



# a Dozen DISCONCERTING RUMORS

BY PHILIP REED

If there is one thing that we can be certain of, it is that the player characters are as likely to wander off in a random direction as they are to follow the trail of breadcrumbs that the GM leaves between them and the adventure. Some players are simply stubborn, refusing to be “railroaded” into adventure, while others overlook clues and go completely off the rails. It isn’t that the players don’t want to participate in an adventure. No, it is simply that some players want to push limits and test the GM’s ability to think fast.

Fortunately, GMs have access to more tools than ever before to assist them in preparing for the unexpected direction that the party takes early on in the game session. The internet is overloaded with inspiration for fantasy RPG gamemasters, but that isn’t going to prevent me from adding even more rumors to the GM’s toolbox.

As with the other titles in this series, each rumor is presented as a single page to make printing/using the selected rumor as easy as possible. Print and go!

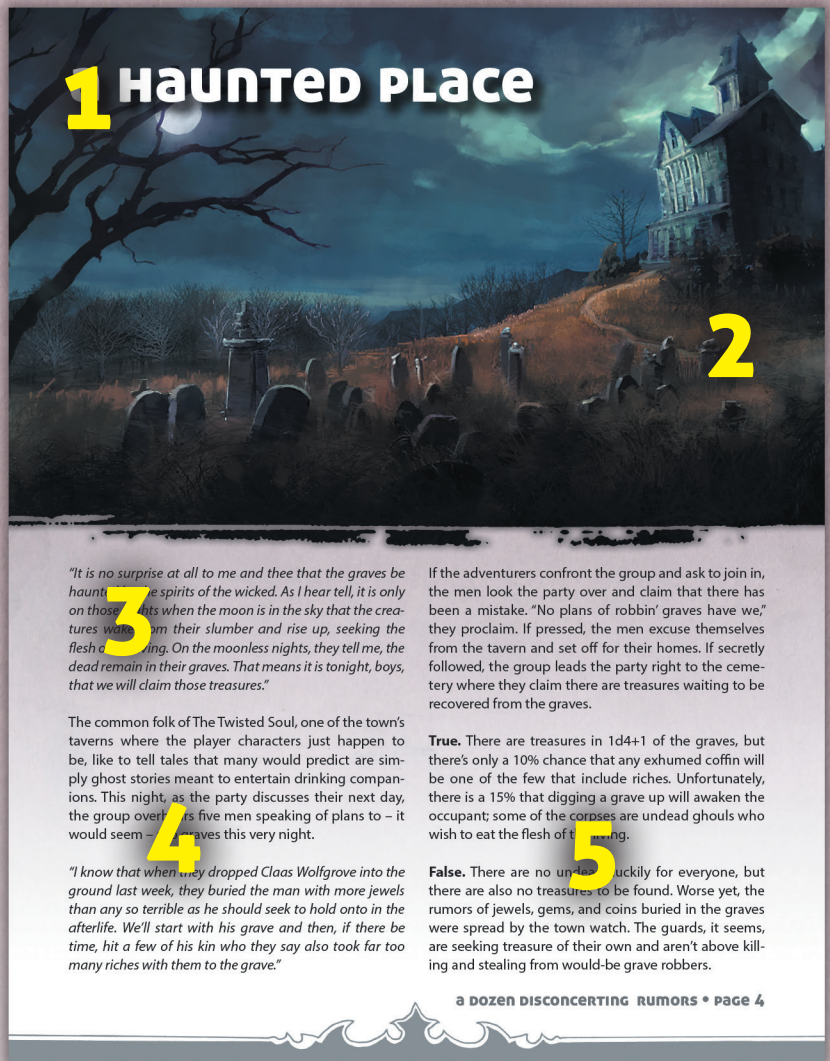
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# anatomy OF a RUMOR

1. A title, to help set the mood.
2. Each rumor includes an illustration to help spark your imagination as you think through how to best use the rumor in your campaign.
3. Flavor text appears in italics. You may use this text as read aloud text, or you may prefer to use it as inspiration and reword the flavor text in your own language.
4. Each rumor includes an overview of the general idea to get your creative muscles humming. Adapt as you see fit!
5. There are true and false options for each of the rumors, providing you with some ideas on how the rumors might play out. Whether or not a rumor is true or false is your call.



## USING THE RUMORS

The dozen rumors detailed on the following pages are first and foremost meant to get your imagination running. As the gamemaster, you're constantly under pressure to devise scenes and stories and to keep the action flowing, always entertaining the players and as much a playwright as you are a movie director.

