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The spirit bound to this tome seems to enjoy juggling the page references when no one is looking. You won't find anything if the spirit doesn't like you. So handle this book with the respect it deserves, understood?

• Merrox, Master of the Hall of Records •

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A Kraton Hand

*The cards are dealt, son. It's up to you
if you pick 'em up or leave the table.*

• Golan, Ork Thief •

1



As I crested the hill, I saw the site of my destiny come into view: Kratas, the City of Thieves. It was all that I could have hoped for. Here I would begin to earn my legend.

The old citadel hugged close to the huge mesa looming up from the plains. The ornate roofs of grand mansions peeking over the top of the crumbling outer walls hinted at the great wealth to be had within. This was where I, Tid Mantel, Thief adept of the village of Goldwheat, truly belonged.

I should say *formerly* of the village of Goldwheat, for I hope never to return. Those bumpkins did not have the sophistication to appreciate the glory that my Discipline impelled me to attain. Their childish insistence on property laws finally drove me to leave them behind. True, the headman made a show of banishing me after discovering his prize necklace in my room, but I planned my departure long before that incident. Anyway, I had already stolen everything worth taking in that pathetic village.

Quickly joining the line of herdsmen, teamsters, and merchants lined up at the gates to the city, I gave the guards from the Force of the Eye my ten silvers to enter, along with my toughest scowl. They gave me nothing but a bored look and a wave through, but I wasn't concerned. I may have been no one to them then, but it would not be long until all the thieves of Kratas knew the Name of Tid Mantel.

Leaving the merchants and herdsmen to their pack mules and sheep, I set out into the city. To my right was an old fortification, once imposing and solid, but now sliding into ruin. Dozens of Namegivers lolled around it, listlessly working through military maneuvers and packing gear. Standing nearest to me was a hard-looking human, discussing something with a few toughs. The words 'job' and 'silver' caught my ears, and I sidled over so that I could better listen in.

"You there, kid. You look healthy enough. Need a job?" he barked at me.

"That depends. What's the job and what's the pay?"

"Slow down kid. What can you do?"

"I, sir, am a Thief," I began. "I can—"

"Shove off then," he interrupted. "Last thing we need here is another lousy thief." He spun on his heels and stormed into the compound, yelling orders to the men there. They quickly pretended to be working harder than they were, and I left the churl to it. I would take no orders from such a man.

Continuing further into Kratas, I entered Drover's Square. Even with all my experience, I must admit my breath was taken away. All types of Namegivers were there,

as well as beasts I had only heard stories of. I was amazed at the nimble turns and spins the ork scorchers coaxed out of their mighty thundra beasts. I was just as amazed that they were doing them in the middle of a crowded city. One animal crushed a small market booth with a careless shrug. The proprietor barely escaped harm, but dared not confront the scorcher and his guffawing companions.

An airship was moored to one side of the square. I had only seen one such vessel before, sailing the sky far above my village, and now here was such a ship, close enough to touch and covered with a bizarre mix of paintings and carvings, with the heads of monsters hanging from its sides. Everyone, even the scorchers, was keeping a respectful distance from the airship, so despite my curiosity I thought it prudent to do the same and continue past.

On the north side of the square I encountered a t'skrang at a small table running a game of "stones and shells." He was surrounded by a small crowd and taking a lot of money from a frustrated ork, who by his leathers looked to be a scorcher. I was familiar with the game; I used to win it a lot in a booth at the harvest fair the local villages held every year. I stood on the edge of the crowd and watched. Soon I spotted the t'skrang's technique. Every third pass of the shells he would do a twirl with the left-most shell and, while the mark was looking there, he would switch the stones under the other two with his tail. I felt sorry for the ignorant ork, but that would serve him right coming to the big city. After a few more rounds the scorcher had lost all his money and stormed off. I knew I would only get one turn before the t'skrang knew I was on to his trick, so I took the chance to double my money. I threw all my silver on the table. Yet when the round was over, even though I watched the twirl, and saw his tail come up from under the table out of the corner of my eye, the blue stone was where the red should be.

I left the table puzzled and with no silver, but I reassured myself that I could steal more before the day was done. No sooner had that thought passed when I saw a richly dressed dwarf merchant stumble out of an alehouse. By his stagger and smell he was clearly drunk. It was an easy matter to bump into him and, while apologizing profusely, lift his purse from his belt. I ducked into a nearby alley and opened the purse. It was full of silver and gold—more than I had seen in my entire life. This was the way to be a Thief!

