

Character Statistics :

Given Name : Zekar Race : Human
True Name : Tayshaun Occupation : Thief/Bodyguard
Guild Name (Public) : Ironheart Experience Level : 3
Guild Name (Private) : Drakin Experience Points : 6450
Alignment : Unprincipled Points to Next Level : 950
Sex : Male Hair : Raven Eyes : Gold Height : 5' 7" Weight: 162 lbs.
Age : 23 H.P. : 21 S.D.C. : 15 P.P.E. : 10 Attacks: 4

Physical Appearance : His long raven hair is pulled back into a pony tail. Though he has light brown eyes, they tend to look closer to a bright gold color. He is usually dressed in black pants, a sleeveless white shirt, and black leather boots with straps (to keep tightly fastened to the leg) that go up to his mid-calf. There is usually a grin on his face, even in the most severe and dire of situations.

Across his entire back is a large tattooed outline of a crow. On his chest though is perhaps the most notable of marks. Over his heart is a huge scar (-2 to P.B. when visible). There is an obvious skin discoloration from the grafted darker skin to the rest of his chest.

Attributes and Bonuses :

<u>I.Q.</u> : 09	<u>Initiative</u> : +1
<u>M.E.</u> : 07	<u>Strike</u> : +3
<u>M.A.</u> : 17	<u>Disarm</u> : +3
<u>P.S.</u> : 10 [11]	<u>Parry</u> : +4
<u>P.P.</u> : 15 [16]	<u>Dodge</u> : +4
<u>P.E.</u> : 11 [12]	<u>Roll with Punch</u> : +4
<u>P.B.</u> : 13	<u>Pull Punch</u> : +3
<u>Spd.</u> : 09	<u>Save vs. Psionics</u> : 12 or higher
	<u>Trust/Intimidate</u> : 45%

Psionic Abilities :

I.S.P. : 20 (Minor Psychic; Save vs. Psionic Attack needed is 12 or higher)
Sense Time [Self/I.S.P. 2] 15 minutes per level of experience
- See page 97 of the Rifts Game Master Guide for further details.
Total Recall [Self/I.S.P. 2] Permanent
- See page 172 Palladium Fantasy Main Book for further details.

Fighting Abilities :

Hand to Hand: Martial Arts
Karate Kick – 2D4 Snap Kick – 1D6
Roundhouse Kick – 3D6; cannot be used in the same round as any other kick
Backward Sweep – Knockdown only; cannot be parried
Tripping/Leg hook – Knockdown only; cannot be parried

Game Notes :

An alchemist by the name of Darius may know something of a cure. He lives just outside the city of Tomoro in Timiro.
His heavy blanket and rope are currently used to tie up a cursed sword.

One of his shirts is wrapped up around the vase he was once sent to steal.

One of the sheets of paper he owns has the symbols and markings of the vase from the home of the Western noble drawn in charcoal. The noble is of the House of Clynn in the city of Shinkasa.

Has another sheet of paper with the map from the warlord.

"Take the kindness given in life and pass it on to others." –words from a man who took him into his house, but died shortly later

Skills :

<u>Type:</u>	<u>Base:</u>	<u>Bonus:</u>	<u>Per Level:</u>	<u>Final:</u>
Hand to Hand Martial Arts	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Acrobatics	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Languages: Eastern	40%	98%	N/A	98%
Languages: Western	40%	+10%	+5%	60%
Sign Language	25%	+10%	+5%	45%
Back Flip (Acrobatics)	30%	N/A	+5%	40%
Climbing/Scale Walls (Acrobatics)	40%	N/A	+5%	50%
- Rappelling (Acrobatics)	35%	+5%	+5%	50%
Concealment	20%	+10%	+4%	38%
Cooking (level 2)	30%	N/A	+5%	35%
Dance	30%	N/A	+5%	40%
Detect Ambush	30%	N/A	+5%	40%
Detect Concealment & Traps	25%	+10%	+5%	45%
Escape Artist	25%	+10%	+5%	45%
Intelligence	30%	N/A	+4%	38%
Juggling (level 2)	35%	N/A	+5%	40%
Locate Secret Compartments/Doors	15%	+15%	+5%	40%
Lore: Magic	25%	N/A	+5%	35%
- Recognize magic wards, runes, and circles	15%	N/A	+5%	25%
- Recognize enchantment	10%	N/A	+5%	20%
Mathematics: Basic	45%	+10%	+5%	65%
Palming	25%	+10%	+5%	45%
Pick Locks	30%	+15%	+5%	55%
Pick Pockets	25%	+15%	+5%	50%
Prowl	25%	+10%	+5%	45%
Rope Works (level 3)	30%	N/A	+5%	30%
Sense of Balance (Acrobatics)	40%	N/A	+5%	50%
Streetwise	20%	+14%	+4%	42%
Walk Tightrope or High Wire (Acrobatics)	30%	N/A	+3%	36%
W.P. Knife	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
W.P. Staff	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A

Weapon Skills :

<u>Ancient Weapon Proficiencies</u> :	<u>Strike</u> :	<u>Parry</u> :	<u>Thrown:</u>
W.P. Knife/Dagger	+1	+2	+2
W.P. Staff	+2	+1	N/A

Weapons & Armour :

Soft Leather	A.R.: 10	S.D.C.: 20	
Hidden Dagger Blade (W.P. + Other) - Can't be thrown	1D6	(+4 to Strike)	(+6 to Parry)
Hidden Dagger Blade (W.P. + Other) - Can't be thrown	1D6	(+4 to Strike)	(+6 to Parry)
Triple Dagger (Dwarven Quality) - Major Magic Item (Indestructible/I.Q.) - Total Bonuses (Quality + W.P. + Other)	1D6 Intelligent (2D6+8)	+4 to Damage Indestructible (+4 to Strike)	+3 to Parry Damage x2 (+9 to Parry)
Retractable Quarter Staff (W.P. + Other) - Minor Magic Item (retractable only)	2D6	(+5 to Strike)	(+5 to Parry)

Other Information :

Money : 954 gold.

Equipment : Two sets of clothing, a waist-length jacket (no hood) with three inside pockets and straps to keep it closed, leather boots (mid-calf in length) with straps, a pair of leather gloves, belt, bedroll, purse, backpack, one large sack, one medium-sized sack, three small sacks, a water skin, a set of skeleton keys and lock picking tools, 50 feet (15.2 m) of rope, grappling hook, two iron spikes, a small hammer, pocket mirror, and a tinder box. He is also equipped with a knife sheath (for the triple dagger), a heavy blanket, treated torch (quick light; 3 hours), a dozen candles (long lasting; 3 hours), earthenware candle holder (uncovered), a 2 pint water skin filled with 2 pints of oil, a small wood box (1 lb) with clear wax (1 lb), an empty small metal box (5 lb), a bar of soap (4 oz), a dozen sheets of paper (9x12), a dozen sticks of charcoal, and 20 feet (6 m) of fishing line. Also, he owns small bottle of pills (kept them so far).

