Baelstaar Mahil was worried as he strode along the crowded street. Many of those who saw him coming often mistook his worry for anger, got out of the Half Elf's way. The combination of the look on his face, coupled with the way he walked, balanced lightly on the balls of his feet, eyes always on the move, made most people decide they had urgent business wherever this angry, dangerous looking warrior was not. The Half Elf had reason to worry, Magni was overdue. They were meant to meet at the Fireside Tavern days ago. Loud, boisterous, and brave to the point of foolishness the dwarf may be, but he wasn't forgetful, or discourteous. Bael knew he'd gone on an escort trip into the desert with a few companions, but that was almost a week ago now. Something had gone terribly wrong. On top of Magni's uncharacteristic absence, and the rumors of a group of Adventurer Killers working the desert road Bael just didn't feel good about it.

His training as a warrior monk was usually sufficient for him to mask his worry behind a calm, outward appearance, but this was a different matter. The Monk headed to the Fireside Tavern to look for his friend again, and get information. The half-elf needed answers, and the Tavern was a good place to start. A short way before getting to the tavern, he got shoulder checked by a broad chested Thorimundman. Bael caught his balance quickly, but had he been a trifle slower he would have ended up sitting on the cobbles as opposed to standing on them. Bael tried stepping left around the man, but the man stepped left as well. Bael stepped right, and the man stepped right as well. Other citizens had noticed what was happening and tried to give the two a wide berth even though the street was crowded. Soon enough there was a good space around them, and the dance continued. Bale would step one way, and the man would follow.

"What are you, pointy ear? No shoes, no armor, just a little pig sticker. I know your type elf, you're one of those that calls himself a monk. Best fighters in the world they say. Think your better than me? I think you're nothing, but a pointy eared little ponce who dances pretty. Dance for me elf boy. If you do it pretty enough maybe I won't take your little pointy stick away, and ram it so far up your back door you taste iron." The man chuckled at his own joke.

Baelstaar looked closely at the man while standing in a relaxed, but ready position. The brute wore a mace at his belt, but the sunken knuckles and oft broken nose pointed to someone more used to his fists then a weapon. The man outweighed Bael by at least a hundred pounds had greater reach, and looked like he could bend horseshoes with this bare hands. Bael wasn't particular worried about this bruiser, but would rather avoid a fight than have one.

"Your pardon, friend," the half elf said. "I was distracted with worry, I should have paid closer attention to where I was walking. Now, if you'll excuse me? I really must be on my way." Bael turned to move around the man again.

A hand shot out from the man, and grasped the monk roughly by the shoulder."I said dance, elf boy. You're not going anywhere until I let you."

Bael smiled slightly. The man had just made a big mistake, he looked at Bael, and knew it. Fast as a sparrow in flight Baelstaar grabbed the man's wrist, twisted it, and flipped him head over heels to the hard cobbles below. Before the fool had even landed, Bael was already in motion delivering a kick to where the man's head would be when the kick landed. A kick with a precisely calculated amount of force. As Bael's unclad foot connected with the brute's temple his eyes rolled back in his head, and he lay still.

Bael turned to the watching crowd. “He’ll wake with a terrible headache in about an hour. If the guards wish to speak with me, I can be found at the fireside tavern.”

Minutes later Baelstaar stepped into the common room, and briefly allowed himself to become lost in the aura of his home away from home. Delicious cooking smells permeated the warm air, a low buzz of conversation and music filled his ears without being overpowering, and the fire crackled pleasantly, keeping the room at just the right temperature. Bael looked around, nodding to a few of his battle brothers, and waving mildly to others. He walked to the bar and signaled, the bartender.

“Bael.”

Baelstaar nodded, “Ander.”

“What can I get for you?”

“Just information. Any word on Magni?”

“Sorry Bael, nothing good, and I’ve been keeping an ear to the ground for word. That dwarfs tab keeps this place in business,” the barkeep replied with a wink and a slight smile.

Baelstaar cut to the chase, ignoring the innkeepers attempt at levity. “I’m afraid he’s in trouble. We were meant to meet Two days ago, I’ve never known him to be late. He headed off through the desert last week on that escort job. I’m worried they ran afoul of that group of killers working out that way.”

“If he did, he would have fought. Magni doesn’t know the meaning of the word quit,” said Hal, becoming more serious.”What are you planning?”

“If he’s in some kind of trouble I’ll pull him out of it. I owe him my life, and more importantly he’s a friend. I need recon before I fully commit though. I can’t repeat the mistakes we made with Teguth and Rotear. I know pretty well where the killers are working, and can slip in there quietly. Then I’ll know what I’m up against..‘

“How can I help?”