However, just as I was counting the coins, two Namegivers entered the alley. One ork and one elf, both clad in black, grabbed my arms.

"Where is your medallion?" the ork growled.

"What?"

"Your medallion," he snapped. Both he and the elf pulled amulets out from under their tunics, similar to those I had seen the guards at the gate wearing, and just as quickly hid them again. "You can't steal in Kratas without being a member of the Force of the Eye, and if you are in the Force, you have a medallion." I stammered something useless.

"We'll have to confiscate that," the elf said, deftly plucking the bag of coins from my hands. "Now, Garlthik will be happy if we simply kill you, but since you are young and



obviously naïve, we'll give you a break. You can join the Force, or leave town now." I knew better than to try to fight the legendary Garlthik One-Eye and his Force of the Eye. Yet this could also be an opportunity. If I joined the Force of the Eye, I had no doubt that I would soon come to the attention of the Master Thief himself, and once I've proved my ability, quickly rise through the ranks.

"I will join the Force," I said firmly.

"Excellent," the elf replied. "Probationary membership will cost you just one hundred silvers."

"But, I have no money, good sirs." I do not know whose face dropped quicker, the elf's or my own.

"Then you must leave." The ork took my arm and began to escort me to the gate.

"Wait a moment, friend," the elf said, halting us. "Perhaps we can do the young man a favor. I know I shouldn't but I have taken a liking to him. Maybe we can arrange a trade?"

"It's on your head," shrugged the ork. "I suppose those daggers might be worth a few coins." The two Thieves looked covetously at the matched pair of daggers on my hips.

"Please, if you want them, they are yours." I smiled as I said it, for even with their black enameled handles and inlaid designs, I knew they were not worth a hundred silver pieces.

"Done." The elf said as he took my blades. "Consider yourself a probationary member. Good luck kid." The two turned to go.

"Wait," I said. "Don't I get a medallion?"

"Not for probationary members," the ork said over his shoulder, as the two disappeared down a side alley.

Now that I was a member of the Force, I took to heart my newfound license to steal and began looking for another target. As the sun had almost set, many of the stalls in the square were closing and the streets beginning to clear. I knew that the best way to find valuables was to find people, so I looked for lights and listened for the sounds of music. This led me to a sturdily built tavern on the western edge of the square. Its sign showed a sword wrapped in leather straps, declaring in Throalic that this was the "Girded Arms." A number of well-armed and well-dressed patrons were entering, drawn by the glow of firelight through its windows. A group of ork Cavalrymen sat on their mounts to one side of the tavern, drinking *hurlg*. As I approached the tavern, one of them yelled out to me.

"Hey you, human! Come here." I hesitated. "Don't worry, we won't hurt you." I cautiously approached, keeping one eye on the well-lit tavern, ready to flee to its safety if need be. "Look, you're a Thief, right?" I nodded. "Well, we have a job for you." This caught my interest, so I edged closer. "My friend here recently lost his halberd and needs another." At this the orks stifled laughs and muttered something to each other in the orkish tongue (which, regrettably, I do not speak). "We'll pay you a hundred silvers if you can steal another one for him."

"That sounds acceptable," I replied. "Any ideas where I might find one?" One hundred silvers for my first job! Already my membership in the Force was paying off.

"Funny you should ask. That tavern over there has a

bunch of old weapons and junk hanging on the walls. Right behind the bar there's a halberd. It should do, and the innkeepers won't miss it. What do they want with an old pole arm anyway?" This brought forth more laughter than I thought was warranted, but I don't pretend to understand ork humor.

"Consider it done," I cockily replied, and sauntered into the bar.

The Girded Arms was much as the orks had described—warm and well lit, with sturdy oak tables, benches sized for Namegivers from dwarfs to trolls, and a jumble of military paraphernalia cluttering the walls. A brithan head hung between a battered helm and a broken lance. Battle flags and standards hung from the roof beams. I saw the pole arm in question hanging right where they said it would be, but I was not going to be rash about this. I ordered ale, and sat at the bar to case the place.

