Peter V. Brett

The Great Bazaar
and other stories
The Great Bazar and other stories
Peter V. Brett
**Introduction**

Every novel is a learning process for the author, and *The Warded Man* (AKA *The Painted Man* in the UK) was no different. It was a real challenge, keeping the story moving along quickly with page-turning “what happens next?” tension, despite the book being close to 450 pages and spanning 14 years in the lives of three separate characters. Part of the process was learning when, for the greater good, to cut out scenes I’d already written (even when I loved them). A more important part of it was learning to look ahead and not write some of those scenes in the first place.

*The Great Bazaar* was one of the latter. It is essentially chapter 16.5 of *The Warded Man*, taking place during the 3 year gap between Chapters 16 and 17, when Arlen is working as a Messenger traveling throughout the Free Cities. This was an exciting, adventure-filled period in Arlen's life, and a very fertile spawning ground for short stories about him traveling from town to town, touching the lives of different people living behind the wards.

Like Caine in Kung Fu.

I have a lot of story ideas for those three years, but there wasn't space to include all of them in *The Warded Man*, and even if there had been, it would have robbed Arlen's race towards destiny of all its immediacy. So I decided to skip those side stories and get to them some other time, putting Arlen, at the beginning of Chapter 17 (Ruins), at the end of a long series of adventures, lightly sketched for the reader, wherein he became worldly, and culminating in him finding the lost city of Anoch Sun, the next true turning point in his life.

Some of those adventures will be told in upcoming novels, but the tale of how Arlen found the lost city itself was too big and self-contained to fit in that format, and I am excited to be able to present it here.

*The Great Bazaar* shows everything I love about Arlen, and showcases one of my favorite supporting characters, Abban the *khaffit*, with his own point of view for the first time. Whether you are a new reader interested in an introduction to Arlen's world, or a fan of the series looking for an appetizer before the second book, *The Desert Spear*, publishes in April 2010, I think you'll enjoy it.

Peter V. Brett
July 2009

[www.petervbrett.com](http://www.petervbrett.com)
The Great Bazaar

SUNLIGHT was heavy in the desert. More than heat or brightness, it was an oppressive weight, and Arlen kept finding himself hunching over as if to yield before it. He was riding through the outskirts of the Krasian Desert, where there was nothing but cracked flats of dry clay as far as the eye could see in any direction. Nothing to provide shade or reflect heat. Nothing to sustain life.

Nothing to make a sane person wander out here, Arlen scolded himself, nevertheless straightening his back in defiance of the sun. He had a thin white robe on over his clothes, the hood pulled low over his eyes, and a veil over his mouth and nose. The cloth reflected some of the light, but it seemed scant protection. He had even slung a white sheet over his horse, a bay courser named Dawn Runner.

The horse gave a dry cough, attempting to dislodge the ever-present dust from its throat. "I'm thirsty too, Dawn," Arlen said, stroking the horse's neck, "but we've used our water ration for the morning, so there's nothing for it but to endure."

Arlen reached again for Abban's map. The compass slung around his neck told him that they were still headed due east, but there was no sign of the canyon. It should have come in sight a day ago, and harsh rationing or no, they would have to turn back to Fort Krasia in another day if they did not reach the river and find water.

Or you could spare yourself a day of thirst and turn back now, a voice in his head said.

The voice was always telling him to turn back. Arlen thought of it as his father, the lingering presence of a man he hadn't seen in close to a decade. Its words were always the stern-sounding bits of wisdom that his father had liked to impart. Jeph Bales had been a good man, and honest, but his stern wisdom had kept him from traveling more than a few hours from his home for his entire life.

Every day away from succor was another night spent outside with the corelings, and not even Arlen took that lightly, but he had a deep and driving need to see things that no other man had seen, to go places no other man had gone. He had been eleven when he ran away from home. Now he was twenty, and had seen more of the world than any but a handful of other men.

Like the parch in Arlen's throat, the voice was simply another thing to be endured. The demons had made the world small enough. He would not let some nagging voice make it even smaller.

This time he was seeking Baha kad'Everam, a Krasian hamlet whose name translated into "Bowl of Everam," which was the Krasian name for the Creator. Abban's maps said it rested in a natural bowl formed by a dry lakebed in a river canyon. The hamlet was renowned for its pottery, but the pottery merchants had stopped coming more than twenty years ago, and a dal'Sharum expedition had found the Bahavans taken by the night. No one had gone back there since.

"I was on that expedition," Abban had claimed. Arlen had looked at the fat merchant doubtfully. "It's true," Abban said. "I was just a novice warrior carrying spears for the dal'Sharum, but I remember the trek well. There was no sign of the Bahavans, but the village was intact. The warriors cared nothing for pottery, and thought it dishonorable to loot. Even now, there is pottery left in the ruins, waiting for any with the courage to claim it." He had leaned in closely then. "The work of a Bahavan pottery master would sell for a premium in the bazaar," he said meaningfully.

And now, Arlen was in the middle of the desert, wondering if Abban had made the whole thing up.

He went on for hours more before he caught sight of a shadow creasing across the clay flats ahead of him. He could led his heart thudding in his chest as Dawn Runner's plodding hooves slowly brought the canyon into view. Arlen breathed a sigh of relief, reminding himself that he ignored his father's voice for a reason. He turned his horse south; the bowl came into sight not long after.

Dawn Runner was grateful when they rode down into the bowl's shade. The hamlet's residents had apparently shared the sentiment, because they had built their homes into the ancient canyon walls, cutting deeply into the living clay and extending outward with adobe buildings indistinguishable in color from the canyon and invisible from any distance. A perfect camouflage from the wind demons that soared out over the flats in search of prey.

But despite this protection, the Bahavans had still died out. The river had gone dry, and sickness and thirst had left them vulnerable to the corelings. Perhaps a few had attempted the trek through the desert to Fort Krasia, but if so, they were never heard from again.

Arlen's initial high spirits fell with the realization that he was riding into a graveyard. Again. He drew wards of protection in the air as he passed the homes, calling out "Ay, Bahavans!" in the vain hope that some survivors might remain.

Only the sound of his own voice echoed back to him. The cloth that had served to block sun from windows and
doorways, where it remained at all, was ragged and filthy, and the wards cut into the adobe were faded and worn from years of exposure to harsh desert wind and grit. The walls were scarred by demon claws. There were no survivors here.

There were demon pits dug in the center of the village to trap and hold corelings for the sun, and blockades running up the steep stone stairways that zigzagged in tiers up the canyon wall to link the buildings. They were hastily built defenses, put in place by the dal'Sharum not to defend the Bahavans, but rather to honor them. Baha kad'Everam had been a village of khaffit, men whose caste made them unworthy of the right to hold spears or enter into Heaven, but even such as they deserved hallowed ground to lay to rest, that I heir spirits might be reincarnated into a higher caste, if they were worthy.

And there was only one way the dal'Sharum hallowed ground. They stained it with their blood, and the black ichor that flowed through coreling veins. They called it alagai'sharak, meaning “demon war,” and it was a battle waged every night in Fort Krasia, an eternal struggle that would go on until all the demons were dead, or there were no more men to fight them. The warriors had danced one night's alagai'sharak in Baha kad'Everam, to sanctify the Bahavans' graveyard.

Arlen rode around the blockades and down to the riverbed, a mighty channel that now held only a muddy, buggy trickle of water. Some thin vegetation clung stubbornly to the water's edge, but further back the stalks of dead plants jutted, choked with dust and too dry to rot.

The water collected in a few small pools, brown and stinking. Arlen filtered it through charcoal and cloth, but still looked at the water doubtfully, and decided to boil it, as well. Dawn Runner nibbled at the bits of weed and prickly grass while he worked.

It was getting late in the day, and Arlen looked at the setting sun resentfully. "C'mon, boy," he told the horse. "Time to lock ourselves up for the night."

He led Dawn Runner back up the bank and into the main courtyard of the village. With little rain or erosion, the demon pits, twenty feet deep and ten feet in diameter, remained intact, but the wards that had been cut into the stones around them were dirty and faded. Any demon thrown into one of the pits now would likely climb right back out.

Still, the pits gave some security. Arlen set up his portable circles right between the adobe walls and one pit, limiting the path of approach to his camp.

Ten feet in diameter, Arlen's portable warding circles were composed of lacquered wooden plates connected by lengths of stout rope. Each plate was painted with ancient symbols of forbiddance, enough to shield him from every known breed of coreling. He laid them out in precise fashion, ensuring that the wards lined up correctly to form a seamless net.

He drove a stake into the clay inside one circle and looped rope around Dawn Runner's legs, hobbling the horse and tying it to the stake with a complicated knot. If the horse struggled or tried to bolt when the demons came, the ropes would tighten and hold it in place, but Arlen could free the knot with but a tug, dropping the loops and freeing Dawn Runner instantly.

In the other circle, Arlen made his own camp. He laid a fire, but did not yet set spark to it, for wood was precious this far out, and the desert night would grow bitter cold.

As he worked, Arlen's eyes kept drifting up the stone steps to the adobe buildings built into the walls. Somewhere up here was the workshop of Master Dravazi, an artisan whose painted pottery had been worth its weight in gold while he lived, and was priceless now. One original Dravazi, lying forgotten on the potter's wheel, would likely finance his entire trip. More would make him a very rich man.

Arlen even had a good idea of where the master's workshop lay from his maps, but as much as he wanted to go and search, the sun was setting.

As the great orb settled below the horizon, the heat leached from the clay flats, drifting skyward and giving the demons a path up from the Core. An evil gray mist rose from the ground outside the circles, coalescing slowly into demonic form.

As the mist rose, Arlen began to feel claustrophobic, as if his circle was surrounded by glass walls, cutting him off from the world. It was hard to breathe in the circle, even though the wards blocked only demon magic, and fresh air blew across his lace even now. He looked out at his rising jailors, and bared his teeth.

Wind demons were the first to form, standing about the height of a tall man at the shoulder, but with head fins that rose much higher, topping eight or nine feet. Their great long snouts were sharp-edged like beaks, but also hid rows of teeth, thick as a man's finger. Their skin was a tough, flexible armor that could turn any spearpoint or arrowhead. That resilient substance stretched thin out from their sides and along the underside of their arm bones to form the tough membrane of their giant wings, which often spanned three times their height, jointed with wicked hooked talons that could cleanly sever a man's head when they dived.
The windies took no notice of Arlen, as he was set back against the adobe walls and had yet to light his fire. As they solidified, they set off towards the riverbank at a run. Their stunted legs offered little grace on land, but as they shrieked and leapt from the edge of the bank, the cruel elegance of their design became apparent as they spread their enormous wings with a great snap and swooped upwards, flapping just a few powerful strokes before soaring into the gloaming in search of prey.

Arlen had expected to see the sand demons that haunted the dunes of the Krasian desert rise next, but the twilight showed the mists thinning already, forming only a last few wind demons.

Arlen perked up at this. Though corelings would hunt and kill most anything, their true hatred was for humanity, and they were sometimes reluctant to leave ruins once the inhabitants were dead, in case more humans were one day drawn to the site. Unaging, demons were nothing if not patient, and could lie in wait for decades or more.

It was only natural for the windies to continue to materialize here. The canyon cliffs provided an ideal takeoff spot, and they could soar far and wide in the night to seek out prey. But land-bound sand demons had no such luxury, and Arlen could find no sign of them in the area. Sand demons hunted in packs known as storms, and it seemed that some time in the last twenty years, the storm had moved on in search of other prey.

Arlen stood and began to pace impatiently as he watched the last of the wind demons go, looking up at the adobe buildings, calculating. If he kept low, it was unlikely a wind demon would spot him on the cliff walls. Even if one did, he could retreat into the adobe buildings. The windows and doorways were too narrow to admit windies unless they landed, and wind demons on land could be easily tripped or outrun. There was still no sign of sand demons; their size and coloring would stand out in the adobe village.

And One Arm wouldn't arrive for hours. If he was quick...

*Don't be stupid. Wait for dawn!* his father's voice snapped at him, but Arlen had seldom listened to it before. If he'd wanted to live a safe life, he would have remained in the Free Cities, where most people went from womb to pyre without daring to step outside a wardnet.

Arlen had been outside in the naked night many times, specially in Fort Krasia, where he was the only outsider ever to dance *alagai'sharak*. This time, though, there were no *dal'Sharum* warriors at his side to help him if something happened. He was on his own.

*Nothing new there, Arlen thought.*

He lit a slow-burning fire at the center of his circle, so he might easily find his way back in the darkness, and affixed a torch socket to the end of his spear. He slung spare torches over his back in a loose pack he hoped would soon be full of Bahavan pottery. Finally, he took up his round shield, painted with the same defensive wards as his circle, and stepped over the barrier.

