

Bandit 1 (Size: 8): serge shirt, serge smock, serge hose, leather shoes, spear, handaxe, spear, taburi

Bandit 5 (Size: 5): serge tunic, serge foot swaddle, staff (taken by Rikoro), ring (taken by Fyna)

Bandit 6 (Size: 8): russet shirt, russet hose, leather calf boots, 34d, 4KC, 3 user notes (taken by Berina), spear, battleaxe

Davas casts his eye over the clothing, to see if there is anything here that is better than what he is wearing. Catching Berina's eye, he says softly "they have no use for them".

[OOO: the only ones that will fit are from bandit #5, they are of poorer quality but are not stained with blood. Bandit #1's, Bandit #6's, Davas' and Fyna's clothes all have blood splatters.]

Davas notices the blood on his clothing and shakes his head. He looks for a pool, stream or even a large puddle to clean it off as well as he can, and when this is done, will assess the results.

Looking from his clothing to the tunic that will probably fit, he sighs. "A spare could be useful here too". He takes the tunic and puts it in his pack.

Davas picks up the handaxe, compares it with the one he has and slips it into his belt. "Might be useful to have a spare" he says with a grin.

[OOO: The handaxe is of the same weight as his but is in need of repairs. -4 WQ]

Davas picks up the battleaxe, looks around nervously, waves it around half heartedly and puts it down again, rather quickly. With a lopsided grin, he says "... too heavy anyway".

Davas picks up the taburi, flips it end over end once and tries to catch it again. "Nice. Anyone use one of these?" If anyone says they know how to use it, he hands it to them, other wise he'll put it carefully into his pack.

[OOO: This could also use some repair. I'll get back to you on how much but it is down a quarter of its weapon quality.]

As he looks around once more, obviously getting ready to leave, his eyes light upon the shoes and the boots. "Lysada?" he calls softly. "Look here. Do these shoes fit you?" He encourages her to try them and as she does so, he tries the boots.

"Ee must be jesting way me," Lysada says, "I could fit both my vate een wan uv dey boots or zhoes."

Holding one boot against his foot Davas smiles ruefully. With a shake of his head, he says "... as could I. Well. We will take shoes and boots and try to trade them in Minarsis for ones that fit".

Fyna follows Davas and tries to clean the blood off of her clothes as well. "I suggest that we modify the boots a bit to make them fit Lysada. We could cut a small strip out of the leg of the boot and thread it through with leather. Do the bandits have any small leather strips holding their clothing together?", she asks Davas.

"I guess it might be moot since we are about to enter a city...its up to you two, I am sure we could do this fairly quickly."

"Ooo, ee be a 'ideworker dey ee can do zitch a ding," Lysada says, "Dey look to be een a purty zorry ztate already bit if ee can do zitch a ding, ee must be a zkilled craftsman."

Davas looks thoughtfully at a boot and then at his foot. I suppose we could ... but I could ruin them ... and we are almost there I think. Better to wait if we can. Lysada? Are your feet well enough for another hour or two?"

"Ees, goodman Davas. I be used to it and de weather be nat as cold as yesterday.

With a grin and a nod, Davas stands. "Then it is decided. You will suffer a little longer and we will trade these in for ones that fit".

Joining Josrel and Rikoro, Berina says: "Excuse me for interrupting the two of you, but I have a suggestion for you Josrel. There are three spears in the pile over there" and she hooks a thumb in the direction of the weapons. "I urge you to select one of them with an eye toward leaning how to use it. As you have seen on more than one occasion, serving Lord Odasart has certain...hazards. If nothing else, you could use the spear as a hiking staff to help ease the pain of your injury while we continue on our way."

Smirking Josrel returns: "Still trying to get me to learn some martial skills, aye Berina." Josrel smiles "Alright I will use the spear as a staff. But I still stand on my principles of not being a life taker." Josrel smiles.

With grim smile and a shake of his head, Davas turns to Josrel. "Would you rather your life be taken Josrel? ... or Lilia's?". He grins quickly, holding up his hands to prevent Josrel's outburst. "No, of course you would not. So, you should learn a weapon. The knife is good, but short ... and it looks less threatening. If you learn to use a long one, perhaps you can keep attackers away without hurting them ... if you are good enough? The spear is good - few want to run towards a sharp point. The staff too is good. But the choice is yours of course. Think on it perhaps? ... and perhaps your God might guide you."

He smiles, his piece said, and turns away, then turns back. "... or a shield perhaps?"

Smiling back at Davas, Josrel says: "I do recognize the need for me to learn skill with a weapon of some sort, especially with the companions I have chosen."

Listening in on the conversation between Josrel and her husband, Berina smiles and utters: "Heh." at the above.

Josrel chuckles. "Even more so now that I have a the start of a family to protect. My own personal morale dilemma is taking life, and of course my aversion to the dead. If was all I could do to keep myself together while praying over the body of the fallen bandit." Josrel shivers slightly.

Rubbing his chin Josrel continues" Perhaps a staff or even a cane would be more appropriate then an item that is a weapon. What would be a more ridiculous site than a Haliki walking around with a spear and shield. At least a staff of cane would be less threatening and more functional for me." Josrel says

ACT 4 SCENE 7 PAGE 2

With a chuckle a shake of his head Davas says "well, few would debate your point of view I think. The staff is a good choice, but think on it a bit before you decide". Still grinning, Davas claps him on the shoulder. "We will make a defender of you yet. As you say ... around us it seems to be a necessary skill".

"A staff would be the most useful, but at the same time do more damage at need. A staff can even kill under the right circumstances, but can be easily controlled to avoid doing so." Berina says. Changing tack, she asks: "Does Save K'nor grant his priests various 'abilities' as Larani does for her warrior priests? I don't imagine he would indulge in things to kill people...although I suppose, being a God, he might...but I was thinking he might grant you the boon of causing confusion among those that are trying to harm you or yours, or maybe making you invisible to those who mean you ill. That sort of thing."

