

# The Journeyman

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## FABLE BECOMES RELIGION IN CITY OF VESTR

With shipping routes now open to the city of Vestr, located upon the isle of Vesthold in the realm of Eúnd Vald, recently discovered by mainland explorers, a lucky few have had the opportunity to explore this colourful, yet dangerous land. Not only are these explorers returning with treasures or artefacts, the likes of which have never been seen upon the mainland, they are also bringing with them tales of interesting new cultures and belief systems...

Mainland historians, with assistance from those of the city of Otta in Norvaegr, have discovered the timelines of Eúnd Vald and the mainland hold similarities, in that the appearance or 'creation' of humans coincided with the beginning of the second age of Neothera. Whilst the belief systems of the two continents couldn't be more different, where westerners do not worship the seven, for example, the inhabitants of Vesthold lost faith in the 'old gods' commonly worshipped by nearly all of the other inhabitants of Eúnd Vald. It would appear this switch of faith took place sometime during the beginning of the third age of our world and is based not on powerful, immortal beings, but a humble brother and sister, and their encounters with five animals.

Journeyman reporter, Tubbs Cricketsworth, was lucky enough to speak to Cho, a renowned 'lore-walker' (a historian or storyteller of sorts) from the city of Vestr. Very kindly, he relayed the tale of Hoshi and Zen, and how the people of Vestr found a new belief system that couldn't be farther from the tales of heroic, elemental-welding beings.

Two young sailors, from Sora'Harumi in the southern realms, were the first outlanders to discover Vesthold, albeit by accident. During the early part of the third age of Neothera, a small sloop manned by Hoshi and her brother Zen set sail to fish off the northwest coast of Sora'Harumi. Frustrated with a lack of catches over the past few weeks, Hoshi and Zen decided to push forth towards the veil of mists that surrounded the southern realms in order to seek greater hauls of fish.

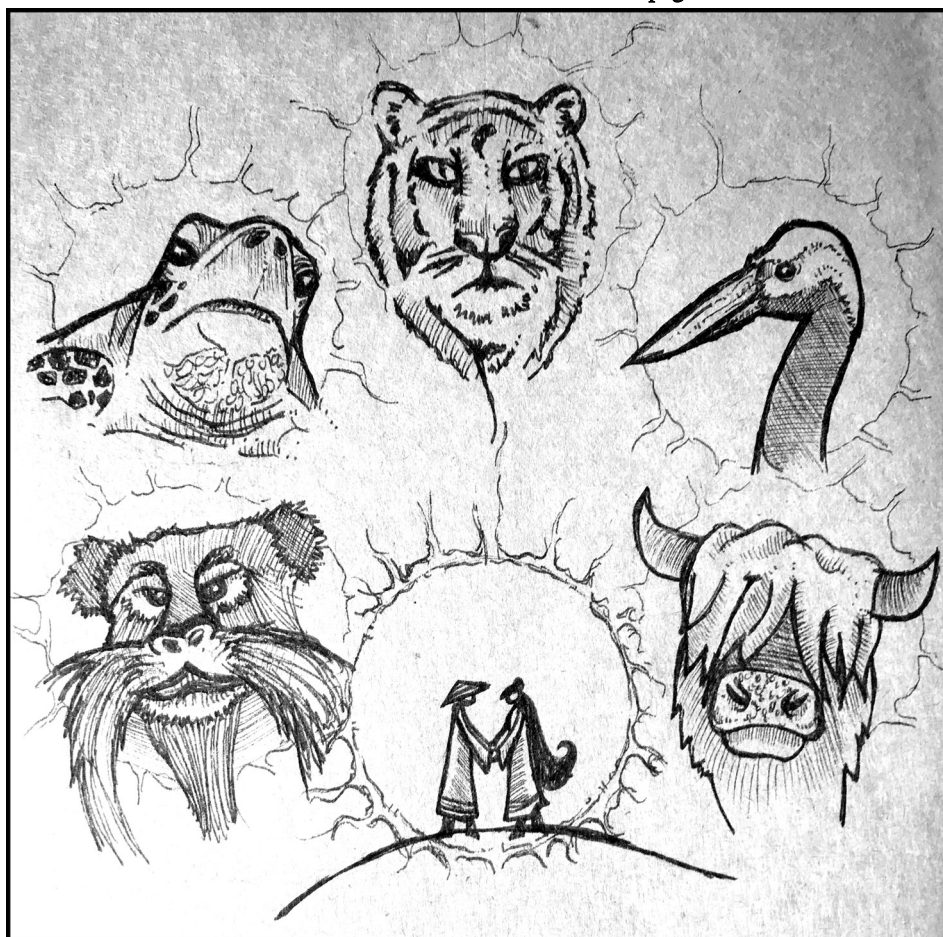
Despite common warnings to stay clear of the mists that surrounded the southern realms, the brother and sister pressed onward but were eventually enveloped by storms, being pushed further into the bleak darkness by strong currents. A great storm raged, and despite their best efforts to fight the savage seas, Hoshi and Zen's boat was destroyed, leaving the pair helpless and facing a certain watery grave.