**Atmosphere.** The rumor isn't intended to do anything more than add some depth to the campaign setting. You never intend for the players to act on the rumor; it is merely being used to make the campaign feel like there's more going on outside of the player characters' sphere of influence.

**Breadcrumbs.** Perhaps you're building to something, an encounter against a rival or a larger in-world event

that will shake the player characters and the NPCs. When used in this way, the rumors are leading to an adventure of your own design that, in some way or other, incorporates the rumors in such a way that the players get the feeling you've mapped things out in advance.

**Adventure Seed.** If you're feeling especially inspired and creative, you can select any rumor and expand it out into a full adventure. In the sample rumor, above, the party is promised an epic battle if they set out to engage the ogres, trolls, and orcs that are approaching the city. Expanding this rumor into an adventure will require you to map the surrounding area, provide statistics for the monsters, and perhaps toss in a few allies – other adventurers, city guards, thrillseekers – who join the party in seeking out and attacking the army.



# THE WITCH and THE TREE



*"She is so horrible that even the people of Woodfall were unwilling to have her. Skrags says that she were cast out of the village less than a week after she arrived and before she had done much more than made her intentions to open a shop of magic known to the people of the village. Any witch so terrible as to be turned away from a village of witches is one to avoid."*

Most likely overheard in a tavern or at the intersection of some major roads in the city, the story of the witch who was too evil for Woodfall\* captures the attention of the adventurers. They've heard whispers of the village before – known as a home for criminals, witches, and the unwanted – but this is the first time that they've heard of someone being banished from the village.

*"It was her plans to undercut the others that did it."*

As they eavesdrop, the party learns that the witch in question – Philomene Moonfall – has set up her shop of magic in the forest a few days from the city. The chatter suggests that the woman is living inside one of the larger, hollowed out trees, and that she welcomes all who bring enough gold to buy her wares.

*"Sure, I'll tell you where she lives."*

If asked, the commoners chatting about Moonfall offer to sell the adventurers directions to the woman's forest home. The more gold that they offer the one who is most talkative, the more detailed his directions become.

**True.** Moonfall was banished from Woodfall, but not because of her plans to open a shop of magic. The witch was forced out because she broke one of the few laws that the village enforces: no stealing from others who also live in the village. Moonfall was caught stealing twice in a single day and was evicted instantly.

She is selling magic items from her tree home, but her selection is limited to 2d4+2 magic potions, 1d6 magic scrolls, and a handful of other minor items as selected by the gamemaster.

**False.** Moonfall was never a citizen of the village of Woodfall, but she was tossed out by the people of the village. The witch was trying to sell charm and love potions when she was traveling through the village; the people of Woodfall do not put up with such evil forms of magic that would twist a person's will until they commit unthinkable and undesirable acts. She had no plans to live in the village, but was only visiting while searching for new potion recipes.

\* To learn more about the village of Woodfall, please see the "Dark Fantasy Mini Setting" described in the **Woodfall** sourcebook by Lazy Litch.





# a Haunted Place

*"It is no surprise at all to me and thee that the graves be haunted by the spirits of the wicked. As I hear tell, it is only on those nights when the moon is in the sky that the creatures wake from their slumber and rise up, seeking the flesh of the living. On the moonless nights, they tell me, the dead remain in their graves. That means it is tonight, boys, that we will claim those treasures."*

The common folk of The Twisted Soul, one of the town's taverns where the player characters just happen to be, like to tell tales that many would predict are simply ghost stories meant to entertain drinking companions. This night, as the party discusses their next day, the group overhears five men speaking of plans to – it would seem – rob graves this very night.

*"I know that when they dropped Claas Wolfgrove into the ground last week, they buried the man with more jewels than any so terrible as he should seek to hold onto in the afterlife. We'll start with his grave and then, if there be time, hit a few of his kin who they say also took far too many riches with them to the grave."*

If the adventurers confront the group and ask to join in, the men look the party over and claim that there has been a mistake. "No plans of robbin' graves have we," they proclaim. If pressed, the men excuse themselves from the tavern and set off for their homes. If secretly followed, the group leads the party right to the cemetery where they claim there are treasures waiting to be recovered from the graves.

**True.** There are treasures in 1d4+1 of the graves, but there's only a 10% chance that any exhumed coffin will be one of the few that include riches. Unfortunately, there is a 15% chance that digging a grave up will awaken the occupant; some of the corpses are undead ghouls who wish to eat the flesh of the living.