Pursing his lips Josrel says: "Save-K'nor has granted me permission to learn some invocations. Unfortunately most of the ones that I know are not combative, I do know some invocations that grant protection but they take a while to perform."

"The other problem with them is the fact that I am calling on Save-K'nor for help. And well He is a God and I am just a humble mortal servant. So he may not wish to spend his precious time on my call to him. I am not sure that He even has combative invocations."

Turning to Lillia " Are you aware of any?"

"We can bless others of our faith and they are more likely to succeed in their next task. We can also aid in the curing of diseases and wounds. Even though it takes a certain amount of time, we can set up an area of protection and that might be done quicker with practice," says Lillia. "No, our real strength is in the gathering and analyzing of information but that takes time as well. We cannot negotiate while everyone around us is preparing to attack...such actions belie any offers we make to resolve the situation without conflict."

Josrel continues, "I could see about changing my field of study to learn some weapon skills. But again that really doesn't help me at the moment. But my greatest weapon is my faith in Save-K'nor and my trust in him that his servants have given me the knowledge to get through those difficult times." Josrel smiles.

"Protection eh?" Berina muses. "Sir Arylen said a prayer over his sword before we went into battle at Holdan manor, and it gave him power to overcome the undead we encountered there. Would you be able to imbue a staff with a blessing of protection that would remain on the staff, ready to use at a moment's notice?"

"No," Lillia answers. "Our 'protection' is only set upon a place that we are located in...as soon as we leave the area the protection no longer applies. We can consecrate an item to defeat our enemies but the enemy of Save K'nor is untruths not physical harm. Consecration to create a holy artifact is never done lightly or without thought of the consequences. The consequences I speak of are related to the fact that some truths are better not to be known by everyone."

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Addressing Rikoro, Berian says: "When we get to Minarsas, we'll be asked various questions, one of which will be, 'Why does one man need two staves?' I suggest that you have Lillia use the staff I gave you while you're working to figure out what this new one does...if anything."

"I was thinking the same." Rikoro replies as he moves off to Lillia. Holding out his original staff he asks, "Would you mind terribly carrying this until we are inside the gates of Minarsas? The reason being is to curb any suspicion regarding why I would have two staves."

"I mind it not," answers Lillia taking the staff, "But know ye it would be best if I have it longer than that. Their suspicions will not be allayed just because you have crossed into the town and are then carrying two staves in town."

With a grin at Lillia Davas says " ... and when you are practicing with Josrel, try not to hurt him ... at least until he recovers".

Speaking to the party as a whole, Berina says: "Speaking of being asked questions...what, if anything, do we say about what happened to us here?"

Pondering for a brief moment, Rikoro states, "Unless we are asked, nothing. Otherwise the truth."

With a quick smile at Rikoro, Davas nods. "Agreed. We may get in trouble ... but lying makes you look guilty even if you aren't".

Davas looks thoughtful and says quietly "... though they are likely to ask our for reason for coming. Best we say something a little less truthful there." He grins again.

"It should be enough to say we were attacked by highwaymen," says Lillia, "as long as you mention not that they asked for a toll. No matter how much the toll is, anyone can require a toll as long as they have the might to take it. If we say we attacked them when they asked for too large of a toll, we could be suspected of tax evasion and, from what we have heard of Minarsas, they would take that very seriously."

"Hmm." Berina says. "I think the both of you are right. Attacked by highwaymen, no mention of tolls." Addressing Rikoro: "It has the advantage of being true."

Davas simply nods.

Thinking for a moment, Berina says: "I suggest that we take the weapons, the knight's shield, and the clothing. We can turn those things and the 34 pence over to the town guard and claim booty. After all, if we say we were attacked by highwaymen...and we are all in good health save for Josrel's injury...they will expect that we must have killed the highwaymen. The victors of a battle would not just continue on their way and leave valuables behind. We say nothing about the Khuzsan crowns, the staff, or the scrolls. Other ideas maybe?"

Again, Davas nods once.

Turning to Berina, Rikoro speaks up and offers, "I suggest you divvy up the crowns and scrolls for now. Both to alleviate suspicion and also prevent loss of everything should one be found carrying them and have the monies confiscated."

"Good idea." As Berina digs out the four crowns and three scrolls, she continues: "It's not illegal for any one person to carry

a large sum of money, but I agree that it would look suspicious." She keeps one of the crowns and one of the scrolls for 4 pounds, gives Rikoro a crown and the other 4 pound scroll, hands Lillia a crown and the scroll for 2 pounds, and gives the last crown to Fyna.

"I think we should tell them of the loot but not give it to them," Lillia says. "Your liege lords are entitled to their third portion but not town guards. They will no doubt search us to assess their taxes so we should not keep silent about the loot."

Berina says, "But how do we keep them from just confiscating everything and then later denying that there was anything taken?"

"That is prevented by the peasants' revolt," Lillia suggests, "a certain amount of greed is expected from the government by the common people but when the government blatantly steals everything in front of a crowd, the people would rise up and replace those in power. I suspect that is why the new taxes are targeted towards the Khuzdul and those of learning. The ordinary people cannot identify with them and so do not defend them. Anyone can be robbed and foreseeing it happening to them the people would not allow it."

Berina says: "We can't be completely greedy or suspicions will be raised. If they assume that we must be holding something back after we hand in the booty, we can hand over any of the bandit's weapons we've kept."

Speaking to Davas and Fyna, Berina says: "I see that the two of you have gotten a bit of blood on your things. Go ahead and see what you can get cleaned off." Turning to Rikoro, she says: "Rikoro, would you help me to put the third body with the other two, please? If you are so inclined, you can take a moment to say a quick prayer for the dead." Addressing the whole party, she says: "Once these tasks are done, let's gather up the booty and be on our way."