Hoshi and Zen awoke on the shores of a new land, and as they opened their eyes a great sea turtle laid before them, smiling as the pair rose to their feet. As they turned to the skies they noticed a great bird with a long beak soaring above them, slowly drifting out of view.

Turning back towards the ocean, Hoshi and Zen noticed tracks in the sand, those of the great turtle's, and what appeared to be sand disturbed by two dragged bodies. The turtle bowed its head graciously and slowly made its way back towards the ocean. The pair were certain their lives had been saved by the majestic sea creature.

Hoshi and Zen travelled on foot for three days and three nights into the new land. All the while noticing a great bird with a long beak soaring and circling above them. Growing weak through hunger, the siblings stopped to rest in a cave. As the sun rose on the fourth day a great tigress appeared before the pair, sniffing at them, and realising they were too weak to defend themselves should predators decide to attack.

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Taking pity on the siblings and smelling the faint scent of the great sea turtle upon them, the tigress left the cave and returned a short while later carrying the fresh carcasses of two rabbits. She placed the carcasses at Hoshi and Zen's feet, beside the dwindling fire that kept them warm. She bowed graciously before walking away into a nearby forest.

Smelling the cooked rabbits from nearby, a monkey chanced his luck by leaping from the top of the cave and stealing the sibling's food. Hoshi and Zen were too weak to follow the monkey and cried out in sadness and frustration. The monkey greedily gobbled up the rabbits as he made his way towards the forest, only to be pounced on by the great tigress who heard the siblings cries. The great tigress snapped the monkey's neck and returned to Hoshi and Zen with the sneaky monkey's body in its jaws. It dropped the monkey at their feet, bowed graciously once again and left the pair with an even bigger meal than they had before. Once again they spied a great bird soaring and circling above them.

With food in their bellies and their strength returning, Hoshi and Zen ventured forth from the cave and continued their journey, hoping to find signs of civilisation. After wandering many miles the siblings happened upon a small encampment at the rocky base of a mountain. The pair spied the occupants for a short while, seeing that they were lizard-like humanoids that spoke in a strange tongue and appeared to be forming a circle where two of the creatures were fighting viciously in the middle. Deciding not to take their chances the siblings quietly crept away, trying not to draw attention to themselves. As they retreated they noticed, once again, a great bird soaring above them. To their horror, a small group of monkeys appeared on the trail ahead of Hoshi and Zen, and smelling cooked monkey upon the pair the creatures began to scream and holler in anger. This drew the attention of the lizard-creatures, seeing them charge towards the noise. The agile monkeys easily scaled the rocky walls either side of the siblings and made their escape, yet the siblings feared they would not be so lucky in fleeing.

The lizard-creatures were about to reach Hoshi and Zen with their crude weapons drawn, yet before they could launch their assault the great tigress leapt from the stones peaks above and roared deafeningly as it came between the siblings and the lizard-creatures. The tigress bowed gracefully at the siblings before it turned its attention to the attackers and swiped at them in fury as the siblings made their escape. Unfortunately, but a mile down the rocky track, Zen fell and twisted his ankle, leaving Hoshi to carry him as far as she could...