**False.** There are no undead, luckily for everyone, but there are also no treasures to be found. Worse yet, the rumors of jewels, gems, and coins buried in the graves were spread by the town watch. The guards, it seems, are seeking treasure of their own and aren't above killing and stealing from would-be grave robbers.



# THE MURDERESS AND THE BLADE

*"There's no telling how many she has killed over the years. The sword's called Soulslicer, they say, and she has wielded the blade these last seven years. If what they say is true, she is somewhere in the city right now . . . and it is best if we all avoid her temper and the edge of the sword."*

Overheard at the local adventurers' guild or tavern, a small group of two women and three men are trading gossip as they wait for a friend. The five of them chatter back and forth, saying little of import, but one of them keeps coming back to stories of Soulslicer and the powerful woman claimed to possess the sword.

*"Genie Rhohur they say she is, mistress of death and warrioress for hire. Word is, they say, that she found the sword when her and a company of mercs infiltrated and seized Skeleton's Tower. Ever since then, she's not been without the sword."*

If the party asks, the talkative one who seems to know all about Rhohur tells them he only has rumors of her being in the city and he can only suggest that they check the taverns and perhaps ask the thieves' guild if they know of the woman.

If they ask around, many know of her, but none know for certain whether or not she is in the city. Everyone who claims to have knowledge doesn't have first-hand info, and every description of the woman the PCs hear varies in some way.

**True.** Genie Rhohur was a warrioress who owned the magical sword Soulslicer . . . years ago. The woman died three years ago and now a band of assassins use her name as a cover whenever they enter a city. Regardless of their gender, each of the assassins adopts her name to throw off others. When necessary, they disguise themselves as Rhohur, though the fact that the woman doesn't exist explains why none of the descriptions of her match. Why the assassins are in the city is unknown, though it cannot be for honorable or good reasons, right?

**False.** Rhohur doesn't exist and never existed. Her tale is a fairy tale that merchants, bards, old women, thieves, and others spin and share to entertain. Stories of Rhohur have spread so far that some now believe that she – and the sword – are real. They are not.





# IN SERVICE OF THE GODDESS

*"She paid as promised and I will certainly take her coin for so long as she keeps dispensing it for such simple tasks. We never once drew our blades and in less than an hour we were in and out, the book safely secured and ready to deliver as she demanded. Easily the easiest gold I've ever made, though I can't understand why she hired us and didn't simply collect the tome herself."*



Overheard on the street or perhaps in one of the city's many shops, two women are talking about how one of them was paid for what she is describing as a "simple task." If the party approaches the women and asks for more information, the one doing most of the talking – Nathalee Surgorsk – resists as first. Threats against her don't work – she yells for help at the first sign of danger – though gold can persuade her to open up. Even as little as two gold coins gets her talking.

*"Goddess, that's what she insists that we call her. She's not old, but she's no child. Each time I have met her has been at the Temple of Stars where she has a private room. She told me to come back tomorrow for another assignment and I mean to be there."*

Surgorsk offers to take the adventurers to meet Goddess if they pay her a few more coins.

**True.** A vile woman has entrenched herself in the temple, slowly turning followers to her cause. She is setting up false tasks for the people and using gold to buy their trust and loyalty. The woman plans to, within a few months, twist the followers she collects into thieves, manipulating them to worship her and meet her every wish.

**False.** Surgorsk is lying about where she got the gold and is terrified when the adventurers overhear and approach her. She's spinning the tale faster than she can contain the lies, and she is now hoping that if she tells enough lies that the party will leave her alone. If pressed, there's a chance that Surgorsk will break and confess to her lies . . . which will no doubt leave her friend upset at the lies and likely drive a wedge between that particular friendship.



# MURDEROUS ARCHERS


One night in the city, the party learns that a war is brewing in the shadows as two forces – the local guild of thieves and a mercenary company that has a training hall in the city – have come to disagree on a matter of payment. The mercs, so the rumors go, were paid to guard the thieves' caravan of goods and when raiders slaughtered many of the mercs and stole the wealth, the thieves decided that it was an inside job; the thieves claim that the mercs pulled off the theft and killed their own.

The thieves, it is said by others, have hired a team of shadowy archers who are taking their time and killing members of the mercenary company . . . one by one, and taking as many days as necessary to kill every last merc unfortunate enough to be in the city.

**True.** The thieves did hire assassins, but the mercs didn't steal the goods. In fact, it was a cabal of thieves within the guild who made off with the treasures after killing the caravan guards. Those same thieves are very much behind this effort to wipe out the mercs; dead mercs mean that it is impossible for the other thieves to learn that they were attacked by members of their own guild.