Rikoro says nothing except move to the remaining body's feet and waits for Berina. Once they both have a hold of the dead bandit, Rikoro carries the legs to where Berina indicated and settles the corpse down carefully, but does not offer a prayer.

8-HALÁNÈ-720 ATHELREN, KALDOR

4TH WATCH [HOT, CLEAR, SOUTHEAST BREEZE]

You continue on your journey and by the end of the third watch, you reach Minarsas. There are several guards posted on the road at the edge of town and a long line waiting for permission to pass by.

Davas whispers to Berina. "So, after all that talk, are we going to do anything except walk in?"

He grins, then looks to Fyna. "and what are your plans now you are here? It seems that our ..." he searches for the right word "... luck has not put you off traveling with us. We should meet later".

A little more seriously he adds "and we have yet to thank you for your aid on the road ..." he suddenly smacks his forehead with his hand "... and you may well want a share of the loot too - of course".

He grins and says more quietly "sorry. We have been traveling together a while now and tend to share rather more than not". He indicates the others. "Let us get through this gate, then we will talk more".

Once the party arrives at Minarsas, Berina moves to get into the line waiting for entry.

Rikoro lowers his hood while waiting in line. He idly glances ahead to see what the hold up is and hear any of the questions being asked.

As you are standing in line, a bearded man leaving the town looks at Josrel and says, "Minarsas, seat of learning, my cods. You should turn back now unless you care to pay just for existing."

As you get closer, you notice that peasants and those with the town's emblem are being allowed to pass while others are being asked, "Are you now or have you ever been a cleric or a member of the Shek P'var."

Those that answer no, are taken aside and thoroughly searched to assess the taxes they owe. Those that answer yes, are being taxed 6d after their name is written in a registry.

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When you reach the head of the line, the guards motion for Lysada and Lillia to pass on by. They ask Davas, "Who is your master and are they planning on selling some of that large load you are carrying?"

Davas looks around in surprise as he works out that the guard has addressed him. Standing tall and looking the man in the eye, he says in a clear voice "I am a free man, and my liege is none of your concern". He smiles. "As to selling some of the load, I think it likely but I have not yet decided. What more do you need to know to admit me?"

With an angry look, the guardsman says, "It is indeed my concern. If you answer to no liege and have no frankpledge in this town then there is nobody to answer to your misdeeds. In addition, anything you sell is charged a hawking tax. Therefore, you must state your liege and what you will be selling or you will be charged a crown for your bond. If you are later to be found selling anything within four leagues that you did not declare you will be charged with tax evasion and fined. If you do not show the proper respect to the town's officials, you will be fined for that as well. Now is that clear enough for you or should you be going back whence you came?"

With a glance at Berina, then the others, Davas recoils slightly. After a long staring pause, he shakes his head, smiles and says "my apologies. I am but recently become a free man and the ways of the city are strange to me still ... and the ways of each city different". He sighs.

Still smiling, he waits patiently.

"Well then. I am Davas of Fainovirs. My liege is lord Dasarayne of Owendel and I am also a citizen of Tashal". He shows the ring to the guard, perhaps a little proudly and for slightly too long. "This lady is my wife" he indicates Berina and grins. Putting his pack and other belongings down and showing the items as he

ACT 4 SCENE 7 PAGE 4

speaks he says "I intend to trade these boots and shoes for some that will fit Lysada". He nods at her. "As my wife has said, the captured weapons we will sell. If there is anything more you want to know, please ask and I shall answer if I can".

"If you are from Tashal, perhaps you know of Sir Koris Harabor. I understand he is the commander of the royal guard in Tashal. There a lot of his kin in these parts and he is thought of highly."

"I ... think I've heard of him" says Davas hesitantly. "... but I don't know him".

"Ah," the guardsman says, "him being nobility and you just recently winning your freedom, that is understandable."

Davas smiles and nods. "Of course. Thank you".

Looking over the boots and shoes, the guardsman says, "that will be 16d for that lot. And exactly which weapons will that be? You people seem to have more than your share of weapons and I cannot believe you intend on selling the lot."

"Sell them all?" Davas grins again. "No, I think not. The axes, shield, bow, arrows and knife are mine. We will sell the others, yes?" He looks to the rest of the group expectantly for confirmation.

"I'm from Tashal." Berina says, and shows the citizenship ring.

"That is nice," the guardsman says with a bit of condescension in his expression.

After Davas has replied, Berina says: "As a free woman, I have no master...except the King, of course...but I have it in mind to ask Lord Fugys Odasart, Royal Weaponcrafter, if he will take me on as a vassel. My husband" indicating Davas "and the rest of us" gesturing to the other members of the party "were set upon by highwaymen a couple of hours ago. As you can see by all of this extra gear, they didn't do so well." and she gets an almost evil grin. "In addition to all of those weapons and the shield, our booty includes four Khuzan crowns, thirty four pence, three bearer bonds, clothing, and that staff." pointing to the staff Rikoro is leaning on.

"You will be required to pay a hawking tax and anything you sell must be offered to the local craftsmen first," says the guardsman. "Now what specifically will you be selling?"

"Since it's not legal for us to keep them, we'll be selling the battleaxe and the unpainted knight's shield." Berina begins. "We haven't yet given a lot of thought to whether any of us will want to keep any of the weapons. Some of them are in tough shape. Naturally, anything that is kept will have to have a third of it's value deducted from the coin we end up with to meet the obligation to our Liege Lords." Turning to the other members of the party, she says: "You guys are going to have to decide right now what, if anything, you want to keep. This good man needs to know what we're going to sell."

"We'll sell the clothing, but we're thinking that we'll try to trade the shoes and boots for some type of footwear for Lysada." and Berina gestures toward Lysada. "We'll also have to redeem the bearer bonds to be able to pay our obligation to our Liege Lords. I believe Rikoro" and she gestures towards him "plans on keeping the staff, so he'll have to come up with a third of whatever it's value is out of his share of the money." Berina gets

a questioning look on her face, and asks: "Who would you see to determine the value of a staff? I mean, you can just go and cut a sapling and there you go...instant staff."