As he left the circle, Arlen took what felt like his first full breath since sunset. He knew it was all his imagination, but it seemed as if the air tasted better outside the circle, cooler and sweeter. It felt good to reclaim a bit of the world corelings took from man each night.

He made his way to the stairs, moving the torch this way and that, carefully scanning for any sign of demons, always ready to defend or flee.

It was a difficult climb. The steps were irregular, with some too narrow to put his entire foot upon, and others where it was several paces to the next step. Sometimes the path was nearly level, and other times it was a steep slope. He imagined the Bahavans had very strong thighs.

To make matters worse, the *dal'Sharum* had ransacked most of the lower tiers for materials to build their blockades. Broken pottery, furniture, clothing; anything not built into the walls was piled on the streets to slow any corelings on the way to Krasian ambushes that threw them over the narrow side-wall and down into the pits below.

Arlen ducked low, using the cover provided by that wall as he climbed and glanced warily out into the night sky. Wind demons could drop like silent stones from a mile in the sky, snapping their wings open at the last instant to sever a man's head, snatch him in their hind talons, and take back off without ever touching ground. He had no doubt one could pick him off the walls if it spotted him before he caught sight of it.

By the fifth tier, the blockades ended and the homes seemed intact, but Arlen continued to climb despite the burning in his thighs. Master Dravazi's workshop was said to be on the seventh tier, for there were seven pillars of heaven, and seven layers to Nie's abyss.

Arlen tried to fight back a giddy smile as he gained the seventh tier and saw the master's name carved into the archway of a large building. He scanned the area again, but there was still no sign of sand demons, and the wind demons seemed to have flown far off into the night.

A ragged curtain hung in the doorway, likely meant more to hold back the ever-present orange dust than for privacy or security. There was no need for such in a hamlet as small and isolated as Baha.

Arlen eased up to the doorway, pushing the curtain aside with the edge of his shield and thrusting his spear into the darkness. The torch cast flickering light over a room filled with pottery.
Arlen choked, hardly believing his eyes. The work lay slacked, prepared for a trip to market some twenty years ago that had never come to pass. The pottery was covered in orange dust, making it the same color as the walls and floors of the buildings, but it seemed intact, even after so much time. He readied out a tentative hand, and his fingers left lines in the dust, revealing smooth lacquer and brightly-painted designs that shone in the torchlight. One room, and it contained more riches that he could possibly carry!

He dropped to one knee, setting down his spear and shield to remove the backpack. He scanned the smaller vases, lamps, and bowls, deciding what to take. He would carry a few pieces back to his circle to examine while he waited for dawn to come, and then return for the rest.

He was sliding a delicate vase into the pack when he heard the rumble. Thinking he had dislodged something and the stack of pottery was about to topple, he grabbed his spear and brought up the torch.

But there was no sign of teetering pottery, and the rumble sounded again, this time almost a growl, a few guttural "r's" floating in the darkness.

Forgetting the pottery, Arlen snatched up his shield, slowly turning towards the sound. A sand demon must have followed him into the room, stalking as quietly as it could, but unable to quell the animal instinct in its throat.

Arlen turned a slow circuit, holding his torch out far and scanning the room, but there was no sign of any demon. He gave a sudden start and glanced upwards, but there was nothing above waiting to drop on him. He shuddered and forced himself to keep looking.

He almost missed it, but for another faint growl that came while his torch happened to be in the right place. It seemed a plain adobe wall at first, but then part of the wall... shifted.

There was a demon there. Even staring right at it, the coreling was almost invisible. Its armor was the exact orange of the clay, and had the same rough texture. It was small, no bigger than a medium-sized dog, but it was compact in a way that spoke of powerful bunched muscle, and its claws left deep grooves in the adobe walls. Arlen had never seen the like.

The coreling wriggled slightly, tamping, and then gave a great roar as it uncoiled and launched itself at him.

"Night!" Arlen screamed as he put up his shield, wondering if the wards would even hold against this new breed of coreling. Wards were picky like that, each made to block a specific type of demon. There was some overlap, but nothing to gamble one's life upon.

Magic flared as the demon struck his shield, knocking Arlen over, but even as the wards activated, Arlen knew they would not hold forever. No demon should have been able to touch his shield at all, but this one held on tenaciously against the force of the magic trying to repel it.

The demon was heavier than it looked, but Arlen got his weight under the shield and lifted, driving hard into the adobe wall. The coreling's claws lost purchase with the impact, and the magic, still pushing hard against the prone demon, flung Arlen backwards instead. He landed in the pile of pottery, smashing much of the priceless artwork.

"Corespawn it!" he cursed, but there was no time to lament, for the demon hurled itself into the pile, scattering clay shards everywhere. Arlen was jabbed and cut from all sides by the jagged clay bits as he tried to put his feet under him.

He managed to get his shield up as the clay demon leapt at him again, but the demon dug its claws in deep and pulled so hard that the leather straps around Aden's forearm snapped, and the shield was pulled from his grasp. He stumbled frantically backwards, trying to get away from the creature before it could untangle itself and come at him again. It would be a long run back to his portable circles without his shield, and from what he had just seen, there was no guarantee his circles would even hold the creature back.

The demon leapt again, but Arlen had his spear up, stabbing the creature right in the center of its chest. It was a powerful blow from a fine weapon, but even the weakest coreling had armor enough to turn a speartip. The point failed to pierce, but the demon took the torch in its face, knocking it from its socket. Arlen shoved hard, throwing the demon back, and in the flickering light, he saw it stumble awkwardly, momentarily blinded by the light.

"Come on, then!" Arlen shouted, goading the demon as he edged towards the door. It leapt at him one last time, still dazzled, but Arlen was ready for it. Snatching the door curtain, he caught the clay demon up in its crusted and dusty folds, gripping the ends tightly as the coreling struggled. The curtain tore from the rod as Arlen pushed out the door and to the stair ledge, throwing the demon over. Still tangled in the curtain, its roars were muffled as it fell to the courtyard far below.

Arlen rushed back to snatch up the torch. He left his pack where it lay, along with his broken shield and spear, and hurried back out to the stairs. He was about to head down when a scrabbling sound vibrated in the air. He looked at the adobe walls going up the cliff face, and felt his stomach churn as they came alive with clay demons.

Gonna get'cherself killed one of these days, Arlen heard his father say, but at that moment, he had neither time nor inclination to disagree. He turned and ran down the steps as fast his legs could carry him.

Moving faster than he could see his footing in the flickering torchlight, Arlen took steps several at a time, but it
wasn't enough. There were demons ahead of him as well as behind. He must have climbed right past them on the way up, oblivions. As he came towards a landing, a pair of clay demons bounded around the corner from the tier below, talons tamping down as their muscles tense to spring.

Arlen had no way to arrest his downward motion when they appeared, so he did the only thing he could think of and rolled right over the edge of the wall.

The drop was a good ten feet, and he landed heavily on his side on the steps of the next tier. The demons gave chase, but Arlen shoved his pain aside, bounced to his feet, and ran on.

The demons were fast, but Arlen's legs were longer, and desperation gave him blinding speed. As much from memory as from sight, he dodged around the Krasian blockades, suddenly thankful that the dal'Sharum had torn apart the lower levels for fodder.

A demon dropped onto him from above, talons digging deep into his back as its teeth sank into his shoulder, but Arlen hardly slowed. He shoved the torch in the demon's face and threw himself backwards into the cliff wall, blasting the breath from the creature and breaking its hold. He grabbed the coreling and threw it at another pair hurtling down the steps at him.

Using the bright torch to drive demons back, Arlen ran on. He fell twice, twisting his ankle badly once, but both times he was back up and running before the pain registered. Behind him, it seemed as if the entire cliff face had become a swarm of roaring demons.

He leapt over another wall to avoid the last infested landing and sprinted for his campfire, only to find the clay demon he had thrown over the cliff trapped in the middle of his circle. The height and cloth wrapping must have protected it from the wards on the way in, but the creature now clawed madly at the wardnet in its desperation to escape, sending spiderwebs of white magic through the air.

Unable to use his own circle, Arlen ran on to Dawn Runner's. A clay demon blocked his path, but as it leapt at him, Arlen dropped his torch and grabbed it in both hands. The demon's sharp scales cut his hands and he caught a blast of its rank breath in his face, but he pivoted sharply, using its own energy to hurl the creature into one of the demon pits in the courtyard.

There was a shriek as Arlen dove into the horse's portable circle, and the wards flared brightly as a wind demon struck the net. The coreling was hurled back and would have gone into the same pit as the clay demon had it not spread its wings in time to catch itself. It shrieked at him again, revealing rows of teeth in the light of the wards.

But Arlen wasn't safe yet. The clay demons surged at him in a wave, dozens of them charging the circle. The wards flared as the demons tried to cross the line, stopping them short, but the clay demons were not hurled back as they should be. Magic shocked through their snub bodies and they howled in pain, but still they dug their claws into the clay and inched forward against the press. Arlen moved around the circle, kicking them back from the net, but it was an impossible task to maintain for long, and it was still early in the night. Sooner or later, the clay demons would get through. Dawn Runner knew it too, the beast struggling hard against the ropes.

But then a roar sounded that dwarfed even the cacophony of the clay demons, and One Arm bounded into the courtyard. The rock demon was fifteen feet tall from horn to toe, covered in a thick black carapace that could not be harmed by anything short of the most potent wards.

Jealous as ever, the giant coreling swept the clay demons aside with its good arm like a man might sweep autumn leaves, clearing a path to Aden's circle. It roared at any clay demon foolish enough to draw close, killing more than a few of its smaller cousins before they took the message to heart.

Arlen had crippled One Arm in their first encounter, almost ten years gone. Little more than a boy at the time, he had severed the behemoth's limb more by accident than design, but One Arm was immortal, and as incapable of forgetting as it was of forgiveness.

Every night, One Arm rose in the place it had last seen Arlen, and followed his trail. No matter how many rivers Arlen swam or trees he climbed, the great demon always caught up to him in a matter of hours, running more swiftly than any horse. Tireless, thirstless, its only thoughts were of vengeance.

The rock demon hammered at Arlen's wards, illuminating the entire river bowl with magic as it attempted to take its revenge, but Arlen knew his rock wards well, and there was little chance that One Arm would succeed. Still, as he sat back, staring up at the enraged creature, he felt no comfort at the unexpected rescue from the clay demons. He knew that sooner or later, the mighty rock demon would catch him on the wrong side of the wards, and then he would likely wish the clay demons had gotten him.

But for now, he flung the demon an obscene gesture and dug into Dawn Runner's saddlebags for his spare herb pouch and bandages.

He had become quite good at stitching up his own skin.
JUST BEFORE DAWN, as the sky began to lighten, Arlen was startled awake by frantic shrieking. A light sleeper by necessity, he leapt up, shaking off slumber like a blanket. One Arm had already sunk back down into the Core, as had all the wind and clay demons save one.

The coreling trapped in Arlen's main circle smashed hard against the wardnet, clawing at the web of magic, but it was unable to pass. The wards might not be wholly attuned to clay demons, but when a coreling was surrounded on all sides by a complete circuit, the net's power was increased manifold.

The horizon brightened further, and Arlen watched the demon's last moments of existence with great interest. In the growing light, the creature looked a little like an armadillo, with segmented plates of orange armor along its back and powerful stub legs covered in thick, sharp scales and ending in hooked claws. Its blunt head was shaped like a cylinder, able to butt with tremendous force, which it demonstrated repeatedly as it smashed vainly against magic walls of its prison.

Rays of light began to reach the dry riverbed, and the coreling screamed in pain, though the canyon walls still kept it in shadow. It wouldn't be long.

In desperation, the demon became insubstantial, disintegrating into an orange mist that filled the circle. But even its dematerialized form was unable to escape. There was no path to the Core in the clay floor inside the wardnet, and it flowed towards the edges of the circle, but crackles of magic held it at bay, shivering through the mist like lightning dancing through a cloud.

The mist flowed around the circle, trying again and again to find a hole in Arlen's tight net. Even in its disembodied state, Arlen could taste its desperation and fear, and he tensed with excitement. Demons were all-but immune to mortal weapons. The only guaranteed way to kill one was to trap it in a warded circle and wait for the sun, a task that often took as many humans with it as demons.

Finally, the sun rose high enough to reach the far side of the river, and Arlen could see sparks catching in the orange cloud like kindling. Suddenly, there was a flash of intense heat as the mist ignited, setting the very air on fire. Arlen felt the rush of vacuum; his eyes dried out and his cheeks reddened, but he could not have looked away if his life depended on it. For all that demons had taken from the world, Arlen would never tire of seeing one pay the ultimate price for its evil.