**False.** There are no secret archers operating in the city, though there's a chance that the story of the thieves and mercs at war may be true.

If there are no assassins, who has been spotted at night stalking the city and attacking members of the mercenary company? No one. The thieves are spreading tales of assassins in the city to keep as many citizens in their homes at night as possible. The tales have the city watch operating increased nightly patrols, but the thieves can bribe them easily enough. Fewer people on the streets means fewer chances of being caught moving stolen goods at night.



*"Hired assassins, here to kill our best defenders and weaken us before invasion they are. The wickedest of killers you can imagine they are, every one of them demonspawn monsters who have sworn allegiance to the darkest of masters. Whatever you do, don't come between one of these monsters and their prey."*

*"Their magical garb shields their thoughts and feelings from even the most powerful of scrying spells and objects, keeping their true mission safely hidden away. I know wizards who are afraid to cross their path, instead choosing to step aside if they learn that even one of these beasts gets involved in a conflict."*



# THE SNAKE CHARMER

*"I didn't see her, but Gerrar says he was there when it happened and described her as a beautiful, terrifying woman surrounded by snakes. Dozens of them he said, describing it as if she were summoning the snakes from the empty air around her. Slithering, striking, lashing, Gerrar says the snakes were an extension of her body, with each moving as if it were a weapon under her control."*

The party is seated with Kaley Flowcreck, a talented scribe known to keep strict, detailed records of actions within the city. For six years, Flowcreck has been the unofficial chronicler of the mayor, recording the important events so that future generations will have a detailed history of the city. Through friends of a friend, the adventurers have been asked by Flowcreck to meet with her to discuss a strange event.

*"It is rare for a snakecaster to be anywhere near the city, and after I detailed the event I knew I needed to find someone to investigate and determine whether or not the woman is really what Gerrar says she is. If a snakecaster is really this close to the city, we must notify the watch immediately."*

Snakecasters are a rare and evil type of arcane spellcaster, rarely encountered so far from the jungles of the south. All of their spells involve summoning magical constructs in the shape of snakes from the air and earth around them; the snakes are not real, though they look very real. Snakecasters worship the demonic snakes of old and one this close to the city can only mean that the snakefolk must be planning to extend their reach into new territory.

**True.** The female snakecaster was within a few days of the city, probing for defenses and acting as a scout for a larger force. If the PCs investigate, they find evidence of the woman's movements, though they do not encounter her. Will the snakefolk attempt to send spies into the heart of the city?

**False.** Not a snakecaster, but an illusionist with knowledge of the ancient and evil arcane art was the source of the tale. The woman is trying to use the fear of the snakecasters' power to make her appear more dangerous than she truly is.





# THE STARBLIND ASSASSIN



*"At night and only if the stars are shining, that's when he strikes. The guard have offered 1,000 gold for his capture – I hear they'll pay even more if he is delivered dead – and so far not a one of the bounty hunters in the city have been able to secure the reward."*

None know his name, but many in the city are talking about the posted bounty for one known as "Starblind." Throughout the city, regardless of where they go, the party keeps hearing rumors of this killer who goes out only at night and only when the stars can be seen in the sky overhead. Some say he has killed a dozen men, other say that he has killed scores of men; none of the rumors align perfectly and everyone who speaks of the assassin seems to have a different tale to tell.

*"A member of a cult is what he is."*

Some who speak of the man tell the PCs that he is a member of Stardeath, a cult that is said to worship only the most ancient and foul of gods. If they investigate the cult, every person with info on secretive groups operating in the city say that the Stardeath cult vanished a decade ago and is thought to be long disbanded and no longer in operation.

**True.** The assassin is the last surviving member of the cult and was recently awakened from a magical slumber. When he came to, he found that the world had changed and that his group was forever gone. Armed with his weapons, his ability to absorb arcane power from starlight, and a small journal listing enemies of the cult, the assassin has been putting his time to use by settling old scores. He is a skilled murderer who, when illuminated by the stars, also possesses the spellcasting ability of a low-level mage or wizard. When in sunlight or complete darkness, he loses his spellcasting abilities.

**False.** There is an angry thief in the city who is taking revenge on those who he feels wronged him over the years. The thief is cursed, poisoned by a magical elixer that is eating away at his soul and leaving him with only days to live. To throw others off, he has been spreading the rumors of a "Starblind Assassin" and is down to only three more people on his list of those to kill before he dies.

