkeye.

I'm ordering a bottle of wine. I guess the meal is free.

I'm assuming Sol took care of my mounts when I left them with him in the marketplace. Sir Victor, I suppose it's either up to you or a Spout roll to see if you recognize me, my Disguise roll was an 18.

**Act IV, Opening – The Traitor and The Assassin**

"Seven for a cold bath and the extras. Nine for a warm bath for you," he says with practiced ease of infection. More than most people, Udai can speak North Common without the heavy accent of Vassagonia.

The common room is packed, by the way. People are afraid to go onto the streets since the Sharnaim are patrolling.

With a nod Arcadian placed down nine gold crowns and accepted the room key from the barkeep. Then he sat down two more crowns in front of the barkeep.

"I have two horses that need attending too. The golden, Dessi mare and the Anarian mare."

He took note of the room number and made his way back over to Kamilah. He handed her the room key and whispered quietly in her ear.

"Go up to the room, Kamilah. I'll be up there in a few minutes."

Cade had caught sight of Victor and wanted to speak with him before turning in for the night.

Valestar was infuriated that he would be stuck in Chahdan not for only one extra night, but two! Didn't that fool Hawkeye remember that they were being sought? Of course, there was the possibility that those they had helped would provide ample protection... but then he remembered the love crazed Vakeros. By the gods, there was certain to be trouble in that group before two nights were spent.

And there were things afoot that none of them could fathom. The voice inside of him had been quiet, and it made him uneasy. It was up to something, he knew. But what?

Sullenly he followed Hawkeye to the inn, Varsuvial baying happily, reminding him of his promise to read to him. Well, at least his paranoia had subsided somewhat since gaining a companion. That at least he could be thankful for. Still he felt uneasy as the desert wind played upon his back. It felt like the claws of some sinister monster raking his spine.

"I'll take the room with the hot bath" the sage said and put nine golden coins on the counter.

Simyn really enjoyed his bath. He had visited the public baths in Barrakeesh and he knew that this really couldn't compare with them, but the hot water made him feel as if he were completely new man. When he got up from the bath he began to feel alert, hungry and foremost thirst.

It felt like ages since he had slept in an inn and he was eager to eat anything else than the jerky and the biscuits that made up his travel rations. Remembering that two meals were included in the price of the room, Simyn went down in the tap-room and ordered a meal. As he waited for the meal to be prepared, he decided to order a bottle of wine as well.

"Who knows when I will enjoy the comforts of an inn again, if ever?"

Korlaeth checked on Astave and his mule briefly before entering the common room of the inn. He let his eyes wander as they adjusted to the dim light inside. The common room was packed, but he spotted Sir Victor across the way. He began moving his way through, uttering apologies and rude comebacks in flawless Vassagonian, as appropriate. As he approached the table at the far end, his eyes widened, for there was Kamilah, taking a key from Arcadian. Korlaeth almost waved, but one look at the other Vakeros' expression stopped him instantly. He continued his quiet way past the two, pulling up a seat by Sir Victor even as he dropped his hood to reveal an apparently Vassagonian face.

"You may not recognize me, but I have some interesting information concerning a certain mutual interest." he said in North Speak.

"Please. Don't leave me."

Her voice was soft, as a summer breeze on a hot day. With the hustle and bustle in the tavern, none heard her speak save Arcadian. Her cheeks were flushed, from embarrassment and crying. All presence of her stubborness was worn away, replaced by a longing in her heart that she had long since attempted to quench.

There is no more hiding it, she thought.

"Mage, are you trying to get us killed? The last thing we need now is another person hunting us? Don't forget that those men you burnt earlier, won't be forgetting us easily and with this new rule, they'll know that those who can't leave town will be staying at the inns and lodging houses. I think it's best we head for this Udai's Inn that the knight mentioned and see if we can room with them." As reluctant as he was, Valestar followed the Kai Lord silently, occasionally grumbling and muttering something. A few minutes later, they have reached the Inn and Valestar quickly went about seeing to his donkey and arrangement for his supplies while Hawkeye went in to ask for a room, and possibly to look for Sir Victor.

Hawkeye stood at the door, looking around for faces he knew, that of Sir Victor and the Vakeros, if all else fails. The common room was crowded with people; travelers and merchants alike, not being able to leave town. "This is not good," he thought to himself as he walked towards the counter. "So many people here strained with this sudden rule, something important is happening. Maybe the innkeeper knows something."

"How much is a room for two plus arrangements for a donkey? And have you had a knight checking in about this tall, this big, possibly in the company of a few others?" Hawkeye proceeded to describe as best as he could to the innkeeper. "By the way, do you know anything about this rule that has been imposed on Chahdan? What's going on?"

Before Hawkeye began his conversation with the innkeeper, Valestar pulled him aside. "Something suddenly came to mind," he hissed quietly into the Kai Lord's ear. "Those men we left in the alley... did someone 'take care' of them? Or do we now have two more on our trail?"

Sol Hawk was in the stable - there he calmed the two camels. "Easy, you are going to be comfortable here." He also took care to ease Korlaeth's animals. He will be back soon, intoned Sol Hawk. With some guilt, he thought back to Blade, his horse, who he had been forced to leave. A creeping feeling came upon him. It had cost all of his money just to buy food for himself and his mounts, but what of the others? They would run out.

Would not be enough money to purchase what they needed for the journey and he knew that they could not hunt in the desert. He would have to speak to the others about this. This was serious. Again he longed for Makala's presence. So often had Sol Hawk done so since the Talcha had left them that the big man was almost still here... but that ghostly image could not bring them good hunting upon the sands. Would it be absolute desert the whole way? Sol Hawk would have to ask Simyn. If they could deviate for only a day or two into more habitable territory then Sol Hawk could perhaps boost their reserves.

With all the animals kept safely now, Sol Hawk headed back for the common area. The bustle of people excited him and he was happy to be here. He did not let his guard down completely, however, for he was very aware that the enemy was no doubt amongst them. He kept his ears and eyes open for any sign of trouble as he joined Sir Victor for a hot meal.
Hello! My name is Varsuvial! I've had an interesting day. First I was woken up earlier than usual by Master, who seemed to be in an excited state of mind. I didn't know what was going on, but it made me excited, too! Then, later on, I discovered that we would be traveling with another man! We've struck up an interesting talk on politics. The horses keep giving us sideways glances and snorting at us, but they refuse to join in. Horses are so life and the gods. I always like conversational topics like that.

Unfortunately I lost my place and couldn't find it again. Then I realized that Master had been gone for a long time and I became worried. I began to call for Master. Some other people came instead, one was very large, the other seemed to be in a state of some agitation. They both went into the blessing we get to stay. He helped her to her feet only to have her knees buckle. Before she could slip to the floor Arcadian caught her. She started crying again and Arcadian meticulously wiped away her hot tears. He lifted Kamilah into his arms and carried her all the way upstairs to their room. Without setting her down he unlocked the door and sat her down on the bed. She laid there, sobbing quietly for a spell.

And to Arcadian's delight she didn't argue. He helped her to sit down and she calmly lifted her head. Arcadian realized that he wasn't doing well. He had been acting strangely and now he was helping Kamilah. He needed to get a grip on himself. He needed to focus on what was happening and not let his mind wander. He needed to think and not let his emotions get the better of him.

He helped her to sit down and she calmly lifted her head. Arcadian realized that he wasn't doing well. He had been acting strangely and now he was helping Kamilah. He needed to get a grip on himself. He needed to focus on what was happening and not let his mind wander. He needed to think and not let his emotions get the better of him.

As he talked to Hawkeye, Valestar cast his eyes about the overcrowded inn. His eyes ran over the confines of the inn. He took in the dirty cups, the trenches pervading the entire common room. He drew his gaze back to the multitudes of people. He was out in the crowd, waiting for Master to finish whatever he was doing so he could come and read to me. There are some other donkeys here, and we've struck up an interesting talk on politics. The horses keep giving us sideways glances and snorting at us, but they refuse to join in. Horses are so stubborn.

He helped her to sit down and she calmly lifted her head. Arcadian realized that he wasn't doing well. He had been acting strangely and now he was helping Kamilah. He needed to get a grip on himself. He needed to focus on what was happening and not let his mind wander. He needed to think and not let his emotions get the better of him.

Kamilah looked at him with a smile.

"Thank you, but really...I'm not that cold." She stated softly while rising slowly from the bed.

"I think I may as well take a quick bath, I must smell no better then pigs."

The look in her hues had changed. No longer did they look at Arcadian with frustration but with sensitivity and devotion instead. She reached her nimble fingers up and pulled his cloak from her shoulders.

"Here..." With an outstretched arm Kamilah handed back Arcadian's garment. After the cloak was back in the hands of the Vakeros, she walked quickly to the bathing area. She undressed and slipped into the steaming, yet refreshing water. The events that had taken place were almost more then the young woman could handle, yet Arcadian was there...just when it mattered most. Because of this Kamilah was able to overcome everything, including their differences.

Arcadian modestly averted his eyes as Kamilah undressed and slipped into the steamy water. To keep his mind on other things he removed his own shirt and folded it neatly. His equipment, he assumed, was still with Sir Victor. Of course he still had two blades with him, they were never away from his person. And there was still the blue-vein dagger he had hidden behind his belt.

Kamilah finished bathing and stood, dripping as Arcadian fished through the single closet of the room. He found a scrubby, tough clean, bedrobe which he handed to the female Vakerine. He still took care to keep his eyes focused away from her bare form.
**Rules, Rulings**

| The room number is not important. Just having the key is. I'm assuming that everyone decided to purchase a room--or at least bunk down with someone else on their floor. If not, you'll have no choice but to go outside.
| Sol Hawk, I've checked the numbers and you're the only one with a chance of hitting this DC:
| Perception check at DC35. You have a +5 bonus on the roll due to circumstances.
| Now, even though it may seem useless, I want Sir Victor to also roll a Perception check. The DC is 35, but I'm more interested in the difference in the numbers. In other words, I'm looking at (35 - the roll = X). This is important if Sol Hawk's roll is really bad.
| OOC: Blow the Perception Check, but let me get a look at this man's weapon. He's bleeding to death, I should be able to stop this with Healing. I can make rolls if appropriate.
| I'm rather bad at those perception checks. So that's 35 - 2=33. I deducted the price of the room (with cold bath for me), but I didn't write the key on my character sheet.
| IMO, that guy could have been Murdoch.

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**Act IV, Opening – The Traitor and The Assassin**

Udai would have normally been happy to have so many people in his inn, but he had reached capacity, and then some. He had too many people and not enough rooms--and he was not about to let anyone stay the night in the common room. Pushing past everyone, he tried to make his way to the door to bar it shut.

Hawkeye entered at that moment, inquiring about rooms and the knight. The innkeeper was a bit perturbed about being interrupted on his way to bar the door, but he answered nonetheless. "Yeah, I have two rooms left," he said. "Nine crowns each, two beds each. Tether the donkey out front and I'll have someone look after it."

He ushered Valetter in hastily after the mage had said a word to Varsuvial, then shut the door and slid a bar across it. Hawkeye asked about a knight, and Udai gestured offhandedly toward the common room. "I have seen no knight, though there are several foreign-born. You're welcome to look around. Come back to the bar to get your room key, by the way."

In response to the question about the new temporary law in effect, Udai shrugged. "Sharnazim law has a way of happening on the spot. It's part of life here. Just go along with it and you'll be fine, like the rest of us."

*I'll take one of your rooms, but I don't need any meals," said Valetter. "Can you not lower the price in such an instance?" The innkeeper scowled.

"Talk to me later, Old One. I don't have time to haggle now."

Udai once more pressed through the crowd and returned to his job. After getting his key, Hawkeye spotted Sir Victor, sitting at a group of tables where indeed a lot of foreigners sat, including one of apparent Sommlending features. He and the mage took a seat in the group and ate as their meal was placed before them.

As Valetter approached the bar, Udai recognized him from a few minutes earlier. He held up a hand to forestall any more talk. "I'll drop a coin from the cost. Take it or leave."

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A half hour later, after several knocks on the barred door, Udai announced the everyone without a room had an hour left to finish up and clear out. There were several grumbles and groans at this, for no one wanted to go back outside.

At a table near the group of adventurers, a scuffle seemed to be breaking out over sleeping arrangements. Several hooded travelers—possibly pilgrims from another region of Vassagonia—began bickering. Well, two of them anyway. One was a small man who had procured a small room shortly after he arrived—Sol Hawk remembered seeing him earlier in the day. The other seemed to think he was more important and deserved the ticket instead. The words escalated, and soon the self-righteous man stood. There was something odd about his voice.

As the other man stood up, the self-righteous one lashed out with a fist and slammed it into the small man's face. He went flying backwards into another table and group of people there, and one of them quickly stood and drew his blade.

There was a flash of movement by the self-righteous man, followed by a howl of pain. The hooded man who had punched his companion had drawn his own blade, disarmed his challenger, and laid open the inside of his forearm in the span of a heartbeat! The challenger found himself with his chin resting on the tip of a blade, poised to run through his throat if he did not back down. Blood dripped freely from the slash in his sword arm.

Udai bellowed in irritation and moved forward through the dispersing crowd, now clutching a massive piece of wood with nails driven through one end at odd angles—a sort of makeshift flail. "Hey, put that down and leave!"

The combat-skilled man did not comply for a long, tense moment to prove his point, then withdrew his weapon and told his other two companions to follow. The trio left their former companion on the floor, nursing his rapidly swelling eye. One of them threw the bar off the door and jerked it open, and the man who was so skilled with the sword turned and looked over the common room. Sol Hawk felt quite uneasy at this.

Then they left. The crowd in the common room began to murmur, and Udai decided to alter his earlier statement.

"Okay, everyone without a room has to go now. Take your food if you're not finished, but just leave. Go!" He shooed everyone out and barred the door after several minutes. Then he began checking everyone who had stayed to make sure they could produce a door key.

** * * *

"There's something very wrong going on here," said Sol Hawk. As the room cleared out (and after the strange warrior left) Sol Hawk moved to the downed victim of the attack.

He spoke to the man in Vassan. "Easy, I'm a healer."

** * * *

The Kai watched the stranger and his two cohorts leave—the hoods were pulled low over the heads, and their clothing was nondescript, yet despite the lack of features...

Sol Hawk just felt chilled. He tried to think what could have caused such a feeling, and he looked at Sir Victor almost reflexively. The knight had also watched the goings-on with slight interest, but it was not worth diverting from the original quest over. So what if people got into a fight next to him?

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**Rules, Rulings**

*SH: You'll have to decide if you say a made-up name, your Kai name, and so forth...are you dressed as a Kai?*

Simyn, yes, you got your wine.

Valestar, here's a summary. I know it was hard to keep up with since I had to use descriptions and not names.

Being presumptuous, I figured that Cade and Kamilah were at a table by themselves, but they left. Sir Victor then took it, and Simyn sat near him. Korlaeth then comes in and sits beside SV, while Sol Hawk sits with Simyn. Then Valestar and Hawkweye come in and sit either at 5V's table or near it.

The fight is as follows. There are 4 people at Table X. Person A and B begin bickering. A stands up and B smacks him. A falls into table Y. Person J from that tables stands with his sword drawn. B disarms J, and B batters him. Korlaeth then comes in and sits beside SV, while Sol Hawk sits with Simyn.

The name of the Act should be becoming less hazy as we go along....

**Act IV, Opening – The Traitor and The Assassin**

Valestar spotted Sir Victor at the same time as his companion. He went to sit with the knight, letting Hawkeye doing most of the talking and introducing himself as Valestar, a Dessi Mage of some repute. Then he pulled out one of his meals that he’d gotten from the other inn. Paying close attention to the conversation he ate the delicious meal of fruit and bread. The innkeeper had provided a sort of sugared water that tasted somewhat like tea and honey in a small earthenware tube.

He was about to ask Hawkeye how his meal was, already trying to decide which inn he’s come to in the future, when he realized he never wanted to come back to Chahdan. And then he remembered that he had to spend another day there. He clocked viciously and tore into his bread.

**Stronger than Aymodani??? Sol Hawk’s mind raced with all of the deadly dangers that he and his group had faced at that Inheritant-Lord's bloody hands. He thought about how he and several of his companions had so nearly lost their lives at the hands of that self-appointed God. But who was this new stranger? He and the others had been only a few feet from the deadly man. Was he in league with Murdach? Had he been Murdach? Sol Hawk knew that Murdach had been headed for Tehp. Could he have decided to stop along the way? Or had this man been someone else altogether?

"You are a brave man to disobey," said Sol Hawk, "Everyone seems to fear that man. My friends and I ran into trouble with some of Aymodani’s men ourselves, at least," said Sol Hawk, choosing his words with care, "I take it that they were his, since this is his city. We are sad to see that the people have to suffer this way at the hands of those in charge. The Sand Mother cannot be crossed in her own domain, this is true, but she also provides for us and despises those who misuse her power. Please, tell me your name and tell me who that man was. Perhaps we can help each other to avoid coming afoul of his wrath again."

At the mention of the Sand Mother, the bruised traveler perked up. "You know of her and her ways? Who are you, stranger. Your accent is northern."

Sol Hawk introduced himself by name.

"Hello there. My name is Kavan. I'm a Kivosh in the Midland Sharnazim army. As for my bravery, well, it may be for naught. Myr-atcho is not known for mercy, and I may have very well bought myself death this night."

"Not that I wouldn't have found out wandering the streets without a room," he mused. He knew of Chahdan's filthy underbelly--there were few ways a city in the middle of a desert could flourish. Slavery and gambling was one of them.

As the crowd in the common room thinned out, Udal barred the door after sending out some people who didn't have keys. "Commons closes in an hour," he announced before exiting into the kitchen.

Kavan rubbed his eye. "I'd love to visit a dose of pain upon that b_stard. He and all his type think they are better than us."

An uncomfortable silence fell over the table. Hawkweye had already reintroduced himself to the knight, and they had been introduced to his other companions. There was a Sage named Simyn, or something similar, who seemed to be asking after a bottle of wine. There was a Kai Lord, kneeling by the injured man on the floor. Once again Valestar wondered why these Kai Lords needed to be everywhere, when their order was supposedly a small one. Next to the knight, whom Valestar now remembered was called Victor, sat a Vassan who didn’t introduce himself and was ignored by the others. Hawkweye had ascertained that they could share the table, but the conversation had ended swiftly after that, and now they all ate in silence.

Valestar took the opportunity to try and strike up a conversation.

"So what brings you to the dessert?" he asked, trying to sound casual. In reality he was highly curious. This was no ordinary group of travellers.

Arcadian lay down upon the bed next to Kamilah for some considerable time. There was little conversation to be had. They both knew each other inside and out. Words were not needed when they could sense each other's feelings as if they were as material as the covers beneath them. Soon Kamilah's eyes closed and her golden hues no longer gazed lovingly into Arcadian’s own. As soon as he was certain she was fast asleep he took it upon himself to leave the room.

He took the key with him, taking care not to wake Kamilah in the process. He hadn’t closed the door behind him when the boy arrived with the food that he had requested. Arcadian then shoved the boy off and brought the food in, set it at the table, and left quietly. He returned to the commons room and quickly found Sir Victor.

"Victor, where is my equipment? I'm looking over at Sol, Arcadian could see a ghastly look upon his face. Normally the young Kai was fairly cheerful but Cade could tell he was afraid of something.

"Something has happened here..."

Arcadian suddenly had a very bad feeling. Something wasn’t right, something about the inn. Arcadian didn’t know what...but it was as if some shadow had fallen over their group.

"All hell's going to fall upon this town...we're in it."

Arcadian was notably a survivor. When the fighting got tough he would find a way to survive, whether it meant running or slipping everything in sight to ribbons. When Murdach had turned on him he had sought shelter. But right now there was no concern for his own life.

Only concern for the sleeping form upstairs in room 21. **
**Rules, Rulings**

Can anyone going to answer Valestar's question, or do they just completely ignore it?

**OOC:** Sol Hawk is dressed as a Kai Lord. He does not identify himself as such to Kavan, but it should be obvious to the man if he knows anything about Kai Lords. If he does not, that's fine with me.

**OOC:** I am speaking the Vassan tongue unless otherwise noted. Only those who understand Vassan will understand.

(KL, let me know if there is an additional role for the bottle).

**OOC:** Hawkeye's father, huh? Ha ha ha! I think the timeline gets a bit messed up, so I'm attempting to return it to normal.

Honestly, I'm quite lost with the current situation even with the explanation, so I'll just go with Valestar's last point and continue from there. At Valestar's advice, what should I do with my food? And how much do I deduct from my GCs for the room?

1 WP, Telepathy

**OOC:** Telepathy allows Hawkeye to respond "for free" in a negotiating manner.

**Vacant look equals telepathy**

Story for being out of the sitch for a while...

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**Act IV, Opening – The Traitor and The Assassin**

Being tired, Simyn did not really take an interest in the scuffle that broke out. Sol Hawk seemed to be interested though. Apparently one of the men had been hurt and the Kai was trying to help him.

“I'm going to bed. I guess we'll leave in the morrow?” the sage asked and went to his room. He really longed for a soft cozy bed.

---

**OOC:** It is an honour to meet a Kivosh of the Sharnazim, said the Kai Lord, and he meant it. Though he knew it best to not to attract Sharnazim attention, let alone the attention of a spell-wielding Kivosh, Sol Hawk instinctively knew it was wise to speak to this man.

“My friends call me Sol,” he said, “you may do the same. Please, sit with me and my friends for a while,” said the Kai Lord, “Circumstance has brought many of us to Ubda’s tonight. Tomorrow is another day. Then, let’s enjoy what our host has to offer.” They approached the table and Sol Hawk bid Simyn good-eve as the Sage headed off to sleep.

“Everyone,” he said momentarily in Northspeak, “Say hello to Lord Kavan, Kivosh of the Sharnazim and our guest tonight. He and I were just speaking about Chadan and recent goings-on here.” He nodded as well to the Kai Lord and his father - a look of great relief at his son-brother’s presence was clearly visible on Sol Hawk’s face - had the Kai Masters already received and responded to his message? “Please, sit,” he told them both, “I ordered some wine. Welcome, welcome! He beamed at them both - his face was boyish beneath a golden beard. His eyes were blue and he was dressed as a Kai Lord. Sol Hawk tactfully avoided Valestar’s question, however he answered instead by passing the old man a full glass of Kourkash, poured straight from the bottle by an attractive serving girl who had been circulating through the common room. Sol Hawk took the rest of the bottle and some glasses, then placed a coin on the plate and noddled to her in thanks, but averted his eyes from hers as is the custom.

“Yes, I may have an accent,” said Sol Hawk, returning to the tongue he knew Kavan would understand, “and I am working to lose it. I knew a Sand Mother once - it is a long story, but it was he who taught me the tongue and also what I know about the Sand Mother, her majesty and fury. Kavan,” he said as he passed out the glasses, “What is happening in Chadan? It is as if everyone is waiting for something. And Myr-atoch - we know the name, but why is he in Chadan? We are told to stay out of his way. I hear he kills his own loyal men. Please, who is he, who does not answer to Ayymonad? If he is your lord, I apologize for any offense. I merely wanted to see an honoured Kivosh threatened under penalty of death in his own city, for that is simply not right.”

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Valestar sipped his drink, noting that his question had met with a strange silence, the retiring of one of the group to bed, and a sudden freedom. He does not identify himself as such to Kavan, but it should be obvious to the man if he knows anything about Kai Lords. If he does not, that's fine with me.

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As Sol Hawk spoke with the Sharnazim, Kavan, he did notice that Hawkeye and the old man appeared to become nervous. He made eye contact with the other Kai for just an instant, outwardly appearing to have his full interest in everything Kavan was saying. Telepathically, he sent a message to the Kai he knew as Hawkeye even as Kavan was taking a drink and then replying.

Hawkeye, it is good to see you, Sol Hawk intoned, The Kai Masters must have sent you. Forgive me for not being more welcoming - I must be very careful with what I say to Kavan, for he is a Sharnazim. However, he seems to have vital information on the man we are tracking - Murdash - and may hopefully provide the clue that will lead us to the lady Armesha of Anari, President Koubedi's own daughter, who he kidnapped.

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Valestar whispered back:

“I’m in agreement with you. We're in a precarious position, being stuck here, and the Sharnazim after us. I say we hole up somewhere, possibly here, and don’t leave the inn unless we have to. And when we do, we travel together. At first I thought to team up with this group for a small time, but they seem to be in deeper trouble than us.”

He suddenly noticed the vacant look on Hawkeye’s face. "What's wrong?” he asked.

---

Korlaeth, still appearing very Vassan, had indicated to the innkeeper that he was with Sol, who had a key, when Kudai had passed by. He had briefly displayed a Sir Victor's old memory of their recovery in the cave a few days ago through Sol's link. As the attention happened, and Sol had gone over to help the wounded men, Korlaeth listened intently to their conversation. He glanced at the Desso Mage and Korlaeth with some curiosity, but smiled to himself and decided to keep playing the part of his disguise for now.

When Sol led Katan over and introduced him, Korlaeth looked up and smiled warmly at his "fellow Vassan" and greeting him in the traditional Kai companion with some curiosity, but smiled to himself and decided to keep playing the part of his disguise for now.

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Simyn couldn’t remember the last time he felt as relaxed as he did now. The hot bath had really hit the spot. As he dried himself, he enjoyed himself with an intellectual game of his. He recited the Lyrisian list of monarchs... backwards!

“I guess there is no possibility to find a good book here. I really could need to brush up on my Vassagonian history. Perhaps there could be something to be learnt about the present from the past.”

As he lied down he felt like doing some sparring. Perhaps he should ask Sol Hawk. Didn't the Kai Lord prefer a rapier as his main weapon?

“Why... I guess we will see lot of fights in the future. We hardly will need any extra practice.”

---

“Well met, Brother Sol Hawk. It has been ages since we last met. Unfortunately, the Monastery did not send me. It would seem that you have forgotten that I was on my own quest when I left the Monastery, and somehow I ended up here in Chadan. Something is happening here and we’re in the middle of it. The mage and I are wanted men due to some earlier incidents and just before coming to this Inn, we rescued the female Vakerine that your young Vakeros friend there called his partner. It’s best that we not linger here in the open, at least not for long.”

Hawkeye communicated with Sol hawk telepathically and exchange brief news. Then he looked towards Valestar and replied, "Huh, oh I was just thinking about something. Glad that we’re on the same page on this but don’t know if you know of, even when you are thinking of something, you will do something else. I'm guessing you want to stay here awhile. At times, I never know what you're grumbling about, mage. Well ok then.” Hawkeye sat in his seat, observing the room and its inhabitants, making some mental notes. He thought to himself, "Really, he also the one who wanted to get away as soon and as quickly as possible, but look who's sitting here wanting to look around.” He sighed.
As per the rules, Hawks, Valestar is d_mn confusing. I don't blame you for getting it wrong, and I laughed when I saw that you had posted for me today. "Ah that Hawkeye," I thought. "So eager." Believe me, if I'm ever out of town you can post for me. But until then... lay your hands off! He's mine! I declared my love for him first!

You can have him all for yourself, I wouldn't even dare to think of competing with you for him. LOL. Yeah, you're right; I'm quite the eager beaver, aren't I? Ok then here goes....
Just some idle chatter, can't help it.

Sorry Val, you didn't put it clearly in your post, so I assumed that you wanted to leave when you agreed with me. So I just moved us along. Honestly, I keep misreading your post for one of two reasons; you did not make it clear your intentions or I'm too dumb to stop posting for you. No offense and I don't mean anything by that... just some grumblings from a Kai Lord. I've edited that out of the group to go to bed just yet. He stayed at the table, observing their every move.

 Perception roll : 28

From the response, Hawkeye has suggested not to roll telepathically as before? What do I roll to eaves-drop if needed, and possible to communicate with Sol Hawk telepathically as before?

"Donkey... that reminds me, Varsuvial will want me to read to him tonight. Don't you about their conversation?", Hawkeye looked at the mage with an eyebrow raised.

"Yes, I speak Vassan but it's not well, something I love doing, eavesdropping on your intentions or I'm too dumb to stop posting for you. No offense and I don't mean anything by that... just some grumblings from a Kai Lord. I've edited that out of the group to go to bed just yet. He stayed at the table, observing their every move.

 OOC: Hawkeye, I don't think you have to roll so long as you are sitting at the table. Sol Hawk is not being too loud, I bet you are in earshot. I am holding off on my next post because I will need Kavan to reply to me before moving on. But likely you will have heard everything said so far...

OOC: This is a problem, Hawks. Valestar is d_mn confusing. I don't blame you for getting it wrong, and I laughed when I saw that you had posted for me today. "Ah that Hawkeye," I thought. "So eager." Believe me, if I'm ever out of town you can post for me. But until then... lay your hands off! He's mine! I declared my love for him first!

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 Perception roll : 28
**Rules, Rulings**

Murdach drew his own blade, disarmed Gruft, sliced Gruft's forearm, and laid the tip of the blade at Gruft's throat. Udaï broke everything up, and Murdach took his two bodyguards (the other men at the table with him and Kavan), and left.

Also, as for what to do with your food, that's your call. Food miraculously keeps forever in most RPGs, as it does in the Lone Wolf books. Some kind of powerful preservative, I'd say. If you want to add realism, though, you can eat what you have in your back and use what is served to replenish it. Food is included in room cost, which is (I think) been posted twice in the above thread somewhere) 7GC for cold water, 9GC for hot water, and grooming your horse.

**Act IV, Opening – The Traitor and The Assassin**

The Kai prodded about Myr-atoch again.

“Your atoche is one of the Kharesh Zhadi...” asked Sol Hawk, hoping to get more answers while he had time.

“Zhadar man’ah, zhadi i’ah,” he said in way of explanation. Sol Hawk pondered on this a moment as Korlaeth introduced himself to Kavan. It meant: “Ragged come, Ragged kill.”

Kavan received the welcome from Korlaeth warmly, and he returned it, glad to see that his own people apparently had not become as corrupted as those he had been traveling with the last day or so. The Vassagonian bantered back and forth, jousting verbally like Simyn longed to do with his actual disguise. Or a very atypical Vassagonian. He kept munching on his food, watching everyone.

The Dessi mage looked deeply at the man, who still hadn’t removed his sand veil. And when he looked back at Valestar, the mage could almost swear the eyes narrowed a bit as if the man had smiled underneath that mask. Valestar wasn’t sure, but he’d almost bet money that was another Kai under that disguise. Or a very atypical Vassagonian. He kept munching on his food, watching everyone.

**Commentary**

Vassagonian Language

Kharesh Zhadi

(pronounced kah REE zha DIE, running the sh/zh sound together)

Ragged Assassin – Likely a member of the elite group called The Ragged which was mentioned in the last act.

**Vassagonian**

Kharesh Zhadi

(From the sh/zh sound together)”}

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**Act IV, Opening – The Traitor and The Assassin**

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He and Hawkeye bantered back and forth, jesting verbally like Simyn longed to do with his actual weapons. Korlaeth watched them, noting that they were drawing attention to themselves. Sir Victor merely sat and picked over what remained of his food, glad to be at ease for a bit.

Udaï entered the room then from the kitchen. “Alright. Everyone out. Up to your rooms.”

Patrons sighed and pushed away from tables, walking to the stairs while carrying on the conversations they were having. Kavan stood, a bit groggily, and thanked Sol Hawk for helping him and waved a farewell to Korlaeth. “Do not expect to see me alive again,” said Kavan, revealing perhaps a bit too much as he turned to leave.

* * *

As the others turned to leave, Sol Hawk paused and turned to Kavan and decided to take a chance. Deadly or brilliant, this would be his only try. “Wait. My friend, you are planning something. No, wait, don’t misunderstand me.” In a lower voice he said, “You are not nearly alone in your contempt for Myr-atoch. You know where he has gone. Am I right?” I and my brother,” he indicated Korlaeth, “were both victims of The Ragged. We, perhaps like you, he lowered his voice still further, “would like very much to see this man stopped.” He looked at Kavan, and there was a long pause. “If not now, then when? If not by his victims, then by who?”

Kavan smiled at the Kai and patted him on the shoulder. He took the bottle of Kourkash from Sol, took another drink, smiled once more, and without saying more, headed for his room.

Sol, let down at the missed opportunity, did the same.

* * *

“We’ll talk again tomorrow,” I’ll be in my room,” stated the knight to the other men present. He still hadn’t fully healed from the previous fight, and a nice cooling bath would be very welcome at that point.

Before retiring to his room, Sir Victor asked the innkeeper to prepare meals for room 21, where the two Vakeros were retired. They may not have much appetite at the moment, but they would need to eat to stay strong for the coming days, and the meal had been paid with the price of the room anyways.

After a quick stop to his room to gather Arcadian’s supplies, the Ruanese delicately balanced the equipment and the food tray in his large hands as he headed over to the Vakeros’ room, where he knocked twice on the door before saying “Arcadian, it’s Victor. I brought your stuff and some food,” then calmly waiting until he had an answer.

* * *

Kavan either didn’t believe the Kai, or he didn’t care. Whatever the reason, he merely smiled at the Kai and whispered, “Then let’s hope you find him first.”

* * *

When Arcadian answered the door he had his mouth full of seasoned noodles and chicken. He swallowed and accepted his equipment from the knight.

“Thanks for the offer of food, Victor.” Arcadian motioned to the table inside the room. “But I already purchased food for Kamilah and I.”

Arcadian spoke softly as Kamilah’s sleeping form could be see in the room’s single bed. The Vakeros placed his equipment inside the room and then returned to the door.

“You need anything else Victor?” Arcadian was beginning to find that he and the Ruanese knight had been getting along much better lately. Maybe it had to do with Arcadian’s desperate attention to Victor and Sol when they were both upon the brink of death. Arcadian didn’t know exactly what it was...but still. At least there wasn’t the same tension between them.

* * *
Sol Hawk met Sir Victor at the door to Arcadian's room. He relayed to them all that he had heard in his conversation with Katan. "That was Murdach who struck him," said Sol Hawk, "Did you see his face when he left the room? I think he recognized me. He knows we're here," said Sol Hawk. "If he knows we are alive, he may come for us tonight. I fear that Udaí's is no longer our safe refuge, though at this time of night, I know not where else we can go. However," he said finally, "It might be wise for us to spend this night. I can take first watch, and besides, I may be of some use tending the wounded."

At about this time, Hawkeye had come to the top of the stairs as well. "Greetings Brother, it is good to see you again, and you too, Sir Victor." Hawkeye greeted them both and then turned to face the knight. "How are your two Vakeros friends? How are they doing?"

After a short while, he left the two of them but not before communication telepathically a message to Sol Hawk, "Brother, I would kindly request your council in my room later tonight, I will wait for you, room 7. There is much that we need to talk about." With a nod, Sol Hawk told him that he understood.

"Gentlemen," he told Sir Victor and Arcadian, "If you see Simyn and Koriath, please let them know about the danger. Perhaps we can choose a room to become our defensive position. I wonder if Hawkeye's room would be ideal. Murdach knows him not, and there is a chance that he will never even realize what has happened, and merely fall to us should he come. He will likely leave Chadan in the morning once he is resupplied, and at that time, if Ayadomi's is correct, he will take the princess and head for Teph.*

After some further conversation on the matter, Sol Hawk struck out for Hawkeye's room. He knew he had to warn him of the danger, and, should Sol Hawk somehow be killed in the days to follow, there was at least hope that news of events could reach his masters through Hawkeye.

* * *

Hawkeye went up the stairs to his room after Udaí had informed them, where he met Sir Victor and Sol Hawk. "Greetings Brother, it is good to see you again, and you too, Sir Victor." Hawkeye greeted them both and then turned to face the knight. "How are your two Vakeros friends? How are they doing?", he asked. After a short while, he left the two of them but not before communication telepathically a message to Sol Hawk, "Brother, I would kindly request your council in my room later tonight, I will wait for you, room 7. There is much that we need to talk about." With a nod, Sol Hawk told him that he understood.

Hawkeye went to his room, to think about a few things. So many things had happened when he arrived in Chadan, then meeting the Dessi mage and then the encounter with the female Vakeros and then Sol Hawk's group and now this lockdown. He had a bad feeling about it and hope to have it lifted when Sol Hawk arrives.

Half an hour later, there was a knock on his door. Hawkeye went to it and ready himself. "It is me, Sol Hawk." Hawkeye felt relieved and opened the door to let his Kai brother in. They both greeted each other warmly, then Hawkeye embraced the Kai brother. "Hello, brother. It is good to see a friendly and familiar face in this sand-blasted place. Come in." Hawkeye locked the door after Sol. "I think you know why I asked for your council. Much has happened here and with this lockdown imposed, I'm more than sure of it. It would seem to me that you know more of this, so pray tell, what is happening?"

Sol Hawk took a stool and sat in front of Hawkeye. He began to tell him what he knew, so far. "A princess of Anari was kidnapped from the Darkening Days Festival. Her name is Ameesha - she has special powers and can see the future. Our group found out that Murdach had her. Murdach is an assassin - a member of a secret group called "The Ragged." He reports to an even more powerful man named Egiolath who has plans for Ameesha and her powers. The others and me have been receiving visions regarding this and I expect that there will soon come a great disaster in the form of a great battle. Anyway, we travelled from Anari and discovered that Murdach and his men were headed for Teph. He again tried to have us killed, again we escaped. Murdach is VERY powerful and nearly killed us all more than once. We tallied him over the desert. And it is here, in this very inn, we saw him and I'm afraid he saw us too. Now he knows we are here. This is very bad. But it could be very good since Ameesha could be nearby somewhere....." Sol Hawk stopped his story for quite some time before ending it, which brought a sense of worry and anxiety to Hawkeye. "Yeah we are indeed in a very precarious position. And yes your suggestion of watching is a sound one indeed. What say you if we go and have a word with my companion, the Dessi mage?"

"We have a lot to discuss tonight. I will wait for you, room 7. There is much that we need to talk about." With a nod, Sol Hawk told him that he understood.

Still, Hawkeye was hesitant about the journey, but he knew he had to warn the Dessi mage.
It laughed. “You think it ends here? How mistaken you are. This is not an ending. It is a beginning.”

“No,” I replied. “You will not stop me. This ends here.”

“It is not time for you to die,” it said.

Reaching into the satchel I still wore at my waist, I pulled out the Esmeralda’s dagger. The dagger which had slit her throat moments ago. I held the blade to my own

No, no it wasn’t over yet. There was still myself. Still the demon to take care of.

they ended in such a cruel manner?

matter how fast I ran, nor how loudly I cursed, he would not leave. I tore at my face. “Esmeralda!” I screamed into the night. Why had these things happened? How had

Act IV, Opening – The Traitor and The Assassin

One final note. Paru is coming on this mission--don’t let that interfere with the goal, or I will permanently interfere in your goal.

I’m glad we understand each other....

Egoliath

“I believe the note speaks for itself,” said Sol Hawk. “The important thing for tonight, however, is to keep ourselves safe until morning. Murdach - the Chosen of Egoliath - was the one who saw Katan struck down this night, here, in Udaï’s inn. He may have recognized us - until now he thought us to be dead and no further threat. But that may have all changed now. He may be coming this night. Master Mage, please, come with me to meet my friends. We must make plans for our defense this night.”

Valestar tossed the book aside in frustration and pulled out instead “The History of the Occult.” But no matter how hard he stared at the dates and figures, he could not

“Can you eat?”

Her eyes slowly opened and Arcadian smiled down at her.

“Where is everyone else” she added looking around the small room.

“IT smells good.” she whispered softly.

Kamilah looked up at Arcadian still drowsy with sleep. She wiped her eyes and nodded at the Vakeros. The young girl sat up slowly and pushed the golden tresses from her silken face.

*y * * *

Valestar stayed in the common room a slight bit longer than everyone else. He was annoyed at being kicked out just when he’d been about to pierce some of the mysteries surrounding that group. for instance the one who winked at him... could he be?

However, he left soon enough, after making a great show of finishing his meal and gathering his belongings. He headed, however, outside first to see if he could get to the stables and Varsuvial. The night was hot and humid and he could feel the drips of moisture rolling down his skin underneath his robe. To his further chagrin, he found the stables locked and barred. He supposed he should be grateful for the security, but at the same time he knew how disappointed Varsuvial would be if he didn't show up.

“Varsuvial?” he called softly from behind the stables. “Varsuvial?”

A joyful baying told him he’d been heard.

“Varsuvial, I can't get into the stables, so” he was cut off by the raspy sound of the wooden boards of the stable creaking and slamming as Varsuvial began kicking them in an attempt to make an opening for Valestar. Valestar’s face went white. If anyone heard the noise and found him out here, nasty questions could follow.

“No! No Varsuvial! You mustn’t make an opening for me! We have to be very careful! There are bad men looking for us!”

The donkey stopped his kicking, but let out a mournful whinny of complaint. “Yes, I know old boy. It is a shame, isn’t it? But think how sad Freyae would be if you didn't come back to Deissi. And if you knock down their stables, chances are they’ll take you away from me. I will read to you two chapters tomorrow night to make up for this injustice. For now, sleep well, and get your strength ready for a ride across the desert in a couple of days. I don't know where we'll be going, but something tells me it won’t be into the arms of safety. But how do I begin to miss home. Or aspects of it, in any case.”

He sat for a few thoughtful seconds longer outside the stables, then scurried back inside.

*y * * *

When Valestar re-entered the inn, all was quiet. He went down the hallway that led to his room. Hawkeye was in room 7, and he meant to stop and talk with him. However, just as he was about to knock, he picked up the sound of more than one voice from within the room. That stopped him for the moment. He didn't want to interrupt anything, he would talk to Hawkeye later. His room was right next door in any case, so he could probably hear when whoever was in the room left.

However, he didn't go to his room. Instead he continued down the hallway to room 21, the only other room number he'd kept an ear out for. This was the room of the love struck Varker. He knocked softly. He heard a brief movement within and then the door opened a few inches to reveal the cautious face of Arcadian.

Valestar ignored the probing eyes and nodded his head in recognition of the Varker. “I came to see how the girl was doing,” he said. “I must apologize for any offense I may have caused you earlier. I meant only to see that the girl survived the awful ordeal she had been put through. Without knowing of your abilities, I acted only out of a sense of duty to one who was injured.”

The Varker regarded him coldly and let the silence sink in before speaking:

“You have interrupted my time with said 'girl.' I have already told you your services are not wanted. Leave us be.” With that cold statement, he closed the door in Valestar’s face.

Valestar stood for a moment before the closed door, eyes blazing with a cold light. He hadn't even got the chance to mention the looting of magical power! Slowly a smile formed upon his lips. The Varker knew not what he was dealing with. He would make the perfect candidate. The voice, quiet the whole evening long, now crept back into his subconscious. His love for the girl is strong, it whispered. He is the one we should use. He has disdain for all other life. He is perfect for the experiment.

Yes... yes he was.

Valestar violently shook himself out of these thoughts. He found one of his hands was placed softly upon the door to room 21. He could feel his heart beating fast in his chest. He drew his hand away in disgust. Never again, he had said. Never again would he allow himself to commit such an atrocity. The Varker was an ungrateful swine, it was true, but he would not be the only one affected by such actions. And surely he didn't deserve it. Valestar strode quickly back down the hallway to his own room. He entered, his hand shaking as he put the key in the lock, and sat upon the bed. He riffled through the saddlebags he had painstakingly brought in earlier for “Winter in a Lemonade Spring.” He flipped to a random page early in the book and began to read feverishly.

The night was dark. I could smell the demon everywhere. He was in the buildings. He was in the sidewalk. He was in the shadows. Most especially, he was in me. No matter how fast I ran, nor how loudly I cursed, he would not leave. I tore at my face. “Esmeralda!” I screamed into the night. Why had these things happened? How had they ended in such a cruel manner?

No, no it wasn’t over yet. There was still myself. Still the demon to take care of.

Reaching into the satchel I still wore at my waist, I pulled out the Esmeralda's dagger. The dagger which had slit her throat moments ago. I held the blade to my own breast and prepared to enter the abyss. Then a voice that was not my own spoke from my throat. A husky, dark, evil voice.

“IT is not time for you to die,” it said.

“No,” I replied. “You will not stop me. This ends here.”

It laughed. "You think it ends here? How mistaken you are. This is not an ending. It is a beginning.”

Valestar tossed the book aside in frustration and pulled out instead “The History of the Occult.” But no matter how hard he stared at the dates and figures, he could not get his mind off of the couple down the hall, nor of the violent impulse which hadn't struck him since that time...

His dark thoughts were interrupted by a knock at the door.

*y * * *
Act IV. Opening – The Traitor and the Assassin

Valestar listened intently to what Sol Hawk and Hawkeye had to say. He was truly grateful to them for interrupting his dark reverie with this problem, and he put all of his efforts into solving it.

"This has many twists and turns about it," he said. "It is too bad we do not have more information on what they may be planning with Ameasha, though obviously it has something to do with her powers of foresight."

"As for your friends," he continued. "Indeed we should meet them. Though I must be frank. My main goal is to leave this winking desert. I am stuck here for two days, it seems. Your story...interests me, and I shall help you for those two days. However, if I can, I intend to leave the Vassagonian lands far behind very soon, and may make my leave of you once those two days are up."

"Now that that is said, let us go meet your friends. Ah, though perhaps we should leave the couple out of this, for now. I think they have...enough on their minds at the moment without being disturbed by talk of death. We should make arrangements for them and tell them of the plans later. Of course it is up to you, as they are your companions, not mine. But it is my advice. I have experience in love, and know that it does not like to be disturbed." With this odd statement he rose from the bed.

"By the way," he asked Sol Hawk. "Did you say another of your companions was Dessi born? I would very much like to talk with him, if this is true. Anyways, lead the way, I'll bring my book of the occult if you don't mind. There are some things I wish to look up.*

* * *

Kavan parted company with the others and went to his room. His belongings were there, just where he had left them. It would have been easier for him to do this if he had given Myr-atoth the room, but then the two bodyguards would be here. And the Kivosh needed surprise on his side.

Anyway, Myr-atoth would be alone tomorrow, preoccupied with the main road through town and the procession on it. And Kavan knew where the Kharesh Zhai would be.

All it took in the ranks of the Ragged was one offense, one insult...and life was forfeit. The higher up you went, the more you could get away with, but there came a point where enough was enough. Kavan smiled haughtily at the fact that he had fooled Myr-atoth.

Myr-atoth, the most powerful Ragged next to Egoliah...had been duped by his replacement. Fitting, that.

Kavan produced the long needle-like khanjar given to him by Egoliah. He then pulled out a small vial of green powder and a jar of resin. He mixed the green powder carefully with the resin, covering his face and not breathing lest he inhale the toxin. Then he used a crude brush to coat the tip and blade of his khanjar with the mixture. The lantern nearby provided a heat source to dry the resin and bond the poison to the blade so it would not be dangerous on contact—only on penetration.

Satisfied with his work, Kavan reached under the bed and felt for what he had been promised to find. It was there. The smuggled outfit inside was mottled with several tatters of colored cloth hanging off of it in various lengths and shades of grey. He disrobed and put on the uniform, noting as he did so that he felt more powerful simply by wearing it.

"Zha'd ni'ah, zha'di'v'ah," he said quietly. "The hunter becomes the hunted now."

The pseudo-Kivosh opened the window and crept quietly out, headed for his hiding spot to wait until the time to strike.

* * *

"Yes," said Sol Hawk to Valestar. "Arcadian you have met. Korlaeth," Sol Hawk smiled inwardly to remember the second Vakeros sitting disguised but right next to Valestar, "is also from Dessi and we will see him shortly. If it is acceptable to you, Master Mage and brother Kai, I would like for all of us to make camp in your room. It is not too close to ours, and Murdach may not think to search for us here. If he has a spy inside, he will know the location of Sir Victor, Arcadian, and myself from Udai's roster. I find it doubtful that he would search the entire dwelling should he fail to find us at once. If we can be in position to see him leaving Chadan in the morning, perhaps we have a chance to discern our chances of taking back Ameasha somewhere on the desert sands before he can join with the other armies that Egoliah is sending to him. Indeed, if we are to rescue the princess, we will have no better chance. I only hope that his entourage is not large, for Murdach by himself is danger enough."

Sol Hawk recovered the others, brought them to Valestar's room which was small but suitable, and relayed in full to everyone the information that he'd gained in the common room and also the full extent of their plan. "We can rise and leave in the morn. Valestar, Hawkeye, do you know the most likely road that Murdach will use to leave for Teph? I expect that he will be able to leave through any gate because of the sway he holds over the Sharnazim, and this may also help us to spot his departure if he must face them to be granted an exit for himself, his men, and the Princess. If you know a place, perhaps some among us can watch for his departure from a building top or other place of vantage. Korlaeth and Hawkeye, you may be well suited to the task, and Simyn, your Spyglass may prove handy as well once again.

"First, sleep though," he said, "I gladly take the first watch, I believe Hawkeye volunteered to take the next. Sir Victor, you should rest. As part of my watch, I will help to heal those who need it. For the rest, I will watch and wait. Can anyone take a third watch as well?"

* * *

"I have a further suggestion," said Valestar. "I say that we break up this rather large group between two rooms, mine and Hawkeye's. Those should be safe, especially if we post, as you say, a guard in the hall."

"I will continue my research in Ameasha's powers tonight," Valestar continued. "I will let you know by morning what I find."

Valestar glanced about the room for the man called Korlaeth, to see if he could get some of the etherical energy from him. But to his disappointment, the Vakeros was not to be seen.

* * *

Arcadian spoke with a distancessness in his voice, as if his mind was elsewhere. "The others are in their own respective rooms by now."

He walked to the room's window and looked out into the night's sky. He turned back toward Kamilah as she began to pick at her food.

"Good. You need to eat to regain back your strength. As soon as you have had your fill get some rest."

Arcadian placed his armor beside his other equipment and then sat with his back to the window. He placed his sword still in its scabbard upon his lap and let his head fall back and come to rest on the window sill. He had already made up his mind; it didn't matter what the others did this night. He was going to stay up all night. He had gotten plenty of rest the previous night.

For the first time in a long while a smile curved at his lips as he took in Kamilah's beautiful form. She was a goddess...
Act IV, Opening – The Traitor and The Assassin

"It would be nice to have the extra space," said Sol Hawk, "and the rooms are next to one another, but I am hesitant to place our watchers in the hall. The assassins' would know for certain that we were here if they ran into our watcher in the hall and possibly could guess the room as well. Nay, also I must be with the sleeping to watch over their wounds in the night. I will be very careful, however, Reader Magi, not to disturb your studies, for which I am grateful. Anything you discern regarding Ameshia's powers or the jewel will provide us an edge that we do definitely need."

With pillows and blankets that he had borrowed from his own room, Sol Hawk prepared a comfortable place to watch from. It was all coming together. He regretted only that he had not been able to enjoy the hot bath for which Udai's inn, and indeed Chadan itself, had been so famous.

"Perhaps then the unwounded should go to the other room with a second guard. We can never be too careful, and the wounded would rest easier in a less crowded area.

He saw to his satisfaction that the Vakeros Arcadian and his woman were not in the room. It was best that they stay away from him, for their own safety. The less time he had to study them, the safer they would be. And besides, he believed that he despised the Vakeros

"Aye, it's settled then. Hmm, I think I'll go with the mage's suggestion. If one group of us get caught or is in trouble, there is still another group. Sound words mage. I would like to know what you find from that book in the morning, if all is well. Right, Brother Kai, I'll gladly take second. And I'll wake whoever's next. But if we were to split into two groups, who will keep watch for the other group? Lastly, before we depart I think, that Vakeros friend of yours should be informed, at least he is aware of the situation he is in. He may be too caught up with his lady friend there, that he may not realised it. That will jeopardise them both greatly. We'll gather here again in the morning. First break of dawn."

As the common room cleared, Korlaeth touched Sol on the shoulder as they entered the Kai's room. "Don't wait up."

Korlaeth quickly opened the window and slipped outside, determined to find what he could while time was still somewhat on their side. He hoped it wouldn't take all night, but figured he could rest in the saddle tomorrow, if necessary.

"Thank you Hawkeye. How are the rooms to be divided? I myself will stay with Sol Hawk, as this shoulder wound seems to be affecting me. The knight also looks as if he could use some of your healing attentions. Hawkeye is able, he could go to the other room with Simon."

"You said there was another Vakeros, Sol Hawk? But I don't see him anywhere? To be truthful, my concern is somewhat a selfish one. I am running low on the ethereal energy that allows my will to control my magics. Without the energy, my willpower will diminish to the point where I will be able to do little more than sleep. All Dessi born have the ability to trade such energy between eachother. I was hoping... what did you say his name was?... could do me the service."

"We need you at full strength, Sir Victor, please don't argue," said Sol, and the Ruanese knight didn't argue when Sol Hawk offered to take the first watch and change his own.

"Fine, I would suggest that those who are injured be in this room with Sol Hawk, in Valestar's room and the wounded would be in the other room with Simon."

"Thank you Hawkeye. How are the rooms to be divided? I myself will stay with Sol Hawk, as this shoulder wound seems to be affecting me. The knight also looks as if he could use some of your healing attentions. Hawkeye is able, he could go to the other room with Simon."

"I'll be over here if you need me. (private joke)"

"By the way, mage, who is Simon? There's no Simon here, the last time I recall. or are you muttering to yourself again? Or maybe you depleted willpower is the cause behind this? Anyway, be on your toes and make sure you keep yourself alive. I want to get out from this place as soon as possible just like you, so I may need your company when we have the chance. Hawkeyed smiled a little and continued arranging with the little company.

"Simon, Simon, the Sage, you fool," grumbled Valestar. "Now stop interrupting me, I'm trying to research."

"Still sore from his wounds, the knight didn't argue when Sol Hawk offered to take the first watch and change his bandages. When he offered to take the next watch, the Kai Lord would have none of that and made him lie back down on the bed. "We need you at full strength, Sir Victor, please don't argue," said Sol, and the Ruanese knight could only with that."

"As the group continued to discuss rooms, Sol Hawk made an interesting discovery. "Well, hello," said Sol Hawk. Indeed, Valestar's Room and Hawkeye's Room, which were adjacent in the first place, had a door which connected them. Apparently in times of less traffic, the two rooms could have flowthrough and could be rented for which I am grateful. Anything you discern regarding Ameshia's powers or the jewel will provide us an edge that we do definitely need."