Eventually, Hoshi became weary and Zen begged for her to leave him and save herself, yet across the plains a great ox appeared and stopped just before the siblings, bowing its head and lowering its front half as it sniffed and smelled the scent of the great sea turtle, tigress and monkey on the pair. Hoshi hauled her brother atop the great ox, then climbed on herself as the creature began its trek north across the stormy flats, following a great bird with a long beak across the desolate wastes. Two days passed and eventually, a city was sighted, and the great ox carried the siblings into its gates where they were met by the people of the city of Vestr...

When Hoshi and Zen met the people of Vestr they were at first cautious, yet realised that the welcome offered by the humans there was not a hostile one. The people of Vestr offered the siblings shelter, food and warmth, and very quickly Hoshi and Zen learned the broken version of elvish that the people spoke there. It was then that they finally told the tale of how they arrived at the city of Vestr. Many people scoffed at their far-fetched story and became frustrated, even angry that they continued to stick to their tale of animals coming to their rescue. One day the Emperor of Vestr ordered the pair to offer proof. Unable to do so, he ridiculed Hoshi and Zen, only to be left shocked when a great crane descended from the skies, the same bird that the siblings had seen many times in their journey. To everyone's amazement, the crane began to speak, and through its words confirmed how it had followed the pair since their arrival in Vesthold, and indeed witnessed each event that they had told the emperor and the people of Vestr about. With a witness to their tale, and the fact that a talking crane had confirmed their story, the emperor had no choice but to believe the story, and so Hoshi and Zen's tale became the spark that would see the inhabitants of Vestr place their faith in animal deities rather than the old gods, which there was no living proof of.

The five animal deities worshipped by the denizens for Vestr are prayed to for a variety of reasons, Cho, the Lore-Walker, was kind enough to expand a little further on each deity and how Vestrians ask them for guidance.

#### **TORTOGA THE TURTLE DEITY**

*Worshipped today by the inhabitants of Vestr as a bringer of new hope, and a guardian of sailors and the seas. There have been countless tales of great sea turtles that have pulled drowning sailors from the dangerous oceans to the safety of land.*

#### **CHIMCHEE THE MONKEY DEITY**

*Prayed to by those about to embark on clandestine or nefarious business, however, is also seen as a bad omen by some. Chimchee is also seen as an acrobat and a trickster. Children are told tales of how doing bad deeds results in meeting a sticky end for such actions.*

#### **TEEGARA THE TIGRESS DEITY**

*Often prayed to by warriors about to embark on a battle. Seen as a symbol of fierce protection, humbleness, a provider, law keeper, and maintaining the balance, the tigress is a commonly worshipped deity.*

#### **BOOLAE THE OXEN DEITY**

*Boolae is prayed to by many who would wish their mental and physical burdens to be carried more easily. A symbol of charity, strength and perseverance in hard times, and the fortitude to carry oneself steadily to their goal. Prayers are also sent to Boolae for safe travels when embarking on journeys across the land.*

#### **CRAETARA THE CRANE DEITY**

*Craetara is a symbol of the truth, that despite others not believing you, the truth will always out in the end. Seen as a guardian that watches over those in times of strife, and one that unites all deities prayed to, to come to one's aid. Craetara is also a symbol of wisdom, that upon the wings of integrity if one pursues their goals with a good heart, they shall, in the end, be rewarded.*

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# MAINLAND CONTINUES TO BURN

Since the destruction of Faradome and Vulpera last year, many parts of the mainland continue to burn in what appears to be an unquenchable fire triggered by the Nightmares that invaded the elven and vulperan capital cities. Such is the scale and force of the destruction and the spreading fires, that even the Hemadri in the Zan'zoula Rainforests to the southwest of the mainland are rumoured to be making preparations for not if, but WHEN, the fires begin to take ahold of their sacred realm.