“It is unlikely I can handle whomever has Magni alone. I will need allies. Could you make inquiries while I’m getting the lay of the land? I know that both Krugg, and Oskar would be interested, they are both quite capable. Possibly the two Gnomes who arrived yesterday as well, Zenrick and Dikembe I think they’re called. I heard it said they were looking for work. Neriff as well, we made need his skills if we need to negotiate, could you do that? Both Magni and I would appreciate it.”

“Sure, shouldn’t be hard to get word to those Five. One thing though, I haven’t heard that those killers in the desert take prisoners. They just kill anyone they come across, and loot the corpses. What makes you think Magni’s even alive if they crossed his path.”

“Magni is hard to kill. You heard what he did to Teguth and Rotear in the end, right? If it's in any way possible to survive them, it's Magni. Besides, what choice is there. If they killed him I will avenge his death, if he is alive I will bring him out.” Baelstaar turned to go.

“True enough. Hey, make sure you bring enough food & water, the desert’s no place to run out of rations. You’ll die slow and painful that way.”

The Monk, waved over his shoulder as he walked away,”I will. My thanks for the help.”

Baelstaar walked quickly through the crowded street of Kaastark, flowing around those that got in his way. Te half-elf still walked with a purpose, but though he was still worried he didn’t let it show. One stop in the Bazaar for supplies, and he’d go. All he needed was food,

water, his spear, his sling, and the clothes on his back. The battle shirt might come in handy if he ran across any trouble he couldn't avoid, but the idea was to be there and back without the killers being the wiser. It was high risk, but any advantage he could give his group, and Magni could go a long way toward surviving where others had failed.

The Bazaar was a riot of sound, color, smell, and people. Baelstaar quickly found the merchant he was looking for. The man didn't carry anything exotic, but Baelstaars needs were simple anyway.

"Good day," the Half Elf said as he walked into the stall.

"Good day, my fine sir," the merchant replied. Using the invisible weights and measures every merchant had innately to decerne if a potential customer had silver to spend. The man nodded slightly to himself, seemingly satisfied with what he saw."How can this one serve?"

"I need trail food. Light, but nutritious. About Fifty days worth, and a dozen or so waterskins. Can I get that all from you, or do I need to look elsewhere?"

"Oh, I expect I can, sir. Won't be cheap though. Fifty Silver for the lot."

Baelstaar knew the price was higher than he could get elsewhere, but he had neither the time nor the inclination for dickering just now."That will do." He dropped his coins on the counter, and waited while the merchant got the supplies gathered.

When it was all piled on the counter in front of him, he stowed everything on his person, and left. He stopped at one of the cool, clear fountains in the Bazaar to fill his waterkins, and started off at a brisk trot. He could maintain a fast paced jog for days. His training at the monastery had involved a lot of conditioning. Horses were fine, but he had been taught that to keep another soul, even that of an animal in subjugation was wrong.

Baelstaar jogged East into the Desert towards where he thought the killers camp might be. It was largely a guess, but the attacks he'd heard about all seemed to happen in a few areas not far from a watering hole that would be a good place for a camp. After several, long, dry, dusty days he started to get close. The desert had seemed to stretch out to infinity in every direction. It seems like nothing but leagues, and leagues of fiery sand during the day, and icey sand when the sun went down. There was very little water to be had, Bael occasionally found wells dug by others, once a lush oasis, but by and large there was nothing but sand. Just as he was about to crest a rise, Baelstaar heard a noise. Loud conversation from several voices, he dropped onto his belly and slithered to the top, just slowly popping the top of his head and eyes above the ridgeline for a look. What he saw made sweat bead on his forehead despite the dry arid heat.

There were Four of them. All massive, and no two alike. Baelstaar had sinking feeling in his stomach as he looked down on the camp. He saw an injured, but still massive salamander, a gnoll with no armor carrying a greatbow, a Lucerin Hammer wielding Bugbear in medium armor, and a heavily armored Hobgoblin with a type of hammer he didn't recognize. Any one of those would be a challenge, but all four together was as close to a suicide mission as he was likely to find, no matter who was with him. It didn't matter though, smack in the center of camp Baelstaar saw the familiar figure of Magni, badly beaten, but still clearly alive.

The Half-Elf started back to Kaastark even faster than when he came. There were plans to make, allies to gather, and friends to save. He only hoped he could do as well for Magni as Magni had done for him.