He searched his campsite after the demon flame expired, but most of his gear had been torn apart and smashed by the demon, or else burned when it ignited the air. He had spares of the most irreplaceable items in Dawn Runner's circle, but that one dead demon was going to end up costing him most of his profit from selling the pottery.

If there was even pottery left to sell, Arlen rushed back up the stairs to Master Dravazi's workshop, and as he feared, almost every piece was cracked or shattered. He searched the rest of the adobe buildings and found a great deal of pottery, but it was sturdy and utilitarian. The Bahavans, dependent on trade to survive, had wasted little of their artistry on ornamenting the pieces they used themselves. He would be lucky to even cover his losses.

Still, despite the pain and loss, Arlen rode out of the canyon with his head high. He had seen someplace no one had visited in over twenty years, braved its demons, and would return to tell the tale.

One of these days, your luck won't hold, his father's voice reminded him.

Maybe, he thought back to it, but not today.

ABBAN LIMPED THROUGH the great bazaar of Fort Krasia, the Desert Spear, leaning heavily on his crutch. He was a large-bellied man, but his lame leg would not have been able to support him in any event.

He wore a yellow silk turban topped with a tan felt cap. Under his tan suede vest he wore a loose shirt of bright blue silk, covered in thread-of-gold scrollwork, and his fingers glittered with rings. His pantaloons, the same yellow silk as his turban, were held up by a jeweled belt, and the head of his crutch was smooth white ivory, carved into the likeness of the first camel he had ever bought, with his armpit resting between its two humps.

The bazaar sprawled for miles along the inner walls of the city. There on the hot, dusty streets were seemingly endless kiosks, tents, and pens, showcasing food, spices, perfume, clothing, jewelry, furniture, livestock, pack animals, and anything else a buyer could possibly want.

Much like the Maze outside the walls, designed to let the dal’Sharum trap and kill any demon attempting to get into the city, the bazaar was designed to trap shoppers and put them off balance as the vendors descended on them. The dazzling array of goods and the aggressiveness of the sellers weakened the resolve and loosened the purse
strings of even the most difficult to please shopper, and apparent exits from the district were more often than not
dead ends as the ever-shifting kiosks blocked through-passage of the street. Even those familiar with the twists and
turns of the bazaar found themselves lost from time to time.

But not Abban. The bazaar was his home, and the sound of shouted haggling was the air he breathed. He could no
more get lost in the bazaar than the First Warrior get lost in the Maze.

Abban was born in his family's tent, right in the center of the bazaar. His grandmother had served as midwife, and
Abban's father, Chabin, had kept their kiosk open to customers even while his wife howled in the back. He couldn't
afford to lose the business, especially if there was to be another mouth to feed.

Chabin was a good man, Abban remembered, a hard worker trying to provide for his family even though his
cowardice had made him unsuitable as a warrior, and the clerics had found his faith lacking.

Denied those two vocations, the only callings considered suitable for a Krasian man, Abban's father had been
forced to bend his back each day, toiling like a woman. He was *khaffit*, a man without honor, and the paradise of
Everam would forever be denied him as a result.

But Chabin had shouldered his burdens without complaint, turning a minor kiosk of substandard trinkets into a
bustling business with clients as far away as the green lands to the north. He had taught Abban about mathematics
and geography, showing him how to draw words and to speak the tongue of greenlanders so that he could haggle
with their Messengers over the goods they brought to trade. He taught Abban many things, but most of all, Chabin
had taught Abban to fear the *dama*. A lesson provided at the cost of his own life.

*Dama*, the clerics of Everam, were at the highest echelon of Krasian society. They wore bright white robes that
could be spotted at a distance, and served as a bridge between man and Creator. It was within the rights of the *dama*
to kill any tribesman below their station, instantly and without fear of reprisal, if they felt that the man was
disrespecting them or the sacred laws they enforced.

Abban had been eight when his father was killed. Cob, a Messenger from the north, had come to the kiosk, buying
supplies for his return trek. He was a valued customer and a vital link to the flow of goods form the green lands.
Abban knew to treat the man like a prince.

"Damaged one of my circles on the trek in," Cob said, limping with the aid of his spear. "I'll need rope and paint."
Chabin snapped his fingers, and Abban handed his father a small pot of paint while he ran to fetch the rope.

"Damned sand demon bit off half my foot before I could retreat to my spare," Cob said, showing his bandaged
foot.

Distracted by the sight, neither Chabin nor Cob had noticed the *dama* passing by.

But the *dama* had noticed them; particularly that Abban's lather had failed to bow low in submission, as was
required of a *khaffit* in the presence of a cleric.

"Bow, you filthy *khaffit*!" the dal'Sharum escorting the *dama* had barked.

Chabin, startled by the shout, had whirled around, accidentally spilling paint onto the *dama*'s pristine white robe.

For a moment, time seemed frozen, and then the enraged *dama* reached over the counter and took hold of
Chabin's hair and chin, twisting sharply. A crack, like the sound of wood breaking, resounded in the tent, and
Abban's father fell over, dead.

It was over a quarter century since that day, but Abban still remembered the sound vividly.

When he was old enough, Abban had been forced to try his hand at being a warrior, that he might not share his
father's shame. But though his Chabin's caste was not hereditary, Abban had proven just as weak, just as cowardly.
He was still a novice when the brutal training crippled him, and he found himself cast out as *khaffit*.

Abban nodded at some merchants as he passed their kiosks. The vendors were mostly women, wrapped head-to-
toe in heavy black cloth, though there were other *khaffit* like him, as well. They, like Abban, were easily
distinguishable in their bright clothes, though all wore the plain tan cap and vest of their caste. Apart from *khaffit*,
only women wore bright, colorful clothing, and they only when alone with their husbands or other women.

If the merchant women felt contempt at the sight of Abban the *khaffit*, they knew better than to show it. Though
he shared his father's weaknesses, Abban had inherited Chabin's strengths as well, and the family business had
grown every year since Abbam had taken the reins. Offending him invariably meant a loss of business, as the fat
*khaffit* had connections and ongoing deals throughout the bazaar and in cities hundreds of miles to the north. The
bulk of trade from the green lands came through Abban, and any who wanted access to the valuable exotic
merchandise kept their disdain to themselves.

All except one. There was a shout from across the street as Abban came to his own pavilion, and he looked with
disgust at the competitor who hobbled towards him.

"Abban, my friend!" the man called, though he was anything but. "I thought I recognized your bright womanly
clothes coming down the street! How is business this day?"

Abban scowled, but he knew better than to offer a rude response. Amit asu Samere am'Rajith am'Majah was a
dal’Sharum warrior, as far above Abban the khaffit as a man was above a woman, and while it was not technically legal for a dal’Sharum to kill a khaffit without just cause, in practice, there would be little or no repercussion if one did.

This was why Abban had to pretend that the occasional carts of goods that vanished from his possession had never existed, much less been stolen, even when he knew it had been Amit's people who took them.

Amit was a recent addition to the market. A sand demon had bitten the meat from his calf in battle, and the wound had festered. Eventually, the dama'ting had no choice but to amputate. It was a grave dishonor to be crippled in battle but not die, but since he had managed to trap the offending demon before the rising sun, Amit's place in the afterlife was assured.

Unlike Abban, Amit was clad from head to toe in black, as befitted a warrior, his night veil loose around his neck. He still carried his spear, using it more as a walking staff than a weapon these days, but he kept it sharp, and was quick to threaten with it when aroused.

A man in warrior black attracted attention in the bazaar, since it was, for the better part, the near-exclusive domain of women and khaffit. People tended to move carefully around him, frightened to approach, so Amit had tied a bright orange cloth beneath the head of his spear to signal his status as a merchant and to draw the eyes of potential customers.

"Ah, Amit, my good friend!" Abban said, his face filling with a look of warm, welcoming sincerity practiced before thousands of customers. "By Everam, it is good to see you. The sun shines brighter when you are about. Business is well, indeed! Thank you for asking. I trust things go well in your pavilion also?"

"Of course, of course!" Amit said, his eyes shooting daggers. He looked ready to say more, but he noticed a pair of women who had stopped to examine one of Abban's fruit carts.

"Come come, honored mothers, I have far better fare across the way in my pavilion!" Amit said. "Would you rather buy your goods from a soulless khaffit, or one who has stood tall in the night against the demon hordes?"

Few could refuse him when it was put that way, and the women turned and headed towards Amit's pavilion. Amit sneered at Abban. It was not the first time he had stolen Abban's business thusly, and likely it was not the last.

There was a hissing in the general din of the market then, and both men looked up. The sound was a warning from other vendors that dama approached. All around, merchants would be hiding wares that were prohibited under Evejan law, such as spirits or musical instruments. Even Amit glanced down at himself to see if he had any contraband on his person.

A few minutes later, the source of the warning became clear. Led by a young cleric in full white robe, a group of nie’dama, novices in white loincloths with one end thrown over their shoulders, were collecting bread, fruit, and meat from the market. There was no offer of payment for what they took, nor did any vendor dare ask. The dama grazed like goats, and there was nothing a merchant who valued his skin dare say about it.

Remembering his father's lesson, Abban bowed so low when the dama appeared that he feared he might tip over. Amit noticed, and smacked Abban's crutch with the butt of his spear, braying a laugh as Abban fell in the dust. The dama turned their way at the sound, and Abban, feeling the weight of that look, put his forehead down and groveled in the dirt like a dog. Amit, conversely, simply nodded his head to the dama in respect, a gesture the cleric returned.

The dama walked on after a moment, but Abban caught the eye of one of the nie’dama, a skinny boy of no more than twelve years. The boy glanced at Amit, then smirked at Abban kneeling in the dust, but he winked conspiratorially before following after his brothers.

And to make matters worse, that was the precise moment the Par’chin arrived.

Being caught groveling in the dirt was never a good way to begin a negotiation.

Arlen looked sadly at Abban kneeling in the dirt. He knew the loss of face hurt his friend more deeply than a dame’s whip ever could. There were a great many things that Arlen admired about the Krasian people, but their treatment of women and khaffit was not among them. No man deserved such shame.

He looked away purposefully as Abban hauled on his crutch to regain his feet, staring intently at a cart of trinkets he had no interest in. When Abban had righted himself and dusted off, Arlen led Dawn Runner over as if he had just arrived.

"Par’chin!" Abban cried, as if he had just noticed Arlen himself. "It is good to see you, son of Jeph! I take it from the laden horse you lead that your journey was a success?"

Arlen pulled out a Dravazi vase, handing it to Abban for inspection. As ever, Abban had a look of disgust painted
on his face before he even had a good look at the object. He reminded Arlen of old Hog, the owner of the general
store in Tibbet's Brook where he had grown up. Never one to let a seller know he was interested until the haggling
was done.

"Pity, I had hoped for better," Abban said, though the vase was more beautiful than any Arlen had ever seen in
Abban's pavilion. "I doubt it will sell for much."

"Spare me the demonshit, for once," Arlen snapped. "I almost got myself cored over these pieces, and if you're not
paying good coin for them, I'll take them elsewhere."

"You wound me, son of Jeph!" Abban cried. "I, who gave you the very maps and instruction that led you to the
treasure in the first place!"

"The place was full of strange demons," Arlen said. "That drives the price up."

"Strange demons?" Abban asked.

Arlen nodded. "They were snub and orange like the rock," he said, "no bigger than a dog, but there were hundreds
of them."

Abban nodded. "Clay demons," he said. "Baha kad'Everam is infested with them."

"Night, you knew?!" Arlen cried. "You knew and sent me there unprepared?"

"I didn't tell you about the clay demons?" Abban asked.

"No, you corespawned well didn't!" Arlen shouted. "I didn't even have proper wards against them!"

Abban paled. "What do you mean, you didn't have wards against them, Par'chin?" he said. "Any fool child knows
about clay demons."

"If you were born in a ripping desert, maybe!" Arlen growled. "They told me the same thing in the corespawned
Duke's Mines after I was almost cored by a pack of snow demons. I should take this whole load north to Fort Rizon,
just to spite you!"

"Oh, there's no need for that, Par'chin!" a voice called. Arlen looked up to see a dal'Sharum hobbled across the
street to them. He didn't know the man, but it was no surprise the man knew him. Most
dal'Sharum had at least
heard of the Par'chin, if not met him directly.

By itself, chin meant "outsider," but in practice it was an insult, synonymous with "coward" and "weakling." It
was a title even lower than khaffit. "Par'chin," however, meant "brave outsider," and it was a singular title belonging
to Arlen alone, the only greenlander ever to learn the ways of the Desert Spear and stand beside
dal'Sharum in
alagai'sharak.

