Shadewalker

By Evan Rhoades

Chapter 1 Lord Dusk was no man to be trifled with, especially when business matters were concerned. He paced along the balcony overlooking his city, dark cloak flapping in the wind. His tower rose above the vast

array of buildings within Cinder's giant walls, the city which he had ruled since his father, Lord Rune, had passed. Sweeping his gaze along her walls, Dusk surveyed his city. If he spared a thought for the

slaves working in the fields and orchards amid the summer heat, he did not show it. To most of the city, they were like ants burning in the sun-some delighted in positioning the magnifying glass. "Power necessitates bloodshed," Dusk muttered aloud to himself. Lord Dusk's erudite bookkeeper, Penquil, stood behind him, his long robe nearly reaching the ground. The studious man had requested a meeting with his lord, and Dusk had finally summoned him. That was ten minutes ago. But Penquil knew better than to interrupt. One did not last long in Dusk's service without learning to speak only when spoken to. Minutes passed before Dusk stirred, not turning from his royal balcony, but speaking with calm authority.

"What is it, Penquil?"

Penquil took a step forward onto the balcony, careful to keep himself two paces behind Lord Dusk. His bookkeeping had been strange of late; his records failed to account for a significant sum of monthly profit. Penquil knew Lord Dusk's precise expectations for all reports and projections. Something was amiss

"My lord," Penquil began. "There have been some irregularities in our books recently. The records sharp decline, though I assure you it will be dealt with accordingly."

show that we are amassing only 95 percent of our anticipated income over the past two weeks, and according to my investigation, the numbers prove true. I'm not certain what could be causing such a Dusk did not stir. Penguil paused a beat and took a deep breath before continuing. "If I may, my lord, perhaps you know something about these irregularities that I do not?" Dusk tilted his head ever so slightly. "It is none of your concern, Penquil. Continue your work and pay

the missing portion no heed." Lord Dusk's tone brooked no challenge. Penquil looked up, surprised. In his short time serving as the city's bookkeeper, Dusk had always treated Penquil's projections and records as gospel, expecting them to be accurate within a very narrow margin. Surely this was a matter that concerned the lord's bookkeeper if no one else. "But, my lord, I-"

"On second thought, it's fitting that you should ask," Lord Dusk interrupted. "The man who last occupied your position asked a similar question before his 'research' brought him to some rather... unfortunate

conclusions."

Dusk paused for a brief moment, turning his head further in Penquil's direction.

"Do not make the same mistakes as your predecessor."

Penquil grew very still, his eyes widening, the blood draining from his face. He sputtered momentarily, looking for some sort of explanation to excuse his overreach. Lord Dusk was not known for mercy.

Thankfully, Dusk interrupted Penquil's terrified thoughts. "Do your job, Penquil. I expect you to report such irregularities to me, but do not press me with questions that are none of your concern. Adjust the books to reflect your expectations. The current numbers now reflect 100 percent of the city's earnings. Is that understood?" Penguil nodded, before realizing that Dusk was still looking out over the city. He would expect to hear a response.

"Y-yes, my lord. O-of course," Penquil stammered, bowing his head. "Good," Dusk replied. "Now leave me." Penguil nodded again and quickly made for the door, but the ice in Dusk's tone froze him to the spot. "Oh, and Penquil," Dusk said, turning his haunting, red-irised eyes upon his accountant.

"Make certain your research does not go too far. Your talents are useful, but all tools are, ultimately, replaceable." Penguil remained frozen for a few seconds at the sight of Lord Dusk's scarlet eyes. No matter how many times he saw them uncovered, they never failed to instill a primal terror in him. He stared for one unthinkable second, then tore his gaze away and fled the study, closing the door swiftly behind him. Lord Dusk turned back to the balcony, eyes glinting like a cinder in the dark as the sun set on his mighty city.