With the flames scorching the lands at the base of the Morrdoun Mountains, home of the Arak'Char, the realm of the fire worshippers is now completely cut off from the mainland, with sightings of great fissures appearing, destroying much of the ground that once connected the mountains to the mainland. No word has been received from Arak'Char emissaries, and the mighty volcano, Thool'mundae has been sighted belching thick, black smoke into the air. The giant volcano has now been obscured from sight due to the smog.

The L'Enaroussian realm of Jerrod's Front is now under high alert, along with The Brook, and Black Hammer Bay, where the three realms are fortifying their defenses, digging trenches and performing deforestations in the south to prevent the flames from reaching their cities. Blightfoot Ridge is assisting in the defenses of the closest realms to the destruction, offer support with machines that are able to spew water in an attempt to put out the fires.

The city of Sora'Harumi in the far south, and the city Otta in Norvaegr, the newly discovered western realm, are both welcoming refugees from the mainland into their realms. The cities of Nald and Karthsworn in the Frozen North, despite also offering sanctuary have yet to receive evacuees from the mainland, save for a number of wights. It is assumed this is due to the harsh frozen climate the cities of the undead are located in.

Despite the imminent destruction of the mainland it seems the majority of its inhabitants are standing strong, refusing to abandon their homes, adamant that the Seven will indeed answer their prayers...sooner or later. Word has also spread of a group of individuals that quite literally lifted a chunk of land known as the Caddington Estate, into the air and flew it to the western realms. A prophecy in Vestrian culture, a newfound land adjacent to Norvaegr in the western realms is rumoured to hold the key to the mainland's survival, however what this prophecy involves is currently unknown to anyone outside of their ruler, Queen Fraydis Skaldmaer's court.

By Gannu Rakieyu

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## FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF A BRAIN INJURY

To be trapped within the body of one so injured has made me realise several things about the function of life itself. To be within one so fragile who can only fall over themselves has caused me to come to several conclusions - and most are at the expense of that current host of the form. I can at time hear her thoughts, and as fleeting as they are, they tell great things of the sheer extent of her injury and how deep it has gone into not only her mind functions but her full bodily functions also.

These type of more severe cases usually come from all kinds of things, be it a mere sporting injury where two people crack heads, or to the more extreme case of physical assault - and this is where I believe the injuries she has come from.

The body seems to not only be suffering from a compound fracture to the brain, where at some point at least her skin was split, as was the bone, but a depressed fracture, where the fracture has caused pressure against the brain, seemingly causing her more confused, and airy attitude.

As for symptoms, she shows many that are telling that the injury she sustained before fully becoming a Wight have persisted even in death. These would be severe headaches, consistent bruising underneath the eyes, feeling drowsy, confused, or irritable, loss of speech or slurred speech, difficulty swallowing (which may explain her aversion to blood), loss of balance, becoming unconscious and ringing in the ears or difficulty hearing among many other things that I have yet to properly take correct note of.

I have easily come to the conclusion that whatever the host had done to the form, or had done to her, was something so very severe as it has caused the body to never heal, leaving these extreme lingering effects when they should no longer. The host seems to have no memories of said event and seemingly didn't realise there was anything wrong with her head until another pointed it out to her, or so she said herself. Thus - what's the issue? If one is so injured but doesn't seem to care, what's the problem?

The problem comes for the personality that was forced out before their turning. With such a traumatic death, be it accidental or intentional, surely the personality that once was would linger somewhat as it can after becoming a Wight. Of course, some do go on to produce whole new personalities either way regardless of who they once were, but there is always a small lingering of who they once were - but not in this extreme case. No part in the slightest of her personality even slightly relates to what once was, which begs the question, is the personality utterly gone, or trapped? Is it a figment of my thoughts, or do I truly exist?

Perhaps we will never know.

By Adelaida Astaroth



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# MMM SET UP NATIONAL HEALTH SERVICE IN THE WESTERN REALMS

The Medics, Makers and Menders, also known as Triple M or MMM, known for providing healthcare, crafting and magical services at a fixed fee has started up in Otta, the capital of Norvaegr. Whilst there, this once-controversial guild has built exceptional relations with King Ubbe who has allowed them to set up shop within his capital city. In no time at all the Triple M have set up a state of the art facility known as "The Haven" right in the heart of the city.