"The value of a staff is what a woodcrafter would charge for trimming and balancing it," says the guardsman. "Even one taken from the forest is valued at the amount owed to the manor lord for foraging rights."

"Ah, a woodcrafter. I should have thought of that. Thank you." Getting a closer look at the booty weapons, Berina says: "By the look of them, I'd say we'll sell all of the captured weapons."

"Since all you have mentioned selling so far is the battleaxe and the knight's shield, your hawking tax is 9d. If you decide to sell other things later, you will have to get a receipt for your taxes at the bonding house before the merchants will buy from you," the guardsman says while writing out a receipt and casually pointing to a building over the bridge into town.

"I'm sorry. I guess I wasn't clear enough." Berina says. She gets the the weapons captured from the bandits...which consist of: the ball and chain, the taburi, the handaxe (this from Davas' belt), the battleaxe, the knight's shield, and the four spears...from whoever has them, puts them in a pile, and says: "This, plus the clothing..." speaking to the rest of the party "show the guardsman the clothes we got from the bandits, guys...not counting the boots and shoes, are what we plan to sell outright. The boots and shoes we hope the trade for a pair of shoes for Lysada. I didn't intend to confuse things. As a scribe, I don't often find myself selling booty. Again, I'm sorry I wasn't clear."

"As I said the tax on the battleaxe and knight's shield is 9d and for the shoes and boots is 16d. Barter counts as a sale for taxes. The tax on the ball and chain, taburi, hand axe and four spears will be 22d. From the look of these weapons, any clothes you have gotten must be worthless and we cannot spend all day on this...other people need to get through...let us call it 47d total," the guardsman says.

Berina says, "Very well. Where and to whom do we pay the tax?"

With a look of growing frustration, the guardsman says, "You pay it to me and you pay it now."

"Ah." Berina says, digging out the 34d they got from the bandits. "I need 13 more pence." she says to the other members of the party.

"Ah ... I think I have that" says Davas reaching for his pouch and counting out the requested coin. "Remember to get one of those writing things ... to say we have paid?" he adds hesitantly.

"If you are speaking of a receipt for the taxes," says the guardsman, "that is not necessary as the taxes are required every time you cross the bridges into or out of town. On the other hand, if you are speaking of a bonding receipt for the things you are going to sell, the clerk will make one out for you."

The clerk makes out the bond receipt, which lists the things you said you would be selling or bartering and gives it to Berina.

Berina continues, "Once we've sold all of the extra stuff, we'll be sending the required third to our various Liege Lords. Are all of the highwaymen in this area as inept as the group that jumped

us? If so, we could make a good living ridding the countryside of them...or at least hiring on as caravan guards."

"Are you saying that the nobility of Minarsas are unable to protect the community and our countryside is rife with outlaws," asks the guardsman, "or are you admitting that you are in the habit of attacking any who offend you and are unable to defend themselves?"

"Neither." and Berina raises one eyebrow. "But we WERE attacked. Are you saying that we ran into the only band of outlaws in the whole earldom? Which reminds me...when we started to get the upper hand, three of them fled and got away."

"I have only the word of, as of yet, unnamed strangers that you were attacked," says the guardsman. Turning to the scribe, he says, "take note of the report of wandering outlaws so it can be relayed to the patrols."

One at a time, they ask Berina, Fyna, Josrel and Rikoro, "Are you now or have you ever been a cleric or a member of the Shek P'var?"

Rikoro simply answers to the inquiring party while shifting his weight to lean on his staff, "I'm neither."

Berina says, "The same for me."

"Then you must step over here so your possessions may be searched for contraband and to assess the taxes you owe," says the guardsman.

Berina says, "Certainly. Where would you like to start?"

The guardsman searches through Berina's belongings and when he comes to the cookbook and the herbal, says "A person of learning are we? If you are not a cleric or Shek Pvar, what is your occupation that you need books?"

"I make my living as a scribe. As it's a non-guilded occupation, I'm entitled to practice it anywhere I can find someone to pay me to do it. Would you know of anyone in town who is in need of a scribe?" Berina says.

"No, I have no need for such information," the guardsman says. "You will have to ask at the hall of the Mangai."

Berina says, "I'll do that. Thank you."

"I mentioned that I'm his wife," and Berina gestures toward Davas "and as far as I'm concerned, any wife who can read and write...as I do...should make a cookbook and herbal. They are great ways to remind me of the things my husband likes. We've sampled many, many things, and it's hard to remember everything." Berina gestures toward the cookbook and herbal, and finishes: "They are perfect for making sure I don't forget anything."

"Like most in this community, I am a man of simple tastes," the guardsman answers, "Any wife of mine will not need to know how to prepare more dishes than she can remember."

Berina "I suppose it's my fault...I've spoiled him." Berina gives Davas an adoring look, and continues: "Just look at him. How could any woman refuse him anything?"

Davas blushes, looks away briefly, then back to her, grinning ear to ear.

The guardsman gives Davas a rather strained smile but says nothing.

Davas grins sheepishly and waves his hand vaguely.

"Of course good man." Rikoro says as he moves in the direction indicated. He then slips his pack off his shoulder and hands it over to the guardsman for inspection.

From his position Rikoro glances over to Berina and in response says, "I have nothing on my person I plan to sell."

Rikoro is thinking over what he knows regarding contraband laws and he finds the only thing he knows is that Fanosel, as a narcotic, is a banned substance throughout Kaldor. [+1 Law] Just as he remembers this, the guardsman pulls the Fanosel out of his pack and says, "What have we here? Doing a little drug peddling are we? You will have to remain here until you can go before the magistrate."