Chapter 2 Cinder was established as soon as the city's walls were erected by the noble house of Teneberis over 150 years ago. Towering above the neighboring villages, House Teneberis gambled the future of their noble title on building a city; one that would connect the great farmlands of the south and the many mining towns in the north with trade routes between the eastern seas and the King's city of Bastion to

the southeast. Their gamble paid dividends. The city of Cinder prospered, rising in power like a spark fanned to flame... and the Black Market rose with it. Made up of fences, thieves, assassins, nobles, merchants, and more, the Black Market thrived in the shade of Cinder's massive walls. The market brought together cunning members of the underground and the wealthy to form an organization that would drive illegal activity for generations to come, providing services and goods to those intelligent, connected, or desperate enough to find and enter its hidden strongholds. Concealed from watchful eyes in the dark crevices and underground regions of the city,

those who ran the market harbored much of Cinder's most sought-after items—legal or otherwise. Everything from daggers to broadswords hung from merchant's walls. Stolen gems glinted in the flicker of quick-made fires amid low-lit market stalls. But the shadows hid traders and murderers alike, and the

Black Market was no place for those unable to hold their own in combat. Deemed too dangerous for many of its members to browse—especially those of noble birth—the Market developed a never-ending need for fences and middle-men, creating opportune employment for those skilled enough or stupid enough to attempt to survive the noble and underground circles. Those who chose this way of life thrived on providing a steady stream of semi-legal weaponry, goods, and services to the underground and the nobility. Most were unable to endure the world of cloak and dagger for long. However, amidst the narrow escapes, the assassinations and thefts, the underground treachery and the noble corruption, these fearless souls performed feats of such incredible daring that they approached the line between skill and miracle. But the greatest miracle was that, against all odds,

some—thanks to what could only be described as impossible talent—survived. As stories of their deeds spread, these few became something more than power or wealth can earn—they became legends.

A wandering resident of the Foundry, the city's poorest quadrant, hunkered down in an alleyway and waited for rest to arrive. Blinking sleepily, the man peered up at the stars, finding the familiar shapes of constellations glowing peacefully above his head. The din of the city had grown quiet, and the rustle of the wind through narrow passageways soothed his aching bones. Closing his eyes, the haggard man

drowsed fitfully. Sometime later, he woke from his slumber, looked out into the night once again, and caught the briefest glimpse of a midnight-black cloak vanishing into the wind along the rooftops. He peered upward, straining to see past the star-studded darkness, only to watch a second dark figure hurtle over the gap above him. The rasp of metal on metal followed and the man scrambled to his feet. Two shadows danced on the rooftop above, daggers flashing in the starlight. He heard a grunt of pain

the darkened streets of Cinder:

"Shadewalker."

100 Years Later

reigned in the passageway once more. Then one of the figures seemed to turn toward him. At that moment, a sense of the fearful unknown, the dangers hidden behind the black veil of night, filled the man. Seeds of dread in the pit of his stomach evoked the age-old instinct that leaves all men with two choices—to flee, or to fight. He ran. The clatter of a blade against the stone sounded behind him before he could make it halfway down the alley. He redoubled his pace. Hearing a dull thud from behind, he turned to look back. A body lay unmoving on the alley floor, shrouded in a cloak that was emblazoned with a crest. One of Lord Rune's elite enforcers. The man stood, dumbstruck, unable to remember the last time one of Rune's best had been slain by any man. His hand began to tremble, and he turned, racing down the alley. A shadow

dropped to the floor, picked something up off the body that laid there, and flew through the gloom. Each time the man looked back, the shadow was closer, until only a few footfalls separated them. Then

from one of the cowled figures, followed by a sharp intake of breath. The fighting stilled, and silence