"The Haven is always open to all who need it" stated Thaddeus, the MMM Guild Leader. "We are a national service offering free healthcare to all of Ubbe's people. We provide the very best care possible with our mix of doctors and mages from all walks of life. If it is science and discovery you are after, The Haven offers a large research wing looking to making the future a better place as well as teaching our skills to those willing to learn.

Lastly, if you want to buy anything, The Haven is the place to be, we have vendors of all types from across the city that have set up their stalls within our walls. It does not matter who you are, human or piskie, rich or poor, all are welcome at The Haven" he continues (now rambling a bit). "The idea of helping those in need has always been something I strongly believe in" stated King Ubbe, "The whole concept of The Haven amazed me, and the work and effort of Thaddeus, Sontar and the others have put in is truly inspiring. The knowledge and teachings they have brought to my land and my city is something I cannot thank them enough for." If you are interested in visiting The Haven you can find just the other side of the main gates to Otta. You cannot miss it, the building is immense and through its front archway is a wide-open lobby with a tree growing inside at its centre.

By Thaddeus, Guild Master of MMM



## A THEORY ON THE INFECTION

It's well known that while the Fae can "naturally" rise as vampyres, other races need a biochemical jolt to bring them through the transition without resulting in the irreparable brain damage consistent with the mindless affliction. The question here is why?

There are several theories on why the fae are more likely to survive with their faculties intact than other races, I will present my own theory on the matter, backed up by many years of study. The original undead infection is actually a result of demonic and dark magic, not merely a mundane disease. Researching this, it functions like a form of bacterial style infection, almost like the hybridised nightmare child of a mega virus and a naturally occurring bacterial CRISPR sequence, but on a scale unbelievably complex and enhanced to impossible degrees by the inherent demonic and dark magic present in its microscopic but densely packed and fiendishly insidious structure.

As such if we look at this in terms of a conventional disease, as the original virus adapted to the Fae specifically, and works by rewriting itself across the body's DNA structure within the infected subject. While there, it is kept in check by the bodies immune response, preventing it activating while the subject lives but is too widespread for the body to purge it.

As soon as the body expires, it rapidly gets to work, siphoning the light within to fuel its own apotheosis. Organs wither, the brain is reformed and overwritten with new neural pathways while others die off, purging the memories of the subject. The stomach usually shrinks and canines lengthen, turning hollow as they become directly linked to a network of veins. The final step is for the body to start using the resources left over from its alteration to heal the wounds it suffered to end its life and a vampyre is born from the corpse of a Fae.

It's tailor-made to the Fae genetic code, and despite the virus' ability to cross the species barrier, it performs an imperfect version of the process. When another race is turned without something like the Elixir of Rebirth, it often results in the infection trying to rewrite the subjects DNA into a wight. However, as this process is fueled by using the light of the Fae, siphoning it to change the subject. In its place, it starts by breaking down sections of the brain to use the raw proteins as building blocks for its restructuring efforts, such as the Amygdala, Cerebrum and the frontal lobe.

Then, depending on the subject in question, it will strip other biological systems for the body for materials to rebuild the subject (for humans, this is the ventrolateral preoptic nucleus, for vulperans, the body's nerve endings), rapidly rebuilding them into a mindless variant of their undead classification.

The Elixir of Rebirth prevents this in one way, the precious Ilyami flowers of Faradome, dissolved into the elixir. While we are not certain as to why, it seems that the flower contains a biological soup that the infection is "tricked" into using as a food source, siphoning the power within its complex structure to rewrite the structure of the subject, resulting in the new wight not having their higher brain functions cannibalized into process, albeit the memory loss persists due to the rewriting process.

From that moment on the body is sustained by the trace dark and demonic magic present within its cells, burning them in place of ATP, which the body will not produce post expiration. However, despite sustaining brain activity and biological functions on the magics in the infection, it isn't quite enough, and the body still requires some outside food sources to sustain its new state or it will undergo a form of autolysis, the cells eating themselves to sustain the body until the wight succumbs to decay and expires completely.