Weapons : A pair of concealed blades within metal bracers on his arms. When the blades are extended, they serve much like daggers. Another of his weapons is a triple dagger. This is not ordinary dagger though, in addition to the uniqueness of a triple dagger it is dwarven quality (130 gold) with an enhanced blade edge and balance. It also has a 10 carat superior cut Smoky Quartz gem (black color; 60 gold) built into the handle. This makes the dagger worth a total of 200 gold pieces (it is now possessed with the spirit of a warlord that Zekar considered a friend and considered a major magical artifact). His final weapon is a staff which is usually concealed in one of the pockets of his jacket. It can be extended to form a full quarter staff. This is considered a minor magical item.

Family : He has no siblings. His mother died when he was only five and he was forced to try and take care of his father as well as himself. After a long history of abuse, he finally fled for his life. Since that time, he has had no contact with his father. If he has any aunts or uncles is unclear to him, but he doesn't care either. The only family he feels he has at this point in his life is the Crow Thieves Guild, especially Silvermane.

Guild Association : Crow Thieves Guild. It is a guild located solely in the Eastern Territories. He is a fellow thief and once the personal bodyguard of Alkon the Silvermane (Raven is his private guild name). Due to his current situation, he left the guild's territory to search for a cure. They are still on good terms.

Religion _____: Unlike his mentor, Alkon the Silvermane, he does not actively worship a pantheon. However, he did accompany him to church at times and came to know a bit of some of them. He is most fond of Thoth and will at times offer worship. Due to the fact that his mentor often said, of all the gods, that he reminded him of Anhur the Slayer of Enemies, there is a soft spot for this god in the heart of Zekar the Ironheart.

Disposition _____: Though he is a thief, he tries his best to steal only when necessary. When he does steal, he tries to target people who can 'afford it.' In other words, he only tries to steal from rich people that can easily enough replace what was stolen. Under the right circumstances, he may steal from a friend. However, if he were to ever do this it would be done in the friend's best interest, or at least what Zekar feels is the best for that friend.

He has a strong code of honor which causes him to fit in quite well in the Crow Thieves Guild. When faced with a tough decision he'll try to do the right thing, even if it is not the best for him. These types of actions resulted in the scar on his chest, which he takes pride in. Despite being a trained warrior, he usually tries to avoid fighting whenever possible. He prefers to keep a smile on his face, even in bad situations. The reason for this is unclear, even to him, but it has been there almost constantly since his injury.

History _____: His mother died when he was young. Though he occasionally has a flash of a woman he believes is her, he can't remember her face. At the age of seven, he ran away from home to avoid being beat to death by his father. For the next two years, he lived on the streets stealing to try and get by. One day he tried to steal from a thief. Though his first attempt failed, his second attempt managed to lift an item from him.

This caused the thief to give chase and corner him in an alleyway. Before the thief could get his item back, he was attacked by two thieves of a rival guild. Due to his actions, he put the thief at a disadvantage. To make up for this act, he interfered in the battle and gave back the man the weapon he stole. This allowed the thief to win the battle. However, before it was over, Zekar was badly wounded and almost died.

When he recovered, the thief revealed he was a part of the Crow Thieves Guild and would sponsor him due to his honorable act in helping. Not only did he train in the ways of a thief, but also trained to become the personal bodyguard of the thief he once stole from, Alkon the Silvermane.

After he grew and became a professional, he came down with a horrible illness. With the help of his guild, an alchemist gave him a small bottle of pills that could help sustain his life for a time. The pills need to be taken once a week to hold back the illness. If not taken, he will die within a few days. This same alchemist also suggested a possible clue to a cure might be located on an artifact in the Western Empire.

To avoid eventual death, Zekar said good-bye to the Crow Thieves Guild (at least for now) and set out to the Western Empire to find the item. He located it in the care of a powerful noble. Though he managed to break in and get a good look at the artifact, he was caught before he could successfully escape.

Added Notes _____: Tends to pass himself as a warrior or bodyguard, not a thief. Though part of a thieves' guild and trained in their ways, in his heart he considers himself the bodyguard of Silvermane, and that is his truth.

Detailed Description :

Note: Though a Physical Description is provided earlier, that is the type of description designed for the players. While some information is repeated, the following description also provides details about items hidden on his body, intent behind the design of his clothing, etc. This information can be used to better describe his actions in the future, as well as help to better understand his mentality.

His long raven hair (shiny and black) is pulled back into a pony tail. To form the pony tail a metal piece that locks around it is used. It is longer than just a normal tie and is used to conceal two small lock picking tools. The tools are completely concealed under the metal piece which is decorative. The entire piece is metal with a small, almost unnoticeable hinge to open and close it.

Though he has light brown eyes, they tend to look closer to a bright gold color. There is usually a grin on his face, even in the most severe and dire of situations.

He is usually dressed in black pants and black leather boots with straps (to keep tightly fastened to the leg) that go up to his mid-calf. The pants are tucked into the boots to avoid any loose ends (he's a thief, so he wants as little of his clothing to be caught or dangle as possible).

A sleeveless white shirt is worn under a black waist-length jacket (no hood) with three inside pockets and straps to keep it closed. The jacket is usually open (or not worn at all) unless he is going on a mission. As for the straps, they are either buckles to move it as tight as he desires or perhaps something more like metal connectors (two ends, one having a three end link that can connect to the piece on the other side ... artist discretion). The coat is short and does not fall below the waist at all and depending on the movement, might rise up above it slightly. Seeming almost out of place are the slightly loose sleeves of the jacket. This is so that the concealed blades can freely slide out without hindrance.

The metal bracer daggers are worn on his forearms. It is plain in appearance and stretches the entire forearm (but does not lap over elbow or wrist leaving them with complete maneuverability). The bracers look plain normally, but can be released to reveal two hidden dagger blades that stretch out over the hand. Though it limits the hand from bending up, it does not actually connect to the hand in anyway. To help hide the blades when they are concealed, there are metal pieces covering the opening which snap open as the blade slides out.

Across his entire back is a large tattooed outline of a crow. The wings stretch from end to end on his back while the tail comes down to just above the waist line and the head near the neck (but just low enough to be concealed under his shirt).

Over his heart is a huge scar. There is an obvious skin discoloration that is surrounded by strips of metal which connects the grafted darker skin to the rest of his chest. It does not come low enough to reach the stomach, but does cover a large part of the left side of his chest.

Crow Thieves Guild (Information) :

Guild Name : Crow Thieves Guild

Headquarters : The Crow Bar (a.k.a. Crowbar)

The Crow Thieves Guild is located solely in the Eastern Territories. It is over a hundred years old. For a long time, it was the only thieves guild in their area. However, in the past twenty years they have been rivaled by a newly formed guild known as the Jade Moon. This has led to a long and bloody conflict between the two guilds for territorial purposes. In the past couple of years, the Jade Moon has successfully taken over some of the cities surrounding their main city.

This guild is more than just a place to fence stolen goods or get some information, this is a brotherhood. The members will help one another, make personal sacrifices for each other, fight alongside them, and even at times die for another. It exemplifies the concept of honor among thieves, at least among their fellow members. Though women are not excluded from becoming members, there are none currently, nor has there ever been, in the guild.

