



## INTO THE VOID

By Ryan Daly

Sharn, City of Towers, metropolis of the kingdom of Breland, teemed with activity even this late in the night. The cylindrical spires whose foundations reached far into the deceased goblinoid kingdom that the city was based upon climbed ever onward into the night sky. Magically empowered lanterns of all colors lit the towers, giving the first-time visitor the impression that the city itself took on a life of its own once the sun had finished its slow march to the horizon.

Ithrien d'Phiarlan of House Phiarlan wandered into one of the many Tower Markets that existed on the Menthis Plateau, the central portion of Sharn. His light, black leather armor wrapped around his body, and the rogue reached down to tighten one of the many buckles and straps used to allow the wearer a better fit.

Ithrien, an elf of smaller stature, followed his taller Kalashtar companion into the bustling marketplace. He and Minharath had been friends for some time. The Kalashtar had nearly died saving the elf from certain death when he was wrongly framed for the murder of an elven nobleman, and so the normally flippant rogue had decided to follow Minharath for lack of a more exciting thing to do. The two quickly became adventuring partners, and Ithrien hasn't looked back.

The Kalashtar abruptly went off into the crowd, and Ithrien shrugged. He had learned not to question Minharath's actions; the warrior had grown increasingly cerebral over the years, and more often than not confused the elf with his strange mannerisms.

He looked across the expanse of the market. One side of it had been cut out so that passing air-boats could dock, taking on passengers or letting their riders get off to browse the wares offered. The elf wondered if the market had existed before the dock, or if the dock had been built and the merchants had consequently taken up shop in the square cavity. Either way it didn't matter to the young rogue, whose eyes wandered to the grand staircase on the other side of the market. At the top of the staircase was a platform, and two opposite sets of stairs branched off from there, each leading up to a higher level in the market.

They were already on one of the highest levels, but Ithrien had no problem with heights, and he found himself enjoying the colorful sights and smells, pick-pocketing random passers-by as he flitted back and forth between sections of the crowded marketplace. He stopped at one weapon stall and bought two throwing daggers from the uppity-looking merchant who tended to the counter.

"Stop, you little Halfling rodent!" the elf heard a cry from down further in his own aisle, and saw a talentan running towards him, his head frequently turning back to look at the shop owner who had taken up chase.

"Can I borrow this?" Ithrien didn't wait for the shopkeep to respond before he grabbed the staff resting near him and casually tipped it into the thief's path. The little Halfling didn't see the pole that lay in between several members of the crowd, and was caught in mid-stride. Falling flat on his miniscule face, the stolen goods flew out of his hand and smacked unceremoniously into the head of an adjacent stall guard. The tiny halfling scrambled to get up and disappear into the crowd, bumping into several people as he did so, allowing the pursuing guard a clear look at the halfling's path through the market.

Muttering to himself about the incompetence of the small talentan, Ithrien strode over to the now undefended stall, engaging the owner in meaningless discussion while pocketing a few trinkets for himself.

Reaching for his final steal, the elf felt a firm grip on his wrist, expecting the worst. He slowly stared up into the calm blue eyes of his companion Minharath.

“You know I disapprove of this,” the Kalashtar said in a firm tone, “dispense with it, friend.”

Ithrien offered him a toothy grin and dropped the small wand.

Minharath turned to the stall owner. “I apologize for my elven friend’s misconceptions about your establishment’s pricing; he seems to think everything in this city comes free. We’ll be going now.”

They then both turned around, Minharath guiding the diminutive elf with a firm hand. “You’re lucky I didn’t make you give up the rest,” Minharath smiled.

Ithrien was surprised by his friend on a continual basis; the warrior did chastise him, but he had become lenient as of late. He suspected Minharath had been watching the rogue work his craft on the shopkeep and had simply grown fed up by the time he decided to intervene.

Ithrien looked up at his companion. A long bundle of brown hair cascaded down around the Kalashtar’s shoulders, framing his angular jaw. The rogue was silently wondering if his friend ever had trouble dealing with his hair in battle when he noticed a change in Minharath’s expression. His face had grown grim, his eyes scanning the crowd.