Perhaps a friend of one of the adventurers is on the man's list? Maybe their friend knows exactly what is happening and asks the party to protect him from the dying thief.





# THE HIRED KILLERS

*"I counted three of them I did. Each as grim as a dragon with eyes as cold as a lich. I was close to the watch officer when they passed through the south gate, and I overheard the fighter say his name be Iven Pagudro. I made note of the name, that I did, for I knew that someone would pay for that particular detail. After all, what man who trades in death and adventure wouldn't want to know the name of a killer who is here for no good?"*

Standing outside the main entrance to the adventurers' guild, the chattering old man is telling his group of friends why he asked them to join him in a visit to the guildhall. His hope, the PCs can quickly determine, is that the information of the fighter's name will be worth a gold or two to someone.

If the player characters choose to take the bait and ask the old man for the dirt, he introduces himself as Hobb the Baker and tells them he will only share what he knows for five gold coins. If they barter, the man goes as low as a single gold figuring he can always sell the name to someone else.

*"I didn't catch the names o' the others, but that man Iven Pagudro is sure to be some murderer here for no good, and his friends looked just as mean and dangerous as he."*

**True.** Yes, Iven Pagudro and two others entered the city through the south gate earlier today, and all three are experienced and battle-hardened adventurers. They're not hired killers, though, but are simply dungeoneers who are on their way to raid one of the dungeons that sits not a day from the city. If the PCs track down Pagudro and his friends, they soon learn the truth and get an opportunity to trade info about possible treasures, adventuring sites, and other bits of import that all explorers and adventurers may find valuable.

**False.** His name is Iven Pagudro and he is in the city, along with two friends, but he didn't come through the south gate. Hobb the Baker was paid by Pagudro to spread lies and, hopefully, throw the assassins who are chasing Pagudro and his friends off the scent. If pressed, Hobb eventually cracks and tells the PCs the truth, including the last known location of Pagudro.



# GOLD FOR memories

*"Twenty gold he paid me!"*

The young man at the next table, little more than a child, raises a jingling sack as he boasts to his friends about his wealth. The group lean in, one reaching for the sack, but the youth slaps at the grasping hand and quickly returns the sack to a pocket in his worn, ill-fitting jacket.

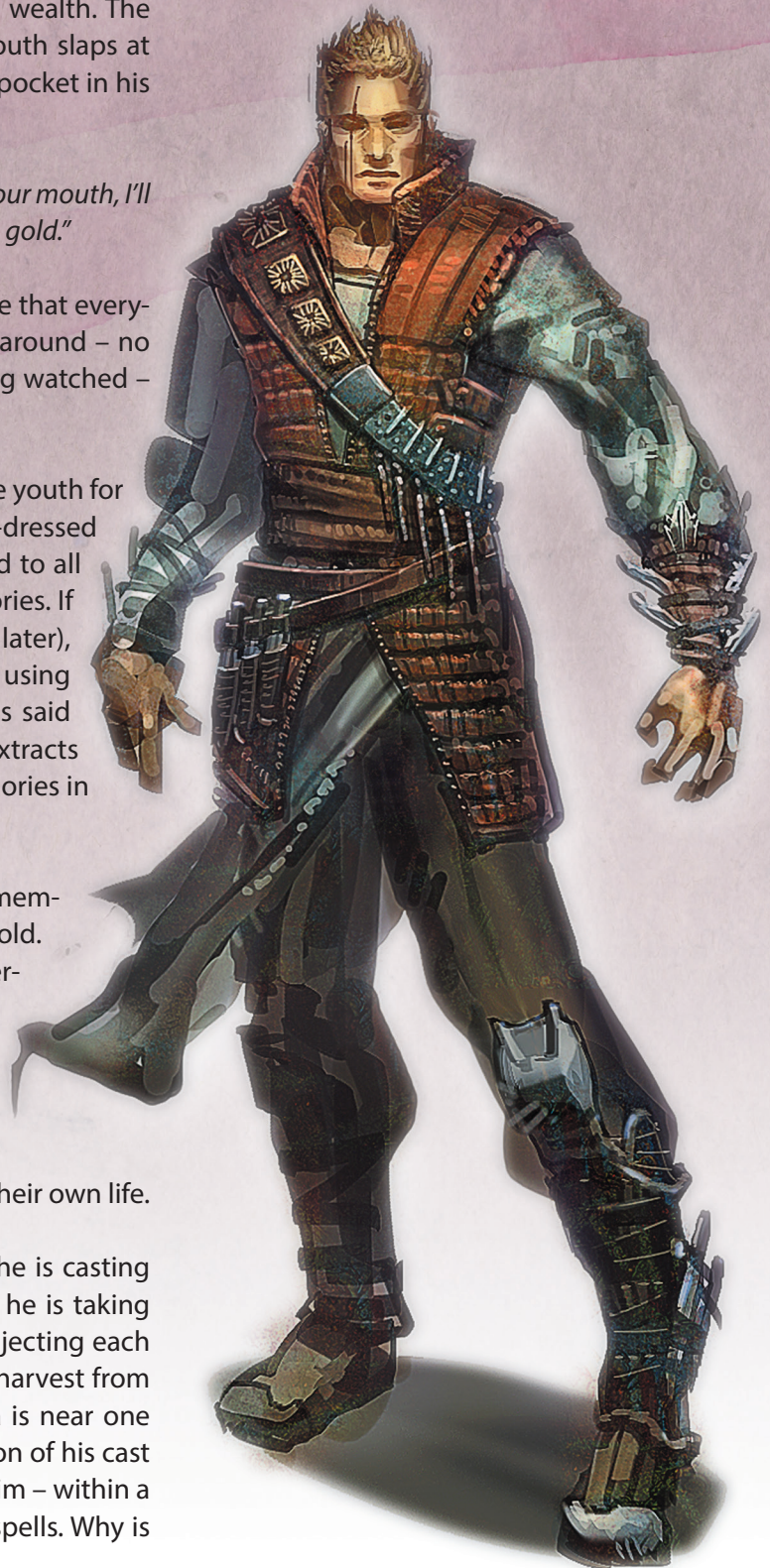
*"Hands off, Scalby. If you can keep your seat and close your mouth, I'll let you in on the secret and maybe you'll earn your own gold."*