With a sigh Rikoro says, "I am a herb gatherer. When I encountered what you say is Fanosel, I did not know what it was. I had taken only a single sample to inquire about it. If I had planned to peddle such a thing - would I not carry more? Not to mention would I have handed over my pack so easily. Please feel free to confiscate it. In the future I will certainly avoid collecting it."

"Very well," the guardsman says, "This looks like a lot more than a small sample but I will accept your word this time. You must give your full name to the clerk here and as soon as you find a place to stay, report to the town watch to let them know where you are at. If there are new narcotics in town while you are here, we will be sure to look for you." He points to the watch barracks which you can just barely see through the trees and other buildings. [18] [+1 rhetoric]

Rikoro nods somberly, simply saying "My thanks and I understand." He then moves over to the clerk and states his full name, "I am Rikoro of Drelin."

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Standing up straighter, Josrel says: "My name is Josrel of Aswain and I am a Haliki of Save- K'nor." Josrel states as he hands the guard 6 pence. "Here is my 6 pence." Then moves on to stand next to Lillia.

One of the guardsmen blocks his way and says, "Hang on there. You have not been given permission to pass. Since you are in such a hurry to get by and are so free with your money, you will have to join your friends so your possessions can be searched to see what it is you are trying to hide."

Rikoro smiles proudly hearing Josrel proclaim his religion and clerical status.

Stopping short in front of the guard blocking his way, Josrel says: "Well, since I must wait for your permission to pass then I must wait, yes I am in a hurry I have been traveling for some time and would like to enjoy the comforts of your city. Here is

ACT 4 SCENE 7 PAGE 6

my pack..." Josrel says as he hands his pack to the guard then spreads his arms " ...feel free to search me as you wish."

The guardsman says, "The taxes you owe come to 6d for being a member of the clergy and another 5d 2f for your writing materials."

Handing the guardsman the required taxes Josrel asks: " If I may ask you without getting myself into any trouble why such a tax on my writing materials? Has something happened that I should be aware of to keep clear of? I wish to have a pleasant stay here and abide by your laws and more importantly not have to pay that tax again. For money is hard for me to come by being a Haliki, so the little I have needs to last me."

You can ask but I have not an answer for you," the guardsman answers. "My liege lord sets the taxes, probably after getting advice from those he trusts, and then I collect them. I do not need to know the why's and wherefore's of my lord's decisions. You will need to pay the tax anytime you pass over the two bridges into or out of town while carrying writing materials."

As the guards search his possessions Josrel asks "Can you recommend a good Inn for a reasonable price?"

"The best inn in town with the most reasonable prices would be the Green Dragon Inn but as to why such a fine inn has such low prices is not my place to say. At a little less quality but still reasonable prices would be the White Horse Inn. Finally there is the Cask and Flagon Inn...about the same quality as the White Horse Inn but with prices that are more what you would expect."

Smiling at the guardsman " Thank you for the information, am I free to go about my business now?" Josrel asks before he heads toward where Lillia is standing.

"Yes, yes," move on so others can enter town," the guardsman answers.

Fyna presents herself and her equipment for search.

"You may pass," the guardsman says.

"You may all pass" the guardsman says.

Davas grins and nods at the guardsmen and walks in with the others.

Once they have entered the city and there are no military types within ear shot, he turns to Rikoro and grins. "That was close. I was trying remember what fanosel looked like ... and if I had any. Luckily, I don't think so".

Turning to Berina, he says quietly "taxes in and out ... every time? Best we do all our business here as quickly as possible ... and let's hope we don't need to go in and out much!" he says with a grin.

Berina "We may be here for a long time. There's no telling how long. I think we should consider looking for a place to lease on a month-to-month basis. Could save us a lot of money in the long run." Getting a really serious expression, Berina continues: "A leased townhouse should be more secure than an inn, where anyone can enter without arousing undue suspicion. Remember, there's every reason to suspect that Armenton and the fugitives from Holdan Manor may be here in Minarsas." and she looks from Davas to Josrel, to Lillia, and to Rikoro.

Josrel, staring back at Berina, says: "I wouldn't mind running into him again. He and I have some things to discuss."

Rikoro subsides into a brooding silence as they walk.

After they have walked a while, he mutters "why do they need so much coin I wonder. I know it is the lord's right to set whatever taxes are needed ... but that seems high to me." There is another pause. "But I know little of cities of course - is that usual? ... common?"

Berina says, "The King is old and a lot of people think he won't last much longer. If someone were to make a run at taking the crown when he dies, a lot of money would be needed to hire mercenaries."

"As a normal rule," Lillia says, "The nobility have the right to collect two types of taxes...regular fees for ongoing rents and privileges granted and aids for special needs. What you would know of the first type would be for pannage rights and rent for your toft and croft, that a serf pays for in labor and freeborn pay for in kind and coin. What you would know of the second type would probably be such things as marriage and heriot taxes. Nobles of a city deal with more complicated situations so they have more complicated taxes."

He waits for answers, waits a little longer, then speaks again. "Only for visitors though. Did Tashal do that?" he asks the others. "Set taxes only on visitors I mean". After another thoughtful pause, he adds "I wonder why they want to keep visitors out?"

"Keeping visitors out would be a good idea so that preparations for hiring mercenaries could be kept from potential rivals." Berina stops speaking to let what she's said sink in.

"Yes, Tashal does the same but it is more noticeable in the summer during the fairs when there are more visitors," says Lillia, "Most nobility think that visitors have more money to allow them to travel and that they do not pay enough taxes in relation to the city's resources that they use. In addition, many of them claim no liege or have a liege that is far away which makes them more vulnerable to local rulings. I am sure you noticed that those with the town's emblem were allowed to pass unstopped. If we have a frankpledge or enough property in town to be used as a bond against any misdeeds, we may not have to pay as many taxes. On the other hand, since the high and unusual taxes were part of the reason we were sent here, there is probably a more sinister reason behind them. We should learn what kind of influence and advisors are behind the local nobility."