“Minharath... ?,” The Kalashtar didn’t respond. “What’s the matter?”

“There’s a tsucora in this marketplace Ithrien, looking for me,” his tone had grown urgent.

“Why are they always looking for you? What do they want?” Ithrien asked, his eyes curious. It seemed to the elf that they had been forced to deal with too many of the quori threats. If Minharath hadn’t been able to sense the attacks before they occurred, it was quite possible the two of them would be dead already.

“They want to kill me,” Minharath breathed, his eyes and mind still searching.

“Yes I came to understand that part of this game a while ago,” Ithrien said, “But I didn’t realize this war was dealt with so openly. Perhaps it’s my Phiarlan instincts getting the better of me, but something tells me these Inspired should be a little bit more subtle.”

“Usually they are, which is what worries me,” Minharath said.

A stream of monks slowly moved past them, and an easy hymn began to roll across the worshiper’s tongues.

“There she is,” Minharath snarled. Ithrien caught a brief glimpse of the Inspired and the mercenaries that were following her, but that’s all it took to understand the full gravity of the two companion’s problem. They had to act fast; the quori was in the adjacent market aisle to their left. Her eyes were closed, but she and her Daask entourage were moving fast, the half-orc in front was muscling a path through the crowd.

“I’m going to assume that you plan on attacking it,” Ithrien said.

“If I do not engage the Inspired on my own terms the battle will end up further endangering the crowd around us,” the Kalashtar said.

Ithrien sighed.

Undoubtedly Minharath would assault the group from behind. The Kalashtar, Ithrien had noted early on in their friendship, was not averse to using weaponry; he differed from the rest of his race in this respect, whom often looked upon physical combat with disdain. The elf looked at the enormous weapon strapped to Minharath’s back.

The double scimitar was of elven design, a weapon of the Valenar. The elves of Valenar certainly didn’t grow taller than the rest of the elves on Khorvaire, which led him to believe that Minharath had this weapon custom built for him, before Ithrien had joined up with him.

Of course, to say that the warrior was not skilled with his innate psionic abilities was a falsity; they had gotten the two friends out of trouble just as many times as the two companions’ blades had.

Ithrien looked up, trying to figure out the best position to launch his own attack from. He noticed a stone balcony above the market with some interesting possibilities.

The monks voices grew louder, their monophonic chant lifted to the ceiling of the marketplace.

“Can you take care of yourself, half-elf?” Minharath asked.

Ithrien looked hurt, “I have some ideas. I’d hate to think you don’t trust me Kalashtar.”

“Don’t get yourself into too much trouble, my shadowy friend.” With a smile Minharath broke away from their path, walking through the procession of monks and to the edges of the crowd in his aisle.

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Minharath determinedly moved toward the Inspired and its entourage. Lucid blue eyes searched the formation. There was a mixed group of three goblins, a human, and two half-orcs, with the Inspired forward of all.

If all went well, race and size would hardly matter, the Kalashtar calculated.

The goblins brought up the rear of the formation, a mistake Minharath thought would prove fatal to the entire company.

He weaved through the crowd and eventually came to a stop, pressing his back up against one of the taller market stands. Easing his shoulder down so that his head could peek out, Minharath began to grow impatient as the group started to slow. Deciding not to wait until the Inspired noticed his presence behind the entourage, he made his move.

The Kalashtar became a blur of motion, bending himself into a crouched position while running towards the rear guard of the group, a goblin wearing no helm, no neck protection.

A foolish goblin, Minharath thought.

As he neared the end of his run, he unsheathed the two kukris belted at his hip, crossed them around the goblin's neck, and sliced the creature's throat open.

Words failed to take shape in the goblin's larynx as it clutched at the blood that was now spurting forth from its wound, and it subsequently fell before Minharath's already moving feet. Blood had spattered the two goblins that made the second rear defense, and they were in the process of turning around when Minharath rotated his arms up and over the goblin's heads, jamming them down and through the sides of each goblin's neck. The goblins, like their now deceased comrade, were wearing no neck protection.