If the PCs watch the group of six youngsters, they see that everyone is paying very close attention as the boy looks around – no doubt checking to see whether or not they are being watched – and then proceeds to tell everyone his tale.

Either by eavesdropping or offering to pay one of the youth for the information, the party soon learns that a well-dressed and well-equipped man of forty years is paying gold to all who will allow him to take possession of their memories. If they listen closely (or interrogate one of the youth later), the party learns that this man, named Izon Muvka, is using magic to separate memories from their owners. It is said that the memories are a thick liquid that the man extracts with a magic wand and that he then stores the memories in small bottles.

**True.** The man is paying for memories, but is it not memories that he is siphoning from those who take his gold. The magic wand that the man owns translates a person's life essence into pure mana, stealing years from the victim's lifespan and depositing that life force into the bottles that the man then sells to evil sorcerers and spellcasters who know how to use the life essence to enhance the power of their brewed potions, crafted magic items and, in some instances, extend their own life.

**False.** The man is paying those who visit him, but he is casting hallucinogenic spells that convince his victims that he is taking their memories. What the man is actually doing is injecting each with a small bit of magical energy that he can later harvest from the unknowing carriers. Whenever this man Muvka is near one of his victims, he may boost the strength and duration of his cast spells by 1d4-1%. If there are multiple victims near him – within a few miles – each contributes to the strength of his spells. Why is Muvka seeding the city with these mana batteries?





*"The ghost stood taller than any man, eight feet at the least says I . . . and I dare any of ye fools to argue that point. I was there, not you, and it was to me that he pointed and I'd be dead if I'd stood there another moment."*