Davas lapses into thoughtful silence for a minute or two, then starts to look around and take in the surroundings and people.

Davas notices that the buildings are more spread out and the roads are of hard packed dirt, similar to the villages he has seen. However, there are a lot more buildings than a village which is more like the cities he has seen. Along the main road which you are traveling, he notices ditches along each side of the road which contain the normal garbage and trash of a community. Once you reach the market square he notices a few holders for rushlights which may be used to light the way at night. The people that pass by, look at the group in suspicion. They are obviously not used to strangers at this time of the year. They

converse quietly to themselves as you pass by but not loudly enough for you to hear.

Once his name as he been taken, Rikoro heads over to the gathering group with the words, "Well this journey has been trying since the start so it makes sense it should finish the in the same manner. Shall we now set about to make new lives for ourselves?" A smile creeps onto Rikoro's face as he speaks the final sentence, then continues, "Visiting the recommended inn first to have ourselves settled for the first night and then separate to find employ?"

"The guardsman said that the Green Dragon Inn had good service at very reasonable prices, and the way he pointed is in the direction of the castle. As we're supposed to find out what's going on around here, being near the castle seems to be a good idea." Berina says. "After we're settled into the inn, we should go to the hall of the Mangai. We can ask after employment, find out what weaponrafter we can sell the extra weapons to, enquire about a moneylender to redeem the bearer bonds, and change the Khuzan crowns to pence. I mention changing the Khuzan crowns, because most merchants won't have enough pence to make change for any purchases we might make. Also, we'll need to do that in order to divide the booty into shares for each of us. As I see it, each one of us should get an equal share. Although not everyone actually fought the bandits, all were ready to do so and if things had turned out a little differently, they would have had to. Are there any objections to my proposal?"

Berina says, "The moneylender should also be able to provide notes for the one-third portion we'll each owe to our respective liege lords."

Waiting until the group has left the guardsmen behind, Davas says with a smile "let us hope there is no employment tax ... or inn tax then".

In all seriousness, Berina says: "I won't be surprised if there is."

8-HALÁNÈ-720 ATHELREN, KALDOR

5TH WATCH [HOT, PARTLY CLOUDY, SOUTH CALM]

Upon arriving at the market square, you notice the watch barracks [18] on the near side of the square and the White Horse Inn [34] on the far side of the square. Most of the other houses on the square do not have signs. The few market tents in the market that are still standing are vacant.

"Wait here for a moment." Berina says, then walks over to the watch barracks. "Excuse me. My friends and I have just arrived in Minarsas, and the Green Dragon Inn has been recommended to us. Where might I find this inn, please?"

Apparently startled by Berina's abrupt manner, the watchman says, "certainly madam. You follow the road northeast from the market square. When you reach the cluster of buildings east of the castle, look to the northwest and the enclosed common is the Green Dragon. If you can wait a moment, I will be going in that general direction and can lead you there." [+1 rhetoric]

"Yes, I can wait. That's very nice of you, thank you." Berina says. Holding out her hand, she says: "My name is Berina of Kyfa. Who might you be?"

"I am Eredos of Lothlar, captain of the watch," he says kissing the back of Berina's hand. "So are you a Haelean...they are the ones who usually stay at the Green Dragon. Melenda, the innkeeper's wife is a Haelean priestess and leads the members of the cult in their rituals. We have been instructed to neither help nor hinder the cult. Her husband, Broe of Tamorith, is a bit of a fool and minds not the debauchery his wife participates in. Matter of fact, the sign of the inn shows a wyvern and he knows not the difference between a dragon and a wyvern. I have tried to join the cult but they have turned me down...like Melenda thinks she can pass judgment on my morals. Well, I am ready. Shall we be on our way?"

Berina says, "Glad to make your acquaintance captain. As it happens, I am a Haelean." Berina stands with a weight-on-one-leg, hip-slightly-cocked stance, and asks...with a smile and a teasing tone to her voice...: "And just what ARE your morals?"

"I believe in taking advantage of whatever pleasures or material gains that I can," says the captain, "and, no offence meant but, I believe that what pleasures I take and how I take them are no body's business but my own."

Berina "I'll introduce you to my husband and the others in our little band of travelers." and she leads Eredos over to where the others are standing. "Everyone, I'd like to introduce you to Eredos of Lothlar, Captain of the town Watch. Captain, this is my husband, Davas of Fainovirs." and she indicates Davas.

Indicating Josrel and Lillia with a sweep of her hand, Berina says: "This is Josrel of Aswain and his wife, Lillia of Aikar. They are both Haliki of Save K'nor. Josrel, Lillia, Captain Lothlar."

Turning to Rikoro, Berina says: "This is Rikoro of Drelin. Rikoro, Captain Lothlar."

"Well met Captain. Berina has a knack for finding fine folk, and it appears she has stayed true to form as usual.", Rikoro says calmly with a friendly smile playing on his lips.

"So, what do you folks do for a living and what brings you to our town?" asks the Captain.

Speaking up Rikoro, informs the Captain, "We are here until the Wool Faire. On errand to find Sorkin Blue mules at the lowest cost possible. During that time we shall each need employ to sustain ourselves as the price we negotiated with the interested buyer was not much. I myself am hoping to find an apothecary to work on behalf of. The name Anesa of Fayrl was given to me as a possibility. Would you happen to know her Captain?"

"I know of her but very little," answers the Captain, "Her shop is down toward the river."

Gesturing to Fyna, Berina says: "This is Fyna of Daarienna. She is a new acquaintance and is, I believe, here to visit a relative or friend. Fyna, Captain Lothlar."

Fyna says, "Hello Captain Lothlar! I am Fyna of Daarienna and I do indeed have a friend here who is a physician. I am very pleased to meet you. Captain, I was wondering if you could help

ACT 4 SCENE 7 PAGE 8

me find that friend of mine who is a physician. Do you know where Sir Petral Aswain lives? As to what I do for a living, I am a hired sword."