"I'll be over here if you need me. (private joke)"

"Sol friend, I shall stay awake throughout the night." Arcadian placed a hand on his friend's shoulder before turning away.
Act IV, Opening – The Traitor and The Assassin

Arctadian shut the door behind him and resumed his place underneath the windowsill. He placed his sword in his lap and made sure that his shortsword was close by in case he needed it. As he sat there the room’s candle began to flicker and dim. Arctadian peered at the form of Kamilah, attempting to discern if she had fallen asleep yet.

The young Vakeros’ mind was torn. Part of him was worrying with concern for Kamilah, and the other was contemplating a reunion with Murdach. We will meet again Murdach... Arctadian rested his back against the wall and let his long hair fall about his shoulders. We will meet and then we will know each other, you and I.

* * *

Sometime after the arrangements had been made, Valestar still pored over his “History of the Occult,” making occasional “ahs” or “hms” as he read. Finally, at one point he spoke to Sol Hawk:

“From what you tell me of Ameesha’s powers, she has an extraordinary gift. So far I have been able to find no instance of such power mentioned anywhere else in history. Of course, this book deals mostly with good aligned practices. There is a chance that such powers have been bred in the Darklands. However, my research in that area would be inconclusive. The world as yet knows very little of the occult practices of the Darklords. There was an interesting antecedent in here about a Cener ritual which allows a group of people to see visions of the future, but the ritual requires a human to be the vessel for the image, and, well, this illustrates best what happens to that vessel.”

He showed a colorful illustration of what looked to be a man having his skin torn off while his organs burned inside of him.

“There’s something else which interests me,” Valestar continued. “From what the book says, and from what I remember, future sight is a very intricate practice. Card readings, for the longest time, were considered the best forms of future telling, simply because of how non-specific they were. For instance, the cards might tell you that a storm is on the horizon. Does this mean that an actual storm was coming? Or does it mean that violent times will soon be upon us? And the horizon... how far into time does this imply? You see, variability, some sort of storm will appear on some sort of horizon. You can’t verify the future beyond this, because the variables are ever changing. Indeed, there are variables not yet accounted for. Even rituals such as the one you described can only show what may be. You can’t predict beyond that.”

“If Ameesha’s powers of future sight are truly as accurate as you say, then the entire foundation of the occult, and of time itself, will be affected. For if someone can see the future, the true future, and predict it unerringly, then it may indicate that our lives are indeed planned out for us. That every roll of the dice is predetermined. Your death, my death, whether good conquers evil... these things have all been decided, and now we are simply watching it play out.”

“In any case,” he continued. “I have more research to do, hopefully I can have something more for you in the morning.”

He grabbed at his shoulder suddenly and grimaced. “My wound aches from holding this book. May I suggest that we remain here, resting, till late in the morning tomorrow? I would personally welcome the rest... unless you have plans that require us to be somewhere early?”

* * *

It was the middle of the night and Sol Hawk listened to everything Valestar said. There was much here to consider and Sol Hawk said little, but thanked Valestar for the research. One thing was very clear - either Ameesha’s gifts were more valuable than he had ever guessed, or they were worthless and Egoliath had some completely different purpose in mind for the young woman after all. Still, from the visions they had been receiving, he believed the former. That poor, poor girl. What was happening to her now? It had been nearly a week now. She had been kidnapped. She had seen her own guards killed. She had seen the destruction at the border. She had been taken hundreds of miles from her home, probably bound and gagged for all of that time. Did she even know that they were on her trail, that she could still hold out a hope that she would soon be going home?

To Valestar, Sol Hawk merrily looked weary, but the impression passed quickly and Sol Hawk was again his smiling self when Valestar complained about his wounds. “Here, let me see,” he said. At the lower Tiers, a Kai Lord needed a needle and thread, herbs, medicines, and bandages to treat a wound such as this. But Sol Hawk was well-practiced in those arts, so he needed merely to press his hand against the wound and allow his own energy to flow into the damaged tissue. It was painful briefly, but Valestar could feel a cool, numbing effect that felt good considering the extreme heat of recent days in the desert. Slowly, slowly, the ruptured skin began to come back together. The bruises and scrapes changed in color and evaporated, replaced instantly by pink new skin. “That should help,” said Sol Hawk, “A good night’s sleep will do the rest. I do want us out there early,” he said, “because we need to be able to watch Murdach leave town and determine his direction. But it will not take all of us to do that. I don’t see why you couldn’t stay here during that escapade.” He grinned again, then went to check on Sir Victor and the others - prepared for a quiet night of careful listening with his weapon nearby.

* * *

Kamilah lay on her backside and watched as Arctadian perched himself near the window. It was obvious something was on his mind, yet she wasn’t quite sure what. Her eyes danced around the room some, her thoughts wandering to and from their current situation. She hadn’t been herself lately; usually she was spiteful and cold now she appeared shy and distant. She hadn’t paid any mind to the others and felt no shame for that. Her breathing changed and she sighed heavily feeling the hours of darkness.

“What is the matter Arctadian?” she asked softly.

* * *

At first Arctadian vacillated to reply. A pastel breeze drifted in through the open window and the hair on his arms stood up on end. His body was wracked with a trivial shiver and he shrouded it with a hasty sigh.

“Nothing is wrong, Kamilah.” Arctadian replied firmly. “Rest.”

However Arctadian’s words were not spoken from his heart. An erroneous ambiance hung in the air and Arctadian felt as if something was amiss. But what?

“Rest...”

* * *

Night passed slowly for those awake, quickly for the slumbering. The noises of the inn (muffled voices through walls, footfalls from the higher floor, and so forth) slowly died off. It was quiet in the desert. Well, as quiet as it could be in a city.

Kubudei at the forefront. They had camped near the city for the night so that they could come through quickly in the morning.

“Rest...”

Downstairs, Valestar had managed to stay awake for a couple of hours until his appointed time was up. He woke Sol Hawk and then collapsed with a sigh onto his bed. Sleep came quickly.

The Kai quietly crept around and checked on everyone. Still no Koralath. Hoping the boisterous Vakeros was alright, the Kai sat next to the main door and placed his ear against it. An hour passed, during which time the sounds of the inn died down.

The Kai then noticed something. Floorboards were creaking somewhere. Not like someone trying to tip toe slowly along, but like someone walking across a room rapidly. Just as he began to strain to hear more, he heard drawers opening and shutting.
Rules, Rulings

If you need anymore rolls, KL, just ask.
Perception Check: 24
Fortitude (boredom): 16

Perception #1 - Can he figure out what was already said?
22
Perception #2 - Can Sol hear any more?
13

Lastly - Sol Hawk communicates with Simyn using Telepathy for EXTRA stealth!
This lasts 1 minute and Simyn can respond telepathically for free

Act IV. Opening – The Traitor and The Assassin

Rather than wake the rest, he carefully opened the door and peeked out. There was nothing out of the ordinary. As the sliding noise of drawers continued, it was then that someone grunted in pain, and someone began speaking muffled quick Vassagonian. Then there was a thud as if a body hit the floor. In a room somewhere, someone ran.

* * *

After a short while Arcadian could hear Kamilah's breathing become shallow as she drifted off into sleep. He left the window long enough to drape a blanket over her bare shoulders. The night was long for Arcadian, and he spent most of it thinking back upon his past. Everything he had done.

Despite almost drifting off once or twice Arcadian was able to keep his eyes open and focused on the single, lit candle in the room. He kept his weapons close and his ears alert for any noise. If anything happened...he would be ready.

* * *

Something was happening. Someone could be searching for them now. Had Murdach come to the inn? What was going on? Sol Hawk decided that the safety of the group and maintaining their hiding place was more important than satisfying his curiosity, so he headed right instead. He scanned the room - everyone was sleeping with weapons nearby, so they would awaken if this happened and be armed. Without more to do and uncertain what was being said, he tried hard to decide what had been said and to hear if any more would be said. He looked nervously to the others. He wanted to wake them, but Sir Victor needed the rest and Valestar was out cold, still chumping Winter in a Lemonade Spring as he slept. If only Koraeth were here.

Simyn was pumped out nearby, obviously (even in sleep) less than enthusiastic at Sol's plan for him to sleep on the floor. Simyn, whispered Sol Hawk in the Sage's mind, Simyn. The others would need their rest, but Sol Hawk decided that Simyn was the best person to wake since he had avoided the serious wounds the others had taken. If no threat came, the Sage could return to sleep until their rest, but Sol Hawk decided that Simyn was the best person to wake since he had avoided the threat.

Simyn's shift came up. If the threat should come, well, Simyn had proved pretty good with a crossbow and poingard, so Sol was proud to have a warrior such as him at his side.

*Shh*, he intoned quietly as Simyn roused,...

He reached for his weapons and, silent as a cat, he moved toward the door closest to the noise he had heard. He positioned himself with surprise should anyone try to break the door in, then strained to hear anything more.

* * *

Arcadian never truly fell asleep and yet his eyes closed and what happened next he could only describe as a vision. The young Vakeros groaned and tried to open his eyes and yet he couldn't, somehow he was trapped within his own mind. He could hear a woman's voice calling out to him from afar, as if she was screaming as loud as she could, but was almost so far away that it was impossible to hear. Everything was black, swirling, darkness...

Suddenly everything around him was sharp and clear, visually stunning. Arcadian was standing in the middle of the desert, surrounded by nothing but sand. Looking up he could see dark storm clouds roil in the sky and a heavy wind began to billow all around him. His cloak swirled around his body and sand lightly stung his face. The ground began to shake and something rose from beneath the sand...beneath Arcadian's feet.

A dragon, a huge, massive creature and Arcadian was perched upon its back just above the tail. Somehow Arcadian knew that in order to kill the beast he would have to get to the neck. But he was faced with an impossible tangle of spines and fur.

The woman's voice reached Arcadian's ears, "Underside."

Looking down Arcadian found himself staring into a hole in the dragon's back. With sword drawn Arcadian entered found more, smaller dragons amidst a foul, slimy passageway. At the end of the passage was a ladder and Arcadian emerged between the shoulder blades of the dragon.

His blood went cold. There, looking Arcadian in the eyes, was Murdach. He smiled and swung his curved blade with intent of spilling blood upon his face. Arcadian could feel the blade rip through his body. Then a black bolt of lightning struck Murdach, covering him in shadow.

"Now!" screamed the woman's voice.

Suddenly Arcadian was back in the dark room at Udai's. The candle had almost completely burned down to the wick. Its light flickered faintly as the hot wax began to cool upon the tabletop. Arcadian moved to the tub Kamilah had previously used to bathe with and splashed some of its now cool water onto his face. He vigorously shook his head to clear the water and his mind. He stood there for a moment, his hands bracing himself upon the edge of the tub, his head hanging low. Drops of water dripped from his trimmed beard and locks of charcoal hair.

Arcadian looked up and stared at his own face in the mirror for several moments before reaching to his belt and retrieving his dagger. He lifted it to his face and began to shave. Soon his beard was completely gone and then he turned his attention to his hair. He rinsed it out, letting much of the dirt and grime that had accumulated the past few days wash into the tub. He ran the water of his hair and grinned at the way it felt as he ran his fingers through it. He then reached for his weapons and, silent as a cat, he moved toward the door closest to the noise he had heard. He positioned himself with surprise should anyone try to break the door in, then strained to hear anything more.

* * *
Rules, Rulings

Perception total: 17

Arcadian: Since this was no ordinary dream, it is difficult to use typical dream analysis on it. The best you can figure, since you were so fixated on Murdach, the dream was showing you the best and quickest way to get to him. Possibly more, but you're not sure.

You're not sure who the woman was or why she sounded like she did. You don't know what the clouds symbolize, nor the lightning. The dragon could be anything, but something in your memory from when you training in Dessor is nagging you.

Then you remember, the different cities of Vassagonia used to have different emblems on their flags—animal emblems. Teph had a scorpion. Feurkean had an ikkar. And Chahdan had a dragon.

I can't tell you any more than that. Just think of what the vision is literally telling you to do in regards to the dragon (the city).

Sol Hawk: You can't tell what was said, and you don't hear anything else.

Intell: 19

Hey everyone, how's the weekend been? Very eventful Friday, I see. Valestor is still out cold, but I have a question. The book says he doesn't restore endurance if he doesn't get 8 hours sleep. Are we overruling this and saying 6 hours is sufficient? Also, does Sol Hawk's hand healing thingy actually restore any points to me?

This will be deleted: Partial sleep = partial endurance.

If you get 6 hours sleep, you restore 75% of your CL in EP, rounded down.

So, if you are level 7, you'd normally get +7EP, but with 6 hours sleep, you get only 5 EP. This is not specifically mentioned anywhere, but based on my personal experience that even a little sleep is good when you've had no sleep in a while.

Also, SH's super-encompassing healing check does apply, as long as he doesn't go traipsing off in the night to explore. After all, you can't be "under his care" if he isn't there.

Also, Cade...well, crap I have to log in to PM you so I'll just edit my post and put the info there..... Better add another WP for Telepathy

Decide if you want to tell HE what has happened. It will have little bearing on the story.

Act IV, Opening – The Traitor and The Assassin

Simyn hadn't been fond of Sol Hawk's idea of having him sleep on the floor, but had agreed that it was a good idea. When Sol Hawk had awoken the sage for the late meeting, Simyn had become somewhat irritated with the Kai Lord.

As Simyn drifted to sleep on the hard floor he dreamt about his homeland. He dreamt about a fair maiden in a tower and a menacing black knight who held the maiden captive in a white tower. In his dream Simyn rescued the maiden and she was very...appreciative. The sage smiled in his sleep as the dream seemed to become very promising. The maiden whispered his name. "Oh, Simyn..."

Simyn awoke feeling a moment of disorientation. "Should we really do this fair maiden?" he mumbled and suddenly remembered where he was. The sage saw that Sol Hawk was listening for something and the sage tried to hear what Sol Hawk seemed to be hearing.

Suddenly the sage froze.

"You're speaking in my head!? This is how telepathy works? How interesting. What seems to be the matter?"

Simyn couldn't help but wonder if the Kai Lord could read his thoughts and perhaps knew something about the dream that had entertained the sage. Some things were private...

If Sol had seen anything of Simyn's dreams, he showed no sign of it. His eyes were directed toward the door.

"Maybe something, thought Sol Hawk to Simyn, Maybe nothing. There's a commotion nearby, between two Vassans, maybe a fight of some kind. Then one of them ran off. I heard somebody hit the floor. I couldn't hear what they were saying, but it was nearby."

Sol waited near the door to the room, poised to strike in case anyone should come for them.

Arcadian, now totally enveloped in darkness returned to his corner by the window. He sat cross-legged with his sword placed across his lap. He looked over his shoulder at the moon, hoping to guess about what time it was. So far nothing had occurred out of the ordinary.

He could see the still, sleeping form of Kamilah. Somehow seeing her rest brought Cade peace of mind, something he had not experienced since he was a young boy. Arcadian's eyes were beginning to adjust to present darkness and he could see Kamilah's shoulders lifting underneath the blanket as she breathed.

So beautiful...

"Shouldn't we investigate further? Perhaps we can learn something about the whereabouts of Ameasha? You're a Kai Lord shouldn't you be able to move stealthier than a cat?"

I can't go, came Sol Hawk's reply, The others need me still. He was torn by what Simyn had said - it was a difficult choice...staying to tend his friends or going to the aid of an unknown stranger.

If that was Murdach, we can't risk facing him alone or drawing him back here with so many of us vulnerable. He may be trying to draw us out, force us to reveal our position. We can't face him with less than our full strength.

Sol Hawk paused to listen again. Because their conversation made no noise at all, he could still hear everything going on in the hall.

Sol Hawk noted the disagoprav on Simyn's face and felt ashamed. He tried to reassure himself that this was not cowardice, but for the preservation of their group. Perhaps...he continued...Do you have the ability to scry?

"To scry?" Simyn was a bit surprised by the question. "No, not really. There are spells of detection, but ordinary magic never interested me. I'm a student of the stars, a field that is a bit controversial among the more conservative scholars of my country. There are those that say that the stars decide our future, but I'm not a supporter of that idea. So what do you suppose we do, just wait and see what happens? I could take a peak. I may not possess the grace of a Kai, but as you already probably have seen I am a dexterous lad."

Yes, I would say you are, considered Sol Hawk, Perhaps we should wait and listen - give it an hour to make sure the coast is clear - and perhaps then, if you deem it wise, you might risk a look to see what has happened. What is your thinking, Simyn?"

Simyn thought about it.

"Sounds like a plan. It might not be related to us at all. If they want to kill us they probably will strike soon."

Simyn entered the hallway under the watchful eye of the Kai. He moved as quietly as he could, trying to see in the near-darkness. He checked the rooms across from where they were staying, peering through the keyholes and finding nothing due to the darkness.

A quick check of the rest of the rooms on the floor revealed the same thing. Whatever had happened would remain in darkness till morning. The sage returned to the room and reported to Sol Hawk what we found out...which was basically nothing.

When the two finished their conversation, it was time to wake Hawkeye.

Hawkeye's watch was the easiest of the three. He had already slept, so becoming sleepy was not an issue once he was awake, and he didn't have to sleep a bit, then try to wake up, then try to sleep again, like his fellow Kai. Sol Hawk seemed to be having no trouble at all, though. The Kai checked on everyone before he went to bed, waking them briefly to re-dress wounds if needed, then off he went to sleep.

The watch was uneventful. Soon, the smell of fresh-cooked meat made its way up from the kitchen, and a heavy stomping could be heard on the stairs. The stealthy Kai took up a ready position next to the door, just in case.
**Rules, Rulings**

Arcadian, you and Kamilah were greeted with the whump whump whump, too. I just saw no point to type what I'd already typed. Everyone get up, get dressed, and head downstairs if you like. Breakfast is the second meal included in the room price: scrambled eggs, fried pig meat (your choice), and juice or milk. Even in Magmarund, breakfast is mundane and stereotypical.

Korlaeth is still not back. And Kavan does not come down.

Food, a good night's rest and now this sage is eager to go off and save our damsel in distress!

Since I was at full health and full willpower before going to bed last night hopefully I would suffer too badly from not sleeping last night. Let me know if there are any side-effects, KL.

So does my partial rest net me 3 EP and 4 WP to bring my totals to full?

DOC: HawkEye, yes - you are full in both. You would have had at least 9 EP from me plus the night's sleep (2/3 of the usual 14) and as for WP, I believe you get to add your CHA score in WP every day (at sunrise).

OK, I think I will abandon the stealth thing in favour of breakfast. I love a good breakfast!

DOC: Everyone at breakfast will hear Sol Hawk although he tries to stay quiet enough so that no one outside the group can hear. Sol also eats, risking the gandum sap cliché... 😊

**Act IV, Opening – The Traitor and The Assassin**

whump whump whump came a beating on the door.

"Time to break fast if you want it. Food's ready." Udai moved to the next door. He repeated his litany at each door, then moved upstairs to the third floor.

Everyone woke, some with a start at the loud banging on the door. In a few minutes, Udai passed back through.

"Curfew's over, time to get fed, get out, and shoo this Anaran fly through our city!" This got a few laughs of derision from other patrons who had started heading downstairs.

Simyn dressed quickly and continued down. He was famished. As he went down the stairs, he felt happy that he had put on his leather jerkin again. Who knew what would happen today? But Simyn looked forward to it, being very much a morning person. With mornings as these he felt that he could fence with a haughty Lyssalian noble and at the same time discuss the migration of the valdorish people.

"All those things will surely happen, but now breakfast!"

Simyn ate with good appetite. Kamilah had returned to their company and Arcadian and her seemed to have settled their differences. Good. There had also arrived two new persons, the Kai Lord Hawkweye and the Desi Magician Valestar. The sage hadn't properly introduced himself to them the evening before, something he wished to rectify this morning.

Valestar woke feeling extremely rested. He stretched his arm to find it no longer ached him. The others were rising around him. He expressed his thanks to Sol Hawk for tending his wounds and looked around for Hawkweye. Seeing him, he asked him how his night passed.

On hearing that everyone was meeting in the common room, Valestar quickly splashed some water on his face, and grabbed a meal from his backpack to take to the table.

There came a whump, whump at the door and some buffoon began shouting about breakfast. Whoever was knocking was preparing to do so again when Arcadian opened the door and found himself grabbing Udai be the collar.

There came a whump, whump at the door and some buffoon began shouting about breakfast. Whoever was knocking was preparing to do so again when Arcadian opened the door and found himself grabbing Udai be the collar. Arcadian's eyes dangerously as he jerked a thumb back towards the sleeping form of Kamilah. Udai got the idea without knocking was preparing to do so again when Arcadian opened the door and found himself grabbing Udai by the collar.

"Keep it down."

Hawkweye went back to check upon the others from his uneventful watch when he heard Udai calling for everyone to wake up and get their breakfast. The others were already stirring from their much needed sleep. "Time to get up everyone, we have much to do and breakfast is available for those wanting it." He went to the mage, and asked him, "How did you sleep old mage? Dreams full of fiery fireballs? Get prepared, we have much to discuss." After that, he went over to Sol Hawk, and whispered to him, "Even after sleep, you looked troubled. Pray tell, what's wrong? As for my watch, well nothing out of the ordinary happened. But I think we have to plan our next move once everyone is ready and full."

Sol Hawk told HawkEye about the goings-on of the previous night upon prompting from his Kai brother. As they ate breakfast and Kavan did not appear, Sol Hawk's disquiet deepened and he mentioned his concerns to the others as well.

"Hmm, perhaps we should. If he indeed got murdered yesterday, which I sincerely do not hope, I think the best thing would be to leave as soon as possible. That would look suspicious, but since we are foreigners in this country the first to blame for the deed would probably be us." The sage took another bite of his breakfast. "When I think about it, if Murdach or someone connected to him really was here last night, why wouldn't they be at breakfast too?" Sol Hawk paused... "well, someone needs to check to see if he is okay."

"But now I see that Kavan has not come down for breakfast. I cannot help but wonder if it was Murdach or one of his men who came for him last night. If so, I am glad that he did not find us as well. But I do not know what really happened. Perhaps we should tell Udai...? On the other hand, everyone saw us speaking with Kavan last night. If he has been..." Sol Hawk paused... "well, someone needs to check to see if he is okay."

Valestar listened to the account of the events. Things were not sounding so good. However, his paranoia seemed to be under control, he was calm rather than nervous, possibly because he had all of the companions sitting around him. Or not all. The couple was (thankfully) not present, and..."
Act IV. Opening – The Traitor and The Assassin

The group was served a wonderful hot meal for breakfast. Compared to days of eating cold and/or dried bits of food for sustenance on the trail, this was certainly money well spent. Midway through the meal and their musings on the current situation and future events, a stableboy came rushing in through the doors.

He whispered something in Udai’s ear and pointed upstairs. The man’s curious look turned sour, and he grabbed his weapon and a ring of keys.

“Stay here, everyone. Looks like we had a break-in last night.”

Most of the people in the common room watched as Udai walked upstairs, but others didn’t care a bit and kept eating. The companions looked at one another with knowing glances and picked over their meals while listening intently and waiting for Udai.

He came back down with a grim look on his face and a small bundle in his hands. “Boy, go call the Sharnazim. We’ve got a kidnapping and a murder to report.” To the rest of the room, he said, “Everyone keep eating or I’ll toss your food to the Kwaraz packs in the sewers outside. No one goes near room 15 until it has been cleared.”

Sol Hawk blanched. Room 15 was where Kavan had been staying.

Udai read the note on the package again and shrugged. “I don’t suppose anybody here is named ‘Sun Bird’?”

Sol Hawk did not speak up at first when Udai announced the package that was supposedly for him. He didn’t need the attention. But only shortly after, once the room returned to normal, he turned in his key to Udai and inquired about it then.

“Thank you for the meal,” said Sol Hawk, using Vassan and speaking in a low voice, “What happened up there?” he asked, “Did it have something to do with Kavan? He wasn’t at breakfast.”

After having acquired it, Sol Hawk stabbed it in his backpack and arrived at the table where his friends were seated. “Let’s not wear out our welcome. Why don’t we hit the stables? And we can see what’s in this package.” Sol Hawk had the idea that whatever it was wasn’t good. It didn’t matter what was in that room. Whatever it was would soon draw Sharnazim Warriors to this place in no time, especially if it was Kavan who was involved somehow.

Chadan had been meant as only a stopover for supplies. They couldn’t afford to become trapped here, imprisoned, or possibly killed for a crime they had nothing to do with.

As Sol returned to the table, Valesar posed his question once again:

“What about the other Vakeros?” he asked. “Did he ever come back? Does anyone have any idea where he is?”

He was getting nervous again.

When Hawkeye heard the news, it confirmed what Sol Hawk has told him. And a murder? Sigh, everywhere he went, it seemed death would follow. This is bad. He sat down beside Sol Hawk and began to eat his breakfast. He wasn’t quite hungry, so he talked further with his kai brother.

“Brother, it would seem that this Kavan is the one in room 15 as you mentioned, and Udai’s announcement of murder, wouldn’t take deserve a closer look? If we are able to obtain any additional info regarding our precarious situation, I’m sure that will be a boon to us all.” The brooding Kai Lord was very much considering to go upstairs and have a look.

“I don’t think Udai would look kindly on people snooping around in a murder scene, Hawkeye. By the way we haven’t been properly introduced Simyn of Quarlen, travelling scholar from far away Lyris. If it hadn’t been for a stroke of bad luck I would probably be back in Lyris by now and not entangled in this troublesome drama.”

The sage took the opportunity to shake hands with Valesar as well. “Simyn pleased to meet you. I would suggest that we try to leave as soon as possible. Who knows perhaps they will close the city gates and question us. We don’t have any clear business in this fair city do we? Rescuing an abducted maiden might seem like a far-fetched lie.”

Sol Hawk returned to the table. “No,” he said to Valesar, who was becoming nervous, “The Vakeros did not return during the night.” He suggested that they leave immediately, but Hawkeye felt that a look at the crime scene would start with their quest.

“Udai didn’t tell me anything,” said Sol Hawk. He recalled not gaining any information from Kavan last night either, “People are not very forthcoming in Chadan. Hawkeye, I am learned in many of the Kai skills, but Camouflage is not one. If Korlaeth were here, he might be able to blend in as a Sharnazim and get a look around up there. Do you have the skill that I lack?”

“In any event, we must get out of the inn while we can, pick up our purchases, and figure out where Murdach has gone. Let us head for the stables. Hawkeye, if you wish to do a fast search upstairs, I will stay here in the common area and wait for you until you return.”

Special Package
OOC: If Sol Hawk does Telepathy with Hawkeye, could the link be maintained once Hawkeye went upstairs? If Hawkeye goes, and if this is possible, Sol will do this in order to provide a lookout

Rules, Rulings

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Placeholder post: Don’t go too far ahead until you hear from Cade and Kamilah. Based on what he wants to do concerning the dream (if anything), he may have some input. Also, 15 is a valid room number, because I never gave any indication of how the rooms were ordered. It could be as follows:

01...02...03...04...05...06...07...08...09...10
stairs down----------------stairs up
20...19...18...17...16...15...14...13...12...11

Sol, I need to know if you have looked in that bundle yet. Also, once TP is initiated, it can be maintained without visual combat. Same thing with psychic combat. It just takes line of sight to initiate.

He, if you decide to sneak upstairs, the DC is going to be random. The minimum DC is 25. The maximum DC is 30. It depends on who is looking and how many people are looking. Here’s how we will do it:

If you want to go upstairs, roll your Stealth check. I will roll a d24+6 (range 25-30). That will be the DC. If you pass, you can move freely around--keep in mind that the room may be locked. If you fail, Udai sees you, or someone alerts him that you’re sneaking up.
Act IV, Opening – The Traitor and The Assassin

Valestar listened to Sol Hawk's comment about them needing to leave and shook his head. "We are acting too hastily," he said. "Though I, too, am anxious to put this murder behind me, there are some points you have not considered."

"First off, we haven't seen the couple this morning, nor have we seen the Vakeros you call Korlaeth. Are we to leave without them? Especially for Koralthea, whom we have no way of relaying where we will be going."

"Also, do we have a safe place to go? We should have some sort of base where we can hold our own ground. With last night's murder, there will most likely be additional security around this inn. If we continue to combine rooms, we could use that security to our advantage. Remember, we only have to last for another two days before we can get out of here."

"Finally, if we stay here, there's a chance we may learn more about last night's proceedings. That is, of course, if you think that would be helpful knowledge."

"By the way," he ended. "I learned something more in my research of last night. Something... disturbing. Should I tell you now or later, at a more appropriate time?"

* * *

"Well, I don't think there will ever be an appropriate time for what looks like bad news, Valestar. You probably could mention it now. Perhaps your research will give more clues to what exactly is happening here and what we can expect from our enemies."

* * *

"Indeed," said Sol Hawk. "We had better hear it. No need to leave the inn without Arcadian and..." he paused - Sol Hawk had not been aware until now that Kamilah had returned, "...and did you say couple?"

Intrigued by this new turn of events, Sol Hawk paused and sat back down in his chair and took another bite of the food that, moments before, he was ready to hurry from.

* * *

"Well, Valestar began. "It is nothing too concrete, but it bodes ill. You remember what I told you last night?" He repeated it, briefly, for the benefit of the others. "Now, like I said, Ameesha's powers are unprecedented. It is not uncommon for someone to be born with limited psychic ability; say, the ability to predict a change in the weather, or to know when a family member is hurt. It is rarer, but still not unheard of, for someone to be born with the ability to control these powers. And often, people with such abilities are taken in by some order, like your Kai, or the Mages in Dossi."

"Now, Ameesha. From what you've told me of her abilities, I'd say she has psychic prowess to match the Shianti in power. You all know who the Shianti are? Good. Now you may begin to understand the power of her talent. But there's more. This talent is just that. Untrained. Imagine what she'd be capable of if she were given proper training, and taught how to use her powers."

"Now, you say Ameesha has been kidnapped. Imagine, for a moment, that she is brought to a practitioner of evil. Someone who can teach her to harness her powers for ill. Imagine the damage she would be capable of causing. This girl is, potentially, the most powerful psychic Magnamund has ever known. She also has the potential to become one of the greatest villains Magnamund has ever known. If this girl is to be used in some evil experiment, or trained for some evil purpose, then..."

He didn't finish the sentence, but left it hanging. He thought the meaning was clear enough. When they found the girl, there was a chance they would have to kill her.

* * *

After Udai took his leave Arcadian walked back to the bed and leaned down, kissing Kamilah softly on the forehead. She stirred a little and her lips parted, letting forth a little gasp of breath. That breath Arcadian took into his own lungs, letting it fill him. He held it there for a moment, his eyes closed.

When he opened his eyes Kamilah was staring up at him, questioningly, as if wondering why he waked her. Arcadian smiled softly and brought a hand to her face. He caressed her tenderly, pushing strands of hair from her face.

"It is morning. And there is breakfast downstairs if you are hungry."

* * *

All this talk of Shianti and psychics was a bit hard to follow for Sir Victor. Not because he wasn't smart, but such esoteric powers were beyond his ken, and, frankly, his military mind wasn't that interested in them, so he just tried to listen and understand as much as he could. There were others in the group who could better interpret and use what was being said, after all.

* * *

Sol Hawk listened to everything that Valestar had said. Yes, Ameesha was a powerful person. He knew that the enemy had plans for that power, either to find or uncover a weapon of some great import, certainly afterwards to tip the balance of power in the region. But he had not considered the possibility that she herself could be turned into a weapon, into a permanent, enduring enemy of the Free Lands.

"No," he said, "No, that's not possible. She loves her homeland too much." This sounded weak as soon as he said it. He was hearing again what Valestar had left unsaid. That the woman they were sworn to rescue, to protect, might have to die. He had heard legends that there existed powers in this world that were capable of turning the mind of a person, making them into something that they truly weren't. The Kai did not have that power, neither did any enemy that he could recall. The Darklords perhaps. Or the dark users of magic from the southern continent, perhaps. All of them were rare. But then, who else but these would have any interest in exploiting Ameesha's powers?

Sol Hawk decided to refuse consideration any further. These were just theories. It was ridiculous to imagine that they would have to fight Ameesha rather than fight for her. Should it happen... well, if it happened, then...

"There is another matter that concerns me," said Sol Hawk, changing topics, "and that is the fact that President Kubudei is coming to Chadan, perhaps even today, leading a full army with him. I was told yesterday in town that he is coming to thank the new leader personally - exactly for what I did not hear - but it bothers me greatly that it is common knowledge, and that Kubudei is coming."

Also, do we have a safe place to go? We should have some sort of base where we can hold our own ground. With last night's murder, there will most likely be additional security around this inn. If we continue to combine rooms, we could use that security to our advantage. Remember, we only have to last for another two days before we can get out of here.

"Great Kai," said Sol Hawk, "Sir Victor, this can only mean war!"

* * *

"So for Kubudei to be here with an army, ah, could mean one of two things..." continued Sol Hawk, "he is either aware of the great army forming north and has come to meet it head-on... or he is unaware of it and is being led blindly into a trap. Sir Victor, you are an expert in these matters... what do you make of it?"
**Rules, Rulings**

*The scene is in PM.*

**Act IV, Opening – The Traitor and The Assassin**

"I'm sorry," Valestar said. "But I'm not sure you've told me who all of these characters are. I may have forgotten in the events of last night. Who is Kubudei?"

* * *

"Murdach you know of now," said Sol Hawk, "And Ameesha also. President Kubudei is Ameesha's father - he is the leader of Anari. Egoliath may be the leader of the Ragged - he is certainly master over Murdach."

* * *

In the distance somewhere, a horn sounds. Another joins the clarion call, and soon the sound rolls over the city. Some patrons ignore it, others look up. Uday merely walks over to a window and looks out.

Sol Hawk looked around to see watch Hawkeye take advantage of the distraction...but...he was already gone. The deft Kai had slipped up the steps in plain sight of everyone!

----------

Hawkeye smiled to himself as he moved backwards up the steps like a nimble cat. This was almost too easy. He moved to room 15, and as luck would have it, the door was open.

* * *

"That Ubedei?" Valestar asked. "What have you gotten yourselves into?" Maybe joining with this group hadn't been such a safe idea. He looked around. "Where has Hawkeye gotten to?" he exclaimed.

* * *

Kamilah though her eyes were open, was not fully awake yet and could only nod dumbly. She pushed her tresses from her face and stood. She peered intently at Cade and he looked away solemnly.

"You didn't sleep, did you?" Kamilah sighed. "You should have waken me in the night and taken some time for rest, Cade."

And then she allowed herself a small smile and her tone lightened some, "you can't protect me all the time, you know."

* * *

The knight nodded at Sol's words, as he felt a sinking feeling in his stomach. "This scenario does indeed sound like a trap. The good President must be warned at all costs!" said the knight. As he was about to formulate a plan with his companions, he was interrupted by a clarion call from outside. Could it be that the Anarians were already here?

"I need to get my armour back from the armourer before it's too late!" exclaimed the knight as he scrambled to get up.

* * *

Arcadian smiled half-heartedly. "I will sleep well enough when I am dead and buried, I think."

From the look on Kamilah's face he could tell that she did not take the joke to well. Arcadian quickly changed the subject.

"Come. Let us downstairs and get something to eat."

Arcadian decided against carrying his armor downstairs with him. He strapped his sword to his back and splashed some cool water on his face.

The young Vakeros had just shut the door to his room when he saw Sir Victor bounding up the stairs towards his own room. Cade placed a hand on the larger man's shoulders.

"Hold, Victor. What hastens you?"

* * *

Valestar started suddenly. He looked around him, blinking. It felt... odd. Like he'd been sitting here for a very long time. It felt like we was waking from a two month dream. He wondered what had happened and whether it had been serious.

He shook his head to clear it and tried to remember what they had been talking about. When he remembered that his new companions were possibly in trouble with the president of Anari, and most certainly in trouble with a deadly group of assasins, he wished he was still dreaming.

* * *

Hawkeye looked around further and determined that there was nothing else he could do, nothing else he could find out. So he proceeded to leave and re-join his companions as quietly and quickly as he had sneaked in. He peeped out the room to see if there's anyone watching and he continued on his way, his mind full of question, needing answers.

* * *

Arcadian stopped Sir Victor in the stairs, asking about what was going on.

"It seems President Kubudei is on his way with the entire Anarian army. That clarion call might be his forerunners already. Meanwhile, the Vassagorian have an army waiting in Teph, probably unknown to Kubudei. He must be warned at once, and I must retrieve my armour from the armourer! Hopefully he will have had time to repair it already. Gather your equipment quickly, for time is of the essence."

* * *

Arcadian's face darkened.

Arcadian pushed his head back through the door. Kamilah was busy dressing herself. She looked up at Arcadian as he said her name.

"Get ready, Kami. We leave Chahdan this morning."

The young Vakeros shut the door behind him and made his way across the room. Moving quickly he gathered his equipment. He strapped his shortsword to his belt and stood, donning his scalemail as quickly as he could. He took a moment to admire the armor for the first time. He peeped out the room to see if there's anyone watching and he continued on his way, his mind full of question, needing answers.

* * *

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"Come downstairs when you are ready, Kamilah." With that Cade turned and left the room behind, leaving the dual keys lying on the desk beside the tub.

* * *

Back downstairs Valestar looked around the table.

"So, what's the plan?" he asked. "Do we have a plan? I hope it doesn't involve rushing off to warn the President. Remember, we are locked inside this city. Not that I like it here, but unless we're staying out for good, I don't intend to get into any more trouble with the local authorities."

----------

**New Avatar:**

*Valestar*
**Rule IV, Opening – The Traitor and The Assassin**

Arcadian walked upon the others just as Valestar was speaking his mind about the situation.

“So, what’s the plan?” Valestar asked. “Do we have a plan? I hope it doesn’t involve rushing off to warn the President. Remember, we are locked inside this city. Not that I like it here, but unless we’re staying out for good, I don’t intend to get into any more trouble with the local authorities.”

Arcadian coughed and the others looked at him. Cade absentmindedly wondered if any of them noticed that he had shaved. Strange what one thinks about in the worst-possible situations.

“This may sound strange to you, but I had a dream last night. And... And, I will not be traveling with you to intercept Kubudei’s army. For those of you who do not know, Kamiah is upstairs. Thanks to your new friends here...” Arcadian motioned towards Valestar and Hawkeye... “she was rescued from possible slavery. I do not know where Kamiah’s path will take her.”

“But I believe that Murdach is here in Chahdan. And that there is a way for me to reach him that will not involve the Sharnazim.”

* * *

Sol Hawk had an uneasy smile upon his face. He listened as Cade spoke. “Sir Victor is right. Prepare yourselves for battle. Like it or not, we are locked into a city which is in the path of an approaching army. What may come when it arrives I do not know - but I do not think the city was locked up to keep us in. It was locked up to keep Kubudei out. As such, there is only one prize here - Ameesha. She will surface during the battle, or a hint to her location. That must be why Kubudei has come. Korlaeth is a man and a warrior. Ameesha is but a girl, and my first duty is to her. She is an innocent in this and must be returned to her father. Hawkeye, I implore you to come with me in her defense. Valestar, Cade, I can only suggest that now is not the time for us to split ways in the midst of a battle field. I must go with Sir Victor now, for I must also be prepared for the fight.”

And with this, Sol Hawk departs with Sir Victor.

* * *

This had seemed to be a rather nice day. “So, do we believe that Ameesha is in this city? Shouldn’t we try to scout a way out of here, in case she isn’t? I have no interest in the politics of this region. I have seen too many wars in the Stornlands to bother about another one. But Ameesha must be saved, she’s innocent.”

* * *

Hawkeye walked casually to the table and slipped into his seat beside Valestar. He was thinking, examining in his mind what he has seen and found out. Not much but any bit of info was crucial, especially now. He was puzzling over the crime scene and didn’t notice the young Vakeros arrived at their table. Valestar nudged him to get his attention, and Hawkeye looked up and saw the Vakeros looking at him and the old mage. He nodded as an acknowledgement and muttered to Valestar, “Someone wants that man dead, desperately. It was a clean and precise kill, much preparation was involved to make sure he’s out of the picture.” He waited to see what Valestar would say when Sol Hawk started talking.

“Sir Victor is right. Prepare yourselves for battle. Like it or not, we are locked into a city which is in the path of an approaching army. What may come when it arrives I do not know - but I do not think the city was locked up to keep us in. It was locked up to keep Kubudei out. As such, there is only one prize here - Ameesha. She will surface during the battle, or a hint to her location. That must be why Kubudei has come. Korlaeth is a man and a warrior. Ameesha is but a girl, and my first duty is to her. She is an innocent in this and must be returned to her father. Hawkeye, I implore you to come with me in her defense. Valestar, Cade, I can only suggest that now is not the time for us to split ways in the midst of a battle field. I must go with Sir Victor now, for I must also be prepared for the fight.”

“My business here will have to wait, matters of the Kai comes first and as such, I will go with my brother. What say you, mage, there is nothing for you to do as well, locked here in the city.” Hawkeye whispered to the Dessi mage. Hawkeye put both his hand in front of him on the table and leaned forward. “I am with you, Kai Brother.” Hawkeye turned to Valestar again, his eyes staring dead at Valestar.

* * *

Arcadian felt somewhat neglected, as Sol Hawk had been the only member of the fellowship to show concern as to his intentions. And Sol Hawk had walked away with Victor. Though Arcadian would never had admitted it, he felt a shroud of jealousy at this moment. Shrugging off his doubts the young Vakeros arrived at the table. The Vakeros tried to keep his thoughts from the others. Though they were a fellowship, they each had their own intentions, their own goals. Sol Hawk was a Kai Lord, assigned to this quest by his masters in the north. Sir Victor was a man of honor, and having sworn to recover Ameesha would lay down his life to do so. Who knew why Korlaeth or Simyn tagged along. As for the two strangers...who knows?

Arcadian, now that he thought about it, no longer knew why he was here. At first he had started out seeking Ameesha, intending to take advantage of her power. And then there was the matter of the blood-debt, which still needed to be paid. Arcadian had slain many of the Talons of Rashuur since his would, and yet he stuck true to his vow that Murdach’s blood and Murdach’s blood alone could appease the debt.

What do I do after Murdach is slain? Do I return to Elzian...or stay to the quest?

Arcadian was doubtful if he should face Murdach alone, should be presented the opportunity. But there was something in the back of his mind that spoke to him, telling him that it was destined for Arcadian to be the one to face the assassin. The more Arcadian pondered his dream the more convinced he became that it had come from Ameesha herself. There was no other explanation. Everything fit together for the vision to be a coincidence. The girl’s voice. Murdach. The dragon, symbolizing Chahdan...

Cade placed a platinum thrown down upon the bar and watched with curiosity as Udal’s eyes lit up at the coin. Arcadian spoke softly, out of earshot of everyone but the tavernkeeper.

“I have heard that there is an undercity...here in Chahdan. What can you tell me about it?”

* * *

Hawkeye slithered his way into the chair beside him. The mage didn’t actually notice until, with a slight jump, he heard the Kai’s voice whispering in his ear:

“Someone wants that man dead, desperately. It was a clean and precise kill, much preparation was involved to make sure he’s out of the picture.” Valestar in his surprise, had no idea what Hawkeye was talking about. He also didn’t know that he had stuck upstars.

“Where have you been? Who wanted who dead? Who is dead?”

The Vakeros appeared at this point, and made an odd proclamation. Secretly, Valestar was elated to hear him wasn’t going. Sol Hawk began to speak at this point. He urged them all to prepare for battle and not to split up. Valestar then watched Sol Hawk leave, without giving the others a chance to respond to his ultimatum. He felt a twinge of annoyance at being treated as if he were so unimportant. But then he caught Hawkeye staring at him and realized with a start that the Kai genuinely cared about whether or not he came with them. “Oh all right,” he said, attempting to sound gruff. “I’ll go with you.” He turned to the remaining companions, raising his voice briefly in the hopes that Sol Hawk would hear. “But I want a better plan than ‘let’s get em.’”

He lowered his voice again. “Preparing for battle... we don’t even know if there will be a battle yet, or where it will take place. To be honest, I am mightily confused. All I know is that the President of Anari is coming here, some powerful assassin named Murdach wants to intercept him, and there is a psychic girl involved, the daughter of Kubudei, if I heard correctly. Is that all correct?”

* * *
Arcadian felt that the blunt approach was best: coin plus question equals?

Udai looked at him and held the young man's gaze for a moment. "The danger is great."

Arcadian remained composed.

"Very well. Undercity connects to Chahdan via the sewers. Both kwaraaz and guards patrol the sewers, which coincidentally are the fastest way to travel from one place to another. They go under buildings, under walls, around obstacles...but what you find in them is often worse than what you find above. If you are captured, rest assured that it is worse than getting killed. Only a few have ever escaped Undercity."

He pulls down his shirt collar to reveal a Vassan number. "And those that do really don't like to see others gamble with their lives so readily. It's your call, young one." He pushed the coin Arcadian offered back and went into the kitchens.

********

People outside were scrambling about, making life difficult for the Sharnazim trying to clear the area and maintain order. Sir Victor stopped a passing man and asked what the horns meant.

"Kubudei's army is near! We must clear the streets at once so they can march through!"

The knight looked at the two Kai and told them to hurry. Everyone separated toward their respective destinations. Fortunately, all was in readiness when it came to armor and provisions and such. The group met back outside the shop where Victor was.

A group of Sharnazim approached, waving their arms and shouting "Clear the way! Be off!"

Arcadian moved back to the table where now Valestar and Simyn were both seated. It appeared that the Kai Lord, Hawkeye had not visited the Market Square with Sir Victor.

"Aye," said Sol Hawk, "That armour looks even better than I've seen before. Well met, Sir Victor." The people were being pushed from the streets - Sol Hawk realized that Cade and the others were still on the way.

"We've our equipment now," said Sol Hawk, "And President Kubudei is on the way. I want to find Korlaeth and also we should see if the others are on the way." He glanced around. He needed some elevation. Where could he climb to?

Arcadian moved back to the table where now Valestar and Simyn were both seated. It appeared that the Kai Lord, Hawkeye had followed Sol Hawk and Victor out. Cade looked towards the stairs; Kamilah had still not made an appearance. Silently he began to worry.

Arcadian spoke to Simyn and Valestar, his voice low. Though he didn't know either of them very well he thought that he should relay this to them anyways.

"I have learned something of Chahdan. There is a place, beneath Chahdan called 'Undercity'. Apparently it is guarded, but it is the fastest way to travel from one place to another. The sewers are the only way to reach this Undercity."

Arcadian could tell from the look on Valestar's face that he did not understand where the Vakeros was going with this. So he began to clarify.

"I believe that Mudrach has Ameesha in the Undercity. The Undercity is guarded, but it is the fastest way to travel from one place to another. The sewers are the only way to reach this Undercity."

Arcadian relayed his interesting news to Valestar and Simyn.

"Excellent, my good Vakeros," said Valestar, "We are beginning to put the pieces of the puzzle together, and what's more, perhaps we can finally begin forming a plan. Break up into teams... yes... yes, a plan is forming in my mind... "
Arcadian's own Int. Roll: 15

Valestar nodded. "Exactly what I was thinking. Except I was thinking maybe two groups should go into undercity, act unaligned, and root out both the enemy and Ameesha."

"Murdach has never seen me or Hawkeye," he continued. "What are the chances of us meeting Murdach, do you suppose? Perhaps we could pose as his allies. We'd have to bring something that he wants, of course, to make it feasible. Something that would bypass the color of my skin... Hawkeye would be fine, I believe he originates from Vassagonia. He'd have to lose the cloak, of course. But if we had something Murdach wanted badly, he'd be blind in his need to have it. And he'd make mistakes. To that end, I've been wondering what's in Sol Hawk's package...

"Well, that's one plan at least. Another one would be to use force. Burst into the Undercity, and steal the girl back. But I think they are too clever for that.

"Then, too, we could try simply sneaking the girl out and leaving Murdach be, for now. It's a little less risky, and possibly better than trying to fool Murdach directly.

"Let me think more on this. Sol Hawk told me very little of the details of your adventures, but the other members, most notably the Sage here, have been filling me in. There must be some small detail I've missed."

In truth, Valestar hoped the Vakeros would jump in with his own ideas. It would take him hours to think through the event in its entirety, and they didn't have that sort of time.

Sol Hawk dropped a Gold Crown in the man's palm and smiled with what he hoped was his most charismatic smile.

"What kind of package did Sol Hawk receive?" asked Kamilah. "He didn't mention the contents, but he did say it was important."

Fluff: 21

Next, Sol Hawk goes to the roof for a better look of the area.
**Rules, Rulings**

Question. Are we planning on coming back to the inn? How many nights did we pay for? If we are losing the rooms today, then I’ll either have to load up Varsuvial with the Saddlebags and bring him, or (probably better) pay for an extra night.

*Don’t know if you’re RPing or not, but to clarify in case you’re not, Kavan isn’t dead. I suppose only HE truly knows this, unless he shared it at some point. Keep it going, I’ll have a post worked up over the weekend. Oh, and glad to see you back, Kami.*

Neither myself nor Valestar knew that. I don’t think Sol knew that either, since the last thing he said on the matter was that the room number where the murder occurred was Kavan’s room. Yeah, Hawks didn’t say nothing ^_^.

**Act IV. Opening – The Traitor and The Assassin**

“Shall we go now to find the others? We cannot proceed much further without letting them at least know what we plan to do. And, as I said, I want a look at that package.”

“Should we rouse the girl?” he finished, hoping to sound casual. The thought had come to him that if he didn’t get some control over his inner demons, his nervousness where the couple was involved could be noticed, and maybe misconstrued.

He didn’t particularly like the Vakeros, but the young man seemed to be genuinely trying to make up for his actions of the night before. Or at least, he seemed willing to put it behind him. Valestar respected that enough to be civil and to give him a second chance. If this was the way the Vakeros was normally, he could make a good companion. Pius, Arcadian represented a connection to his home in Desi, a home he was truly beginning to miss.

Arcadian pondered for a few moments...

“This murder...I did not know of this. Who is Kavan? The name sounds Vassan in nature.”

“Told you I wanted to tell Valestar in the post but left it out since I wasn’t sure myself, not until I’ve asked KL. So yeah, only old Hawk knows of this at the moment.”

Welcome back, Kami. :D

Um, I don’t know about everybody else. But I only purchased room and board for one night. So I assumed that my keys were due to be turned in this morning. I am pretty sure that nobody else paid for additional nights. Because, as we all know, KL likes to throw new things at us.

I paid for one night and to my knowledge, nobody has made any additional plans just yet.

I’m going to go ahead and post this as general goings-on in the area that can be seen by anyone looking outside, from any location.

Now, that being said, anyone can still exit where they are and possibly move to another location in the next couple of posts. The president arrives soon.

---

* * *

Arcadian motioned beside him, “go ahead and sit.”

Hawkeye followed Sol hawk and Sir Victor where Sol Hawk tried to convince a townsperson so that they can use the roof. Hmm, personally he felt they should just have climb their way up, they’re Kai Lords after all. But then the same can’t be said about the knight. Then Hawkeye’s mind drifted back to the scene in the room, “That man was looking for something or someone, possibly Kavan himself but he was not there and now, that man is dead. So most probably Kavan killed him. If we find Kavan, that may lead us somewhere. Or maybe that dead man was looking for something, something which may now be in Sol Hawk’s possession. So many ifs, and not many facts.”

Arcadian shrugged his shoulders in indifference. “Valestar here and I are coming up with a plan regarding the possible... capture of Murdach and rescue of Ameesha.”

Arcadian motioned beside him, “go ahead and sit.”

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Simyn sat silently watching the discussion between Arcadian and Valestar. “What proof do we have that Murdach is in this city or even have passed through it? We need solid evidence that Ameesha is captive in Chahdan or else we should think of means of leaving Chahdan. I’m a scholar and a fencer, but I know nothing about the art of warfare and wouldn’t feel useful if we were trapped in a siege.”

Valestar suddenly remembered that they had only paid for a single night’s stay at the inn. He ran off to find the inn keeper, to pay for a second night. He needed a place to keep his things while they were galavanting around.

The man looked at the Kai and grinned, revealing a couple of crooked teeth that were doing a fair job of covering the gaps created by nearby missing teeth. “Five, and you can go on top.”

As an afterthought, he added, “And I won’t even tell the Shamnaim you are up there.”

It was at that moment that Sir Victor and Hawkeye entered at the request of the Shamnaim patrol.

“Five each!” exclaimed the greedy Vassagonian at his new arrivals.

* * *

Valestar quickly paid for another night, and Udai pocketed the money. He told the old mage that the day without a market would not affect the quality—or quality--of the food.

A group of Shamnaim entered the inn at that moment. “Udai,” one of them began, obviously familiar with this territory. “let your patrons know that this area will be closed off while the president comes through. No one enters or leaves for any reason. We have a couple thousand extra Shamnaim arriving through the north and southeast gates at the moment to help out with this.”

* * *

Welcome back, Kami.

I know little of Kavan. Sol Hawk met him last night. You were not with us at the table when we dined, but Kavan was a Vassagonian who stayed in the inn last night. As I said, Sol Hawk knows more, but he hinted that Kavan may be able to provide information on the Ragged.

“Will I meet you by the stables,” Valestar said. To Kami she gave a brief nod, asking her how her night was. After hearing her response, he left to find Varsuvial.

The donkey was happy to see him, nuzzling against his robes. “You’ll have to stay here a little longer, friend,” Valestar said. “But I’ll be back for you.”

* * *

Kamiah shot Valestar an almost disdainful glance but did not reply to his question. She was completely distrustful of the mage, and if he honestly cared about her night than she was Ishir herself.

She looked towards Arcadian who was sitting there without a care in the world, “pray, are you going to tell me what this is all about or should I just stand here guessing?”

Arcadian stood and then motioned to Simyn, “are you joining us Simyn?”

* * *

Five, and you can go on top.”

Gaps created by nearby missing teeth. “Five, and you can go on top.”

* * *

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As the horns sounded in the distance, signalling the arrival of the president's entourage, the Sharnazim began to line the sides of the marketplace, three rows deep in most places. Others patrolled in the "path" afforded by this formation—the one that the president and his personal entourage would be following through the course of the city. Patrols were everywhere in the alleyways, though somewhat sporadically.

Valestar, having secured board for his donkey and belongings, left for the stables, hopefully to meet the others. Before leaving, though, he stuffed a couple meals and some other items into his backpack, just in case.

They had to move fast, or they'd be closed off from the companions, let alone the undercity.

