

CHARACTER STORY:

SAGE

I am getting too old for all this nonsense.



Even getting up to get the firewood the kind villagers supply me with is a struggle in the colder months as my joints creak, reminding of age and the strain they already had to endure. The pain is especially bad when it rains but what am I going to do, not enjoy rain? Not going to happen. Always liked the distant patter of it, ever since I was a young enthusiastic fool, my nose buried in a book, seeking long-forgotten secrets in the libraries of Aulstrad.

People were different then. Less resigned, still thinking we could rebuild after the Cataclysm. I remember many aspiring crusaders coming to me, willing to pay for locations of strongholds lost to the disaster, now occupied by greenskins or worse. They went, and they tried to reclaim these, to claw back what was taken from us. Hardly anyone came back. Hardly anyone would bother to even try now. How long ago was that, forty, fifty years? That's now how long it takes for hope to die, I suppose.

I was happy spending my days with musty tomes, eager to share my knowledge for coin. I ate like a Lord back then – say what you will of the morals of Aulstrad but they feed you well if you can afford it. These memories bring a smile to my face as I ladle the gruel from the simmering pot in my hut.

I took what I could from these libraries and have broadened my search, ever hungry to expand my knowledge. I took trips to far cities of the Dark that still stood to learn from the sages there, glean the knowledge held by the elders. The roads were not safe even then, but I could afford protection. Some of my travels took me to less traveled places, but it is those that often hold the most intriguing knowledge. My curiosity started to attract attention. The unwelcome kind. The first conversation I had with a Templar should have told me everything I needed to know. The furious seekers of corruption are indiscriminate in their zeal to purge it from our lands and I fear little weight was given to my objections and assurances of innocence. Suspicious activity, wrong kind of research, dangerous implications. I felt the dial of fate turning against me, but my preparations to leave Aulstrad were not expedient enough. Within four days of that conversation I was taken to the Purgatory.

Seven years. That is how long I spent in that place devoid of hope, devoid of light, devoid of knowledge. A place where the corrupting taint of magic and forbidden lore is burnt out of those who have come into contact with it – willingly or by chance, proven or by suspicion. The food in that place made my gruel here feel like a feast. I remember clinging to my sanity as if it was a ledge on which I had only the most precarious footing. Many who went in there were not so fortunate. I had a little help. I could hear the rain in my cell and that sound helped my thoughts drift away from the terrors I had to endure. After seven years of inquest, no convincing evidence of my involvement with the forbidden knowledge was found and I had my freedom again, damaged as I was.

I left Aulstrad soon after being released. The burden of what I had to endure was too much to bear and the open road beckoned. With no coin to my name this journey was quite different. Travelling without guards and having nothing worth stealing I spoke to brigands, stopping in settlements of ill repute that were still dotting the countryside of the Dark. I visited sages in rickety huts and half-mad prophets spouting things that were either great truths or inane ramblings. I consulted tomes in forsaken ruins and pursued rumours. I offered what knowledge I could to help the folks along the way and their kindness in response made sure my needs were looked after. It felt good to learn again, to breathe free. But all journeys must end and mine led me here to this hamlet at the edge of nowhere where I sit stirring the gruel over a dying fire. It is a simple life but one that I have enjoyed as it left me to my research, untroubled by the attention of the Templar who have much more obvious targets for their righteousness this close to the border of the Scarred Lands.

I have grown old and content here, my research nearing completion, when one night an unexpected opportunity came knocking. A desperate-looking fellow in a dark hood – nimble and shifty-eyed – asking for my knowledge to aid him and his companions in a dangerous expedition. There are risks, he warned, but the rewards would exceed my wildest dreams. Better yet, he seemed to know better than most what would be of most value to me – not shiny trinkets and baubles, but knowledge, knowledge of a very particular kind.

According to him, a cavern complex not far off contained forsaken ruins of an ancient empire – the vague descriptions he provided matched what I already knew through years of research. The ruins would hold the answers I needed, perhaps even the appropriate materials to enact the formula.

After all it was immortality I was after, something I dedicated most of my life to study, regardless of how corrupt shortsighted fanatics would deem it. And such knowledge justified many risks.

I was old, yes, but alive and keen to continue living – and I intended to stay that way for a long, long time to come.