"You mean the Earl's personal physician," asks the Captain. "He lives at the manor. If you are looking for work, I am sure the physician can recommend you for the Earl's guard. If not, come back to the watch barracks and we will find something for you to do."

Snapping his head quickly to Fyna, Josrel asks "Excuse me Fyna for ease dropping did I hear you say the person you are looking for is an Aswain? I am an Aswain, perhaps he is a relation of mine. May I tag along with you to find him?" Josrel asks hopeful.

"Josrel, of course you are more than welcome! I would love to introduce him to my new found friends and comrades in arms." Fyna says with a smile on her face. "I am sure that he would be pleased to meet someone who might be a relative. What a pleasant meeting this will be! Should we head out after our meal?"

"Yes once we are settled that would be fine." Josrel says to Fyna

Rikoro interjects calmly, "I believe it would be wise to wait until tomorrow morning. Visiting a noble manor at such a late hour will most definitely bring rejection if not scorn for disturbing the peace." In contemplation, Rikoro asks hesitantly, "Fyna, if you are willing to wait and stay the night here, would you care to share a room as we did before?"

Fyna says, "That would be great Rikoro."

"Last, but not least," and Berina puts a hand on Lysada's arm "this is Lysada of Taamejin. Lysada, Captain Lothlar." She adds: "Captain, Lysada also is desirous of becoming a Hlean. While I'm not a priestess, I can...instruct...the two of you in certain of the basics if you'd like."

"You can do that without permission of your clergy?" the Captain asks with a surprised look. With a bit of a leer, he looks Lysada over and says, "I think I would like that."

By her expression, a thought has suddenly occurred to Berina, and with a comical, crestfallen look, says: "I hope I got the order of introductions properly. I can never seem to get it right."

"Oh, I have no need for courtly manners," says the Captain.

* * *

As you arrive at the inn with the sign of a Green Wyvern, the Captain points it out saying, "There is the Green Dragon Inn that you were looking for. I must leave you now so I can get home to my wife and have my dinner. It has been nice meeting you."

When you enter the inn, you see three tables, only one of which is occupied. Of the three people sitting at the table, one is a large woman dressed in rawhide with a fur mantle. The second is an attractive, small man dressed in worn shirt, tunic, hose and shoes. The third is a very small, corpulent man dressed in a shirt, hose and calf boots. The two men have a mug of ale in front of them and the one with the tunic has a plate of food. The woman has nothing in front of her and you notice some white scabs on the back of her hands.

The common room looks to be a mess and the staff are busy cleaning up what must have been a wild party of several days. The innkeeper approaches you and says, "Welcome folks. I am Broe of Tamorith. Sorry about the mess. What can I get for you?"

Looking about, and then smiling at the innkeeper, Berina says: "Looks like the aftermath of The Banquet of Delight Festival. We need some rooms. One for me, my husband," indicating Davas "and this girl here." indicating Lysada.

"You know the Queen of Pleasure and Self-Fulfillment?" says the innkeeper. "I guess then that there is no need to ask if our beliefs and practices make you uncomfortable. While we are not persecuted here in Minarsas, we are not well respected either. Rooms? Yes, we can accommodate you. Shared rooms are two people per room at 6d per person and include two drinks, one hot meal in the evening and one cold meal in the morning."

Berina says, "I'm a Hlean, my husband is a follower of Peoni. Those three" indicating Rikoro, Josrel and Lillia "look to Save K'nor. In fact, they" pointing to Josrel and Lillia "are husband and wife, and both are Haliki...ordained priests. Lysada" putting a hand on Lysada's shoulder "wants to be a Hlean. As for her" indicating Fyna "...Fyna, who is the Deity you look to?"

"I am a worshipper of Larani." Fyna says and then sticks her tongue out playfully.

Rikoro offers a soft smile in the direction of the innkeeper and his wife, but remains silent during the introductions.

Speaking to Fyna, Berina asks: "Fyna, would you like to share with Davas, Lysada and me?"

Turning back to Broe, Berina says: "Also, meals for Lysada, my husband and me, please."

Turning to Lillia, Josrel asks, "Do you wish to stay hear my dear?"

"As you wish, husband mine," Lillia says.

When she agrees Josrel asks the Innkeeper for a room as well.

"Elaenne!" the innkeeper calls to one of the bar maids, "show these people to their rooms...the husband and wife to the first on the left and the maid to the first on the right." Turning back to Berina, he continues, "Your meal will be ready in about an hour. Tonight we are having amondyn eyroun [almond omelet] for an appetizer, rota [barley fruit soup], a choice of entrée (galantine pie, luce wafers [a delicate fish cake], or fesaunt and gelye [baked chicken with cold herbed jelly]), accompanied by St. Joinis' Rice [currant rice with carob cream], cocket [cheap white bread] and beer [golden color, heavy fruit aroma, very smooth, soft texture, complex fruit flavors that lasts to the end] For desert we have perys cofyns [lentil and berry filled pears]. I hope you enjoy your stay and, if there is anything you need, just ask."

Berina says, "That all sounds wonderful! I'll have the fesaunt and gelye."

Tugging on the tip of his beard, Rikoro finally says, "I would like to try the luce wafers please."

Berina says, "Since we have an hour, I'd like a bath to scrub off the grime of the road, please."

"Ah grand plan Berina.", Rikoro adds.

"I can provide a wash bowl, a pitcher of water and some towels but a bath would require much more preparation," the innkeeper replies. "If that is what you want, I think we can arrange for it by midday tomorrow?"

"Actually, the bowl, pitcher and towels sound just right." Berina says.

Berina says, "Also, the captain of the watch said that your wife is a priestess of Halea. I'm wondering if she might undertake the training of Lysada? Would that be possible?"

At that moment, a woman enters from the kitchen and says, "I am Melenda, priestess of Halea, and I can teach her if she is not afraid of hard work...it will take some time and she must pay her first, fifth and sixth coins."