Sol Hawk thanked the man curtly and removed the coins from his near-empty belt pouch. After receiving directions he looked to Sir Victor and Hawkeye, then moved for the roof.

Once atop the roof, Sol Hawk finds a location that is well-concealed from below. At once his sharp Kai eyes began skimming for Murdach, Ameesha, Kubudei, or Kavan. He made certain that they were alone before telling Hawkeye the plan. "We should be able to see well what goes on from up here. Maybe we can find Murdach, Ameesha, or Koralath without being seen ourselves." He sends a mental image to Hawkeye—his brother Kai knows at once what Murdach, Ameesha, Kavan, Kubudei, and Koralath look like—so Koraleath, Sol Hawk showed both his disguised and normal forms, for he had had the opportunity to see both.

They sat for a time—Sol Hawk had placed his bow down and removed the package given him before. "What do you suppose this was all about?" he said, then opened it.

Simyn nodded to Arcadian. "I'll go with you. I just need to get my rapier and poignard first." At the top of the stairs Simyn met the innkeeper and paid him another six gold crowns for another night's stay. He then quickly got his gear putting on his leather jerkin and sheathed his rapier and parrying dagger. He straightened out his moustache and went to the stables ready to face another day of uncertainty and possible dangers.

Sol Hawk: *package contents in PM, nothing unusual to report on your Perception check. Alasi: I kept the story going in a way so that you and Kamilah could ti up any loose ends. Sir Victor: Sol Hawk opted to climb the stairs instead of the building exterior, so you could have gone along—but your decision to not be a rooftop beacon is very wise.

Sir Victor: Sol Hawk thanked the man curtly and removed the coins from his near-empty belt pouch. After receiving directions he looked to Sir Victor and Hawkeye, then moved for the roof.

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Rules, Rulings

Act IV, Opening – The Traitor and The Assassin

Sir Victor chuckled quietly at the little girl’s words. Obviously, people think others will do as they themselves would have done in the same situation, and the man thought the knight could stoop low as to steal anything from his house, had there been anything of value to actually steal.

“Don’t you worry, little one, your father can rest assured that I won’t steal anything from him. You see this seal on my armour?” he asked as the girl stepped up for a closer look. “That’s the mark of a Sommerlund knight of the realm, and we’re sworn, on our honour, to uphold good standing moral values. You and your father have nothing to fear from me or my companions.” “That is, unless he has anything to hide or betrays our trust, thought the knight. “Do you know where your father went, by any chance? Is he still in the house?”

Valestar watched the others saddle their horses. He was confused. In Elzian, horses were rarely used within the city. He supposed every place was different. Rather than let on that he was unaware how this city worked, he prepared Varsuvial for riding.

Sol Hawk passed the note to Hawkeye. “The note is from Kavan,” said Sol Hawk, “the man who I met in the inn last night. You saw Murdach last night,” said Sol Hawk – Hawkeye had also seen Murdach’s face just now in the telepathic message Sol had sent. “Murdach is the one who kidnapped Ameesha. Now it looks as if she is no longer with him – she is being taken to Teph instead and Murdach is going to be murdered by Kavan... perhaps even as we speak.”

The note, given to Sol Hawk by Udai just minutes ago was written in the Vassan Language and read as followed:

“Sun Bird – I know that is not your name, but it is the nearest our tongue allows in brevity.

“Your actions are rare. It shows how different our cultures are, for no Vassagonian would help a low-level traveler such as myself in such a situation. It was not as though I needed the help, but my ruse allowed you to think such. That earns my respect.

“Do not worry yourself with Myr-atoch any longer. After the morrow, his soul will withite in Aishtarah for crossing my master. The strong must fall to the stronger, the quick to the quicker. As Egolah commands, I gave Myr-atoch his orders to come here with me instead of to Teph with Ameesha. As Egolah commands, I shall now end the wretch’s life for his past crimes.

“I implore you to avoid the area north of here known as Four Towers. Your kindness has granted you this warning: if you interfere with my mission, you will be subject to my wrath. The Ragged have interest in Myr-atoch only... if you interfere, they will come for you, as well.

“The debt of kindness has been repaid. My soul is once more clean.”

About that time, Hawkeye motioned Sol Hawk to get down which Sol Hawk did. He peered out once more to see the procession on the way and to decide what this could mean. He had no love for Murdach, that was for certain - but did the secret of Ameesha’s location lie with this man still, or with Kavan?

“So,” Valestar asked the three who had come with him. “Do we have any idea where the Kai Lords and the Knight are?”

He looked around the bustling city warily. He had no idea who his enemies were in this crowd.

“Not really, but perhaps I can find out where they went.” Simyn knelt down beside Staffar and began scrutinizing the ground. Perhaps he could find the tracks of their runaway companions.

As everyone checked their provisions and readied their mounts for travel, the stable boy laughed. Simyn ignored the lad, instead running the beads to his mouth to imitate the horns blowing. “OverCity is shut down today,” he said, shaking his head in disbelief at these foreigners who were unfamiliar with their ways. He had probably just saved their lives, and they didn’t even know it.

From their vantage point, the two Kai saw the standard bearers of the president arrive first and file down the column demarcated by rows of Sharnazim. The black-clad soldiers touched the red sash around their waists, then their foreheads, then raised their hand as if throwing something as the procession moved by.

Horns sounded again as Kubadei himself entered. Had it been the Zakhan, the Sharnazim would have drawn their scimitars and bitakali and laid them on the ground in submission and deference. As it was, they merely repeated the regional gesture for quick passage and good fortune.

Sir Victor looked out and could only see mounted men moving along far away. The little girl was still staring at the emblem on his armor. “Fania is locking the back door – the one by the alleyway. He and Ehmonia are probably eating. I’ve already eaten,” she said innocently.

The knight was about to open the door and look outside to get a better look, but he felt a slight tug at his arm, followed by a gasp. “Don’t go! The guards will fight you if you try to go outside now.”

At the girl’s comment, the knight stopped himself from opening the door. Now was not the time to draw attention to this place, while the two Kai were observing from the rooftop. However, another comment she had said struck him.

“Why is Faniah locking the door to the alley?” he asked her.

“On the donkey, off the donkey... this was getting to be annoying.

Any luck tracking them?” Valestar asked Simyn gruffly.

Arcadian shot Valestar a glance and then knelt down so he was facing the young boy eye to eye. The boy seemed to be anything but intimidated by the little foreigner but Arcadian payed it no mind.

“If Overcity is shut down, as you say, I will believe you.” Confirmed Arcadian. “So show me an entrance to the Undercity.”

The Vakeros Knight reached into his belt pouch and withdrew a single copper pawn. He held it up in front of the boy’s eyes. “Show us the way.”
Rules, Rulings

Act IV, Opening – The Traitor and The Assassin

Sol Hawk watched as Kubudei passed. Kavan was going to kill Murdach - at least he was going to try. But what did it mean? Why should it be today? Unless...

"Gods," said Sol Hawk, "Hawk Eye, I believe that Kavan intends to kill Murdach in plain sight of Kubudei. With Murdach dead, Kubudei will be thrown off the trail and so will we. We all know that Kubudei took Ameesha. That makes him a liability. If he dies, Kubudei will know, we will know, and Ameesha will vanish into the sands forever - even as Kubudei is pressed to make peace with the ones that avenged themselves against Ameesha's captors - the very ones that orchestrated the whole catastrophe."

Sol Hawk was quiet and continued to watch. Kavan didn't know just who he had given this information to. He must not have realized that Sol Hawk was after Ameesha - but why had Kavan even mentioned Ameesha in his letter? He had told Sol Hawk a great deal. But why? Had it been an innocent mistake made in confidence? Or was there more to this?

"Hawkeye," said Sol Hawk, "Tell me more about who was murdered at the inn last night and what you saw." Sol Hawk continued to watch the procession - especially wary for anything out of place. He also glanced northward in search of the area Kavan had warned him to avoid at all cost...

* * *

Valestar was taken aback by the Vakeros' question. "Er," he whispered aside to Simyn, "Aren't we supposed to be looking for the other companions?"

Of course, it was true that they had to move fast, and the companions could be anywhere, but he wasn't sure he loved the idea of traipsing off to the blasted undercity with this crazy bunch.

"We're just becoming more separated," he persisted, hoping at least one of the three would see things his way. He couldn't very well find the kai lords on his own.

* * *

"How are we supposed to find them, Valestar? You heard the boy, the moment we step foot into the streets we will be challenged by the sharnazim."

Arcadian wasn't trying to test Valestar's patience. The young Vakeros felt that his words were true. What good would trespassing into the streets be? They would be arrested or struck down on sight.

"Maybe we can leave a message here with the boy. Obviously Victor, Sol, and Hawkayee will return to Uda's when they can." * * *

Valestar didn't trust the boy.

"I'm in this mess as good as any of you now, I suppose," he said. "Might as well get completely involved."

* * *

"They haven't gone far that much I can tell you. They walked from here. There horses might still be in the stable or perhaps they took them with them as they left." The sage looked upwards. "We could take the Undercity, but I'll guess it would be hard to navigate there. If we could find a suitable house roof perhaps with a bit of luck I could find them with my spyglass. Was sir Victor wearing his suit of armour? It wouldn't be so hard to spot."

* * *

The little girl looked at Sir Victor, wide-eyed with fear. "The Sharnazim aren't all nice. Sometimes when they patrol, they break into houses and steal things, or..." she looks away, distant, "...or worse."

Above him, the two Kai pored over the information they had, trying to fill in the copious blanks. Each new step they took only got them further into the intrigue surrounding Egoliah, Ameesha, Murdach, and now Kavan. Sol Hawk looked northward, seeing the four large buildings known as Four Towers in the distance.

All the action was here now, but it would soon be there. What would ultimately happen there? The Kai debated what to do as he looked at the procession—these "ragged" he had learned of were nothing to be trifled with, yet how could he just do nothing?

At this distance, he could make out Kubudei's face. The man looked drained, yet he tried to project majesty and strength. A few horses behind the president, Sol Hawk saw a familiar face. His heart leapt as he recognized former Command Captain Ihm'razir al-Marash. He was still alive after the punishment.

The Kai blinked and looked down at these thoughts. Had it only been a few days ago that all that happened? The Onia a-Barouta seemed like a distant fuzzy dream now. Again he looked northward.

----------

The little boy looked up condescendingly at the Vakeros. He held up his hand, showing all five digits. Arcadian suppressed a smile at the innocent insolence of the youth. Five was a small price to pay. He gave the boy a handful of the brownish coins.

"Over here," he said, scurrying to an abandoned stable. "I found it one day when I was playing, but Udaid said to cover it back up before it's too late!" exclaimed the knight as he scrambled to get up.

"Don't tell Udaid I showed you this, okay?"

* * *

"Don't worry, boy," said Arcadian reassuringly. "I won't say a word to Udaid, your secret is safe with me. Spend the money as you see fit, though don't show it to Udaid."

Arcadian pondered the situation for a moment, "one of needs to stay in Overcity, to tell the others where we have gone. I am not asking any of you to come with me. But that vision I had..."

Well, Arcadian was almost sure...

"I am positive that it was a beckoning from Ameesha," exclaimed the young Vakeros Knight. "All the dreams we have had so far. All of them have had significance. And I believe that this one does as well."

Even if Murdach isn't hiding Ameesha in the Undercity... how else are we to leave Chahdan and pursue the Talons? We cannot leave Chahdan through Undercity, it is in lockdown. The only way through would be to fight through a mass of sharnazim. It makes sense that this would be an entrance to Undercity somewhere other than within the walls of Chahdan."
Act IV, Opening – The Traitor and The Assassin

Kamilah looks to Arcadian.

"What is it that you think we should do?"

Kamilah glanced down toward the sewer entrance with a look of utter disgust.

"That is foul..." Seeing Arcadian out of the corner of her eye she looked at him intently. For some reason past feelings were beginning to consume her inside- and this made her uneasy, for what sword can fight back emotion? Snapping out of her daze she spoke softly.

"Arcadian, I want to stay with- you'll protect me, right?" Kamilah herself had changed, this was unlike her. She was unsure of Cade’s comming reaction, but this was a risk she was willing to take if it meant staying by his side.

* * *

Valestar instantly volunteered to stay above ground.

"To be honest," he said. "I don’t like the idea of waiting here, with no idea how anyone else is faring, but I also probably have the worst chance of surviving undercity. If there is a slave trade down there, then I've already run into it. They’d recognize me on the spot."

"Before you go, Arcadian, could I ask once again to 'borrow' some of your energy? I spent nearly all I had yesterday," said Valestar.

Arcadian shrugged, almost hopelessly. "I know not what else to do. I fear that if we enter the streets now we will be apprehended...or worse."

"Before you go, Arcadian, could I ask once again to 'borrow' some of your energy? I spent nearly all I had yesterday," said Valestar.

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"Perhaps I should descend into the sewers alone," suggested Arcadian. "The three of you can find Victor and the others and join up with me later."

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"Before you go, Arcadian, could I ask once again to 'borrow' some of your energy? I spent nearly all I had yesterday," said Valestar.

Arcadian nodded. He placed his hand upon Valestar’s shoulder and the magician clasped his own over Arcadian’s. A few moments passed and Valestar opened his eyes with a smile.

The young Vakeros stepped back, drained at the loss of power. He pushed his long, black hair from his face and bent beside the metal grate. He gingerly felt the lock.

* * *

Valestar was surprised that the Vakeros agreed to his request. If he was honest with himself, his respect for the young man had grown already just by watching his actions of the morning. And his selflessness is saying he would go into undercity alone... if the girl was to be left with him, Valestar vowed he would protect her. Possibly it would give him some peace and respite from his past. Perhaps, by protecting this couple’s love, he could correct his mistake from so many years ago.

* * *

Haweeye explained to Sol Hawk as best as he could despite their position. He related to the other Kai Lord what he had learnt while searching the room, all the while maintaining observation.

"Him, if this Kavan is indeed planning to do what you’ve mentioned, then I would think he would do it here, where he can easily lose himself between the rooftops and crowd. This procession must be going through somewhere which will be the ideal spot. If my hunch is correct, that is where we will find your friend. What do you think, Brother?"

* * *

Kamilah eyes dropped as she listened to Arcadian speak of his plans to venture alone to the under city. Feeling disregarded by Arcadian, her attention was averted to the stable boy. She knelled down slowly as to see eye to eye with him as she spoke.

"Listen." She said softly as she smiled coolly at the boy.

"I’ll award you another five copper pawns if you run off and find something else to do for a little while..." Kamilah paused and smiled as to not scare the boy.

"Oh, and if any one asks, we were never here, ok?" She gathered her coin pouch and slowly rose to her feet. Kamilah glanced at Cade solemnly to alert him of her disapproval and then quickly turned back to the boy.

* * *

"Perhaps we just could try to avoid the sharnazim patrols? I’m not eager to enter the Undercity and I don’t know why you should go alone Arcadian. Take someone with you at least." The sage looked at the vakerine.

* * *

The man reappeared and saw Sir Victor talking to his daughter. "A-tarir, voda ny na’malooah. Peska, shahri, peska."

The little girl looked at Sir Victor and shrugged, touching his armor once more. "Got to go," she said, walking past her father and into the room he came from.

"When the Sharnazim clear, I would like you to leave. You are not invited, but I do not wish to cause a disturbance, so I stay my tongue in alerting the guard."

--------

Arcadian watched Kamilah coercing the boy to leave, and he debated at what to do. There was no way of knowing if his decision-- whatever it was--would ultimately turn out right in the long run.

Simyn looked over the guards that were standing all around outside the stables, suggesting nonchalantly that they find ways to avoid them without getting near to UnderCity.

The two blue warriors locked eyes, and Valestar smiled a bit as they did. He was anxious to hear what came next, for he had seen the glances between them.

Varsuvial, however, snorted lightly and looked around. And people called him slow and stubborn.
Act IV, Opening – The Traitor and The Assassin

Arcadian draped his arm around the Vakerine's shoulders in a deft gesture of reassurance. The young Vakeros knew that until yesterday Kamilah's mood towards him could be described only as one of apathy. It heartened the Vakeros to see that her insouciance had melted away to a warmer, concerned manner.

"Please do not fret," Arcadian lowered his head, speaking softly, into her ear. "I will not force you to leave my side."

Arcadian turned to the others. He studied the faces of Simyn and Valestar before taking a deep breath and finally making a decision. He spoke evenly, his voice resonating an assurance that he did not often feel.

"Valestar and Simyn, I know that you do not understand why I go. Stay here, find the others. Let them know where I have gone. If I have not returned to Chahdan when Victor and the others are preparing to move out...let them know to continue without me. Chances are they will move on to Teph. And we will follow them there."

"Valestar raised an eyebrow at the word 'we' and Arcadian explained. "kamilah will come with me, or stay here with you, the choice I leave up to her and her alone. I will not make it for her."

"Arcadian turned to the Vakerine. "The choice is yours...Kami..."

* * *

"There," said Sol Hawk to Hawkeye, "The Four Towers."

Something tingled within him - his developing Sixth Sense - that "where we should be. It is all happening there." The Four Towers stood ominously, overlooking the very path that Kubudei was to tread. Sol Hawk looked to the streets - he hoped his friends would be near, but the streets were flooded with Shama'zim and if Arcadian, Simyn, and the rest had not yet come this way, they would find it nearly impossible to do so now.

He looked to the rooftops. Could he reach the Four Towers in this manner? The streets... these would be impossible to navigate.

He's eyes next searched Kubudei and his entourage, and Command-Captain Ihm'razir al-Marash who had journeyed with Sol Hawk and his band upon their arrival in Anari. Sol Hawk tried desperately to make eye contact with one of these two men... or failing this, with one of those Anariani nearby to Kubudei... *

* * *

Hawkeye was standing there, examining the area, the crowd the street and the entourage. He looked closely for possible ways to reach the Four Towers, the place Sol mentioned moments ago. "Yes, that would indeed be the most ideal place if I were him. But we won't get there in time with this crowd, at least not before Kubudei."

"Sol Hawk, have you got any ideas yet? It would seem almost impossible to reach there before them by way of the streets or rooftops. But perhaps, if we can't go over the ground, may we consider an alternate route?" Hawkeye muttered, scratching his chin. *

* * *

"One thing is clear," said Sol Hawk, "and that is this: President Kubudei must be warned of the danger - and so must Sir Victor be. We must tell Sir Victor what we have seen."

With this, Sol Hawk took a final look to get his bearings, then descended to find Sir Victor what they had seen. *

* * *

"Okay," Valestar turned to the Sage as Arcadian and Kamilah disappeared. "So we've got to find the others and tell them what the Vakeros and the girl are up to. Where do we start? Do we know where the Armourer is?"

* * *

Simyn shook his head. "No, I don't. I passed Chahdan briefly on the return from Barrakeek, but I never did stay in the city. My guess is that the armourer is somewhere around the square where the merchants were gathered. Or..." Simyn looked around. "Where did that stable boy go? Perhaps he knows where the armourers can be found?"

* * *

The two Kai stealthily moved across the rooftop to the trapdoor in the ceiling that led to the attic of the house. They entered and began running two steps at a time down the stairs, a noise which elicited a curse of surprise from the man below with Sir Victor. The knight smiled as the two Kai emerged from the stairs on the left side of the room.
**Rules, Rulings**

Just got to re-reading. Whether or not Kamilah goes has no bearing on story flow yet...so, here we go:

You are now split from the main group. Begin posting in the Scene entitled "Belly of the Beast".

**Act IV. Opening – The Traitor and The Assassin**

They moved close to the knight so that the man could not hear, and they related to him what they had talked about and seen above. There had to be a quick way to the Four Towers region. .

--------

Arcadian placed the tip of his blade in the clasps of the rusted lock, then gave the blunt backside of the blade a kick with his heel. Reversing the blade, he then pried until the thing snapped loose. Glad that the ravages of time had helped him years in advance of this moment, he hefted open the hinged grate and looked at Kamilah.

He then probed with a leg inside the sewer until he found a ladder, and began to climb down. It actually didn't smell all that bad in here, for a sewer.

As he reached the end of the ladder, he looked down at the light provided by the open grate above. There was a platform on either side of the tunnel, supposedly to walk on. He dropped down onto the platform, landing with a thud on the rickety boards. As he did so, the section of the dream where he entered the dragon flashed into his mind. He looked up, to see if Kamilah was coming or not.

--------

Valestar walked over to the edge of the stables, where some boards were not exactly flush with their neighboring boards. He peered out and saw at least 2 rows of black-clad Sharnazim in front of the stables. Moving about between cracks in the boards and squinting like some near-sighted voyeur, the mage finally made out a procession of dignitaries on horseback riding near them.

Simyn looked around for the dirty youth that was supposed to be tending the stables. Kamilah had given him a handful of coins and said something to him, then he ran off. The sage sighed in frustration and went to join Valestar to see what they could see.

Varsuvial twitched his ears and brayed, the best imitation of a watchdog he could muster. Ignored. Again. Ah well, back to eating the tasty grains in the trough next to him.

A voice called out behind the two learned men. "Hey, what's going on here?"

They turned around, startled, to see Udai holding the dirty stableboy by a scruff of hair. The innkeeper was looking from the two men to the open sewer grate.

"When I asked the boy who was minding the stables, he said he had been asked to take a break. Care to explain?"

The big man had come around from the service entrance to the stables, a small tunnel built for such martial-law occasions, and he stood with more of a confused than angered look on his face.

* * *

Valestar stammered out nonsense trying to come up with a suitable reply. damn it all, why hadn't he finished his studies in enchantments before leaving Dessi?

* * *

Simyn looked at Udai and smiled. "What can I say? I haven't asked him to take a break! It seems you're not looking after your stableboy, innkeeper. Boys in his age say anything to take a break. Don't be too harsh on him. As a matter of fact my horse needs tending. That would be a suitable punishment for his laziness."

* * *

Udai shoved the boy toward the horses. "You heard the man--get to work."

The innkeeper folded his arms, looking from Simyn to Valestar and back. "But you may not have heard me--what's going on here?"

"I'm advisor to the king of Lyris. I was sent to Vassagonia to inspect your magnificent waste disposal system. My master has heard wonderful stories about the Baga-Darooz in Vassagonia and wanted me to explore the possibilities of building something similar in Lyris." The sage shut the grate. "I was just looking out of professional curiosity. I'm sorry if I have broken some sort of local law. I have to say that I'm very impressed by your sewers. I'm afraid that we can never achieve something as marvelous in Lyris."

* * *

Sol Hawk relayed his suspicions to Sir Victor regarding the Towers and also his desire to warn the President of Anari. "The streets are blocked," said Sol Hawk, "but Hawkeye and myself may yet be able to reach him should we proceed by rooftop. Yet Sir Victor, I am not certain this is wise since we would have to part from you. We could alternatively attempt to go to the more difficult route - by surface routes - though methinks our best chance to get to him would be by bluff or stealth in that event."

Finally, Sol Hawk passed Kavan's note to Sir Victor, though it was still furled up, and explained to the Knight of Sommerlund what it had said:

"Sun Bird--I know that is not your name, but it is the nearest our tongue allows in brevity.

Your actions are rare. It shows how different our cultures are, for no Vassagonian would help a low-level traveler such as myself in such a situation. It was not as though I needed the help, but my ruse allowed you to think such. That earns my respect.

I wanted to write and let you know something, since you honored me with your assistance-you knew well how those around you would view you for helping me, yet you did anyway.

Do not worry yourself with Myr-atotch any longer. After the morrow, his soul will withire in Ashtarah for crossing my master. The strong must fall to the stronger, the quick to the quicker. As Egoilah commands, I gave Myr-atotch his orders to come here with me instead of to Tepih with Ameesha. As Egoilah commands, I shall now end the wretch's life for his past crimes.

I implore you to avoid the area north of here known as Four Towers. Your kindness has granted you this warning: if you interfere with my mission, you will be subject to my wrath. The Ragged have interest in Myr-atotch only...if you interfere, they will come for you, as well.

The debt of kindness has been repaid. My soul is once more clean."

* * *

Udai looked at the fair-skinned sage, who was smiling genuinely. The Vassagonian mumbled something and leaned down to slam the sewer shutter, then turned and left.

Varsuvial looked at Valestar accusingly, as if to say, "You could have told him the boy could groom me instead of that pampered horse." The look was wasted, however. Back to the trough.

Simyn sighed in relief. Valestar merely raised his eyebrows. They had gotten out of that one? Wow.

A slight noise from outside the stables, behind the inn, drew their attention--they were being watched.

* * *
Act IV, Opening – The Traitor and The Assassin

The two Kai were desperate to spring into action. How they could do this with Sharnazim all around...they were unsure. They showed the note to the Ruanese knight, both to fill him in on recent discoveries, and to see if he could come up with an idea that didn't involve leaping from rooftop to rooftop.

The owner of the house leaned back and forth to peer around the Kai, more curious about what their predicament was than he was angered over their acting like they owned the place.

"What is that? Where are you going?" The man moved forward. "Anywhere but here," he said in Vassagonian.

* * *

At the little girl's reaction to his question, the knight then knew the man whose house they had "borrowed" didn't have any malicious intent with them, and was only preoccupied with keeping his family safe, which was very honourable in itself.

The two Kai finally came back down and presented their quandary to the knight.

"I obviously couldn't follow you two on the rooftops, however crazy that idea sounds for anyone. The streets are filled with Sharnazim patrols, and we couldn't get anywhere without being stopped and arrested, if not worse. I'm not ready to take on the entire garrison of Chahdan by myself, and I doubt you feel like doing that. What other options does that leave us?" pondered the knight. If we can't go up, perhaps we could head down? He turned to the Vassagonian. "is there any other way out of here, sir, some type of unseen passage? If so, we'll leave your place and you won't have to be concerned about us anymore."

* * *
**Act IV, Scene VI – Out of the Frying Pan**

Korlaeth had been formulating a plan the entire time he had sat in the inn. After greeting Kavan and seeing the mage's response, he felt sure that his attire would even fool other Sharnazim. When the time came to head upstairs, he enacted his plan. Giving a quick message to one of his friends, he entered his room and promptly descended into the alley below, near the stables.

He exited the alleyway he was in casually, but he was almost immediately spotted by a group of four Sharnazim. "Hey," said one, "what're you doing down there?"

Quick on his feet, Korlaeth replied, "Had to go--everywhere was closed already." He wiped his hands on his uniform to emphasize the fact. This seemed to work, for the lead Sharn dropped the subject.

"Where are you assigned?"

This idea was almost too easy. "Four Corners."

"Well, you had better get on over there and finish securing the area. The procession will be headed through there at noon, and there's still lots to do on this end. So, unless you want to help here--"

Korlaeth took the veiled threat seriously and excused himself. Either there was a gang mentality among the Sharnazim, or there was some sort of jealousy over being assigned to Four Corners. Whichever, the Vakeros decided that away that in his mind. He looked all around for someone he could question or get more information from. Apparently, people took the edicts of the military quite seriously here. The marketplace that had been overflowing with merchants was absolutely vacant. Stores had their doors shut, and some had their windows shuttered. Lights were on here and there in buildings, providing the only light for travel.

At last he found the guarded gate. Over a half dozen guards stood around it, so the Vakeros decided to wait and watch, listening for a name to be spoken. Within a few minutes, he had it. Sure it would work, he strode forward like he had lived here his whole life.

"Stop, Sharn. Why are you headed in here?" asked the guard, more out of duty than out of suspicion.

Without missing a pace, Korlaeth replied, "Reassigned to Four Corners. Hey D'vana, they got you working guard duty tonight?"

D'vana had no idea who this was, but they obviously knew him. Not wanting to appear forgetful or rude, he said, "Yeah, yeah they do. I guess you'll be glad when this is over tomorrow evening, eh?"

"Sure will," said Korlaeth, walking past the gate into the next district, his sly smile hidden beneath his sand veil.

Finding Four Corners was easy enough--each tower had a large beacon light at the top. Korlaeth decided the best way to continue on was as he had done so far--avoiding stealth in favor of disguise. He walked past several groups of Sharnazim, none of which paid him any attention, until he came to the crossroads. On all four sides of the roads, tall towers stood about forty feet higher than the warehouses.

Korlaeth stood looking at them for a moment, listening to the sounds of the night: dogs barking in the distance, the sounds of revelry (possibly at an inn having a party instead of closing down), and the murmurs of the people moving around him.

"Sharn!" came a gruff voice behind him.

He turned around to see a battle-scarred man standing behind him with his hands on his hips. Quickly inferring that being called out like that meant he was subordinate to this man, Korlaeth snapped to attention and saluted.

"Flames of Ashtarah, boy, what were you gawking at?"

Korlaeth paused in answering, unsure whether this was rhetorical or not.

"Who's your commander and where are you supposed to be?"

Korlaeth ducked his head, stumbling slightly in pretended weariness. "I'm sorry sir...I carry a most urgent message from Teph, and this place..." he grimaced slightly, nervous to be reporting any kind of failure to a superior, "it...looks very different at night, sir."

Korlaeth focused on the man as he spoke, trying to glean any information from his presentation that might be useful. All he could make out in the night, however, was that the man had two scimitars strapped to his belt. He knew that higher-ranking (and more powerful) Sharnazim were trained to use two blades with no penalties: "Nava-nava" in their tongue, "Twin Scimitar" style in common.

The man listened to Korlaeth, then rolled his eyes. "Tephani irrf-raft I don't have time for any more messengers tonight. It can wait till morning. Now go find something useful to do before I slap you down like a little feyata."

With that, he walked away, cursing under his breath.

Korlaeth shook his head after the man turned away, for the benefit of any possibly hidden watchers, then turned and looked around, as if seeking to remember the right way to go.

Korlaeth looked around for a moment more, then decided instantly that he couldn't gain useful information out here. His disguise had worked before, so...

Korlaeth strode purposefully now, and swiftly toward the well-lit south-east tower. He moved up and tried the door, intending to continue his purposeful stride right inside.

Korlaeth opened the door easily and walked into the room as if he owned the place. Inside the room (approx 20x20) was a group of other Sharnazim. One of them was holding a prisoner--it appeared to be a beggar--and shoved him in Korlaeth's direction.

"It's about time you showed up. He's your now--I'm tired of fooling with these vagabonds." And with that he pushed past Korlaeth and left the fettered man standing there.

The other three Sharnazim looked back down to something laid out on the table.

---

**Rules, Rulings**

* * *

**Perception:** from another? Any obvious places for an HQ? entrances? Anything else to distinguish one

**Bluff:** 27(yeah, baby!) for weapons, any weaknesses I can exploit in

**ruptions:** so to speak.

---

1 FP

Nice bluff...but, probably the wrong person to bluff to in this case. However....

The area is now vacant for the moment. Of course the four towers encircle you, as do the warehouses each one springs from. Keep in mind that one "warehouse" is a makeshift prison--you don't know which one.

---

Any guards on any of the warehouse entrances? Anything else to distinguish one from another? Any obvious places for an HQ? Perception check: 22

---

All towers have a guard on the top (open parapet). No lights on in NW tower. One light in NE tower. As you watch, someone exits the SW tower and enters the NE tower. There are plenty of lights on in the SE tower. Other than those observations, nothing outwardly indicates what building is used for what or contains what.

---

You're going to have to Bluff pretty good on this one.
### Rules, Rulings

**Perception:** 10

It is obvious from this man’s actions that he is taking the ‘old criminal’ to some execution area.

Also, Korlaeth, let me know what your ultimate goals (if any) are here. I may have to rapidly merge the two stories, and want to know what you wished to accomplish. If you are playing it by ear, that’s fine, too.

Current time is roughly 6 hours behind the main Act.

Know its not as heroic to let the beggar go, but my heroic inspiration isn’t operating at full capacity at the moment, and I couldn’t think of anything to do that could save the beggar and still let me get information, which is what I’m here for. If you’ll allow and let check for an amazing, heroic plan, that would be great, otherwise. The needs of the many outweigh the needs of the few, or the one. My ultimate goal was simply to gain as much information as possible as to what’s being planned here. Are they really just guarding Kubudei’s visit, or is there an assassination planned? Or what’s really going on?

Any questions? I figured I would stop in case you wanted to ask something.

Hope, no questions.

Anything really important on this map? Guard locations, secret sewer entrances, etc.

Were there any of the sewer entrances or such-like noted on the map? How well did I memorize it (or should I make a roll of some kind)? How soon is dawn?

---

### Act IV, Scene VI – Out of the Frying Pan

Korlaeth took firm hold of the beggar and sent a questioning look after the man who had handed him over as the door slammed. He then turned his head to examine the three still in the room, specifically looking for signs of rank and any clues as to the importance of these three as well as what the object on the table might be.

* * *

Korlaeth grabbed the uncouth man in one hand and used the action to get closer to the table. There were no distinguishing marks or insignia upon the men, but Korlaeth did see that on the table was a map of some sorts. It appeared to be a city map, for there were many crude squares and rectangles on it.

The men were talking too low for him to hear anything, and at that time, the beggar began speaking, "What will happen to me?"

* * *

As soon as the beggar spoke, Korlaeth cut his words off with a sharp gesture. He stood holding the now quiet man, straining to overhear the conversation. Meanwhile, he glanced briefly around the room for any other exits.

* * *

"Hey," said one of the group looking at the map. He had noticed that Korlaeth was merely looking around the room instead of getting along with things. "If you’re gonna just stand around and gawk, let me take care of that old criminal."

He drew his blade and grabbed the man’s other arm, pulling him toward the only other door opposite the door Korlaeth entered through. "We don’t have all night to get this perimeter in place."

* * *

"I just came from Teph," he explained.

* * *

As the guard relieved Korlaeth of the prisoner, taking the begging man through the other door in the room, Korlaeth spoke up about being from Teph.

One guard eyed the other. "See, I told you we’d be getting some."

The other sighed. "Very well, come here, um..."

Korlaeth stated the name he was using.

"Yeah, well, come here. This is the path Kubudei will take," he pointed to the north/south road between Four Towers. "Everyone in Chahdan knows that it’s the perfect assassination point."

"And before you ask," interrupted the other one, "it’s the only road wide enough for the president and his entourage to use—and it’s the shortest through the city. The sooner they leave, the better."

"Yeah, we’re supposed to guard our former enemy from the populace. Ironic, eh? For years we promised we’d wipe them out, and now we have to shield them."

Korlaeth studied the map.

* * *

Korlaeth looked at the map in unfazed interest, nodding his head in understanding.

* * *

One guard held out his hand in Vassan greeting at Korlaeth. "I am Shavash. Shavash al-Kanar, to be precise. This one here is Karido."

Karido spoke up. "I see you are the same rank as us," he said, pointing to a gem on Korlaeth’s sash. "That means I can’t tell you where to take station at. All you Tephani are supposed to be perimeter sweeping detail. We get to be rooftop lockdown."

A bell sounded twice outside. Both of them stood and rolled up the map, tossing it into a large basket in the corner. "Well, there’s the bell. You on first, second, or third shift?" he asked Korlaeth.

Shavash shrugged and clapped Karido on the back. "Doesn’t matter to me. I’m first shift and that bell means I can sleep now."

He moved around Korlaeth and toward the door the man had taken the beggar through.

* * *

"First," he reached for the map, "but seeing as I’m new enough to still get lost out there, I’d like to look over things again."

Korlaeth unrolled the map again as Shavash passed through the door. He looked down at it for a moment, then looked up at Karido, "Is Myr-atoc nearby?"

* * *

"Myr-atoc? Who’s that?" Karido shrugged. "If he’s Tephani, I don’t know him." With that, he left out the door. Korlaeth was all alone now.

He looked at the map again, paying close attention to where everything was. If he was at the center of the map, it stretched out in a radius from him for about 100’. There were dots all over the map, probably denoting where guards were to be at. A line through the center showed the path the Anari would take when they arrived.

As Korlaeth was looking over it, he heard some voices nearing. Almost instantly the door Shavash had gone through opened up, and a half dozen Shamnaim exited. A couple of them stopped to look at the map, quickly finding what dots were on what buildings, then left. One of them looked at Korlaeth for a moment, then walked through the door. As quickly as they had come, they left.

* * *
Rules, Rulings

The building you are in and the NE one has a sewer entrance. There are some scattered about the streets and alleys.
If you want to find something general (outdoor sewer entrance), no roll is needed. If you wanted to recall something really detailed (number of buildings bordering NW tower), you'd have to roll. Roll what...I'm not sure. Intelligence has no bearing on memory.

Dawn is approximately 5.5 hours away.

Successfully cast Clarity just before I get within challenging distance of the guards. Story is that I have to deliver an urgent message. Bluff check is: 39

You may now begin posting in the main Act again. Keep in mind you are outside the stables and there is no entrance where you are.

Act IV, Scene VI – Out of the Frying Pan

As Korlaeth stood looking at the map amidst the “changing of the guard,” another group came in from outside. They moved to the desk and spoke, their posturing indicative that they were irritable and in no mood to be refused.

“It's our shift now, Tophari” said one of them. “Get to your tower and bunk down for the night.”

“Let someone who knows the city stand guard,” said another.

Another one propped his hand on the pommel of his blade. “Yeah, Karido and his ilk might not mind you in our city, but I think you're better off in the sewers than above ground.”

* * *

Korlaeth looked warily from one to the other for a moment, then, with a last glance at the map, he walked out the door he had come in.

* * *

Korlaeth headed purposefully for the gate, intending to head back and share what he found as soon as possible and hopefully get down on paper what he could remember of the map he had studied. As he neared the guards, he grasped his blue-steel dagger and cast Clarity, hoping it would be enough to get him past.

* * *

Korlaeth breezed past the guards. Not a single person among them questioned his mission or presence as he talked to them. They were quite possibly the friendliest people he had met in a while. One of them even offered him a glass of seasoned water and a breaded slice of meat as he walked past. Thanking the man, Korlaeth took the food and entered the district where his friends were.

The Sharnazim were out in full force tonight, however, and he got swept away in a menial escort detail halfway across town. Once there, he finally managed to grab a sheet of parchment and a piece of hardened chalk. It was better than nothing. He moved into an alleyway and used the light from nearby dwellings to help sketch out a crude map. Then, sneaking from backalley to backalley, he slowly made his way back toward Udai's.

He arrived and found the place under lockdown. Rather than risk breaking in, he camped out back of the stables and took a short nap to rest. The short nap, however, turned into a short snooze, and he was awakened by shouting.

“What's going on here?”

Simyn said something then. Korlaeth couldn't make out what it was, but it was a long answer. It must have worked, for Korlaeth saw Udai leave the stables via a small covered passageway/tunnel.
Arcadian looked up to see if Kamilah would join him, and that was when he heard the low baleful moaning and hissing. He looked slowly around in the dim environment in which he was in, remembering that the Vassagonians frequently used Kwaraz—giant lizards that would eat almost anything—to monitor the sewers.

There were grates scattered along the sewers, providing the only illumination in the dark place. A breeze blew through the tunnels, carrying with it a distant stench of offal. He would now have three dangers to avoid: UnderCity patrols that watched for intruders, Kwaraz that watched for meals, and scattered deposits of waste that would carry disease.

He turned so that he could get his bearings. The tunnel he was in ran north/south. A little ways in the distance, it intersected with an east/west tunnel. There was a ladder leading to a grate there.

The sewers were dark and smelled of something rank and foul. Arcadian looked up and Kamilah cautiously descended into the sewers after him. Arcadian waited for Valestar to return the iron grate to its position before reaching into his backpack.

Arcadian considered lighting a sunrod but decided against it. This was a strange place to him. As an when visiting all unfamiliar areas it is wise to take any advantage of secrecy possible. The two Vakeros moved northwards through the tunnel, as Arcadian honestly had no idea where he was going. However, he dropped a single Gold Crown in the dust at his feet. He would know if he ended up circling around, unable to find his way.

They walked slowly, carefully in their footsteps. Out of interest more than anything Arcadian moved to the grate and matically climbed the ladder. He didn’t try to remove the grate put peered upwards. He had a hunch that this was a second entrance to the sewers, possibly one that Udaí had within his own kitchens.
Rules, Rulings

I'm going to be posting a map soon, just so you can know where you've been vs. where you can go. For now, see if you follow this description:

North = long tunnel, 3 visible grates
Grate 1 = ladder, another tunnel heads east
Grate 2 = ladder, another tunnel heads west
Grate 3 = ladder, no tunnels that you can see from here

The fun news is that 3 more companions are now in the sewers, totally unplanned by me. Let's just say we're on high improvisation mode.

Speeding things up...no slight against either of you. I just don't want one group to get so far behind that I can't merge them. After all, you two are the critical pace-setting group.

Okay, you guys need to use Sewer Map A from the upcoming link in my signature. Decide what you want to do and how you want to do it. I'll let you know what happens.

I didn't give any bonuses for them having their backs to me or anything because I honestly don't know if my horrible stealth check is going to give the that advantage.

Sorry about the delays, my computer is up and running again. I will make a habit of posting more regularly.

Arcadian moved quickly along, urging Kamilah to keep pace. After a few feet, he crouched and bade her do the same. From the shadows he watched as the men looked around at the intersection...

...and then started walking back toward the lighted part of the tunnel, to the north, speaking Vassan softly. From their actions, they had either not seen the duo, or they were very good at staying calm.

Arcadian prayed for the former.

Arcadian made a few motions with his hand, which he prayed that Kamilah would be able to make out in the darkness. He pointed south and began to slowly make his way into the darkness. In his right hand he held his sword firmly, using it to help him find his way.

Once again he considered using a sunrod but he couldn't bring himself to do it. Sunrods emitted far too much light for this sort of situation. He would be spotted very easily. Too easily.

In his other hand Arcadian grasped Kamilah's wrist, helping to guide her through the dark. He began to wish that he hadn't brought her into this. He knew that she hated dark places. And the press in her despised the smell of the sewer.

Though Kamilah hated the smell and darkness of the sewer, there was something comforting about Cade's aura that made her, well, less irritable given the current situation.

Thinking to herself she wondered, why is it that I'm following him, to watch as he rescues another woman? Kamilah sighed with jealousy as her thoughts drifted again. Why was it that he never came back to me, why was I not rescued, did he plainly forget about our hometown and...me?

Shaking her head to clear her haze she watched Arcadian and his motions. These motions were hard to make out in the darkness, but these motions were also the only things keeping her from getting lost or worse.

Kamilah feeling a little shaky, perhaps from pure anxiety, tried to stay as close behind Cade, as was possible. There were many distractions within the tunnels of the sewer, however Kamilah kept her hazel eyes glued to his guide, Arcadian.

...and then started walking back toward the lighted part of the tunnel, to the north, speaking Vassan softly. From their actions, they had either not seen the duo, or they were very good at staying calm.

Arcadian moved a series of fluid movements with his right hand and Kamilah managed to depict their meaning despite the darkness.

Wait here.

Without a word being spoken Cade moved around the corner and creaped westward, towards the two guards who the Vakeros could only assume were Sharnazim. He knew that he would have to dispatch them quickly. The odds were great, but Arcadian hated the thought of turning a corner only to run into these two once again. It was better to take care of them while it was he who had the element of surprise.

Arcadian drew his sword as he moved, careful that the singing blade made little sound. He didn't want to risk the light of his battleblade ability, so refrained from activating it as he reached the two men. Quickly, he brought the blade up, hoping to send it straight between the first man's shoulder blades.

Arcadian moved against the curved wall of the sewer until he was in striking range. So far, none of the boards underfoot had cracked or made any noise. When he was close enough, he began a charge toward the two men. His sword held in reverse with his free hand across the pommel, the Vakeros kept his intent as his target turned to look down the tunnel. He barely had any time to register a threat--the blade plunged into his chest, exiting the back.

The other person with him cursed and shouted before jumping across the gap to another catwalk. Arcadian ripped his blade free and prepared his next action as the man he attacked struggled to breathe. Still, the wounded man was able to pull out a thin-bladed rapier and keep his balance.

Arcadian made quick work of these two men, noting as he did so that they were not dressed as typical Sharnazim. Remembering the stories of the Undercity, he decided these might be guards to a possible nearby entrance. If that was the case, he needed to avoid that at all costs.

He rejoined Kamilah and the two set off down the northern tunnel, narrowly escaping capture twice--once by more guards, and once by a Kwaraz that neither of them saw nearby. A section of catwalk had collapsed and lay like a ramp into the sludge, and upon it was the lounging Kwaraz. Quickly they jumped to the other side and hurried along to avoid being a quick meal.
In a half hour, Arcadian climbed another ladder and looked through the grate. He saw a great shadow obscuring the sunlight, and he pushed the grate open to get a better look. A short distance away, to his south, was the barrier wall that restricted them from entering the Four Towers area. Pushing the grate further aside, he climbed out and ascertained that the area was secure before allowing Kamilah to join him.

The two hunched down in the shadows afforded by the alley they were in. Trumpets were sounding closely on the other side of the wall. They had beaten Kubudel here, but not by much. In the distance, he could see a large makeshift tower—possibly one of the ones that gave this area its name.

* * *

From somewhere towards the towers, a thunderclap sounded, followed by some men shouting in panic. Seconds later, it was followed by bells clanging on the other side of the wall. Arcadian could hear people running to and fro, upset and concerned by the sudden noise.

* * *

And the sound of a thunderclap Arcadian shot Kamilah a quick glance and after looking around for any sign of Sharnazrim made his way towards the tower.

As he reached the tower his vision from the night before flashed in his mind. He gritted his teeth, willing his fear away and opened the door to the warehouse. He held up his hand, bidding Kamilah to wait one moment. The Vakeros knight stepped inside first, his hand on the hilt of his sword. He looked around for any sign of Sharnazim, that being his second concern.

His first concern was his dream. For if his hunch was correct, and Ameesha had sent him that dream... Murdach was close by.

---

Diagrams for Scene VII – Belly of the Beast

Arcadian and Kamilah traverse the sewers...

Legend, Side View of the sewers...
"Yes sir," said Sol Hawk, "I must thank you once again for your kindness and for the use of your roof. I must admit my friend and I were most curious to see first-hand what all the commotion was about."

Sol Hawk smiled with that nonchalant look of bemusement which it seemed that only he could pull off in just such a way.

"We are both grateful to you for your hospitality," said Sol Hawk with just the right accent and a slight bow that made the little girl smile.

** ***

Simyn turned to Valestar. "Seems that someone is watching us. Should we go and say hello?"

** ***

Korlaeth stood up slowly. He had heard voices inside, and since he recognized one of them as the sage, he moved to a nearby door and knocked loudly.

** ***

Simyn went and opened the door and was surprised. "Korlaeth? We've been missing you! Where have you been? I guess you have things to tell us. Presently it's only me and Valestar here. Arcadian and Kamila have gone to the Undercity. We're not sure where sir Victor and the others have gone to. We were just about going to find them when you showed up!"

** ***

The girl's father looked at the knight with obvious distaste in his eyes. Some people just didn't take kindly to others.

"There are sewers, but only the very foolish or very brave try to take them. And whether or not you live determine if you were foolish or brave," he said, a slight hint of amusement playing across his eyes.

"There is an entrance around here somewhere--out in the back alley. They are all over the place, so if you look hard enough, you will find one."

Sir Victor looked out the windows at the front of the house. The only problem was, if they looked hard enough, someone unwanted might find them first....

---------------

Korlaeth's keen vision had picked up the outline of a door in the stables. It looked unused, and perhaps it was sealed from the other side, but he still decided to knock.

This sudden noise startled Valestar, for Simyn had just told him they had a guest. The suspicious mage narrowed his eyes and leaned his head low, looking this way and that for any sign of intruders. That knock may have been a diversion, or the balt to an ambush, sir...

Valestar's scrutiny of the area turned to abject shock as the sage merely walked to the door and threw back the bolt, then opened it. What the?!

There was a Sharnazim standing there! Quickly Korlaeth remembered his disguise and pulled off the headwrap.

** ***

At the mention of a sewer, Sol Hawk became noticeably dismayed. The Vassan man noted this and smiled almost sardonically - Sol Hawk exchanged glances with HawkEye and Sir Victor. But the Knight had been correct - this would be the only way. Moving through the streets would never be fast enough and Sir Victor would not be able to join them on the rooftops. They had to find the President and fast - failing this, they would have to reach The Four Towers before he did. Sol Hawk's new Tracking Discipline had helped him to memorize the geography of the city with only a few minutes of concentration upon the rooftop just moments before. His uncanny sense of direction would guide them through the sewers to their destination and with the help of his brother Kai, this would be even more certain.

Yet what might lay ahead beneath the city streets was all too uncertain...

Sol Hawk reminded himself that the fate of several nations hung in the balance and that Kubudei had to be protected at all cost. With this, he nodded curtly to the Vassan Storekeeper and moved out the back door in search of the entrance they sought.

** ***

Valestar nodded to the Vakeros. "Allow me to introduce myself," he said. "My name is Valestar, a mage of Dessi. If I may be so bold, your face looks familiar to me, young Vakeros. What family are you from?"

** ***

Having heard what the man said, Hawkeye turned to his companions, "That was what I was thinking when I mentioned of an alternate way. I rather take my chances down there than up here with hordes of Sharnazims breathing down my neck. As well as the possibility of innocent bystanders getting hurt. We don't have much time to lose, lets go now!"

Hawkeye ran towards the backalley that man mentioned, trying to avoid any unwanted attention to what they were doing. He began searching for the manhole cover that would lead them down below, while the others catch up.

** ***

It was as he had thought: the only way would be to crawl through the city's sewers. As much as the idea of this act repelled him, Sir Victor knew that his duty lay in protecting the President of Anari as much as liberating the princess, so he put his qualms aside and steered himself for the ordeal ahead.

Nodding to the two Kai, he thanked the man and slipped him a gold Crown before leaving this house behind forever.

** ***

The manhole cover that would lead them down below, while the others catch up.

** ***

By the way that Hawkeye moved and his fluid certainty, Sol Hawk realized at once that his brother Kai was a master tracker. This skill was new to Sol Hawk who had only just developed the talent, and from Sol's perspective Hawkeye barely needed to examine the signs at all. They had gone some distance and managed to avoid trouble at least once already when Sol Hawk caught the slightest hint of refuge on the air. This had been the trail his brother Hawkeye had been following all along.

Amazed, Sol Hawk merely moved to keep up, learning more about the Discipline in a few minutes than he had learned in all his reading at the Monastery.

** ***

Korlaeth looked surprised to see a Mage of his homeland and for a moment, he didn't say anything at all, instead nodding briefly to Simyn. He then turned back to Valestar.

"Well, it's been a long time, as I'm sure you know, but I am of the..." he trailed off then, looking at Simyn again with a little worry now in his eyes, "Where is everyone?"
companions or not? We should just roll perception dice and see if we find the moving our group along, while.

Stealth : 40

Sir Victor wouldn't have stealth and no bonus in DEX, while.

Nothing like a good ol "Pick a number from the random number chart" at a time like this, eh?

Sol Hawk debated leaping into the hole, but he remembered the words of one of his mentors in Hunting: "Never jump into the dark—it can really hurt." This was from Master Iron Elix, one of the fastest and "most evasive" Kai ever.

"They've seen us," said Sol Hawk apologetically to Hawkeye even as Sir Victor arrived. Down into the dank he went, grasping fast to the entrance or ladder or both. Also, make an Athletics check at DC12 to see if you are able to land properly.

Valestar shook his head. "Somewhere in the city," he said. "We were about to go look for them when you showed up. You are, of course, the Vakeros they mentioned last night? A lot has happened since then. The city is under martial law. Kubedei is arriving shortly. And someone was murdered in the inn last night. Arkadan and Kamih have just left to try and break into the Undercity. We stayed behind to talk the others. He racked his memory, seeing if he'd left anything out.

"My suggestion is that we go out looking for them and try to avoid the Sharnazim guards. A couple of Sommlendings shouldn't be hard to find in a Vassagonian city."

"Hawkeye was a master at moving about. He exited the house without a sound and moved along the alleyway with a fluid ease that left Sir Hawk staring open-mouthed. Sir Victor came behind them, aware that his armor would not help them much.

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Sol Hawk was hot on Hawkeye's tail, but as they moved from one alley to the next, there was an open area that Sol Hawk saw to be visible from the main street. Sol Hawk moved soundlessly, but there was not enough cover to avoid being totally invisible as well. Once more Sol was in awe of his brother Kai who might have been a mere ground-shadow for all the suspicion he had aroused.

"Hey!" he shouted, nudging the soldiers beside him as the Kaidashed across the open space. "Come back here!"

Sol Hawk didn't even spare them a glance. He stopped short of the sewer entrance, debating whether to jump in or climb down the ladder that was barely visible.

Behind them, Sir Victor began his crossing.

"They've seen us," said Sol Hawk apologetically to Hawkeye even as Sir Victor arrived. Down into the dark he went, grasping fast to the ladder and beginning his descent into the total darkness...

"No time to worry about that now. Let us just hurry, the knight is almost here", replied Hawkeye, waving to his knightly friend. He looked and saw that some of the Sharnazim are headed in their direction.

"So much for sneaking about undetected."

As the knight prepared to cross on Sol's heels, the Kai was spotted by a Sharnazim, who started yelling at them to stop. So much for that idea then, he thought as he hurried to the grate and started climbing down in his bulky armour, behind the two Kai Lords.

Sir Victor managed to get his lower body into the sewer entrance, but then things became tricky. His breastplate was threatening to be large enough for a man, but possibly a bit restrictive to a man in plate armor...especially a bulkly muscular man.

He managed to get through the restrictive grating by the grace of fate.

Nothing like a good ol "Pick a number from the random number chart" at a time like this, eh?

"Four Towers" questioned the mage. "Where is that, and why is it important?"
Rulings

- If we only had a wheelbarrow, that would be something!
- I rolled 39, plus 25, for a total of 64.
- Watch out Kai Lords!
- Knight falling through!
- Path of Thought (Maybe Shielding Impulse) to move the lid. DC 12 (or maybe 16) and I got a 29, good!
- No damage. Just a really sore back and shoulder from the fall in the armor, like falling off a tall horse after a joust.
- You now have your own Scene to post in, so split off from this Act.
- I hope I'm remembering the name right...
- Perception check at DC18. Go ahead and post what you like, I'll modify it to reflect whether or not you pass the check.
- Perception check was a 21.

Rules,

**Act IV, Midstory – The Traitor and The Assassin**

In all his years, Sir Victor had never imagined that one day he would be in this situation, stuck in a man hole and wedged tightly by his armour. To make matters worse, an entire patrol of Sharnazim was heading directly for him, and he would be at their mercy, a thought which boded ill for the Sommlending.

