

Soul Forge



The Hog's Head Inn, quieter than most nights due to the storm, still had its share of excitement. The two men huddled together at the bar weren't the only ones talking about the mysterious hooded figure occupying a table in the corner shadows of the tavern.

The barkeep approached the two men. He leaned in and motioned with his chin. "That guy asked me if I know anything about someone living in these parts. Someone who years ago fought for the king. Someone special, he said. Who do you suppose that could be?"

The larger patron grumbled, "We all fought for the king."

The smaller patron stole a quick glimpse into the shadows. “Surely it can’t be anyone from this cesspool. Nordic Town is about as far away from special as a person can get. Nothing exciting ever happens here. Where did he say he’s from?”

The bartender tried his best to appear inconspicuous. He leaned in closer. “He didn’t. Just asked if I knew any middle-aged warriors living around here.”

The large man snorted. “We’re all warriors when it suits the king.”

“You’re lucky he didn’t turn you into a toad,” his companion declared to the barkeep.

The barkeep gave the short man an odd look. “Aye, but the way he said it made it seem as if the man he’s looking for is different...I don’t know. I *do* know I’ll be happier when he’s gone.” He stepped away to tend to another customer.

The larger patron hazarded a glance at the stranger and elbowed his buddy. “Aye laddie, he does have the look of a wizard.”

Lightning flashed. The building shook with the ensuing thunderclap. Both men gulped.

The barkeep rejoined them. “Hey. Do you think he’s looking for that guy living off the old Gulch Trail?”

The two men considered the question. The smaller man nodded. “Aye, perhaps. What’s a wizard want with him, though? That guy hasn’t left his cabin in years. He’s probably dead by now.”

The larger patron rubbed his chin. “This reminds me of when our beloved Quarrnaine died, may the gods bless her soul. Remember? The king’s men came in search of Silurian Mintaka, up by the Gulch.”

The two patrons spat on the ground at the mention of the name.

“Hey,” the bartender said, spitting himself, “isn’t that the same place you and the boys went to lynch that crazy, son of a—”

A chair scraped the floor, grabbing the attention of the few patrons inside the Hog’s Head Inn.

The mysterious man in question stood beside his table. He reached into the folds of a black-hooded cloak and plunked a few coins down. Without a word, he grabbed a wooden staff leaning against the wall.

All eyes followed the white-bearded man as he shuffled toward the exit. A rapid succession of forked lightning silhouetted his frame when he opened the door, blinding those within the dimly lit room. By the time their eyes recovered, he was gone.

Before anyone had a chance to catch their breath, another hooded figure rose from the opposite corner of the tavern. Where he had come from, nobody knew. The hunched figure slipped across the floor like a wraith and followed the wizard into the night.