there was nothing. He stopped at the alley's exit and was greeted only by the moaning of the wind. The shadow was gone. But a specter could have ways of remaining unseen. The man shuddered and turned toward the sheltering light of a nearby pub. Then the sound of something clinking against the cobble beside him made him jump. He tore his gaze away from the light, only to find a knapsack lying on the cobblestone. Reaching down, the man seized the object and checked its contents, wary of some sort of trick. His eyes widened when he saw coins glinting back at him. The knapsack was a purse. The shadow flew above him one final time that night, away toward the northwest corner of the city: the home of the nobles. Snatching the purse from the cobblestone, the man, still trembling, hobbled to the nearest pub to share an unlikely story and a portion of his newfound treasure. Though many drank to him that night, his tale was largely ignored. The body was never found, and the knapsack could have come from anywhere. But similar reports began to surface from other sectors of the city. Sightings of a black-clad figure seeming to walk upon the shadows of the night, often followed by the ring of metal against metal—and, sometimes, money against stone—were quickly told and retold, exaggerated and distorted until fact could no longer be separated from fiction. Had the shadow killed one man in an alley, five along the rooftops, ten in full view of the noble towers? Nothing was certain, and, therefore,

nothing was impossible. But one word remained consistent from tale to tale. One word stood out from the many mythologized, drunken stories. One word was taken from the man's lips and whispered from house to house and block to block whenever the deep shadow of a fluttering cloak fell hauntingly upon

Eve entered the tunnel, its familiar scents covering her like a blanket: sweat, cigar smoke, and the ever-

operations during Cinder's fledgling years. When the operations were moved outside the walls, the pits inside had been left to stink and burn in the Foundry. Shafts used to let in air and keep fires burning had become so clogged with soot and debris over the years that the inferno died long before burning the remaining garbage. This left a stinking pile of trash languishing underneath an abandoned repository until the Black Market overseers became involved. The mysterious benefactors of the underground in Cinder, commonly referred to as "the Circle," always made good on profitable circumstances. Hiring peasants to clear the shafts of soot, the Circle started the fires once again, the smoke mingling with the ever-present smog above the Foundry's many factories. The fires burned the rest of the garbage to ash and cleared out a large, barren cave in the process. In time the pit became the Hub of the Black Market, connected to much of the city through a network of tunnels, and largely secure from prying eyes. The Hub had remained whole and undiscovered by Dusk's enforcers—known as Visionaries—for

present stench of garbage. The scent hadn't left the pit since it was used for garbage burning

as long as Eve could remember. Unfortunately, the stench remained equally preserved.

Despite some of her best efforts, Eve had yet to memorize even half of the underground passageways that zigzagged beneath Cinder's streets. But she knew more than most could claim, and this particular passage was as familiar to her as the hilts of her twin daggers. She exited the gentle slope of a tunnel, trailing her fingers along its coarse, grooved surface, and entered the Black Market Hub. Tents were spread across the floor of the massive cave like a patchwork cloak. Smoke rose from a dozen large fires, serving to illuminate the cavern with garish light, overpowering the stench of both the garbage and the Hub's inhabitants. The world smelled of smoke and ashes. Eve's cloak settled around her, black as the tents' shadows that she used to hide her presence. She worked her way from the southwestern side of the cave toward the east, where she would find the buyers. Though she had frequented these tunnels for years, she felt an all-too-familiar sense of unease that accompanied her in such a lawless place. She had lived and moved outside of the law for most of her life, and the unpredictability of those in the underground both terrified and thrilled her. Some Shadewalkers had built up reputations for being impossible to capture, unstoppable in a skirmish, or even unnoticeable in an empty room. Eve had been a regular at the Hub and various other Black Market locations for some time, but she had no such reputation. She could never shake the sense that, having entered the cavern, she had become prey far too easily lured into a trap. She probed the array of tents and poorly erected structures that ringed the fires for signs of danger. The tents furthest from the fires were almost completely shrouded in darkness. Darkness often acted as her ally—an uneasy alliance at best; one that could shift at any moment.

Darkness was a tool to be used, but it did not play favorites. Kell had taught her that.

Thankfully, her midnight-black cloak kept her concealed. It was matched by dark boots and a gray shirt. Unlike most of those who entered the Hub, Eve kept twin daggers hanging by her sides in

party all their own, with a separate set of rules that governed their time spent in the market.

The buyer was as savvy as Eve was swift, safely locating himself just outside the tent rings that surrounded two adjacent fires. Eve slunk to the back of the tent, circling it like a hound would an

Shadewalkers were simply too valuable to risk. As was their business.