By Cyrus Encarmine



# A LIFE IN YOUR HANDS

The sound of limbs being hacked from the body. The sound of screams as an arrow drives its way into your back. The snap of a bone-breaking in two. The sounds of war. It's a brutal creature, yet one which has reigned supreme, and taken the lives of many. What is most often shown is the valour and bravery of the warriors and knights who fight to protect, and serve. However, little is often documented about, in some people's eyes, the true heroes of war are the medics.

These people put their lives on the line to save others. As a first-hand witness of being on the ground, in the mud, I can tell you it is the foulest thing one can witness. The sight of men, women and sometimes children with their stomachs cut open and guts pouring out is something you get used to doing surgery... but when they are still alive, and screaming for it all to end, you can't help but squirm at the sight.

However, some medics, like myself, see this as an opportunity. A sandbox of possibilities to finally show off the years of hard work, perfecting your skills to save lives. Admittedly, you can't save everyone... but those you do save will praise your work until the end of their time.

Those who are too far gone... they are always useful. Medicine cannot move forwards and progress without experimenting. Now, don't get me wrong, I'm not trying to say we should all go out and create mutant abominations like the Brotherhood of the Red Wolf did. But what we should be doing is attempting to push our beloved craft forwards, and create wonderful new medical breakthroughs! I took a birds blood and injected it into myself. Some called me crazy, and still do to this day, but I call myself a pioneer. I have taught many students since that day, and I tell every one of them the same thing - Medicine has countless possibilities and we must find them. Medicine can only move forward, and it must be us that drives it.

By the Osprey



## VESTRIAN CULTURE: A TEA CEREMONY

I was lucky enough to attend a tea ceremony whilst on my travels in Vestr. Cho, the Lore-Walker, further extended his kindness by inviting me to an old friend's Minka (Vestrian name for a house). The ceremony itself lasted several hours, yet I was grateful for this peek into Vestrian culture.

The host prepared the garden all so tranquil and simple to encourage a calm spirit. Flowers with gaudy colours or deep scents are avoided as they are a distraction. Stones of varying shapes and sizes make up the path that leads to the teahouse. A stone lantern is placed close to a stone basin near the entrance where visitors wash their hands before entering the tearoom.

The ceremony is traditionally held in a tatami room. The entrance for guests is kept low so that entering guests have to bend over, symbolising humility. Decorative elements in the tearoom, include an alcove where a scroll or seasonal flowers are displayed. After a bow, the head guest enters the room and takes the seat closest to the alcove, followed by the other guests.

Once they have taken their positions, it is customary to bow once more before observing the decorations which were carefully selected for the occasion. The host prepares the tea in front of the guests.

The main equipment includes the tea whisk, tea container for the powdered green tea, tea scoop, tea bowl, sweets container or plate, and the kettle and brazier. Each piece of equipment was carefully selected according to circumstance and has a specific place.

Sweets are served before tea and are supposed to be eaten before the tea is drunk. The tea bowl is placed onto the tatami mat in front of the guests, with its front facing them. The guests pick them up with their right hand and place it on their left palm. With their right hand, they turn it clockwise by around 90 degrees so that its front is not facing them anymore. The guests drink the tea in a few sips and place it back onto the tatami. They bow and express gratitude after receiving and finishing the tea.

Towards the end of the ceremony, there will be time to inspect and appreciate the tea bowl by lifting it. Once finished, turn the bowl so that the front now faces the host. The host may ask if guests would like another round of tea, and if not, the tea ceremony is over when the host washes the tea utensils and returns the equipment to where they were before starting.

By Tubbs Cricketsworth



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# A LOOK INTO UNLIFE

You're born. Whether you had a good childhood or not doesn't matter. You grow up. What you did growing up doesn't matter. Maybe you found a trade. What you learned doesn't matter. You died. And how you died doesn't matter. What does is that you were infected before this. Maybe you were a Faerie and knew or didn't. Maybe you weren't and sold everything to buy an Elixir of Rebirth.

Maybe. Maybe. Maybe.