"Allow me to introduce myself," the stranger said in Krasian, gripping forearms with Arlen in a warrior's greeting.
He didn't speak the northern tongue as Abban did, but unlike most other Messengers, Arlen spoke the Krasian
tongue fluently. "I am Amit asu Samere am'Rajith am'Majah," the man said. "Tell me how this pathetic
khaffit has
failed you, and I will better anything he has offered."

Abban grabbed Arlen's arm. "Tell him you stole pottery from hallowed ground, Par'chin," he said in the Northern
tongue, "and we'll both be staked out before the city gates as night falls."

"Khaffit!" Amit barked. "It is the height of rudeness to speak some barbarian tongue in the presence of men!"

"A thousand apologies, noble
dal'Sharum," Abban said, bowing low and stepping back so the other man could not
trip him again.

"You don't want to deal with the likes of this pig-eating half-man," Amit said to Arlen. "You have stood in the
night! Dealing with khaffit is beneath you. But like you, I have demon ichor on my hands. Twelve, did I help see the
sun, before losing my leg!"

"Ah," Abban muttered in Arlen's language, "the last time I heard him tell it, it was only a half dozen. He must be
adding to his count still."

"Eh, what was that, khaffit?" Amit asked, not understanding, but knowing it was likely an insult.

"Nothing, honored dal'Sharum," Abban said, bowing smugly.

Amit smacked Abban's face. "I told you before you were being rude with that savage grunting!" he barked.
"Apologize to the Par'chin!"

Arlen had had enough. He stamped his spear, rounding on the merchant angrily. "You would ask a man to
apologize for speaking my own language to me?!" he roared, shoving Amit so hard he fell to the ground. For a
moment, the merchant's eyes hardened and he gripped his spear, ready to leap to the attack, but his eyes flicked to
Arlen's strong legs, and then to his own stump, and thought better of it. He bowed his head.

"My apologies, Par'chin," he bit off the words as if each one had a foul taste. "I meant no insult."

The caste system cut both ways. Amit had greeted Arlen as a fellow warrior, and warriors had their own pecking
order: strong to weak. His peg leg put Amit at the very bottom of that order. To a strong warrior, he was only a small
step above khaffit himself. It was no wonder Amit had chosen to make the bazaar his home.

Arlen pointed his spear at Amit. "Think twice before you insult my homeland again," he said, keeping his voice
low with menace, "or the next time the dust of the street will be dampened with blood."

He meant no such thing, of course, but Amit need never know that. Dal'Sharum required a show of strength, if they were to respect you.

Abban took Arlen's arm and hurried him into his pavilion before the incident had a chance to escalate further.

"Hah!" he cried, when they were inside and the heavy tent flap closed behind them. "Amit will make me suffer a month for seeing that, but it will be worth every insult and blow."

"You shouldn't have to tolerate such treatment," Arlen said for what felt like the thousandth time. "It's not right."

But Abban waved him away. "Right or wrong, it is the way of things, Par'chin," Abban said. "Perhaps they treat my kind differently in your land, but in the Desert Spear, you might as well ask the sun not to shine so hot."

It was cool in Abban's tent, and his women came over immediately, taking Arlen's dusty outer robe and his boots, giving him a clean robe to sit in. They piled pillows for the men and brought out pitchers of water and bowls of fruit and meat, along with steaming cups of tea. When they were refreshed, Abban produced a small bottle and two tiny clay cups.

"Come, Par'chin, drink with me," he said. "Let us calm our nerves and start our meeting anew." Arlen looked at the tiny cup dubiously, then shrugged and took a sip.

A moment later, he spit it back out, reaching frantically for the water jug. Abban laughed and kicked his feet.

"Are you trying to poison me?" Arlen demanded, but his anger dissipated when Abban held up his own cup and drained it.

"What in the Core is that foul brew?" he asked.

"Couzi," Abban said. "Made from distilled fermented grain and cinnamon. By Everam, Par'chin, how many casks of it have you lugged across the desert without having a taste?"

"I don't drink the merchandise," Arlen said. "And for the ledger, it tastes more like a flame demon's spit than cinnamon."

"It can double as lamp oil," Abban agreed, smiling. He refilled Arlen's cup and handed it to him. "Best to drink the first one quickly," he advised, refilling his own cup, "but by the third, all you'll taste is the cinnamon."

Arlen threw back the cup and nearly choked. His throat burned like he had just drank boiling water.

"This is a corespawned drink," he choked, but allowed Abban to fill his cup again.

"The Damaji agree with you, Par'chin," Abban said. "Couzi is illegal under Evejan law, but we khaffit are allowed to make it to sell to chin?"

"And you keep a little for yourself," Arlen said.

Abban snorted. "I do more business in couzi here than in the green lands, Par'chin," he said. "It takes only a small bottle to make even a large man's head swim, so it is easily smuggled under the darnel's noses. Khaffit drink it by the cask, and dal'Sharum bring into the Maze to give them bravery in the night. Even a few damn have developed the taste."

"You don't think it'll cost you in the next life, selling forbidden drink to clerics?" Arlen asked, draining another cup. Already, it was going down smoother.

"If I believed in such nonsense, I would, Par'chin," Abban said, "so it is well that I don't."

Arlen sipped at the next cup, his throat numb to the burn now. He savored the taste of the cinnamon, amazed that he hadn't noticed it before. He felt as if his body were floating above the embroidered silk pillows he rested upon. Abban seemed similarly relaxed, and by the time the small bottle was empty, they were laughing at nothing and slapping one another on the back.

"Now that we're friends again," Abban said, "may we return to business?"

Arlen nodded, and watched as Abban rose unsteadily to his feet, stumbling over to the Bahavan pottery that his women had unloaded from Dawn Runner and brought inside. Of course, Abban's face immediately fell into one of practiced neutrality as he prepared to haggle.

"Most of these are not Dravazi," he said.

"Wasn't much in the master's shop," Arlen lied. "Besides, we still need to discuss your lack of candor regarding the dangers of the trip before we talk coin."

"What does it matter?" Abban asked. "You walked out unscathed, as always."

"It matters, because I might not have gone at all if I had known the place was infested with demons I didn't have proper wards for!" Arlen snapped.

But Abban only scoffed, waving a hand at him dismissively. "What reason would I have had to lie to you, son of Jeph?" he asked. "You are the Par'chin, the brave one who dares to go anywhere! Had I told you of the clay demons, it would only have strengthened your resolve to see the place and spit in their eyes!"

"Flattery ent gonna get you out of this, Abban," Arlen said, though the compliment did warm his couzied mind a bit. "You'll need to do better."
"What would the Par'chin have me do?" Abban asked.
"I want a grimoire of clay demon wards," Arlen said.
"Done," Abban said, "and free of charge. My gift to you, my friend." Arlen raised his eyebrows. Wards were a valuable commodity, and Abban was not a man free with his gifts.
"Call it investment," Abban said. "Even plain Bahavan pottery has value. A little hint of danger to make a buyer feel lie's getting something rare." He looked at Arlen. "There's more in the village?" he asked.
Arlen nodded.
"Well," Abban said, "there's no profit in you getting killed before you can haul it back."
"Fair enough," Arlen said. "But still, how can you just offer something like that? Aren't books of warding forbidden for you to even touch?"
Abban chuckled. "Most everything is forbidden to a khaffit, Par'chin. But yes, the damn consider warding a holy task and guard the art closely."
"But you can get me a grimoire of clay demon wards," Arlen said.
"Right out from under the dama's, noses!" Abban laughed, snapping his fingers under Arlen's nose. Arlen stumbled drunkenly, falling back onto the pile of pillows, and both of them laughed again.
"How?" Arlen pressed.
"Ah, my friend," Abban waved an admonishing finger at Arlen, "you ask me to give away too much of my trade secret."
"Demonshit," Arlen said. "Your map to Baha was off by more than a day. If I'm to trust my life to these maps and wards you give me, I want to know the information is good."
Abban looked at him for a long moment, then shrugged and sat back down beside Arlen. He snapped his fingers, and one of his black-clad women brought another bottle of couzi. She knelt to fill their cups before bowing low and leaving them. They clicked cups and drank.
Abban leaned in close. "I will tell you this, Par'chin," he said quietly, "not because you are a valued client, but because you are my true friend. The Par'chin has never treated this lowly khaffit as anything but a man."
Arlen scoffed, refilling their cups. "You are a man," he said.
Abban bowed his head in gratitude and leaned in close again. "It is my nephew, Jamere," he confided. "His father was dal'Sharum, but died while the boy was still in swaddling. The father's family had little wealth, so my sister returned to my pavilion, and raised the boy here in the bazaar. He recently came of age and was taken to find his life's path, but he is scrawny, and the dal'Sharum drillmasters were unimpressed with him. His wit, however, impressed the dama, and he was taken as an acolyte."
"He was one of the nie'dama in the market today?" Arlen asked, and Abban nodded.
"Jamere may be a cleric in training," Abban said, "but the boy is utterly corrupt, and has even less faith than I do. He will happily copy or steal any scroll in the temple if I tell him there's a buyer and share the profits."
"Any scroll?" Arlen asked.
"Anything!" Abban bragged, snapping his fingers again. "Why, he could steal even the maps to the lost city of Anoch Sun!"
Arlen felt his heart stop. Anoch Sun was the ancient seat of power of Kaji, the man the Krasians worshipped as the first Deliverer. Three thousand years earlier, give or take a few centuries, Kaji had conquered the known world; the desert, and the green lands beyond, and united all mankind in war against the corelings. Using magical warded weapons, they slaughtered demons in such great numbers that for centuries it was believed that they had won, the corelings were extinct, and the night was free.
But it was a fleeting victory in the great scheme, as everyone now knew. The demons had retreated to the Core, where none could follow, and they had waited. Waited for their enemies to grow old and die. And their children. And their children's children. Immortal, the corelings had waited until the surface of the world had all-but forgotten their existence. Until demons were nothing more than myth, and the ancient symbols of power that man had used against them were forgotten bits of folklore.
They had waited. And bred. And when they returned, they took back all they had lost and more.
The basic wards of forbiddance and protection had been found in time to save a few pockets of humanity, but the ancient combat wards of Kaji, wards that could make a mortal weapon powerful enough to bite into demonic flesh, were lost. Arlen had spent years searching ruins for a sign of them, but had yet to find a hint of evidence that they had even truly existed, much less the wards themselves.
But if they were anywhere, they were in Anoch Sun. When the Krasians prayed, they knelt to the northwest, where the city was supposed to lay. Arlen had looked for the lost city twice before, but there were thousands of square miles of desert in that direction, and his searches had felt like looking for a particular grain in a sandstorm.
"You get me a map to Anoch Sun," Arlen said, "and you can have the lot of Bahavan pottery for nothing. I'll even
go back with a cart for another load, on my own coin."

Abban's eyes widened in shock, then he brayed a laugh and shook his head. "Surely you know I was joking, Par'chin," he said. "The lost city of Kaji is a myth."

"It isn't," Arlen said. "I read of it in the histories in the Duke's Library in Fort Miln. The city exists, or did, once."

Abban's eyes narrowed. "Let us say you are correct, and I could procure this," he said. "The Holy City sacred. If the dama ever learned you went there, both our lives would be forfeit."

"How is that different from Baha kad'Everam?" Arlen asked. "Didn't you say looting the ruins for pottery would mark us both a death sentence if we were caught?"

"It is as different as night and day, Par'chin," Abban said. "Baha is nothing, a camel-piss hamlet full of khaffit. The dal'Sharum danced alagai'sharak there to hallow the graves of the Bahavans only out of obligation to Evejan law, to allow its inhabitants a chance to be reincarnated into a higher caste. Besides, there is Dravazi pottery in every palace in Krasia. The only notice a few new pieces added to the market will draw will be from eager buyers."

"Anoch Sun, on the other hump, is the holiest place in the world," Abban said. "If you, a chin., were to desecrate it, every man, woman, and child in Krasia would cry for your head. And any artifacts you returned with would draw many questions."

"I would never desecrate anything!" Arlen said. "I've studied the ancient world my entire life. I would treat the find with more reverence than anyone."

"Simply setting foot there would be a desecration, Par'chin," Abban said.

"Demonshit," Arlen snapped. "No one has been there in thousands of years, a time when Kaji's empire extended over my people's lands as well as yours. I have as much right to go there as anyone."

"That may be, Par'chin," Abban said, "but you will find few in Krasia who will agree with you."

"I don't care," Arlen said, looking Abban hard in the eyes. "Either you get me that map, or I take the Dravazi pottery north and start selling my northern contacts' goods to other vendors in the bazaar."

Abban stared back at him for some time, and Arlen could practically hear the abacus beads clicking in his friend's head as he calculated the loss of Arlen's business. There were few Messengers willing to brave the dangers of the Krasian desert and its people. Arlen came to the Desert Spear three times as often as other Messengers, and he spoke the Krasian tongue well enough to take his business elsewhere.