"Caution never goes unrewarded," she recited softly.

occupied tree.

things."

replied.

"What is it this time? Surely not a social call."

"You can be the buyer for 170 sill," she said.

"A nice little bauble," she said.

sell; they both knew it.

bought from him.

dim light of the lantern, mimicking her emerald eyes.

blackened sheaths, tucked safely underneath her cloak and fastened securely to her waist. The middle, lower, and peasant classes were expected to surrender any weapons to a holding tent near the entrances. There were, however, a few notable exceptions. Shadewalkers did not dare to venture anywhere in Cinder unarmed, even, or perhaps especially, in the underground. Taking a Shadewalker's weapons was akin to signing their death warrant. Thankfully, the Circle recognized Shadewalkers as a

Eve palmed the item hidden in the many flaps of her cloak. The simple, green gem was worth more than a year's wages for a peasant and was tempting even for a Shadewalker to pocket, but she had a reputation to uphold. She slid through the crowd like a grain of sand sifting through an hourglass, smoothly slipping in and out of gaps between tents and men alike, only half-listening to their bartering, storytelling, boasting and ware-hocking. Eve kept silent and on alert until she reached her destination.

Satisfied that the perimeter was secure, she lifted the flap of the tent, dropping a hand to her knives as she entered. She paused, giving her eyes time to adjust to the light from a dim lamp hanging at the apex of the make-shift room. Swords and axes, daggers and knives, rapiers and longswords, and even a few broadswords—all immaculately sharpened—covered the stiff walls of the tent. Eve heard the sound of a smooth rock scraping along metal. "You're late," a voice grunted from the corner, smoke wafting up from a cigar in the buyer's mouth. He held a small dagger in one hand and a sharpening stone in the other. The smoke rose past the bill of his brown, wide-brimmed hat, making its way out of the musty air to join the fumes from the fires outside. "How many times do I have to tell you to arrive on time?" the voice said. "As many as it takes, Kell. The drop wasn't where my instructions indicated. I bet you would just *love* to crawl around Cinder's streets looking through every nook and cranny for a carrier who also happens to be a lost, blind beggar, who also happens to have wandered halfway across the Foundry with your-" Kell interrupted, snorting loudly and looking suitably unimpressed. Eve decided against finishing her explanation, removed her hand from her knives, and flashed him a half-smile. Kell gave her a wry grin. "Heaven knows I dealt with more when I was your age. Back when I couldn't even afford cigars." He frowned disapprovingly and grunted once again, flicking the butt of his finished cigar at Eve. Eve took a second to reflect on the efficient stupidity of men's monosyllabic communication, then ground the butt into the dirt with her heel. "It really is a disgusting habit, you know. You would be better off if you couldn't afford those nasty

"Good to know you care so much, considering you're the one who brings me the big bucks," Kell

He flipped another cigar out of a pouch, lit it with a practiced hand, and placed it between his teeth.

Eve took another step forward into the small tent and pulled out the gem. It flashed a dull green in the

Kell's eyes widened slightly. She knew his tells by now, and he knew hers. Today would be an easy

When Eve first met Kell, he had intimidated her out of many a score, but it had not taken long for her to realize that Kell admired straightforward deal-making. The man may have been a wise-cracking, sarcastic, gruff, mischievous fox, but when it came to making deals, he was all business. Which was just fine for her. Sometimes Eve would spend hours bargaining with a buyer, but with Kell, she had an understanding. Plus, the extra time she saved allowed the two of them to get to know each other. In the underground, relationships were often far more valuable than any single score. Kell had become an indispensable source of advice. As a former Shadewalker turned buyer, his wisdom had saved Eve's life more than once. She fingered her knives absently. They were the first and only thing she had ever

She gave Kell an even look and held his gaze with an air of stubborn finality.