Berina says, "Well Lysada, I'd say that this is your chance. I recommend that you take service with Melenda. She will certainly be able to teach you far better than I can." and Berina pauses for Lysada's response.

"Oh dank ee, madam, vor everything ee 'ave dude to bring me yer," Lysada says with enthusiasm and then follows her new mistress to the kitchen and her duties.

"Good choice." Berina says. "I'll see to it that you get your share of the booty, just as soon as we can get things sold and redeemed. I'm sure Melenda can advise you on how to invest it." Turning to Melenda, Berina asks: "We need to see a moneylender and a weaponcrafter. Who would you recommend?"

"There are two usurers that I know of: Anerd of Harabor deals in larger sums but charges a reasonable rate and Gotar of Vaben deals with smaller sums but charges a premium rate in order to be able to afford keeping cash on hand," Melenda says, "The only weaponcrafter we have available is Margan of Loda. He makes a quality product so is not likely to give much for used weapons but, by the town's custom, you can only sell to others if he flatly turns you down. You will not be able to see either of them until the marrow."

Berina says, "Well then, sounds like Anerd of Harabor and Margan of Loda are the men we'll need to see." Berina says. "In the morning, if you would be so kind as to give us directions to where each of them may be found, I'll appreciate it. Thank you."

Berina says, "The others" indicating Josrel and Lillia, Rikoro, and Fyna "follow other Gods, as does my husband," indicating Davas "but I follow the Maker of Bargains, and it's been a while since I've had a chance to do some formal worship. Do you have a regular schedule of services?"

"Our lay mass, or feast of pleasures, is on the seventh of each month and of course we have just finished our annual mass," Melenda answers. "We have a daily mass each morning at the seventh turn of the glass, before the market opens, but that mostly consists of discussing the seven coins and the seven cures. You are welcome to attend those. We are not as immersed in hedonism as everyone thinks we are."

Berina says, "I would love to attend the daily masses. There is always something new for me to learn." At Melenda's mention of hedonism, Berina laughs and says: "Indeed!"

* * *

Before the meal arrives, Rikoro kindly asks the innkeeper, "If it wouldn't be too much trouble, the Haliki with us injured his stomach on the road here. I have a herb that will aid him, but I'm in need of some water to boil it in. Would you mind terribly providing me with some?"

"Certainly, my Goodman," It will be ready for you when you are ready to retire for the evening," the innkeeper answers.

After the meal is finished by all, Rikoro gains the attention of the innkeeper and asks, "With dinner complete, could you provide me with the boiled water spoke about please?"

While Broe prepares the water, Rikoro rummages through his pack and retrieves the betony from inside. When the hot water arrives, the practicing physician immediately crushes the herb into the container and lets it sit.

As time passes, the Fyvrian mage sets out the dining cloth and folds it carefully. "Haliki, ready your abdomen so that once this is cooled I can place it on the bruise immediately." Rikoro says to Josrel with a soft smile.

When several minutes have passed he soaks the self made bandage in the infused water. Then he pulls the cloth out, and swings it gently around to let the heat dissipate. Gauging the warmth of the cloth, Rikoro lets Josrel know, "I am ready when you are."

Josrel says, exposing his chest to Rikoro: "How is the bruise Rikoro?" Josrel asks as he winces in anticipation when Rikoro places the cloth on his chest.

* * *

After your evening meal and a bit of polite conversation, you retire to your beds.

As the group makes their way upstairs, Rikoro turns to Fyna and lets her know, "I intend to spend some time tonight before sleeping studying the staff I hold, I can also endeavor to do the same with the ring."

Fyna says, "Rikoro, I think it wise that we determine what both items do. I'm both enamored and curious about my precious. Tomorrow we can then head over to my friend the healer. That should be fun!"

Arriving in his room, Rikoro settles his pack down and tugs off his boots with a wistful sigh. Then while in the comfort and privacy of his room, the Fyvrian mage attempts to channel his energies into divining the properties of the item he holds. He closes his eyes and gently runs his long spindly fingers over it, while taking careful practiced breaths.

Rikoro is unable to make the psychic connection to tell anything about the staff. However, it looks to him just like an open focus that he was taught about in the chantry. He does not have the spell or sensitivity to attune to it but he knows that if he keeps in contact with it at all times, he can try to manually attune to it.

ACT 4 SCENE 7 PAGE 10

Taking the ring from Fyna, Rikoro examines it and tries to tell of its past. Suddenly he senses a presence or intelligence within the ring. His entire body goes stiff and he falls to the floor unmoving.

Fyna immediately jumps up and runs to Berina's room Knocking frantically at their door loudly whispering, "Help! Help!" When someone answers she will guide them to our room and explain what happened.

Berina opens the door to hers and Davas' room and is astonished at the sight of a hysterical Fyna. Sifting through what Fyna is trying to communicate, Berina quickly realizes that something has happened to Rikoro. Rushing to their room, she sees Rikoro layed out on the floor and exclaims: "Oh, Balgashang!"

Turning to Fyna, Berina says: "Help me lift him up onto his bed."

Once they've got Rikoro on the bed, Berina says to Fyna: "Gather your thoughts...concentrate. What EXACTLY was he doing when this happened to him?"

"The ring, eh? Hmm." Berina looks around for the ring. Finding the ring clenched in Rikoro's fist. Berina carefully pries Rikoro's fist open and says to Fyna: "You were able to handle the ring safely, so take it and put it on that stool over there." Berina herself does not touch the ring.

Berina goes back to the room she and Davas are sharing and says to him: "Something has happened to Rikoro. He was examining the ring from the booty and was suddenly paralyzed. I'm going to go stay with him and wrack my brain for anything I may have heard in the past that might help. I'll catch a little sleep there. If you've ever heard of something that might help, let me know when you think of it." She then returns to Rikoro's and Fyna's room.