Three foolish goblins, the Kalashtar thought.

The creatures hit the ground, trying to cry out, grasping at the kukris that were lodged in their necks. They did not die immediately; the Kalashtar's angle had made sure of that, however accidental it was.

Minharath began to whirl forward, whipping out the Valenar double scimitar strapped to his back as he did so. The agile Kalashtar's motions brought him perfectly in line with the human in front of him. The rough-looking mercenary managed to cry out as one end of Minharath's weapon cleanly sliced through the flesh and muscles surrounding the bone that formed the top of his foe's spine.

The head sailed through the air and hit a bystander who consequently screamed in horror at the sight of what had happened in the aisle. The half-orcs that made up the next line spun around and brought out their weapons with a speed that belied their size. One began to circle Minharath, the other charged with a throaty roar. Minharath prepared to hurl himself out of the way of the rushing half-orc when he realized that there was nowhere for him to go. To one side was the rather crafty half-orc who had positioned himself to cut off retreat, to the other side was the crowd.

Minharath's dilemma was solved for him as an arrow slammed into the offending half-orc's skull.

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Ithrien looked on at his brown-haired friend trying to disappear into the crowd.

*Trying*, Ithrien thought ruefully, *but not quite succeeding*.

The Kalashtar race was inherently possessed of a rather strong presence, one that was very difficult to miss. Minharath stood out more so than most beings ever could, and not just because of his size. The presence could be described like one would describe the aura of evil that seemed to permeate the Inspired they were hunting. However, the two warring race's ideologies could not be more different.

The Kalashtar, Ithrien thought, seemed to be the very essence of good. It was really quite disgusting.

Continuing onward, Ithrien made his way to the stairwell at the other end of the market. He darted in and out of the crowd, past the now fervently chanting monks, always keeping his objective in front of him and ever so careful about where he was stepping and who he was bumping into. If he hit the wrong person, he would have to worry about more than just the Inspired.

Finally reaching his goal, he bounded up the steps, taking them three at a time as his hands propelled his body upward from the railing. He turned left and prepared to make his way up the next set of stairs, glancing through the series of arches that jutted up from the low railings. He saw the Kalashtar peek out from behind a market stall, his brown hair standing out among the vibrant myriad of colors the tower market displayed.

Ithrien heard the sound of clinking chain-mail ahead of him and the elf quickly rolled under a stray table, melding in with the shadow and disappearing as only those of the House Phiarlan were able to. A large procession of some rather unruly-looking humanoid filed through the corridor ahead of Ithrien.

Not my problem, Ithrien thought, and after the procession had ended, the elf dashed down the dimly lit corridor and rushed up the first staircase he saw to his left. Ithrien was sure his friend had made his move by now; the Kalashtar tended to be impulsive when it came to his pursuit of the Inspired.

The stairs seemed to wind on for forever until Ithrien slammed against the door at the end of the steps. As it banged harshly on its adjacent wall, he made straight for the glass door encased in the far wall of the shop, dodging the rush of an enormous warforged. Ithrien was too fast for the construct, and he hurled himself at the door.

The elf burst out onto the balcony he had spotted before, broken glass falling down all around him. He hit the ground rolling and brought himself up onto his feet, taking two steps before leaping off the edge and bringing out the shortbow strapped to his back.

Ithrien had judged the distance between the balcony and the ground correctly, and with a smug smile he drew out an arrow, took aim at the half-orc that was blocking off his friend's only escape route, and let fly. He then grabbed his two talented tangats that were also strapped to his back and splayed his limbs out, bending them at the elbows and knees.

It looked as if he was going to miss the cloaked Inspired, and would hit the half-orc next to her.

Ah well, the elf thought with some disappointment, she's Minharath's target to begin with. His hair and the edges of his tunic whipping all around him, Ithrien prepared for the impact that would surely prove jarring.