Important Members :

Guild Name (Private) : Feathered Death

Guild Name (Public) : Scar

Twenty-five years ago, his inner guild name was Butterfly (because of his beautiful looks and graceful moves) and his public name was Smiley. When the former guild leader was leading them to ruin, he stepped in and challenged for leadership. Though he won the duel to the death, it left him with a horrible scar on his face forever ruining his good looks. Despite that fact, he has no shame of this mark and is a symbol of great respect within the guild. It is the reason for his new private guild name, and his public name is a result of his lethal combat style. Ever since he became guild leader, they say his smile has faded a little more each year. The stresses of command have appeared to take their toll on his once happy disposition. His true name has been long forgotten even to him.

Guild Name (Private) : Raven

Guild Name (Public) : Silvermane

He is one of the head lieutenants at the guild. Scar trusts his council greatly. His main skill is as a strategist for the guild, though he is a skilled fighter and thief. There are rumors that he was once a part of the military, but these are unconfirmed. Only Scar may know the truth of the matter. The name Silvermane is a result of his light grey, almost silver, beard. His true name is Alkon. After Zekar stole from him and then helped him to fight off two assassins from the Jade Moon, he took Zekar into the guild and trained him as a thief and personal bodyguard. In many ways, Silvermane became close to a father figure for Zekar, and the reverse is true as well.

Guild Name (Private) : Bald Eagle

Guild Name (Public) : Wild

He is a tall, bald headed thief of the guild. He does not have any specialized rank or position, but he is still one of the most experienced members in the guild. Despite his tremendous size he is very quick with great reflexes. The name Wild originates from his

wild tactics and unpredictable techniques when pulling a heist. It is also in part due to his, at times, hot temper. Though he and Zekar had a rough start, the two became close friends and trusted comrades. After a brutal incident involving the Jade Moon, he now has a long scar on the top of his head. His true name is Jared.

Guild Name (Private) : Falcon-man

Guild Name (Public) : Dragon

The name Dragon comes from the tattoo of a winding dragon around his left bicep. He is the strongest warrior in the entire guild and its enforcer. When something happens that requires a strong arm or lethal repercussions, Dragon is the one they turn to. He is considered Scar's second in command. This is what gave him the name Falcon-man (a variation of Feathered Death). Of all the members in the guild, he seems to have the least honor. That is perhaps the reason he makes such a good enforcer. Zekar and he had almost no dealings with each other. His true name is Vantrel.

Rumors :

1. There are some in the guild that believe Dragon is building up to one day challenge Scar for leadership.
2. Many of the same members believe Dragon's potential betrayal is the reason Scar made him his second, to keep his enemies close.
3. Some believe that Grayson the Alchemist is the one behind the illness of Zekar. How he pulled this off is debated about, but they believe that he gave one of them a horrible illness that only he could fix so they would steal objects for him.
4. There are others who believe the old wound on the chest of Zekar is the cause of this illness. As skin grafts and healing such horrible wounds are not a perfect science, it is possible it caused some kind of infection.
5. A relatively new rumor is that the true leader of the Jade Moon is the previous leader that Scar defeated. The duel was to the death, so it seems relatively unlikely. However, they insist he either survived somehow or was brought back by some other means.

History :

A young boy of around only seven years of age walks down the night street lugging a heavy case. Inside is his business. Times are slow though and it isn't good for anyone. As the economy of this small city is on the decline, it is taking the morality of its people right along with it. The young lad opens the door to a run-down shack. Before he steps inside, he is grabbed and pulled in by force. His case hits the ground only seconds before his head slams hard into the wall. It hurts; it hurts a lot, but he's had worse. He looks at who grabbed him, but it isn't necessary because he already knows. The man is his father. Since the lights are off in the house, he thought it was safe to enter.

Usually at this time his father would be off on one of his drinking binges. As long as he got in bed and was asleep, or at least pretended to be, he could usually avoid a conflict. The fact that his father is home now could only mean one thing, a second later that suspicion is confirmed. With a hard shake that pulls him off the wall and then slams him back against it, his father asks, "So how much ya bring back?" This, of course, means his father is out of drinking money.

"It was a slow day," responds the young boy as he pulls out a few gold coins. He holds them out towards his father in an open hand. With a hard whack, he is backhanded across the face. The gold pieces go flying from his hand. A brief clanking can be heard as they hit the floor. One of the pieces rolls and drops down a crack in the rotting floor. Blood now trickles down from the boy's lower lip. As stated earlier, he had worse. The hard wall is gentle compared to his father's fists.

His father shouted, "Stop your lies! I know you're holding out on me."

The accusation is true. Every day, his son holds back a little of the profits he made that day. It isn't out of greed or just for spite, but for a far better reason. Without thinking the boy replies, "Well if I gave you all the money we'd both been kicked out on the street a long time ago!" His words are harsh and filled with anger.

The comment isn't the smartest move he's ever made. Those words lead to a beating at the hands of his father. Tonight's beating is bad, real bad. It's worse than any of the ones he received before. He loses all sense of time. Whether it's been going on for only minutes or a few hours doesn't seem relevant, his stubborn refusal to fall to the fury of his father's fists only fuels the man's rage all the more. There is no sign of letting up this night. The boy knows that when it is over this time it might be over for good.

"Jaykel, I found some ... oh, sorry, didn't mean to disturb you." The man speaking is Barnel, a drinking buddy of the father. His words are sincere in that he really didn't mean to disturb Jaykel; it had nothing to do with awkwardness of the scene he walked in on. It never bothered him in the past, he isn't about to let it bother him today. After all, he only stopped by to tell Jaykel that he found some drinking money, but if the man is busy then that means more for him.

Jaykel stops the assault in a moment of distraction. In that instant instinct takes over the boy. With a hard swipe of his hand, he knocks the loosened grip of his father off of him. Then without hesitation, he bolts for the door. His vision is blurry and his right eye is almost completely swollen shut. As he makes for the door, he sees Barnel move slightly.

With his poor vision at the moment he can't tell whether Barnel is just flinching from someone charging at him or he is trying to stop him is unclear. It doesn't matter, he responds to the situation in an instant. Thud! The kid hits the floor as he dives between

the legs of Barnel. He doesn't wait to see how they react as he scurries the rest of the way out the door and back to his feet. Swerving back and forth between people and objects, he dashes through the streets running as fast as he can.

As he flees he can hear his father shouting, "Tayshaun!" The voice isn't far away. Either he is too weak to run away fast enough or his father is giving chase. If it is the former, there is nothing left he can do. However, if it is the latter then he needs to act fast. His small little legs are no match for the long strides of his father. Then he quickly dives between a pair of struts under a building. He is breathing heavily and his heart is still racing. Puffs of breath can be seen in the cool night air.

There is a wretched stench under this building. At this moment he knows exactly what type of building he is lying under, but he doesn't care. Even though he is lying in a pile of waste, not once in his life has he ever felt freer than now. Despite fleeing, he is still bleeding. His body might give way to the damage and this could be his last night regardless or perhaps he'll live the night and die a few nights later from starvation. Either way didn't matter to him, from this point on he is free to live and die by his terms.