"Very well, Par'chin," Abban said at last, "but be it upon your head, if it comes back upon you. I will deal in no Sunian artifacts."

That surprised Arlen, who knew Abban was not one to turn down any chance at profit.

"A fool's a man who knows better and does the thing anyway," his father's voice said.

Arlen pushed the thought aside. The call of the lost city was too great, and worth any risk.

"I'll never breathe a word of it," he promised.

"I will get a message to my nephew this evening," Abban said. "There is a lesser dama who comes to me for couzi each night, and he carries messages to the boy in exchange. He will reply tomorrow telling us how long the texts we require will take to copy, and where and when to meet him to make the exchange. You'll have to come with me to that, Par'chin. I won't smuggle a map to Anoch Sun through my tent."

Arlen nodded. "Anything you need, my friend," he said.

"I hope you mean that, Par'chin," Abban said.

"WE'LL NEED TO wear these," Abban said, holding up black dal'Sharum robes. Arlen stared at him in surprise. Even though he sometimes fought beside dal'Sharum in the Maze, Arlen was not allowed to wear the black, and Abban...

"What will happen if we're caught wearing these?" he asked.

Abban took a swig of couzi right from the bottle and passed it to Arlen. "Best not dwell on such things," he said.

"Well be doing the exchange at night, and the robes should hide us well in the darkness. Even if we are seen, the night veils will add a measure of disguise, so long as we outrun any who see us."

Arlen looked at Abban's lame leg doubtfully, but made no mention of it. "We're going out at night?" he asked.

"Isn't that forbidden under Evejan law?"

"What about this Nie-spawned transaction isn't, Par'chin?" Abban snapped, grabbing the couzi bottle and drinking again. "The city is well warded. There hasn't been a demon on the streets of Krasia in living memory."

Arlen shrugged. "Makes no difference to me," he said.

"Of course not," Abban muttered, taking another pull of couzi. "The Par'chin fears nothing."

They waited for the sun to set, and then slipped into the black warrior robes. Arlen admired himself in one of Abban's many mirrors, surprised to see that with a bit of makeup around his eyes and his night veil drawn, he looked
just like any other Krasian warrior, if a few inches shorter.

Abban, on the other hand, would not withstand close scrutiny. He was tall like a warrior, but without his crutch, he leaned heavily on his spear, and the bulk stretching the robes about his midsection was most unlike a warrior's lean form.

It was full dark when they opened the tent flap and looked outside. In the distance, Arlen heard the signal horns of the dal'Sharum and the reports of their artillery, and longed to fight beside them.

*Anything is safer than that,* the voice in his head said, and for once, Arlen agreed. Alagai'sharak was a beautiful madness, but without the combat wards of old, it was madness nonetheless. But the way of the north, cowering behind wards each night, was no saner. One way killed the men's bodies, and the other, their spirits. The world needed a third choice, but only the wards of old could give it to them.

They rode a small camel cart to their destination. The camel's feet, as well as the wheels of the cart, were wrapped in cushioned leather for silence, and whispered in the dusty sandstone streets. They dared no light as they crossed the city, but the stars in the desert were bright, and the flashing of the wards in the Maze was like lightning, illuminating everything for a moment at random intervals.

"We meet Jamere at Sharik Hora, the temple of Heroes' Bones," Abban said. "He cannot venture far from the acolyte cells."

Arlen weathered a moment's guilt. Mammoth Sharik Hora was both temple and graveyard, the entire structure built from the dal'Sharum who had died in alagai'sharak. The mortar was mixed with their blood. Their bones and skin composed the furniture. Hundreds of thousands, perhaps millions of warriors had given their lives for its ideals and their bodies for its walls and domed ceiling.

There was no holier place in Fort Krasia than Sharik Hora, and here he was, sneaking in the night to steal from its walls. Like Baha kad'Everam. Like Anoch Sun.

*Is that all I am?* Arlen wondered to himself. *A grave robber? A man without honor?*

He almost asked Abban to turn back. But then, he thought of the huge temple, and how the dal'Sharum could not even fill the seats anymore, because of their endless war of attrition. All because a group of Holy Men hoarded knowledge. The Tenders of the northland were much the same, and Arlen had never hesitated to ignore their rules.

*They're only copies,* he told himself. *Ent stealing, just forcing them to share.*

"I've only a moment, uncle," the boy said, pressing a leather satchel into Abban's hands. "I think someone heard me. I need to get back before I am seen, or they perform a bido count."

Abban produced a pouch that clinked heavily with coin, but the boy held up his hand. "Later," he said. "I don't want it with me if I'm caught."

"Nie's black heart," Abban muttered. "Get ready to run," he told Arlen, handing him the satchel.

"I'll give the money to your mother," Abban told Jamere.

"Don't you dare!" the boy hissed. "The witch will steal it. I'll come for it later, and you had best have it ready!"

He went and gripped his rope, but before he could begin to climb, a flickering light blossomed in the window above, and there was a shout as the rope was spotted.

"Run!" Abban whispered harshly, using the spear to hop along at an impressive pace. Arlen followed, and when a white robed dama stuck a lamp out the window and spotted them, the boy came hurrying after, muttering Krasian curses too fast for Arlen to follow.

"You there! Stop!" the cleric cried. Lights began to blossom in the temple windows, and the dama leapt from the window, disregarding the rope entirely. He hit the sandstone street in a roll, heading right for them even as he exhausted the fall's momentum. He got back on his feet in a moment, sprinting hard after them.

"Stop and face Everam's justice!" he screamed.

But all three of them knew that "Everam's justice" meant only a quick death, and wisely ran on, turning a corner
and breaking the cleric's line of sight momentarily. Abban was slowing them, huffing as he hobbled on his spear. He stumbled suddenly, falling to his knees and dropping his spear. He looked at Arlen with frantic eyes.

"Do not leave me!" he begged.

"Don't be an idiot," Arlen snapped, grabbing his arm and hauling the fat merchant upright.

"Get Abban to the cart," Arlen told Jamere. "I will delay the dama."

"No, I'll do it," Jamere said. "I can..."

"Mind your elders, boy," Arlen said, shocked to hear one of his father's phrases pass his own lips. He grabbed the boy's arm and propelled him towards Abban. The boy looked at him as if he were mad, but Arlen glared at him and he nodded and tucked himself under Abban's arm.

Arlen slipped into a shadow, his black robes making him invisible in the night, and slung the satchel over his shoulders. If anyone was caught with the evidence, let it be him.

Right fix you've gotten yourself into now, the voice in his head observed.

The dama came around the corner at a run, but still he was ready for Arlen's ambush, ducking smoothly beneath a circle kick that would have blown across his solar-plexus. The dama rolled by, then straightened suddenly, his stiffened fingers striking Arlen in the wrist.

Arlen's hand went numb, and his spear fell away from his nerveless fingers as the dama dropped low and spun to sweep his legs. Arlen threw himself backwards, tumbling until he could spring back to his feet. The dama came at him hard, a white-robed specter of death.

They met on even footing and traded furious blows. For the first few moments, Arlen thought he might have a chance, but it quickly became clear the dama was only taking his measure. He twisted sharply away from one of Arlen's kicks, pivoting back to punch Arlen hard in the throat.

It was not like having the wind knocked out of him, which Arlen had experienced many times. This was like having the wind trapped within him, its means of egress and replenishment cut off. He choked, staggering, and the dama turned almost lazily into the kick to his stomach that forced the breath back out of his damaged windpipe with a blast of agony and sent him flying onto his back in the street. The dama laughed. "Your sharusahk is pitiful, fool. You only prolong your pain."

Arlen knew the man was right, he was the superior fighter. But combat was more than perfection of art. Combat was doing whatever was required to win.

He grabbed a fistful of sand from the street and flung it into the dama's eyes, kicking hard at his knee even as the cleric cried out and clutched his face. There was a satisfying crack, and the dama dropped screaming to the ground.

Arlen staggered to his feet, running after Abban and the boy. The were on the cart now, and Arlen leapt aboard just as Abban whipped the camel and the beast galloped away.

Behind them, half a dozen clerics gave chase, all carrying lanterns and moving with the same impossible grace and speed.

Abban whipped the poor camel raw, and slowly they began to pull away, as the beast reached speeds no man could match. Arlen dared to think they might escape when they hit a pit in the road and one of the cart's two wheels shattered. All three were thrown to the ground, and the camel stopped, the heavy beast laboring for breath.

"To the abyss with you both," Jamere said. "I'm not dying for a chin and a khaffit." He leapt to his feet and ran towards the dama.

"Mercy, masters!" the boy cried, falling to his knees before them. "I was but a hostage!"

Arlen didn't stop to stare. "Get on!" he shouted, shoving Abban at the camel as he produced a wicked knife to slice the leather harnesses that held the beast to the broken cart. The moment it was free, he stuck one foot in the stirrup, grabbed the saddle horn, and slapped the camel hard on the rump with the flat of his blade. The beast gave a great bray and broke into a run, leaving the cries of the dama behind.

"TAKE THE BOOKS and go at first light, Par'chin," Abban said. "Leave the city, and I will bribe the gate guards to swear you've been gone for a week."

"What about you?" Arlen asked.
"I will be better off with you and the evidence long gone," Abban said. "Jamere will tell them he could not see our identities with the night veils in place, and without proof, a few well-placed bribes will divert any inquiry."

Arlen nodded, and bowed. "Thank you, my friend," he said. "I'm sorry to have caused you so much trouble."

Abban clapped his shoulder. "I am sorry, too, Par'chin. I should have better warned you about the dangers of Baha kad'Everam. Let us call the account settled." The shook hands, and Arlen headed out into the night.

At dawn, he returned to his hostel, pretending to be returning from alagai'sharak. No one questioned this, and he was able to retrieve his possessions and escape Fort Krasia before most of its inhabitants left the undercity. The dal'Sharum at the gates even lifted their spears to him as he left.

As he rode, he clutched the precious map tube. He would go to Fort Rizon and resupply, and then, he would find Anoch Sun.

THERE WAS A hissing in the bazaar, as the merchants warned of approaching damn. Abban hurriedly drew back into his tent, peeking through the narrow gap in the flaps as a group of black-clad dal'Sharum warriors appeared, shoving people aside as they escorted a group of furious looking damn and a young, skinny acolyte. Abban's fingers tightened on the canvas as they marched up the street, stopping in front of his pavilion.

Amit came limping up to them, the crippled dal'Sharum bowing his head slightly. "Have you come for the khaffit, finally?" he asked one of the warriors. "Whatever you think he has done, I assure you it is the least of his crimes..."

He was cut off, as the dal'Sharum struck him across the face with the butt of his spear. Blood and teeth exploded from the merchant's mouth as he fell to the dust. He tried to rise, but the warrior that had struck him leapt around behind him, putting his spear under Amit's chin and his knee into his back, pulling hard to choke Amit's head upwards to look at the dama and boy.

"Is this the one?" the lead dama asked the boy.
"Yes," Jamere said. "He said he would kill my mother, if I did not obey."
"What?!" Amit gasped. "I've never seen you before in my...!" Again the warrior pulled back on the spear, and his words were cut off with a gurgle.

"Do you recognize this?" the dama asked, holding up the spear Abban had dropped in the street, tied with the bright orange cloth he had used to signal Jamere. "Do you think us stupid? It's no secret you wear a womanly orange kerchief on your vestigial weapon, cripple."

"Dama, see here," a warrior cried, leading a camel from Amit's pen. "It's been whipped recently, and wears leather pads on its feet."

Amit's eyes bulged, though it was hard to tell if it was from incredulity or the continually choking spear at his throat. "That's not my...!" was all he managed to cough.

"Tell us who your accomplice was," the dama demanded. The warrior at Amit's back eased the choking spear so he could answer.

Gone was all the smug superiority from Amit's voice, the security in his position in this world and the next. Abban listened carefully, savoring the pathetic desperation in his rival's voice as he protested his innocence and begged for his life.

"Tear the black from him," the dama ordered, and Amit screamed as the warriors took hold of his robes, ripping at them until the crippled man was lying naked in the street. The dal'Sharum took his arms and pulled back on his hair to ensure he made eye contact with the dama, who knelt before him.

"You are khaffit now, Amit of no lineage worth mentioning," the dama said. "For the short, painful remainder of your life, know this, for when your spirit leaves this world, it will forever sit outside the gates of Heaven."

"Nooo!" Amit screamed. "It is a lie!"

The dama looked up at the warriors. "Confiscate everything of value in his pavilion," he said, "and bring it to the temple. Use his women, if you like, and then have them sold. Put any sons to the spear." Amit howled, thrashing against the men who held his arms until one of the warriors clubbed him in the back of the head with his spear, dropping him senseless to the ground.