Not quite sure what else to do in this predicament, the knight did the only thing which he could think of, which was to push up against the underside of the grating, and push he did, with all his might. His corded muscles bulged beneath his armour, sweat beaded on his forehead, the veins on his temples stood out, until finally, something gave, and the knight felt his armour scrape against the sides of the opening until his shoulders were through! He had made it!

Unfortunately, his hands weren't holding the ladder anymore, and he plummeted down through the air, his hands desperately trying to grab anything to stop his fall.

* * *

Sol Hawk was astonished to see the knight falling from above, but was able to avoid being in his path, already having stepped aside to the catwalk. Sol Hawk looked up to see the manhole cover still toting along the edge of the opening, and with a determined will, Sol Hawk held the metal with his mind and drew it back into place. Fortunately, the hole had not been widened by Sir Victor's escape and the lid stayed in place. Sol Hawk hoped that Sir Victor had managed to make his exit from the street before his route of escape had been seen.

He moved to help Sir Victor, then listened for the Sharnazim.

* * *

"He's stuck!" lamented Hawkeye, watching Sir Victor jerking and jiggling around to help unwedge his massive form. The cries of the Sharnazim were getting louder, and little trails of sand began to fall into the sewer around the knight due to his struggles.

"Move!" called out Sol Hawk, and then he quickly pushed Hawkeye out of the way. "I meant you!" he explained. There was a loud gronk of metal grinding against metal, then a startled grunt from the knight. As Sir Victor fell, Sol Hawk sought out the grate with his mind and pulled it closed. There was a loud crash nearby as the Ruanese slammed into the catwalk, and the entire structure buckled. Even the two Kai felt it as far from the ladder as they were.

* * *

Korlaeth looked at the mage in exasperation, then understanding, "If someone's planning to assassinate Kubudei, Four Towers is the place it'll happen. I can only guess, but I would think the others are headed there now."

* * *

"Well then, that's where we should go!" said Valestar. "Though I don't love the idea of those sewers. But then again, we may meet the other Vakeros there. But then again... Oh! If only I knew this city better!" He thought for a moment in silence. "Very well. I opt for the prisoner route. Less chance of getting lost."

* * *

Using a few pieces of rope from the stables, Korlaeth soon had both Simyn and Valestar bound at the wrists. He instructed them how to hold their hands so that the bindings looked tight, but could actually slip off in a second if needed.

Within minutes, they were off into the streets of Chahdan, heading away from the main processional path for the moment, but intent on arriving at the gate to the district where Four Towers was located before Kubudei did.

Few paid them any mind, and those that did regarded the prisoners with sour looks on their faces. Dislike for outsiders ran high among the Sharnazim. Korlaeth turned to tell his "prisoners" that they were about halfway there, then turned back around to find a Sharnazim standing in his path.

"Hold there," said the man, saluting. "I'll take over for you."

He held out his hand, and Korlaeth looked at him suspiciously.

"Korlaeth returned the salute, but didn't hand over his charges.

"Thanks, sharn, but I was given strict orders not to let these prisoners out of my sight."

* * *

Valestar shifted uneasily, but stayed silent. God this was unnerving.

* * *

Korlaeth immediately noticed the rank jewel on the other Sharn's uniform. He was of equal rank, which would prove advantageous. Korlaeth waved off the offer of help and kept walking northward. This left the other person looking at them in confusion, since the local detainee center was only a block away.

Korlaeth led his captives to the gate he himself had passed through hours earlier. Luckily for them, one of the people who was working in the night hours was still on shift. He and Korlaeth recognized each other and began talking. Everyone else's suspicions were removed by this, and they went back to their details.

Giving Valestar and Simyn a good tug to enhance the ruse, he pulled them along through the gate. In a quarter hour, they were walking along a corridor of Sharnazim along a deserted street. On the rooftops, men paced back and forth, watching the trio with interest, branching their crossbows across their shoulders.

Korlaeth stopped as an officer stepped out of a nearby building and stood in front of them.

"Destination," he said in an obvious tone that meant "Stop, and by the way, you'd better have a good excuse for being here."

Korlaeth's scouting from the night before paid off. He bluffed the man with a story of how the two he had in tow were swindlers and had been caught in an inn nearby...he was taking them to the tower that had been turned into a makeshift prison—just in case they needed executing. He wove details of the room where he had seen the area map into the tale, and the officer bought it.

"That was close," whispered Valestar as he leaned close to the Vakeros after the encounter.

"You're too close...back off," he replied.

Miffed, but understanding, the mage slowed a few paces.

In minutes they were at Four Towers. Simyn and Valestar could now see why this area was of such dire importance: the towers were the tallest structures around, they flanked the road, and there were windows everywhere.

Sniper heaven.
**Rules, Rulings**

I suppose this probably calls for a Bluff check. If I can, I'd like to take 10, which would give me 20. If not, I get a 14.

You can't take 10 on a Bluff, since it basically means that you try the check 10 times to see if you got it right.

We're going to go round by round now, just in case something happens. This was the surprise round. Here's what I need in the way of rolls from everyone:

Korlaeth: Reflex save against DC20... If you pass, you have kept from reacting to Simyn getting snatched. If you fail, you have flinched or involuntarily moved toward him. The guard will see this.

Also, d20 for Initiative, and any dice rolls for any actions you wish to conduct in round 1.

Simyn: Strength check against DC15... If you pass, you have shrugged off the guy trying to grab you and hold your arms down. If you fail, you are now held in a reverse bear hug.

Valestar: Same thing as Simyn. I don't know how your personal berserking works based or how it is based on your friendship ratings with others, so I leave that up to you.

A grid will go up later today in my signature.

Well, I was trying to pass off as a high-ranking so and so, and now, but, my dice betrayed me. AARGH! Bluff check is a 12, which may be moot, since my Reflex save was 8. Stupid dice roller...

Don't forget Round 1 action rolls, Korlaeth. I'm counting the Bluff and speech as a free action in the surprise round.

Here is the action flow so far:

**S13: Leader (E5): AC 16 EP 95/95 Init 19**

**S8: Soldier (A3): AC 13 EP 44/44 Init 14**

**S8: Soldier (E3): AC 13 EP 44/44 Init 14**

**S8: Soldier (E3): AC 13 EP 44/44 Init 14**

**S13: Leader (E5): AC 16 EP 95/95 Init 19**

Rolled an 8 on my Initiative and 11 on my strength check.

Here you have the list of where we are:

Valestar here, with a question. Is my backpack with me? And where is my staff? I can still use magic without the staff, but it's unlikely Valestar would let it go far. Even handing it to another is a huge taboo in Dessi culture.

"You wouldn't part an old man from his walking stick...?"

Initiative: 1. I lent my rulebook to my brother, so I can't remember exactly which use of Enchantment this is, but I'm trying to affect the Sharnazim leader's mind in my favor. I'm also trying to make it appear that I'm just muttering, not casting magic. Hopefully, it's the last thing they'd expect from me. I'm not sure what I should be rolling, sorry.

Well, Valestar hasn't berserked in a while... I'm gonna roll a d20 and if it's even, he stays serene. Otherwise, he uses magic. And in either case, he failed his strength roll... okay, he hasn't berserked yet. He'll wait to see what Korlaeth's next move is. But he's maintaining a grip on his staff. By the way, are we thus assuming that backpacks were left in the stables?

Valestar: I'll allow you the staff. However, you must make a Reflex save vs DC10 to keep holding it: Since I'm backing up time to allow it, I'm also backing up time to make the person grabbing you to slap it out of your hands as he grapples you.

Backpacks and equipment (more than what's in your hands) are at Uddal's stables.

Korlaeth: Mental Coercion from the Elder Art Enchantment? It's -2WP per use, and you don't make any rolls, but the leader's level keeps him from being affected.

Initiative lineup: Leader, Korlaeth, Soldiers, Simyn, Valestar

**S13: Leader (A4): AC 16 EP 95/95 Init 19**

**S8: Soldier (A1): AC 13 EP 44/44 Init 14**

**S8: Soldier (F2): AC 13 EP 44/44 Init 14**

**S8: Soldier (H3): AC 13 EP 44/44 Init 14**

**edit: You can repeat the Strength check to break free with a +1 bonus this round due to movement and distraction.**

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**Act IV, Midstory – The Traitor and The Assassin**

As they soaked in the surroundings, Korlaeth led them to the tower he sought and opened the door.

Four Sharnazim looked at them as they entered the room and closed the door behind them. Korlaeth's plan had worked so far. Now it was improvisation time...

"Where are you going with those two," asked the leader of the group. "We're almost full as it is without these Feyata foreigners."

"Have we got somewhere else we could put them?" Korlaeth replied, "I've been watching them for some time, and I think they may know something of a potential assassin."

**ROUND 0 (Surprise Round)**

The leader stood at this news. "Somewhere else? we could keep them? Where were they before? Why weren't they kept there?"

He motioned to his men. One escorted Korlaeth to the door, where they both stood. Each of the others stood behind Simyn and Valestar, holding the bindings on them.

The leader strode over to Simyn. "You know of an assassination? Speak!" he shouted, lashing out instantly with the back of his fist. It caught the sage unawares. 3 EP subtotal.

The Sharnazim pulled his khanjar out with his other hand and the two men who were behind the prisoners reached around them and tried to get them in a grapple-lock.

Korlaeth flinched in sympathy as Simyn was struck and cursed himself even as one of the guards looked at him suspiciously. He had one more desperate gambit to try, and stopped forward angrily, pushing back his robe to reveal Paru's khanjar.

"You Feyatas, these are my prisoners!"

As Korlaeth moved slightly, the guard next to him noticed it and reached to restrain him. The Vakeros called out to the lead Sharn, and the restraining arm in front of him instead shoved him roughly back against the wall.

The leader turned at the insult and glared at Korlaeth.

**ROUND 1**

The sharnazim holding him was a strong man and Simyn had never flexed his muscles if it wasn't called for. He couldn't break the man's iron grip. For now he was in the man's grip unable to get free.

Korlaeth glared back, muttering under his breath the words of enchantment he had been taught so well in Dessi. He again tried to reveal Paru's sword at his waist, this time bolstering his effort with a little magical help.

Valestar fought to control his paranoia as he was grabbed from behind. Surely Korlaeth had taken this possibility into account. He would have a plan for saving them.

And if not, these men would learn the meaning of pain.

Simyn struggled but couldn't break free. Valestar, on the other hand, merely let the man grab him, though the startling nature of the attack threatened to awaken the wildness in him.

The leader twisted the khanjar in his hand into a reverse grip, distracted by Korlaeth. His face betrayed his anger and insult. "I will rain your blood upon the sands."

He saw Korlaeth show off his sword and began mumbling something. "Yes, pray to the sand mother that she'll forgive your insolence."

He spoke to his men. "Guard the door; move those two back; I will teach this fool a lesson."

He motioned to his men. One escorted Korlaeth to the door, where they both stood. Each of the others stood behind Simyn and Valestar, holding the bindings on them.

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He spoke to his men. "Guard the door; move those two back; I will teach this fool a lesson."

His hand flashed like lightning as his men moved into position. Korlaeth ducked to the side, and the khanjar's blade tore a gash in the wall of the building where his neck had been. The leader twisted with the motion and drew a scimitar, coming to face Korlaeth again.

Valestar and Simyn moved a step back with their captors as the deadly dance began.
**Act IV, Midstory – The Traitor and The Assassin**

### ROUND 2

Korlaeth swiftly drew the khanjar at his side, nothing in his movements or face showing the worry in his heart.  
"Say your own prayers, fool. You have no idea what you're dealing with," Korlaeth glared at the Sharnazim leader and struck back hard.

* * *

Suddenly the sage did a sudden move which took his captor by surprise and he was able to get free. Quickly the sage drew his poignard which he previously had hidden in his boot. His rapier and its sheath was currently worn by Korlaeth but he was at least not unarmed.

* * *

Valestar struggled in vain against the Sharnazim holding him. The arms were tight around him in a bear hug that squeezed the air out of his lungs. However, despite his position, he managed to maintain a hold on his prized staff. He'd be durned if it would be dirtied by their hands.

Rage built within him and he sent a magical attack at his opponent. Then, as an after thought, he summoned the Spirits of Fire. May they all burn in Naar's kingdom!

* * *

The lead Sharnazim was a flurry of motion. His scimitar lashed out, seemingly from nowhere, as he utilized his superior Serpent Form of attack. The blade pierced Korlaeth's shoulder above the collarbone, almost severing the muscle beside his neck. The Vakken deflected the khanjar that lashed at his midsection, then ducked as the scimitar whistled through the air. Korlaeth: -8 EP

His own attack was foiled by the pain in his shoulder, being slow enough that the leader was able to bring the scimitar back down and deflect the blow. The Vassagonian smiled cruelly. "Empty threats."

Meanwhile, the guards tried to move their captives back out of the way a bit more, but both met with troubles.

Simyn used the distractions around him, along with the technique of going limp and then flexing with all his might, to raise his arms and break free. Elated that someone not trained in the ways of might could perform such a move, he quickly dropped down and produced his off-hand weapon. He spun around to face his surprised opponent.

Valestar concentrated on his magic instead and launched a dual-prong attack. A harpoon of shimmering energy appeared in front of him and whizzed over his shoulder, glancing off his captor's shoulder. The man released his grip and took a step back, wary of this spellcaster's fell magic.

Almost instantly after that, the firespawn that the mage summoned exploded into being near at the location of the most combustible material in the room—the dried parchment maps in the corner. It looked around and chose its target, then flared in intensity.

### ROUND 3

The sage was armed although with a dagger he was dangerous with it. In rapid succession he struck his assailant twice, although he was using a defensive fighting stance.

* * *

Korlaeth stifled a cry of pain as the Sharnazim warrior’s sword bit deep. He made two ineffectual return slashes, and cursed his lack of swordsmanship practice over the past days. Unable to do more than try to avoid being wounded by his skilled opponent, Korlaeth fell back on an old tactic.

Prying open his clenched teeth, he laughed in the Sharnazim’s face.

* * *

Valestar backed away from the Sharnazim, swinging his staff madly.

* * *

The fire elemental that Valestar summoned wanted badly to visit vengeance upon him for pulling him to this cold humid land. But someone else was closer. In a flash of fiery light, it raced across the floor, singing the boards as it went and then exploded onto the Sharnazim leader’s back, turning clothing to ash and skin to blister.

The elemental vanished as quickly as it came, it’s mischievous laugh sounding like water dripping rapidly onto white-hot metal.

Korlaeth seized the moment to drive his blade across the leader’s torso twice, leaving tears in the bellowy black fabric.

Simyn’s weapon danced through the air, deflecting his opponent’s blade and then striking out on its own twice, leaving two wet spots of blood in his enemy’s uniform. He knew something dire had happened to his left, but he saw Korlaeth in his periphery and did not despair.

The old mage barely moved to the side in time to avoid the worst of the attack that came at him. The blade still managed to nick his upper arm, however, and that made him want to trade blow for blow. Valestar: -2 EP

Valestar abandoned his magic in favor of the tactics of his fellows-brute force. Of course, with a Dessi mage, brute force is augmented by magic. His staff whoshed through the air and cracked into the sternum of his enemy.

All the while, the guard standing by the door debated what to do.....

* * *
Rules, Rulings

* * *

Act IV, Midstory – The Traitor and The Assassin

ROUND 4

Disliking the Sharnazim's advantage because of his usage of a longer and heavier weapon, Simyn tried a maneuver that took skill and experience to perform: to disarm his opponent. If Simyn had had a rapier in his hands he would have had no trouble executing the maneuver, but when holding the poignard alone and also in his right hand it would be much harder.

* * *

Korlaeth continued to smile as he began to feel the balance of the khanjar and his blows began to strike home.

* * *

The guard by the door opened it after witnessing the evil sorcery and shouted for help at the top of his lungs.

The leader's mask of pain contorted to rage. He lashed out at Korlaeth once heavily, striking the man across the chest with a mighty blow, then moved to the man at the door and raised his other scimitar in the air. Korlaeth: -7 EP

Meanwhile, both Simyn and Valestar had the same idea. Using his skill with offhanded tactics, Simyn managed to entangle his enemy's curved blade in his forearm and the poignard, then spun slightly to put pressure on the man's wrist. The hand reflexively released the blade, and it fell to the floor. Simyn swooshed through the air with his blade in a flourish and a devilish grin of success.

-1 FP Valestar used a different tactic. He may appear to be an old man, but he still could act like a youth at times. He fell back to the floor groaning, causing his captor to take a step and lean closer. Then he arched his back and kicked upright, startling the man. Twirling his wizard's staff he caught the sword in his maneuver like a wagonwheel catching a stick in its spokes. Ending the twist as soon as the blade was ripped from the man's hand, the old mage pointed his staff at the ground, and the scimitar moved with it. The curved blade embedded itself point-first into the floorboards, wobbling from the force of the impact as Valestar looked up and tightened his grip on his staff, the end of which began to glow. Fear was evident in his opponent's eyes.

At that moment, the unexpected happened. The guard who had been screaming for help pulled his head back into the room and turned to see what had transpired. He came face to face with his livid commander, and the poised scimitar fell through the air and clove the man's head from his neck in one smooth curving motion. Korlaeth wasted no time and continued his assault on the man, as did Simyn and Valestar. Their preoccupied opponents could only fend off the attacks feebly as they had to deal with the events going on around them.

At that moment, a contingent of more black clad soldiers poured into the room, leveling crossbows at everyone in sight to ensure they did not move or do anything further. An average-sized man entered behind them, attended by two brutish-looking Sharnazim who wielded twin bitakali instead of scimitars. Their arms and torsos were bare to show off their massive bulk.

After a quick explanation of what happened, he ordered Korlaeth, Simyn, and Valestar stripped of all equipment and put into prison tunics, and then for them to be thrown into the common cells until the procession was finished.

"Then we'll kill them. But right now, we have a job to do out here."

* * *

Valestar backed towards Korlaeth.

"What do we do now, Vakeros?" he whispered. He fortunately had saved some of his magic, which could be instrumental in freeing them from a prison, if into one they were thrown, but if he could help it, he'd rather not get there in the first place.

And he'd be damned if he was about to turn over his staff.

* * *

Korlaeth struggled against his captors as they sought to bind him and remove his gear. Finding his efforts nearly useless, especially as more Sharnazim poured into the room, his struggles lessened. He gave a brief, reassuring look to Valestar as his eyes swept the room. He then let his gaze rest on the recently arrived Vassan leader as he spoke in Vassagolian.

"My lord, we have information of a plot to assassinate Anari's President!"

* * *

They couldn't hold the sharnazim off forever and Simyn saw no use in getting himself killed with out proper cause. Better to live and fight another day. Reluctantly the sage surrendered his bloody poignard.

* * *

Valestar kept moving as best he could to keep his staff out of the reach of thier captors. He had one last desperate plan, but he waited to see what their response to Korlaeth was before going ahead with it.

* * *

The commander narrowed his eyes at Korlaeth's words. "Good. It is only by the Zaikhan's command that we don't turn the sand red where he stands. If an assassin kills him..." he shrugged in exaggerated apathy. "It is nothing to me. Take them away."

They pulled Korlaeth's arms behind his back and bound them, discussing which of them would get his weaponry. Simyn surrendered reluctantly, and the guard who took his weapon turned it over in his hand and stared in puzzlement.

Valestar presented a bit of a problem. Like a cornered beast he jerked and twisted and fumed, trying to keep hold of his staff. The man who was struck by Valestar's Force Blade backed away in fear. "The old man is a wizard!" he cried out. "He can summon demons from Ashhtarah!"

Those who had relaxed their grips on their weapons held them at the ready again, and the two Sharnazim trying to wrest the staff from Valestar took a more cautious stance, as if they were suddenly faced with a dunerunner asp.

* * *

Simyn saw how Valestar reluctantly surrendered his staff. The old mage had fighting spirit. The sage had hoped that Valestar's magic knowledge would go unnoticed. Now the sharnazim would surely make their best to hinder any attempts of spell-casting. Perhaps the vakeros had a few tricks up his sleeves? Simyn had no ideas how they would manage to escape their prisonment, but they hadn't seen the actual inside of the prison yet. Perhaps something would show up that would solve their current predicament.

* * *

As Korlaeth's plan fell to nothing, and the Sharnazim hesitated, Valestar drew himself up to full height. "We come to Chahdan in peace, and we are bound and treated like common prisoners!" he called. "You speak of open war with Anari! You would bring your country to war! You have angered your gods! I can hear them crying in rage! Their spirits bear at me! They are coming! She is coming!"
wound, right? On the same lines, doesn’t bludgeoning do non-lethal damage?

Next, roll a Fortitude save for the effects of the thunder. If you fail, you are stunned for one round and (if you fail by more than 5) deafened for a couple of minutes.

Valestar, your DC is 13 on both of these.

The doorway is open, but there are bodies all around moaning and either brushing off sand or wincing in pain. The statuses of everyone (not counting possible DC failures) are as follows:

Korlaeth: weaponless, hands bound behind the back
Simyn: weaponless, hands bound in front of the waist
Valestar: still holding the staff, unflattered

I’m not going to round-by-round combat again, but I will give the equivalent of a surprise round for everyone to act.

The DC for the gust of wind is 17, and the thunderclap is likewise 17. To see if you were able to stay standing, roll a Strength check and a Dexterity check. If either passes, the wind didn’t knock you over.

After that’s resolved, the rest of his actions depends on whether they pass their checks or not.

Korlaeth passed both his checks: 18 on Dex, 16 on Fortitude. As noted below, if Valestar can find the weapons, he’ll take them and cut the cords of his companions. If he can’t find their weapons, he’ll still look for a weapon to cut the chords. If he can’t find a weapon, well he still spent time looking, so my move doesn’t change.

After that’s resolved, the rest of his actions depends on whether they pass their checks or not.

Well, fell over and stunned one round. Seems I’m loosing my dex bonus to defense as well.

I’ll allow you two to decide what to do about Simyn before I post.

Korlaeth and me should probably grab him as best we can and make for the exit. That’s the ‘good’ thing to do. Otherwise, it’s every man for himself! Hey, if I were to hit someone right now, and they were stunned, it would be a grievous wound, right? On the same lines, doesn’t bludgeoning do non-lethal damage? Making my quarterstaff a non-lethal weapon.

I think the opponent has to be utterly helpless do be able to make a grievous effect. Or you have to be a Darklord.

Well aren’t I?

I’ll wait for the fortitude saves before going any further.
He pointed it at Korlaeth and squeezed the release. The arrow skimmed across the Vakeros' shoulder. He felt burning lancings pain across his chest as the poison took effect. Korlaeth: -2 Effort DCs: Initial DC 20, Secondary DC (takes effect in one minute) 18

Sinyrn could only watch where his head was facing and listen. He saw the mage get shot, and he heard another twang, followed by Korlaeth's grunt. His only consolation was that he didn't have to get shot.

Korlaeth had nearly freed himself when suddenly, more Sharnazim rushed in, a crossbow bolt grazed his shoulder. Ignoring such a minor wound, Korlaeth continued to work at his bonds, when suddenly, he felt the poison begin to take effect.

Sinyrn wanted to scream a warning to Valestar and Korlaeth to tell them that they should save themselves instead. But the sage was too dazed to do anything other than watch.

Valestar saw Korlaeth stiffen suddenly, and fear began to enter his senses. His eyes drifted to the crossbow bolt in his thigh. Quickly he pulled it from his leg, but already he could feel that he had been too late.

Valestar felt his sense of urgency to act drift quickly away. It was replaced by a desire to just rest. He was so tired from all his journeys. He was certain that if he could just relax that he--

The mage lay gently down on the floor and closed his eyes. Korlaeth watched and soon shared a similar feeling of calm. His last thought before drifting to sleep was that for a warlike nation, the Vassagonians sure didn't like to kill someone outright....

Sinyrn heard the reinforcements surrounding the building. Even if they had all run out, they would have likely come face-to-face with ten times as many guards. The men quickly moved about the room, noise that those that were disturbed by the thundering, and binding the prisoners. Sinyrn was just able to start moving slowly when a heavy weight pressed on top of him—the Sharnazim held him in place while another secured his bindings.

He was hoisted by his hands and feet and carried through the other door in the room, back into a dirty-smelling makeshift prison. No doubt he was in one of the large warehouses, for the boxes that were normally all around had been stacked on one end of the large room. In their places were several iron cages, chained to the support columns that dotted the barren storage area.

Perhaps two dozen other prisoners were here. Over to one side of the storage area was a large blood-splattered section of flooring. The blood had dried, but it was evident that something unpleasant took place there. As he was put into a holding cell with a couple of old men, Sinyrn noticed that there were no guards.

And no exits, save the one they entered through.

Valestar was put into a cell by himself, bound heavily around the wrist to one of the iron bars of the cage. He was gagged as well, to prevent any spellcasting.

Korlaeth was put in a cell by himself, near the blood-covered floor.

Valestar blinked his eyes blearily. His mouth felt heavy and dry. He found he couldn’t breathe. There was a moment of panic, before he realized he’d been gagged. He moved to wrench it away, and found his wrists had been secured to the metal bars of his cage. His cage? Why was he in a cage? Slowly the events came back to him. So he’d been captured. Then panic shot through him. His staff! He struggled madly against his bonds, casting about the cage for that which was given to him by the Council of High Mages, but it was not there.

A heavy weight began to form in his stomach. His name would forever be bismirched! To have lost such an important artifact. The High Mages would never give him another one. He’d heard of mages who had lost their staff and spent the rest of their days as lower level mages, until they either gave it up completely or went on desperate quests in an attempt to find a replacement. His staff had been a part of him, it felt like. Without it, he felt suddenly old, and useless.

After a moment, the voice in the back of his head, silent for so long, began to whisper to him. He would find those responsible for this injustice and make them return what was his. They would not survive the encounter.

"And what about those that got you into this mess?" the voice whispered. "What about the Kai Lords and the Vakeros?" For a moment, Valestar felt that it was right. This was not his fight. He had wanted to sit still. He had not wanted this kind of adventure.

Or had he? Hadn’t he left Dessi in order to search out this kind of experience? To face hardships? To cleanse himself?

"And what about those that got you into this mess?" the voice continued. "What about the Kai Lords and the Vakeros?" For a moment, Valestar felt that it was right. This was not his fight. He had wanted to sit still. He had not wanted this kind of adventure.

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"Perhaps," hissed the voice. "But did you leave to have your honor stolen from you, and to be locked in a cage like an animal?"

No. No he had not. But... he had come to get rid of... yes... that voice... that experience.

"Silence," Valestar said out loud. But all that came out was ‘mrphmmph.' The voice laughed. "Gagged like a common animal. You know, with my help, you could get free. We could find the staff. We could leave those who got you in this mess to die. With my help, you can be powerful."

But Valestar had recovered his wits. He buried the disturbing emotions within himself and closed his eyes, leaning his cheek against the cold metal bars, meditating. The voice continued to nag him with visions of power and then, when it saw he wasn’t listening, with visions of death. Death caused by Valestar. And then the images of the past began to flood in. Valestar let them rush over him with no feeling. He had come on this journey to cleanse his soul of the demon within him. He would no longer fall prey to its whims. Not if he could help it.

Within him, the presence growled and retreated. It would be back. It always came back. But maybe, soon, a time would come when it could no longer do so.

Valestar opened his eyes and looked around the room. After a moment he spotted Korlaeth and Sinyrn. Both of them were still unconscious, though they were beginning to stir. At least they were both okay. Valestar began to think. There had to be a way to get out of here.

Korlaeth came to slowly. A lot slower than he usually did, and that worried him. As a matter of fact, a lot of things about this situation worried him, particularly the loss of his blue-steel dagger. Well, and the fact that every instinct told him that someone was going to assassinate the President of Anari, and the group he was with still hadn’t a clue where his daughter was. Not of American the premonitions of the Elder Magi back home that had sent him to Anari in the first place, of which he still had very little idea how all of this might be involved.

He quickly opened his eyes and forced himself to look around, hoping to divert his attention from the frustration that was building inside him. It appeared that Valestar and Sinyrn weren’t too far away, both caged as he was. The cages didn’t appear very sturdy, but were probably sturdy enough to keep them all inside. What he wouldn’t give for blue-steel and knowledge of ‘Penetrate.’

Oh well, best to try and come up with something else.
Act IV: Midstory – The Traitor and The Assassin

Valestar knew that one day that he would have to turn inside himself and face the voice. It would not be a welcome day, but a necessary one. Until then, however, he had succeeded in shielding it. Looking around, he saw nothing interesting, nothing important. Simyn was a couple of cells away, and Koralthea was across the room. Behind the Vakeros were piles of crates and bags of something—flour, sand, powdered manure...who knew? Despairing, and trying not to let his negativity give way to the entity, he propped his head back on the cold iron bars.

Koralthea watched as the mage looked around. It was a shame either of them couldn't cast any spells. A survey of the area revealed absolutely nothing of use. Koralthea's gaze rested upon the floor that was caked with blood, and a voice beside him interrupted his thoughts.

"I'm glad you are now in the cage next to me," said a malnourished-looking mag with a stubbly face. He smiled slightly. "Now I won't be the next to die."

Koralthea looked down the row of cages. Sure enough, the side he was on typically had one person per cage, and he was in the cage next to the blooded area. Great.

One of the bare-chested Sharnazim with the large bitikali walked in with the leader from earlier behind him. They strode straight to Koralthea and stopped a few paces back. In a moment, a man in robes joined them...possibly a Kivosh.

"Tell me why you are here—the truth, my friend. I, Miz'raheen, will weigh your answers and decide what action my two companions will take. If you tell the truth, and the Kivosh agrees you are not lying, perhaps we will abandon you in the desert instead of..."

His eyes trailed to the bloody floor. Beside Koralthea, the dirty stubble-faced man laughed quietly.

***

Koralthea watched the trio approach with some trepidation. He knew an interrogation party when he saw one. However, he also knew how to respond to such a party...with just enough rope to tie a noose and hang themselves.

He quickly schooled his mind, focusing all his training and efforts on ensuring that his thoughts agreed with his words, for if Miz'raheen truly was a kivosh, he may be able to judge his mind. When he finally spoke, it was in Vassan, his accent that of a man from the west, near the Anari border. His voice barely contained his frustration and disgust for the leader that had originally accosted him.

"I was attempting to bring information necessary to the safety of President Kubudei to rightful ears," Koralthea paused as he saw the scowl start on the face of the Sharnazim leader, "I know how you feel about him, you Maghan cursed...

Koralthea bit off the last word, and lowered his eyes in respect for the leader he had slighted. However, there was not an inch more there than he felt was absolutely necessary, and his disgust was still evident. Raising his eyes again to Miz'raheen, Koralthea continued.

"His death could open the way for a traitor in our midst to bring great harm to us."

***

Valestar listened in frustration to Koralthea speaking to the man who had captured them. The only word he understood was "death" and that didn't sound promising at all. He realized he really should've studied Vassan, as the Dessi nations were so close to the desert nation. But then, he had never liked the heat (which made him sweat), or the sand (which found its way into the most uncomfortable crevices), or the authorities (who now had him gagged, without his staff, in a cage while he listened to a Vakeros discuss death).

***

The leader deferred to the Kivosh, who nodded slightly.

"Good," Miz'raheen said. "I am glad you are deciding to cooperate. Neither I nor my mage sense any deceit. However, you insult me in one breath, then offer me insight with the next."

He stood and stroked his chin. "You are not unlike the Whiptail, a rock-dwelling serpent in this land. It has no poison in its fangs, yet it has a scorpion-like stinger in its tail. If you try to pick it up behind the jaws, as you can other serpents, it will spin wildly and lash about with its dangerous stinger."

He called for more men to enter. The two Sharnazim reached in and bound another rope to each of Koralthea's wrists. Then the looped a rope over his neck as Miz'raheen smiled cruelly. The binding that held the Vakeros' wrists together was cut, and immediately the two men who held the new bindings pulled and stretched Koralthea's arms out, fully extended. The rope around his neck caused him to keep his neck stiff and his back straight.

Then the large bare-chested man moved around behind the cage and grabbed a long thick pole. He placed it on the spot of the Vakeros' spine that lay on a point below the neck and between the shoulders. At a gesture from Miz'raheen, he began to unfurl the pole. The muscles in Koralthea's chest began to burn. His neck began to have lancing pain from the pole, and the rope began to tighten underneath his jaw and throat, making his breathing quite difficult.

"Now," said the leader, his hands resting on his weapons, "we will drain this whiptail of all his venom and see what further news he has for us."

Miz'raheen waved his hand and the pole was removed. Koralthea gasped and choked, groaning as the strain on his arms was released.

"What is this 'great harm' you mention? How will it come to us? Why is Kubudei the key? Answer quickly, for he passes by soon."

***

Valestar contracted his neck and tore at the gag with his teeth, trying to shake it off. He couldn't stand the feeling of suffocating any longer.

Meanwhile, he could see that Koralthea was in danger. He still couldn't understand what the Vakeros was saying, but he knew torture when he saw it. And whatever he said was useful. He didn't care, really. Valestar raked his brain, trying to think up something in Vassan's past...something arcane which would interest them, but which was plausible enough to factor into this situation. He may be able to assist Koralthea, if he was truly bluffing.

***

Koralthea gasped like a fish out of water as they let him loose. He sagged against the bars behind him, only still standing because of the guards who held him up. Already he wasn't sure how much of his exhaustion was act and how much was real. He looked up at the kivosh, defeat in his eyes.

"My...my..." Koralthea coughed, trying unsuccessfully to get out one word, "Myatoc...he..."

Koralthea spasmed in a fit of coughing, unable to continue any further. In reality he was grateful, at least partly, for the excuse to pause. He was wracking his slightly pain addled brain for the rest of this story that would satisfy them, and the stalling he hoped would make them slip and say something...anything he could latch on to and build from.

***

Simyn sighed. Why hadn't he taken any interest in locksmithing? He was an able swordsmith, but of what real use was that? He was surely not strong enough to bend the bars of the cell and what good would that do him even if he could? What could he do to help Koralthea in his plight?

Nothing. If they had been outside he would have called down the might of the heavens, but down here what could he do? Could he come up with a convincing lie? What could he say to make them believe a foreigner? Simyn cursed his red hair. The sage looked over to Valestar. The mage wouldn't be much help as long as he was gagged. The sage looked at the cage again. There had to be some way out of this infernal prison!
Valestar tried to signal to Korlaeth to wait, that together they could fool these desert maniacs, but it was hard to signal with both hands tied up and the gag still in place.

* * *

Simyn turned around and began studying the others who he was locked up with. Perhaps they could help in some way. "Anyone here willing to fight for their lives, if opportunity arises? Anything must be better than die in this stinking cage!" he whispered in Vassan.

* * *

Miz'raheen raised his eyebrows at the prisoner’s answer. Finally, a name. "Who is this 'Myr-atoch' person you--"

Valestar began gnawing at his gag and shaking the cage, stamping his feet to get their attention. The Kivosh turned and raised a warding hand in case the Dessi got the gag off.

Korlaeth looked in that direction as well, wondering what the unpredictable old man was trying to do. The leader motioned the sand-mage to go and stand guard by the Dessi-born. The Kivosh stood at the ready, watching intently for any signs of escape.

At about that time, Simyn used the diversion and tried to rally the prisoners to their cause.

"If we were all free, maybe. Without a key..." The fellow captive beside Simyn shrugged weakly. The other man in the cage said nothing.

Miz'raheen turned back to Korlaeth. "You keep dangerous company, Sharn. Who is Myr-atoch? And why do you have this banou pet without a leash and muzzle?"

* * *

Korlaeth recovered slowly from his coughing fit while Miz'raheen was distracted by Valestar. By the time the kivosh had returned his attention, Korlaeth was much more composed and stood a little straighter than a moment ago.

"I have, as yet, been unable to determine this Myr-atoch's true identity, but he has powerful allies. He has been directing mercenaries out of Cloeasia, sharnazim warriors from various parts of Vassagonia..." Korlaeth paused for a moment to breathe.

"I believe an assassination of Kubudei here will pave the way for him to take over Anari. It would then be a small matter to do the same in Cloeasia, and I believe he would then be able to march with the sharnazim he controls on Teph, or Fenu Fizan...even the Zakhan's army, may he live forever, would be hard pressed to stop him. Especially since..." Korlaeth trailed off again and shifted his gaze to look at Valestar for a moment.

"This one was hired to rescue Kubudei’s daughter, whom Myr-atoch stole. This would be of little concern to us except that she is a seer of great power." he looked up at the Kivosh in front of him, "A seer’s foresight, with the army Myr-atoch hopes to gain...."

* * *

Valestar struggled once more with the gag. This time he could feel it was slipping from his mouth. He still had no idea what Korlaeth was saying, but he had been listening carefully, and the name ‘Ameesha’ he had caught. Surely Korlaeth realized that once they got what they wanted in information, they would kill the companions? But if they thought they had other information... maybe their lives would be worth something...

* * *

The Kivosh noticed Valestar fighting against the gag. Knowing the danger involved if the mage could speak, the sand-mage pulled out a gleaming khanjar and held it underneath Valestar’s jaw. “Leave it.”

* * *

Valestar battled with the Sharnazim as Simyn and Valestar struggle to free themselves and join the fight.

Little do they know that the very fight for Anari is taking place in the sewers of the city itself, far below their very feet...

* * *

Korlaeth continued to balance on the tightrope he was on, and perhaps he just dropped his pole....

Miz'raheen regarded the man for a moment, weighing the words. He glanced at the brute that stood behind Korlaeth. "Wait here, I must go and find Gizad and tell him this news."

Rules, Rulings

I assume I didn’t get the gag off with that roll? If I didn’t get the gag off, then Valestar will start banging his feet on the cage bars to get the guard's attentions.

Diplomacy check 26

Since I forgot you were wearing the armor till a few days ago, then I'll also rule that they did not find it.

Move action: escape gag 16

Waiting for Kai Lord to confirm if I’ve pushed off the gag. And then we have to do some serious thinking.

Last post of this act, I am going to allow Arcadian one more round of action, then I’ll officially end the entire Act. Good work on holding back the finality of death—at this stage, it was just a matter of stalling and hoping for a miracle.

Or the intervention of a super-psychic.....

Grid for Act IV

Korlaeth battles with the Sharnazim as Simyn and Valestar struggle to free themselves and join the fight.

Little do they know that the very fight for Anari is taking place in the sewers of the city itself, far below their very feet...

Act IV, The Traitor and The Assassin
**Act IV, Scene VIII – Flight Through the Dark**

The Sharnazim may have been startled by the grate closing, but they were undeterred. It opened and the cries of “Get them!” filled the sewer.

Sir Victor stood as quickly as he could, favoring his sore shoulder. He moved across the catwalk, causing it to shake with each step from his weight. “Let’s go,” he said, pointing ahead of them to an intersection visible in the light from the grate behind them.

***

Sol Hawk almost danced upon the catwalk as the Sharnazim Warriors entered the tunnel, but he lost no time in following Sir Victor’s command to press on. His Kai Sixth Sense guided him through the dark, and as they reached the first intersection, he indicated the correct path to the others.

He glanced back now and then in hopes that they could quickly lose the Sharnazim in this twisting underground way.

***

The fall had hardly stopped the valiant knight, who wasted no time clearing the space beneath the grate.

“Hurry, they’re right on our heels!” he exclaimed as he drew himself up and started toward the intersection. However, the lack of light and his disorientation didn’t help him to choose the correct path, and he deferred to the Kai Lords, who had studied the lay of the land and who knew a thing or two about tracking.

“I left my taches in my saddle bags, how are we going to see in this murk?” He hoped one of his fellow countrymen had thought about that beforehand.

***

Assuredly, Sol Hawk had also left his lantern upon his steed, having originally planned to return for it once he had retrieved his armour. Also for the best laid plans, however - now they were running through a sewer on a catwalk using only that light that shined in from other grates positioned at odd intervals along the corridor.

Corridor was actually an apt description. Had Sol Hawk the time to take in the full scope of their surroundings, he would have been impressed by the miles and miles of underground tunnels; these were where the holes had appeared under... it would have taken untold skilled engineers and workers to plan and create such a network, for the sewer system was made to not only provide for the needs of an entire city, but also to last for hundreds of years.

Sol Hawk led by example and took the North corridor. This would have to be the right way. So they were headed for the Four Towers. He hoped that there would be a way to intercept Kubudei before he reached that deadly destination, rather than having to face Murdach AND Kavan. That was a confrontation that Sol Hawk wanted no part of, and if it was fated by Kai that he should become involved to the end of discovering Ameesha’s true location, well, he wanted at least to know that the President of Anari was safely out of the way.

It made sense, he told it to the others as they ran. “Kavan plans to kill Murdach at the Four Towers. There is only one reason I can think of for why Murdach should be there now. That’s because Murdach plans to kill Kubudei. The Four Towers gives him the perfect vantage point. Either way, Kubudei is in danger.”

***

Even as they turned the corner, Sol Hawk took an AP arrow from his quiver and tossed it to the side, into the air. As he saw it tumble in the air, he sent an indomitable mental command toward it. As the head Sharnazim came into view, the arrow shot like a ray of light toward the catwalk, imbedding itself in precisely the right angle needed to trip his unwary pursuer.

***

The arrow swirled and slammed into the wooden planks near the ladder. As the trio came to the first intersection and jumped across the gap (or in the case of the knight, carefully stepped across the gap) onto the next section, the Sharnazim began landing in the sewers.

Their cries and shouts filled the air. Some of them jumped onto the other side of the tunnel and the two formations began running along, oblivious to the arrow sticking up in front of them. The lead man on the side the the ladder was an stumbling over the arrow, causing the people close behind him to either slam into him or jump to the other side to flee the pile-up.

The only problem was that there was traffic on the other side, and a pile-up resulted there as well. Though no one fell onto the catwalk, a couple of people fell into the sludge and struggled to get back out of the mire.

From somewhere in the tunnels, a low moan filled the air, picked up by more moans and grunts. The kwaraz had heard the commotion and were now likely moving to find and intercept whatever food was running around in their domain.

The Kai bounded along in the darkness, aware that there could be an unseen corridor at any moment. He collided with a barrier, and something hard and metal slammed into his cheek. Hawkeye smashed into him from behind, and Sir Victor crashed into both of them. Sol Hawk - -2 EP

***

Sol Hawk steadied himself on the catwalk by grasping at the bars in front of him, then instinctively reached back to make sure that HawkEye had not fallen. From the sounds of the Sharnazim splashing in the mire, Sol Hawk knew that the chances were greater now that they would be detected first by the ever-hungry kwaraz.

“This way,” he hissed once he was certain that the others were ready - he made a turn into the East passage, mindful of whatever might be within...

***

Hawkeye followed the others quietly, he didn’t talk much, trying to figure out the way as well. So far, they seemed to be going in the right direction. He looked around the sewers for tell-tale signs of enemies, in particularly kwaraz.

***

The Ruanese knight followed the two Kai Lords, occasionally looking back over his shoulder to see if their pursuers were getting any closer. On one such occasion, he collided with Hawkeye and Sol Hawk in front of him, crushing them against a metal barrier! Conscious of the noise they had just caused, he quickly helping the Kais back up and they took another path.

***

Sol Hawk jumped over to the other side of the tunnel and then bounded behind Sir Victor. Hawkeye did the same, and in seconds they were headed out of the dead-end tunnel. The Sharnazim were recovering from their own fasos, so Sol Hawk quickly turned to his left, and dashed down the eastern tunnel, using the light from an upcoming grate as his only beacon.

The others followed behind him, unable to see much in the dark conditions, yet able to see enough to know that the mob of black-clad men was coming up behind them.
The Kai jumped across the small gap between platforms and landed on the far side of the tunnel that now headed north. He wasted no time moving forward, for that was the only direction he could go. Hawkeye duplicated this move, but Sir Victor slowed and cautiously turned the inside of the corner, not keen on the idea of jumping in his armor. He ran alongside the others as they came upon a large lighted area. Grates were in several places, and tunnels left out of many parts of the underground room.

In the middle of the room, however, down in the filthy water, was a group of Kwaraz—big ones ranging about twenty feet long. They groaned and hissed as the humans came upon them. One of them began snapping its jaws open and shut, splashing along towards them. Hawkeye looked around the room—noting quickly that the platform he and Sol Hawk were on was broken some distance away. Moving in that direction would require a long jump.

Behind them, the shouts of the quickly-advancing Sharnazim added extreme urgency to their predicament.

* * *

Act IV, Scene VIII – Fight Through the Dark

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* * *

Sol Hawk held out his arms as the others approached the room full of Kwaraz. Sol Hawk made eye contact briefly with Sir Victor and Hawk Eye, then came the familiar intonation of Sol Hawk's voice to them.

Quick, this way, came his thoughts, then came an image of the destination Sol had in mind for them—it was a new tunnel which was in the South-West corner of the Kwaraz Chamber (this would be square A20 on the close-up map).

Sol Hawk could see that no sooner had he sent the message, the first large Kwaraz had moved in towards them. Sol Hawk stepped closer it along the catwalk, moving with great stealth as not to alert the other two—also to give Sir Victor and HawkEye the room they needed to move out of its path. The huge scaly beast began snapping its jaws, then Sol Hawk made eye contact with it, moving into its alien reptilian mind.

South, came Sol Hawk's command. The Kai Lord fought and strained to press his will upon the giant dragon of a creature—it was huge and Sol Hawk hoped that his power was enough. He sent telepathic pictures into the Kwaraz's mind as well, showing it the South Passage and also showing the tasty men who the Kwaraz had no doubt already begun to smell...

* * *

A familiar voice reached into the knight's mind: Quick, this way!, it told him. It took a moment for Sir Victor to realize that Sol had transmitted his thoughts to him telepathically, so as not to alert their pursuers. As he watched the large reptiles slither closer, he needed no more urging to follow the Kai into the tunnel, although if it came to it, he would be prepared for a fight.

* * *

Sol Hawk perceived the threat as he entered the room and saw the dull glow from the eyes in the water below—Kwaraz pit. His mind reached out and felt for the minds of the one beast that had splashed over to him. It was easily shaped and influenced, and the Kai sent it southward.

The beast clacked its mouth and gave a brief grunt, then tore off through the tunnel to the south. Its movement and calls intrigued the other two, and they lumbered over, investigating the strange smells they found on the air. They saw the trio and hissed, lashes their tails eagerly, waiting for someone to fall.

Sir Victor heard the Kai's voice in his mind and began moving down the tunnel next to where he already was—at least he didn't have to jump or cross any spans of sewer yet. Sol Hawk looked back down the tunnel they had come from and saw the Shamazim advancing—the more delays the three of them hit, the closer that mob came.

He slapped Hawkeye's chest and motioned to follow, then jumped over the gap and followed Sir Victor. Hawkeye understood and jumped across, just a few seconds ahead of the group of Shamazim that came.

One of the black-clad soldiers jumped and lost his balance, falling but grabbing onto the catwalk. His feet hit the water, however, and in any other location he would have had time to get back up. With two hungry Kwaraz nearby, though, he might as well jumped into Ashtarah head first.

Notes:
- My Stealth Check: 27 (I want to stay hidden to the other Kwaraz by being quiet as possible)
- My Handle Animal Check: 24 (Voice of the Forest) "South" - lasts 6 rounds, rolled high enough to work on a creature of 14 HD or less
- Sol Hawk won't jump/step across unless he has no choice. Only if he feels he is in the Kwaraz's way as it heads South will he do so. He is more likely to stay where he is or perhaps move East if it seems wise to do so.
- Athletics: 7
- Telepathy: This costs 1 WP I believe, even for all three targets.
Rules,
Rulings

Act IV, Scene VIII – Flight Through the Dark

His screams echoed through the tunnels as the pair of beasts grabbed him in their diseased jaws and began feasting on his legs.

The Kai's choice seemed to be a lesser of two evils, however, for a group of Sharnazim had broken off from the main group and had flanked around—this group arrived at the other end of the tunnel they were in as they were midway along.

They were boxed in.

ROUND 1

Sir Victor shivered as he heard the Sharnazim's screams and the sounds of the feasting Kwaraz, for such a fate was horrible to behold, and he could be next.

He continued down the tunnel along the catwalk until he realized that some Sharnazim had flanked them and were coming up right in front of them!

After a quick glance back, he realized that there was no choice left but combat, which he was ready for. This was finally something which he understood well enough, and he was getting weary of all this sneaking around. Holding his shield up in front of him, he stalked towards the Sharnazim coming up to intercept him, his broadsword ready to claim yet another life.

As the Sharnazim came, Sol Hawk made himself ready. The Kwaraz were already attacking the enemy to the east, so Sol Hawk resolved himself to strike there first. Those from the west, well, they would have to go through Sir Victor.

Pulling his feet high as he lept, he soon planted himself easily upon the footing of the opposite side. The Sharnazim closest to him began to edge closer and Sol Hawk walked closer his foe also. Immediately, one of Sol Hawk's arrows had freed itself and found its shaft imbedded through Sharnazim armour (DAM 4). The Sharnazim stumbled for a moment and Sol Hawk wasted no time with a follow-up mindblast (DAM 7).

With perfect symmetry, Sol Hawk drew then the two scimitars that had once belonged to Aymodani... two blades of finest quality that had been hard won. Each blade was of a beauty that rivaled the desert herself, and each blade was now set firmly in the determined double-grip of the Kai Lord called Sol Hawk.

Hawkeye looked at his companions and saw that they were preparing to fight. "No way back now", he told himself as he drew his bow and notched an arrow. In an instant he trained a target, the nearest approaching Sharnazim P4. he went for his knee, hoping that he would buckle and slow the others down in the limited space they were in, if not drop into the waters and become kwaraz fodder.

Upon releasing the arrow, he channelled his mind powers into a ball of devasting energy and slam it into the unprotected mind of another Sharnazim Q4.

Hawkeye drew an arrow and waited a second before letting it go. Sol Hawk's jump across the sewer didn't distract him, and the arrow ripped into the nearest Sharnazim's knee. Sol Hawk smiled as his fellow Kai's victim collapsed off the catwalk and hit the water with a loud splash. His own arrow, moving much slower than Hawkeye's, still managed to have enough momentum to pierce flesh. That was all he really needed it to do, after all.
Sharnazims? have 2 fewer starting EP than all the other L6

Question: Why does the Sharn in front of me (C4)

Yup, that's the beauty of D&D computer games.

Psychic attack on L4 again, autohit : 6 damage

Continued:

so, then I'll just post in replace of this.

Rules, Rulings

Okay, first things first. Sol Hawk, you need to decide if you stay put (Dexterity check DC18) or move away (Athletics check DC10). Your options are I2, k4, or into the sewer water. The jump or balancing act would be a move action for the round.

Hawkeye, your section is kind of unstable, but it has not given any immediate sign of collapse. And Sir Victor is doing fine.

Initiative lineup: Hawkeye 18, Sol Hawk 18, Sir Victor 16, Left Sharnazim group 14, Right Sharnazim group 12

L8 Sharn (G2) AC 14 EP 45/47
L7 Sharn (G2) AC 13 EP 35/35
L6 Sharn (C2) AC 13 EP 25/25
L6 Sharn (C4) AC 12 EP 10/23, bleeding
L5 Sharn (C5) AC 12 EP 20/20
L6 Sharn (L2) AC 13 EP 14/25
L6 Sharn (M2) AC 13 EP 25/25
L6 Sharn (G2) AC 13 EP 25/25
L6 Sharn (N3) AC 10 EP 20/25, tripped into the sewer, flat-footed
L6 Sharn (L4) AC 13 EP 18/25
L6 Sharn (M4) AC 13 EP 25/25
L6 Sharn (N4) AC 13 EP 25/25

Hawkeye: I'm beginning to appreciate computers doing the math and keeping up with the stats automatically in RPG games.

Yes, that's the beauty of D&D computer games.

Question: Why does the Sharn in front of me (C4) have 2 fewer starting EP than all the other L6 Sharnazims?

To quickly answer SV: That Sharn was typed and he would be ready for them.

Sol: Psychic move to 12, scored 16 vs. DC10 (std - fighting defensively: raised AC to 20, -4 to hit)
(std - hit AC 25 vs. L2, DAM 4+5+9 crit)
(free - Strafing Will, hit AC27 vs L2, DAM 5 I lose 1 EP and 1 MC arrow)
(psychic - psychic attk, autohit on M2, DAM 7 I lose 2 WP)

Would it be possible to attack with a bow again? If so, then I'll just post in replace of this.

Continued:

Attack with bow, M4 : 22
Damage : 9
Psychic attack on L4 again, autohit : 6 damage

Act IV, Scene VIII – Flight Through the Dark

The air was thick with psychic energies as the two Kai reached out with their minds to tear at their enemies' spirits. The effects were not visible, but both Kai were sure they had succeeded. The Sharnazim who rushed to face Sol Hawk swung low, hitting the Kai above the ankle. Sol Hawk: -3 EP

While the two Kai honed their supernatural abilities, Sir Victor gripped one of the only things he truly trusted in the world—his sword. Moving in heavy, laborious steps toward his own cluster of enemies, the knight swung his sword in a low horizontal arc, slamming into the hip of the closest enemy. The man cried out in pain, even as the Sharn behind him tried to thrust his sword through the narrow gap between wall and man to hit the knight.

The weak retaliation by the Sharnazim the knight faced was easy to block, and the stabbing threat around the corner was no danger at all. However, something was afoot...

Sir Victor's enemies began to leap from platform to platform, bypassing him and heading toward the unsuspecting Kai Sol Hawk! A quick glance over the shoulder affirmed that the Sharnazim from the other end of the tunnel had arrived.

The boards creaked as the three groups fought. Being at a corner, Sir Victor had little to worry about, but the weight around the two Kai had almost quadrupled as the Sharnazim ran and came to a halt. There was a loud crack as the beam near the Kai gave way. He and everyone near him fought to maintain their balance.

ROUND 2

Even though Sol Hawk had already warmed him with a psychic assault, the insane Sharnazim rushed forward yelling and even hit Sol Hawk with a sloppy swipe. The planks began to buckle and groan under the concentrated weight and even though Sol Hawk's Sixth Sense was warning of impending collapse, the crazed Vassan did not quit and instead kept fighting. Sol Hawk was forced to push him off with his swords - the Sharnazim tripped and fell backwards into his kin as his blood traced twin red lines through the dimly lit air (DAM 9).