The tavern was run by the oldest and roundest dwarf couple I had ever seen, and they both seemed to spend as much time talking with their patrons as serving food and drinks. The clientele were mostly soldiers and guards, with a few merchants and caravan masters among them. Once or twice a merchant would pair off with a soldier and head to one of the private rooms that lined the common room, to emerge some time later.

Biding my time, I waited for an opportunity. As the evening wore on the room began to fill, and a circle formed around the fireplace at the other end of the room. Warriors, young and old, swapped stories of battles, both historical and contemporary. The detailed and lengthy discussions of battle formations nearly made my eyes glaze over, but my patience was eventually rewarded; however, by this time the fire was down to the embers.

The female innkeeper was engrossed in a lengthy conversation with a tall, imperious elf at the fireside, her back to me. Many of the patrons were starting to leave. The male innkeeper disappeared into the back room for something, and I took my chance. Slipping off my stool, I slid silently behind the bar, crouched amid the dirty glasses, and quickly sneaked my hand up to grab the pole arm. It was better polished than I expected and the edge of the blade fairly gleamed in the light.

Then I felt a touch at my shoulder. A glance showed the edge of a dwarf sword at my neck; one simple flick of the wrist and my throat would be cut. How had the old dwarf woman managed to sneak up on me? And where had the sword come from? Suddenly the pole arm was yanked from my outstretched hand and the dwarf barman spun it around and down with astonishing speed. Like a scythe through a stalk of wheat, the halberd passed through my wrist like so much air. I saw my hand hit the floor of the bar, and then I fled into the street, screaming with pain. Collapsing in the dirt, I held my bleeding stump.

Through tear-filled eyes I saw the ork scorchers pointing at me and laughing. Bags of silver passed from hand to hand. They had clearly been betting on my success or failure. One of them, who had begrudgingly handed a large sack of coins

to her fellows, took pity on me. She spurred her horse over, dismounted, and began bandaging my wrist.

"Thank you," I stammered through clenched teeth. "Sorry you lost money on me."

"Don't worry about that, son. I'll most likely kill him next week and get my coin back anyway." I could only manage a confused look, so she explained as she continued to treat my wound. "I'm a Thunderer, and he is of the Clan of the Eighth Peak, the Metal Fist Scorchers. A few of us have been hired to escort a Circle Path caravan to Jerris. After drinking with him tonight, I found out some of his tribe have an eye on that caravan. So I'll either kill him, or he'll kill me—and in the last case, I won't be needing any coin, will I? Done. You should live now." She was back in her saddle before I could blink.

"Thanks for betting on me. Sorry I didn't make it." She snorted a laugh at me as she rode off.

"No one bet you would make it. I bet you would lose your head, not your hand!"

▲ ▲ ▲

Rising to my feet, I stumbled down the street. All I wanted now was a place to sleep and heal. Unfortunately it had begun to rain. As I made my way down an alley, I saw the t'skrang from earlier in the day, the one who had run the "stones and shells" game. He was walking arm-in-arm and sharing a bottle with the ork he had fleeced, though now the ork was no longer wearing his scorcher leathers, but was dressed as a dandy. It dawned on me then why the red stone had not been where I had thought it was. It had been the mark, not the ork, and they intended me to see the switch all along. Then, when I was confident I would win, they didn't switch the stone when I was depending on it. I swore that I would get them later, but for now the rain was getting harder.

I managed to find a decrepit stable that was being used as a flophouse. The makeshift clapboard roof kept some of the rain out at least. Digging my last silver out of my boot, I gave it to the old dwarf who sat on a stool at the door. Then I found a dark stall, crawled out of my wet and bloody clothes, and collapsed in the dirty straw.

The pain in my arm kept me from sleeping, so I heard the thugs announce their arrival.

"Right, you scum. Rent has just been raised." Two huge trolls and a weasel-faced dwarf stood in the doorway. The old dwarf rose from his seat to object, and had his skull crushed by one of the trolls' clubs. The three thugs began rousing the drunks from their stalls and shaking them down for their last coppers. Luckily I had chosen the stall farthest to the back, and was able to slip out between two loose boards. Congratulating myself on a quick escape, I then remembered my clothes had been left behind in my haste. I spent the rest of the night wet and shivering in the ruins of an old corral, fighting off the rats with my bare feet.