The dama looked down at Amit in disgust. "Haul this filth to the Chamber of Eternal Sorrow," he told the dal'Sharum, "that the Damaji might take their time in flaying the skin from his misbegotten bones."

Abban let the tent flap fall and retreated into his pavilion, pouring himself a cup of couzi. A few moments later, the tent flap rose and fell again.
"The Par'chin nearly broke Dama Kavere's knee," Jamere said. "He wants more than couzi to account for it."
Abban nodded, expecting as much. "You were supposed to volunteer to stall Kavere when I stumbled, not the Par'chin," Abban reminded.
Jamere shrugged. "He beat me to it," he said, "and would hear no protest."
"Well don't let it happen again," Abban snapped. "The Par'chin is valuable to me, and I would be most displeased to lose him."
"Do you think he'll find Anoch Sun?" Jamere asked.
Abban laughed. "Don't be stupid, boy," he said. "Those maps have been copied and re-copied for three thousand years, and even if they still manage to point him the right way, the lost city, if it even exists, is buried deep beneath the sands. The Par'chin is a good-hearted fool, but a fool nonetheless."
"He'll be angry, when he returns," Jamere observed.
"But then you'll wave some other ancient scroll in his face, and he'll forget all about it," Jamere guessed, stealing a swig out of Abban's couzi bottle, not bothering with a cup.
Abban smiled, giving the boy the various bribes he would need when he returned to Sharik Hora. He watched Jamere go with a mix of pride and profound regret.
The boy could really have been something, if he wasn't set to waste his life as a dama.
**Deleted Scenes**

THERE were a great many deleted scenes from *The Warded Man*. Some were cut for length (I had written an extremely long book by debut novel standards), or for pacing, or because they went off on tangents and reduced overall tension.

However, many of those deleted scenes are nice little stories in their own right, and it's wonderful that Subterranean Press has given me the opportunity to share a couple of them, along with my commentary, in this great collection. What's best about the selections presented is that they are self-contained story arcs, and can be enjoyed by new readers and fans of the series alike.
INTRODUCTION

THIS SCENE IS how it all started. I was taking a fantasy writing class in 1999, and we were given a homework assignment to “write the first scene of an original fantasy novel.” I wrote a little story about a young boy named Arlen who was never allowed to go farther from home than he could get by midday, because he needed to get back home before the demons came out at night.

To be honest, I knocked the story out in one night, and after I got my grade (an A, natch), I threw it in a drawer for years. At the time, I was working on a different book, but Arlen was never far from my thoughts, and every once in a while I would jot down a few notes on his world. The entire Warded Man series grew out of this 1600 word story.

WHY IT WAS CUT

THIS OPENING WAS one of the biggest points of contention between me and my editor. She felt quite strongly that prologues in general were obsolete, and that this one was also told in a very different voice than the rest of the book and didn't fit. She also thought it didn't add anything that couldn't be shown elsewhere. I couldn't have disagreed more, believing that it set the mood and scene perfectly, and was a view into young Arlen's personality that was essential.

We had some... lively debates on the subject. I have a great deal of respect for my editor, and I tried very hard to see her side of things. It took me a while to separate my personal attachment to the scene to the point where I could consider things impartially. When I finally managed to do so, I realized that she was right, and cut the scene. I think the book as a whole works better without it, though on a personal level, it is still very near and dear to my heart. It makes me really happy to see it in print at last.

SCENE

WHEN ARLEN WAS a boy, he would play outside until the last moment of dusk before answering his mother's calls. There was nothing worse than being locked inside each night, and he was determined not to let a minute of daylight be wasted indoors.

He would rise while darkness still reigned, stepping over the threshold of his family farmhouse before even the cock could crow, just as the first beams of sunlight topped the hills, brightening the reddened sky and sending the shadows scurrying away for another day. His mother wanted him to count to a hundred after that, but he never listened.

Adventure awaited, but Arlen knew his chores came first. Snatching the cloth-lined wicker basket from where it lay by the door, he would run to the chicken coop, ignoring the squawks of protest as he gathered the eggs, handling them as deftly as the colored balls of a Jongleur.

With a dash back to the house, he left the eggs for his mother to find and was outside again in a moment. Before his father could pull on his overalls, before his mother had changed from her nightdress, Arlen was on a stool beneath the first of the cows. He left the milk and rushed to the rest of his chores while his father ate breakfast. The wellhouse, the curing shed, the smokehouse, the silo, each was paid a hurried visit, as if he were but a breeze passing through the farm.

There was something comforting about the morning ritual. It reaffirmed his bond with the land, a bond severed each night as his mother locked the doors and his father checked the wards on the windows.

He let the animals out of the barn, guiding the pigs to their day-pen and the sheep to the pasture with cracks of a switch. He fed the swine and the horse, paying the sheep little mind. Even without the dogs to mind them, they would not venture past the wardposts, for the grass beyond was scorched and ruined.

There were other chores, less frequent, less comforting. Once in a while it happened that some animal or another
was not where it was supposed to be by dusk, and was lost. He would find it the next morning, torn to shreds, and bury it behind the outhouse.

Arlen had done it all a thousand times, and he went about his duties with such practiced efficiency that by midmorning, he was usually done. By then, his father was well out into the fields checking the wardposts, and so he went back to the house for the familiar breakfast: oats, eggs, and bacon kept warm by his mother. He'd wolf it all down without a pause for air. A gulp of milk to help him swallow, and he was bouncing from his seat.

His mother caught him. She always did. There was always something for him to do in the house, the chores he hated most. But there was no denying his mother, and complaining would not fill the firebox, or sweep the floor, or put fresh charcoal sticks in the warding kit. "Yarn doesn't make itself," she would tell him.

By midday, he was free. Before his father returned from the fields with new chores for him, Arlen would snatch some bread and cheese and dash off to eat his lunch. Like his breakfast, he hardly tasted it. Food was sustenance, nothing more.

How far can I get today? he would ask himself as he ate his lunch. With nearly eight hours until dusk, he could head off in any direction he wanted for four. The sun's place in the sky would tell him when to turn back.

It was a dangerous game, one the other children of Tibbet's Brook dared not play. It was one of a thousand ways Arlen differed from them. All of the others were content to live in the Brook, never caring what lay over the next hill. It was a safe way to live. His father called it a smart way, but Arlen thought differently. The people of Tibbet's Brook were too content to take someone else's word for what lay up the road or through the woods or past the river to the south... if there even was a river. Arlen preferred to see for himself.

How far could I get if I had all day? he always wondered. How far, if I didn't have chores in the morning, if I didn't have to turn back and run halfway to dusk? Could I make it to safety before they came? The thought thrilled and terrified him. What lay beyond the point of no return?

Maybe today I'll keep going.

But his resolve always faded as the sun rolled across the sky, and halfway to dusk, he inevitably felt his feet turning him around.

He slowed down when the house was in sight, despite the cries of his parents, despite the terror in their voices. This was the time of day he felt most alive. He watched the sun dip in the sky, eclipsed by the turning of the world beneath him. Shadows began to lengthen. He waited until the last minute, and then ran to his house as fast as he could, the exhilarating tingle of fear sweeping over him, making his heart pound and his hands shake. Air tasted better in those few seconds, his body alive with sensation. No sight was more beautiful than the reds and oranges of dusk, no sound more exciting than his parents' warnings. He tumbled over the threshold, careful not to disturb the wards, and turned to watch the corelings rise.

As the last warm rays faded from the horizon, and the heat leached from the ground into the air, the flame demons rose up from the Core to dance.

He was soon yanked inside and the heavy door shut, its bar thrown (as if it could stop a coreling!). Arlen's father would then check the wards on the sills and threshold again, making sure they had not been scuffed or scratched. He told Arlen that a triple-check was all that was needed, but he could never help checking a fourth time.

He was always scolded. Sometimes with his father's belt. But Arlen's parents knew deep down that no punishment could ever make him give up his wandering.

After punishment came supper, and then, while his mother knit and his father carved wardposts, Arlen could sit by the window and watch the corelings dance. They were so graceful, even beautiful. Sometimes, he caught a glimpse of a wind demon, its shadowy form swooping on leathern wings, illuminated by the blazing eyes and mouths of its fiery cousins.

Less beautiful and thankfully less common were the rock demons, their hulking, sinewy forms encased in a carapace that could break the hardest spear tip. No dancers these, they stalked the yard slowly, flashing their rows of razor teeth as they searched for prey.

Arlen had never seen a water demon, but he had heard Jongleurs' stories. They could tear through the hull of a boat, dragging unfortunate fishermen underwater. Arlen shivered as he imagined the depths of the town lake swirling with dark, terrible forms. The idea terrified him, yet he longed to go out and try to glimpse one.

On some nights, the demons attacked the wards. They flung themselves at the doors and windows, only to be sent hurtling back by the flare of magic. Arlen's parents seldom flinched, having witnessed this all their lives.

"Why do they keep attacking when they can't get through?" Arlen asked his father once.
"They're looking for flaws in the net," his father replied, joining him by the window. "Every warding has them. Every one. Corelings aren't smart enough to study the wards and reason out the weak spots, but they can attack them and look for holes that way. You'll never see a coreling attack the same spot twice in a night." He tapped his temple. "They remember. And they know that time weakens even the strongest wards."
The night would light up over and over as the corelings tested the wards, magic flaring like tiny lightning flashes to momentarily illuminate the features of the yard as the demons tried to crush the wellhouse, or reach the meat in the curing shed.

They attacked the barn as well, but the wards there were just as strong. Arlen could hear the livestock bleating in fear. The animals never got used to the demons. They knew, instinctively, what would happen if the corelings ever got through.

Arlen knew, too. When he was seven, he had watched helplessly as the demons tore apart one of their sheepdogs, spreading its guts all over the yard.

Corelings took great pleasure in killing.

It was said there had been a time when the demons were not so bold. A time when the greatest wards had not yet been forgotten; when the demons feared the power of mankind and stayed within the Core. But those days, if they ever truly existed, were long forgotten by the great-great-grandfathers of the oldest men alive. Now, those wards were nothing more than a Jongleur's tale.

As he watched the creatures that had stolen his world for another night, Arlen dreamed of bringing those wards back. He dreamed of traveling beyond Tibbet's Brook, and resolved that he would leave one day, even if it meant spending a night outside.

With the demons.
Brianne Beaten

INTRODUCTION

THIS IS FAR and away my favorite cut scene, my poor deleted darling. It takes place in Chapter 13 of *The Warded Man* ("There Must Be More"), and happens directly after the confrontation between Gared and Marick in the Cutter's Hollow marketplace. The purpose of the scene was to force Leesha to confront Brianne, who had been one of her best friends until the events of Leesha's first story arc destroyed their friendship. It was also meant to illustrate how confident and powerful Leesha had become during her Herb Gathering tutelage under Bruna.

WHY IT WAS CUT

I TAKE FULL responsibility for cutting this scene. No editor or agent or test reader suggested it. I needed to reduce the overall word count of the book, and much as I loved this scene, it was over 3,000 words, and lifted out so cleanly that no one would ever miss it but me. That Leesha had grown too big for Cutter's Hollow was already apparent, and nothing else happened that affected the rest of the story at all.

I don't regret the decision. The final draft of the book is lean and mean and every scene moves the story forward. This scene doesn't; it's just a tangent. Removing it also helped balance out the Leesha/Rojer air time, which I had intended to be equal, but which was (and still is) skewed in Leesha's favor.

Still, I love this little side-story, and am really happy I finally get to share it with people who might enjoy reading it.

SCENE

"THERE'S NEED FOR your skills," Mairy said.

"You feel unwell?" Leesha asked, concerned. She laid the back of her hand against Mairy's forehead, but Mairy shook her head, pulling away. "No, it's not for me," she said.

"One of the children?" Leesha asked, her eyes quickly scanning each for a sign of ill health. "Or Benn?"

Mairy shook her head again. "It's Brianne," she said. "She's been having stomach pains. She tries to hide it, but I see her wincing. Something is wrong. We hoped you might take the request for aid better from me."

"Why me?" Leesha asked. "Darsy is her Herb Gatherer."

"You've said yourself that Darsy guesses at her cures more oft than not," Mairy said. "And she lost Dug and Merrem's child last winter."

"I never said that was Darsy's fault," Leesha pointed out.

"You didn't have to," Mairy said. "Half the town is whispering it whenever she passes by. Brianne is just too proud to ask for your help."

"Even if she did," Leesha asked, "why should I give it?"

"Because she's sick and you're an Herb Gatherer," Mairy replied.

"She's spoken nothing but ill words on me for nearly seven years," Leesha said angrily. "And don't forget that she did her best to destroy my life." She turned away, but guilt ate at her. There were oaths Herb Gatherers took, to help all in need.