Sol Hawk stepped back swiftly then, having escaped a fall into the mire even as the woodwork fell apart beneath the spot where he had only just stood. Somehow, his assailant still wanted to foolishly leap the gap even though Sol Hawk noticed was behind his oblique underlings. As the next Sharn came too close, Sol Hawk turned his psychic fury upon him and the Sharnazim could suddenly feel a gruesome premonition - and knew then what it would feel like to be eaten behind his oblative underlings). As the next Sharn came too close, Sol Hawk turned his psychic fury upon him and the Sharnazim could suddenly feel a gruesome premonition - and knew then what it would feel like to be eaten behind his oblative underlings). As the next Sharn came too close, Sol Hawk turned his psychic fury upon him and the Sharnazim could suddenly feel a gruesome premonition - and knew then what it would feel like to be eaten behind his oblative underlings). As the next Sharn came too close, Sol Hawk turned his psychic fury upon him and the Sharnazim could suddenly feel a gruesome premonition - and knew then what it would feel like to be eaten behind his oblative underlings)

A veritable corpse-on-feet now, the sharn slumped away into the sewer, the hate still in his eyes. Sol Hawk's eyes met with those of the next warrior in the gauntlet. This Sharn paused for a moment, seeing his rash companion fall so quickly, but inched forward, driven by the cries of his superior (who Sol Hawk noticed was out. The rest were copy & paste. Bunch of evil cutthroat of a guard, and he lept - only to find himself instantly impaled through the head with a master-crafted arrow (DAM 8).

Sol Hawk once more readied himself, crouching, and held one sword to either side of him. They were coming...

Seeing an opening in the defense of the warrior around the corner, Sir Victor slipped his blade under his opponent's guard and plunged the heavy sword into his heart, killing him instantly. Against C5: Attack: 14, Damage: 20.

However, unsure of his footing on the planks of the walkway, he stumbled and completely missed his mark on his second opponent, swinging wide and chopping a part of the wall. Coming to Sol's aid would have to wait a few seconds longer.

* * *
**Rules, Rulings**

**Act IV, Scene VIII – Flight Through the Dark**

"Sol, 2 more behind you!"

Hawkeye heard the knight shout a warning to the other Kai Lord, who was being surrounded front and back. "Kai brother, hang on as long as you can. We're coming!" He tightened his grip on his sword, intending to resolve this melee quickly, in order to aid Sol Hawk.

* * *

Whose side were the gods on? Not the Sharanazim.

Sol Hawk managed to avoid the dangers of the collapsing platform, managing to get one final strike in upon his opponent as he did so. The force of the Kai jumping backwards was the final stresor upon the support boards. The rickety wooden platform—which was never designed for the weight of so many—split apart with another couple of loud cracks. The man Sol Hawk had been fighting fell sideways, his head hitting the platform Hawkeye was on. The two men behind him lost their footing and fell, one into the mire, the other sliding down the newly formed ramp in front of him.

The Sharanazim behind them slid to a halt and cursed, watching the scene unfold. He looked over his shoulder as a new sound filled the air. The tunnels carriedmale moans and hoarse wails. Flattening himself against the wall, he stayed motionless.

Hawkeye let fly two more arrows, one of wood and one of psychic energy. He dropped his bow and drew his weapon, intent on close-quarters combat. The chaos surrounding Sol Hawk's side of the tunnel, however, cast a doubt on whether he'd have to do anything at all. One person fell into Hawkeye's section of the platform, causing the Sharanazim coming for him to hesitate even as they cursed him for the pain he'd inflicted.

There was a familiar cracking noise, and the section where they were simply gave way and fell into the sludge. They shouted in alarm and grasped at the broken planks nearby, and their focus on the Kai was lost when the sounds of hungry Kwaraz filled the tunnels. The men began floundering and trying to get back up onto the platforms.

The Kai's keen senses caught it first—a loud splashing from all around, getting nearer.

Sir Victor had no time to survey all this going on behind him. His attentions were on the person in front of him. With practiced ease, the man died, his body flung into the mire. The one who had been covering behind him narrowly avoided having his own life ended, and looking around in horror at the screams of men preceding the walls of the Kwaraz, he dropped his weapon and ran off, shrieking something about "Nanirah kazzin!"

Sir Victor surrowed his brows at these strange words, meaning to ask the Kai about their meaning later. He turned to see that Sol Hawk had just been attacked by the person behind him.

Sol Hawk felt the blade enter his side even as he turned to face the new enemy his friends warned him about. For a moment he was at a loss—what now? Sol Hawk: -8 EP

Hawkeye watched as the other Sharanazim that was rushing toward Sol Hawk made a dramatic diagonal leap across the gap and camed to stand before him, scimitar held at the ready.

It was at that moment the Kwaraz decended upon the place from nowhere. They entered from both ends of the tunnel, ripping with ferocity at the men trapped in the sewer water. Acting in their limited capacities, the Kwaraz followed a single inborn rule: if it moves, attack it. They tore and leaped and thrashed in a frenzy. Blood and stinking water flew in all directions as the beasts attacked. Their lashing and spinning and such slammed into the supports near where the Kai were, threatening to either knock the rest of the catwalk down or make them lose their balance and fall into the water.

One of them climbed up the newly formed ramp opposite Sol Hawk and spotted the Sharanazim flattened against the wall.

ROUND 3

The kwaraz were feeding as if possessed. Sir Victor knew their time was short if they wanted to escape these tunnels. Unheeding of his own safety, the brave knight retraced his steps along the catwalk to help Hawkeye battle his lone Sharanazim. Once they were done on this side, they’d come to Sol’s help before leaving this place.

"Soldier! Turn around and meet your fate," threatened the knight as he stalked towards the Sharanazim on the catwalk. Stabbing a man in the back was not his fighting style, no matter the circumstances.

* * *

Sol Hawk was amazed as the Kwaraz came swarming into the sewer, and even moreso as one of them even crawled up onto the walkway. "Look out!" yelled Hawkeye - a Sharanazim was trying to get at Sol Hawk from behind. Sol Hawk moved with superhuman grace and as the Sharanazim thrust with his weapon, Sol Hawk let it come, taking it under his arm against his own body. The Sharn grinned and twisted it, which injured Sol Hawk, but Sol Hawk did not let the blade go free, and although a trace of a wince was on his features, there was also the faint hint of a smile.

Sol Hawk twisted his entire body in a way that dazzled the sluggish Sharn, and as Sol moved, the Sharanazim was thrown completely off-balance - his own blade was the lever and the Sharn was now the spinning top.

"Noo-oo-oo-oo" he said as he spun - his single word was truncated twice as Sol Hawk’s twin blades did their work upon him, and there was an arrow (DAM 4, 5, 4). All of this happened within just a split second, and the man fell to his knees before Sol Hawk.

"Will you not leave us in peace?" said Sol Hawk, sorrow in his bright blue eyes.

But the Sharn only spat and since he had by now lost his blade, he reached toward Sol Hawk’s legs and tried in a clumsy manner to pry Sol Hawk off and over the very ledge.

But despite whatever chance the Sharn thought he had against a Kai Lord, there was in reality none. At that moment the Sharn’s head began to throb, and in an instant, it had exploded (DAM 17), leaving no trace at all as his husk toppled into the waiting jaws of the Kwaraz.

---

**Commentary**

**Vassagonian Language**

Nanirah Kazzin

Loosely translated, he’s saying the place is haunted and filled with ghosts.
**Rules, Rulings**

*Attack roll, J4 : 25*

---

**Damage : 6**

You are in a small partially covered fenced-in area behind one of the main warehouses that has a tower on it. You're not really sure which tower this is, but at least you are near one.

Right now, you are all in the covered area, hidden from the patrolling Sharnazim on top of the building and tower itself. There is a door leading into the warehouse itself about 20paces away, but to go there would require crossing without cover.

Sol Hawk, I know how you think, so you can mentally pick the lock in a take-20 situation. Just include that in what you do.

There is also a gate behind you with a similar lock. It leads to an alleyway that runs alongside the warehouse. Just an option so you don't think I'm leading you.

If you wish to cross the open area to the door, you'll have to do it one by one.

The DC is 11+1d6. Stealth check. Here's what that means:

You cannot predict when a guard is going to appear. That's the take-20 part. Your DC varies based on whether or not a guard walks by on the rooftop. I will roll in the dice thread as an example.

---

Velesstar has just notified any chance of getting caught if you run like hell to the door to the warehouse.

Remember, running toward the sound, not sure if this is also toward the warehouse.

**Perception Check: 17**

**Stealth Check: 15**

**OOC: Sol Hawk moves toward the sound, taking cover wherever possible along the way.**

**OOC: Warmth of the Sun x2 +16 EP**

---

**Perception check : 2**

---

No take-20 this time. It's a three-shot deal. If you can't open the door within 3 rounds, something bad might happen. Alternatively, you could always run back under that covered area and hope for another chance to cross. There is no sign of Kubudei, by the way.

**OOC: Is North-West the direction we expect Kubudei to be coming from in relation to the towers? I am getting the distinct impression that it is *not***

**Simple Focus: 17 (expected DC20)**

---

**Act IV, Scene VIII – Flight Through the Dark**

Hawkeye immediately turned to face the Sharnazim, "Why can't you just leave us alone?" The young Kai Lord eyeing his opponent, looking for an opening.

"Simple, you're a Kai Lord!"

"Soldier! Turn around and meet your fate,"

The Sharnazim was taken aback by the threat coming from behind him, which made him lose his attention at Hawkeye, just for a moment. The Kai Lord immediately stepped forward, brushing his opponent's weapon aside and sliced him right across his belly.

Sol Hawk had managed to handle things in his own particular style, leaving the only other threat to his two companions.

Hawkeye drew first blood on the Sharn while Sir Victor finished the job once the man turned to see who was coming at him from behind.

The Kwaraz feast below was reaching a frantic pace. More of the beasts were coming to join the cacophonous noise of the massacre. Sol Hawk slowly moved backwards along the tunnel, watching the Sharnazim across the way stare down the large reptile that was eyeing him. Unfortunately for him, there was another rule the Kwaraz had learned over the years to go along with their inborn instincts. That rule was this: Even if it doesn't move, attack it and see if it does move.

The creature hissed and sped across the platform, clamping down on the man's leg. He cried out in terror like a little girl and tried to pull free, but that only made matters worse. The Kwaraz used its legs and mouth to rip and tear its way up the man's body, causing him to fall with a loud splash into the water.

The trio needed no coaxing to leave the place. No doubt now that all the Kwaraz in Chahan were coming here, it was the only place they needed to be the least. Relying on the direction sense of the Kai in the group, they slowly made their way to the northeast, dodging Undercity patrols easily despite Sir Victor's glistening armor.

----------

After an hour of slinking around in the dark, they decided to exit the sewers and get a look around at a dimly lit grate. The Kai sensed nothing dangerous near them, so they moved to check things out. The grate they had chosen was inside a fenced-in holding area next to a large warehouse. As Sol Hawk looked skyward, he could see a massive structure very close by, bathed in sunlight—one of the Four Towers!

"We're right by one of the towers!" he said elatedly. In order to keep from drawing too much attention, and to save time, Sir Victor removed his breastplate and shoulder plates, sending them up before he tried to climb out of the tunnel. The idea worked perfectly, and after putting them back on, the group decided how best to proceed.

* * *

While everyone was deciding what to do next, a blast of thunder rang out from nearby, followed seconds later by cries of alarm. Hawkeye looked out from their cover at the guards on the roof. They left sight, possibly running to the other side of the rooftop to see what the commotion was.

* * *

"Kai preserve us," said Sol Hawk, "It has begun." The sky was clear, yet there was thunder so great that it shook the ground. "It is near. Kavan said he was a Kivosh... we have to move!"

As Sol Hawk took off like a bullet his twin scimitars still ready, pausing only to be sure that the others were with him, he tried to make sense of what was happening and get his bearings at the same time. Wherever Kubudei was, well, the explosion he had just heard had to have something to do with it. And if it did not, no! Sol Hawk knew that there was no way that they could take that kind of chance.

Kubudei was here, but where? Kavan, too, and Murdach, perhaps Ameesha - all of them were here, but where? Sol Hawk strained his Sixth Sense ability in an attempt to bring some clarity, but alas, his ability was still modest compared to that of others in his order. His eyesight, however, rivaled the best...

* * *

Glad to be out of the sewers and that ordeal, the knight strapped his breastplate back on just in time to hear a loud thunderclap, which drew the attention of all the nearby guards.

"We have to move!" said Sol before he sprinted away to look for the assassin.

Sir Victor followed suit, scanning the grounds for enemies to make sure they were really unobserved and watching Sol's back.

* * *

Hawkeye followed the others as well, covering their rear as they made way towards the towers. The young Kai Lord made a quick observation of the surrounding, the structures and layouts, a mental map of the Four Towers as they went along.

* * *

Sol Hawk was the first to rush out from cover when the clamor began. The knight ran next, toward the door, noting as he did so that the Kai veered off to peek through the narrow slits in the wooden fence. As Sir Victor tried to make out anything important beyond their current location, the other Kai moved through his line of sight, blocking what little view he had.

He stood between the Kai and the doorway, perhaps the only one among them aware that their time was limited. "We have to move!" he said urgently.

Sol Hawk peered through the fence, as did Hawkeye. They both saw groups of Sharnazim running toward the north (to their left), hands on weapons. Others stayed where they were and looked around sternly for any signs of danger—lucky for the trio the gaps between the boards weren't larger.

Across the wide road was another similar building with a tall tower-like structure rising out of it. The guards on top of it were looking diagonally toward the northwest. Whatever was happening was happening in another tower—not the one they were nearest.

A guard came to stand in front of where the Kai had been looking, and they decided it was indeed time to move. Sir Victor had already tried the door and he gestured at Sol Hawk. "It's locked!"

"What are they looking at?" Sol Hawk said of the guards. He needed to discover the cause of that explosion - and the object of the guards' attention.

"I'm going to open this," he said, still holding his swords, "Hawkeye, can you see what they're looking at? Sir Victor, get ready - anything could be on the other side of this door."

While putting his full trust in his friends, Sol Hawk focused his mind upon the lock, racking once more for his mind-over-matter skill...
Sol Hawk checks:
Perception: 11

Stealth check: 1.

Yeah, I thought "bonked" was an appropriate word to use. It should go without saying, stairs up, door out, look out windows, etc. There is no further noise from upstairs.

Rules, Rulings

Perception: 22

2nd Try, Nat 20. Simple Focus: 31

Sol Hawk is prepared to enter and does so soundlessly. He is listening for the guards or anything else inside. He still wants to know what caused the explosion. He is moving as quietly as he can. He is ready to launch The Swiftstrike if an opportunity for Surprise arises.

Perception: 15
Stealth: 19

Act IV, Scene VIII – Flight Through the Dark

"I'm going to open this," Sol said, still holding his swords, "Hawkeye, can you see what they're looking at? Sir Victor, get ready - anything could be on the other side of this door."

**Right.** was the simple answer Hawkeye gave as he went back to the fence and tried to observe the guards and determine what they were watching. Or what was the cause for that loud sound. Using his skills and putting on his thinking cap, Hawkeye continued his spying, while his two companions tried their luck with the door.

**Ricking locks was something Sir Victor left to the Kai Lords. If he could help them to open the door, it would rather be by battering it down.**

As Sol concentrated on his task, the vigilant knight stood guard beside Hawkeye, ready to defend his friend's back if the situation demanded it and looking around to see if any Sharnazim would spot them.

**The lock proved stubborn - Sol Hawk found himself momentarily distracted, but brought his focus quickly back to center. This was a Cloesian Combination Lock and Sol Hawk instinctively knew that only three chances were allowed before the alarm was sounded.**

The dials spun like Roulette in Sol Hawk's mind, and although his first attempt had not succeeded, the second time everything had come clearly into focus:

295
921
350

The lock opened before Sir Victor or Hawkeye ever truly realized their peril. In all humbleness, Sol Hawk only nodded, indicating wordlessly that it was time to move.

**Sir Victor followed the Kai as quietly as he could, his mail clinking with every step. He wondered why he even tried, as his heavy armour would negate any effort towards silence.**

Wincing with every step, he shrugged apologetically to the two Kai Lords as they turned and looked at him disapprovingly.

"Hawkeye," said Sol Hawk, "Let's see if the guards have any keys or anything else of interest."

**Without a word Hawk went to the job of the keys and grabbed them. "No Sol Hawk I see that you will have to do more than a swift search to find anything. Here is the way it was shown to me by my Kai Masters. Watch and see, this is all foreseeable future. He then followed them upstairs to the tower top.**

With this Hawkeye revealed what his brother had not.

**After knocking the two sharnazim guards out and wrapping their heads together with their shoufa while the Kai Lords searched their pockets for anything useful, Sir Victor felt confident that they wouldn't be anymore trouble for the foreseeable future. He then followed them upstairs to the tower top.**

**As he and Sol Hawk were searching the guards, HawkEye also told Sir Victor about the hidden door that he had seen behind the boxes. "I wonder what could be in there," he said.**

When Hawkeye mentioned the concealed door, Sir Victor's curiosity got the better of him. Instead of starting up the flight of stairs, where his lack of missile weapons would prove useless, he decided to flex his muscles some more and put them to good use moving the crates away from the door. After all, an alternate way out might prove useful in these circumstances.

As Hawkeye made a second quick search of the bodies that Sol Hawk had found nothing on, Sir Victor began sliding boxes and crates out of the way slowly. The door he found was next to a dingy window, and looking through the window he saw that there were Sharnazim lining the street very close to them. Curiously enough, several Sharnazim were exiting a doorway across the road from them, then hustling back into position. Kubudei must be close.
Rules, Rulings

I'm back! Thanks guys and especially Sol for helping me out for the past week. Let me catch up on things and I'll post again soon. Hmm I have new items? Don't know if I can carry them without going over my limit?

Act IV, Scene VIII – Flight Through the Dark

Hawkeye found a handful of items, none of them truly unique or interesting: 15 Crowns, a small pair of bone dice, a small parchment with some random marks on it, and standard weaponry (khanjar and scimitar on each). He did, however, cock his ear while searching.

"Did you hear that?" he asked. "It sounds like horses advancing outside."

A chill ran down Sir Victor’s spine as he realized that time was running out and they had precious few seconds left before the President arrived at Four Towers.

"They’re almost here!" hissed the knight, "we must hurry!"

He tried the door’s handle.

Sol Hawk looked over to where Sir Victor was, moving in that direction as Sir Victor planned the next move. They needed a way to warn Kubudei or spot his assassin - and Sol Hawk considered that elevation would be their best bet. He paused to see what Sir Victor might have discovered...

Hawkeye took several items and added these to his person: the dice, the khanjar, the 15 Crowns, and the parchment (which he briefly looked at to see if it contained any Vassan or Common words of interest. Then he moved to where Sol Hawk and Sir Victor were, taking out his bow and ready for anything.

"Wait!" called out Sol Hawk, seeing Sir Victor move behind the boxes. "Check the window first."

Sure enough, there were Sharnazim lined up all outside the building. The knight frowned. So much for that idea.

"Come on," said Hawkeye, "let’s go up."

The trio raced up the stairs and looked around the small room they found themselves in—the first floor of the tower. Finding nothing useful (and not having any windows to see out of), they moved up to the next section. There were windows on all four sides here.

Sir Victor looked out one and saw Kubudei start making his way between the buildings, conferring with a nearby Anari advisor about some matters, now that there was no need to wave to any citizens. Hawkeye peered up to the next level of the tower, wondering what could be there, while Sol Hawk raced to another window.

"Guys! Come look!" They came to stand next to the Kai, who pointed across the street to another tower. Through the abrasions and staining on the window, they saw two figures fighting—one in dark clothing, and another with glittering swords.

"It’s Arcadian," said Sir Victor.

Rendered by Kailord in Lego: Scene VIII, Flight Through the Dark

(Pictured left to right: a Kwaraz, Hawkeye, Sol Hawk, 2 Sharnazim Warriors, and Sir Victor)
**Rules, Rulings**

**Act IV, Scene VII, Last Part – Belly of the Beast**

Thunder in the desert was not natural, and that sure sounded quiet for true thunder. Arcadian surmised that it was Dessi-magic, and if that was the case...Valestar might be near.

Using the distraction, the Vakeros ushered Kamilah into the warehouse and squatted for a minute by the closed door. No movement within. None without. He told her to stay and guard the door, much to her disapproval.

Not waiting to see if she did as he asked, Arcadian ran on his tip toes across the warehouse floor to a set of wooden stairs that led up into the tower. He walked slowly up them, making sure to place his feet near the wall so the boards didn’t bend from his weight and creak.

The second level of the tower was barren. Only another staircase on the opposite of the room occupied the area. Windows were on all sides, making Arcadian cringe as he crossed slowly to the other staircase. As he took one step onto it, he heard a muffled cough from the room above.

His heart raced, and the hairs on his arms pricked. A wave of nervous sweat pulsed over his body, and he moved to all fours in his ascent so he could move as carefully as possible. After a couple of minutes, he was able to peek into the next level. It was actually a double-level, with supports in the corners and old boxes stacked around the perimeter and randomly in the room itself.

There, across the room from him, with a crossbow resting upon a crate by a slightly raised window, was Murdach.

---

**Check: 22**

This was beneath him. Sure, killing the president of Anari would give him a sense of personal fulfillment, but overall it was just too easy. He should be delivering Ameesha to Egoliah right now, basking yet again in the praise of the old fool he called master.

Soon, he told himself. Once this task is over, he would set a plan in motion to bring about Egoliah’s downfall—one he had been plotting for some time now. He would assume command of the Ragged.

Then came that mysterious thunderclap. Probably some stupid Kivosh miscasting a spell. It was just another irritation, for it had delayed the procession. He could see them in the distance, stopped near the wall. They would probably ride through this section pretty fast, for there was really no one to cajole or wave to. No crowds, no faces to play to, just a column of Sharnazim herding the pig to the blade....

Sighing, Murdach breathed in a bit too much of the dust in this place. He muffled a cough, then wondered why he did so. Since when did he?

The assassin stopped. Since when was he this overconfident? It could be fatal. He listened intently for the slightest noise. Something just wasn’t right. He felt watched.

The Ragged almost turned around, but then he caught sight of the gates opening. Kubudei would be coming through shortly. If he began looking around now he’d miss his shot....

---

Arcadian whispered quietly to Kamilah, “please, go down to the lower level of the tower.”

She moved to say something in protest but Arcadian placed his hand over her mouth. His eyes were pleading, desperate.

“Trust me. Please, just trust me. This is something that I have to do alone. I know there is no way I can make you understand. All I need is for you to trust me.”

With that Arcadian removed his hand from Kamilah’s mouth and pressed his lips to hers. He could feel her eyes flutter as they kissed. He broke away and pointed towards where they had came.

“Go.”

Kamilah turned and scrambled away. Arcadian didn’t bother with the idea of subtlety. He moved into the room, clad in his blue-steel chainmail, his cerulean cloak fluttering about him in the dusty air.

“Murdach. I told you we would meet again, and that meeting would be our last.”

Arcadian drew his sword in one, quick fluid movement. He twirled the blade about his body in slow, deliberate arcs. He watched as Murdach’s shoulders tensed at the sound of his name.

“Where is Ameesha.”

---

Murdach could not shake the notion he was being watched. He spared a quick glance over his shoulder at a sudden noise and was mildly surprised by what—rather who—he saw.

“Banou!” Murdach said in delight. “I’m surprised you survived and followed me this far. But I figured you may have had something to do with Aymodani’s absence the past couple of days.”

The assassin turned back to the window for an instant, ignoring the threatening pose of Arcadian. “I’m a little busy at the moment,” he said, laying the crossbow down and gesturing with his hand. “Perhaps you don’t mind waiting for a moment first?”

---

From a well-hidden vantage point, a single eye peered through a hole at what was transpiring. The situation had just become a bit more complicated with the appearance of the Vakeros. The man seemed familiar. Perhaps from the inn the night before?

All things would work out as planned, however. This banou was irrelevant, and could prove to be a decent distraction.

Wait...

The eye saw Myr-atoch set down the crossbow and point out the window. Where did his other hand go?

Agh! Stupid banou!

The figure moved away from his spyhole and cautiously and quietly moved into position.

---

*Actually, I do mind.*

Arcadian was in no mood for the charismatic charm of this man. The Vakeros Knight took another step further into the room. His eyes were blazing with a dangerous fury. His dark hair swished about his shoulders as he moved.

*Step away from the window. Fight me!*
**Rules, Rulings**

The Perception DC to see the figure peering into the room is 30. You may try an acrobatics check for movement to close the gap to Murdach. I'm making a temporary rule if you do: for every 5 points over a roll of 10, you get a +1 temporary (this round only) bonus to AC against the one crossbow attack.

Keep in mind this arrow is designed to kill in one shot. You will have a link to a grid in my signature within minutes.

**Act IV, Scene VII, Last Part – Belly of the Beast**

Arcadian had seen this type of tactic before, and he actually expected it now, considering the type of man he was dealing with. One did not get to be as powerful as Murdach by facing all foes on equal footing.

When he pointed out the window with one hand, Cade’s attention instead followed his other hand, which reached out of his sight. As Arcadian shouted for Murdach to move away from the window, the assassin stood abruptly and slung his left hand around.

The Vakeros knew something was coming. He dodged his head to the left as a metal spike whistled through the air and embedded in the wall behind him. The assassin used the slight distraction to move into a more defensive position, crouched behind a long chest. The crossbow he had brandished for use to assassinate the president of a nation now centered on the Vakeros’ chest.

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The observer peered over the edge of the floor through the hole afforded by the staircase. He saw his target move a bit closer, but now he was more obscured. A quick glance showed the Vakeros had survived. Well done, indeed.

**ROUND 1**

"You underestimate my abilities, Mudach!" Arcadian spat the last word and his hands began to move in a zealous flurry. He brought his left hand around in a crescent circle. His right hand had his sword in it, which he brought vertically across his body at the same time.

Murdach peered over the edge of the long chest. Realization crept into his eyes; this chest was not going to protect him.

Arcadin loosed his Penetrate spell ability, the invisible funnel of energy propelled towards Murdach at the chest.

**ROUND 2**

Knowing he had the upper hand, Murdach fired his crossbow. The poisoned arrow screamed across the room in a blink--and deflected off Arcadian’s sword as he moved it to cast his spell.

"Impossible!" screamed Murdach, and then he realized whatever spell the banou was casting would imminently finish. He gritted his teeth, having faced such banou sorcery before.

The spell shot across the room, striking the assassin in the chest and knocking him back into the wall. The crossbow he held clattered to the floor out of his reach. Murdach grunted from the impact with both the spell and the wall, but quickly recovered, drawing two weapons as he got to his feet and ran across the room.

Arcadian watched the blur of motion, unable to spot the khanjar the assassin had hurled as he ran. The weapon did little damage, however, its pommel crushing into the Vakeros’ hand instead of the blade. It was a clumsy throw, but was it true desperation or a ruse? Arcadian: -1 EP

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*Arcadian: -1 EP

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_Belly of the Beast – In a Blur of Motion, Murdach prepares for a deadly attack on Arcadian…_
Rules, Rulings

Move Action: 10 feet, to E6

Standard Action: Draw Weapon (shortsword)
Free Action: Battleblade Ability

Intimidate Roll: 11

-3 EP for Penetrate, -1 EP for Penetrate

Murdach: AC: 16 EP: 84/90

Initiative: 21 DR: 1/-

Damage 3: 9
Damage 2: 6
Damage 1: N/A

Attack 3: 23
Attack 2: 17

Okay, it has been a while since I did combat rolls. So if I messed up please let me know.

Murdach: AC: 16 EP: 84/90

Initiative: 21 DR: 1/-

Attack 2: 17

Damage 1: 8
Damage 2: 6
Damage 3: 9

Okay, it has been a while since I did combat rolls. So if I messed up please let me know.

Murdach: AC: 16 EP: 84/90

Initiative: 21 DR: 1/-

Attack 2: 17

Damage 2: 6
Damage 3: 9

Okay, it has been a while since I did combat rolls. So if I messed up please let me know.

Murdach: AC: 16 EP: 84/90

Initiative: 21 DR: 1/-

Attack 2: 17

Damage 2: 6
Damage 3: 9

Okay, it has been a while since I did combat rolls. So if I messed up please let me know.

Act IV, Scene VII, Last Part – Belly of the Beast

Arcadian stepped forward into the room, his eyes constantly towards Murdach. His offhand fell to his belt and in a quick, swift move he released his cobalt shortsword from his belt. He twisted the dual blades in his hands, letting the cobalt blur around his body. Suddenly a blinding, blue light flooded the room, erasing all shadow. Both of the Vakeros' weapons were writhed in cerulean lightning. The energetic particles of light danced up and down and around the hued blades. Arcadian began to twist and flourish the two weapons expertly. "Come Murdach, why do you run? I am but one man; surely you could stay me with only a moment's gesture."

ROUND 3

"Sorcerous novice," sneered Murdach at Arcadian's words. "I need no magic to kill you." With a burst of speed, the assassin closed the gap, hoping his proximity would help instead of hinder.

His silver scimitar whirled through the air, and with a twirl, he reversed the grip and drove it into the banou's thigh. Arcadian: -7 EP

The figure above them watched them, not needing his eyes to load his weapon. Why endanger himself yet? Let the banou prove himself. Perhaps there would be no need to interfere.

Arcadian was prepared for this. Murdach, though a great warrior, had much the same temperament as Arcadian. He was easily goaded. Murdach moved, his scimitar bit into the Vakeros' thigh. At the same moment Arcadian lunged forward with his sword.

"Let this be a testament from a 'novice'!"

ROUND 4

Murdach walked into a series of magic-enhanced attacks. The motes of magical energy danced from his wounds for a second before dissipating. He had expected this to happen, but it was a fair trade, for he had himself up to display his own prowess.

He drew his second khanjar and attacked with his main blade, twisting his arm in a way to bypass the attempt to block the attack. The weapon pierced Arcadian's shoulder muscle an instant before the curved dagger slid down his arm. The scimitar danced downward in a twist and caught him on the side of the leg, but the final attack met with the scintillating bluesteel weapons in a loud clash. Murdach took a step back and in one fluid motion tossed the dagger at the Vakeros. The blade sank into his other thigh as Murdach smiled and held his own wounds with his now-free hand. Arcadian: -18EP total

"Ashtarah awaits even an infidel banou like yourself." He twisted his blade and held it forward at the ready.

Arcadian's arm bled freely, the warm liquid dripping off his fingers. The Vakeros moved in retaliation, both of his blades slicing out towards Murdach.

ROUND 5

Murdach laughed as the Vakeros opened up more wounds on him. They were not debilitating, and all of them could be easily healed. So his foe could do some damage with magical enhancements, so what? Let's see him break through an impenetrable physical defense. The assassin drew himself up and unleashed with a single Serpent strike, lancing the Vakeros' gut.

Arcadian: -SEP

Arcadian lashed out at Murdach again, but his swords were blocked every time. The assassin glanced quickly out the window and saw Kubudei and his procession moving onward. He had to act quickly if he was to complete his mission.

Ignoring his chance to strike the Vakeros yet again, Murdach opted instead to tuck into a roll and grab the crossbow. He then did a backflip to move back closer to the window—and his other poisoned bolts. He fired one point blank at Kubudei, another at Kavan. After that, he'd open the shaft of oede herb to rapidly heal himself and escape.

He hadn't counted on one thing, however. There was someone else watching all this, and that person had his own mission to complete.

Kavan dropped from his vantage point as Murdach grabbed the crossbow and began his backflip. He took a couple of steps and sprang over a large crate, landing just as the Vakeros closed in on Murdach.

"Sorry, banou," he said, slinging his left arm wide and hurling a handful of sand into the Vakeros' face. Arcadian grunted in shock and irritation as the grit entered his nose and eyes. He dropped one blade and wiped at his eyes while he held the other blade horizontal in front of him in defense.

Murdach turned at the commotion and strange-yet familiar-voice. His eyes widened considerably when he saw another assassin in front of him. Instantly he felt the fiery pain of a steel blade penetrate his gut. Poisoned!

"Egoliah sends this word: He knows you tried to kill him. Now you die instead." Kavan twisted the blade and took a step back to leave before Arcadian recovered.

Murdach felt the poison already taking effect, causing him to become disoriented and cold. So the old fool knew? Ah well, if he couldn't kill the one who sent the message, he could kill the messenger himself.

With reflexes and focus that only a few men would ever possess in healthy perfection, let alone heavily wounded and poisoned, Murdach slung the poisoned bolt he had in his hand at Kavan. It punctured the man's shoulder. "You die too," he said.

Kavan looked in shock at the shaft protruding from his arm. Ripping it free, he turned and pushed past Arcadian and staggered down the stairs, hoping this poison was one he was immune to.

Undaunted, Murdach still set out to finish his mission. Apparently Kubudei's assassination was a giant ruse that was not needed. Bait to lure Murdach into the trap. If the president's death would hinder Egoliah's plans, so be it. He fumbled for another bolt and loaded it. Before he shot, however, he turned to check on the incapacitated banou.

But Arcadian had recovered. He remembered his vision. In fulfillment of that prophecy, he heard a voice in his head, a female voice.

***
## Rules, Rulings

This ends the entire Act. I can’t remember who leveled last time. If you leveled at the end of the last act, you don’t level this time. Otherwise, you have gone up a level.

Everyone will level up after the next act. It’ll be funnn.

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rules, Rulings</th>
<th>Act IV, Scene VII, Last Part – Belly of the Beast</th>
<th>Commentary</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Far across the desert, near Teph, Ameesha fell into a trance. Her mind warned her that one of her prophecies was transpiring, the one about Myr-atotch’s demise at the hands of the Vakeros. | **Introducing:**
| She had sent the vision to him when she herself saw it initially. She only hoped that he would hear and understand what he needed to do. She stretched out with her mind, her psychic abilities far beyond the petty confines of proximity or familiarity. In Chahdan she found him. She saw boxes within a box, and two forms: one blue, one black. | Lady Ameesha
Daughter of Kubudei, Lady Ameesha is said to have astonishing psychic ability.

Although her rescue is the main objective of our companions, this is the first time she appears in *The Enemy of My Enemy*. |
| She focused on the blue one. *NOW!* she shouted mentally. | |
| * * * | |
| Arcadian heard the word in his mind, and he knew what to do. Blades would not avail him here. His magic would. He repeated his earlier spell of Penetrate, noticing that Murdach was right beside a window. | |
| The magical energy pulsed across the room in an instant, striking the assassin squarely in the chest. Arcadian had no knowledge of Murdach’s poisoning, or that the assassin was dizzy and unbalanced as it was. The blast of magical energy was his doom. | |
| Like a stone slamming into him, Murdach felt the shockwave of magic carry him off the ground and through the window. It shattered and he fell twenty feet before catching the edge of the roof of the first floor. The jolt spun him like a rag doll tossed into the air, and he landed hard on the compressed sand below, breaking his neck instantly. | |
| Sharnazim rushed to the body as commanders barked orders. Kubudei was surrounded by his own riders and almost dragged off his horse. Horns and whistles sounded all around, and before Kubudei was taken inside, he saw a familiar face standing in the window from where the man had fallen. It was that Vakeros that Ihm’razir had captured during the Oina a-Barouta! The president began frantically telling his officers to let the Vassagonians know not to harm the Vakeros. | |
| | **Commentary** |
| Sir Victor was the first to leave the window. “They’re bringing Kubudei in here! Let’s go!” | Lady Ameesha
Introducing:
Lady Ameesha (NPC)
Daughter of Kubudei, Lady Ameesha is said to have astonishing psychic ability.

Although her rescue is the main objective of our companions, this is the first time she appears in *The Enemy of My Enemy*. |
| They rushed down the stairs and as they entered the warehouse from the tower, panic washed over everyone but Kubudei. Everyone around him drew weapons and some even ran for reinforcements, but the president assured everyone that these people were not dangerous. Indeed, they were special friends and envoys of Kubudei! | |
| Thinking quickly, Sir Victor bowed to the president slightly and spoke. “Sir, our companions are near! Arcadian is in that tower there, and there are three others possibly nearby that cannot be harmed!” | |
| Kubudei listened to the descriptions and then turned the reinforcements that entered around to go find these three outlanders. | |
| Korlaeth shot nervous glances at his two companions. Simyn shrugged weakly, and Valestar simply narrowed his eyes and fumed inwardly. Within a few minutes, an uproar sounded outside, and the Vassagonians left by Miz’raheen looked at one another in confusion and anxiety. They stayed put, however. | |
| A contingent of Sharnazim entered the room running a minute or two later, followed by Miz’raheen. | |
| Great, thought Korlaeth. This is it. “Release these three!” shouted the commander instead. Instantly the Dessi and Lyrisi were freed and escorted out. | |
Kailord

Rules, Rulings

Act V Avatar

The Enemy of My Enemy

Act V

Opening: The Red Sands of Vassagonia

Reunited at last.

All the companions were gathered together in one room. Some had fared worse than others. Arcadian had numerous wounds, which had been treated by a couple of Kivosha. Korlaeth had rope burns around his neck and wrists. And Valester gripped his wizard's staff so tightly his knuckles turned white.

The body of Murdach was brought in, and the city commander of the Sharnazim had arrived. At his order, the building was locked down and secured for an impromptu debriefing and meeting on next-move plans. Sharnazim stood everywhere, inside and outside.

In an effort to keep order, Kubudei was taken into the tower and the adventurers were brought in to sit before him and the commander one by one. Each was asked to state what he—or she—knew of what had happened, and to give an account of their actions and whereabouts.

For the next couple of hours, the interrogations continued. Kubudei learned much, but he was not persuaded that Cloeasia was innocent of wrongdoing. Despite the suspicions raised by the testimonies of the adventurers he had hired to find his daughter—and those they had encountered and gained along the way—he was sure that the reports he had received were accurate.

After all, Vassagonia herself was arrayed against Cloeasia in a formidable blockade, and they had even given millions of Crowns in aid to Anari. War and peace would be decided by those who had the most at stake, not by the musings of a few adventurers on the trail of the princess.

Kubudei was uplifted that she had just this day contacted one of the male Vakeros, yet he was dismayed to learn that her location was still a mystery. According to what they had learned just now, she was headed to Teph. Though it sounded strange that the destination of this Cloeasian group was Teph, he was bolstered by the knowledge that they would encounter the blockade of Vassagonia's troops.

He could only move as fast as his army could, but these adventurers would be able to move much faster. They could reach the blockade and get word of any captured Cloeasians, then return that word to him before he arrived. Three of them were still duty-bound to find his daughter, and so he would use them as scouts to Teph.

Kubudei conferred with the city commander for a few moments, then left the tower to address the adventurers in the warehouse below.

“You all have my thanks for your efforts so far, especially you, Arcadian. You have yet to find my daughter, but you have kept me safe so that I may live to see her again.”

And with that, the president touched his heart, his forehead, then extended his open head and bowed. This drew whispers among the Anari in the room, for this was an act of homage and respect—something that a person should express toward Kubudei himself, not something the president should extend to another person.

“I remind you now that you are still duty-bound to find my daughter. According to your suspicions, she rides to Teph. As you may or may not know, Vassagonia has moved her military into position around Cloeasia. Any group who tries to enter Teph will be subject to capture, as they must pass through this blockade.

“Therefore I wish to ask you to ride ahead as scouts to Teph. Commander Sha’ra-fet here will provide you with the appropriate paperwork that will allow you freedom of movement through the desert and the blockade. If you should find word of my daughter’s safety, ride back to the south and you will find my army marching north. Bring her to me at that time.

“You should not find any word of her, it is your choice to either enter Teph and search for her, or seek her out in the open desert. Though I must confess—the latter is not the way unless you take guides with you. The Dry Main is harsh even to its own nomadic tribes, let alone outsiders.

“Commander Sha’ra-fet has also agreed to let you submit to him a request for a weapon type or armor that you prefer. He will then check the garrison’s private acquisitions and holding rooms for such an item.

“In addition, I have authorized payment of 750 Crowns apiece to each of you out of Anari’s treasury. I ask that you use it to buy whatever provisions you need and set forth as soon as possible.”

With that, he dismissed himself, and a flurry of activity ensued. Guards escorted him as he made his way back outside, moving along in a sturdy wagon through the rest of town instead of on open horseback. A man came forward, dressed in Anari finery, and gave each of the companions a sack of coins. Behind him was Commander Sha’ra-fet himself, dispensing scrollcases which contained the documents Kubudei had mentioned. A squad of Sharnazim then came forward and—under the commander’s orders—“offered” to escort the group back to wherever they were staying, so they could prepare for their assignment.

Far away from Chahdan, in the secret training school of the Kivosha, one of the eldest teachers was in meditation when he felt his mind being pulled across the sands. Only once before had he felt the Sand Mother's Caress, the soothing cool winds that the spirit rode upon when it saw visions of the future.

Now, it took him to the western regions of Vassagonia, to the farthest sections of the Dry Main. Storm clouds gathered quietly in the sky, blotting out the sun. Rain fell, cool at first. Sin-va’tel closed his eyes and turned his face upwards. The cooling rain suddenly stopped. Wiping his eyes, the elderly magician opened them and looked at the heavens.

A glittering scimitar of the finest silver, longer than the tallest spire of Barrakeesh, hovered far above him, at the base of the clouds. Four bolts of lightning struck from the four compass directions, and the scimitar began to dance around, its curved blade slicing through the clouds themselves. Rain fell again as the blade vanished and reappeared in its dance amidst the skies. Only the rain was warm, heavier than usual.

Sin-va’tel looked at his outstretched hands and noticed they were being covered with droplets of blood, falling from the skies. The dry yellowish-white sands around him quickly became saturated with the hemorrhaging heavens. The sands of Vassagonia ran with blood, and as the life-giving fluid spilled into the lifeless sands, untold legions of the dead began to rise and claw their way out of their sandy graves. They grasped at the falling droplets, crying aloud in raspy whispers, “Mine!”

Millions of cadavers joined the chorus, and the roar of the dead became deafening.

“Mine! Mine! Mine!”

Sin-va’tel cried aloud in agony and fear, calling upon the Sand Mother to release him. Looking skyward, he saw the silver scimitar fully crimson with the color of blood. It was saturated with the color, as if it was itself made of some reddish metal. With blinding speed, it shot off toward the east and plunged into a crystal blue ocean.

A wall of water washed across the land as a vast mushrooming cloud of steam billowed skyward from the weapon’s penetration of the waters. Sin-va’tel was swept away in the wave, away from the red sands of Vassagonia, away from his terrifying vision.
Act V, Opening – The Red Sands of Vassagonia

He awoke to find himself drenched in water. Other elder Kivosha were in the room, trying to revive him by splashing him with urns of chilled water. They called his name and asked about his condition as he sat upright, dazed, remembering the vision.

"A prophecy," he said. "A single storm from the blood of four multitudes. And the ocean claims the desert. The crimson scimitar is our doom."

His head slumped forward, and his eyes rolled into his head. Sin-vael fell, never to again be revived....

Cade had said nothing much since their reunion although Sol and the others had managed to gather at least the basics regarding what had gone on beneath the city.

Sol Hawk’s meeting with Kubudei had been likewise terse. The President had indeed demonstrated his gratitude with a hefty pouch of cash, but Sol Hawk wished he had said more about why he had come to Chadan. Sol Hawk did not push the point, however, for the presence of the army itself already said more than Kubudei needed to say.

With the President’s approval, Sol Hawk sent forth a second message to his Kai Masters in Sommerlund. It was encoded, as had been the last one, and it detailed everything that had happened on the way to Chadan. Sol Hawk shuddered at the idea that he had not survived the brutal circumstances of the desert that the Lords of the Kai would possibly have never known the going-on in this southern realm. Now they would know it all - the death of Aymodan, the attempt on Kubudei’s life, and the treachery of Murdash and those called The Raged. The Kai would know all of this. This time, a pair of the finest Sommerlending Hawks were delivered into Sol’s hands - these birds were trained to return to the Kai Monastery itself.

Should one bird fail to make it, the other would likely do so. The Kai would know. They had to know. Untrained as he was in diplomatic matters, even Sol Hawk realized the repercussions that could come of an action such as this in the land of the Sand Mother.

Quietly, during his training, Sol Hawk finally acknowledged what the God Kai had granted him - the rank of Savant. At first, Sol Hawk had been unsure of this, but soon, the gradual improvement of his Kai Skills transformed naturally into the acquisition of new powers. His Sixth Sense was sharpening. He was able to move with greater ease than before. And the twin scimitars that had become his favourite weapons were now more and more like extensions of his own arms. He practiced with Sir Victor, Cade, and Simyn. Each of them had had something to teach him about the blade. It was not long before Sol Hawk absorbed the lessons and took on almost a quiet empathy with his weapons as well.

Having returned from his purchases, Sol Hawk again joined the others back at the inn where they had been only the night before.

For the first time in what seemed like an eternity Simyn took the opportunity to enjoy himself. As they were waiting for their departure he had taken the liberty to explore the city. He had searched for interesting books and parchments, but had settled with buying some potions of laumspur. All of his equipment had been returned to him and the sage was already well equipped for the travel ahead. He had his rapier and his poignard crafted by the best craftsmen in Quarlen, weapons he wore proudly. Simyn had also sparred with Sol Hawk and had really enjoyed the match. The sage had praised the Kai Lord’s skill with the scimitar and also had given the Kai Lord some pointers when Sol had asked for it. Simyn didn’t think his advice was much worth though, though Sol Hawk was already an accomplished swordsman and seemed to improve with every day passing.

One day Simyn presented the mage Valestar with a small gift: the vial containing an air elemental that they had found in the cave in the desert. Since the sage suspected that the vial had Desli origins, he thought that no one would be better equipped at taking care of the precious but dangerous object.

Korlaeth had recovered well and quickly from his Vassagonian imprisonment, and had thanked President Kubudei for both his freedom and the money. He had slightly altered the black fabric of a sharnazin uniform so as not to offend him with the continuation of his use, but he had found it to be quite comfortable in this desert climate. In addition, it provided a ready disguise and hid well his blue-steel chain.

The reuniting with those who were fast becoming friends was joyful and problematic. Korlaeth and Arcadian seemed content to act for now as if the event had not existed, while Valestar had withdrawn inside himself since the theft and return of his staff.

Korlaeth had enjoyed participating briefly in sparring with Simyn and Sol, using his recently reacquired blue-steel blade. While he could neither match Simyn in skill with a rapier, nor Sol Hawk in skill with the scimitar, his versatility made up somewhat for his lack of expertise.

He wandered the city briefly, blending in with the locals and searching for any tidbits of information that may later prove useful.

"No, not like that Sol," Arcadian reprimanded the young Kai. The Vakeros could hear Kamilah stilling a giggle at his frustration.

"If you want to bring your blade in overhead like that you need to hold your offhand sword here," Arcadian showed him, using his own dual blades.

"That way your opponent cannot slice you open from underneath."

In all truth, Arcadian was tiring. Sol Hawk possessed undying constitution and stamina. No matter what grueling sword practices Arcadian put Sol through the Kai managed to return him blow for blow.

"Enough for now," Arcadian finally said. "Let us rest."

Arcadian sat down and took a long draught from cool water. He knew that they would be leaving for Teph soon. But the Vakeros was enjoying a slight rest in the meantime.

Suddenly a slight tremor ran through Arcadian’s bones. He shivered visibly and both Kamilah and Sol looked upon him in concern. The Vakeros quickly excused himself and walked away from the others, his hand upon his forehead. As soon as Arcadian was out of sight he fell to his knees, groaning. He drew his arms around his sides, which were now beginning to ache. He felt as if his whole body was on fire, each and every one of his muscles contracted. Arcadian gritted his teeth, trying to ride the pain out. Veins on his neck and forehead bulged, threatening to pop.

The pain, it consumed him. Arcadian felt white lances of energy snap and crackle around his body. He stared down at the ground, breathing heavily. Suddenly Arcadian leaped to his feet and threw an angry punch at a nearby wall. His hand went straight through it.... Arcadian stared down at his hand in disbelief. He felt...invigorated, renewed.

Arcadian had heard of Valestar’s power to overcome impossible feats of strength and stamina using battle magic. It seemed that Arcadian had just gained this ability himself.

After giving himself a few moments to calm down Arcadian walked back to the others. He would have to be careful with this ability. He had thought that his anger would die with Murdash...but Arcadian’s soul was not at rest. He quickly shrugged off any concerned glance with a half-smile.
His eyes glanced towards Koriath. The bruise upon his chin had long-since disappeared, but the memory remained. Arcadian tried to bite his tongue but found I could not do so.

"How about you, son of the hidden school? Would you like a lesson in swordsmanship?"

Arcadian was taunting, and he knew it.   
* * *

While Valestar had withdrawn into himself for the most part after their rescue. He had felt somewhat uncomfortable when the President had arrived, and had noticed that the man had cast a critical eye over him and Hawkeye, the newcomers to the team...  
... the team. Valestar was both pleased and annoyed to be considered part of it. On the one hand, no one had asked him whether he intended to stay or leave. They had assumed he was coming and had informed the President as such. On the other hand, he had nothing better to do, and he had learned more about himself in the last few days than he had expected he would learn on this entire journey. If anything, that told him that he had to stay with the group. And Varsuvial seemed happy to have found some more friends.

He had stayed away from Arcadian and Kamilah, afraid that the voice inside of him, silent for a long while now, would awaken again. Soi Hawk was spending a lot of time with Hawkeye, which he supposed made sense, as they were both Kai Monks. However, it also made it hard to start conversations that didn’t have to do with past missions or old mentors, especially when he didn’t know what he wanted to say in the first place. He asked Koriath for news of home, but the Vakengos hadn’t been to Dessi in a long time, as he worked mostly to protect their foreign interests. Sir Victor proved to speak little and converse less. He spent most of his time training and exercising his body, things which Valestar had little interest in.

The one member of the team he did talk to was the Sage Simyn, who was an excellent conversationalist and knew enough knowledge to surprise Valestar, even though he himself had studied books and histories for most of his life. When Simyn presented him with the Air Elemental Vial, Valestar accepted his gift eagerly and asked the Sage if he would take anything in return. He also asked for Simyn to tell him more about their finding of the Air elemental, he had some knowledge of it through his studies of elementalism.

Aside from this, Valestar did little. He didn’t really explore the city, staying mostly with the group. He didn’t accompany Simyn to a weapon’s shop and ended up buying both a shortsword and a crossbow. While Mages weren’t trained in the use of any weapons besides their quarterstaff, Valestar felt that after his escapade with the Sharnazim, he would want something to support the Sharnazim, he would have useless to him unless he was once his magic ran out, and these weapons would hopefully balance out. Simyn was kind enough to give him a few lessons in the use of his sword and crossbow, though he cancelled the lessons when Valestar almost shot a bolt into the Sage’s foot.

* * *

As he met with president Kudubel, Sir Victor held nothing back from the Anarian ruler, presenting all the facts as he knew them, without embellishing them with rumours and hearsay. The President would know what to do with the information, and it wasn’t the knight’s place to ask that he take any particular course of action, especially since he was a foreigner.

He could see that some of this information wasn’t concurrent with all of the intelligence gathered previously by the President’s scouts, and the ruler was more inclined to trust his own men than hired warriors from distant lands, which was far enough in Sir Victor’s eyes. Since president Kudubel wanted to keep their services, because the princess was not yet rescued, this only meant that they’d have to work harder to uncover the truth behind the lies and deceit in this strange land of sand and scimitars.

Later, when he retired in his room, the pious knight prayed to Kai and Ishir, asking them for forgiveness for his sins and guidance for the coming ordeal. They would have to cross the Dry Hain on their way to Teoph, a hard journey which would already have its share of dangers without the current political climate. In his prayer, the knight vowed to uphold the Code of Honour and to forever more always utter the pure and unadulterated truth. No deceitful words or half-truths would issue from his lips anymore, or else how could they ever uncover what was really going on behind the scenes in this country? His honour demanded nothing less.

At peace with himself, the knight went to bed and slept uneventfully throughout the knight.

The next day saw many preparations for the coming journey, and Sir Victor also found the time to train with his fellow warriors, especially Sol Hawk, who wanted more practice with his twin scimitar fighting style. He was a fast learner, and his skill with the technique literally grew before their eyes.

"Good, thought the knight, we’ll need all of our skill at arms soon."

* * *

While Sol Hawk and Arcadian practiced dual-weapon fighting, the others looked on. Before sunrise, they had all relocated to this warehouse, and a regiment of Anari soldiers stood guard outside. Though they liked to think it was for their protection, they knew also that it was to make certain they departed as required.

Arcadian had studied about the Sharnazim enough during his time in Dessi to know of the twin scimitar style" that higher ranks in the military were trained in. Through years of training and discipline, every Sharnazim became skilled in an art that others would sometimes never master in their entire lives.

He and the Kai knew that something inside them had awakened, had progressed and made them stronger. Soi Hawk was developing a kinship with the scimitar that rivaled a native-born Vassagonian. Whereas most people would use it for hacking and find its curved length awkward due to the slight delay in contact that straight swords would provide, the Kai learned that wrist technique and proper follow-through were vital. He had discovered the usefulness of the curvature for both deflecting weapons on the bladed side, and hooking and disarming weapons on the reverse side.

In addition, he was now able to twist the blade and lock it into the notch of bone on the inner part of the back of his elbow.

Sir Victor kept apart from the rest, his mind coming to grips with certain maxims and axioms of his own code of beliefs. He realized that lying was something beneath him now, that it was nothing more than the shadow which tried to avoid the source of light in the world. Kai and Ishir had graced him with overwhelming external strength, and so it was left to him to develop overwhelming internal strength. He looked at his hands and realized that for every hand that gripped a sword in truth, dozens clenched their weapons in opposition to that truth.

Hawkeye meditated in his own way, silently to one side of the vast room. He opened himself to any new teachings of Kai, but none came to him this day. Perhaps soon he would feel the stirring of another latent discipline within. Until that time, he would seek guidance and follow.

Kamilah had fallen into one of the introverted spells that Arcadian himself suffered. She expressed little emotion to anyone but him, and then it was only a slight offering at best. She was not brooding or moody, just...detached. No one questioned Cade about her, for they knew how his protective temper about her could flare. She was his charge, and be she burden or blessing to the group, they were not getting rid of her.

Simyn and Valestar sat in talk about myriad subjects, gaining respect and knowledge through conversation. Even on topics they debated and disagreed upon, the two men were wise enough to know that even when contrary to everything they were taught, the opinion of another—however flawed or foolish to the listener—gave insight into that person and their beliefs. Too many people condemned based on “who” or “what” rather than learning “why” or “how”.