As the ground rushed to meet him, Ithrien wondered if Minharath was indeed impulsive, or if his tremendous lack of fore-sight was due to sheer impatience. He then began to wonder if there had to be a difference between the two in the warrior's case, if perhaps his friend was simply the product of impulsive impatience. This was probably a result of his friend's innate pre-cognitive powers; because the Kalashtar was able to sense real danger within a certain time before said danger occurred, he had simply grown too impulsive to care about what happened past the limit of his precognition.

Ithrien's thoughts were promptly interrupted as he landed on the half-orc, making sure his blades hit first.

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Lathriel d'Lyrandar watched the events unfold in front of her from on top of a market stall near the one the Kalashtar had dashed out from. She sighed as she watched him initiate his killing spree, his brown hair twirling around him in a very handsome fashion.

The sound of shattering glass from above caught her attention.

She incredulously looked on as a small elf leaped from a very high balcony over the marketplace, loosed an arrow, and landed on an unsuspecting half-orc.

The half-elf quickly picked herself up and started over the wooden ribbed ceiling of the market stall. It looked like the goodly Kalashtar and the elf who seemed to be his companion were in a situation only she could extricate them out of. Thus, as a member of the Order of the Silver Flame, she had no choice but to lend a helping hand. Her lithe body maintained perfect balance as she leaped from roof to roof, and as she drew closer, she got a clearer picture of the battle.

It looked like the elf, (she noticed the ears that were longer than her own,) had used the impact that his curved swords created when he landed on the half-orc to lessen the impact of his fall. That, in addition to the actual body mass of the tusked henchman created a very nice cushion for the small humanoid to fall into. The speed at which he had fallen had in effect contributed to rending the creature down two separate paths, starting halfway across both sides of its collar bone. The swords had finally stopped at each side of the half-orc's hip bone. Lathriel looked away from the gruesome sight, focusing her attention on the elf, who was now shaking his head, uneasily trying to get to his feet.

The Inspired stood immediately behind him, flail in hand.

Three spiked balls hung from long chains that were attached to a handle of wood, possessing intricate carvings that conformed to the wielder's hands, and undoubtedly stored enchantments of the offensive sort. Of course, Lathriel mused, the Inspired did not entirely need a weapon. Like the Kalashtar, the tsucora quori innately controlled an assortment of psionic powers that could penetrate a man's inner-

most thoughts, or thrust his mind into utter disarray; leaving his body prone to physical or magical attack from the outside. Therein lay the true danger in assaulting an Inspired.

The half-elf brushed her thoughts aside and pulled a spell component out of one of the many woven pouches that lined the shoulder belt she wore. As she jumped off the final market rooftop, Lathriel threw the dust into the air, and quickly spoke the final word of the spell she had prepared earlier. An arrow wreathed in a magical flame shot forth from her outstretched hand, sailed through the air, and subsequently slammed into the Inspired's chest. The woman cried out and stumbled back, searching wildly for her assailant with vicious black eyes.

Lathriel knew it was difficult to escape the probing mind of the Inspired, so she didn't bother trying. The wench was most likely reaching out with her mind right this instant, her thoughts becoming like tendrils, slithering out to find the elven wizard. Lathriel dove behind a stall and closed her eyes, shutting her senses out from the screaming gnomish stall-owner who practically tripped over himself trying to get away from the half-elf.

She began looking inward, hastily constructing a mental barrier that would render herself immune to the psionic attacks she knew were coming in short order.

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Minharath didn't know where the arrow came from but he was intensely glad for its arrival. He assumed the source was his elven friend, taking shots from some secluded area where he was under full cover. He took solace in the fact that his companion was completely safe from the battle raging on the ground.

He tore his eyes from the amusing sight that lay in front of him and glanced at the encroaching half-orc. Lines of spittle that were originally trailing from his mouth flew into the air as his bulk came to a sudden halt, his head turning to his kin. Just as quickly as he had stopped however, the half-orc's attention shifted back, and he resumed raging onward toward his foe, the greataxe he clasped firmly in his enormous hands raised high over his head.

The Kalashtar gratefully took his newfound opportunity.