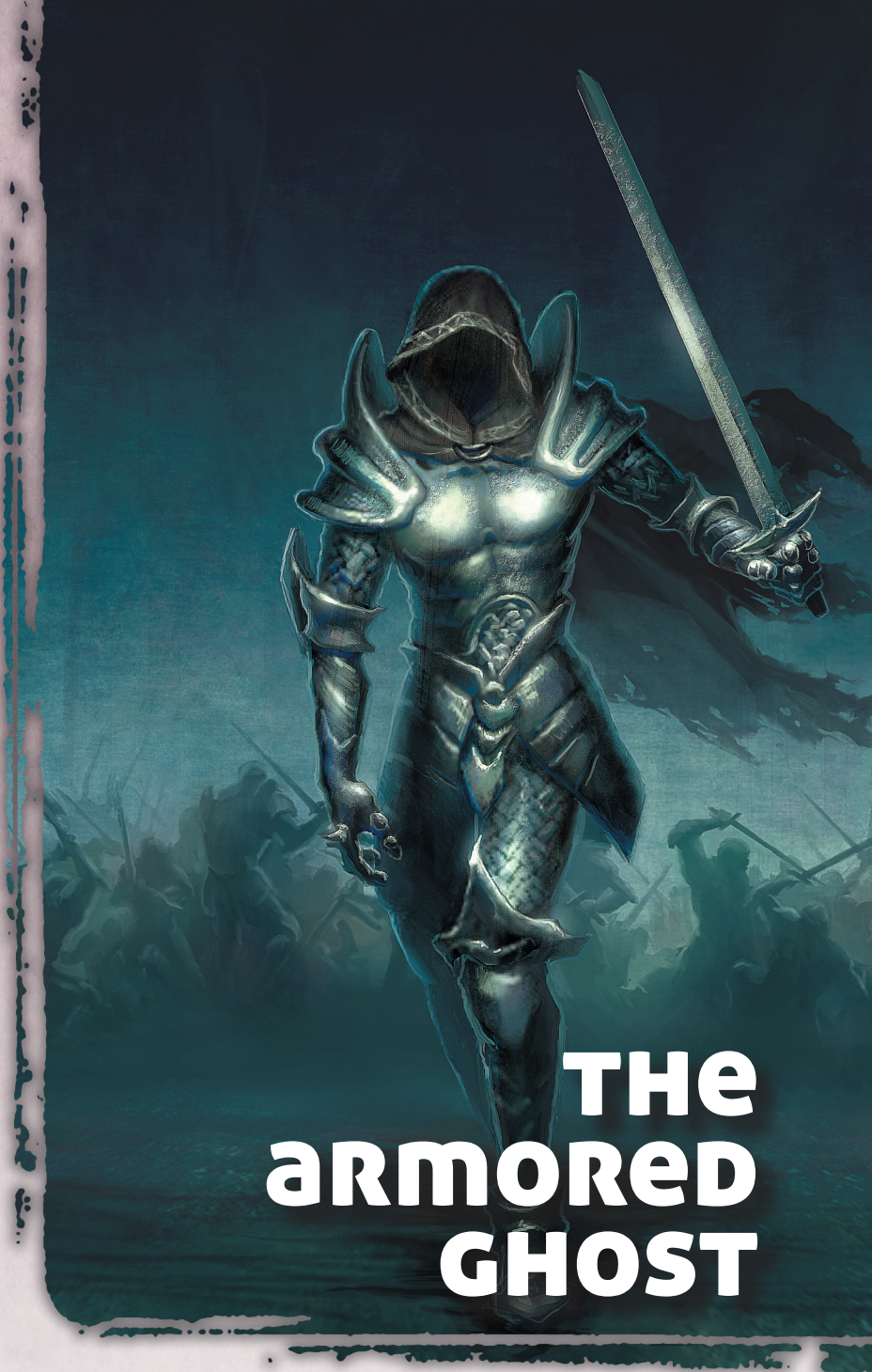
Raff Smartkeeper, one of many who work as a moneylender in the city, is not one to overly drink and certainly not a man to tell tall tales, so when he stumbles into the nearest tavern telling of an encounter late at night there are few who would doubt the man's tale.

*"Faceless, he was, maybe even headless, though I stared not long enough to know for sure. That armor is what I most remember, shining as bright as polished silver under the noontide sun, and I'd have thought more about what the suit must be worth if not for the flashing of light on the pointed sword."*

Smartkeeper refuses to step foot outside that night, begging the tavern's owner to allow him to sleep there in the glow of the fireplace. Even if offered 100 gold coins, Smartkeeper wants nothing to do with stepping out of doors until the sun has climbed high into the sky.

Within an hour of the man's entrance and of telling everyone his tale – one that is as disjointed as any ghost sighting may be – a few of those who drank a little much start to discuss the idea of setting out to find the ghost. Smartkeeper urges them to stay inside where it is safe, but he will do nothing to stop any who set off in search of the spirit.

**True.** Smartkeeper saw a ghost and one that is intent on murder. The apparition was once a human warrior, but death on the battlefield brought an end to his service in the king's army and soon led to the spirit searching for a way from this plane of existence to its final resting place. The armor and sword are inhabited by the spirit and move as animated objects. If someone can destroy the ghost and send it to the afterlife, they'll find only the sword and armor remain behind.



