

Dreams of Tomorrow

In this issue, we will update the plot and catch a glimpse of where our characters go from there.

Running Plot Summary

Highmorn: Dunmar and Eb, having lost Moss to their adversaries, regroup. They bribe a drupe vendor who happened to see the commotion, and she points them in the direction of an old factory. Having heard previously that this was where Umberto and the Lieutenant were holed up, the two decide to scout the location. They quickly spot professional soldiers peering out from behind small high windows in the factory, and hatch a plan to make a commotion so that they can enter undisturbed. Eb ties a bag of coins on a high pole in a busy street, while Dunmar destroys the bag with a well aimed lance, scattering money everywhere and starting a street brawl immediately. While the sentinels are distracted, the two slip in the back.

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Sunfade: Meanwhile, Moss wakes up in a room with Sarbi. He tries to start a conversation with the girl, but she is neither distraught about her situation nor particularly eager to help Moss. Before he is shut up by Umberto, Moss manages to tell Sarbi that he intends to marry her, a clever political move that would make all known parties happy: Sarbi, because she escapes from the confining presence of her father and Steelworth, because his daughter marries into a legitimate noble line. She does not respond and Moss is pummeled into submission by a noble-hating Umberto. He questions the nobleman at knifepoint, and Moss reveals that he is working with two other people to rescue the girl. Umberto and his gang depart with the girl in tow, leaving Moss tied up in the room.

Eb and Dunmar arrive to rescue Moss, but they walk into an ambush set by the Scorpions. Narrowly avoiding death, they manage to free Moss and defeat the men who ambushed them. They run for fear of rein-



Umberto may have been killed, but the quiet conflict between the Maze and nobility will rear its head again and again.

forcements, but not before capturing a soldier. They pay the man handsomely to reveal his employer, who turned out to be Tiberius Bale, a prominent nobleman and notable opponent of Steelworth's induction into true nobility. The soldier also reveals the location of the intended trade: Sarbi for something that Steelworth owns, of great value to Bale himself.

The three talk to Steelworth to see whether he had had communication with Sarbi's captors. He reveals that he had just gotten word that she was to be exchanged for a book in his possession at sunset. The book apparently contains a secret of Bale's that concerns both himself and the Lieutenant, and the threat of public disclosure was enough motivation for them to kidnap Sarbi in the first place. Steelworth does not discuss the contents of the book, but reluctantly hands the object over to the group after hearing Moss's plans to legitimize his noble status by arranging a marriage with Sarbi. The three head to Moss's estate, where they are given a chance to recover from the day's fighting. Moss speaks to his father, who, after some persuasion, is behind the marriage proposal.

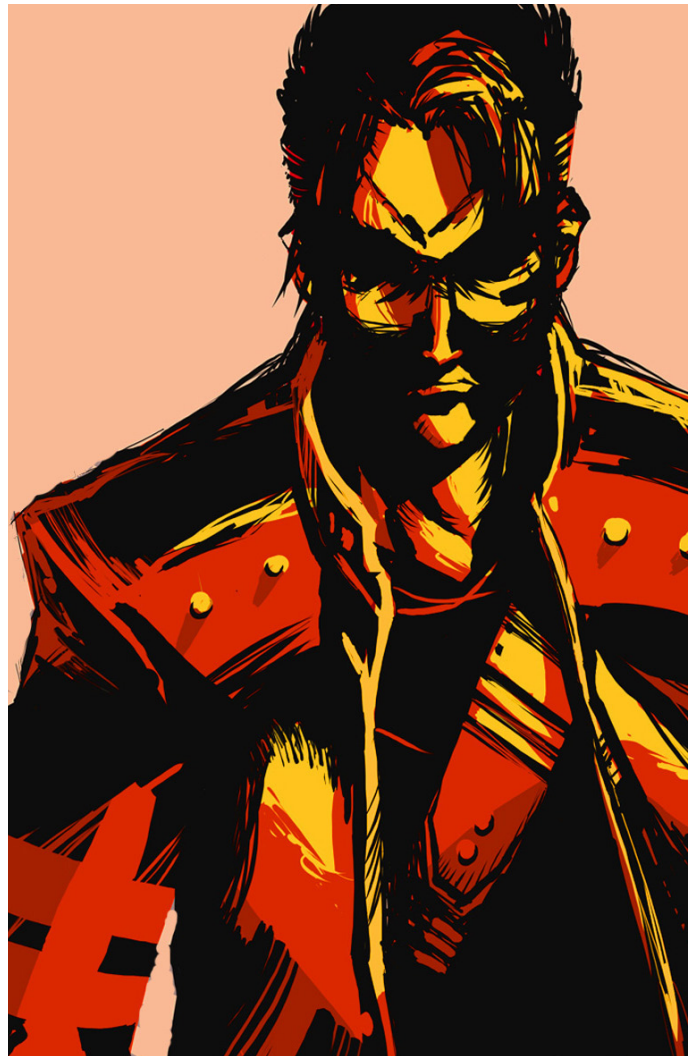
The group approaches Cairn Ridgeknight in order to place a protective glyph on the book. Ridgeknight has many arcane tools at his command, and in the end, the Moss pays to have the man erect a spell that teleports the book to him should anyone other than Moss, Eb, or Dunmar touch it. This ensures that in case the book is captured by the Lieutenant, it will immediately fall into Ridgeknight's hands, whose penchant for gossip would become a useful contingency. Dunmar is given some of Ridgeknight's liquid hair, and immediately falls into a gleeful drug haze. His clarity for magic seems to improve, although one cannot be sure whether this is an effect of hallucination or of true ability.