The gift of the air elemental in the small glass vial was tremendous. Valestar waited till he was alone and tried to commune with it using what limited language of the elementals, he had some knowledge of it through his studies of elementalism.

The gift of the air elemental in the small glass vial was tremendous. Valestar waited till he was alone and tried to commune with it using what limited knowledge he had about such things. He knew a bit about extraplanar matters, but not as much as some of his fellow mages. He asked the creature inside about its situation, and a sound like an angry storm came to his mind. Winds blew and whisked, distant thunder rumbled, and inside the transparent vial, the tiniest flickers of lightning appeared, like a capture firefly. Valestar looked around—no one could hear it but him.

He made out only one word, blaming his lack of understanding on his fledgling knowledge: “Trap”

He began to think how an elemental could be trapped. It would have to be summoned to a small pocket of its element, surrounded by another element. Perhaps the bottle was submerged in a pool of water? But to hold it in the container would take some sort of magic he was not familiar with.
Act V, Opening – The Red Sands of Vassagonia

It could be Dessi in design, but... Valestar inhaled sharply. Could the bottle be Shianti in craft? There was no way to study it without breaking the seal and releasing the elemental, and Simyn had told him it was an angry elemental and would attack the closest person at the time it opened or broke....

A horn sounded in the distance. Sunrise across the horizon. At once the Anari troops outside the warehouse entered. The commander walked up to Sir Victor. "Sir Knight, it is time for all of you to depart. May the gods sweep enemies from your path."

--------

As they departed Chahdan (none too soon for some of them), the group noticed that Koubudil's army had taken up camp on the north side of the city. They passed through the Anari encampment, amazed at how many people would be pressing through the sands.

They were stopped for questioning only once, at the perimeter of the army, by the lead officer. He acknowledged their paperwork and bowed to them out of respect. He gave each of them a qarinafah*, and bid them safely, informing them that the army would be moving out later in the day.

The hours passed, and the rationing of food and water began with the first meals of the day. By noontime, the qarinafahs were proving immeasurably valuable. The fabric effectively blocked the sunlight and kept it cooler than expected.

Still, travel by day was grueling for the non-natives to this region. It was humiliating to think that entire tribes of people, including toddlers and weak aged folk, moved through this barren environment and called it home.

A calm uneventful night passed. To the south, the companions could see the fires of the Anari encampment on the horizon. As time wore on, they should pull further and further away from the army, which would require large amounts of time to set and break camp every day, as well as distribute provisions from the numerous wagons that stayed in the midst of the army.

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The second day came, and despite the conditions they were in, most everyone was in good spirits. They had survived their first day of open desert. Around noon, a scattering of clouds mercifully blocked some of the sunlight. The northlanders were reminded that the further north they went, the more clouds they were likely to see. It was refreshing.

At noon, Hawkeye was riding a bit forward of their position to scout when he saw something on the horizon. Sand storm? All he could make out was a yellowish-white haze on the northern horizon. He rode back to camp and spoke of what he saw. Simyn volunteered to ride with him and use his spyglass to look at the coming storm.

The sage extended the device and adjusted the focus. The glare veil of his qarinafah was not allowing him to see clearly, so he pulled it back. The unfiltered glare was painful to look at in the magnification, but necessary.

"A storm would stretch from horizon to horizon, most likely. This is confined to a large area, but not a regional one like a storm. The cloud isn't high either—I'd think a sandstorm would be more violent." He looked one moment longer, then lowered the eyeglass in disbelief and raised it again.

"What?" said the Kai.

"There's a dark line on the horizon, between the desert and the sandstorm."

The two looked at one another simultaneously. "Riders," they said in unison, then turned their mounts around and raced back to camp.

* * *

Valestar was thankful that he had the company with him. They were now heading further away from Dessi than he had originally planned, but he now knew that his plans had changed. And his main goal now was to get out of the desert as soon as possible. Riding across it was, of course, the fastest way, but he doubted he would've survived out here without the group.

He was also thankful for the odd robes he had been given. They made the sun bearable and the journey was almost comfortable. They didn't eat quite as much as he hoped they would. Few would guess it, but he loved to eat, and considered himself something of a connoisseur of food.

On the second day of their journey, the voice emerged again. The last thing Valestar heard was Hawkeye telling him he had seen something, then suddenly all went black. The voice came to him out of the darkness.

"Mage... we have much to discuss..." it said.

"Who are you?"

"That will come later. For now, you must know that these people will be the death of you. You will not survive this desert in their company."

"What do you mean?"

"Red Riders approach. The bringers of blood and agony. They will find you and TEAR and RIP and SHRED your skin and bones. You will feel pain such as you never have before and you will DIE."

"You have no more power over me! Be gone! I repent for my earlier sins! Death holds no more fear for me!"

The voice laughed. "Lies, and you know it. Beware, Mage, for your judgement is close at hand. And without me you shall not survive the encounter."

Valestar felt he was falling. The ground was shaking, though he couldn't see it. And then he awoke. One of the party members was shaking him awake. Hawkeye had returned.

* * *

"So that's it. We're expecting a sand storm but before it hits us we'll be run over by riders. Their intent is not known, but I'll bet my last gold crown that they are up to no good and meeting them would be certain death. So what do we do? Either we can try to find some shelter and hope that it protects us both from the storm and the riders. Perhaps we could ride through them and use the storm as cover. I've heard some things about the desert during my travels here, but I'm not sure of my ability of surviving that storm. I wish that the Telcho Makala was still with us. What you have told me about his abilities he would have been a resource if it's to the desert."
Rules, Rulings

Act V, Opening – The Red Sands of Vassagonia

“Unfortunately, I don’t have any magic which can help us determine its cause,” Valestar said, still shaken by his odd dream. “But I am in agreement with Simyn that it can’t be anything good. How far do you think the Anari army is from us? Could they be the final destination of these riders?”

He shivered. The dream had said riders in red.

“Riders.”

Arcadian pulled the hood of the sprinfal down over his eyes. When facing the unknown the Vakeros tended to hide his eyes until the moment of striking came. Arcadian knew that you could discern much about a man through his eyes.

The Vakeros’ right hand instinctively lowered to his sword. His fingers grasped the hilt, pulling the blade upwards an inch. It was loose in its sheath...ready to be pulled should the need arise.

Arcadian was no stranger to the desert. As a warrior of Dessi his countrymen had often fought with the northern Vassa. Long before this day he had crossed swords with the nomads of the southern provinces. Arcadian knew how to fight the Vassan, but he hated fighting on their land. The Vassan had specially breeded horses that moved swiftly through the sands. And their warband techniques gave them advantage among the rolling sand-drifts.

“Should we ride to meet them or wait for them to come?” And then in resolution, “no matter what happens. Do not let them surround us.”

Without wasting any time, Hawkeye strained his eyes across the desert sand, trying to identify any possible sand dunes or the likes from which to take cover from the approaching riders.

The riders were too far for the group to be able to identify or determine their intent but that also meant that they still have time to prepare; to hide or to confront them, weapons drawn or not, only time will tell.

After listening to Hawk Eye and Simyn’s report, Sir Victor squinted to see in the distance, but beyond a vague disturbance, could not make out the far shapes of the riders. One thing was for sure however, the width of the approaching column told him there were quite a few of them headed this way, enough to threaten an army possibly.

“What else did you make out? Any standard, or distinctive feature?, he asked of his companions. “They could very well be riding for the Anarian army. One, preferably two of us, for increased safety, must ride back to warn President Kubudei of this impending danger to his forces. This bodes ill.” said the knight grimly.

Hawkeye gazed to the north, toward the cloud. It was getting larger, as in getting wider. He looked around their chosen campsite for something that would provide cover for them. Aside from numerous small dunes, the Dry Main had nothing unique or strategic to offer them.

“This is not good,” he said simply. “That cloud is kicked-up sand from hundreds of horses. That line is over a mile wide and closing fast.”

Hawkeye cringed. Hiding in the sand would only mean getting trampled. Not to mention their horses and provisions being affected.

Varsuvial brayed, his loud whiny cry breaking the tense silence almost sounding like “Hey YOU, Hey YOU.” Valestar shooshed him and shrugged impatiently at the others. “Well?”

“Could we flank them? How about splitting up in two groups, one trying to flank them on the left side and the other on the right side?” Simyn said as Sir Victor returned the sage’s precious spyglass.

“I imagine they far outnumber us. Even if we could surround them, we would lose that battle. But what about hiding? These cloaks are supposed to offer some concealment, right? Ah, but then there’s Varsuvial and the horses...” He stopped and thought for a while, trying to ease his nerves. “Could it be,” he said at last. “That our experiences have made us paranoid? Perhaps these Riders have their own business and do not wish to disturb us at all!” even as he said it, it sounded flat, but it was a possibility. “Maybe we shouldn’t be the first to strike,” he said. “For war can only breed war, but with diplomacy, there is a hope of peace.”

Simyn laughed. “Perhaps I was a bit unclear. I meant that we should try to ride around them by riding around them on their flanks. I have no will to fight these overwhelming odds.”

Valexar laughed as well. “That sounds very diplomatic! I say we do that!”

“Our small group could probably avoid them undetected, but the same can’t be said of President Kubudei’s army, which lies right in the path of this incoming juggernaut. Whether this horde is friendly or not towards the Anarian forces, as acting scouts for the President, we must report swiftly, so that our allies will be prepared in case these riders mean them ill.” The knight paused, observing the companions. “I doubt I would be the lightest and swiftest rider to carry these news, but I will do it if no one else volunteers for the task.”

“This army is not interested in us,” said Sol Hawk, “they clearly have a larger target in mind. We must do as Simyn has said and simply get out of their way. Our hoods make us appear to be average travellers. So let us go now and not be here when they arrive.”

Sol Hawk led by action, moving his camels by the shortest route to a place out of the oncoming army’s path.

“Is there a way to deliver the message to Kubudei without riding back to that way? The distance is greater than a day’s ride.”

“I fear the Riders would be upon us before we could get them a message,” spoke Valestar. “Besides, Kubadei has his own scouts, surely they’ll notice the army before long? And they are better equipped to deal with them. I say that our top priority here is to carry out our mission. Nothing should side track us from that.”
From the companions, a trumpet sounded in five staccato blasts. Then it repeated. In the distance, far behind, another horn signaled the same way. The group turned to see who was causing this noise, and a lone rider came rushing toward them, riding a horse the color of the sand. In his qarinahfah, he was nearly invisible.

"Hail to you in the name of Anari," he said as he stopped abruptly in a spray of sand. The others noticed his attire and qarinahfah were a unique style, making him hard to see against the sand. Anari scouts were well-prepared, it seemed.

"Several of us were sent to trail you, and are even spaced back to the army itself, a couple of hours from here." Seeing Sol Hawk's raised eyebrows, he nodded, "Yes, we move fast. The sooner we finish this, the sooner we may rest easily. Kubudei has had us on rapid forced march since before daybreak."

He gestured ahead. "And now this."

"We were guaranteed clear passage to the lines at Teph. This is abnormal, and a rather large abnormality at that." He patted a horn at his side. "Fear not--our light cavalry will be here in half an hour at most. Until then, we must hide."

Another rider came up from behind him. "I have alerted Kanev, he should be next to come." This rider was similarly dressed. Apparently, as they passed the warning from one to another, the scouts rode ahead to regroup at the lead.

"Sol, I have heard that Kai lords have some sense of impending danger." he gazed at the Kai for a response, "Do these riders bode us ill?"

"Quite no—their light cavalry will be here in half an hour at most. Until then, we must hide."

Just as he was about to move further on, he heard the loud horns. He went back to the others, looking in the direction of the sound and saw a rider approaching. Anari scout. He listened while the scout explained to them their situation and waited for the others to speak their minds.

"Let's ride then!" Simyn said. He patted his horse. "This reminds me when Starfall and I first met you. I had been riding quite hard and I was nothing was coming. However...

"Sol Hawk turned to Koralthe. "I do not believe the oncoming army means us ill... but we are not wise to stay here, either, for they are likely to change their minds if they believe we can provide any tactical information to them. They are no doubt planning to clash with Kubudei... somehow, they have received word of his coming-I do not doubt that they are without the means to do so. I expect that Kubudei already suspects their coming as well, but..." he turns to the Anarian Scout, "...you will see that Kubudei is told the latest immediately, will you not, brave brother? What is your name?"

Everyone in the group was moving now, soon to be out of the direct path of the oncoming army. Sol Hawk's next hope was that a detachment would not be sent to meet with them, interrogate them, or any other such dangerous inconvenience. He turned once more to the brave Anarian Ranger.

"You said we should hide. Please, lead the way." Sol Hawk was very curious to see what chance they had to hide themselves considering the vast expanse of sand. The Kai Lord's eyes searched, too, for any hint of a cave or a dune, wondering what the brave Ranger had in mind and hoping that he was more accustomed to life on the sands than he.

Valestar pulled his hood tight and, taking Varsuvial's reigns, led him after Simyn.

Simyn began to think about what he did know about the geography of Vassagonia. Which way would be the best to avoid the army? West or east?

Koralthe pulled his light-colored cloak well around him as he looked at the scout that had joined them and nodded.

As they debated which way to ride, Simyn told them that moving west would only take them away from their goal. The logical choice would be east. The scout agreed, noting that going west would take everyone into Warlord Anzi's domain, and he did not take kindly to outsiders.

As everyone broke camp, a couple more scouts rode up. At that point, the lead scout (the one what had been closest to the group) spoke. "They've stopped moving."

They had been spotted by the riders, and now they themselves were being scammed.

Taking the opportunity, everyone began to ride east as quickly as they could. This was hindered by Varsuvial and the amount of provisions. It appeared as though Valestar's faithful animal friend was rather disappointed that they were sinking away. Two of the scouts joined them as they rode.

To the south, they saw the up-kick of sand from the Anari light cavalry. To the north, the dark army stayed unmoving. One of the scouts called for the group of adventurers to stop a few minutes into their eastward travel.

"Look there, on top of that tall dune, quickly!"

Simyn reigned Starfall and checked where the scout was pointing.

"* * *"
**Act V, Opening – The Red Sands of Vassagonia**

One of the scouts called for the group of adventurers to stop a few minutes into their eastward travel.  

"Look there, on top of that tall dune, quickly!"

Hawkeye looked towards where the scout was pointing, and focused his vision to see better.

* * *

Valestar squinted into the dust and sand, trying to see what the scout was pointing at.

* * *

Sir Victor was relieved when the Anarion scouts rode up to them. Of course President Kubudei would have his own men out in the field as well. Good for them. Now the companions could concentrate on their mission.

Since Simyn knew the local geography, the group headed for the shortest path to Teph, East, while avoiding the riders, who had now stopped to observe them. The scouts rode with them for a few moments until one of them shouted a warning, drawing their attention to the top of a sand dune.

* * *

Korlaeth stopped at the scout’s warning and tried to hide his growing unease as he gazed up at the dune.

* * *

As they approached the dune, Sol Hawk opened his mind in order to determine if indeed there was any danger nearby, then said to the Scout, "What is it?"

* * *

Only two of the group saw anything of interest on top of the tall dune ridge. One of the riders did, though. "Who were they?"

The lead scout held out his arm to halt as Sol Hawk opened himself up to danger. Using his Kai disciplines he detected nothing beyond what he would normally see—different visions of the items and weapons each of them had that were lethal, a sand asp hiding behind a dune to the left, and not much more.

"Everyone stay here," said the lead scout. "I must go check this out alone."

He rode to the base of the tall dune ridge and dismounted, slowly walking up the hill halfway, then dropping to a crawl.

Behind them, the Anarion cavalry advanced faster. The dust cloud began to boom large, and a brownish tinged line of horses could be seen on the southern horizon. Behind them, perhaps a few minutes distant, another cloud was forming.

"That is the sand-sign of our heavy riders and the bulk of the army," explained one of the scouts, noticing that it had drawn the attention of a couple of the companions. "The light cavalry will ride to assess the threat, and the heavy riders will ride behind them, looking for signal flags from the light riders. Based on where the flags are raised, the heavy horse will divert to either a lance attack up the middle, a pincer attack from the sides, a wide angled flank like a vice, or a half dozen other specialized formations."

Horns sounded from the north, drawing everyone's attention that way. "They've begun moving again," said another scout, "charging toward our people. Is it Sharnazim? Have they betrayed us?"

"Likely so," said the other scout, grim-faced at the prospect. "We should go be with them."

He moved his horse anxiously, looking toward his captain at the top of the sand dune. "My lord, please hurry."

* * *

Sol Hawk looked to the others as the scouts turned to leave. "We are being given an opportunity to complete our mission," he said to Sir Victor, "We need to hurry and complete the mission that Kubudei assigned to us. If these warriors come from Teph, our chances of getting into that city have improved greatly since the bulk of the military appears to be here. Whatever the outcome is here, we cannot waste this opportunity. We must avoid the oncoming fray. We must ride."

* * *

"The Kai Lord speaks wisdom," Valestar said, still struggling with Varsuvial. "This is not a retreat of cowardice, but an attack of opportunity! We must not let this chance go by! We should make haste!"

* * *

"Yes, quickly. To be caught here now, is only folly. The armies will resolve this battle themselves and ours needs resolve in Teph. This is as good a chance as we'll get, when the army has been drawn out. At least a smaller number awaits us there. Let's go." Hawkeye reiterated what Sol Hawk has mentioned.

"Aye old mage, I thought you were always the eager one to leave when we were in Chahdan." The young Kai Lord, amazed at how Valestar has changed. Different than when they were in Chahdan.

Hawkeye went over to Sol and whispered, "Did you notice what the scout pointed to? It's very strange don't you think?"

* * *

The lead scout had reached the top of the ridge. He stayed there a moment despite his men's urgings, but then began to skitter back down, hastily trying to stand and run. "Get back!" he shouted. "Get back! Sound the horns! Long blast! Long--"

A rider mounted the top of the hill and threw a spear at the scout. It tore through his shoulder and caused him to flip and careen down the dune. He lay at the bottom, groaning from the broken shaft in his mangled arm. The rider on top of the ridge was quickly joined by a dozen others. They stood and watched, making no further moves.

* * *

"Get back!" he shouted. "Get back! Sound the horns! Long blast! Long--"

"By the Gods! What in--" Hawkeye muttered as he turned to see what has happened.

A rider mounted the top of the hill and threw a spear at the scout. It tore through his shoulder and caused him to flip and careen down the dune. He lay at the bottom, groaning from the broken shaft in his mangled arm. The rider on top of the ridge was quickly joined by a dozen others. They stood and watched, making no further moves.
**Rules, Rulings**

If you need a Strength or Constitution check from me just ask. I know there is probably a couple rounds of posting here, but let's see...

If any ugly black-clad rider pokes his head over that sand dune his going to wish he was never born. I make a

**Ready** action, readying to cast the spell Starfall Fire on any bad guy who comes into view.

Okay. I think I've been unclear. This long dune ridge is in front of everyone in the group...that is, it is due east. The lead scout climbed to the top, then turned to run. A rider appeared at the top and hurled a spear. Then a dozen more appeared. The retreat was sounded.

Now, the two things I will need addressed are Simyn's readied action: do you want to strike the guy who appeared first? One of the others? Or anyone else that appears?

Sol, heading east would go right up the ridge into the newest black riders.

Sorry if I was vague. The point was to make you feel boxed in. However, if you do want to ride east, up the ridge, go right ahead. In fact, it might be fun.

In fact, I may just have Sir Victor charge them.

**Earth Spirit** arrives in 5 rounds. Spent 4 willpower.

OK, let's see... enemies from the south, east, and north. That's pretty boxed in! Unless Sol Hawk can see that one way is better than another (less enemies) the best thing to do might be to punch through to the East. All other things being even, this is the most direct route.

In this case, Sol is going to back up Simyn, advancing East (but not rushing in headlong). Sol does not have to rush in - he has a bow and can lead the others in their advance a few steps at a time until they can see what is going on beyond the dune.

Yeah, he will pop off a bow shot at any enemy who is visible, hopefully combining his efforts with another comrade.

**OOC:** that would hit AC 21 and do 7 DAM

In case it's unclear, I'm taking Cade's horse and moving up next to him to assist with the fallen scout.

Threw 18 points of damage. I'm attacking the rider that threw the spear. He's supposed to do a Reflex save against 16 for half damage.

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**Act V, Opening – The Red Sands of Vassagonia**

"Do as he says! Retreat!" shouted one of the scouts. He reigned his horse around and fled, raising a horn to his mouth. The other scout had already started blowing on his horn. The loud long tone filled the air, but nothing happened.

The noise of the charging horsemen to the north and south drowned out the sound of a couple of lone horns.

"We have to move now. Go!!!!!!"

"Is it always going to be like this around you?" Valestar asked of Hawkeye while trying to get Varsuvial to budge.

"Do as he says! Retreat!" shouted one of the scouts. He reigned his horse around and fled, raising a horn to his mouth. The other scout had already started blowing on his horn. The loud long tone filled the air, but nothing happened.

The noise of the charging horsemen to the north and south drowned out the sound of a couple of lone horns.

"We have to move now. Go!!!!!!"

Arcadian ignored the other scouts and quickly leapt down from the back of Iri, who was calm despite the situation. Arcadian rode across the sands to the fallen scout. As soon as the Vakeros knight reached him he pulled the man up from the ground and threw him over his shoulder. His eyes were constantly on the riders upon the top of the dune.

Hawkeye saw that the young Vakeros knight called Arcadian, ran to the scout's aid, struggling to bring him to the group. He immediately readied his bow to cover the Vakeros while on his horse.

Since no one seemed willing to flee and since Arcadian was determined to help the fallen scout, Simyn just waited. He was prepared to cast the most powerful spell in his arsenal, if someone would poke his head over those sand dunes.

Seeing that Cade had recovered the fallen scout, and then seeing Simyn's readiness to go, Sol shouted to all, "Cade, let's bring him, let's move on the ridge!"

His bow was also out and ready on Hawkeye's cue, but he began moving again east, coaxing the others to follow to what Sol Hawk hoped would be the path of least resistance. The scout Cade had rescued could be tended once they were out of harm's way and moving again toward Teph - until then, they needed to gain ground. With one camel in tow and riding another, Sol Hawk advanced slowly up toward the ridge, his bow at the ready.

Valestar saw that their way was blocked suddenly. He fought to control himself. There was no sign yet that these men meant them harm. Maybe they would pass by.

But at seeing Arcadian seemingly charge into their midsts, Valestar's nerve broke and he called upon his powers, directing the attentions of an Earth Spirit at the east ridge.

Timing his attack with Simyn's, Sol Hawk lets fly an arrow at one of the advancing enemies...

"Get ready to break through the East Ridge!" Valestar called out. "You'll know when!"

He readied his crossbow, and sat atop Varsuvial, who complained at the extra weight, but otherwise seemed ready to go.

Koraeth gazed in earnest around him as more and more black riders appeared. He tried to think quickly as the scout fell with a spear through him, but nothing was coming. During his training, he had never done very well at the mass combat portion and was unsure of the best action now as everyone around him seemed to be doing different things.

Finally, Arcadian leapt from his mare and raced toward the fallen scout. Koraeth stared for a moment more, then quickly spurred his horse. Despite his personal feelings for Arcadian, he was still a brother in arms until proven otherwise, and here was something Koraeth knew he could do.

As the first rider appeared Simyn turned his head to the heavens. Although they couldn't be seen Simyn could feel the presence of the everlasting stars. According to his beliefs they ruled the destinies of them all and their might was his to command. Fire fell from the heavens and struck the rider who caught ablaze. As the hapless man began screaming the sage drew his rapier readying for a charge.

Sir Victor readied his horse for the charge. They would break this pathetic line of a dozen horsemen. Simyn blasted the aggressor amongst them with heavenly fire, causing the rider to be knocked from his horse, which itself reared up in fright and bolted down the slope past Arcadian. The Ruanese knight interposed himself between Arcadian and the others, while everyone else stretched their bowstrings. Koraeth joined in the effort to help, while Sol Hawk decided to begin firing. An arrow hit one rider in the chest, and the whole lot of them retreated back down the sand dune.
**Act V, Opening – The Red Sands of Vassagonia**

Behind the companions, the two lines were thundering closer to one another. It would be a massive clash. Hawkeye—the one having the best natural vision amongst them—looked behind him as the riders on the dune ridge disappeared.

The flags of both sides were now visible at the forefront of the lines. Anari's banner flapped defiantly to the south, and to the north... Hawkeye squinted to make sure he was right.

It was Cloean's banner...not Vassagonia's!!!

With no time to consider this, he moved along with the group as they cautiously climbed the dune ridge. As they neared the top, the sight that greeted them was a complete and utter shock.

The dune ridge was manned, large wooden walls with angled beam reinforcements held a huge wall of sand in place. Ramps lead up in dozens of places along the vast ridge so that riders could mount the maimade obstacle—or was it a natural blind instead?

For behind the dune ridge, stretching out for almost a mile in either direction and hundreds of yards deep, was a sea of black riders in red sashes. Black and red. The colors of Vassagonia's Sharnazim.

"Those riders to the north," said Hawkeye in understanding, "are Cloeasian—they do not fly the flags of Vassagonia."

Tens of thousands of Vassagonian warriors shouted as the small group of companions mounted the ridge. There was no heading east. The only clear path was through the center of the two charging lines of Anaran and Cloeasian riders.

Simyn's stomach clenched into knots, and even Sir Victor faltered. Valestar's earth elemental roared into being then, taking the form of a sandy blob rising from the dune. It moaned with the vibrating sound of sliding sands and raised two fists which it slammed into the nearest ramp, shattering it. It then stretched out over the nearest Sharnazim and exploded in a spray of blinding sand.

* * *

"Sir Victor!" Simyn shouted. "What should we do? We can't ride through THAT!" The sage pointed at the Vassagonian army with his rapier.

Simyn had suspected something along these lines already when he had discovered the hidden army camp in the mountains outside of Chahdan. Simyn liked being right, but this time he had preferred to be wrong.

* * *

Arcadian's voice was low and ominous, "three armies. Three armies. Somehow I feel this is some ploy of Egoliah."

Arcadian had managed to pull the spear from the scout's shoulder and half carry him back to his horse. For all the good it would do them now... As soon as the scout was muted the Arcadian thanked Arcadian and moved off towards the other scouts.

Arcadian jumped up on Iri's back and pressed his knees in. Iri quickly climbed the slope towards the others.

* * *

Sol Hawk reared up then dramatically on the camel he had named Stout Heart before retreating to the safe side of the manmade dune to regroup.

"It's no good," he said, "We're not getting though unless we fight our way through." He stared out across the vast sands. "If we go east, we will be destroyed - we'll be the only targets in sight and suddenly we'll be attacked by every man with a bow for miles. No. Our only chance to break through is with the help of the Anarian Army.

"Ah, if Ishir could only grant us invisibility."

Sol Hawk looked to the Cloeasian line, searching for any clue as to the best place they might burst through... then where and how they might best merge with the Anarans... he relayed everything he saw to Sir Victor who might make best sense of his findings....

* * *

Valestar's jaw fell. His elemental had smashed against the barricade like the sea against a rocky cliff that has stood for generations. It would take many such attacks to destroy this army.

* * *

Backng down off the ridge, Sol Hawk looked toward the two charging armies. Their lines were too solid. Far to the north, the Vassagonian army began to surge up the ramps as quickly as they could, spilling out on the eastern flank of the Anaran and Cloean armies.

A quick glance southward revealed a similar event. The Vassagonians were going to wait for the two lines to clash, and then ride them through in the chaos of battle!

The only way that Sol Hawk foresaw to escape this was to ride through the clear zone between the two advancing lines, who were perhaps a mile distant now. Each second they delayed, the snare of certain death tightened around them as more Vassagonians began to charge the ramps.

* * *

"There!" he shouted, pointing out the only remaining gap to Hawkeye, and to the others, "We have to hit that gap and escape through it... no time left - before we're trapped against the tide!"

"Valestar, will your sand-elemental serve as a distraction? Cade, Koriath, how fast can you ride?"

* * *

Arcadian gritted his teeth and reared Iri around, facing her nose towards the rapidly narrowing breach.

"Fast enough, Sol. I can ride fast enough. I will take the rear, if anything should happen keep riding."

* * *

Valestar felt his throat clench. He was no rider. Donkeys could actually go as fast as horses, especially in rough terrain, where they were better. But Valestar knew very little about controlling a mount. Varsuvial had served him mostly as a pack mule. Still, he had ridden him across a stretch of desert before... this was no different... right?

* * *

"It would help you ride faster if you drop some of the load. Hurry! Sol Hawk is right. That gap is our only way out from this vise." Hawkeye urged the others. Their lives were all at risk, hanging on to the one chance that they must cross the distance quickly.

* * *

Sol Hawk saw that Valestar was struggling to control his mount and so rode up alongside. "There, now," he said to the donkey, "Time to run for it, run for your worth, little friend." He tried to pet the little beast, but perhaps spoooked, perhaps unappreciative of a stranger telling him what to do, Varsuvial just shook his head and snorted. The Kai Lord was amazed, for there were few animals outside his ability to comfort. This donkey was a little...
**Rules, Rulings**

**Act V, Opening – The Red Sands of Vassagonia**

Using next his Kai powers over animals, Sol Hawk decided that the time for finesse was over. Follow, he said to the donkey, then cracked the reigns on his own animal, riding full speed toward the gap.

“Starfall, ride as the wind! You have saved me before, save me again!” Simyn exclaimed as he drove his mare forward.

Over the dune, a vast army carpeted the landscape. The Anarians had been led straight into a trap laid out by the Vassagonians, and were sure to perish. The realization of this sickened the Ruanese, for even if the Anarian army wasn’t his charge, even if he was tasked with another mission, he still felt like he somehow failed President Kubudei. Unfortunately, there was nothing much they could do to stop the coming massacre and rout of the Anarian army, but they could at least make their sacrifice worth something by going and accomplishing their task.

Sol was right, they must ride through the gap and battle their way through. Hopefully their efforts would help the Anarians through the battle, although Sir Victor knew the outcome could only be defeat for their allies.

“Ya! Let’s ride!” yelled the knight, as he spurred Bright Lance on, towards their destiny.

To the west the companions rode now. It was the only available direction that would allow them to escape the influx of Vassagonian military that was soon to sweep down upon the unsuspecting armies riding across the western edges of the Dry Main. Sir Victor’s horse was used to such conditions, having been trained from the time it was a foal to concentrate on what it was told and not what it may see. Sol Hawk’s camel padded across the sands without faltering, the Kai riding high atop his saddle.

“Ya! Let’s ride!” yelled the knight, as he spurred Bright Lance on, towards their destiny.

**Act V, Opening – The Red Sands of Vassagonia**

Sir Victor, since you are the most skilled in riding, if you wish to make Ride Checks to see what results you get, I’ll take those into account in any maneuvers and encounters you have. That way I’m not nullifying one of your strong points.

Sol Hawk, it’ll be harder to attack from camelback, so in any combat you’ll get -1 on attack rolls.

Occult Rolls for spells from the magical ones among you have their DC increased by +1 due to jostling from the riding.

As soon as someone decides to be the leader(s), I’ll need that person to do two things:

1. Let me know which direction you wish to go (8 compass points are valid).
2. Roll 2d20 to determine X and Y placement on the big grid.

**Act V, Opening – The Red Sands of Vassagonia**

So as not to lose hope and their last chance to reach Teph. He would get through or he would die trying, it was as simple as that. Thankfully, he was in his element now, as he was born, raised and bred for war.

To the west the companions rode now. It was the only available direction that would allow them to escape the influx of Vassagonian military that was soon to sweep down upon the unsuspecting armies riding across the western edges of the Dry Main. Sir Victor’s horse was used to such conditions, having been trained from the time it was a foal to concentrate on what it was told and not what it may see. Sol Hawk’s camel padded across the sands without faltering, the Kai riding high atop his saddle.

**Act V, Opening – The Red Sands of Vassagonia**

The solid black flag had the green lightning strike of Cloeasia on it, with a golden eagle’s foot spread open for attack on top of that. The Talons of Rashnu! Not taking any time to ponder why or how this could be, the scouts held up flags to signify what form the attack should take—they were meeting a straight line of horses, so they would form spearponts every so often in their own line to push through.

The Anari light cavalry surged forward. Scouts just behind the front line of the charge raised up in their saddles with no fear of falling, for the special leg-strappings unique to their saddles held them in place. They raised dual-spyglasses held beneath a Borish focusing dial and looked at the oncoming army.

**Act V, Opening – The Red Sands of Vassagonia**

The Arctarid's horse sl was not as trained as the Ruanese mount or the camel, but it handled itself well, seeming to understand the need to move faster than ever before. Korlaeth's horse followed suit, sensing in the air the fear that the group exuded even though they did their best to hide it outwardly. Starfall surged forward, leaving most of the others behind as it matched pace with Sol Hawk's camel.

Even Varsuvial displayed a much-needed rapid pace. Valestar felt that his coaxings combined with everyone's shouts was the reason. In reality, the donkey had realized that the Kai could talk to him. Maybe he could talk to the Kai and tell him what he wanted Valestar to start feeding him more vegetables?

Wait! cried out Varsuvial as he tried to get alongside the camel to talk with the Kai. Never mind the danger at hand—there was conversation to be had!

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**Act V, Opening – The Red Sands of Vassagonia**

The flank's of each contingent of troops slowed, forming a jagged array similar to several pointed teeth.

One scout happened to notice strange array of riders--warhorse, camel, donkey, horses--in the midst of the field of battle, riding hard to the west. That was odd. They had better hurry....

**Act V, Opening – The Red Sands of Vassagonia**

Upon solid earth, the approach of so many horses from either side of them would have been thunderously loud. As it was, the sound of their own arduous ride was louder due to the muffling effects of the sand. To the left and right, Sir Victor saw the approaching lines. He was reminded of a trip to Durenor once, where he saw crocodiles in the Rymerift surge onto the banks to snap at birds there. Only this time, they were the bird, and the teeth of the predator were the two rapidly advancing armies.

**Act V, Opening – The Red Sands of Vassagonia**

At the midway point, Sol Hawk--sitting higher than the rest--saw it first. Like gazing into a mirror, he saw in front of him what they had just witnessed behind them.

Dozens, then hundreds, and no doubt soon-to-be thousands of black-clad riders began riding over a ridge far to their west. It couldn’t be. He looked behind them and in front again. Sure enough, it was true.

**Act V, Opening – The Red Sands of Vassagonia**

Vassagonia was attacking from both flanks, and would no doubt encircle the entangled Anari and Cloeasian forces, then ride ‘round them and grind them to oblivion.

The others saw it now, too. Sir Victor’s pace slowed somewhat as he considered the grim outlook. He held up his hand and pointed to draw everyone’s attention.

Valestar regarded this with a strange mixture of fear and fascination. Something inside him laughed and tore at his being with fear-tipped claws.

**Act V, Opening – The Red Sands of Vassagonia**

Soon, we shall meet again

A new war host appeared over the western dunes, to the companions’ disbelief and despair. These feelings soon turned to resolve, however, as Sir Victor knew that they couldn’t stop here though, or else they would lose hope and their last chance to reach Teph. He would get through or he would die trying, it was as simple as that. Thankfully, he was in his element now, as he was born, raised and bred for war.

“Toph, you can’t do it! You can’t let them—!”

**Act V, Opening – The Red Sands of Vassagonia**

Sol Hawk at first stunned to find that they were trapped on all sides by death. But as he looked to Sir Victor, whose entire life and training were war, he could see that the huge man’s plan was the right one.

As Sir Victor began to ride, Sol Hawk dutifully followed, his eyes focused upon their final test. He still carried his bow, riding just behind the Sommlending Knight. He was taut on the bowstring, prepared at any moment to strike whoever he had to for them to pass.

Korlaeth gazed ahead and behind in disbelief. He tried to think quickly, but he was not one for fights of this magnitude. Perhaps he must just stay with those who knew better. He drew his dagger and concentrated, swiftly changing it to a sturdy horseman’s bow. He pulled the black veil of his robe’s over his face, even as he shouted at Sol Hawk, “Don’t lose me, friend!” and pointed at his head.
### Rules, Rulings

Since I don't normally roll to summon, I don't think I need a check when riding. Do I? Anyways, 7 rounds before the Earth Spirit shows up again.

---

**Act V, Opening – The Red Sands of Vassagonia**

He leaned low over Avatre's back as he reached for an arrow and remembered his crossing of the Anari border, only this time, the Vassagonians were in his way. He reached back to an old remedy for times such as this and smiled as he belled out a Telchos battlecry with all the volume he could muster.

It would certainly be an interesting ride...

---

Valestar had never been in a war before, and the sights and sounds were driving him to distraction. He realized, however, that there was no longer any escape from the battle. And he be damned if he was going to leave the group.

So once again he called upon his powers, directing as best he could his efforts towards the group of Vassagonians they were riding for.

---

Hawkeye stared on in disbelief. Treacherous Vassagonians! They were in the middle of a soon-to-be massacre. Flashbacks came - Hawkeye knew all too well the feeling of being in one. Dark Moon, formerly his mentor had gone astray and killed many innocents and Hawkeye took the sole responsibility of following the trail of death and destruction that the wayward Kai had left.

"Snap out of it!" A voice in him screamed. Hawkeye had almost regretted arriving in Chahdan and having to face this deathtrap. But he’s not alone now. He had friends and companions now and they have been charged to complete a mission.

"Ride fast and fearless, my friend! We will live to see another day." Hawkeye leaned forward and pat the neck of his steed, while whispering into its ear. He urged his horse to ride faster, along with the group with the knight at the lead. He withdrew his bow and prepared to rain death on anyone trying to stop them.

---

Simyn didn’t say anything. It was almost impossible to think in this racket and since Simyn didn’t have any better idea he put his life in the hands of the Sommlending knight. Hopefully the knight’s battle experience would lead them to safety.

---

Arcadian brought Iri around, her hooves tossed up furrows of sand as he did so. As Iri dug her front hooves back into the sand he drew his sword and followed Sir Victor. Arcadian knew that he and Victor were the best suited to ride at the front of the others. They were both the most skilled in war and in combat training. Not to mention their armor was the thickest and could turn aside arrows.

The Vakeros rode aside the brilliantly armored Ruanese Knight, Iri snorting and heaving beneath him and she strove for air.

---

Sir Victor and Arcadian took a moment to coax their mounts for what they were sure was a tremendous test of endurance. Soi Hawk took advantage of the moment of slower riding and slung his arm to the northwest. He surged forward a bit and shouted.

"Northwest! Ride!" The groups were closing in on them. In perhaps a minute, they would be in the midst of the chaos.

---
The knight kept his course towards the northwest, glancing occasionally around and behind him to make sure the rest of the group were keeping up, and shouting words of encouragement to them as well.

There were two grids in my signature. One is the area combat grid, now zoomed in to reflect where you are.

- Anari units are brown, Talon units are black with green, Vassagonian units are black with red.
- Each square in the large map is 100' x 100'.
- Everyone is considered mounted, but ride checks are not required. You can roll them if you like. If they are good, they may enhance your actions. If they are bad, they will definitely hinder them. If you don't roll, your actions happen as you want.
- Combat can be over at any time, depending on circumstances happening in the large grid.
- Movement is 6 squares in any direction, with a diagonal counting as 1.5 squares of movement. It is allowable to move 5 straight and 1 diagonal, though.
- There is no 5' step allowed in this grid combat since you are mounted. So, your options are: full attack to someone next to you already, standard attack + move action, or 2 move actions.

Act V, Opening – The Red Sands of Vassagonia

The knight kept his course towards the northwest, glancing occasionally around and behind him to make sure the rest of the group were keeping up, and shouting words of encouragement to them as well.

On one such occasion, he noticed the dust cloud rising to the south, which meant the Anarian cavalry had started to charge. Time was running out.

Simyn followed the knight closely knowing that his knowledge of arcana, history and a whole range of subjects would be useless here. His only hope of survival lied in following the advice of those of his companions that knew warfare.

Sol, too, rode his camels for all they were worth. Like a shadow on the sand he flew, keeping right in Sir Victor and Arcadian's wake.

Hawkeye continued riding with the others as they continued making their way northwest. He kept a sharp eye out on everyone in case they had any difficulties. Not all of them are accomplished riders like the two leading them but he wasn't going to let that be a reason to fail. Not here, not now.

He urged his horse to speed on, leaving a small trail of clouds behind them.

Arcadian knew that Sir Victor was both the better rider and leader, so the young Vakeros followed his lead, staying slightly behind the others. His sword was already drawn, and at the ready in case the need should arise.

He looked over his shoulder at the approaching horses. The gap was rapidly closing and Arcadian's heart began to race.

This isn't good...

Time was running out.

We aren't going to make it.

Korlaeth rode hard behind his comrades. He held an arrow nocked as he watched the Talons and Vassagonians rapidly closing. He glanced at where they were headed...it didn't look to promising.

Perhaps we can take a few of them with us.

Their horses snorted and sweated, and they themselves found it harder to breathe as a cold sweat of realization broke out on them. The line were closing too fast. There was still a quarter mile of so to ride, and in second the Talons would be upon them. Riding northwest was not the best course of action. Sir Victor turned his mount to face due north, heading straight for the Talons.

Everyone else followed, whether they relied fully on his knowledge of mounted combat or whether they thought him to be a lunatic. It was up to him. With the two Kai at his flanks, Sir Victor drew his massive sword and held it close till the last minute. Everyone else followed suit. The Talon line faltered a bit, not sure what to make of this small ramshackle group racing towards them. They parted slightly, not wanting to waste their charge. Sir Victor could not have asked for a better occurrence.

Each of them counted his life in heartbeats now instead of days and years. Sir Victor closed his eyes for a brief moment, calming his mind and preparing his body for the shock of the unavoidable clash. Sol Hawk remembered the times he had been close to death before, and the fact that it was a place better than this relaxed his mind. Korlaeth envisioned his homeland, far to the north, and how he would ride through this tide of evil in the direction of his home. Arcadian gripped his horse tightly with his legs, both hands holding his weapons. His thoughts were on Kamilah, whom he had parted ways with before this incident based on some rather...unexpected news. He must live for her...for them.
Act V – Opening – The Red Sands of Vassagonia

Simyn was a bit apprehensive about using his weapons in a mounted charge, but he decided that his weapons could be used for lateral thrusts as he rode past the enemy. He practiced a move or two and was satisfied. Koraeth had a grim outlook on the whole situation. How could they survive this onslaught? The Talons of Rashuur were able to hold their own against Vassagonia’s finest overlords, and here they rode against them. All well, he mused, a hero never sings of his own glorious death.

Valestar began to think the earth spirits hadn’t heard him. This was certainly the longest he had ever had to wait for them to answer before. He brought the back of the change, and something caused him to look to his right before they met the line. A large wave of sand, shaped like a fist, raised up suddenly a few dozen paces away and slammed into one of the Talon formations. Horses and riders tumbled sideways and backwards, and the line broke into chaos at that spot where the elemental raised up. Sureley the Anari cavalry would exploit that gap.

Sir Victor held his sword high and shouted as they finally engaged the line. The close formations pressed upon one another to avoid the small group, and Sir Victor smiled at their yield. He held strapped the reigns to his belt and held his sword with both hands to his left, leaning a bit out of the saddle. Sure enough, he felt something slam into it. He let the momentum of the blow carry the sword back and up, then he brought it down again. Another slam, another arc, another attack.

Sol Hawk used a different approach, aiming instead for vital areas such as the riders’ arms and hands. Scatter, he told the horses he passed, and some of them turned and ran across the line, causing further chaos. Simyn thrust his weapon with perfect timing as he rode past the Talons, wounding them heavily enough to make their riding less efficient. Valestar just kept low, fighting a wave of panic that was washing over him. He felt the pangs inside him, starting to claw. He ducked low on Varsuvial, praying for relief.

Hawkeye followed the style of Sol Hawk, striking in order to maim instead of kill. He had a perfect view of Sir Victor’s tactic, and the brutal efficiency of it deeply impressed him. He had merely held the sword out, and when it hit a rider, it tore through him in a spray of blood, sometimes beheading him. How could any foe survive a charge of dozens of these knights?

Arcadian twisted his swords and struck arms, legs, heads—anything in sight. Riding behind him, Koraeth complemented his fellow Vakeros’ attacks by striking out at the foes that Arcadian missed.

All in all, they tore through the formations of Talons, leaving at least ten dead and almost twenty more wounded. To their west, where the Kai’s animal kinship and the Desser’s elemental was concentrated, the line bucked and slowed, forming a perfect rift for the Anari cavalry.

But riding through the Talons was over in less then half a minute. It would be a simple matter to continue onward to the north, but for one small...rather, one large problem. The Sharnazim army was pouring over the dunes like a swarm of fire ants out of a disturbed mound. Yes, swarm was the best word to describe it. Like locusts taking flight to find a new land to ravage, so did the Vassagonians ride forth from their hiding places.

Sir Victor called a halt to the group. He surveyed the scene and sighed heavily, grimly. The charge of a small unit was only good through a long line or small...rather, one

Their only hope was if some of the Anari broke free and came. Then they could ride the line made by the Anari and pass the Black Army. He turned and saw the spearheads of the Anari cavalry break through the Talons. Good! The riders saw the new threat facing them and rode forth, ignoring the Talons. Even better!

"Join with them!" shouted Sir Victor, knowing that a force of dozens would fare better than a small handful of riders. They surged forward as the Black Army descended upon them.

Above them, clouds blotted out the sun. The darkening skies seemed to be a testament of the angry gods of good who despised this treachery of Vassagonia. Or perhaps it was a blessing of the gods of evil who condoned it? No one knew, but the land grew dark even as blood spilled out across the sands.

ROUND 1

Sol Hawk grinned with elation as Sir Victor led them successfully through the fray. His eyes searched left and right for their next move as Sir Victor led them north. Now they were coming upon a knot of opponents. They could not slow down. They had to keep riding.

"There!" he yelled to the others, "We need to take the kivosh down first!" Sol Hawk saw Valestar searching wildly for the targets he had indicated, then said, "There!" and he pointed.

Stout Heart. Sol’s camel, was magnificent upon the sands — a true desert native. Sol Hawk drove the animal forward, coaxing the second supply camel to stay with them as they moved north. But something was disturbing them, and they began to snort and hesitate.

Seeing that Sol Hawk had just shot their mage, one of the Sharnazim began to ride south toward the Kai Lord and the others might soon follow suit. He then felt a pressure like a vise as he made contact with Sol Hawk. The Sharnazim swayed in the saddle (DAM 12) and Sol Hawk followed quickly with a second tactic that had worked for him so far.

In the language of the horses he called out to the mounts of their enemies: Danger! Run North! The horses hesitated as their masters fought to keep control, Go! Run! Insisted Sol again (Bluff 15).
**Rules, Rulings**

Can I use a crossbow when mounted? Sol, if you got a longbow have you dismounted then? It’s impossible to use that from horseback...

Well, rolled a 6 in damage hitting the sharnazim in square D100. DC 16 Reflex save for half damage. Wished I had chose Left-Handed Sage magic instead although then I hadn’t had this buttkicking AC.

*Move* to the detention block square (AA23). Shoot the same Kivosh that Sol did.

**Attack roll:** 14, **Damage:** 7

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**Round 2 Grid**

*In other words, he's hoof-bait.*

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**Act V, Opening – The Red Sands of Vassagonia**

Not sure if he could manage to load and fire his crossbow when on horseback Simyn chose to petition the stars again. His plea of help was answered and fire began raining from the sky hitting one of the sharnazim.

Korlaeth turned and stayed just behind Sol, who pointed at the Kivosh with the group to the north. Korlaeth bellowed at the approaching Vassagonians in their own language, "Majhan take you!" and let fly with an arrow.

They had done it, they had managed to push through and pierce the Talon lines, hopefully giving some respite to the Anarian cavalry who were riding behind them. It had been grim and bloody, but the Ruanese knight knew the bloodshed was far from over. These were merely the opening moves of what would surely be a long day...for those who would survive to see the night.

As they emerged behind the Clesian lines, the first Vassagonian riders appeared, ready to block their way and disrupt the Talon’s rear lines. The distances grew shorter with every breath, until they could practically see the whites of their enemies’ eyes. The knight sheathed his blade and unclad his lance, holding it steady. As they drew closer, the battlefield around the knight disappeared momentarily, replaced by...Sir Victor shook his head, unsure of what he had just seen. A dream, in these circumstances? This was neither the time to ponder what he’d been privy to, and he brought his complete focus on the enemies ahead.

*Stand firm! Change!* bellowed the knight, as his resonant voice embodied the hearts of his companions to greater feats of arms. He rode forward, abreast of Sol, who drew his bow and let fly at the Kivosh while telling them to target the mages first.

Hawkeye looked at the enemies in front of him, studying them for their tactics and actions. He singled out their leader (T20), and shouted to Arcadian, "Taking out the leader would bring confusion to their ranks." He pointed to the leader and rode to engage him. As he rode, he focused his psychic energy, to deliver an initial blow that would "soften" the enemy.

With a quick look over his left shoulder, Sir Victor determined that they needed to worry about the northmost group of Sharnazim, for a contingent of Anari cavalry had broken through the line and was racing to join them in combat.

The leader to the northwest shouted something to his men, and they diverted their mounts to face the coming charge. He remained fixed upon the group, however. Arcadian took this opportunity to teach him some humility.

The Vakeros moved his hands and blade in perfect conjunction and unleashed the spell Penetrate. A flash of light arced between them, knocking the arrogant warrior from his horse and onto the sand. The horse heard Sol Hawk’s call and fled, leaving the man on foot. He rolled over and began to stand as he drew his scimitars.

Sir Victor moved his horse cautiously ahead, rallying everyone as he did so. Simyn took advantage of their edge in acting before the enemies, and he brought his complete focus on the enemies ahead.

The Sharnazim riders swarmed around Sir Victor and Sol Hawk, their blades flashing like the strikes of angry serpents. Despite his mental anguish, Sir Victor managed to fend off all attacks, including an arrow that came a bit too close to his neck, but Sol Hawk was not as fortunate. He was skilled at mounted combat, but being atop a camel was a bit odd in this situation. His legs made easy targets. Sol Hawk: -4 EP

The leader who Arcadian had knocked from his horse charged Sir Victor, shouting a Vassagonian curse as he did so. His scimitars flashed low, however, aiming at the knight’s horse. Deftly moving his mount to the side with trained ease, the Ruanese avoided the gutting attacks and placed himself in prime position to attack with his horse if desired.

The Anari charge moved to clash with the other group of Sharnazim then. The cries of anger drowned out the clang of steel as the two groups fought with hatred bred through the generations.
Act V. Opening – The Red Sands of Vassagonia

A swarm of large hornets began to swarm around everyone but Sir Victor and Valestar. The insects sought out chinks in the great battle noticed nor cared about the adventurers. A few of the more curious attacked and even managed to get in a few stings. The battle continued as usual.

ROUND 2

Korlaeth reigned in swiftly and let loose two more arrows at the same Kivosh he had hit before. If nothing else, he knew he couldn’t move the horse to square X21. A light rain began to fall and the sandstorm started to ease up.

The enemy came and came fast. With the Sharnazim attacking him at full speed, Sol Hawk had distastefully already taken a hit to the legs. The Sharnazim who was attacking him felt a faint THUD as if he was coming up against a spiraled barrier of invisible spikes: the Kai Lord’s psychic defenses were up (Crimson 1, Polush). The vision had shocked him to the core (Crimson 15 Polush, Dstk) and he found himself unable to move. His elation turned to worry--they likely going to be boxed in just a few seconds.

The Vakeros determined counterspell DC and if nothing else, he knew he needed to drop his lance or can I need be, KL or SH, please NPC for me. Cya for now.

Hawkeye took aim with his bow when a sudden gust of wind blew the desert sand into his eye. He accidentally released the arrow earlier than he aimed to, thus missing the shot which normally would have wounded or killed others. Cursing his luck, he immediately focused another ball of psychic energy and unleashed it into the naked mind of his opponent.

* * *

**Rules, Rulings**

- Attack roll 18 and 8 with damage of 6 and 4, although I don’t think the second one hit. Hitting the same Kivosh I did before and remaining in square AA23.
- (no action) S’ step
- (no action) Psychic Lash on Sharnazim (AA18)
- (move) Sol Hawk draws twin scimitars (standard) Dagger of the Mind on Kivosh (AA15)
- (psychic) Psychic Attack on Kivosh (AA15) (free) Strafing Will vs Kivosh (AA15) (free) speaks to Sharn’s horse (bluff) (AA18)
- Sol Hawk loses 2 EP (Dgmm, SW), 1 Arrow (SW), gets -1 on attacks/DAM/AC, enemy gets -1 to hit (PL)
- Attack roll : 12
- Damage : 8
- Psychic Damage : 8
- Won’t be around during the weekend, so if need be, KL or SH, please NPC for me. Cya guys!
- Draw my rapier (move action) and move the horse to square X21. A light horse has a move of 60 feet! Nice! Do I have to roll a Ride check?
- Move move to AA17
- Attack roll against kivosh at AA15: 22 Damage roll: 13, doubled for a charging attack roll : 13 (Psychic 15 & Aspect of the Unnamed) Sol Hawk’s camels were blissfully unaware of anything Sol Hawk had said in the language of horses and came again under his benevolent control, stepping then around the Sharnazim and giving Sol Hawk a view of the first Kivosh. Sol Hawk focused his attention.
- The Kivosh, taken by surprise, experienced a horrid wailing and saw a hundred arrows of blood iron falling from heaven to skewer him. He broke into a sweat, at first not sure where they were coming from. The vision had shocked him to the core (Crimson 13 Polush, Dstk) and he found himself unable to move. His elation turned to worry--they likely going to be boxed in just a few seconds. At this point Sol Hawk had managed to wrestle both scimitars free of their scabbards and turned in his saddle to see what was next...
- Simyn unsheathed his rapier and urged Starfall to move forward. The sage was looking to get a position on the left side of the Kai Lord named Hawkeye.
- The sand mages had targeted the brave knight with their minds, trying to break him with this power that he’d seen the Kai Lords use on their own enemies. This invisible force was not something the knight was used to, but he steered his horse toward the right and used his mind to attack, as his fellow Kai did a

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**Act V, Opening – The Red Sands of Vassagonia**

Arcandar spared a glance at the battle to his left, then he looked behind him. He was relented to see three or four more groups of riders on the characteristic chestnut-brown Anari steeds coming up fast. But some Talon riders were moving to intercept them. His elation turned to worry—they likely going to be boxed in just a few seconds.