"Fair's fair," Kell said after a few seconds, pocketing the gem and throwing Eve a pouch of sill with a decisive nod. "By the way, if you're trying to deplete my cigar fund, you're shit outta luck. Business has been good lately." Eve smiled and caught the pouch. "Thanks to yours truly," she responded. "I would love to stick around and chat, but the sellers have been running me ragged." Eve turned to leave the tent. She didn't bother counting Kell's sill anymore. The money would be there. Kell nodded and grunted once again. "I know how it is," he said, a wistful, pained look in his eyes. "Get some rest, Eve. But keep one eye open. Never forget-" "The shadows never sleep," Eve finished. "And neither do 1. Not lately at least. I'll see you again soon. Try not to choke on a cigar while I'm gone." Kell rolled his eyes. "Don't let the flap hit your overconfident Shadewalking behind on the way out."

Eve waved to Kell and exited the tent. She once again made her way through the canvas maze, keeping to the shadows and staying out of sight before reaching a dark alcove. The alcove opened to a set of stairs meticulously cut into the rock by peasants from the mines. The stairs wound their way out

of the cave system and into a nondescript building a few blocks from the abandoned garbage

repository. Eve emerged discretely into the waning light of day, entering the sprawling southwest side of the city where peasants eked out a living working in factories and doing odd jobs for anyone who would hire them. Most of the Foundry's residents worked for the factory owners or for local bars and rundown shops. As prosperous as the city may have been, the peasants felt little relief from their

downtrodden lives. To the nobility, they were simply lucky not to be one of the slaves working the fields.

Eve dropped a few sill into the waiting hand of a beggar who sat just outside the building she had left. The Circle required compensation for their services, and nondescript beggars just outside of Hub entrances acted as collectors. Even though most who frequented the Hub could conceivably get away without such payment, the phrase "honor among thieves" generally applied to those who used the Circle's services. Whether they decided to pay the toll out of the goodness of their hearts or out of intimidation at the thought of ending up on the Circle's wanted list was for them to decide. For most who frequented the markets, it was a combination of both. For Eve, it was gratitude for a score well settled.

Having paid her dues, she wound her way through the packed streets of Cinder, blending into the crowd of peasants with her dark cloak wrapped around her. She passed many beggars sitting against the sides of buildings and in alleyways. A host of reasons explained why these unfortunate figures had been cast into the mire. Many had been widowed, maimed, deformed, or worse, marked by Visionaries as disturbers of the peace. The latter relegated them to a life of begging due to the large, eye-shaped

Dusk is always watching, Eve thought as she made her way toward her bolt hole near the center of the city. Although her home wouldn't normally be considered cheap, it still lay within the Foundry. Ironically, the Foundry had been the center of the city before Cinder expanded. A mercantile quadrant had risen in the southeast and a quadrant for the nobility was established in the northwest. Eve preferred living near the center of the city for swift access to all four, though she rarely had any desire to enter Dusk's

A relatively small, unassuming inn near the inner edge of the Foundry had been Eve's home for nearly four months. Unfortunately, it would be time to move on soon. She rarely stayed in one place for long. She flicked some of the coins she had gained from Kell into the waiting hands of beggars while she walked, blending in with the crowd and staying in the shadows when she could, silencing any exclamation of thanks. The price Eve had anticipated for the gem had been 150 sill, but she still remembered her days on the streets, fighting just to survive. When she could, she would mark up her prices enough to keep the beggars of the southwestern streets alive. To her, it wasn't just a silly

Shadewalker tradition. It was life or death for many of the beggars lining the streets. It helped her sleep

But it wasn't all for generosity's sake. The coins served another, perhaps more important purpose. Closing a coin around the hand of a beggar, Eve cautioned the recipient to keep silent and threw an indistinguishable glance toward the crowd behind her. At first, all seemed to be like most days, just beggars and peasants walking the streets with hurried pace, intent on making their way home before the sun disappeared below the city walls. But by the third glance, Eve knew something was wrong.