A nine year old Tayshaun wakes up on the roof of a building. He stares up at the night sky for a moment. It's a new moon out tonight, but the stars are still shining brightly. His moment of admiration for the heavens is interrupted by his stomach grumbling. As he sits up he thinks, "Times like this I almost wish I was still at home." Then he laughs out loud. His thoughts continue, "Yeah right. Even if I stood there I wasn't guaranteed a meal. I'm better on my own."

He stands to his feet and looks down to the streets below. People are bustling through the streets. The fair is still in the city. This is the last night. As he surveys the crowd he thinks, "Well, I better get to work while pickings are still good. Things won't be so easy after tonight."

Without further hesitation, he leaps from the rooftop. While falling, he grabs onto a clothesline between two buildings. It sags under his weight, but he doesn't hold on for long. He uses it just enough to help reduce the speed of his fall and alter his trajectory slightly. Moments before he hits the ground, he is close enough to the wall of the next building. With catlike reflexes, he pounces off the wall further breaking his fall. Though he tries to land on his feet he falls flat on the ground.

"Darn hunger messing me up," he thinks. It is just an excuse and he knows it full well. The plain and simple truth is he messed up his landing and he is embarrassed to admit it, even to himself. When he picks himself up off the ground, he does his best to try and pick up as much of his pride as he can as well.

As he exits the alleyway he dusts off his clothes, which seems a rather silly act considering how dirty they are. His clothes are battered and torn and his boots are two sizes too big. The only decent article of clothing he is wearing is the forest green cape. All of it is stolen, even the undergarments. That last part wasn't his proudest moment in life, not even as a thief, but it wasn't his worst either.

In his best attempt to fit into the crowd, he uses the cape to pull conceal his clothing. Otherwise, his tattered appearance would more than likely draw attention and make it hard to complete a good night's work. As he weaves through the crowd he

stumbles and bumps into a woman. Instinctively he grabs onto her for support. He is quick to apologize by saying, "Sorry ma'am." The entire time he keeps his head down as he continues further into the crowd.

After he gets a safe distance away, he smirks. When he bumped her, he lifted her coin purse at the same time. It wasn't an accident he bumped her, but a ploy so that she wouldn't feel the theft. Then he tucks the pilfered purse into one of his pockets. His thoughts are only towards one thing, "That's one down already. This should be a good night."

A few hours later, his collection is much larger. People at the fairs tend to carry a lot of money and don't pay much attention to just a kid. This is the perfect environment for him. Unfortunately, the fair would be gone tomorrow and so would his easy marks. That means things will get much harder. As far as a thief goes, he is still a novice. He knows a few useful tricks, but not enough to call himself a professional.

Since he can't rely on steady income when there is no large gathering like a fair, he usually does his best to get as much as he can on nights like this and then try to spread out his earnings to last as long as possible. Most would have wasted the money on fancy clothes, an elaborate meal, and even a room at an inn. But that wasn't his style. He'd much rather use the money sparingly and survive as long as possible off of it. That is the best way to stay out of prison. Desperate times call for desperate attempts and that leads to getting caught.

Tayshaun tries to figure out how much he took in so far. According to his rough calculations, it should be enough to get by for a while. Then he decides upon one more for good measure. As he scans the crowd he finds his mark. A relatively well off looking man, someone who won't miss a few gold coins. In passing he goes for one swift motion and keeps going forward, never pausing. However, things don't go quite as he had been planning.

The moment he grabs the coin purse the man grabs his hand. He didn't even have the chance to try and snag it before he was caught. Quickly he spins and tries to pull his arm free. There is little luck in freeing himself. In a feeble effort he starts to hit the man's arm with his free hand, but the man doesn't let go. Instead the man tightens his grip causing his caught hand to force open. With the shock of being caught, he didn't realize he never let go of the coin purse. Then with one last hit to the man's arm, he is released. It seems he is lucky that the man had no interest in turning him into the authorities.

After letting go of the small boy, the man starts to walk away. Before going more than a few steps he realizes he is missing something. Quickly he turns to look back at the boy. The kid is already running. He had been sloppy and underestimated the lad, now he is going to have to catch him to get his item back. However, it isn't an item he is prepared to just let go. With that, the chase is on.

Tayshaun maneuvers through the crowd. The crowd works to his advantage. Though he may not be fast, the crowd doesn't make this a foot race as much as it does a test of flexibility. His small size makes it easy for him to squeeze in between the people in the crowd. However, his pursuer is no slouch and is making good timing as well.

Whatever he took must've been important for this man to go through this much trouble to get it back.

In truth, he doesn't even know what he took. All he knows is that he felt something hidden on the man's arm. So during the last time he hit the man he swiped it, or at least a part of it. The object was large and clunky, but he did manage to pry some part of it free before he fled. It isn't much and he isn't even sure why he felt the need to take it. Perhaps he just wanted to see how good he really is, more likely though he was just being foolish.

At this point, he can no longer see the man chasing him. Best to keep running though, just because he can't see his pursuer any longer doesn't mean he isn't there anymore. More than likely, the crowd is simply obstructing his view. He can see a wall just ahead. That wall is the border of the fair, the perfect place for his escape. All right, this is time for his talents to shine.

Finally he finds a break in the crowd and leaps up on a stock crate. He dashes across it and the next one beside it. Then he leaps up again and lets his foot touch the top of a post holding up a canopy over one of the sidewalk shops. His weight doesn't settle there for long as he quickly springs off and lands on the edge of the canopy. With one final jump he flips in the air, placing his free hand on the wall doing a momentary hand stand for balance before going over. The other hand is still tucked close to his body holding the stolen object. This time, he lands firm on his feet.

While smirking he thinks, "Perfect landing; perfect escape." Half of that is true. It was indeed a perfect landing. A perfect escape, on the other hand, wouldn't have him landing only feet away from the man that he stole the item from. At first he doesn't even notice the man. For the first time since he stole it, Tayshaun takes a look at the object. It is metal, looks to be some type of casing. There is a symbol of some kind of bird. The man finally makes his presence known by saying, "Not worth much, is it you little brat?"

Tayshaun quickly spins to look at him and then takes a few steps away. His escape over the wall took him into a back alley and there is little place to run back here. Most people couldn't have kept up with that last little acrobatic feat he pulled back there. However, this man not only kept up but somehow got ahead of him. This man must be good. Perhaps even a professional. More than likely that is the case and that is not good for Tayshaun.

Trained warriors have been known to never wake up again due to a knife in the back for crossing a thief. The man takes a step closer. His heart is racing now. He knows there is a good chance this will end badly for him. If that is to be his fate, so be it then. At least he had a good run while it lasted. Of course, realization of the fact doesn't mean he is giving up, not quite yet at least. His left foot slides slowly back and then twists to the side. He is getting ready to make his final move. It will probably mean the difference between escape and death.

Before Tayshaun can try his last ditch effort, a voice from down the alley shouts out, "Well what do you know? Some dumb kid did the hard part for us. And here we thought it was going to be hard to get him alone."

It is only now that Tayshaun realizes that two other men have entered this back alley. There is one on each side, blocking any possible retreat. For the next few moments, he is lost on what is going on. The man that had been pursuing him though knows instantly. The two crescent moon necklaces they wear made of jade says it all, they are

members of the Jade Moon Thieves Guild. Their members should not be underestimated in combat and there are two of them. This is about to get ugly, very ugly.