You woke up from the other side of death. You remember nothing. And that does matter. Maybe you pieced your past together from the stories of those around you as they taught you to speak common, read and write and you learned who you were before this embrace. Maybe you had no such luck, and you instead got taught in Nald or Kathsworn when you made your way there.

If you didn't discover who you were, you were stuck creating a new you. Some, if they knew their past, may find this liberating. But it is a rare Wight who doesn't have at least a bit of curiosity about the "them" that preceded their new life. It weighs on them, a niggling itch that can lead them to detach from those on the other side of the mortal coil. And even if you were among people who knew you and pieced it back together, no matter what you do, you can never be certain that the "you" they tell you of is who you really were.

To make it worse, people treat you differently. Whether it is with politeness or hostility, you are inherently "different". A sign that things are not as they should be. People who loved you in life, even if they profess to still care for you, may flinch when you get close, they hesitate when you talk to them. They're scared, nervous, and this fear can exacerbate the psychological detachment many feel that leads them to venturing to the Frozen North.

But good news, you're now immortal. You can spend eternity doing anything you like. A nice upside, right?

Sadly, very few have the mental fortitude to live forever. If you learn your past you will likely see your loved ones age and fade away. And even if you don't, you could live long enough to see the eternal cycle of creation and destruction that we are all bound to, cities rising and falling, nations are born, grow and die in what one day, feels like years, then months. Then, in the blink of an eye.

Some can handle this, dedicating themselves to great works of science, magic, or even penning great tactical treatise and a million other pursuits both great and small. It's a focus, whether to keep them attached to the breathing world or to distract them from it. But many break.

Some detach themselves from the affairs of the living, becoming colder than the plains they call home. Some fall to madness, becoming horrors that sicken even the most jaded hearts. Some simply wander, desperate for a reason, any reason, to keep their biological decay from killing them. For some reason to care about existing.

Maybe you set yourself a grand goal, and work to succeed while hoping secretly you fail, so you have something to fight for forever. Maybe you do as you wish, answering to nobody and nothing as you wantonly rampage through the living. Maybe you fall into despair at the creature you were, and self medicate to feel the numbness, trying to pass the years by.

Maybe. Maybe. Maybe.

That is what the curse of undeath is. It's an existential nightmare. A limbo where you have no choice, sooner or later, than to forsake what you were as most of the world eyes you with suspicion at best, and calls for your final death at worst.

By Cyrus Encamine

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## SPORTING ALMANAC FOUND



Above: Griff Tanner

A man called Griff Tanner was taken into custody after an unusual winning streak at sports bets in Blightfoot Ridge. The circumstances could not have been more unusual. Tanner, a beefy bloke in his late-twenties, was reporting a crime at the local guard's station last month. He accused Alfonso Carone, the owner of an official local fighting pit of beating him up "*proper-good-like*" with the help of three unidentified minds.

Confronted with these imputations, Carone denied everything and even presented three witnesses that supported his arguments. He furthermore said, he saw Tanner falling down a flight of steps earlier and that he might only be after some compensation for his own clumsiness.

Then Carone tried to press charges himself against Tanner. The fact that he predicted the outcome of every pit fight in the last two weeks correctly was more than suspicious. Tanner even bet successfully on the round and the precise way any fight would end. He made some respectable amounts of Llandies with these bets, but he, unfortunately, lost most of the cash when he fell down the stairs so unskilfully.

On further investigation, the room of the inn Tanner stayed at was searched. The Journeyman found out later that the guards found a small booklet with all outcomes of the official fights in the establishment in question. The title "Sporting Almanac" was written on its cover. The pamphlet also predicted the results of fights to come in the next few days, that soon turned out to be correct.

After some outsourced interrogation, the guards found out that Tanner found the booklet at a public latrine next to the old library in central Bightfoot Ridge. When he found it, small parts of it were covered in specks of a strange golden dust. We will keep you updated if we have new insight into this bizarre situation.

The Journeyman very much wants to emphasize the fact that Alfonso Carone is a very respectable and valuable member of our society.

By Martin Mc Walk