Your next action is an auto hit on the leader if you wish.

* Can’t find my MoM book. How does a Vakeros determine counterspell DC and cost? The DC of this spell is augmented by arcarmy

 Karn walks through the battle, his eyes scanning for his enemies. He is looking for a weakness in their formation that he can exploit. Suddenly, as the arrow hit him, Valestar was thrown out of this world and into a world of hazy visions and dreams. He stared about him incredulously, watching a scene unfold that meant little to him, yet stirred his emotions...
Rules, Rulings

(No action) Psychic Lash on Kivosh (6 DAM) (move) Sol Hawk double moves to melee range with Kivosh (U14) (free) Handle Animal to get Camel to Attack (29 vs DC25) (hit AC20 DAM 6) 26 (standard) Dagger of the Mind on Kivosh (6 DAM) (psychic) Psychic Attack on Kivosh (8 DAM) (free) Strafe Wall vs Kivosh (hit AC21, 7 DAM) (free) speaks to enemy horses (bluff) (nat20, DC28) (free) speaks to Kivosh (longer than 6 secs but what the hey!)
Sol Hawk loses 2 EP (DotM, SW), loses 2 WP (PsiAttk), 1 Arrow (SW), gets 1 on attacks (DAM/AC), enemy gets -1 to hit (PK)

Counterspell check is 22. If that's not a standard action, then my first attack is a 15. If I get my second attack, it was 14. Both on the Kivosh.

Ride check for my warhorse's AC: 37
Ride check for riding with no hands: 26
Auto hit against leader, damage: 10
Second attack against leader: 13, damage (if hit): 8
Warhorse attacks: 13, 11 and 11 to hit, damage of 10, 10 and 6 respectively. 5' step to square Z15

Act V. Opening - The Red Sands of Vassagonia

... and then he was back amidst the heat and the stench of the battlefield, and he could hear the voices of the companions as they rallied against the Vassagonians. And he was filled with an intense rage. Crying out, he spurred Varsuvial towards the archer that had shot him.

** * * *
Suddenly there was bees swarming all around him. The insects didn’t seem to hurt much, but they were a disturbance. Somehow Simyn succeeded in drawing his poignard and attacking a sharnazim with his rapier.

** * * *
As the bees began to swarm everywhere, Sol Hawk’s eyes narrowed through the swarm to where the final Kivosh was mounted. He was an evil, evil man and Sol knew that this could not stand. As his friends fought with the swarm, he knew it was his responsibility to free them. And this would only happen when the Kivosh’s blood at last burst free of his corpse to paint the very sands themselves.

“YAH, Stout Heart,” yelled Sol Hawk, “There!” he pointed to the Kivosh, “GET HIM!” The Camel had known Sol Hawk for only a short time, but the meaning could have been no clearer. The Kivosh’s eyes only bulged in fear as the huge animal began pounding its feet into the sand, snorting and braying as it went. (Handle Animal 29) (Ride Check 28)

**(NININNNNooooooooo!!!!) shouted the Kivosh as Sol Hawk neared. 

“NININNNNINNNNNNNOOOOOOO0OOOOO!!!!!” Sol Hawk tossed an arrow from his quiver, concentrating with the might of his mind to send the missile forth. Even as the Kivosh tried in vain to cast again, the arrow had pierced his forearm. DAM 7 "Oh no you don’t," said the Kai Lord, “You’re mine.”

“BIIWAAAAAGGGGGHHHH!!!” snorted Stout Heart as his companion lady camel looked on admiringly from nearby. With a leap more graceful than any jungle cat could muster, the huge hairy camel broke past the archers and bit the Kivosh right on the nose, then shook it violently until he tore it lose DAM 6.

“AAAEeeeYYYY! yelled the Kivosh, struggling in the saddle, “WHO ARE YOU?”

He never expected Sol Hawk to respond, for he had spoken in the Vassagonian tongue. Yet the Kai was onto him here and this is what he said:

“My friends are on a mission of peace, but there have been only war not to one nation, but two. You may say that you are only ‘following orders,’ but in the eyes of the Sand Mother, we both know that such a weak aliby can never absolve you of personal responsibility for the ones you kill so freely. Stop the madness! Stop it now!”

“Never! I will kill all of you insolent boy, and I will begin with you and your camel!”

The threat was too much. To threaten Sol Hawk was one thing. To threaten an innocent camel was quite another. Sol Hawk could not tolerate it, and so he inserted into the Kivosh’s mind a brilliant display of fireworks. The Kivosh was delighted at the lightshow occurring in his own mind’s eye, the colour! the splendor! Yet as each bright flower exploded and faded, so also did each compartment of the Kivosh’s mind... dying... dying... dying. DAM 20

“Get away,” he said to the enemy horses nearby, “Flee now, there is only death here for you!” (Bluff nat 20 hit DC 28)

Korlaeth reacted swiftly when the other Kivosh began waving his hands. For this, he knew exactly what to do. He held his bow aloft briefly and for this, he knew exactly what to do. He held his bow aloft briefly and focused on the Kivosh, channeling magic through his blue steel blade to counter the horns that sprang from the Vassagon man’s hands.

** * * *
One of the mages was down, and the second one wouldn’t last long if Sol Hawk had anything to say about it. Sir Victor could see the swarm of horns which had magically been summoned by foul sorcery around his allies assuming Korlaeth’s counterespell was unsuccessful, but he couldn’t do anything about that now. One of the sharnazim leaders had targeted him, and another of the men was also harrying his flank.

Urging Bright Lance forward away from the other warrior, Sir Victor swept his lance across the leader’s saddle, trying to knock him off his steed. Then, as he was lying prone, the huge Sommerlund warhorse rose up and pounced upon the man with both hooves and clacked its teeth at him. On his left, the knight noticed Valestar the mage charging into the melee against a group of Sharnazim. “The fool,” thought the knight, “Does he want to get himself killed?”. His fate was in his own hands now.

** * * *
Valestar whipped his staff around, focusing his power to create flames of destruction to carry forth his wrath. The bolts sped across the sands, though Valestar couldn’t be sure whether they’d find their mark.

** * * *

Commentary

Perhaps I’m crazy, but I’m having a hangover first. I just let me recover somewhat from this last round. I really don’t remember Kai Lord’s last interpretation and I think I disagreed with him. I think ended with a mage being able to cast a lot of different spells at the same time as long as he was allowed multiple attacks. Personally I would like to treat multiple magical attacks as you treat physical attacks: You need to make a full round action to use all of them. That includes the motion of casting the appropriate spell or using the appropriate object. It’s simple and straightforward. A problem arises if you have two wands, one in each hand. Can you use both wands or only one of them? When in doubt I would look at the ordinary combat rules and use them as analogues. Using two wands would be as using two weapons and since two-weapon fighting usually is done with heavy penalties I would give them as analogues. Using two wands would be as using two weapons and since two-weapon fighting usually is done with heavy penalties I would give them as analogues. Using two wands would be as using two weapons and since two-weapon fighting usually is done with heavy penalties I would give them as analogues. Using two wands would be as using two weapons and since two-weapon fighting usually is done with heavy penalties I would give them as analogues. Using two wands would be as using two weapons and since two-weapon fighting usually is done with heavy penalties I would give them as analogues. Using two wands would be as using two weapons and since two-weapon fighting usually is done with heavy penalties I would give them as analogues. Using two wands would be as using two weapons and since two-weapon fighting usually is done with heavy penalties I would give them as analogues. Using two wands would be as using two weapons and since two-weapon fighting usually is done with heavy penalties I would give them as analogues.
Act V, Opening – The Red Sands of Vassagonia

Arcadian pushed his heels into Irri's side and the fine mare dashed north, towards the nearest archers. Arcadian raised his sword in his right hand and with a loud yell activated his Battleblade ability. The bluefire lightning shot up his arm and his deadly blade's bluish tint was suddenly writhed blinding light.

The Vakeros rode upon the nearest archer and swung twice with his sword, attempting to drive his blade through the archer's chest. * * *

Chaos was everywhere. The group of seven companions was starting to feel the strain of the combat, while all around them, things quickly degenerated. By this point, many hundreds of Sharazim had entered the area, riding along with scimitar and binto, lobbing off heads of anyone who did not have on a red sash. Sand mages rode into position away from the lines and threw spell after spell into the combat, quaffing down potions and curatives to counteract the toll it took upon their bodies.

* * *

The last combat was probably going to be nasty, and a nightmare for me, but you guys will love it.

Act V, Opening – The Red Sands of Vassagonia
Act V. Opening – The Red Sands of Vassagonia

Korlaeth spurred after his companions, causing them to flinch back on to his mount. He nodded once to Cadew as he passed, the young vakeros once again taking up his seat. His priorities may be misplaced, but there were few Korlaeth would rather stand with...

He looked right and left as huge black masses continued to pour from the sands. It seemed hopeless, but then, so it had been when the Cenars had first emerged. He nodded another arrow and let loose in the general direction of Vassan troops. He bellowed again his favored Telchoi battle cry, his fist and bow raised in defiance, and shouted again, in a fit of patriotism with a bit of perverse humour, '"Dessi!!"

* * *

The sage smiled at Korlaeth's sudden outburst of defiance. When you thought about it, what did a Lyrian Sage, a Sommlieding Knight, two Kai Lords and two Vakeros and a Dessi Mage in the Vassagonian desert? Their company seemed very unlikely and the situation was quite absurd, not made less absurd, if you pondered that you might be dead before sunset.

* * *

The group was riding now along their selected path, united, and taking out straggling foes that came across their path. Sol Hawk was excited. Their group was not unlike a honed military unit. The fear had passed and now the exhilaration had set in. He rode his camel hard, taking each cue from Sir Victor as they went.

"Don't get cocky," said Cade, and Sol Hawk could see why - he strained to look upon the horizon where a dark cloud had begun to form.

"Don't stray, everyone," said Sol Hawk, bracing for the upcoming confrontation.

* * *

The group of seven broke free of the combat around them by virtue of both skill and luck. To the northwest they continued, fully aware of the danger that was in that direction. It had to be done.

They rode close enough to groups of Sharnamz to clash weapons once or twice, but nothing serious. Then a group of six riders came upon them. Sir Victor angled his lance and unseated one with a vicious blow to the shoulder. The force of the impact tore the man's arm clean off, and the outstretched lance was in such a position to cleatheline the next rider across the neck.

Sol Hawk again used his mental powers to divert a horse after it threw its rider. Hawkeyes and Sol Hawk communicated and focused the painful part of their psychic abilities on a single rider. Both Vakeros simply lashed out with their weapons, leaving trails of blood in the riders they past. Even Valestar got in on some of the action as he rappee one rider in the temple. The blow disoriented the man, and he, too, fell into the sands.

They continued onward, aware suddenly of a rider with a large crimson and silver flag mounted on his saddle. This person rode up and over the sand dunes where the army had waited and stopped. He pulled out a large horn and blew on it.

A shrill tone tore through the air as the horn blasted. The seven were quite intrigued by this, as they were heading in that general direction. Suddenly, a Sharnamz in silver-trimmed attire riding on the back of a gigantic sand-drake sprang over the hill and landed in a spray of sand.

He was quickly flanked by a group of riders with matching attire, and the standard-beared galloped to join them as they surveyed the scene. The lizard, easily three times the size of a horse (not counting the tail) opened and closed its mouth, tasting the air with its tri-forked tongue. It looked about excitedly, flaring out two membranous fans on each side of its jaws. A row of spines on its neck and head raised straight up as it spied the group riding towards it.

The Sharnamz shouted to a nearby group of riders to intercept the companions. These riders--perhaps a dozen in number--veered along and cut across in front of the path of Sir Victor and company. Immediately they either pulled out bows or began waving their hands. Half of them held their blades high and charged!

**ROUND 1**

Valestar would later recall the battle as a series of confused images. The Kai Lords racing into the fray, the Knight screaming orders, Varsuvial panning beneath him, arrows and sand flying around him. When the immense Sand Drake reared its head and roared its challenge, the feeling of surrealism was complete. Valestar felt himself preparing for the attack, but he could not seem to find his emotions. Fear, excitement, rage...none of these registered. There was only a strange emptiness. Despite the thunderous noise of the battle, everything seemed dulled and silent.

His mind couldn't comprehend the scale of the battle. He decided to focus his attention on the Drake.

He reached into the depths of his soul and drew forth the full extent of his abilities, pouring the energy into his staff. The quarterstaff trembled with the force being placed upon it. Valestar felt as if his head were about to burst. He cried out, the scream carrying across the desert, as a huge explosion nearly knocked him from Varsuvial's back. The bolts of energy issued forth from his staff and sped towards the sand-drake, turning the sand to glass beneath them.

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The relative calm was now gone. The storm of chaos would now descend upon everyone.

* * *
**Rules, Rulings**

Also, I can only use my Rallying shout once per hour. Has it been an hour yet or is it still active? I doubt it.

Good question Sir Victor re: Rallying Shout. I, too, will await the map before posting.

Allowable on the laumspur. I'll also allow the shout to still be active because I feel generous today. Map link should be actively momentarily. Valestar, can you tell the people around the drake different color bars across the bottom? It's red/yellow as opposed to red. StdBr = standard bearer.

Hawkeye: Yes, you probably took damage. If you refer to the text it'll say how to determine it...I can't remember off-hand.

This is (as you can probably tell) the fiercest combat you'll face for a while. After this, we'll have another light combat time in the next couple of acts. There is a total of 1681 enemy EP. Have a nice day.

Seriously, though. Use strategy. Use your characters. It is not impossible. Keep in mind that I do check for morale, but I never post it. People have fled before in combat, so you may not have to stay everyone.

--------

**Act V, Opening – The Red Sands of Vassagonia**

Valestar saw his magical attacks hit, and could tell that they did considerable damage to the drake. But the beast wasn't dead yet. In fact, Valestar had no enraged it. The battle would now begin in earnest.

Suddenly, the mists that had seemed to obscure his thoughts for the entire battle lifted. He knew with dread certainty that this battle would be won through patience and strategy, not rage and brute force. The companions would have to outsmart and outmaneuver their opponents.

"We need to plan our attack now!" Valestar called to the others. "We have strength in numbers, but someone is going to have to distract the main force while the rest of us concentrate on taking them out one by one!"

"Either that, or we have to take down the leader as swiftly as we can, and demoralize the others! If that drake takes off, take it down! The fall should kill the leader!"

"Right!" said Sol Hawk. "We have to draw the leader in. We need a slow retreat. Let them come to us. Hawkeye, can you mindblast that nearest Sharn?"

The Sand Drake was enraged at Valestar's hit. Sol Hawk was amazed at the pure power that had come from the old man. "Master mage, let us keep them busy. We will cover you. When they close in, I have a surprise for the overlord as well." A wry smile traced across Sol Hawk's lips.

The drake was a huge animal. Sol Hawk watched it closely. He had a way with all natural creatures. Perhaps the Sand Drake would obey his command as well. Sol Hawk studied the beast to see what he could discern about this creature and its kind (Primal Kenning, H T1).

Sol Hawk superimposed images of the fire drake. He had a way with all natural creatures. Perhaps the Sand Drake would obey his command as well. Sol Hawk studied the beast to see what he could discern about this creature and its kind (Primal Kenning, H T1).

Sol Hawk was able to make eye contact with the lead enemy horse - and sent a telepathic message to its mind. "Run! It is raining fire! Run, tell the others and run! We'll die if we stay! Sol Hawk superimposed images of the firestruck drake and leader, showing the image again and again, showing fire from the sky striking down and burning horses all around. He also wove in the smell of burning flesh and the sounds of frightened animals.

With this he stepped his camel back and waited for the mind-painting to take its toll.

--------

**ROUND 2**

Valestar saw his magical attacks hit, and could tell that they did considerable damage to the drake. But the beast wasn't dead yet. In fact, Valestar had no enraged it. The battle would now begin in earnest.

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With this he stepped his camel back and waited for the mind-painting to take its toll.

--------

There it was, like some creature emerged from a legend, a huge lizard, ridden by the general of the army, flanked by a group of bodyguards who were probably not needed. Take the head off the army's shoulders, and the body would probably fall. But first, there was the matter of this army group which had been called in reinforcement. Perhaps if they were hit hard enough, they would run away with their tail between their legs.

Sir Victor yelled some words of encouragements to the other heroes as they tried to adopt a strategy against the overwhelming odds, while he repositioned himself with his lance at the ready.

--------
Rules, Rulings

- Hawkeye loses 1 arrow and loses 2 WP.
- (free) move to F20 (5 foot) (ride Check 22) (standard) attack standard bearer with bow (free) move to F20 (10 DAM) (free) Perception Check against Drake Rider (he DC19) (free) Primal Kenning on Sand Drake
- Hope I got this right. Now, can horses move as their own action? I thought I need someone say that earlier.
- Move: retrieve willpower potion Standard: drink willpower potion, recovering 10 WP.

* * *

Rules, Rulings

- EDIT: Initiative = 13
- Initiative: 6 (accidentally added 4 instead of 5 on the dice rolls page), Casting Clarity.
- Weapons in hand Simyn decided to move into the middle of the group. He was determined to help them in any way he could. This was probably the best gift he could give. "I'm going to cast a spell, but I need you to stay close for it to have effect" he told his companions.

- "Everyone stay together!" Arcadian shouted over the din of battle that surrounded them on the sands. "If they surround us fight together, and do not turn your back to the enemy!"

- "Kivosh, get the archers to aim their arrows over there!" Arcadian shouted, "I can feel a magic emanating from that area, and I knew instantly that one of the Kivosh had done this."

- He turned to look at them, and the sands themselves raised up into a wall blocking the Overlord and his mount from their view. All that was visible was the constantly moving tail of the large lizard mount.

- "Korlaeth's use of Clarity had allowed him the upper hand in this combat. He was sure that he would act first in all instances from now on. Waiting upon his horse, he watched as the riders began to race across the sands.

- "The horse whom Sol Hawk had focused his mental ruse upon snorted in reply and kept charging at them. He had not fooled the animal at all. He decided to focus upon the Sand Drake next to see what he could discern about it."

- Arcadian brought his horse around, following Sir Victor's lead. As a Vakeros he was a master of combat and his knowledge in warfare was nothing to scoff at. But he knew that he lacked in comparison to Sir Victor, who's very existence and training revolved around his abilities as a leader upon the battlefield. Still.

- Korlaeth hesitated a moment in indecision as a truly insane idea came to him. He nearly spurred his mount forward, but the hooters around him "Stay together!" kept him still. Cooler heads prevailed for the moment, and the idea would wait. He instead focused briefly on his battle magic to prepare himself.

- Overlord Tavryn (D4) AC 18 EP 163/165 Init (see Drake)

- Sand Drake (C4-E4) AC 21 EP 108/150 Init 15

- Sharnazim Bodyguard 1 (C2) AC 14 EP 42/45 Init 19

- Sharnazim Bodyguard 2 (B9) AC 16 EP 43/45 Init 19

- Kivosh Bodyguard 1 (I6) AC 16 EP 90 Init 16

- Kivosh Bodyguard 2 (C9) AC 16 EP 90 Init 16

- Kivosh Bodyguard 3 (J5) AC 15 EP 80 Init 12

- Kivosh Bodyguard 4 (J9) AC 15 EP 80 Init 12

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- Leader (Sz12) (L21) AC 12 EP 75 Init 8

- Rider 1 (K19) AC 12 EP 65 Init 8

- Rider 2 (M15) AC 12 EP 65 Init 8

- Rider 3 (K17) AC 12 EP 65 Init 8

- Rider 4 (M17) AC 12 EP 65 Init 8

- Rider 5 (I14) AC 12 EP 65 Init 8

- Rider 6 (K14) AC 12 EP 65 Init 8

- Rider 7 (I12) AC 12 EP 65 Init 8

- Rider 8 (K12) AC 12 EP 65 Init 8

---

- Archer 1 (S19) AC 13 EP 60 Init 13

- Archer 2 (U19) AC 13 EP 60 Init 13

- Archer 3 (Q17) AC 13 EP 60 Init 13

- Archer 4 (W17) AC 13 EP 60 Init 13

- Kivosh 1 (V16) AC 11 EP 38 Init 10

- Kivosh 2 (R12) AC 11 EP 38 Init 10

* * *

Act V, Opening – The Red Sands of Vassagonia

Hawkeye chuckled at Sol Hawk's question. "Just watch," he said, He aimed his bow, charging it with mental power. Then, sidestepping his mount with his knees, he released it. The feathered shaft flew, striking the far distant standard bearer square in the chest and he staggered. (DAM + 10)

Hawkeye slung his bow across his back, searching for his sword. As he did so, his acute eyes were trained on the Drake Rider and the Sand Drake that Valestar had just struck. "Nice work, old man," he said, then searched both his opponents for anything he could use to his advantage.

* * *

Valestar heard Sol Hawk and Hawkeye's praise and inwardly accepted it with a smile. Then Sol Hawk was telling him his plan. Valestar knew it to be a sound one. His magic was powerful, but he could only use it a very limited amount of times. He pulled open his backpack and drank one of the potions he'd bought in the city. Instantly he felt his energy expand in a great rush that made him almost heady. But even so, he knew he could only get off three more powerful shots. Hopefully that would be enough to take down the Drake, for that was Valestar's plan. As soon as the thing took flight, he would try and knock it out the air. If not, he had bought more potions, but he'd still have to be careful with his magic. He silently thanked the Sage for helping him pick out a crossbow. He may have need of it before the battle ended.

* * *

Weapons in hand Simyn decided to move into the middle of the group. He was determined to help them in any way he could. This was probably the best gift he could give. "I'm going to cast a spell, but I need you to stay close for it to have effect" he told his companions.

* * *

Arcadian moved to meet his enemies. The horse upon whom Sol Hawk had focused his mental ruse upon snorted in reply and kept charging at them. He had not fooled the animal at all. He decided to focus upon the Sand Drake next to see what he could discern about it. Hawkeye paid the oncoming riders no mind, however. He focused all his power upon most likely the weakest adversary they faced--the standard bearer. Sending forth an arrow of the mind and of reality simultaneously, he smote the rider holding the flag instantly, the shaft protruding from his throat. Gurgling, the man let go of the flag to grasp at his wound. And he and his flag fell off the horse in opposite directions.

Both Kai used their sense of Hunting to determine that the Sand Drake was not a true dragon, in the sense that it was not a magical beast. Though it shared many traits with dragonkind, most notably the serpentine neck and tail, and the membranous fans behind the jaws, it was in fact nothing more than a large desert-dwelling lizard.

Simyn reacted quickly, moving his horse through the two Vakeros and to a position near Hawkeye. As he did this, he glanced toward the oncoming riders and saw the air around Sir Victor begin to shimmer. He could feel a wave of heat emanating from that area, and he knew instantly that one of the Kivosh had done this. He turned to look at them, and the sands themselves raised up into a wall blocking the Overlord and his mount from their view. All that was visible was the constantly moving tail of the large lizard mount.

Valestar rode past Simyn then, finishing off a potion and tossing the empty flask to the ground. The mage glared at the oncoming danger with a mixture of irritation and anger.

The bodyguards around the Overlord started to shift their positions, moving closer to the group, interposing themselves between danger and their lord.

Sir Victor felt the horrible heat he had felt before and knew that a Kivosh was to blame. He cursed their magic and tried to fight off its effects as he turned and rode to a different position. Fortitude Save vs. DC 22 or lose -2 Str and -2 Dex for the next 2 rounds.

As Sir Victor moved past him, Arcadian enacted his own newly unlocked power that made him more powerful. Little did he know his friend was fighting off a spell that made him weaker. As an aubic wash of power came over him, Arcadian moved to meet his enemies.

Sir Victor became acutely aware of a devious tactic of the archers who were riding nearer, but staying out of range. The arrows coming at him were all low, striking past his horse's legs or hitting the sand. But they weren't aiming at him—they were trying to hamstring or bring down his horse! Fortunately none of the arrows hit, but the archers stalled their riding and began to reload. The next volley would definitely be more numerous and more severe.

The other two mages rode closer, but only when they stopped riding did they start casting. Soon their spells would go off. I'll put DCs on the spells they cast from now on.

And then the riders were almost upon them. Breaking into two groups, they began what appeared to be a semi-flanking maneuver. In the span of two heartbeats, the blades of the Sharnazim would strike....

Something clenched in Valestar's gut. Fear? No, he was not afraid to die. Concern for his friends? Perhaps. Some more than others, but they were capable of handling themselves.

We meet again.

The mage sighed. An outward battle and an inward one? By the gods, why now? He ignored the voice and concentrated on what was around him.
Act V, Opening – The Red Sands of Vassagonia

ROUND 3

You come at the most irritating times, Valestar thought. Leave me! I have no use for you!

"We used to be such friends," replied the voice in a silky tone. "You wouldn't let our friendship die so easily, would you?"

I'm changing. I'm putting that behind me.

"You can't put it behind you. You can never be forgiven."

Shut up!

"You're nothing without me, you know."

I'm even less with you.

"I'm hurt. After all the power I gave you, you'd treat me like this?"

I was young and careless! I've become less selfish. I don't desire power at the expense of others.

"Oh? But can you really say you've left it behind? After the scars it left on your dear sister?"

No... Valestire...
**Rules, Rulings**

As a full-round action Simyn casts Sign of the Stars, thus granting all allies within 10 feet +2 in AC for 8 rounds. Kai Lord will be the judge of who benefits. Those that are lucky will gain +1 in AC, +1 in ranged attack, and the corresponding bonus on all Dex-based skills.

To face Kivosh - Free Action Penetrate - Standard Action (hit, 6 damage on Kivosh 1 at V16)

Move 16 feet to L23 - Standard Action

What I really want to do is perform a couple spells, but I do not have my rulebook with me right now so I cannot remember the rules for it. If I remember right, it is a free action. If it is, Kivosh could do any needed roll for me and tell me how much EP or WP to deduct. Thanks, Arcadian.

**Ride Check:** 17

Charge Sharn leader at L21, moving to L22

Hit AC 16, 29 damage total

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**Act V, Opening – The Red Sands of Vassagonia**

"That's why you left, isn't it? Because she knows."

Stop.

"Coward."

Stop.

"Fool."

Stop.

"You're a deviant. What do you think your new friends would say if they knew what you did?"

Stop. Leave me alone!

"It's going to happen again, you know it."

Be gone! I no longer fear my past!

"Hm... is that so?"

The voice laughed as tears formed in Valestar's eyes.

Simyn incanted the words and traced out the lines for the sign of his chosen star, [I]Iaos, Star of Air[I] thus granting the benefit of the star to his friends as well.

Arcadan could see that the two Kivosh were preparing spells. He had personally seen what damage the sand mages could inflict and the chaos they could issue were they allowed to complete the spells. Arcadan wheeled his horse around so he was directly facing the nearest Kivosh and he let loose with his Penetrate spell.

With a flurry of his sword and two quick horizontal movements with his offhand the spell was completed and Arcadan sent it flying towards the unaware Kivosh.

As soon as the spell was off and rotating across the sands at unnatural speeds Arcadan nudged his horse around and moved to meet the approaching Vassagonians.

The knight saw the air shimmer around him, and knew he was being targeted by the dastardly sand mages. He willed himself to resist the enchantment, but to no avail: the heat was wearing him down slightly, slowing his reflexes and weakening him. Despite the spell, the knight was still breathing and vowed to fight until there were no enemy left or he could not anymore.

Seeing the enemy draw nearer, he decided it was time to give them of taste of Sommlending weaponry. He targeted the leader of the oncoming warriors, looking him straight in the eyes. He pulled a specific arrow to his bow and let it fly. With a flurry of his sword and two quick horizontal movements with his offhand the spell was completed and Arcadan sent it flying towards the unaware Kivosh.

"Korlaeth!" shouted Sol Hawk - the Vakeros had broken from the group. "The leader!" shouted Valestar, "he's attacking the leader!" No more time. Korlaeth would never survive what he was planning. Even as Simyn's spell began to flicker and fade behind him, Sol Hawk searched his quiver for the one arrow he was saving, the one arrow he hoped he would never need:

The Graveeweed.

The head and tip of the arrow had been bound by Sol with fabric to prevent the poison from coming through. Korlaeth would know what to do. It was a token of the time they shared together in the dungeons of Aymodani, as his slaves. This arrow had been made by Korlaeth's own hand and now it should return to him. Tears welled in Sol Hawk's eyes as he held out the arrow to his pack-camel, Wing Hoof, who grabbed at once the poison payload as she would a bit.

"Wing Hoof," he told her, "be brave like your mate was. Take this to my friend right away." Sol knew though that she didn't understand what he was saying, but she knew what to do. She broke the bond, and now her master's mind was free. His Kai Powers would be able to fight through her. Sol Hawk dashed off and the horse took off at full-speed, nearly on his tail before the tide of evil warriors could close the gap.

"Valestar," said Sol Hawk, "get ready in case Korlaeth can force the enemy through that sand barrier. Everyone be ready - they're upon us!"

As the wave of enemies came flowing over the desert sands like a tide of death, Sol Hawk tagged Stout Heart's reigns. To the east, Sir Victor was making his charge into battle against the leader's warhorse. As the Lance of Justice neared its target, Sol Hawk cut loose with a strafing arrow and a follow-up psychic attack (DAH 9, 5) which caused the Sharnazim leader (L21) to bellow as Sir Victor lanced him through the gutlet with an angry warhorse seeking for the evil man with his large horse teeth.

Sol Hawk didn't halt there, but targeted the Sharn leader's approaching lieutenants. Escape! he commanded the horse (K19). He could not resist Sol Hawk's powers, the animal dashed off for safety at a full run.

Sol Hawk targeted the next rampaging animal (K17), again trying to plant the imperative for escape whilst using the language of horses: Your comrades are running and dying - get out of here while you're still alive! Bluff: 12, Beast Speech (SW)

Finally, Sol Hawk spurred his mount to retrieve, moving into range with Simyn as the Sage's spell took effect.

Noticing that Valestar was babbling, Hawkeye nudged him and said, "Hey old man, snap out of it can't you see that we are in the middle of a flight here and we could use some help from you, not babbling right now?"

Seeing that Sol Hawk and Sir Victor were attacking the leader of the Sharnazim, Hawkeye added to their attack by turning his mental powers on the leader (L21, DAH 4).

"Everyone, that sand drake is just a big lizard - it can't breathe fire, ok?"

As Simyn had almost finished his spell, Hawkeye coaxed his horse into stepping toward the sage so he could defend both him and Valestar. Hawkeye pulled out his sword and readied himself into a defensive stance. And if he got a benefit from Simyn's magic, all the better, right?
Act V, Opening – The Red Sands of Vassagonia

Hawkeye’s voice came to him out of the haze that had formed over his mind. Valestar regained his senses. He would deal with the voice later. For now, he had to survive.

Seeing the enemy draw closer, Valestar readied his crossbow.

Volerthaq watched as the Sharnazim moved in on him and his companions. They were hopelessly outnumbered. His arrows were feeling more and more ineffectual against the seemingly endless numbers of Vassan troops arrayed against them. He looked around again and saw the enemy commander, only a dim outline behind the wall of sand that had been raised in front of him. An insane thought sprang to mind, and Volerthaq kicked his horse before he thought to much about it.

Avrate leapt forward at a dead run, Volerthaq leaned over and trying to ignore the soldiers and arrows that could put a stop to this before he got there. He thought of his home and the recent fighting with Cade. He hoped he would live to see that made right.

Avrate swung around the sand wall, eyes rolling in fear, but her training held fast. He raced around the front of the Vassan Commander’s lizard and came alongside. He muttered a swift prayer to Ishir as surprise registered in the Commander’s face.

Volerthaq leapt at the leader, hoping against hope to knock him from his steed straight into the sand wall beside him.

Volerthaq saw Volerthaq break free of their group and rush away across the dunes. For a moment he wondered what he was doing, then he realized. “That fool!” he said. He moved to prepare a spell in order to help this desperate act, but he knew that he would be too late.

“Volerthaq is attacking the leader!” he called out to his companions.

Sol Hawk reached down into his backpack on the side of his camel and pulled out the poisoned arrow he had kept from days ago. Hopefully the poison had not lost its potency. He pulled out two and let one fall, grabbing it with his mind and sending it at the Sharnazim leader. It was followed closely by a pulse of unseen energy that washed over the man like a wave of fearful nausea.

He was about to use the poison arrow of one of the approaching bodyguards as he moved back closer to Simyn, but he saw Volerthaq take a deep breath and tighten the grip on his reigns—he wasn’t holding any weapons... no. It couldn’t be. What was he thinking?

The Kai then used his skills on the pack camel to go take the poisoned arrow to Korlaeth. The creature trotted across the sands, chomping on the arrow.

Simyn began calling upon Laos to lend them aid in these dangerous times. Perhaps it was the alignment with Magnamund, perhaps it was an intercession by some higher power, but no one would ever know. The circle of glittering energy spread from Simyn outwards then exploded in a flash, hitting every one of his companions! Simyn felt the euphoric state drain from him immediately, and he opened his eyes to see the wreath of magic spread to everyone. Augmented for my own reasons.

The other Kai lent his psychic aid in combat against the leader as he moved into a better position for the oncoming attack. After instructing them about the drake’s true non-magical nature, Korlaeth’s resolve only strengthened.

Hawkeye felt the influence of the magic a split second before he felt a hard blast of sand smash into his chest and spray into his face. It felt as if someone had just beaten his chest with an iron rod. The approaching Vashan bodyguard had unleashed a potent spell designed to bludgeon him from his horse! Strength check vs. DC25 to remain on horse. Hawkeye: -8 EP

Meanwhile, the other bodyguard concentrated on his wall spell, holding it in place so the Sharnazim could wipe out these puny rag-tag fools with no further damage to the drake.

Volerthaq grabbed and loaded his crossbow, feeling the spray of sand from Hawkeye right next to him. His concern over one of his closest friends was devoured by the demon that plagued him. MORE, it moaned in delight. Give me more so that we may walk together again.

The scimitar-wielding bodyguards made a light gallop into place to get closer to the cluster of enemies. They let those Sharnazim below them attack first; however—no one could breach their defenses themselves. They were too effective in defending their lord. They needed only assure that magic-user didn’t threaten the Overlord anymore.

Meanwhile, the Overlord himself gained control of his mount and reached into his black wrap-tunic and pulled out a potion of Laumspur. He poured it onto the drake’s scaled scutes, noticing their charred color fading as the fluid washed over them.

Sir Victor dropped his lance into position and moved forward to engage. An arrow whistled past and hit the leader a second before Sir Victor got near. The Sharnazim veered his horse slightly for some reason, but it was not enough. The knight felt the lance impale the man, and as the bulk of the force pushed upon his arm, Sir Victor released the lance to avoid personal damage and slowed Bright Lance from the charge. The enemy had moved past him, not expecting him to move, yet this only cleared the path between him and the archers.

They fried immediately, reloading and firing again as they held still. The effects of the heat spell, along with his lancing maneuver, had put him at a dire position. Bright Lance whirled in pain and jerked about as some arrows hit and some missed. All in all, the horse had been wounded in three places—twice on the rear haunches. Bright Lance: -7 EP

Arcadian concentrated instead upon the two Kivosh, knowing that he could handle this. Not realizing that he and the Kivosh bodyguard behind him had just cast similar versions of the same spell, he completed the gesture flawlessly and knocked one Kivosh from his horse before he could complete his spell. The other one completed his spell, only to have it disintegrate by the Vakeros. -4 EP for the counterspell, Cade

Seeing this discharge of magic, two of the bodyguards of the Overlord moved to investigate. This was something they could not allow near their lord.

Meanwhile, the unhorsed Kivosh staggered and tried to recover his horse, being unable to do much else. His companion collapsed glorified in hatred. Only a Broodthash mage...or a banaosh...could do that! Very well, he would drain their life force with his own! He began casting once more.

The riders, committed to their charge, raced toward the nearest enemy, or in some cases, had to divert their charge based on the bodyguards crossing their paths. Regardless, a half dozen of them closed in upon everyone.

Hawkeye was attacked from both sides, having already been blasted from the sand. He felt the sting of the swords even as he felt the sting of the sand in his eyes. Hawkeye: -6 EP total Valestar tried to fend off his own assailant with his crossbow, but he was unskilled at such behaviors. Indigo so I’ll need to save: Valkrest: -6 EP And not surprisingly, Sol Hawk was surrounded by the most enemies, simply because he was at the forefront of the attack. Blades flashed left and right as the Sharnazim halted their charge and swung from all sides. Sol Hawk: -9 EP total

And then Volerthaq saw the camel coming at him with an arrow in its mouth. Recognizing it instantly, he yanked it free and put it in his own mouth, trying not to think where it had just been. With a hearty yell, he charged, the camel trotting after him faithfully, remember the command to follow.

Around the Sharnazim, around the bodyguards, past the Kivosh, and around the wall he raced. The Overlord looked up from healing the drake as his attendant Kivosh hissed a warning. The ceased to concentrate on the wall and it vanished. Then the Kivosh performed the quickest spell he knew, and Korlaeth felt a wave of heat across him as he leapt at the Overlord. The attempt was hindered by three things, however:

The Kivosh’s spell, Swelter, distracted him. Fort Save DC22 or -2 Str/Dex for the next 2 rounds

The horse was close enough for the drake to attack, since the Overlord had dropped the reins. Avrate: -11 EP And the Overlord had some of the quickest reflexes Korlaeth had ever seen. He blocked the Vakeros’ lunges, and spiraled in the saddle, the end effect of which was him falling forward off the drake instead of being thrown off of it. Korlaeth, however, was tossed further than he intended, landing behind the drake and right underneath the Vakeros.
Rules, Rulings

To best describe what just happened, think of if you jumped at an object whilst in motion. You have your own momentum going west. You leap south. You grab an object that is not secured as you travel southwest on a combined vector. It turns and falls, but pushes you to the west even more.

Make sense? Please don't ask me to to an animated gif of it.

Overlord Tava'ryn (D3) AC 18 EP 163/165 Init 18, undraked
Sand Drake (C4-E4) AC 21 EP 115/150 Init 15
Kivosh Bodyguard 1 (C2) AC 14 EP 42/45 Init 19
Kivosh Bodyguard 2 (B15) AC 14 EP 39/45 Init 19
Sharnazim Bodyguard 1 (G17) AC 16 EP 90 Init 16
Sharnazim Bodyguard 2 (H18) AC 16 EP 90 Init 16
Sharnazim Bodyguard 3 (J5) AC 15 EP 80 Init 12
Sharnazim Bodyguard 4 (I9) AC 15 EP 80 Init 12

Leader (L21) AC 12 EP 25/75 Init 1, bleeding profusely -3 EP/round, unhorsed, pinned
Rider 2 (I22) AC 12 EP 65 Init 8
Rider 4 (I21) AC 12 EP 65 Init 8
Rider 6 (G21) AC 12 EP 65 Init 8
Rider 7 (F20) AC 12 EP 65 Init 8
Rider 8 (H21) AC 12 EP 65 Init 8
Archer 1 (S19) AC 13 EP 60 Init 13
Archer 2 (U19) AC 13 EP 60 Init 13
Archer 3 (Q17) AC 13 EP 60 Init 13
Archer 4 (W17) AC 13 EP 60 Init 13
Kivosh 1 (W15) AC 11 EP 32/38 Init 4 unhorsed
Kivosh 2 (R12) AC 11 EP 32/38 Init 10 countered

Sol Hawk's Ride Check DC5 req'd for "no hands": 30 (yeah!)

簸 (standard) VoF on I21 horse, DC15, "Escape!": 25
簸 (psychic) Psychic Attack on enemy who is on G21: 10
簸 (not an action) Psychic Lash against warrior at G21: 3
簸 (free) Strafing Will to attack G21 rider HA nat 20, hit DC39, HIT for 3 DAM
簸 (free) Bluff all enemy horses near to him (Beast Speech): Bluff: 15
簸 (free) speak to others (move) to F24

Notes: Sol Hawk loses: 2 WP, 1 arrow, 1 Endurance, -1 in melee (hit & dam) loses 1 AC
簸 Notes: Voice of the Forest lasts for 6 rounds. Which means that the horse recovers its senses at the end of Round 10 and if it runs back at the same speed, may be back by end of Round 16

簸 (standard) sword attack vs. D21 rider HIT AC16, DAM 11
簸 (psychic) Psychic Attack vs. G21 rider, 8 DAM (move) to D24
簸 (free) Bluff Sharn at D21: hit DC28

Note: my AC is now 18, also -2WP for me

Act V, Opening – The Red Sands of Vassagonia

He looked up and heard the sounds of scimitars being drawn, along with the Kivosh casting hastily. At least he still had the arrow, and he was still alive.

ROUND 4

As the enemy arrived a split-second later, Sol Hawk couldn’t even see Korlaeth anymore. The Sharn Warriors were attacking Sol Hawk from all angles. Good, thought Sol Hawk, They’re right where I want them now.

The Sharnazim nearest to Valestar took the brunt of Sol Hawk’s attack. They could not be allowed to touch the mage. An arrow flew from Sol Hawk’s quiver, stabbing the huge Sharn (G21) in the giblets (DAM 4). This only angered him and Sol Hawk realized that this man was trained in pure warfare since the time he was a boy. And there were four of these guys!

Well, Sol Hawk had learned more about war in these past weeks than most learned in a lifetime. They were outnumbered, but not beaten. He had to hold these brutes off long enough for Korlaeth to fell their leader. Korlaeth! Sol Hawk did not let his thoughts linger, but instead refocused his psychic energy on the muscular Sharnazim (DAM 10, 3). Even Stout Heart, spurred on by Sol Hawk, joined the attack, sensing that he was fighting to free his lady love and perhaps also all camels everywhere. (DAM 5)

Escape! Sol Hawk said to an enemy horse (G21, VoF hit DC25 ). The horse turned tail and bolted at full speed. I am more dangerous than any enemy you have ever faced, continued Sol Hawk in the tongue of horses, I won’t say it again! Escape now! (Bluff with Beast Speech: 15)

With the enemy everywhere, there was just one choice now. *Retreat! Valestar, Simyn, back up! Retreat!"* Sol Hawk moved his camel back a few more steps in order to draw the enemy after them on his own terms.

* * *

Hawkeye shook the sand out of his eyes in time to block a sword strike from the oncoming Sharnazim Warrior. The man was a brute and although strong, found it hard to keep up with Hawkeye’s speed. Hawkeye’s sword struck him under his attack and struck him beneath the shoulder (DAM 11).

“It seems that you have cut yourself,” said Hawkeye. “Let us continue now. I have killed nine men today,” he said, examining his master-crafted sword, “and I think ten would be a good number to finish on.” He looked at the man with a long stern gaze. (Bluff: 28)

Out of the corner of his eye Hawkeye could see that his brother Sol had his hands full at the moment. He concentrated his power onto Sol Hawk’s chosen foe (DAM 8 on G21)

“Thanks for the spell,” he said to Simyn, “Now come on we have to get out of here now.” Hawkeye backed up, drawing the enemy in. Hawkeye also tried to keep his eye on the Kivosh who was no doubt up to no good.

* * *
Act V, Opening – The Red Sands of Vassagonia

Korlaeth stumbled to his feet as quickly as he could, and gazed for a split second at the arrow in his hands. He shook his head in amazement and exasperation, and a little desperation as he locked the wasow and left for the former lizard rider. His aim was true and he whistled for Avatre even as the arrow struck home, hoping that her combat training would bring her over to the top of the commander to come to him.

Sir Victor had to let go of his lance as the shock of the impact unhorsed his enemy. Seeing the downed man bleeding off to death, the Ruanese did not hesitate, and in one motion, drew his mighty broadsword and slashed down onto his enemy, holding nothing back, to end his misery.

Even as he was giving the killing blow to this enemy, another one presented himself in front, and he spurred Bright Lance on, urging her into an all-out attack. Rearing up, the warhorse slammed both hooves squarely into the sharnazim warrior, while she snapped her teeth inches from his shoulder.

17 damage. This enemy will soon join his fellow, and then the knight will be able to turn his fury upon the archers who were targeting his loyal steed.

Valestar tried to ignore the Sharnazim slashing at him and instead concentrated on helping Korlaeth. He urged Varsuvial out of the press of warriors and taking up his staff sent his thoughts and power towards the Overlord, a speck in the distance. But just as he was about to complete the spell, Varsuvial bayed and shook his body. The press of combat was proving ill for both of them. The fireballs went astray, and Valestar knew they would explode into the dunes twenty feet away from their intended target.

Valestar: one round left. After this coming round of actions, you’ll split into a separate thread.

Sand Drake (C4-E4) AC 21 EP 115/150 Init 15
Kivosh Bodyguard 1 (F7) AC 14 EP 33/45 Init 19
Kivosh Bodyguard 2 (B5) AC 14 EP 39/45 Init 19
Sharnazim Bodyguard 1 (N20) AC 16 EP 90 Init 16
Sharnazim Bodyguard 2 (M22) AC 16 EP 90 Init 16
Sharnazim Bodyguard 3 (M15) AC 15 EP 63/80 Init 12
Sharnazim Bodyguard 4 (N15) AC 15 EP 80 Init 12

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Rider 2 (D22) AC 12 EP 40/65 Init 8, bleeding
Rider 4 (D21) AC 12 EP 65 Init 8
Rider 5 (D21) AC 12 EP 31/65 Init 8, bleeding -2 EP
Rider 6 (G21) AC 12 EP 37/65 Init 8
Rider 7 (F20) AC 12 EP 63 Init 8
Rider 8 (H21) AC 12 EP 65 Init 8
Archer 1 (Q27) AC 13 EP 60 Init 13
Archer 2 (O25) AC 13 EP 60 Init 13
Archer 3 (O25) AC 13 EP 60 Init 13
Archer 4 (W26) AC 13 EP 60 Init 13
Kivosh 1 (W15) AC 11 EP 32/38 Init 4
Kivosh 2 (R12) AC 11 EP 30/38 Init 10 countered

Rules, Rulings

* * *

The Penetrate attack had worked with all the effectlessness that Arcadian could have possibly hoped for. He grinned at the rage of his fellow Kivosh as his counterspell was undone by his own counterspell.

The Kivosh had begun to envoke another spell and once again Arcadian quickly fought to unravel the spell before it could be completed. Not even waiting to see if he had succeeded Arcadian turned to aid Sol Hawk, who was hard-pressed by Sharnazim.

Arcadian rode up to the nearest Sharnazim and swung twice with his blue-steel sword, attempting to drive the Vassan to his knees.

Simyn guided Starfall with his feet, so he could attack one of the riders. He quickly struck out three times with his rapier and piispand and they all hit home.

The horses that Sol Hawk threatened held their ground, though a couple of them seemed to jerk against their reins and force their riders to abandon hands-free riding. The Sharnazim on these spooked horses cursed and flailed.

Hawkeye’s intimidations worked substantially better, however. The Sharnazim pulled his mount back away from the Klv, who rode past him and toward the south a bit. The Sharnazim kept his eye on this fellow, scotching back to join his own black-clad group.

Unfortunately this put him riding past Simyn, the whirling dervish of doom. The rider was so intent on keeping the Kai in his sights as he repulsed that he moved right into a flurry of slashing and impaling from the fair-skinned Lyrian.

The Kivosh that had been heading toward Valestar instead moved back to protect his lord, not expecting one of these fools to change after him. He moved back closer to the Overlord and sent a wave of psychic energy at the banou to distract him. He then cast a spell that wreathed his hands in flame. Throwing a leg over his horse, he dropped off into the sands behind the drake. Korlaeth: -5 psychic damage (Jalie from WP First)

Valestar was being distracted by inner turmoil and outer chaos. Having just gotten his crossbow ready, he was forced to put it down and change tactics, but Varsuvial didn’t care much for the close quarters combat with the combat-bred horses around him, and his motions caused the crossbow to fall from his master’s lap. This in turn caused Valestar to fire along the wrong vectors with his magic, and the blasts detonated harmlessly in the sands between him and the intended targets.

You are weak and feeble, old man. I am sure to win this time.

Two of the Sharnazim bodyguards spread out and flanked Sir Victor, their training of combat keen enough to realize that if the knight retrieved his lance, he could impale any of them easily. They arrived simultaneously, causing the knight a bit of a quandary before he carried out the actions he had planned. Both of them swung at once, and the Ruanese was only able to block one of them.

Sir Victor: -9 EP

Far from this action, Korlaeth faced down his toughest opponent ever. Overlord Tava’ryn drew himself up to full height, even as his drake continued its voracious attack against the Vakeros’ horse. From seemingly nowhere, two polished scimitars appeared in the man’s hands, twirling. He pointed at the horse and drake. “So shall I do to you, fifty-val-kahn-ows,” he said, trying to pronounce the difficult Dessi word instead of his own native word, banou.

Korlaeth prepared to face this enemy with bravery and resolve. The few seconds were nothing but an ever-blossoming explosion of pain. The Overlord was truly a master of twin-bladed combat. The Kivosha that had been heading toward Valestar instead moved back to protect his lord, not expecting one of these fools to change after him. He moved back closer to the Overlord and sent a wave of psychic energy at the banou to distract him. He then cast a spell that wreathed his hands in flame. Throwing a leg over his horse, he dropped off into the sands behind the drake. Korlaeth: -5 psychic damage (Jalie from WP First)

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Arcadian, -4 EP for another spell countered. And *Asha-vo* combat is basically like painting imaginary Japanese characters with your weapons as the brushes--the Sharnazim twin scimitar routines utilize similar structures, coincidentally.

Arcadian's blade swirled in the air, using the patterns of Asha-vo combt in, which ancient pictoglyph letters are used for attack patterns. Across, down, across, thrust! The initial strike caught the Sharnazim completely off guard, tearing through his side easily. The following attack foc used on the same area, as the blade thrust into the existing wound.

The archers were unable to see their original target now, and so they rode in search of a new target--and they found plenty of them. Each of them took unleashing their arrows. One of them took a cheap shot at Sir Victor, but the arrow deflected off one of his pauldrons. Another shot long at Hawkeye, but the warm winds underneath the dark clouds above pushed it off course into the sands. The other two took aim at Sol Hawk, and while one missed, the other one hit the Kai hard in the shoulder, penetrating into the joint itself. Sol Hawk: -12 EP, Critical Hit, -2 to melee or ranged attacks until healed.

Sir Victor then became surrounded, and it was all he could do to fend them off. The blades flashed around him, and he felt one hammer into his thigh. The thought occurred to him then--were they still trying to take down his horse? Sir Victor: -4 EP

While one Kivosh that Arcadian had knocked off his horse climbed back into the saddle and got situated, the other tried to complete his spell that was initially countered, only to have it countered again! He could not keep on wasting his life this way. Angered, he pulled out his khanjar and rode to face the Vakeros face to face. He came to a halt behind Arcadian in time to see him stab the Sharnazim. Perhaps one more attempt at magic was prudent--a different spell now that he was close.

The riders, most oblivious to the fall of their squad leader, kept battling on, maneuvering in an attempt to attack as many people as possible, rather than hack one to bits. The bloodlust of combat seemed to make them forget their training.

Valestar blocked a swing from the bleeding Sharnazim that had come past Simyn, but another rider next to him managed to hit him on top of the head with a return-swing of the scimitar. Had it been a double-edged weapon, the mage would have been heavily wounded. As it was, he was only dazed a bit. Fortunately for him, one of this assailants sped away and attacked someone else. Sol Hawk had just been hit from the archer's arrow, and now the Sharnazim attacked him. The blade missed however, striking the camel on the flank. Valestar: -3 EP Sol Hawk's Camel: -5 EP

This is the moment everyone has been waiting for...it deserves to be set apart. Korlaeth...check your inbox.

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Korlaeth felt the press of evil around him. Through a haze of throbbing pain he nocked the arrow into his bow and dropped to one knee to steady the shot. It was point blank, but he could not let this miss. Turning the bow at an angle to line up with his sight, the Vakeros released the arrow. It sank into the Overlord's chest, just below the heart. The man grunted in pain as Korlaeth stood again, whistling for his horse, the same instant his eyes found the faithful Avatre in the bloody jaws of the sand-drake.

He turned to see the other Kivosh bodyguard coming, his hands covered in fire. This is contingent on whether you try to counter. The other Kivosh then unleashed a torrent of sand at him, striking him in the back and trying to push him off balance. At the same time, he could feel his willpower being crumbled by yet another psychic attack. Korlaeth: -6 EP, -9 WP, Counterspell DC = 23, +4 points to counter if you attempt, Strength check DC25 to remain standing.

Through the convergence of attacks directed at him, Korlaeth maintained his view of the leader.

Tava'ryn snapped the arrow off and reached to pull it out of his back. He then staggered a step and brought his hand around to look at it. As he recognized the sticky substance on his fingertips from the arrow, he knew that he had been poisoned. The graveweed was having its effect on him. He became violently dizzy, nauseated, and his alternated between burning hot and freezing cold. He clawed at his face, leaving crimson abrasions where his nails tore into the flesh.

"Ny!" he shouted, drawing the attentions of his Kivosh bodyguards. "Azarn, akta 'ban azarn. Ny!" he cried, and then fell backwards onto the sand, his arms wide when he hit.

The Kivosh stared in shock that quickly turned to intense anger. This banou had just slain Tava'ryn, leader of the Western Armies of Vassagonia and contender for the Zakhan's crown with this campaign. The Kivosh on horseback jumped off his horse and ran to the standard-bearer's horse.
Act V. Opening – The Red Sands of Vassagonia

ROUND 5

Sol Hawk knew that he had to get to Korlaeth and soon. Diverting his enemies with a number of skills that he knew, Sol Hawk had managed to create some space for himself. He yelled for his camel to run - "Hiyah!" and ran right for where Simyn was battling with one of the Sharnazim. The camel jumped the gap and hit the sand running - the duo were on their way to the site where Sol Hawk dearly hoped to find Korlaeth still alive.