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Eventide: As sunset approaches, the group finds themselves in a church square, near the Tofu Kitchen, where the captors had holed up. The trade goes relatively smoothly, until Sarbi, who had contemplated the marriage proposal, tells Moss that she is only interested in marrying “a real man.” To test his manliness, she instigates a fight by attempting to escape, which breaks out with relative ease due to Umberto's seething hatred of noblemen. With some difficulty, the group dispatches their foes, although the Lieutenant used his arcane ability to scorch the book beyond readability and escape via invisibility before the group can pin him down. Sarbi, not yet satisfied with the bloodshed, attacks Moss and forces him to beat her unconscious.

Having succeeded at recovering the girl, the group returns to the Sanctum, where Steelworth congratulates the group before disappearing with his daughter. Promises of marriage are in the atmosphere, though Moss reconsiders the idea of marrying a girl who tries to kill him for fun. ■

“The book apparently contains a secret of Bale's that concerns both himself and the Lieutenant...”



The Lieutenant's reign over the Maze is as fleeting as everything else in the maze.

Aftermath

The *Killikri Advent* sat like a distant, floating cigar on the Tan Dorra oceanscape. Nearly a mile long, the massive vessel lit up the predawn horizon with the soft glow of active sigils. It was almost time. Dunmar stared out at the city from the ship's platform deck, contemplating his next step in the exploration of hallucinogen-induced spiritual clarity. Nursing an inevitably growing addiction, Dunmar sighed and watched the faint tendrils of mana coil into soft helices out in the calm bay.

He could not see the Maze from his vantage point; it crawled and writhed just out of his sight, out of anyone's sight. A dozen bodies littered the back alleys, the casualty from a night of livelihood. Eb's wolfpack had taken the initiative and went on the offensive when they learned that several of the Scorpions had been killed, and

the latter gang had been just as bloodthirsty for revenge after the havoc Eb had sown amongst their ranks. After a few years of tenuous peace, the two gangs once again were in open war. The business of a hundred hair farmers, the future of ten thousand addicts, and the fate of a million crowns lay were at stake in the simple gamble of knives and metal knuckles.

Today was also a tumultuous day for the nobility, as two powerful families would be united by a new marriage. Moss had chosen wisely, for his bride was young and beautiful, sophisticated and sociable. A large crowd was gathered to celebrate, including extended family, old friends, and business partners from across the Crescent. Between talk of the quality of wine and the adorable nature of Moss's anticipated children, the community giggled rumors of social taboo. Indeed, one of their own, a prominent nobleman, was quietly stepping down from



An early portrait of Tiberius Bale, who opts to settle into obscurity, and effectively retires from politics.

Artwork courtesy of, respectively, MaComiX, zano, and RedCrayonAristocrat via deviantart.com

power after scathing rumors surfaced of his own extramarital, homosexual involvement with a Maze thug.

There was a rumble as the locomotive sigils of the *Advent* roared to life. Dunmar nearly passed out from the arcane storm erupting to life, though the other passengers nearby seemed hardly perturbed. A woman in her thirties wrapped a wool shaw around her young daughter and the two braced themselves against a rush of cool

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ocean air. The mother looked back at Tan Dorra, their birthplace, and wondered if she would miss the lives they were leaving, for despite its hardships and cruelties, it was predictable. There was no telling what lay in their life ahead, and Arius was in no shortage of hardships or cruelties. The daughter looked at the sea with wide eyes and bore none of the fears of her mother. To her, the *Advent* was the beginning of a long journey and she had in her heart a type of excitement that no slave of the Maze would ever have. Years later, if one would ask her, she would say that that feeling itself was worth all of the costs that they had paid.

Twenty seven decks below Dunmar, Sarbi Steelworth rolled up a pair of dirty sleeves and continued scrubbing the tavern floor. She would toil for next to no pay, and be abused by employers and customers alike, in more way than one, but one day, perhaps when fate was finally ready, Sarbi would ascend to make her own mark upon legend. The apple, it seemed, did not fall far, as she had accomplished in a peculiar way what own father had two decades ago: escape a prescribed fate. Her father would hate her for it, as the Maze had hated him.

The *Advent* began to move, first an inch, and then a meter, and then it turned and powered its propulsion systems full blast, driving water behind it at speeds that would be felt on the Dorra docks. She sped away from the city and its denizens toward another life. ■