Instinct told her to search the crowd for a second longer on the next turn. Doing so, she memorized the figures of most of those nearest to her. By the last glance, her suspicions were confirmed: She was being followed. A cowled figure had been steadily advancing closer to her, face hidden by his cloak. The stranger clearly didn't think Eve would be able to pick him out from the crowd, but she had grown up on these streets. She knew the downtrodden look of the peasants and beggars well. She had worn the same countenance many times before. The Seeker's imitation of a peasant's walk and hunch hadn't been far off. Another Shadewalker may have been easily fooled, but not Eve. Here, in the Foundry, she

domain in the northeast. Few members of the city ever arrived there willingly.

scar on the palms of their hands.

a little easier at night.

faster. Almost there.

Quickening her pace, Eve changed course. She made for the north side of the Foundry, stealing glances behind her at every turn. The stranger drew closer, moving faster now to match her pace. He stole through the streets and crowds with the fluidity of a Seeker, nearly able to match a trained Shadewalker. But few Shadewalkers had prowled the streets of the Foundry from childhood. As the Seeker drew close, Eve turned a corner and vanished from his sight. Acting on pure instinct, she scaled a ladder without even looking at the rungs, leaped atop a building, and broke into a sprint, watching the Seeker behind her do the same as she passed over the familiar rooftops. Eve's instincts led her on as her subconscious shifted into pure analytical defense. Although no two chases were the same, Eve had practiced her elusion skills over Foundry rooftops so many times that her body moved almost without her knowledge, leaving time for her mind to wander the train of hundreds of memories she had formed through countless evaded pursuits. Memories of things Kell and many others had taught her. Memories of the hunter and the hunted.

Just make it until sunset, she thought. Dash over the rooftops; feel the wind on your face. Don't think. React. Your body flows into the motions you have drilled thousands of times, near perfect. But not perfect. Remember that. Your feet rustle against the bricks of the streets, your cloak against the stone of the houses. Your breath gives you away in a dark room; your eyes flash under the moon; your pale skin reflects the lantern light. You are only ever half as good as you think you are. So think less... and move

The sun was beginning to disappear beneath Cinder's walls as she ran. This time, darkness would

"Let your reflexes overwhelm you. Think only of the unexpected, the irregularities that could disrupt welldrilled routines. Let yourself be guided by pure, terrifying instinct. Become the line that separates the

They spent that evening flying over the rooftops together. One of the few moments when Kell would leave his duties behind and join Eve in the city. She would never forget the way their laugh rang out

Eve snapped out of her reverie just in time to leap past a tent above a small shop. Using the piece of cover to break the Seeker's line of sight, she dove into an alleyway at just the right angle. Stuffing herself in an opening, she held her breath as the sun's final rays died out. She crouched, silent as a shadow, as the stranger passed through the darkness above. The alley was small and unlit, but easy to see into. Anyone looking for her would see an alleyway that could scarcely hide a rat, let alone a person. As she watched from below, she noted the telltale blue glow of the Seeker's eyes pass overhead. She dared not breathe a sigh of relief. The small hole in the wall which she occupied had served her well many times, but a Seeker's hearing went beyond that of a normal human. Even a Shadewalker's honed senses would never quite reach the same level as a fully trained Seeker's. Dusk made sure of that when devising the Seeker's training, taking advantage of the unique abilities granted to them by a process few knew, and less understood. The nobles had some inkling of it. Shadewalkers who served them were known for manifesting unheard of abilities from time to time. But Eve thought the stories were likely exaggerated, just like the ones that began the Shadewalker mythos. She had seen some rather unconventional skills in her time and had performed daring escapes from situations that seemed utterly hopeless, but none, to her knowledge, were aided by supernatural powers. That was a

Uncomfortable as it was, with rough bricks closed in around her, Eve's bolthole was secure. A realm all her own. She sat silently for a few more minutes, not for fear of discovery, but because moments of calm and peace, even in a dark alley pressed against the edges of broken bricks, did not come often to her. She sat, motionless as the brick around her, until no stranger passed in the streets. She enjoyed the