The Jade Moon member standing in front of the man charges first, the one from behind charges only an instant later. Their plan is simple. By the member in front charging first, they intend to have the sole man standing in the middle stay focused on him while the one from behind gets an easy mark. So far the man is yet to draw a weapon; this might be easier than even they originally thought. However, their target is no push over.

This man is patient and waits for just the right moment. When it comes, he moves in a flash. The Jade Moon member in front is armed only with a knife, but the man coming from behind is armed with a war club. That one is the real danger. If he can get a clean hit from behind, it would probably be a knockout attack, or at least enough to daze the opponent. The lone thief knows this and responds accordingly.

With a spin to face the Jade Moon member coming from behind, a blade slides out of the man's sleeve. It was hidden there until now, concealed within a gauntlet. The blade makes contact with the war club and cuts half way through it before stopping. Meanwhile, the knife from the other member makes contact with the leather armor under the man's long coat.

As Tayshaun watches, he realizes what the item he stole from the man is. Its shape and size, no doubt it was a second concealed blade until it was stolen. This means that due to him, this man is at a handicap compared to normal and it is his fault. His spirit is torn in decision. Thoughts race through his head, "This is your chance to escape, just run. He was probably going to kill you anyways. It's best this way." He grimaces and closes his eyes as he tries to think. Tears start to stream from his eyes. In a build up of frustration and guilt he shouts out as loud as he can, "Damn it!"

Without further thought, he rushes into the battle. Thinking is a luxury he can't afford at the moment. The lone thief ducks under a swing of the war club and parries the knife of the other with his blade. As the club misses, it hits the wall hard and breaks at the point where the blade cut into it earlier. Tayshaun weaves in the middle of their fighting and then tosses up the second blade still hidden within its metal casing. He can't reconnect it himself; it is a miracle he even managed to get it off without the man noticing in the first place.

Before the lone thief can even catch it, Tayshaun grabs onto the arms of the one holding the club. He can't do much in a fight; he has no weapons and no training. But at least he can help to stall for a little time. To say the least, he owes the man that much for his interference in all of this. It takes only an instant for the man to reconnect the second blade and enter it into the battle. Now with two blades, he makes quick work of the one with the knife. All of it takes only seconds.

However, to Tayshaun, those seconds are too long. The young boy is not able to compete with the strength of the full grown man. He is flung off and slams hard into the wall. It seems to be a reoccurring pattern in his life. As he makes contact with the wall, he is stunned for a moment. The member of the Jade Moon uses the remainder of the club to stab him in the chest. Though it was broken, the shattered edge is jagged and sharp. This makes it still a formidable weapon that tears through the flesh of the nine year old.

He coughs up blood. The broken club stabs in near the heart. It takes less than a second for his whole body to lose all feeling. Everything starts to go black for him as he

falls limp to the floor. Before he loses consciousness there is one final thought that races through his mind, "Well, die on your own terms, that's what I said. I did the right thing." As the life drains from his body, there is a smile on his face.

After a few blinks the eyes of Tayshaun finally open, the first time in days. At first everything is out of focus, but his eyes quickly adjust. Before he can even move, he feels a horrible pain in his chest. Instinctively he clutches the spot. It feels strange to the touch and there's something more, the feeling of cold pieces of metal. His eyes shift around the room frantically trying to figure out where he is, and if he is even still alive.

He hears a voice from elsewhere in the room, "Hurts, doesn't it? Well, that's what you get for allowing yourself to be stabbed in the chest."

It takes a moment or two for Tayshaun to place it, but then it finally comes to him. The voice is from the man he stole the hidden blade from. Well at least that means he is still alive, or maybe he died too. Nah, it hurts too much for him to be dead. He tries to sit up to look at the man, but the pain keeps him flat on his back. Whatever he is resting on is soft though, probably a bed or couch. That means he at least isn't still dying in some dark alley.

A man walks up to him and looks down. This man isn't the same man from the fair; the giant scar down this man's face makes that obvious even if he can't remember the other man's face right now. Oddly, while most would hide the scar and be ashamed of it, this man almost seems proud of it. There are a few strands of hair blocking it, but these strands look more out of place than actually trying to conceal it. The scarred man spoke, "So he's the one? It's so hard to imagine one so young."

Tayshaun tries to speak, "W--w--who are--" His voice is weak though and it hurts to even try to speak.

Before he can try to finish his question the man from the other night speaks, "You're still weak, it's best to try and not speak. Just be thankful to still be alive."

The scarred man looks at this one, "Very well, I'll leave you be with the boy then." He then walks out of sight.

The thief with the hidden blades then continues to speak to Tayshaun. "Well, imagine my surprise that the same boy who stole from me returned to try and save my life. I couldn't very well let your sacrifice go without reward. I in turn took you to a healer to treat your injuries. Your actions still forced you to pay a price though."

He holds up a mirror so that the boy could see his reflection. Over almost the entire upper left side of his chest, there is a darker color skin. Surrounding the discolored section are several stripes of metal connecting it to the rest of his skin. Tayshaun turns his head away from the mirror. Unlike the man earlier, he is not able to take such pride in a horribly disfiguring wound.

"Don't look away," says the man angrily. "Every mark on our bodies is a testament to the actions we have done. Your actions the other night are nothing to be ashamed of. In that alleyway, you proved you have a heart of iron. That is a rare trait in these times. That is why, I am willing to take offer you a place into the Crow Thieves Guild ... as my personal bodyguard. But you'll be more than that; you'll be my apprentice as well."

Tayshaun looks up at him and smiles. Since running away, he's lived by his rules and done as he pleased. However when he almost died, he realized there was something missing. With this new awakening feeling and this man's offer, he is confident it must be a sign of some kind. He may not know many things, but he knows enough that a sign isn't something to simply be ignored.

The man saw Tayshaun smile and responds, "I take it that means you accept. Now wipe that smile off your face. You did a good job kid, but let's not forget I wouldn't have been in that situation if it wasn't for you in the first place." The expression on the face of Tayshaun quickly changes to a more serious look. Once the smile is gone, the man continues, "I'm Alkon, but I believe in time you'll come to refer to me more and more like the other guild members, Silvermane. What's your name?"

As Tayshaun stares at this man, he can understand the name. His beard looks a bit like a lion's mane. The name silver probably refers to the fact that his light grey color of his hair. He responds, "My name is Tayshaun."

Silvermane replies, "Tayshaun? That is a weak name, the name of a child. How about from now on I call you ... Zekar? That is the name of a thief now." The kid smiled. Zekar, he likes the name. He never had any attachment to the name Tayshaun; it is the name his father gave him after all.

Weeks later, after he is fully healed Zekar visits the Crow Bar for the first time. It is the main headquarters of the Crow Thieves Guild. Anyone can be allowed it, but it is most common for only members and those seeking their services. Most others chose to steer clear of this place. Despite its reputation, there is little danger for customers unless they start trouble or are connected to the Jade Moon Thieves Guild.