He spun clockwise to the side, taking his double scimitar and under-handing it with his right arm, letting the handle pivot and whirl around on his outstretched palm over his head as he continued his body's rotation. As he ended a final revolution he brought the elven weapon to bear, but the dazed half-orc, with an arrow protruding from his head, managed to feebly throw his bastard sword up in time to save his thickly muscled neck. As the two weapons clashed, Minharath snapped his wrist in order to regain his grasp on his own. He succeeded, but nearly lost the implement from the impact of the two weapons meeting. The Kalashtar berated himself for under-estimating the thickness of his opponent's skull as he mused over how Ithrien's arrow apparently hadn't penetrated deep enough to destroy the motor skills of its target.

He quickly realized that the half-orc had indeed slowed down in his response time however, and immediately reversed the direction of his rotation, planting his foot and throwing the other around it, again whirling his double scimitar up and over his head. This time, no sword came to meet his, the severely impaired creature in front of him only widened his eyes in horror. Even that reaction, Minharath thought, was a little slow. The blade embedded itself far into the half-orc's barrel-sized neck, eviscerating flesh and bone.

That same instant, the silver-haired warrior's pre-cognitive abilities alerted him to the other half-orc, whose speed had again surprised him; the humanoid had managed to recover from his charge, and had begun anew. Minharath was forced to attempt ripping his weapon out of the half-orc's jugular too soon for his liking, and in the split-second it took for him to realize he would not be able to dislodge the blade, the other half-orc was upon him. It drew back for a mighty swipe, and as it brought around its greataxe, the Kalashtar ducked his head down and took cover behind the only option he had.

This time, the half-orc's eyes widened all too quickly as it realized that its companion's weapon was hurtling across with a momentum he knew couldn't be stopped. The arrow in its massive head twitched as his kinsman finished the job started by the whirling Kalashtar.

Minharath watched in dismay as his double scimitar broke free of its prison, sailing parallel to the severed head, end over end, eventually embedding itself in a wooden plank just above a certain horrified gnomish stall-owner.

The Kalashtar moved forward and deftly plucked the bastard sword from the decapitated foe that was falling in front of him, which brought him in line with the right side of the other half-orc. Readying

himself for a slice into the heavily muscled torso to the left of him, he began to sweep diagonally up with the sword, and was surprised to note that he had sorely underestimated the weight of the orcish weapon. His foe noted this same mistake, and wasted no time releasing one hand from the grip on its axe, backhanding the Kalashtar in front of him with his enormous gauntleted fist.

Minharath had little time to regret his miscalculation before the fist slammed into his left cheekbone. Blood and spittle flew everywhere as the force of the blow sent him into a spin that ended where the ground below him began.

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Even in his dazed state, Ithrien noticed the furtive movements on top of the market stalls that lined the aisle. The figure's position became even more apparent to him when the the giant fire-ridden arrow she sent screaming in his direction shot from her fingertips. He quickly regained his senses and rolled to the side, half-anticipating that horrid burning sensation that always erupted from the shock of a flame arrow, and half-hoping that his luck was better than that.

So when the burning sensation did not arrive, the diminutive elf was overjoyed to hear a cry of pain from behind him. Quickly rising to his feet, his expression sank as he found himself looking at the quori still standing, albeit with a large charred circle on her chest. The malevolent being looked distracted to Ithrien, her black eyes were now glazed over. He had seen Minharath use the same type of ability.

He didn't want the undoubtedly powerful psionicist noticing his renewed vigor, so he tumbled backward, rolling in between two astonished-looking women; more astonished by the arisen elf than anything, who had just plummeted down several stories to what looked to be certain death, and had in all fairness recovered at an inane rate.

Ithrien finished his roll and threw his back up against the countertop of the stall. His body had gone unseen by the psionicist, he was sure of it.

Noting the sounds of battle to his right, further down the aisle, he watched as Minharath neatly lost his scimitar in the neck of the half-orc Ithrien had just shot. For a split-second Ithrien looked in amazement at the beast, who was still not quite dead, his face contorted in an expression of bewilderment.

Enough of that, he admonished himself, the wizard gave me another life, it's time to use the opportunity to save her's.