Eventually, Eve left the alley, taking a circuitous route to the inn. She would sleep with a dagger in hand tonight, one safe beneath her pillow. Neither strayed far from her, Seeker or not. Reaching the inner section of the Foundry, Eve made her way to the side of the Silent Swan, the inn she had been staying at ever since her last big score had made it affordable. She entered through a low door, mounted the stairs, and climbed until she had reached the second story. When she came to her room, she put her ear to the door. There was no sound except for the rustling of the wind. The innkeeper must have taken her window cover off. She would have to discourage him from doing so again. Entering with restrained ease, Eve checked the corners of the small but cozy room, then put her ear to the floorboards. It never hurt to be careful. All she could hear was muffled conversation from the bar below. Nothing unusual there. She crossed to the washroom, listening at the door, daggers at the ready. No need to check underneath the bed in the other corner. Eve would never rent a room where the bed was high enough to conceal an attacker. The lower to the ground it was, the faster she could roll off if necessary. This was one of the first lessons she had learned from Kell: every second counts. Eve let out a sigh of relief, letting her shoulders drop and rising from the half-crouch she had naturally sunk into while entering the

Looking around her, she slipped one of her daggers under her pillow, turning to survey the rest of the room. Though the inn was little more than a two-story house, it included more than the essentials. A window opposite the door she had entered by let cool air into the room, with a desk to the right of it. Along the same wall lay her bed, and across from the bed stood a cramped closet, which she always left open. A dresser sat between the closet and door, with a single painting hanging above it. The painting depicted a dark-furred wolf stalking through moonlit shadows towards the room's only

window, fangs bared with eyes as pale as the moon peeking above the rooftops, bathing the room in a

Eve laid her cloak across the desk, checked the reinforced lock on her door, and pulled the custom-

indeed be her ally. She thought back to something Kell had taught her.

dark and the light. To live this life, you must learn to dance in the shade."

over the aging stone that night, pride gleaming from Kell's eyes.

realm that Dusk had claimed for himself.

room.

silvery light.

stillness, the serenity, the aftermath of the chase... the thrill of escape.

was another breed altogether, mothered by the same streets she now walked.

made plate back over her window. She paused to look out at the moon one final time before she bolted the piece back into place. She would really have to talk with that innkeeper. Unstrapping her belt, Eve undressed, laid her clothes across the foot of the bed, and sighed, lowering herself and sinking under the covers before finally closing her eyes. She let the darkness take her, dreams carrying her into the starry night sky above Cinder. Laughing, she flew among the clouds to a land where darkfurred wolves like the ones in her painting ran among the stars. Their eyes gleamed with green gems, not unlike the one she had sold Kell. The jewels danced in their eyes as they chased after the scarlet clouds of dawn. Chapter 3 In the morning, Eve exited the Silent Swan, resting her fingers against her daggers' sheaths in case of an attack. She had bought them from Kell—daggers made by the city's best blacksmith, a man named Gorlog, who liked his liquor hard, and his steel harder. Kell seconded that sentiment. Scanning the crowd, she perceived only the mild unrest of irritated workers in the morning. No Visionary appeared from behind a corner, and no Seeker launched themselves at her from a second-story window. This had happened only once before, but Eve quickly learned to scan the skies as well as the ground. The Seeker would have skewered her in the back if it weren't for her cloak flowing around her, obscuring her exact position and causing the Seeker's downward plunge to miss by mere inches. Some

sixth sense told her to step slightly to the right and the Seeker's blade shattered against the sunhardened bricks of the street, his momentum acting as his undoing and leaving him defenseless. Evidently, he didn't buy his blades from Gorlog, the liquor-infused master craftsman. What a pity.

Luckily, he had attacked her in an alley removed from the public eye. She had left him senseless in an alcove, only to wake up hours later with the shards of his broken blade scattered about and a headache that would leave him to recover for days afterward. She had used the Seeker's dagger to replace the original hilt of one of her own weapons during her last trip to Gorlog's. Eve gripped her right dagger tighter in her palm. When she had related the events to Kell, he had only one thing to say.