"She cried for you," Mairy said at her back. "We all did."

Leesha turned. "What do you mean?" she asked.

"That morning, when your mum came to town saying you ent come home before dark," Mairy said. "She had the whole town out looking for you or..." she looked away, "your body."

"We were sure you were dead," Mairy went on after a moment, when Leesha did not reply. "Brianne said it was her fault, and fell into tears. We tried to tell her it wasn't like that, but she was inconsolable." She touched Leesha's shoulder, "She knew she hurt you, Leesha."

"I never heard a word of contrition," Leesha said. "In fact, she's said worse about me since. Don't think I haven't heard."

"She meant to apologize," Mairy said. "Saira, too."
"But you were the only one that actually did," Leesha said.
"Hurting with words is easy," Mairy replied, echoing Leesha's earlier statement, "it's healing with them what's hard. Don't forget it was you what hurt her first."
Leesha felt as if she had been slapped in the face. What if Brianne was really sick and needed her help? Would she deny her? Deny her child? Had Bruna ever denied anyone?
"You're right," she told Mairy. "Of course I'll come help her."
"There's one other thing," Mairy said.
Leesha looked up.
"She's pregnant."

MAIRY SENT HER little ones scurrying off home, and they headed for the small house the townsfolk had built when Brianne and Evan wed.

"How long has she known?" Leesha asked, walking so fast that Mairy had to scurry to keep pace. Fear for Brianne's child gripped her.
"Her stomach told her a few weeks ago," Mairy said. "She might be as far as two months, now. She only told Evin this week."
"Were there any complications with her first pregnancy?" Leesha asked.
"Apart from being forced to marry Evin?" Mairy asked. Leesha frowned at her.
"It's not funny, I know," Mairy said. "Callen's birth was easy. In fact, you might say it was the only easy thing about Callen."
"Because Evin didn't want him," Leesha said.
"That's putting it light," Mairy agreed. "Neither one was expecting the child. Brianne used to go to Bruna for pomm tea, but with you around... she said she couldn't bear the shame."
"She was one of the first to turn to Darsy," Leesha said.
"Only Darsy won't make the tea," Mairy said. "She says it's sinful, and told the Tender on the wives who'd been taking it. He gave a big sermon about our duty to procreate."
"I remember," Leesha said. Tender Michel had railed against Pomm tea, but he had been careful not to say an ill word towards Bruna, lest the town learn how personally he took his duty.
"Well, that explains why Darsy is so busy as a midwife," Leesha said. "Those that go to her are a lot more apt to need it."
"It's just as well," Mairy said. "There's few enough of us in Cutter's Hollow as is."
"Just as well, so long as she lets no more be born still," Leesha said.
"Brianne blames you, sometimes," Mairy blurted.
"Me?" Leesha asked. "What did I do?"
"Made her feel too shamed to get her pomm tea," Mairy said. "Made Evin have to marry her against his will. Made every day what's been bad since then."
"That isn't fair," Leesha said. "I was the one publicly humiliated because of her."
"Because of Gared," Mairy corrected.
"And Brianne got pregnant because of Evin, not me!" Leesha retorted.
Mairy nodded. "So maybe its time to stop taking it out on each other," she said.
Leesha was quiet a long while. "I will if she will," she conceded at last.
"One of you has to be first," Mairy said.
Leesha stopped short. "Brianne doesn't know I'm coming," she said. When Mairy made no reply, she grinned.
"Aren't you quite the little manipulator these days?" she accused.
"I get it from being a mum," Mairy confided with a giggle.

Mairy took a deep breath and knocked on the door. There was noise from inside, but no one answered. Mairy knocked again.
"Who's that?" Evin cried.
"Mairy!" Mairy shouted.
There was a some shouting inside. "Get it, yurself!" they heard Evin bark.
"Just come in!" Brienne called. "It ent barred!"

Mairy opened the door to reveal a squalid cabin. Two wolfhounds ran freely about the main room, and much of the furniture was gnawed upon. Evin sat with his muddy boots up on the supper table, whittling. The floor around him was covered in curls of wood. Brienne had her back to the door, chopping vegetables on the counter by the fire that served as her kitchen. Callen, six years old and tousle-haired, clung to her skirt with one hand. With the other, he rooted about one of his nostrils for some elusive prey.

"Sorry for the door, Mair," Brienne said without turning. "Creator forbid Evin fall behind at whittling useless sticks."

"Maybe a walk to the door once in a while would sweat off a few pounds," Evin muttered. "Whattaya want, anyway?" he asked, looking up and seeing Leesha enter.

"Well, well," he said, devouring Leesha with his eyes as he stood up suddenly, brushing the wood shavings from his clothes, "welcome to our humble home."

Brienne turned and saw her husband leering. She saw Leesha, and her face darkened.

"What is SHE doing here?" Brienne demanded angrily, coming over with the chopping knife still in her hand.

"I thought she might be able to help with your pain," Mairy said.

"I didn't ask for any help," Brienne snarled. "It's nothing. I'm fine."

"I can see you're not," Leesha said. "Your coloring is off, you're breathing's out of rhythm, and you grit your teeth when you walk."

"She said it's nothing," Evin said.

"Please," Mairy said. "Let her take a look. If not for you, think of the little one."

"The baby is fine," Evin said.

"Leave," Brienne said.

"Brienne..." Leesha began.

"Are you deaf?" Evin asked. "She said..."


"This is my house...!" Evin sputtered, storming towards them, but Leesha put a hand in the pocket of her apron, and he noted the move, pulling up short.

"GET OUT!" Brienne screamed, throwing the knife at him. Evin ducked the missile and scowled, but he eyed Leesha's hand in her pocket, and he noted the move, pulling up short.

"And take those damn dogs with ya!" Brienne cried. "I'm tired of cleaning their shit off the floor!" Evin clicked his tongue, and both animals followed him out of the cabin.

Brienne seemed to deflate as he left. She knelt in front of Callen, but grimaced in pain as she did. She lifted a corner of her apron to dry his tears.

"There, there, baby," she said. "It's all right. Run along and play with yur logs." She hugged him, and the boy ran over to the far corner of the room, where a pile of tiny sticks had been laid to form a crude miniature cabin.

Brienne stood, wincing again. Her face was ashen. "I suppose it makes ya feel good to see me like this," she told Leesha, "fat and miserable, while ya walk through town singing to the birds on yur shoulder and turning every man's head as ya go."

Leesha killed an angry retort before it reached her lips. "No one's suffering makes me feel good," she said. "Take a seat and let me have a look at you."

Brienne didn't argue, pain flashing across her face again as she sat. Leesha looked in her eyes and mouth, feeling her forehead for a fever and checking the pulse in her wrist.

"Let me know if anything I touch hurts," she said, and Brienne nodded. Leesha began to probe with sensitive fingers, watching Brienne's eyes the whole time. She already had her suspicions as to the cause of Brienne's pain.

"Aaah!" Brienne cried as Leesha pressed at her ribs.

"Take off your blouse," Leesha said.

"Is that really necessary?" Brienne asked.

"You were never shy about being naked back when we were friends," Leesha said.

"I was pretty then," Brienne shot back.

"Off with it," Leesha ordered. "Mairy, help me."

Brienne did not resist as the two pulled the blouse over her head. Mairy gasped at the yellowed bruises that covered Brienne's arms and back, and the black one, about as big as a palm-sized stone, on her ribs.

"It's just as I thought," Leesha said. "Two of your ribs are broken. You're lucky you didn't pop your lung."

"Can ya fix them?" Brienne asked.

Leesha shook her head. "There's not much to do for ribs but let them heal. I'll bind them so they heal straight and don't grind when you move, but you'll have to limit yourself for some time. Best altogether if you stay abed."
"Some time?" Brianne asked.
"Weeks," Leesha said, and she caught Brianne's look. "No arguing," she snapped. "We'll send someone to help you with Callen and around the house. You're lucky it's not worse."
"Creator!" Mairi said. "What happened, Bri?"
"I was standing on the woodpile, holding the paint can while Evin touched up the wards on the roof," Brianne said. "I slipped, and half the pile came down on me."
"Night!" Mairi exclaimed. "Why didn't you say something?"
"I thought I was fine," Brianne said.
"Look, I've got things here, Mair," Leesha said. "Why don't you get on home before the little ones get themselves into trouble?"
Mairi glanced at Brianne, who nodded her assent, and left.
"Demonshit," Leesha said when they were alone. "That son of a coreling beat you, and don't you think me stupid enough to believe any other tampweed tale you pull from your arse."
Brianne looked at her in shock. "Living with Bruna taught ya to curse," she said with a pained laugh. "Proper li'l Leesha I knew wun't have known what them words meant."
"Don't try to change the subject, either," Leesha said.
"Bind these ribs, to start," Leesha said. She took a roll of white cloth from her basket, and began wrapping it around Brianne's midsection, just below her breasts.
"Ahhh! Night, that stings!" Brianne gasped.
"Not half so much as the breaking itself, I'll wager," Leesha said. "Brianne, you have to tell someone. This can't go on."
"It was just the once," Brianne said.
"A man who'll hit a pregnant woman isn't new to the deed. Does Darsy know?"
"No one knows. I never needed a Gatherer before."
"We have to put a stop to this before you need a Tender and a gravedigger," Leesha said.
"What would ya have me do?" Brianne demanded. "Tell my da? He and my brothers would kill Evin for this. They'd kill him for real, and be put out of the village at night for it. Callen would lose every man in his life over it, and where would I be?"
"Then tell Smitt," Leesha said. "Let the council handle it."
Brianne shook her head. "Da would still find out," she said, "and that would be that."
"So what?" Leesha demanded. "You let this go on until he does permanent harm to you or your unborn? Or Callen?"
"It won't happen again, Leesh," Brianne said, squeezing her hand, "he promised. Ya have to swear not to tell."
"Brianne..." Leesha began.
"Swear!" Brianne demanded, cutting her off. "Remember yur oath!"
Leesha's eyes narrowed, but she was trapped, and she knew it. Images flashed in her mind of Elona's belt, and how the pain had always seemed less than the shame of telling. "I swear," she said at last, grinding her teeth as she did.
She finished binding Brianne's ribs, and selected a handful of roots, holding them out. "Chew these for the pain," she said. "Only one a day, and no more, or the little one," she stroked Brianne's belly, "will make you regret it."
"Will the baby be all right?" Brianne asked, near tears.
"This time," Leesha said. "But if this happens again, who knows?"
"It won't, I swear," Brianne said.
"I don't think it's up to you," Leesha said.
Evin returned the smile. "Yur looking good these days, Leesh," he breathed.

Leesha looked around. Seeing they were alone, she moved closer, standing on tiptoe so her hps practically touched his ear. "Come around the side of the house," she whispered. "I want to show you something."

Evin's grin split his face, and he grabbed her hand, practically dragging her along.

When they were alone, he was on her in an instant, kissing her hard and pawing her breasts. He didn't notice the needle in Leesha's hand until she stuck it in his neck.

"What the...!" Evin exclaimed, pulling away and slapping at the puncture. Already, he was starting to sway.

"The poison works fast," Leesha told him, straightening her blouse.

"Pois...?" Evin started to ask, but then his feet went from under him, and he collapsed to the dirt, spasming erratically on his stomach.

"You feel that?" Leesha asked, kneeling beside him as his seizure began in earnest. "The horrid cramps and pain? Your limbs just twitching despite your commands for them to move?"

"Don't worry, don't worry," she said, patting his back. "The poison will leave your muscles soon." She bent close, caressing his hair, and whispered, "It moves next into your gut."

Evin let out a low moan into the dirt.

"I promised Brienne I'd keep quiet about this," she said. "Herb Gatherers have an oath to hold secrets, and I'll not break that. But that doesn't mean I can't act on my own."

She gripped his hair tightly, forcing his head to turn towards her. "Look at me," she commanded. He tried weakly to pull away, but she held tight, pushing up his chin with her free hand to make him meet her eyes.

"You think hard," she said, "when you're screaming in the outhouse tomorrow. Think about how the next time I have to treat Brienne or one of the children because of you, you'll think of today as nothing. I'll make your bones scream, and your pathetic little dangle shrivel up like a raisin. I'll leave you hobbling on a cane before you see your thirtieth summer."

Evin looked at her, his eyes wide with terror. A lather of spit foamed out of his mouth, and a tear ran down his cheek.

She let go and stood. His head fell back to the dirt, flopping oddly.

"You think hard," she said again. Turning, she found herself face to face with Brienne.

She froze as Brienne looked down at her husband convulsing on the ground, and then back to Leesha. Their eyes met for what seemed like forever. Finally, Brienne nodded once. Leesha nodded in return, and Brienne turned and went back into the cabin.