Unseen, he rushed out from behind the wooden counter, making straight for the far wall of the market directly behind the Inspired. As he neared his destination, he noticed that the woman was still in her glazed-over state. Ithrien privately gloated as he took out his dagger and lowered himself into a slide, side-arming the weapon at her in the process.

Much to the elf's disappointment, the dagger stopped in mid-air right before the psionicist's head, and the faint bluish tinge of magic lingered in the air surrounding the weapon.

"I SEE YOU, PHIARLAN," the words boomed in his ears, and the effect was deafening. Ithrien grew nauseated at the overwhelming ringing sensation that threatened to subdue him.

Still clutching at his head but knowing he had to do something, Ithrien picked himself up and rushed to meet the Inspired head-on. He brought out his shortbow and took aim at the quori still standing with her back to him. In the instant it took him to do that however, he noticed Minharath get pummeled by the remaining half-orc. Still running, he quickly shifted his aim, drew back his arrow, and let go of the string.

With a sharp 'twang' the arrow shot from his bow and thumped into the creature's back. Ithrien let go of his weapon and charged the psionicist, hoping to over come the woman with brute force. His plans were interrupted by the explosion that rocked the ground beneath both of them.

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The instant Lathriel felt the assault on her mind weaken, she leaped out from under cover and climbed on top of the market stall she was behind. Quickly triggering another spell, she made a series of arcane gestures with her hands and let loose a seething ball of fire that began to rage toward the psionicist; unfortunately taking note of the elf who was nearing too late.

Shaking her head in annoyance she looked to her right and saw the peril the Kalashtar had gotten himself into. She took out her crossbow, drew back the bolt, and shot at his torso.

Lathriel was surprised to see the handsome warrior beneath the half-orc recover from his unconscious state and take the bastard sword that lay next to him, neatly slicing the half-orc's belly open.

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The half-orcish warrior's hands were trying to fetch this newest projectile out of his skin when he felt a sharp pain in his abdominal region. Glancing down, he dropped his greataxe and attempted to cover up and otherwise stem the tide of blood that was now pouring from his belly. Darkness washed over him in a matter of seconds, and the tusked humanoid's life ended.

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Minharath nodded his thanks towards the half-elven woman and looked up, eyes scanning fervently for his friend among the ledges that lined the area Ithrien had pointed out to him earlier. He heard a shout from the half-elf, and she pointed towards the direction of the Inspired. He was surprised to see the light-haired rogue and the quori each struggling to get up. The quori however, was having a little more success at it, and was reaching for her flail.

He noticed his friend writhing on the ground, and realized he was being subjected to the foul woman's mental attacks.

The Kalashtar reached out with his mind and thrust his thoughts like a spear into the quori's brain. The Inspired's head snapped around to look at Minharath, which only doubled his efforts to topple whatever defenses she still had left. Still gazing at the foe sitting upright some distance away from him, he began to move towards the stall where his double scimitar lay embedded.

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Lathriel wasted no time in shooting a crossbow bolt at the Inspired. The bolt forced an ounce of attention from the quori, which was all that was needed.

The elf laying next to her sat up, dazedly looked to his left, and jammed a dagger into the quori's midsection.

At that same instant, a Valenar double scimitar whizzed by Lathriel's head, cutting through the air until it firmly implanted itself in the Inspired's chest.

Breathing a sigh of relief, the wizard hopped down from her perch on the stall and was nearly knocked over by the tall Kalashtar charging past her. She ran hard to keep pace with him and noticed his worried looks to their right. Following his eyes, the elf saw a very large group of Daask mercenaries making their way through the stunned crowd.

"Elf!" the Kalashtar cried, "More trouble heading this way!" The elf was already on his feet and starting for the crowd to their left.

The Lyrandar realized she didn't have much choice in the matter as she sprinted after the two companions. If she stayed with the bodies of the deceased, the Daask would surely kill her. She couldn't try to lose them in the crowd either, the mercenaries had them very well surrounded. As she looked out the void the half-elf was leading them towards, Lathriel began to form a plan. But in order to execute the plan, she needed to delay the Daask somehow.