She never forgot again. The education of the streets—never learn the same lesson twice. Only the rich had that luxury. If the Seeker had been more experienced, she would have been dead, sixth sense or

Eve slipped her daggers back into their concealed sheaths and joined the press of morning bodies headed toward the Foundry's core. Even though she had grown up enveloped in them, crowds of this size still bothered her. Her senses were muted by the clamor of many bodies pressed together. As much as the Black Market raised her hackles, crowds like these made the hair on the back of her neck stand on end. Not that she would ever admit that fact to Kell. He would likely chastise her with some cryptic comment about "the many outnumbering the few." A right genius Kell was... when his nuggets of wisdom made any sense. Eve still swore the cigars were messing with his head. She made a mental note to steal Kell's cigar box again the next time she saw him. It wouldn't be the first time she had managed to take them without his knowledge. Hopefully, the next time would be the first she actually got away with them.

Kell was remarkably observant when he wanted to be, especially when cigars and liquor were

Working her way through the crowds, taking back alleys whenever possible and sticking to buildings' perimeters, Eve gradually reached the Gray Goose Tavern. Owned by the same man who ran the Silent Swan Inn, the place was a haven for the denizens of the Foundry, a far cry from the Swan, but not an unusual location for a Shadewalker. The owner, Mr. Denegree, like any good merchant, recognized

You'd be surprised how many people forget to look up.

no.

concerned.

that good business was diversified business and acted accordingly. He maintained multiple establishments located in three different quadrants within Cinder's walls. His name kept unsavory characters out of the Gray Goose-most of the time. Despite Denegree, the shadowy doorways of various taverns still concealed much of the city's underground inhabitants, even in the light of early morning. Or perhaps especially then, given the number of drunkards who spent the hangover-laden dawn recovering in taverns throughout the city. Whatever the case, the Gray Goose would hold more than idle drunkards before the morning was through. Eve approached the generously entitled "establishment" with a confident stride. One did not enter an inner-Foundry tavern timidly. Sliding the door open, Eve stepped into the tavern, her boots making a slight rasping sound against the floorboards as she crossed to the bar, meeting the eyes of anyone who glanced at her, never the first to look away. The bartender greeted her with a graybearded smile and a twinkle in his eye, as he greeted any guest who appeared even partially capable of paying a tab.

"What'll it be this mornin', friend? A whiskey to start yer day off right?" Eve fought not to roll her eyes. Every barkeep was just the same in the Foundry. Kind, crafty, and as generous as a farmer is to his pigs on their final year of feeding. "Water," Eve responded, "on the rocks." The barkeep's smile turned to a slight frown as Eve slid a shill across the counter. When he saw the coin, his frown deepened. He looked into Eve's eyes with apprehension. Seconds later she left the bar for the table furthest from the entrance, glass of water in hand. The shill, emblazoned with the crest of the royal family on one side and the eye of Dusk's Watchtower on the other, had been carefully doctored to darken the eye—only enough to notice if you were searching for it. For a barkeep who'd been handling all kinds of shill for decades, the difference was immediately apparent. The pupil of the Watchtower's eye was obscured by the pigment on the silver coin. The barkeep would turn a blind eye to Eve and would recall at most a "small figure in black" if questioned about any odd occurrences in his tavern of late. To the men and women of the Foundry, Shadewalkers were legendary figures. The myths about the best of them had spread so widely that large cities outside of Cinder had begun to produce their own forms

of Shadewalkers, even in the King's city of Bastion. Even the relative novices like Eve would be afforded proper caution and respect by the Foundrymen. In truth, the legends were mostly just thatmyths spread by the growing reputations of certain Shadewalkers in high noble houses. Most

Shadewalkers did not believe in supernatural abilities, though some may seem to have come close with

their uncanny skills in evasion, thievery, stealth, and more. But the legends were startlingly effective in reaching the masses and Eve didn't see any reason to make the Foundrymen question them. In fact, she encouraged them whenever she could. "Better business that way," Kell had told her. Eve sat in silence, sipping her drink and preparing for a session of bargaining. The knowledge broker would arrive soon. His drinks would be on her, and her payment would include a bribe for the barkeep's silence. One could never be too cautious, no matter what the legends said. f y v

Ecotourism in Kenya

The Table Ministry of Jesus in the Gospel of Luke

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