Sol’s arm was still throbbing from where the arrow had struck him. He felt guilty for leaving the others, but he knew that if Korlaeth was still alive, he needed backup right now. Without another thought, he arrived on the scene - there were robes Kivosh everywhere and Sol’s heart sank when he saw the Sand Drake feasting on what had been Korlaeth’s horse. Sol Hawk focused his powers of command upon the Sand Drake - with tasty targets in front of it, Sol Hawk hoped that it could be turned to attack their enemies. "Rebe’I commanded it. But the Sand Drake’s will was unbelievably strong. Sol Hawk doubted that his words would sway it. (Hit DC25)

Then, as the Sand Drake began to shift position, Sol Hawk gazed on a wondrous sight - Korlaeth was fighting on. And at his feet - the Overlord! Sol Hawk was astonished, then deeply proud. He had done it!

* * *

"Drake’s loose, run while you can," bluffed Sol Hawk at the first Kivosh (F7) he passed (Bluff: 18). There was no time to say more, for Sol Hawk was already riding down the second foe before the first Kivosh could respond.

Sol Hawk’s camel grabbed the Kivosh Bodyguard (BS5) by the back of the neck and shook (DAM 4). Sol Hawk’s presence was like knives and these hit the Kivosh like razors on the wind (DAM 1). Sol Hawk tried to launch an arrow as well, but the arrow failed to lift from his quiver so great was the stress between riders at this moment.

"Stay away from my friend," said Sol Hawk, for he could see that the Kivosh Bodyguard already had Korlaeth in his sights. With more power than Sol Hawk had ever mustered into a psychic blast before, the Kai Lord literally burned the Kivosh’s mind from the inside out as one would ignite cheap wrinkled paper with a twin-linked flamethrower (DAM 12, Kivosh stunned for 5 rounds).

Finding himself surrounded, Sir Victor knew he couldn’t stay in this position for long if he meant to survive this day. Suddenly, a weight was lifted off his shoulders as the mystic curse he was under was dispelled. Enjoying his regained strength, the knight focused his energies and skill at arms against his opponent, laying two vicious blows against the sand warrior.

"Attack, Bright Lance, Hiyeah!" he ordered his faithful warhorse, driving her forward with his knees. The mighty beast once again pummeled the sharnazim with her hooves and even took a bite into his thigh, before Sir Victor skilfully maneuvered out of harm’s way.

* * *

Hawkeye watched as Sol Hawk dashed away. Hawkeye sighed. It was up to him to defend Simyn and Valestar. "Hey there Arcadian," he said to the fighting Vakeros nearby, "let’s do it."

The arrows whizzed by and Hawkeye tried to keep his eyes on the prize. Once Sol Hawk’s camel had jumped the gap and surprised the riders, Hawkeye charged forward on his horse, swinging his weapon and striking at one of the riders (DAM 5) who was worse for wear. "Take him Simyn," he said, "he’s yours."

"As Hawkeye hit the rider with another psychic attack (DAM 3), he could see that someone was running for the standard..."

Korlaeth stared in stunned disbelief as Avatre was ripped from his life even as the Vassagonian Overlord fell to the sand. A wall of sand slammed into him even as he stood, and try as he might, he couldn’t focus through the pain and shock he was in enough to counter the spell. He stumbled forward, but miraculously retained his footing, finally tearing his eyes away from Avatre’s bloody remains to focus on the Kivosh near him.

The bow in his hand was useless without the arrows that had been with Avatre, but this blue steel had many forms, and with a shimmer, he was holding a long sword. He moved up to the Kivosh with the burning bands, wincing slightly as he walked. He yelled again, this time a Vakeros warcry, and he too to Fahir his armor would protect him a little longer.

* * *

Simyn was focused on his enemy now. Attack, riposte, lunge. Years of mock training at the Halls of Learning in Varetta and other places had given Simyn phenomenal fencing skills. His opponent was no aware of Simyn’s unusual fighting technique, but it didn’t stop the sage from planting three quick stabs in the body of the riding sharnazim.

* * *

Arcadian struck out at the Sharnazim in front of him one last time before he turned to face the Kivosh that he had just counterpelled for the second time. To the Vakeros’ surprise the Kivosh was right behind him, preparing another spell.

Arcadian let out a roar and urged Eri forward and then struck downwards with his blue-steel sword, the blade biting into the Kivosh’s unprotected body. The Vakeros was a whirlwind with his sword, striking out with blows that sought out the vital organs of his enemies.

* * *

Valestar began to cast his spell again, but suddenly heard Hawk Eye, who had the best eyes of the party, cry out "He’s dead!"

For a moment, Valestar’s heart sank in honor of the brave Vakeros. Then Hawkeye call out again: "He’s dead! The Overlord is defeated by Korlaeth!"

Valestar’s eyebrows lifted in amazement. That Vakeros was a monster! No normal man could’ve survived that! Valestar would make sure to mention his name to the Eldar Council when he returned to Dessi.

And if he no longer needed his magical support then Valestar could focus on the annoying sap in front of him. Casually he unloaded his crossbow into the man’s shoulder, then directed Varsuvial back a few paces. He remembered Simyn’s training, and another arrow was in the crossbow within seconds.

* * *

"Bruhruhuhuuu!" growled Sol Hawk’s camel as the Kai urged it into motion. Fanciful visions of the animal leaping through the gap between Simyn and his closest foe shattered into broken fantasy as the camel merely barged through instead. "Bruh bruhruuhuu!" it groaned as it raced along.

The Kai yelled at the first Kivosh as he passed, but the man paid him no mind. Sol Hawk refocused his attention upon the other flaming-haunt Kivosh ahead. He expended a tremendous portion of his inner strength in an effort to persuade Korlaeth’s attacker. And it worked. The mage took a shaky step, then another to balance himself, then his arms slowly drooped.
Act V, Opening – The Red Sands of Vassagonia

Sending a mental command to the sand drake, the Kai coaxed his camel to slam into the dazed Kivosh. The man grunted and flew forward a bit, limp and airborne, crashing into the sand like a sack of cabbages tossed from a skyrider.

Recovering from the camel’s rabid charge (it was foaming at the mouth, after all, as camels sometimes do), Simyn and Hawkeye combined to deliver a massive amount of damage to a nearby Sharnazim. His lifeless body fell from the horse, which—free of its rider’s commands—decided to trot away from the chaos.

Valestar managed to grab his crossbow and bring it level with a nearby Sharnazim. He pulled the release bar and watched with satisfaction as the bolt sank in the man’s chest. But the elation was short-lived.

"YONK-eee!" cried Varsuvial, which could have been Donkey for “Get up you old narcoleptic coot!”

Valestar managed to grab his crossbow and bring it level with a nearby Sharnazim. He pulled the release bar and watched with satisfaction as the bolt sank in the man’s chest. But the elation was short-lived.

Free again! came a cry from within. You will soon serve me, fool. Come. Let us embrace.

The Dessi’s eyes rolled into his head and he dropped the crossbow. He tried feebly to grab Varsuvial’s mane, but consciousness was already removed from him. He hit the sand hard, and the Sharnazim whom he had just attacked laughed cruelly and threw a leg over his horse to dismount.

"FRENK-eee!" cried Varsuvial, which could have been Donkey for “Get up you old narcoleptic coot!”

Arcadian had no way of knowing the deeds of his kinsman, for he was busy creating his own legend. With intense focus, he drove his blade through the heart of the Sharnazim next to him, then took a step and with a flourish, he drove the wet blade into the Kivosh’s heart as well. He pulled the sword free as fighter and mage on either side of him fell to the sands in unison.

Realizing he could share a similar fate, one of the archer’s morale faltered, and he turned and ran away.

The archers and riders pressed on with their attacks, drawing blood on more than one occasion. Hawkeye: -9EP total damage, Simyn: -8 EP total damage.

Korlaeth hobbled as best he could toward the unsightly hero—a bedraggled yet cheerful Kai riding astride a foamy-mouthed mage-tipping camel. He laughed at the sight briefly in spite of the fresh jagged wounds on his back from the drake. As he looked at the helpless Kivosha before him, he willed his bow to change to a blade. At that instant, he felt another mental onslaught from the second Kivosh bodyguard—the one who had blasted him with sand. Korlaeth: -7 WP (if WP reaches 0, damage is to EP)

A second after hitting the d_mnable Vakeros with another blast of mental force, the Kivosh found what he was looking for—the standard bearer’s horn. Hefting the large dragon’s horn to his lips, he blew a long sonorous tone.

The final Kivosh raced toward the Vakeros who had insulted his honor, intent on casting a spell. However, the commotion of the ride ruined his ability to focus, and the spell was ruined. Cursing, he pulled his mount to a halt and began preparation for another casting. As the tone from the horn rang out, he hesitated and looked northward.

The Action as it is at the End of Round 5… can Korlaeth triumph?
Rules, Rulings

Here's how combat will work—it's very simplified.

Add your current WP and EP together. This is now your LP score, your "Life Points." As discussed before, the demon never attacks when your LP is high. Now we use the psychic combat rules.

You have a Psychic AC here, even though you may not in real life. It is calculated the same way, substituting wisdom for Intelligence (I don't have the rulebook with me to go into specifics).

All you can do is attack. It is simply a matter of who defeats who first. The psychic attacks can take any form you wish, be it a lance of cinnamon light, a blazing green fire, etc. After all, nothing where you are is truly tangible, though it seems that way.

The Enemy of My Enemy

Act Va
Let Us Embrace

Valestar was in a foggy dismal gray place, much different from the bright yellow desert. It would be a welcome change, except that he had been here before and knew what to expect. The fog swirled around him, caressing him, violating his proximity.

Laughter filled his mind as the fog condensed in a spot across from him. Two slanted orange eyes opened in the fog, and a creature found in nightmares appeared.

The gaunt figure hunched over, its back permanently curved like a deformed C. the tail dragged underneath, sluglike and limp, mottled gray and brown. Long spindly arms covered in patches of fungus and sores were bent in front of the creature, its hands wringing in anticipation.

Strings of greasy matted hair hung almost to the ground, framing a skeletal face with tattered pieces of flesh hanging loosely on it. The eyes were free of their sockets, rolling on hyperextended muscle fibers across the thing's cheeks. Stark, they moved in unison and were fully in control of the beast. It lacked a lower jaw, and saliva dripped freely in long mucoid strands.

I grow more beautiful with the passing of time, eh? said the Inner Demon known as Sinfless. Unlike your pathetic kind.

It scratched its ribs, tearing skin from them in the process. Unfazed, it continued. If I don't kill you, those sand-b...stand will. And then I will find a new vessel. Perhaps I will latch onto that moody Vakeros and wait till I am close to his woman? Then I will rip him apart before her very eyes as a prelude to the torment I will inflict upon her.

"So you finally show yourself." Valestar slowly stood to face the abomination. "For years you've tormented me so cleverly that I actually allowed it. Even embraced it. But now I see what you really are. Just a demon. And nothing more."

Now he understood why his mentors had sent him on this journey. This would eb the end of his torment, one way or another. But then an image came unbidden, the image of his sister. Valestire. His courage failed him. Would this be her salvation as well? Or was she already doomed by his actions?

"Nothing more?" the apparition hissed in amusement. It took a step forward and extended its arms. The needle-like fingers flickered and twitched. "I am powerful enough to pull you here and leave your mortal form helpless. Can you extricate me from your inner self so easily?"

A shrill noise emanated from the creature's skull. It pierced Valestar's own thoughts and caused pain and fear inside him. Valestar: -4 LP

Valestar threw up his hands to block out the horrible visage, forgetting that he was not in the actual world. Immediately reacting to this weakness, the demon flooded his mind with terrifying images of the companions in various scenes of death. Last came a horrible image of himself mounting the dead body of his sister. His face was old and haggard and his voice sounded as if he was winded after a long run. "And then I will show the world what you really are. Just a demon. And nothing more."

"You are outmatched this time. Give up."

Valestar kept control of himself this time. His mind was returning to him. He knew he couldn't fight the demon with rage and anger. He needed to change the battlefield. Drawing on his training, he created a focused thought.

Suddenly, the demon found itself alone in a grand library. Valestar seemed to have vanished. It growled for him to come out and play. When it got no response it grew angrier still, and tore at the shelves, ripping open the books. As the books fell to the floor, the words on their pages came free and began wrapping around the demon. Valestar's voice read out loud, stories from his youth, books from his days at the academy. The memories of his studies wound round the demon, pushing into his skin, burning him. Demon: -10 LP

The apparition wrinkled in pain as the powerful assault ripped into it. Perhaps the mage would win this time? He had not succumbed to the spirit's influences, and therefore, he had starved it. Maybe the creature had not picked a good time to attack after all....

Then it felt it. Pain. It laughed. "Your mortal shell is being attacked, fool. Submit to me, and I'll release your spirit to tend to it before it is too late."

The demon's arm stretched out and plunged into the mage's gut. Valestar: -6 EP in real world (this affects life points, too), -5 LP in this world

Commentary

Introducing:

Valestar's Inner Demon (NPC)

Valestar once managed to banish the demon that was feeding off this rage. But even so, Valestar knows that the consequences of his actions earlier in life have not yet been remedied—there still remains the damage done to his sister. Now taking its opportunity, the Demon returns...
The library faded. Valestar found himself in a truly bleak world. Perhaps it was once covered in green hills and lush forests, but now all that remained to tell of this history was greying grass and dead stumps. Valestar was more astounded though by the contraption he was in. His limbs were gone. All that remained was his torso and head, and they were buried in a net of cables. Wires stretched out from where his limbs used to be. He was hooked into some kind of iron monster. He couldn't find the words to describe it.

Ahead of him stalked a similar two legged, squat metallic beast, bristling with spikes and turrets that reminded him of the cannons on a pirate ship. The demon's voice rang out from the machine.

"Do you see the glories of progress?" It said. "Technology, which you were always curious of, in an extremely advanced form. We could shape this world, Valestar, you and I. It needn't look so bleak. Why, with machines, this world could be rebuilt and destroyed a hundred times over. It doesn't matter. We would hold all the power."

Valestar knew that a part of him was interested, very interested. His desperation in response to this transferred to his machine, and before he could stop it, a volley of missiles had been launched at the demon's machine. It's machine roared and fired a spray of bullets, exploding the missiles mid air. Then it turned those bullets on Valestar.

Not sure how to control his mount, Valestar stood still and took the full impact of the bullets. As each one hit, he felt not pain, but rather an awareness of the damage caused to his machine.

The demon laughed and moved forward. Valestar knew this was the demon's arena, and he could not win against it here.

Time for a scene change.

* * *

The grey mists became white clouds and blue skies. Valestar looked down in alarm, fearful of falling—but he floated in the atmosphere. Below him was a desert, he could tell that much due to the yellow coloration. He looked back up, mindful of the demon, only to find a beautiful woman descending to him.

Her silky auburn hair scintillated in the sunlight as it moved on its own accord, flowing softly as if submerged in water. Large white feathered wings extended from her back, slowly moving as if in decoration more than necessity for flight. Her pale skin was covered only in a white silken banner that wrapped from her neck across her breasts then around her back and across her hips and ending at her knees. Nothing was bared, per se, but the sage's mind was transfixed by the beauty.

He felt drawn to her warm smile. Her wings flared wide, separating her feathers as she reached out her arms. The hair was mesmerizing. She was radiant and entrancing. All the while she had looked down, until she was near the mage.

Then she looked up, and her eyes shivered and fell from her sockets even as her lower jaw melted away in yellow ichor. The clouds turned from fluffy white wisps to heavy grey thunderheads. The mage saw the wings shimmer, and then then enclosed around him, having transformed into leathery talon-tipped wings instead of the soft caressing feathered ones.

The talons lanced his ribs, causing him to gasp sharply in pain as the cold energy pulsed his lifeforce away. The demon roared in laughter and the whole scene faded back to the drab combat arena.

Valestar: -9 LP

* * *

Valestar saw the harpy reappear. She swooped for him. He felt as if chained. He could not move. He would be struck again and again. The demon's voice rang out from the machine.

"Let us finish this together," Valestire said.

He knew that voice. "Valestire?" he said, incredulously. Turning, he saw the pale profile of his sister. Her eyes held a glint of determination. The demon's eyes were dead, hollow. They were not the eyes of his sister. That, and his sister would never beg.

"Let us finish this together," Valestire said.

* * *

The creature looked up into the air over his shoulder, as if sensing something. "They are finished fighting. To disturb you would be unwise at this stage. Any healing of you heals me as well."

Flying leeches (known as Lammeys) appeared and sailed toward the mage, their open mouths revealing sharp teeth. Smacking in hunger, they almost missed Valestar. He was able to pull away just barely in time. Only a couple struck him. Valestar: -2 LP

Valestar lent her power to him. It was time for him to strike.

The demon shimmered and became the mirror image of Valestire. "No," it simpered, dropping to its knees, pleading. "Don't do it."

* * *

The demon ploy would not work on him. He had Valestire beside him now, and he could see the difference in the eyes. Valestire's eyes were hard, but kind. The demon's eyes were dead, hollow. They were not the eyes of his sister. That, and his sister would never beg.

He felt Valestire's hand press into his, and let his energy mingle with hers. Then, at one moment, they unleashed the power of a love between brother and sister, a love he had almost corrupted so long ago, but one which was still whole.

The power of the attack was immense. Bright light encompassed the demon. His guise of Valestire fell away, revealing him as a pitious, starved creature Demon: -9 LP. The battlefield flickered and changed. They were standing in a field of colorful flowers. Sunlight and birdsong surrounded them.

* * *

This vessel had become too hostile. It was time to leave. Sinifess stretched out his essence. There were two around him. One had mental protections. The other did not. His mind was acute, however. It would be tough.

"I would concede, but that is an admittance of defeat. I shall plague you in another way."

The gangly deformed creature faded from sight quickly.

* * *

Valestar watched as the malevolent form left, and the oppressive weight of the place he was in vanished. The grey infinity faded rapidly to black, and with it went the dizziness of Valestire. Then the darkness began to brighten. It was incredibly bright.

Consciousness came back to Valestar, and he gazed around groggily, realizing that Hawkeye was looking him over for signs of injury. Suddenly, Simyn shouted in panic.
**Rules, Rulings**

Taking a 5 foot-step so that I get into the same square as the dead Vassagonian (square E21) and attacking the Vassagonian Rider in square F21, hitting him three times and giving him 17 points of damage.

- Move Action - Draw Shortsword
- Attack: 22 (Dex mod applied, -2 penalty for improved weapon applied)
- Damage: 16 (Str mod applied)

I forgot about range penalty, KL, so go ahead and apply those.

- (psychic) Telepathy on Sand Drake, 1 WP
  - (standard) VotF on Sand Drake
  - (free) fast dismount DC20, hit DC: 26 (free) strafing will against Kivosh
  - (Bodyguard) F7 DC14 hit DC: 16 2 DAM (move) to G6 (not an action) Psychic Lash on Kivosh
- (Bodyguard) F7 DC14 hit DC: 16 2 DAM (free) strafing will against Kivosh
- (Bodyguard) F7 DC14 hit DC: 16 2 DAM (free) psychic blasts Sharn at F21 w/ Psychic Attack

**NOTE:** Hawkeye loses 2 WP

**OOC:** -1 arrow for me, -1 WP, -1 EP

You guys do realize that someone is coming to kill Valestar, right? He's unconscious at the moment. I don't know... someone might want to deal with that ^_^

- (free) pulls out an arrow
- (free) 5' step to F22
- (free) speaks (tellround) attacks Sharnazim at F21, G21, M21, N21 (psychic) Telepathy on Sand Drake, 1 WP

**Act V, Conclusion – The Red Sands of Vassagonia**

**ROUND 6**

The rider being killed by the combined efforts of Hawkeye and Simyn, Simyn decided to continue his efforts by attacking the Vassagonian warrior next to them. This warrior stood dangerously close to Valestar who had fallen. If the mage was badly injured or something else was the matter was not possible for the sage to judge.

Keeping things on matter at hand Simyn attacked the rider.

- His blue-steel sword ripped through the hearts of the Sharnazim and the Kivosh with fluent ease. Arcadian grimaced as the blood of both of his enemies splattered across his face. An archer, witnessing the lethal abilities of the banu turned and ran from the combat. Arcadian didn't bother with the archer but turned his attention to the final Kivosh.

Arcadian drew his shortsword from its sheath and threw it with all of his might, intending to send the second Kivosh to the hell the Vakeros had just sent his brother.

- "Korlaeth," said Sol Hawk, "Great work! Quick, bring the Overlord's head! I have an idea!"

Sol Hawk grinned as Korlaeth's attacker fell face-first into the sand, groaning from psychic shock. Sol Hawk knew he would be done for the count. As the Drake went on a killing spree, Sol Hawk was more determined than ever to bring it back under control. As the great beast swiveled its head toward him, Sol Hawk fixed it with a gaze and established telepathic contact. He put an image in the Sand Drake's mind - an image of the Kivosh who was currently blowing the horn. In the Sand Drake's mind, the horn was the most annoying thing it had ever heard - Sol Hawk added sensations of a very tasty-smelling Kivosh as well, the juice were just rolling off his plump sweaty body, just ready for snacking. Sol pointed at the horn blower and gave a new command: "Attack." (VotF, FAIL)

Even as the Drake began to move, Sol Hawk leapt off of Stout Heart and shot an arrow with his mind toward the Kivosh Bodyguard which winged him (DAM 2). Then Sol Hawk ran in, swords spinning, engaging the powerful mage and at the same time unleashing a psychic onslaught upon him (DAM 2).

- Hawkeye was elated as he and Simyn took down their opponent. Yet there were still three riders and they were being shot by arrows all around. These warriors were like iron! Would they ever quit?

- "Hup hup," he said to his horse, moving the steed to stand above Valestar in order to protect him from the Sharnazim who were crowding in from all sides. "Bad time for a nap, old man," he said, although there was no humour on his face anymore. Arcadian! he shouted, "Valestar's down! We need you!"

With a nimble dexterity, Hawkeye drew an arrow from his quiver and stabbed at one of the Sharnazim Warriors with it, while trying to fend off the other with his sword. Both attacks missed and Hawkeye felt his heart sink although he didn't let it show. He smiled at Simyn, then surprised the Sharnazim attacking the Sage with a bolt of pure psychic power (DAM 5 vs F21).

- Korlaeth scrambled不远处 away from the lizard that had just torn into him. He didn't hear much of Sol's words through his haze of pain, but he saw a Kivosh in front of him and struck hard.

The clash of steel was heard all around him, and Sir Victor kept trading blows with his numerous enemies. His unring sword arm kept its steady pace and bit deeply into an as yet unharmed shinazim, as he commanded Bright Lance to finish off the man they'd already attacked, one hoof pulverising his pelvic bone even as the loyal steed's jaw clamped firmly on his arm.

The knight ordered his mount to back steadily back away from the fray. Move to K19

- Sol Hawk injured the horn-blowing Kivosh, causing him to stop long enough to regard the Kai coming at him. Further south, Hawkeye moved to defend Valestar, whilst Simyn continued slicing apart his enemies bit by bit.

Sir Victor turned his anger against the bodyguards that tried to slay him, proving that a Ruanese Knight was more than a match for four Vassagonian Sharnazim.

There was still one problem, though. The sand-drake was in a blood-lust frenzy now. It had enough food for now, but the taste of blood and the smells of fear, combined with living things still around it...then there was the voice inside its head. It saw the camel knocks someone over, and the person kept moving slowly. More food!

It gave one final shake to the Vassan horse and turned to the Kivosh, but unfortunately Korlaeth was in the way. The lizard raked him again before clamping down on the Drak and tearing at his back with its free claw. Korlaeth - 5 EP

Arcadian eyed the approaching Kivosh and drew his blade, twisted it in balance, then hurled it as hard as he could. Amazingly, the blade sank into the mage's chest, piercing clean through one of his lungs. Crying out in pain and shock, the mage moved to get behind the bodyguards and tried to cast a spell, only to be distracted by the sword, which he unwisely pulled free. Blood oozed from the wound, and the bodyguards rode nude in pursuit of the knight--leaving him once again in the sights of the Vakeros.

The three remaining Sharnazim heard the horn and moved to block the knight and hopefully take him down. All three of them saw their scimitars repeatedly, nothing more than raging sharpened blades against the knight's steel plating. One managed to get through however, lodging in Sir Victor's hip below his breastplate. Sir Victor - 7 EP

The archers moved further, knowing what the horn signaled. The signal the Kivosh used meant the leader had fallen. It was all because of these outlanders. Revenge burned in their blood. Their aim was driven by the desire to run the sands red.

It gave one final shake to the Vassan horse and turned to the Kivosh, but unfortunately Korlaeth was in the way. The lizard raked him again before clamping down on the Kivosh and tearing at his back with its free claw. Korlaeth - 5 EP

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All three fired true. Both the sage and the lethal Vakeros known as Arcadian suffered arrow wounds. Simyn: -4 EP, Arcadian: -9 EP

Despite Hawkeye's move to protect Valestar, the helpless form made an easy target. Still, his presence probably saved the mage's life. The scimitar only struck once the mage in the instead of the torso. Simyn was able to parry off all attacks coming his way, but the efforts to keep from trapping Valestar took too much of Hawkeye's attention. A blade slammed into his lower back, and the Sharnazim holding it cackled with glee. Hawkeye - 6 EP

The Kivosh who blew the horn turned to Sol Hawk and knew that the Kai likely had a psychic shield. Still, it was worth it. He launched an assault at the interloper while preparing his spell. Can't see your signature while posting, SH. Hit PsAc 24, damage 10.

He bent and grabbed the sand and the handful of sand he stood with formed into a flanged mace. He yelled and swung it at the Kai.
Act V, Conclusion – The Red Sands of Vassagonia

ROUND 7

Korlaeth stumbled toward the standing Kivosh ahead, determined to help his friends in any way he could, unfortunately, the big lizard pawed past him first, tearing what remained of his shoulder and sending him sprawling, unconscious, to the sand.

* * *

Simyn continued coldly to attack the rider hitting him many times giving his opponent small wounds that slowly weakened him.

* * *

A horn sounded close to the north, which marked a change in the Sharnazim's demeanor. Could it mean that their lord had fallen? Sir Victor had been embroiled in his fight against these bodyguards for the past few moments, and things had been moving very quickly. He hadn't really taken the time to see what had become of his valiant allies and friends.

Taking a quick look around, he noticed there were fewer Sharnazim standing, but there were still a few of them around, including the pesky archers. The sage Simyn and the kai lord Hawkeye seemed to have their hands full and were selling their lives dearly, but thankfully Arcadian was nearby, ready to lend a helping hand. The mage's donkey was behind them, unridden, and the knight feared the worst had happened to the old mage, unless he had used to sort of sorcery to whisk himself away.

Sol Hawk and Korlaeth seemed to have moved away from that area, and were probably the reason why the bodyguards had moved to interpose themselves between their lord's position and himself. Unfazed, the knight proceeded to continue attacking the one he had previously wounded, landing heavy blows of his broadsword. Finally, he ordered Bright Lance to finish off the weakened man. The huge warhorse was a sight to behold as it reared up and whinnied out loudly, before it shattered the sharnazim's chest with its heavy hooves, tearing at his shoulder with its teeth.
Rules, Rulings

Move Action to 019. Attack Kivosh at 018.
Attack: 29
Damage: 10
Ride Check: 28

* Varsuvial *

If attacks on G21
(full attack) Wolf vs. Drake, DC 25, hit DC 33
lasts 6 rounds
(move) removes Laumspur Potion from belt
(free) drops Potion near Korlaeth
(free) Remedy's Touch on Korlaeth heals 4 EP
(free) Stratagm Will vs. Kivosh Bodyguard F7
DC4 hit 26
(not an action) Psychic Lash vs. Kivosh Bodyguard F7
(psycho) Psychic Attack vs. Kivosh Bodyguard F7
hit PsycA 26
(free) speaks
Notes: -3 EP for Sol Hawk (-2 RT, -1 SW) -2 WP for Sol Hawk (PA) -1 MC, Arrow, -1 Laumspur Potion (dropped)

Act V, Conclusion – The Red Sands of Vassagonia

Arcadian grinned as his shortsword buried itself in the chest of the Kivosh. Before he could plan his next move he sensed several men to the south. Quickly the Vakeros turned but not fast enough. An arrow buried itself in his shoulder, nearly ripping him clean from the saddle. Arcadian quickly dismounted only to have a second arrow strike him in the back as he turned to face the Kivosh.

The Vakeros nearly faltered but held his ground and tried to steady himself. He gave a quick cough, and grimaced as his own blood splattered the already red sands. Arcadian held ignored his wounds and moved as quickly as he could to the Kivosh, who had nowhere to hide. The Kivosh held up his hands futilely.

"No banjo!" Arcadian ignored his pleas. The man had pulled free the blue-steel shortsword and the Vakeros could see the blood that was pouring out of the mage's mouth that his lung had been punctured.

The Vakeros swung with his sword and the Kivosh fell back, lifeless, into the sands. Suddenly Arcadian lurched and began to puke, the brown-gray liquid mixed with red-black blood. The Vakeros wiped his mouth and took in a deep breath.

Not much longer now...

* * *

As Korlaeth came running, the Drake had raked him across the back and felled him. Korlaeth fell, somehow still managing to reach the Kai. Sol Hawk looked down at him, and Korlaeth tried to speak, but could not and slumped into the sand.

The Drake was defiant, but Sol Hawk's will was like iron. Freeze! he commanded the Drake, and at last all could see whose will was the stronger (Volf success, hit DC33).

"Rise and be healed," said Sol Hawk. The Kai nudged Korlaeth with a toe - his personal aura enveloped Korlaeth with a bright radiant light and the Vakeros awakened (+4 EP Korlaeth). Sol Hawk struggled for a moment with the strap on his belt, flicking the snap with his scimitar and releasing the Laumspur Potion that was there - it fell into the soft sand right in front of Korlaeth's awakening eyes. "Drink it!" said Sol Hawk as he continued to distract the Kivosh Bodyguard with his other sword. The Vakeros attempted feeble to parry with the horn.

The Kivosh Bodyguard leveled his considerable psychic powers at Sol Hawk, but discovered that Sol's mind was a destructive energy washed over it like cool refreshing water. And it was then that the Kivosh became truly afraid.

"This is for all the innocents you've killed," said Sol Hawk in Vassan to the Kivosh. He unleashed a blast of Psychic Energy all his own and the Kivosh found himself unable to stop it (hit PsyAC 26, 8 DAM). This was followed by a second charge (PL DAM 5) and a third (SW DAM 2).

* * *

Well, this blows guys. First, you bring me into the desert, then you throw me at an army, and now you're all yelling and kicking around in the sand with your weapons. I'm hot, I'm sweaty, I'm tired... and I'm scared. Why is Master not getting up? These people, why do they want to kill us? What did I ever do?

Suddenly, warmth flooded into him from places unknown, and his vision began to clear. Korlaeth blinked his eyes, unsure what to make of it. A bottle dropped to the sand right in front of him. Laumspur! He didn't yet notice where it had come from, but it was a most welcome sight! He grabbed and unstoppered the bottle, drinking deeply of the contents.

Blackness had descended and Korlaeth knew in his heart that fate had turned against him. His decisive blow against the Vassan fortress had used up all his luck and now it was time for the other side to fall...

Suddenly, warmth flooded into him from places unknown, and his vision began to clear. Korlaeth blinked his eyes, unsure what to make of it. A bottle dropped to the sand right in front of him. Laumspur! He didn't yet notice where it had come from, but it was a most welcome sight! He grabbed and unstoppered the bottle, drinking deeply of the contents.

The other mental direction of the Kai demanded death from the Kivosh next to him. The spellcaster cried out from the pain, then readied himself, knowing death was near. He must please the Sand Mother to avoid Ashtarah....

Meanwhile Simyn did indeed deal out death to the rider closest to him. The man succumbed to many wounds and fell from his horse. Hawkeye, acting next to the sage and trying to avoid trampling Valestar (while Varsuvial moved aside for Vassagonia) staggered along as long as he could, his arm hanging loosely, blood draining from him in a trail across the sand. He collapsed at Sol Hawk's feet. The Kai had studied healing so long for just such an occasion. His efforts brought Korlaeth back from the brink of death, albeit with terrible stiffness in the shoulder that was heavily damaged. Korlaeth - 1 FP, -2 Dex until a night of natural healing.

Sol Hawk's mind took two directions then. One commanded respect from the Drake, who acquiesced and stood, tail swishing in the sand, the torso of the dying Kivosh in its mouth, appendages dangling out. The beast looked around for who had told it to stop its rampage.

The other mental direction of the Kai demanded death from the Vassagonia next to him. The spellcaster cried out from the pain, then readied himself, knowing death was near. He must please the Sand Mother to avoid Ashtarah....

The Ruanese knight had no equal. With a series of expertly placed attacks and maneuvers, he slew one of the elite bodyguards effortlessly, using his horse to finish the man off in brutal fashion. This was too much for one of the other bodyguards that remained.

They had slain his master. And now this one just annihilated his fellow soldier in mere seconds. What chance did they have? As he fled, the sole remaining bodyguard traded the knight blow-for-blows, plunging its scimitar so deep into the knight's leg that it could not be retrieved. He was forced to draw a khanjar, only to stare at it in frustration. He was at a severe disadvantage now. Then he saw the Vassagonia near and shouldered an order. Sir Victor - 16 EP (crit)

Unfortunately for him, the Vakeross at that moment tore through the man's chest with his blade. Now faced with the both silver and blue knights on his flanks, the bodyguard sensed what his cowardly companion had just seconds earlier: there was no point in staying around.
Act V. Conclusion – The Red Sands of Vassagonia

He turned his horse and prepared to flee.

The archers lost one more volley, then, seeing the rest of their kind fleeing, followed suit. Simyn: -3 EP, Hawkeye: -4 EP

The only one who remained was the Kivosh bodyguard. He would have only one chance at this before being slain. With these two in close range, he invoked a spell known as Flame Spray. He would at least try to take down the Vakeros, who the Kai had just dropped a potion. Koriath: -6 EP

Korlaeth drank the potion and stood groggily, only to be hit with a powerful mental blast of pain that shot down his spine. Korlaeth: -6 EP

The Kivosh then unleashed the spell, and a spray of fiery beads shot in all directions in the front of the Kivosh. (Think of a firework shell you see in the air on holidays detonating right next to you.) The Kai, Vakeros, and drake were blasted with these incendiary beads, and the Kivosh pulled out a dagger when he finished, dipping one hand into the sands he wore in a pouch around his waist. Korlaeth: -5 EP, Sol Hawk: -8 EP

Far to the south, the horn’s effect upon the Sharnazim army was spreading. The word of the fatal blow to the head of the army had a huge demoralizing effect. Since the Overlord was in command of these men, their disobedience would now go unpunished. Those who learned of this and had not yet engaged in combat veered off and rode back across the desert sands whence they came. They would find employ under another lord.

Those who were already engaged in combat and heard the horn and/or news broke off as they could. This proved fatal for some, as the Anari and Talon armies turned on them.

Watching from their northern vantage point, the seven—well, the six conscious—adventurers could not see what was happening as they could from the clouds above. The initial sides of the combat, Anari and Cloesias, stopped fighting one another and began to fight the traitorous Sharnazim who encircled them. It was a losing battle. There were too many Sharnazim to be impenetrable an offense:

The infantry kept a hard line around the armies, the mages peaked through the lines to attack as they could, and the archers fired into the proverbial ‘barrel of fish’ at will. Anyone trying to flee met with magic and blade by the Sharnazim.

Until the horn sounded. The resolve and reason (and punishment for cowardice) for the fight was now gone. Each man watched as his company leader turned and fled, and then those men fled in similar fashion. They streamed back into the desert in all directions—but for some reason not to the north.

At first the adventurers rather cockily attributed this to their combat skills, but then they began to sense that there was another reason no one wanted to go north. Teph was to the north. And Teph was the presumed center of power in this region. Was the true leader—the Overlord’s leader—in Teph?

* * *

The knight yelled in pain as the scimitar bit deeply into his leg. Remembering his training and focusing through the pain, he told himself that he’d lived through worse before. Looking up, his eyes screamed revenge against his attacker, and he readied his blade and his steed for retaliation. The sharnazim, glancing left, noticed that he now stood alone against the Sommlending and a Vakeros knight who had just finished off his Kivosh lapdog, and, sensing that to stand would be his end, turned tail and ran, thus offering a tempting target for the vengeful knight.

Sir Victor lowered his blade and pulled on Bright Lance’s reins, calming his mount. He could not possibly strike a man down from behind, even if that man had just tried to kill him. The fight was over, the last pockets of resistance fading away into the desert sands. He looked over at Arcadian, who looked sick. “It’s over, but at what cost?”

Looking around, he saw the other Vakeros lying bloodied in the sands, so Sol was finishing off the last kivosha bodyguard, while behind him, Simyn and Hawk Eye were attending the prone form of the Dessi mage. As he surveyed the scene, the knight remembered that he was also in a sorry shape and bleeding from a score of cuts. His brave steed had also been grazed by a few arrows, although he knew that it could take much heavier punishment before going down and would carry the knight despite its wounds.

Sighing at the carnage, the knight reached into his belt pouch and drew out a potion of Laumspur, which he used over the wound in his leg to quench his thirst.

* * *

Simyn was tried. He had fought as he never had fought before and he really, really wished he could hang his rapier over the mantelpiece in his study, if he had have one. He knelt down beside Valestar. “Is he all right?” he asked Hawkeye worryingly. “I have heard rumors that the healing skills of the Kai Lords should be something extraordinary.”

* * *

Korlaeth started back as the last reserves of his strength were sapped by the Kivosh nearby. The firespray hit him full on, and the pain and hurt were finally too much. He looked down at his burning robe for a moment without reacting, ready to die as he had been when the lizard struck him before. He knew that if he simply let go, the pain would be gone, and he feel forward into the sand.

As the flames died down somewhat, smothered by the ground beneath him, a small voice began to speak inside him, “That Kai Lord saved your life, you ungrateful wretch, and look how you’re about to repay him!” Korlaeth turned his head to the side, freeing it from the smothering sand.

"*Princess Amessa is still in trouble!*" Korlaeth pushed at one side, rocking himself back and forth to further smother the flames.

And then something tugged at the edge of his mind, a hint at the future that would leave little conscious memory behind it, but served as a powerful push, "Your homeland is in danger!"

Korlaeth rolled more strongly, smothering the fire at his chest. He pushed himself to his knees, his now exposed blue-steel chainmail hot against his skin. He would continue to live for a while longer, for there was much yet that was undone.

* * *

As the Kivosh sprayed fire out of his hand, Sol Hawk did a duck and roll to douse the fire which had caught the corner of his Kai Cloak. Then the Kivosh Bodyguard was running and running and yelling something about the Sand Mother which was incomprehensible to Sol Hawk despite the fact that Sol knew the language fluently. Before the so-called head mage could even blink, an arrow had pierced his heart DAM 8 and he was purging on his own tongue. With steam rising off of Sol Hawk, the Kai Lord leapt forward, swinging his swords—in two clean sweeps CRIT 11, the Kivosh’s head was sailing through the air, freed from the body of a madman. But before the head could even reach the height of its parabola, he opened its mouth and screamed, “I’m in hell!!!!!” and then exploded DAM 6 into two halves like a coconut. The brain fell out and into a puddle of burning blood where it flipped around for a while before finally disintegrating into steaming waste.

All around, the enemy was routed. Sol Hawk grinned, seeing that Arcadian and Sir Victor were breaking through the enemy ranks and cutting them down left and right. TO SOMMERLUND! Having taken out the dread Overlord and his minions, Sol Hawk began to believe that they might, just might, have a chance against Epistath in his stronghold called Teph.

Sol Hawk looked at Korlaeth, helping to steady him. "Are you ok?” he said, then taking out his canteen, he said, "I could go for a drink of water!"
**Rules, Runings**

- **Panguine Wisdom + Remedy's Touch if the animal is still at all alive**

  OOC: -1 Laomspur Potion (given to Korlaeth)
  OOC: Drake should stay docile for some time yet. Another hit of Animal Kindship is available if needed, and yes, Sol Hawk is keeping careful track of that.

- **What do I need to roll to find out what happened to Valestar?** And yeah, I'm back. So Avatre is/was a mare.

- **A healing check would give the most info.** The higher it is, the more likely you can figure out what's wrong. A perception check would be needed if you were looking for any type of wound or small object (such as a poisoned dart).

  Oh, and Sol Hawk, lay off the acid.

- **Healing check : 22**
- **Perception check : 20**

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**Act V, Conclusion – The Red Sands of Vassagonia**

"Take this, too," Sol Hawk said to Korlaeth, handing him a second potion of Laomspur. "That was some heroic fighting! I've heard stories about the Overlord. They say he has no equal in combat. Or should I say 'had.' You saved us all," said Sol Hawk, "I consider myself to be in your debt, brave Vakeros."

With a whistle, Sol Hawk called both of his camels to him. They had both survived the fight and proven as battle-ready as any warhorse. Sol Hawk would reaward them with their favourite treats once this warzone was safely behind them.

But Korlaeth's horse - fallen. Sol Hawk dashed to Avatre - she was likely dead, but if there was any chance...?

Sol Hawk wasted no time moving to where the Overlord lay. Who was this man? The drake watched as Sol Hawk searched the body for any items or orders of any use before mounting up once again and returning to the others.

**x x x**

Hawkeye heaved a sigh of relief that the battle was over. As his companions cleared out the last of the enemies, he knelt beside the old mage, a concern look appeared on his face. The sage, Simyn was beside him. "Is he all right?" he asked Hawkeye worriedly. "I have heard rumors that the healing skills of the Kai Lords should be something extraordinary."

"You heard right but only Kai Lords who mastered the arts of healing. Alas, I'm not as gifted as my brother over there. But I will do what I can." Hawkeye looked over Valestar, trying to discern what was wrong with him with the little knowledge that he had, almost regretting he hadn't paid more attention in healing class back in the Monastery.

**x x x**

Hawkeye recalled back whatever he could from the depths of his mind, all his knowledge in the arts of healing, for the purpose of finding the cause of his friend's condition. He also search thoroughly the mage's body and clothing for any tell-tale signs of physical injuries and wounds. Something bad has happened to the mage and he won't let it get any worse, not without trying.

**x x x**

After a few moments, Sir Victor realized that the sand drake was still moving about! Korlaeth and Sol Hawk seemed very vulnerable nearby.

Casting his eyes around, he swiftly located his lance, which was still impaling the dead sharnazim lieutenant. He rode up, leaned over and with one mighty heave of his arm, pulled out the lance, its tip grazing on the bone of the deceased, even as it exited the wound with a slurp.

Then, obeying only his instincts, the brave knight rode at top speed towards the drake.

**x x x**

Korlaeth took and quaffed the laomspur potion gratefully, pushing himself to his knees, his mind finally clearing from his near-brush with death. His thoughts turned to Avatre a split second before Sol, and he stood and quickly stumbled to her side, dropping to his knees in pain at her tattered body.

**x x x**

Sol Hawk walked past the drake, which was breathing heavily through its nose as it looked around with the body of the Kivosh still hanging out of its mouth. Korlaeth's horse was mangled beyond comprehension by the drake's attack, as was the other Vassagonian horse.

The Kai looked down at the overlord. So, this was the mighty overlord, felled by one single arrow. The thought made the Kai shudder. Any arrow the enemy fired at him could be coated with the same poison.

As he bent over to examine the man, he heard thundering hoofbeats behind him. He turned and saw Sir Victor charging the sand-drake, lance held in attack position. Should he alert the knight that the creature was held in sway currently?

Hawkeye saw nothing physically wrong with Valestar aside from a gash on his leg. The mage's breathing was rapid, and his eyes darted about as if he was dreaming. The Kai shrugged and shook his head. He had no idea how to bring the mage back around, for he found nothing outwardly wrong.

At the same moment Sir Victor retrieved his lance and charged the drake. Valestar opened his eyes, spitting the sand out of his mouth and wiping off his face. He looked at Hawkeye, then at Simyn, who swatted at something and then cried out in alarm.

Simyn himself saw what none of the rest of them could. A black mist left the mage's mouth and wafted rapidly toward him. It began to invade his nostrils, and a smell of stale death overwhelmed him. What was happening?

**x x x**

Just after Hawkeye had accepted the fact that he could do nothing to help the old mage, Valestar opened his eyes, spitting the sand out of his mouth and wiping off his face. He looked at Hawkeye, then at Simyn, who swatted at something and then cried out in alarm.

"What is it? What's wrong? Don't tell me you're going to spit out sand too?" Jesting awkwardly, he turned to Valestar, "Are you still with us, mage? What happened to you? You had me worried there."

**x x x**

Sol Hawk saw the brave Sir Victor charge the great drake. At first, Sol Hawk opened his mouth to speak. But no. Sol Hawk knew that with the Overlord dead that the Drake would never heed another master. Worse, the poor creature had been trained to kill men and could not return to a normal life. Dumbly, the Drake stared on as the Knight of Sommerlund charged on. Sol Hawk said nothing, did nothing. With a tear in his eye, he kept his Kai control over it as Sir Victor charged headlong into it. Sleep now, whispered Sol Hawk into its mind, Sleep now and be free.

**x x x**

Simyn was terrified. What was this mist? Something alien invaded the sage's thoughts.

"My thoughts are my own! Begone!"

Simyn would not let anyone or anything invade the privacy of his mind!

**x x x**


**Rules, Rulings**

**OOC:** Sol Hawk has taken all items from the Overlord. Let's divide them later - in the meantime, since I know everyone is curious, here is what was found:

- A silver necklace with inlaid ruby pendant
- An underlining of tightly-woven cloth underneath his Sharnazim attire
- A small pouch of sand
- A small pouch containing 50 platinum Thrones
- A ruby-encrusted gold khanjar +5 (+3 craft, +2 magical)
- Twin silver scimitars +5 with ruby decorations (+3 craft, +2 magical)
- A ring with the profile of an eagle etched into an onyx stone

I for one would like the scimitars (who wouldn't) but perhaps Koraeth and Sol Hawk can chat about that one we're "safe." In addition to these goods which will definitely finance the next leg of the journey, found a note to the Overlord with some important information, also to be shared by Sol Hawk shortly.

If anyone is inclined to do so, searching the Kivosh Bodyguards or the Sharnazim Bodyguards might also reveal some useful magic items or cash also.

Reminder: my camel and Wing Hoof are sharing the responsibility of carrying food for the group and for the mounts - enough for the journey to Teph. Also I have 4 Laumspur Potions remaining - let's see who needs one once we've camped. Fortunately, I should be able to heal us all nicely by use of my Healing Skill. Koraeth has taken the worst beating, but he has had some Laumspur and should be OK now most likely.

- the scimitars indeed look interesting. I benefit from the use of scimitars instead of my trusty rapier and poignard. Can you use scimitars as finesse weapons?

Do you want me to check out the other stuff more thoroughly? They could be magic...

- anything magical Valestar would enjoy the use of. Here I had forgotten about my trapped elemental, too. Gotta try talking to him again sometime.

- Not getting any response from Simyn or Valestar? LOL Those are great stuff, Sol. Heck, I'll give it a shot. But why is there not a good/magical bow in there? Sigh....

- Not sure how many dead bodies I'm checking or bow in there? Sigh....

- Valestar? LOL Those are great stuff, Sol. Heck, I'll waiting to see what happened to the demon.

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- Valestar? LOL Those are great stuff, Sol. Heck, I'll waiting to see what happened to the demon.

**OOC:** Dropped Aymodan's blades, took the Overlord's blades instead.

**OOC:** holding all Overlord's loot for now

**OOC:** used Warmth of the Sun x3, healed 30 ep

**Act V, Conclusion – The Red Sands of Vassagonia**

Koraeth knelt before the remains of Avatre, once again nearly oblivious to the other goings on around him. He had been far more faithful than many of his mounts, and he had ridden her for a long time.

Suddenly, Koraeth stood, intending to look into the face of the man who had been indirectly responsible for Avatre's death, and had been directly responsible for nearly killing him. Also, perhaps he could find a momento to stand next to Paru's khanjar that he still carried on his belt. Such well-made blades were exceedingly useful to a member of the Khorren college, allowing him to fight without revealing his true identity with little loss in ability.

As Koraeth came to the body of the Overlord, Sol Hawk had already begun liberating the useful items, including two gem-encrusted scimitars, an onyx ring with an eagle emblazoned upon it, a silver-ruby necklace, and what appeared to be the finest khanjar Koraeth had ever seen, inlaid with rubies and shining of pure gold. Sol Hawk had a concerned look upon his face for he held in his hand the orders given to the Overlord Tav'ryn and none of it looked good.

"Koraeth, let us move out as quickly as possible for now - once we are safely away, perhaps we can discuss the best distribution of this wealth. My condolences for your mare - she was a fine and true steed. Take my camel, Wing Hoof, as your own for the journey and let us escape from here before our opportunity slips from us. I have gathered all of interest for us here - pray, take what equipment and load what you will from Avatre and let us escape from here at once."

Having made sure the old mage and the sage were alright, Hawkeye proceeded to move about the battle scene, searching dead bodies for any useful items that might aid them in their journey. They were dead after all. He was quick about it, for he didn’t want to be here any longer than the others. They would have to continue the journey now, when the coast is clear.

The knight drove his lance into the drake's chest, and it let out a loud shriek of surprise and pain before keeling over onto one side, the lance sticking up into the air.

The black mist that assimilated Simyn swirled about Valestar once, then floated across the sands. Meanwhile, Hawkeye began searching all the dead that lay around him. He gathered together all the loot that was worthwhile and dropped it in a pile:

- A collection of scimitars and khanjars, all of mastercraft quality.
- A total of 3 laumspur potions.
- A combined total of 317 Crowns.

From the bodyguards:

- A total of 3 scimitars and 5 khanjars, all of superb quality (+3, nonmagical).
- 2 alether potions
- Matching signet rings with a silver hawk claw symbol on them (4 total).
- 47 platinum Thrones.

The clouds began to drip rain, softly, upon the battleground. As the clouds cried at the scene of death below them, everyone realized the need to seek shelter—not necessarily from the rains, but from scavenger groups of Sharnazim that might reform and sweep the area for loot.

The mass of Cloesanian and Anari warriors that had survived meandered about far to the south of them.

With the menace of the beast removed, Sir Victor could now concentrate on helping with the wounded. Koraeth was in really bad shape, and the knight came over to help him stand.

"You were very brave or very foolish there, but no matter, you did good. With the death of their general, the Vassagonian army is now in full retreat and your deed has saved untold lives. If you need healing, I have some extra potions for you."

He nodded to Sol. "That was some fight. Still, we shouldn't tarry. As soon as everyone has gathered, we let's head out north.

"Yes," agreed Sol, "Let us go. He handed the reigns of Wing Hoof to Koraeth (who the camel was still following) and mounted his own. All but depleted psychically, Sol Hawk took a final look at the dead Drake and prepared to ride.

Arcadian looked around him in amazement. How did they survive? Arcadian looked down at himself. His armor was mostly undamaged, though he still had an arrow imbedded about four inches into his back. He felt the shaft of the arrow with his hand.

I was lucky....It missed my spine by a hair....

The Vakeros Knight dropped to his knees, took in a deep breath and yanked the arrow from his back. He felt forward, gritting his teeth together as the blood began to flow down his back. The knight tossed the shaft aside and let his hands hit the ground, palms down, to stop his fall. He crouched still for a few moments, breathing rapidly.

There was another shaft, that had cleanly pierced his shoulder. He moved his arm around and quickly summed that it was only a flesh wound. This arrow took a little more time to dislodge but it finally came, a torrent of dark blood following it.

Arcadian only know wiped the blood from his eyes and looked around. The others were searching the bodies but Arcadian left the corpses where they lay. He had everything and anything that he needed. The knight limped towards Sol Hawk, shaking specks of blood from his shiny blade while doing so.

"Hello friend, it seems this time you are not in need of my superior healing skills," said the Vakeros dryly.

Sol Hawk smiled at his friend's remark. "Ah, right in the back," he said, "Yes, by Ihrir's grace we have survived the worst of it and come away whole to tell the tale. Perhaps the gods have a plan for us yet." Sol Hawk let the warning of his Kai power flow into the deep wound near Arcadian's spine. The wound closed and was no longer so painful to bear. "That is all I can do for now, but when we find a safe place to camp tonight, I will have time to finish the job. How did you and Sir Victor handle all of those Sharnazim? I thought they had us this time for sure. Looks like the Vakeros are made of stronger stuff," he said, with a sideways glance at Koraeth as well.
And on that note, I'm going to close the thread. As alluded to, everyone levels up this time. In the interests of time, I will fast forward through the desert with narration in the opening post of the next act, leaving everyone with Teph on the horizon. I've not really settled on a fitting name yet. Remember what I said about Teph, though. It is not a friendly place at all. And you will have a rip-roaring good time if I'm able to pull off all that I plan.

**Act V, Conclusion – The Red Sands of Vassagonia**

While the others ransacked the bodies of the fallen and exclaimed over their wounds and victories, Valestar moved to the top of a dune and stood alone, staring out over the sands. Had it really gone? Was he free, just like that? Was his quest complete?

Had it really gone... Valestar knew not the answer to this. He knew that it was no longer inside him. But it could always manifest in another, if one put themselves at its mercy. The demon's spirit had sped across the dunes. Valestar would not forget the demon, and the demon would not forget him. Somehow he felt the confrontation was not yet ended.

Was he free... yes, for now. But freedom is reflected in the choices one makes. Valestar had been changed. If he did not forget what he had learned, he may be able to keep his freedom for many years. But it would be challenged again and again, this he knew.

Was his quest complete... no. The voices of the companions drifted up to him. No, he still had his friends, and they would need his help before the end. He would lend them what aid a Dessi Mage could offer. He had learned to forgive himself his past. Now he would forge a future. He turned and headed back towards the companions.

Far away, in Dessi, Valestire opened her eyes and smiled as the image of her brother faded back into darkness. He would be okay now. At least, until she got there. She picked up the satchel she had packed with rations and items for the journey. She left the tall white building she was in and mounted a horse waiting for her. Then she began to ride, ride into the west, following the sun.

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**Awards by Kailord**

Handed down by the GM for special recognition of the words and deeds of three of our finest players, these modifications to their Avatars are like badges of Honour for Arcadian, Korlaeth, and Valestar…

**Arcadian**

The Master Writer’s Award recognizes the fine attention to detail Alasi has exhibited in telling us about Arcadian, his life, his love, and his mission.

**Korlaeth**

The Medal of Heroism is given to Korlaeth for defeating Overlord Tava'ryn against all odds – and surviving to tell the tale.

**Valestar**

Valestar receives the Storyteller’s Award for not only creating a compelling backstory, but also for bringing it to life during the Inner Demon Battle.