"Kalashtar, I need you to wait," the half-elf shouted. "I have an idea."

The Kalashtar whirled and started to reply, but the elf didn't hear his words.

Lathriel slowly turned around and planted her feet.

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"Ithrien, hold," Minharath yelled.

Ithrien stopped and was in the midst of screaming at the warrior about how time was a very important factor when it came to their survival when Minharath pointed towards the half-elven woman behind them. The wizard had turned around and was rolling her sleeves up.

An attractively intricate dragonmark laced its way around her right arm's skin, seeming to begin at the top of her wrist and end nowhere.

There was no incantation, no ridiculous waving of the arms as the half-elf shut her eyes and brought her palms straight up and out, her two arms parallel to one another. There were no incantations spoken as the dragonmark on the half-elf's arm flared with a powerful blue light, and a wall of wind slammed into the surprised Daask mercenaries. The miniature hurricane spared nothing as the Daask, civilians, and stalls were sent careening backwards into the far wall of the marketplace.

Ithrien smirked and gave the wizard an approving look as she turned around and raced towards the docking area with him and Minharath.

"Useful trick you have there. A little less subtle than I would have hoped for, but useful nonetheless," Ithrien said.

"I'm glad you liked it," the elf said, "At the moment however, it might be prudent of us to get ourselves off this tower." Ithrien watched as she went through the motions of the same spell three times. One by one, three floating discs appeared out on the edge of the docks in front of them.

"Get on the discs and follow me," the wizard said.

Ithrien had a hard time getting used to controlling the disc at first. His feet became magically sealed to it almost immediately after hopping on, so he didn't have to worry about keeping his balance, but he did have to worry about where he was steering and how he was controlling the pitch of the disc. Ithrien took a moment to emulate the half-elf's stance in front of him, his dominant foot forward of the other, knees bent.

"We've got more company up and ahead," Minharath pointed to the approaching sky boats that were fast making their way towards them. "Your squall must have knocked over a guard or two half-elf, I suggest we split up," he said.

"A boat to each of us then?" Lathriel replied. And with that she veered away from the two. She was doubtful of the group's ability to lose the boats, but she knew they had to at least try. If things got too hectic, the rogue could always head straight for the Depths, but she figured he'd rather not abandon Minharath; the tall Kalashtar was going to have quite a bit of trouble eluding any pursuit.

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Minharath realized that the only way they could escape their pursuers would be to try and head for the Depths of the city. An idea began to form in his mind as an arrow whizzed by his head, and with a grim determination the tall Kalashtar sped through a gathering of towers, heading for one of the many interconnecting bridges.

Checking the distance between him and the air boat that had gone after him, Minharath slowed as he neared the bridge and started to mentally untie the bonds that held him to his flying disc. An arrow bounced off of the low wall that served as a railing on the bridge ahead, and the Kalashtar ducked and dove down under the bridge before sharply veering upward after he was safely past it. Minharath felt the rush of air as he shot up and gathered the momentum needed that would send him flying back over the causeway.

With the bridge nearly beneath him the warrior leaped off his disc, allowing his body to slowly corkscrew as it flew into the area over the bridge.

The warriors on the elementally-controlled sky boat watched in fascination as their target arced over the bridge and flew into the air. The warrior stopped his corkscrew and began to spin, his body perpendicular to the ground that was well over a mile below them. The guards all squinted as they caught the reflection of light bouncing off a large double scimitar that the warrior had now brought out and was holding horizontally in front of him, both arms gripping the handle.

The captain of the small air boat slowly realized what was happening and started to frantically bark the order to turn the ship, but it was too late. Minharath finished his spin in between two of the guards and slammed on to the deck. His feet hit the boat crouched beneath him, one arm planted firmly on the wood, the other holding his weapon out behind him.

The two men to either side of him hit the deck knees first. The rest of the guards watched in horror as the torsos of their fallen comrades slid off, hewn by the Kalashtar's blade.

"Attack him!" the captain shouted.