It has been a full day and it is now late. The guild is sitting down for dinner. As the food is set on the table, hands hurry and grab it up. By the time Zekar can move to grab some, there is nothing left. All of it is already snatched up and on someone's plate. He looks at the empty table with hungry eyes. His gaze soon wanders over to the plate next to him. On this thief's plate is a hefty sized mound. This one clearly managed to grab more than his fair share. The eyes of Zekar continue to stare greedily. Without looking, the thief says, "Shift those eyes elsewhere boy. Here we earn what we everything, even our food. Don't think just because you're with Silvermane you are exempt."

Silvermane smiles and then replies, "He is right you know. Exercises like this help to sharpen the reflexes. But, as you are my guest today ..." He breaks off a large piece of bread from the loaf on his plate and throws it onto the empty dish of Zekar.

Zekar smiles smugly. It's smile of some punk kid that is too conceited for his own good. He throws the piece back to Silvermane, "Don't worry. If that's how it is done here, then I will earn what I eat tomorrow."

Silvermane gives the boy an odd look as he wonders if the boy knows what he is getting himself into. Regardless of his reservations, he respects the wishes of his new apprentice. He places the piece of bread back on his plate and continues to eat. This next day would be interesting to see if his apprentice could follow through with his boast.

The next day, Silvermane and the others enter into the main room of the Crow Bar and sit down for dinner. There is one missing though. The new apprentice of Silvermane, Zekar, is missing. With a chuckle the bald headed thief from the day before comments, "Well, looks like the runt didn't show. Must've realized talk doesn't do much good, eh?"

Silvermane remains quiet, not even bothering to respond to the comment. Instead, a response comes from over the bar. "We will see," says the man standing behind it. None of them noticed him earlier and no one noticed him enter, but such stealth and quick moves are to be expected from the lead of the Crow Thieves Guild. There is an automatic silence among the others in respect of his presence. It is a rare treat to be blessed with him at the dinner table. This man is the same scarred individual that Zekar saw the night he awoke from his injuries.

As the scarred man walks towards the table, Silvermane is the first to speak, "So what brings you here, Scar?"

Scar responds, "I heard a rumor about the boy, I wanted to check it out for myself. I allowed him into the guild per your request, but I wish to see if he truly deserved it. His actions proved he has the heart, but his skills have yet to be proven."

Once Scar is seated, the food arrives at the table. Everyone at the table responds as normal, giving their leader no special treatment. Of course, if he needed special treatment he wouldn't be the leader of the guild. His skill allows him to fill his plate quickly, but stops before being greedy though. As usual, the serving plates are emptied leaving only the food on the plates of the members.

The bald thief looks around at the table, "Still no kid. Guess he missed out again." There is a smile on his face as if he is taking pleasure in the fact. Scar smiles after the man makes his comment, but does not respond. Usual talk continues around the table, but the topic of the missing kid does not come up again. It would simply seem he did not have what it takes to be a member of the Crow Thieves Guild. There is no shame in the fact, few have the talent.

Everyone at the table is just about finished eating finally. The bald thief finally finishes his plate and stretches out. "Ow," can be heard coming from under the table. He quickly looks under and sees Zekar sitting on the floor next to his feet. Unbeknown to him, when he stretched out he kicked Zekar in the head.

Quickly, the bald thief grabs the kid by an arm and pulls him out. "What are you doing under there brat?"

Zekar smiles gleefully, but doesn't answer. Scar laughs out loud and then answers for the lad, "Don't you realize? He's been stealing food off your plate the whole meal."

The bald thief shouts, "What?! Why you little --"

Scar is quick to intervene, "Easy Wild! Don't be angry just because the kid outfoxed you. He said he'd earn his meal, and he did. His moves are sloppy, but he shows potential with proper training. He knows his strengths and uses them. He's a kid and you underestimated him, simple as that. If you hadn't, you would have noticed yourself."

The bald thief known as Wild looks hard at Zekar. Then he gently lowers the kid, still eyeing him with a stern look. Zekar keeps his focus on the giant man to make sure he

doesn't try and hit him. His stealing from the man's plate no doubt angered him and angry men often resort to violence. Though he realizes he probably won't be able to do much if it came down to a fight, he at the very least would try to make it hard on him.

Then, Wild lets out a laugh and slaps Zekar hard on the shoulder. Zekar stumbles to the side from the hit unable to hold his balance. However, the hit wasn't meant to hurt him, but as a friendly pat. While laughing Wild says, "Not backing down, I think I'll like you. You've got a lot of heart kid."

Scar adds, "A 'heart of iron' I believe I once heard it described. So that will be your name here from now on, Zekar the Ironheart."

Zekar questions, "The Ironheart?"

Silvermane answers, "Every thief in the guild has a name given to him by our leader, like I am Alkon the Silvermane. It is a great honor; it means you've been truly accepted as one of us now." Zekar smiles, he is happy with the thought that he has proven himself now.

Wild then says, "Yes, it fits him. However, he'll still need an inner name."

Zekar listens to the conversation, but looks confused as to what is meant by an 'inner name.' As his mentor, Silvermane is the one to clarify his confusion, "We all have our public names, as has already been explained. But then we each have an inner name as well. This inner name is private and only known to the others here, not even the other branches of the guild know them. This is for purposes of communication."

Silvermane could tell that Zekar the Ironheart still did not fully understand. The kid is still young and most likely has yet to deal much with secret codes and worrying about keeping names anonymous in terms of the local law. He elaborated by saying, "As we use these names such as Silvermane and Ironheart on the outside of these walls, there are many who can identify the person with the name and deeds. This would make this name unwise to use when we wish to keep something secret. By having an inner name, we can pass messages and other deeds without fear of being discovered. None outside these walls know my inner name, Raven."

Scar picks up by stating, "My inner name is Feathered Death. So if I wanted to contact Silvermane, but not let others know who I was contacting, I'd refer to him as Raven. This way, only other members know who it is. All of the inner names are winged creatures. It is the way we know it is a member of our guild. By keeping the name only within our branch, we reduce the risk of a leak. Do you understand better now?"

Zekar nods. Finally Silvermane comes up with a name he finds suitable, "Drakin; that will be your inner name. It is said a Drakin is a bird of fortune, and you my friend have already brought me luck. To escape an assassination attempt at the hands of the Jade Moon is a fortunate event indeed. Few can say such a thing, even of my skill."

Scar replies, "Very well then, it is decided. Zekar the Ironheart is the Drakin of the Crow Thieves Guild."

Zekar and Silvermane walk into a building together. The nineteen year old Ironheart examines the surroundings. It's just an old wooden building with its most notable feature being the long chain attached to the floor at one end and shackles at the other. Finally the young apprentice asks, "So Silvermane, what is this place anyways?"

Silvermane responds, "This is a training ground ... of sorts."

Zekar replies, "Oh yeah? So what will we be --" Before he can finish his question Silvermane locks the shackles around the wrists of Zekar. Silvermane then pulls out a rope and starts to tie up his student. With a bit of a chuckle Zekar says, "I thought we already practiced my escaping skills. Granted I could still do better, but I don't see why we couldn't just do this back at the Crow Bar like last time." As he finishes tying up Zekar, Silvermane states aloud, "Remove the covering."