## THE ARMORED GHOST

**False.** Smartkeeper is telling the truth when he says he saw an armored man in the street, but it wasn't a ghost that he encountered. The "ghost" is Welsh Marwood, an adventurer who was ensorcelled by an evil wizard and is being forced to stalk the streets in search of citizens to kill. The sorcery binding Marwood's actions and thoughts to the wizard is powerful and will be tough to break, but an experienced practitioner of magic who makes a successful Knowledge Arcana check when seeing the "ghost" may recognize him for a man possessed. It is the walk and limp, puppet-like movements of Marwood that tell an experienced wizard that this armored spirit is under the influence of evil magic. Can the PCs free the man . . . and can they find who is pulling his strings?





# THE MEMORABLE RUINS

*"Like the gears of some clockwork contraption they were, though I've never seen gears the size of a shanty before. It may have been a tower of sorts, before it collapsed, but whatever it was, it's no longer a functioning machine and is now little more than wreckage that is being consumed by the drifting, blowing sands of the wasteland. At this rate, it will be swallowed by the desert before the year has come to a close."*

A traveling merchant, on his way to the next city to sell a wagon of rugs to a dealer friend, stops in for a drink at the inn on the road and is soon telling everyone of a strange wreck he saw several days earlier. If the party isn't near a desert, perhaps the wreckage is being buried in drifting snow, or maybe the crashing waves of the ocean threaten to drag it to sea, but regardless of location, something will soon remove this wreck from existence and prevent them from recovering whatever items of value may be resting amongst the ruins.

The merchant has no time to take the party back to where he saw the wreckage, but he is willing to draw them a map if they'll buy him a few drinks. If asked to describe what he saw, he can only say that it was clearly once a complete object – a tower is his guess – and something tore it apart and scattered the bits of metal and wood across the landscape.

**True.** The merchant did spot the remains of something and his map is true, guiding the adventurers to the spot where he promised it would be. Scattered in the wreckage of the tower the PCs find clothing, some personal belongings, and assorted trash that shows the building was clearly inhabited by men.

The tower was once a planar conveyance, a machine that could travel between planes of existence by the spinning of the gears and under the control of a wizard. The tower crashed here months ago and the occupants were all killed in the accident. It is possible that a scholar or mage in one of the larger cities in the realm would pay for whatever info can be collected from the wreck.

**False.** The merchant spotted a bit of wreckage, but nothing more than a wagon that had broken down and been abandoned. He was bored when he met the PCs at the inn and decided to have a little fun, spinning a yarn that caught the attention of the adventurers a little more than he was expecting.

Rather than admit to the lie, the man decided to get a few free drinks and keep the story going. And since that night, he has continued to tell the tale, directing more and more adventurers and treasure seekers to the "wreck" where he insists they will find valuables.



# SELLING access TO a TRAP

*"I was there. For seven hours, we did all that we could to get deeper into the complex and seek out the treasures that we were told were scattered across the dungeon's winding and twisting rooms. Our efforts were hindered by a handful of traps, a lone goblin with an axe, and the very scoundrels who told us of the dungeon. It turns out the dirty backstabbers had made a business out of selling maps and information to those adventurers such as we . . . and then following the unsuspecting dungeoneers into the complex and murdering them."*

Brandon Jimmum and his friend, Kerek the Brave, are the survivors of an encounter with a group of murderous thieves who have found an odd racket: selling access to a dungeon and then killing the mark within that very same dungeon.

*"Skulls, so many skulls. Mounds of them. It is impossible that all of the skulls are from those who ventured in before us, but I know not where one could have collected so many skulls as we saw in the dungeon."*

Jimmum describes mounds of human, elven, dwarven, and half-orcish skulls in the dungeon, reporting that many of the piles were knocked over and made the floor difficult to traverse.

If asked, Jimmum gives the adventurers the name of the one who sold his friends and him the map. *"All I ask,"* he says as he names the man, *"is that you see he and his companions pay for the deaths they have caused over the years."*

**True.** Jimmum and his friends were not the first to fall victim to this twisted scheme. The man, a half-orc named Kirag, has been running this operation for a year now and so far has killed a few dozen adventurers who fell into the trap. Will the party confront Kirag in one of the city's taverns and fight him there, or will they buy the info and then set their own trap in the dungeon for the half-orc and his accomplices?

**False.** Jimmum is a liar. He is the one selling the dungeon map and he's found a new way to spin the operation in the hopes of luring more prey into the dungeon. Jimmum and Kerek are only two of the group behind the scam; there are four others waiting to join the pair if the party falls for the story. There is no half-orc; instead, when the party gets to the tavern where the half-orc is reportedly waiting, Jimmum's friends are waiting to attack.