Minharath was already up, and the remaining guards proved no match for him. He rotated left as they ran to meet him, side-stepping the charge and bringing one end of his blade around to cut through the first guard. The second guard attacked with an overhand slash, dodging the fall of his comrade. The Kalashtar easily caught the weapon with his own blade, parrying it away to the right with one end of his blade and cracking into the skull of the guard with the other.

The captain didn't look back as he promptly jumped off the side of the boat.

\* \* \*

Ithrien hadn't had much trouble losing the air-boat that had chased after him, he'd angled off behind a tower, hiding himself among the darker areas of the spire. He had watched and smirked as the skipper veered around the bend and continued off into the night.

The elf kept himself out of sight until he was sure it was safe to head back to where the three adventurers had initially split up. When he reached the area, he again placed himself in a place no light was touching. Hearing the soft whir of another approaching air-boat, Ithrien cloaked himself further in shadow.

The elf watched the skipper get nearer, silently wondering why it seemed to be making a bee-line to the alcove where he was hiding. The top of the boat eased to the right as the rest of it pulled up to his position, and Ithrien let out a sigh of relief. Minharath stood casually next to the pilotbox, where a short human in a uniform stood, eyes wide with fear.

"Elf, I know you're there," the Kalashtar said, his blue eyes penetrating the darkness until they met Ithrien's own.

"Wait a minute," Ithrien grinned, "I'm savoring the moment."

They both heard a shout as the half-elven wizard appeared off to their left, slowly making her way towards them. There were several holes in the cloak billowing in the wind behind her, and she was in the process of pulling an arrow out of her thigh, a grimace of pain plastered across her face.

"We have to move," the half-elf said, "I blew the sky-boat into another tower, but I saw more boats mobilizing when I doubled back. I'm not sure if their intent was to follow me, but it would be wise for us to find somewhere to stay until morning, when this all blows over."

"Perhaps we may find solace in the lower city?" Minharath suggested.

"Perhaps," Ithrien said, "But taking that marvelous sky-boat with us is not the best idea. What shall we do with our esteemed pilot friend?"

The half-elf wizard took out a wand from her pack and pointed it at the terrified wind sailor. She uttered the trigger-word and the human fell asleep, crashing to the floor.

"A less violent solution than the havoc you've wreaked here," she said, nodding toward the grisly scene on the deck.

"I did not have a choice, wizard," Minharath replied defensively, "Besides, I've learned that most of the men the government of this city will refer to as keepers of the peace are in fact crooked, taking bribes from all parties."

The half-elf's lips turned up in a smile. "I didn't catch your name, Kalashtar."

"My name is Minharath. This is my elven companion Ithrien," he said, and gestured to the elf who had leaped aboard the skipper. "Allow me to give my thanks on our behalf for your services in the tower market; I do not know if we could have survived without your aid."

"It was my duty to the Silver Flame. I was contemplating whether or not I should attack the Inspired on my own when I saw your assault begin. When the elf fell from the balcony.." the half-elf trailed off, smiling at Ithrien.

"You make it sound like it was an accident," Ithrien looked pained, his tone indignant, "I'll have you remember that I've been safely hidden here in the darkness while all you've done in the past couple of minutes is find us more trouble," the rogue continued, "Lathriel d'Lyrandar."

The wizard's eyes widened, "How did you --"

"Don't give me that look," Ithrien said smugly, "I'm of the Phiarlan, it's my job to know."

"Indeed? Well, now that we've allowed the city guard plenty of time to find us, what shall we do about escaping?" Lathriel asked.

Minharath stepped onto the air-boat's railing and looked down into the void below them.

"I'm going to assume you have a mass feather fall spell, wizard?" he said. Lathriel nodded in affirmation. "Then we'll jump." And with that, the Kalashtar and half-elf dove into the night.

"I've been doing this way too often as of late," Ithrien muttered to himself, and quickly followed suit.

A few moments later, two air-ships warily pulled up next to the skipper Minharath had captured. Slowly, the lone survivor aboard the boat stood up, the effect of the sleep spell worn off. The soldiers took one look at the slaughtered guards on deck before boarding the boat and apprehending the astonished suspect.