Then Zekar notices Wild. Until now he had remained hidden, but revealed his presence to remove part of the wood flooring right behind Zekar. The floor piece is rather large and looks as if it is fairly heavy. It is more than likely rigged to be easily moved. Then, of course, there is the fact that Wild is as strong as an ox and good at moving large things by himself. Underneath the floor is a large pool.

Zekar looks at it with a weak smile. When he looks up from it he stares at Wild, "Hey buddy, what are doing? You know how I feel about water." His words are said in a playful manor to try and help conceal his uneasiness at the situation. Without pausing from talking he turns to Silvermane and continues, "I mean I can't even swi--" Before he can finish it, the word turns into a scream.

The reason for the scream is because Silvermane just pushed him into the pool. That scream is short-lived though as his head is soon submerged. As he sinks lower in the pool he begins to struggle frantically to get free. What he was trying to say earlier is he can't swim, a fact that has always made him a bit uneasy around bodies of water. With lot of effort he finally frees himself of the rope. However, the shackles are proving more difficult. His actions become more desperate and he just starts trying to pull free from them. It is a futile effort. The shackles are secured tightly around his wrists.

He is near a wall of the pool. To gain more leverage he places his feet on the wall and pushes away trying to pull the shackles free. Still he has no luck. This, of course, would have done him little good anyways as he would still be stuck under the water. Bubbles float to the surface as he lets out a scream of frustration. Water starts to flow into his lungs.

Then he suddenly rises to the surface, much to his surprise. Wild had used the chain to pull him out. Zekar coughs up water as he rests his head on the now wet floor. Silvermane looks down at him and asks, "Have you learned anything from this?"

"Just that you're sadist," quips Zekar.

Alkon the Silvermane laughs, "No Ironheart. The lesson is that you have to try and not let your fears get the best of you. Had you not let your fear of the water and drowning cloud your judgment, you could have escaped from those shackles, or used the chain to pull yourself up. You panicked, and therefore you would've died. Never let fear cloud your judgment."

Zekar sighs as he thinks, "This is so embarrassing."

A twenty-three year old Zekar creeps out of an alleyway. Tonight, the shadows are proving to be a dear friend. This night had started off with a glimmer of hope, but now is one of survival. After the past year being one of the bloodiest in the rivalry between the Crow Thieves Guild and the Jade Moon Thieves Guild, both sides agreed to

talks in order to form a truce. When the Jade Moon first showed up in Crow territory so many years ago, they weren't even viewed as a threat. However, the Jade Moon is no ordinary guild.

Somehow they thrived in Crow territory. No matter how hard the Crow Thieves Guild pushed, the Jade Moon always was able to push back just as hard. Despite suffering heavy losses, they always seemed to have more members to fill the void. It was, is, an impressive feat. Then the Jade Moon managed to monopolize a few of the neighboring cities and drive out all Crow influence from it a couple of months ago and things only got worse.

Finally there were talks of a truce. The Crow Thieves Guild showed in good faith. At first it appeared the Jade Moon had done so as well, but things got ugly fast. When it happened, Silvermane was the first to respond. Even though Zekar is technically his protector, it is clear after this night which is truly the protector. Silvermane watched out for Zekar as a father would a son. This is not to say Zekar did not do his part to aid his comrade during the chaos, but in the face of such insanity only one had the experience to deal with it cool headed.

Before it was all over though, all the member of the Crow Thieves Guild split up. Not having another to watch their back is risky but under the circumstances it is a necessary risk. The key to their survival is first to divide the enemy forces which clearly had the advantage earlier. Next, they are to meet up and predetermined locations. That is where Zekar is headed now. His rendezvous point with Silvermane is in an empty room at an inn nearby. From there, the two will move to the next point to meet up with others.

He waits for the right moment; then he darts across the street and into more shadows. As he waits for the next moment to move unseen, his thoughts turn to Wild. The last time he saw Wild, the man had a nasty head wound and was being flanked by the enemy. There were two other members helping him fight, but the situation looked grim. He quickly moved to help, but Silvermane wouldn't allow it. Though it went against his instincts, he knew the decision of Silvermane was the right one.

In the Crow Thieves Guild, concepts such as honor and loyalty are stressed. Their decision to flee wasn't out of lack of loyalty though, it was about strategy. The more members focused in one spot the more the enemy could focus on one area, and make sure to cut off any route of retreat. Continuing to fight there on that night meant certain defeat. Besides Silvermane and the Ironheart were going to have their hands full just trying to escape as it was.

Every good thief knows when it is time to cut his loses and run; and Wild is a great thief. If the chance arose, Wild would have fled. Zekar just needs to have faith in him at this point. However, it is hard at the moment. Even escaping when they did, neither he nor Silvermane escaped without injury before they were split up. Even though technically he didn't know if Silvermane had truly escaped once they were separated, in his heart Zekar could never see anyone being able to hurt him too badly to need to worry.

Finally he arrives at the inn. With stealth befitting a thief, he enters in through the room window. Silvermane is already there and waiting, a brief smile shows on his face. However, his relief at the fact that his apprentice is safe lasts only seconds, he is too concerned about the others to let it longer than that brief moment. He walks over to Zekar and places his hand on the young man's shoulder. Then, while showing little emotion on the subject, he says, "I'm glad you're okay, but we need to get moving. Are you ready?"

"Yeah, let's go," he responds. For the first time in hours, the body of Zekar begins to relax. First there was the fight and then came sneaking around in shadows hoping not to be caught by the enemies. Even though they are getting ready to leave being near his mentor, a man he considers more a father than his flesh and blood, puts him at ease. Up until now, his body has been running on almost pure adrenaline.

As he starts to relax, he stumbles. His vision blurs and he covers his mouth with his hand as he coughs. At first it seems that it is only fatigue setting in. However, it is soon discovered it is something far worse in nature. When he pulls his hand away from his mouth after coughing, they discover his hand is covered in blood. There is a trail dripping from his mouth.

Without the adrenaline to sustain him any longer, his entire body starts to feel as if it is ripping apart from the inside. As he falls to the floor, he screams out in agony. Specs of blood fly out of his mouth. The pain is so great that he can't even hear Silvermane calling out the name Ironheart.

Zekar the Ironheart lies on a table unconscious. He is still recovering from the effects of the alchemic healing he received just a day ago. Thanks to the quick actions of Silvermane, an alchemist on good terms with the Crow Thieves Guild managed to temporarily stave off the illness infecting his body. The alchemist managed to save his life for the time being, it has taken a toll on his body and he is still far from healthy.

On friendly terms or not, the alchemist required a heavy price for the complicated healing process. It is a price the guild willing paid. However, anyone who knows an alchemist knows that price does not always mean gold. This price required the guild to 'obtain' several items for the alchemist. In exchange though, not only did he perform the treatment he also provided them with a bottle full of several alchemic pills.

The pills are very small, forest green spheres that give the appearance of some type of liquid turned solid. These tiny pills are the difference between life and death for Zekar though. Though the healing process temporarily stops the illness, he will need to take the pills once a week for the rest of his life in order to keep it at bay. However, the alchemist has given them a glimmer of hope in a clue of a possible cure.