When dawn broke, the rain stopped and I crawled out to see the new day, wearing only my undertunic. On the edge of Drover's Square I saw three heads mounted on pikes. As I came closer, I recognized the heads of the two members of the Force of the Eye who had given me probationary membership, as well as that of the dwarf whose pouch I had lifted. A burly troll wearing the amulet of the Eye, and carrying a massive axe over his shoulder, stood guard. I asked him what crime they had been guilty of.

"These three were running a scam, selling memberships in the Force of the Eye to would-be thieves. Can you believe some bumpkins actually fell for that? Normally Garltik doesn't care who scams whom, or who steals what, but they were using *his* Name to do it. Nobody gets away with pretending to be part of the Force. As if you could just buy your way onto the Force of the Eye. Anyway, why do you care?"

"Actually, they had some daggers of mine. I don't suppose I could get them back, could I?" The troll just laughed and shook his head in disbelief. His look confirmed that, in his eyes, I was one of the bumpkins he had spoken of. I looked at my reflection—clothed in a puddle-dirty undertunic, rat-bitten bare feet, with straw sticking out of my hair.

"I just didn't expect so many thieves," I muttered to my reflection. And then he said the words that finally crushed me.

"Thieves?" laughed the troll. "You haven't met any thieves yet. This is just the Stables. It's mainly scorchers and sell-swords here. Now, go further into Kratas—there you'll see some *real* thieves."

As I began the long walk back to my village, I wondered if I could still plow a field with only one hand.



Introduction

*The chaotic bazaars, the dirty taverns, the surly guards.
Best of all, the easy marks. It's great to be home!*

• Jonjon Gondra, Itinerant Human Thief of Kratas •

2

The age of **Earthdawn** is an era of magic that existed thousands of years ago in our world's dim past. Magic touched every aspect of the lives of men and women of the Namegiver races: humans, elves, dwarfs, orks, trolls, windlings, t'skrang, and obsidimen. However, as the levels of magic rose, so did the dangers in the world. The rise of magic brought the Horrors to Earth, creatures from the depths of astral space that devoured all life in their path.

For four centuries, the people of Barsaive hid underground as the Horrors devastated their lands during the dark time that came to be called the Scourge. Now, the people of Barsaive have emerged from their sealed kaers and citadels, ready to fight for life and freedom against the remaining Horrors and the oppressive Theran Empire. From all across Barsaive, bold heroes step forward to champion their land, arming themselves for their daunting task with powerful magical spells and treasures.

Through magic, skill, and daring, Barsaive's heroes strive to heal the world of the scars left by the Scourge. By doing so, they become Barsaive's living legends.

Kratas: The City of Thieves offers gamemasters and players an in-depth look at Barsaive's most disreputable city. Home to the clever and the desperate, the wealthy and the destitute, the fallen citadel of Kratas is the center of all mercenary and illegal activities in Barsaive. The legendary ork Thief, Garlthik One-Eye, controls the city through his gang, the Force of the Eye. Kratas is a veritable hub of information and stolen goods. Adventure and intrigue—both can be found here, in the dirty streets of the City of Thieves!

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

The first part of this book provides a general overview on the city, giving information on Kratas' history, its gangs, and the city's relations to the rest of the province of Barsaive. In a sense, these chapters lay the foundation on which this hive of scum and villainy is based and details how player characters can join the gangs of Kratas and become a part of this city.

The book's second part contains detailed descriptions of Kratas' various districts, including dozens of adventure hooks and gamemaster characters. Be prepared for a journey into the unimaginable depths of Barsaive's underworld, from the heights of Clifftop to the unexplored tunnels of the ancient Undercity beneath the ruins of Kratas' shattered citadel.

The lands surrounding the City of Thieves comprise the third part of this book, which details the nearby towns, the Kratas Mesa, the Dinganni Plains, and the trade routes that connect Kratas to the rest of the province. The book will talk about the various secret societies and cults and their shady business in and around Kratas.

Last, but not least, the final part of the book features rules for all the new traps, creatures, talent knacks, magical treasures, and goods and services available in Kratas. A comprehensive index helps you find things quickly.

The **Player's** and **Gamemaster's Guides** are required to use this book. While the **Namegivers of Barsaive** and **Nations of Barsaive Volume Two** books are not required to make use of the information provided in this tome, they offer additional information to help creating a rich and diverse background for Kratas' role in the **Earthdawn** universe.