"BRIANNE IS AT least seven weeks pregnant," Leesha said. "She told Evin a week ago, and some time not long after, he beat her. The child is fine, but I treated two broken ribs and a number of bruises."

Bruna nodded as if Leesha had said nothing more than it looked like rain. "She begged you not to tell, I assume," she said.

"How did you know?" Leesha asked. Bruna raised an eyebrow at her, but didn't bother to reply.

"What did you do about it?" the crone asked.

"I stuck him with a needle dipped in slipsnake venom and told him I'd do worse the next time," Leesha said. Bruna cackled and slapped her knee. "Couldn't have done better myself!" she howled. "Boy won't touch her again, and I wager he'll squirt his breeches the next time he sees you!"

"That was the idea," Leesha said, reddening.

"My children will be in good hands with you one day," Bruna said.

"No day soon, I hope," Leesha replied.

"Not for a while yet, at least," Bruna agreed, with a hint of sadness.
**Krasian Dictionary**

**ABBAN**: Wealthy *khaffit* merchant, crippled during his warrior training.

**ALAGAI**: Corelings, demons.

**ALAGAI'SHARAK**: Holy War against demonkind.

**AMIT**: Crippled *dal'Sharum* with a peg leg who is Abban's principal rival in the Bazaar.

**ANOCH SUN**: Lost city that was once the seat of power for Kaji. Believed claimed by the sands. People and artifacts called Sunian.

**ASU**: Son, or "son of." Used as a prefix in formal names.

**BAHA KAD'EVERAM**: Krasian hamlet renowned for its pottery, destroyed by demons in 306AR. Name translates as "Bowl of Everam." People known as Bahavans.

**BAZAAR, GREAT**: Merchant district of Krasia. It is run and frequented almost entirely by women and *khaffit*, because such business is considered beneath the warrior and clerical castes.

**CAMELPISS**: Something or someone low and unworthy, vulgar.

**CHABIN**: Father of Abban. *Khaffit*.

**CHAMBER OF ETERNAL SORROW**: Torture chamber in the underground tunnels beneath Sharik Hora used for heretics and traitors.

**CHIN**: Outsider/infidel. Insulting connotation, implying that the person is a coward.

**COUZI**: a harsh, illegal Krasian liquor flavored with cinnamon. There is a brisk underground market because a small easily-concealed flask will get several people drunk.

**DAL'SHARUM**: Krasian warrior caste.

**DAMA**: Krasian clerical caste. *Dama* are religious and secular leaders of Krasia. *Dama* wear white robes and carry no weapons. All are masters of *sharusahek* unarmed combat.

**DAMAJI**: Tribal leaders/high priests. Their council is the ruling body in Krasia.

**DAMATING**: Krasian Priestesses and healers. Said to have magic powers, *dama'ting* are held in fear and awe by all outside their order.

**DESERT SPEAR, THE**: The Krasian term for their city, Fort Krasia.

**DRAVAZI, MASTER**: Famous pottery artisan from Baha kad'Everam. His fine pottery became priceless posthumously.

**EVERAM**: The Creator.

**GREEN LANDS**: The lands north of the Krasian desert.

**GREENLANDER**: One from the green lands.

**JAMERE**: Abban's *nie'dama* nephew.

**KAJI**: The ancient Krasian leader who united the tribes and then the known world in holy war against the demons. Believed to have been the first Deliverer, who will come again.

**KHAFFIT**: Men who fail warrior training and are forced to take a craft. Lowest caste in Krasian society. *Khaffit* are forced to dress in the tan clothes of children and shave their beards as a mark of shame.

**NIE'DAMA**: Young clerical acolytes; *dama* in training. Literally "not *dama*.'"

**NIGHT VEIL**: Veil worn by warriors to show unity and brotherhood in the night.

**PARCHIN**: Literally "Brave outsider;" singular title for Arlen Bales to qualify that, though *chin*, he is no coward.

**PIG-EATER**: Krasian insult meaning *khaffit*. Only *khaffit* eat pig, as it is considered unclean.

**SHARIK HORA**: Temple made out of the bones of fallen warriors. Literally "Heroes' Bones."

**SHARUSAHK**: The Krasian art of unarmed combat.

**TRIBES**: Krasia is divided into 12 tribes: Anuja, Bajin, Halvas, Jama, Kaji, Khanjin, Krevakh, Majah, Mehnding, Nanji, Sharach, and Shunjin. Tribe is considered part of one's name.

**UNDERCITY**: Huge honeycomb of warded caverns beneath Fort Krasia where the women, children, and *khaffit* are locked at night to keep them safe from demons while the men fight.
INTRODUCTION:

WARDS ARE MAGICAL symbols whose origins are lost to history. Long thought to be the stuff of superstition, their power was rediscovered when, after an absence of thousands of years, the demon corelings returned to plague the surface of the world.

By themselves, wards have no power. Demons, however, are infused with core magic, and wards siphon a portion of that magic away, repurposing the energy. The most common wards are defensive in nature, but a handful of wards that can achieve other effects are known, and in theory, it is possible to create a ward for any desired effect. Recently, mankind has discovered offensive wards, which can actually harm demons, who are otherwise immune to hand weapons and can quickly recover from almost any injury.
Defensive Wards

Defensive wards draw magic from demons to form a barrier (forbiddenance) through which the demons cannot pass. Wards are strongest when used against the specific demon type to which they are assigned, and are most commonly used in conjunction with other wards in circles of protection. When a circle activates, all demon flesh is forcibly banished from its line. Some examples:

**Defensive ward against:** Clay Demons  
**First appeared:** The Great Bazaar  
**Description:** Clay demons are native to the hard clay flats on the outskirts of the Krasian Desert. Small, they are about the size of a medium-sized dog, made from compact bunched muscle, and thick, overlapping armor plates. They have short hard talons that allow them to climb most any rock face, even hanging upside down. Their orange-brown armor can blend invisibly into an adobe wall or clay bed. The blunt head of a clay demon can smash through almost anything, shattering stone and denting fine steel.

**Defensive ward against:** Flame Demons  
**First appeared:** The Warded Man/The Painted Man  
**Description:** Flame demons have eyes, nostrils, and mouths that glow with a smoky orange light. They are the smallest demons, ranging from the size of a rabbit to that of a small boy. Like all demons, they have long, hooked claws and rows of razor sharp teeth. Their armor consists of small, overlapping scales, sharp and hard. Flame demons can spit fire in brief bursts. Their firespit burns intensely on contact with air, and can set almost any substance alight, even metal and stone.

**Defensive ward against:** Mimic Demons  
**First appeared:** The Desert Spear  
**Description:** Mimics are the elite bodyguards to mind demons (coreling princes), and are believed to be the most intelligent and powerful demons short of the princes. Their natural form is unknown, but they are able to assume the form of any living thing, including other demon breeds, clothing, and equipment. These demons are somewhat lacking in creativity, and so are usually restricted to taking the forms of creatures they have themselves encountered (unless directed by a mind demon). One of their favorite tricks is to take the form of an injured human and feign distress to lower the defenses of their prey.

**Defensive ward against:** Mind Demons  
**First appeared:** The Desert Spear  
**Description:** Also known as coreling princes, mind demons are the generals of demonkind. They are physically weak, and have little in the way of the natural defenses of the other corelings, but they have vast mental and magical powers. They can read and control minds, communicate telepathically, and kill with their thoughts. By drawing wards in the air and powering them with their innate magic, they can create almost any effect. The other corelings,
great and small, follow their every mental command without hesitation, and will give their lives to protect them. Sensitive to even reflected sunlight, mind demons will only rise on the three night period of the new moon cycle in the hours when night is darkest.

**Defensive ward against:** Rock Demons  
**First appeared:** The Warded Man/The Painted Man  
**Description:** The largest of the coreling breeds, rock demons can range in height from six to twenty feet tall. A hulking mass of sinew and sharp edges, their thick black carapaces are knobbed with bony protrusions, and their spiked tails can smash a horse's skull in a single blow. They stand hunched on two clawed feet, with long, gnarled arms ending in talons the size of butchering knives, and multiple rows of bladelike teeth. No known physical force can harm a rock demon.

**Defensive ward against:** Sand Demons  
**First appeared:** The Warded Man/The Painted Man  
**Description:** Cousins to rock demons, sand demons are smaller and more nimble, but still among the strongest and most armored of the coreling breeds. They have small, sharp scales, a dirty yellow almost indistinguishable from gritty sand, and they run on all fours instead of two legs. Rows of segmented teeth jut out on their jaws like a snout, while their nostril slits rest far back, just below their large, lidless eyes. Thick bones from their brows curve upward and back, cutting through the scales as sharp horns. Their brows twitch continually as they displace the ever-blowing desert sand. Sand demons hunt in packs known as storms.

**Defensive ward against:** Snow Demons  
**First appeared:** The Dukes Mines (tk)  
**Description:** Similar to flame demons in build, snow demons are native to frozen northern climates and high mountain elevations. Their scales are pure white, blending into the snow, and they spit a liquid so cold it instantly freezes anything it touches before evaporating. Steel struck with Coldspit can become so brittle it shatters.

**Defensive ward against:** Swamp Demons  
**First appeared:** Mentioned in The Warded Man/Painted Man  
**Description:** Swamp demons are native to swamps and marshy areas and are an amphibious form of wood demon, at home both in the water and in the trees. Swamp demons are blotched in green and brown, blending in to their surroundings, and will often hide in mud or shallow water, to spring on prey. They spit a thick, sticky slime that rots any organic material it comes in contact with.

**Defensive ward against:** Water Demons
**First appeared:** Mentioned in The Warded Man/Painted Man, seen in The Desert Spear

**Description:** Water demons vary in size and are seldom seen. They are long and scaly, with webbed hands and feet, tipped with sharp talons. Some breeds have tentacles ending in sharp bone. They can only breathe under water, though they can surface for a short time. Water demons can swim very quickly and delight in savaging fish, though they prefer warm-blooded mammals as their prey, especially those humans bold enough to dare to sail at night.

**Defensive ward against:** Wind Demons

**First appeared:** The Warded Man/The Painted Man

**Description:** Wind demons stand about the height of a tall man at the shoulder, but with head fins that rise much higher, topping eight or nine feet. Their great long snouts are sharp-edged like beaks, but hide rows of teeth, thick as a man's finger. Their skin is a tough, flexible armor that can turn any spearpoint or arrowhead. That resilient substance stretches thin out from their sides and along the underside of their arm bones to form the tough membrane of their wings, which often span three times their height, jointed with wicked hooked talons that can cleanly sever a man's head when they dive. Clumsy and slow on land, wind demons have tremendous power in the sky, and can dive, attack, and reverse direction before hitting the ground, taking their prey away with them.

**Defensive ward against:** Wood Demons

**First appeared:** The Warded Man/The Painted Man

**Description:** Wood demons are native to forests. Next to rock demons, they are the largest and most powerful demons, averaging from five to ten feet tall when standing on their hind legs. They have short, powerful hindquarters and long, sinewy arms, perfect for climbing trees and leaping from branch to branch. Their claws are short, hard points, designed for gripping through the bark of trees. Wood demons' armor is barklike in color and texture, and they have large, black eyes. Wood demons cannot be harmed by normal fire, but will burn readily if brought in contact with hotter fires, such as magnesium or firespit. Wood demons will kill flame demons on sight, and often hunt in groups called copses.
Offensive (Combat) Wards

Combat wards siphon magic from a demon, weakening its armor at the point of contact, and redirect that magic as offensive force. This force can manifest in many different ways. Some examples:

**Combat ward:** Bludgeoning/impact  
**First appeared:** The Warded Man/The Painted Man  
**Description:** This ward turns coreling magic into concussive force. The stronger the original blow, the more power generated. It can be placed onto any blunt weapon.

**Combat ward:** Cutting  
**First appeared:** The Warded Man/The Painted Man  
**Description:** This ward, when etched along the length of a blade, can enhance its sharpness, allowing the weapon to cut cleanly through even coreling armor and flesh.

**Combat ward:** Pressure (Arlen's palm ward from avatar)  
**First appeared:** The Warded Man/The Painted Man  
**Description:** Pressure wards exert a crushing force that builds in heat and intensity the longer they remain in contact with a demon. The Warded Man has one on each palm, and has been known to squeeze a demon's head with them until it bursts.
Other Wards

Many recorded wards have no known use, their purpose lost to antiquity. Because testing requires bringing them in contact with a demon, volunteers to conduct the research are understandably scarce. Some examples:
Table of Contents

Introduction
The Great Bazaar
Deleted Scenes
Arlen
Brianne Beaten
Krasian Dictionary
Ward Grimoire
  Defensive Wards
  Offensive (Combat) Wards
  Other Wards