According to his account, there is a rare vase that is rumored to contain the life force of a slain angel. Marked around this vase are old writings which can give a clue to how to obtain a cure. The major issue is the vase is currently in the possession of a noble in the Western Empire. If they bring the vase back to him, he has even agreed to help translate it for them.

Scar and Silvermane sit and discuss the situation. The leader of the guild is the first to speak, "That is far out of our domain. I want to help him too, but we can't afford to send any men that far out of the Territories right now. This situation with the Jade Moon takes top priority right now. Last night's events demand a response."

Silvermane responds, "Agreed. But something about last night doesn't feel right to me. The Jade Moon has never tried anything to that degree before. Maybe they're becoming bolder, but I suspect there is something more to it than that. Before we worry about seeking retribution, I think we should worry about seeing what was truly behind their attack."

"I'll confess I haven't had the same dealings with them as you," replies Scar. "But they've been attacking our guild in all our cities. This act hardly seems out of the ordinary for their tactics. What makes you think this is so out of place?"

"Yes, they've been attacking us, but you've placed me in charge of studying their tactics, and this doesn't fit. They've always moved slowly, learning secret lairs, key figures in the particular chapter, and then taking them out one by one. Until last night, they've appeared more than willing to wait and bide their time taking as long as needed to accomplish their mission of wiping us out. So why the sudden change? But there is something more than that." Silvermane pauses for a moment as he thinks about his next point. "Ironheart, his sudden illness, I have to believe is more than just coincidence."

Scar answers, "He was injured in the fight. Most likely he caught a poisoned blade."

"Perhaps, but I doubt it is as simple as that," states Silvermane. "Most of us were injured in the skirmish, but he is the only one affected. Perhaps he has had it for some time now and last night's excitement has just caused it to act up, but my instincts tell me it is more than that. It's as if I can see the pieces of the puzzle are being laid out in front of me, but I can't figure out how the pieces fit together yet."

Scar stands up and takes a few steps away. He looks at the unconscious Zekar, a fellow thief, a member of his guild, and a person that he even considers a friend. He sighs. Then he says, "Very well Silvermane, I was the one who asked you to be in charge of dealing with the Jade Moon in the first place, I won't second guess your judgment now. We'll proceed as you see fit. As for the boy ... I'm sorry. Things are still too dangerous here to go sending members off the Empire of Sin."

Silvermane starts to speak, "But --"

Before the first word is out of his mouth, Scar cuts off Silvermane. "Listen, we've already pushed the bounds to do everything we have. So many heists in one day are bound to give us problems with the authorities. However, it was worth it. He's still alive for now and can live for sometime longer with those pills. His situation isn't immediate, ours is. But, when he awakens, I'll give him the option to go and find this vase himself. He won't have the active support of our guild, but we will still be with him in spirit."

Scar then turns to Silvermane and continues, "This will give him a chance to earn a cure for himself. Nothing truly worth it in life is ever just handed to us. And when he finally returns, we will be here to take him back." In the back of his mind, he is just hoping that they will still be around to welcome him back. However, unless something changes soon with the Jade Moon, there may not be anything left when Zekar the Ironheart returns.

Zekar walks down a well lit street with his hands in his jacket pockets. He pauses and looks at a huge house surrounded by a wall. There is a smile on his face as he continues passed it now. A few hours later when night falls, he returns near the west wall away from the main gate. After taking one of his alchemic pills, he jumps up and pushes off the wall with his legs for a bit of extra height. Once at the top of his leap he grabs onto the edge of the wall. Then he pulls himself up and over, disappearing into the shadows.

It's been months since he left the Eastern Territories. After a long trip though, he finally made it to the Western Empire. Now though, he is ready to steal the vase and try to find his cure. Like any good thief, he's spent the last few days surveying and purchasing information on his target. It is well protected, but with a little luck he should be able to pull it off. Thanks to the training with the Crow Thieves Guild, he should have enough skill to succeed in this heist.

He is already moving across a line hanging over the room with the vase. The floor is filled with thin wires that will set off alarms if one is tripped. Then with grace and style he drops from the line and lands on the floor, avoiding all the wires. This vase contains a beauty that captures his attention for a moment. Staring at its craftsmanship can wait though; right now he has a job to do.

Before anything else, he studies the vase. He takes careful note of all the markings and symbols on it. Those, more than any other part of it, hold relevance for him. The alchemist said it was markings that held the key, and he holds little interest in stealing when it isn't necessary. However, the agreement is to return the vase to the alchemist for his help.

Before he can decide whether or not to take it though, alarms bells start to sound. What set them off he isn't sure, but it doesn't matter. Within seconds, a guard enters the room armed with a glaive. Every good thief knows when to cut his loses and escape, Zekar is no exception. He grabs the vase, but he isn't stealing it. Instead, he flings it at the guard. For the guard, instinct takes over as he drops the glaive and catches the object thrown at him.

Zekar seizes the opportunity to push the now unarmed guard to the side as he runs into the hall. Straight ahead is a giant window. That's his escape point. He's on the fourth floor of this house, but that shouldn't be a problem. As he leaps through the window, shards of glass go flying everywhere. With precise timing, he plants the hook of his grapple into the wall and starts to fall. His hands slide along the rope as he falls. If it wasn't for the leather gloves he is wearing, it would burn worse than the fires of Hades.

Not good, below is another guard. He lets go of the rope and free falls the last floor to land faster, catching the guard slightly unprepared. The guard tries to stab him with the long spear in his hands. However, Zekar ducks quickly and extends his staff into the man's diaphragm knocking the wind out of him. When he returns home, he'll have to thank Wild for the staff. Before he left, Wild insisted he take it his favorite weapon as a gift. It seems it has come in handy.

As he makes a break for the nearest wall, he retracts his staff and slides it back into one of his pockets. Damn! Another guard shows up. They're trained to respond quickly. For the person who hired them that's a good thing, but for a thief it's a curse. The guard swipes quickly with the antler sword in his hands. This attack is a swinging waist attack, hard to avoid by simply dodging out of the way given his current situation. It'll be quicker to just knock the attack away.

From under his coat sleeves slides out a metal blade the parries the sword. Concealed in metal braces on his arms are hidden daggers reminiscent of the one he once stole from Silvermane. With the sword successfully deflected, Zekar follows through with a punch. His skills as a bodyguard are coming in handy, but his instincts say to just kill the man. However, he knows better. If he starts killing guards, a simple crime of attempted theft will be turned into murder. That would be a foolish mistake.

The punch only throws the guard off balance for a moment, but that is all Zekar is looking for, a chance to flee. Then he suddenly comes to a stop. Two more guards, then there's the one right behind him, definitely not good. This noble appears to have lots of money to spend on guards and escaping without fighting is looking unlikely. If he fights, it will only give them time to send more guards. It'll most likely end badly for him if he tries.

Zekar sighs. He stops running and raises his hands in the air. Surrender is the best option for the moment. The thought of being shackled and jailed doesn't thrill him, but the thought of killing needlessly or being killed himself doesn't thrill him anymore. As the guards take him into custody, they keep a close eye on him. He has proven a dangerous foe and underestimating could prove their downfall if he tries something when they get close. With that, the Ironheart of the Crow Thieves Guild fell into the custody of the Western Empire authorities.