

## PROLOGUE



Wax crept along the ragged fence in a crouch, his boots scraping the dry ground. He held his Sterrion 36 up by his head, the long, silvery barrel dusted with red clay. The revolver was nothing fancy to look at, though the six-shot cylinder was machined with such care in the steel-alloy frame that there was no play in its movement. There was no gleam to the metal or exotic material on the grip. But it fit his hand like it was meant to be there.

The waist-high fence was flimsy, the wood grayed with time, held together with fraying lengths of rope. It smelled of age. Even the worms had given up on this wood long ago.

Wax peeked up over the knotted boards, scanning the empty town. Blue lines hovered in his vision, extending from his chest to point at nearby sources of metal, a result of his Allomancy. Burning steel did that; it let him see the location of sources of metal, then Push against them if he wanted. His weight against the weight of the item. If it was heavier, he was pushed back. If he was heavier, it was pushed forward.

In this case, however, he didn't Push. He just watched the lines to see if any of the metal was moving. None of it was. Nails holding together buildings, spent shell casings lying scattered in the dust, or horseshoes piled at the silent smithy—all were as motionless as the old hand pump planted in the ground to his right.

Wary, he too remained still. Steel continued to burn comfortably in his stomach, and so—as a precaution—he gently Pushed outward from himself in all directions. It was a trick he'd mastered a few years back; he didn't Push on any specific metal objects, but created a kind of defensive bubble around himself. Any metal that came streaking in his direction would be thrown slightly off course.

It was far from foolproof; he could still get hit. But shots would go wild, not striking where they were aimed. It had saved his life on a couple of occasions. He wasn't even certain how he did it; Allomancy was often an instinctive thing for him. Somehow he even managed to exempt the metal he carried, and didn't Push his own gun from his hands.

That done, he continued along the fence—still watching the metal lines to make sure nobody was sneaking up on him. Feltrel had once been a prosperous town. That had been twenty years back. Then a clan of koloss had taken up residence nearby. Things hadn't gone well.

Today, the dead town seemed completely empty, though he knew it wasn't so. Wax had come here hunting a psychopath. And he wasn't the only one.

He grabbed the top of the fence and hopped over, feet grinding red clay. Crouching low, he ran in a squat over to the side of the old blacksmith's forge. His clothing was terribly dusty, but well tailored: a fine suit, a silver cravat at the neck, twinkling cuff links on the sleeves of his fine white shirt. He had cultivated a look that appeared out of place, as if he were planning to attend a fine ball back in Elendel rather than scrambling through a dead town in the Roughs hunting a murderer. Completing the ensemble, he wore a bowler hat on his head to keep off the sun.

A sound; someone stepped on a board across the street, making it creak. It was so faint, he almost missed it. Wax reacted immediately, flaring the steel that burned inside his stomach. He Pushed on a group of nails in the wall beside him just as the crack of a gunshot split the air.

His sudden Push caused the wall to rattle, the old rusty nails straining in their places. His Push shoved him to the side, and he rolled across the ground. A blue line appeared for an eyeblink—the bullet, which hit the ground where he had been a moment before. As he came up from his roll, a second shot followed. This one came close, but bent just a hair out of the way as it neared him.

Deflected by his steel bubble, the bullet zipped past his ear. Another inch to the right, and he'd have gotten it in the forehead—steel bubble or no. Breathing calmly, he raised his Sterrion and sighted on the balcony of the old hotel across the street, where the shot had come from. The balcony was fronted by the hotel's sign, capable of hiding a gunman.

Wax fired, then Pushed on the bullet, slamming it forward with extra thrust to make it faster and more penetrating. He wasn't using typical lead or copper-jacketed lead bullets; he needed something stronger.

The large-caliber steel-jacketed bullet hit the balcony, and his extra power caused it to puncture the wood and hit the man behind. The blue line leading to the man's gun quivered as he fell. Wax stood up slowly, brushing the dust from his clothing. At that moment another shot cracked in the air.

He cursed, reflexively Pushing against the nails again, though his instincts told him he'd be too late. By the time he heard a shot, it was too late for Pushing to help.

This time he was thrown to the ground. That force had to go somewhere, and if the nails couldn't move, he had to. He grunted as he hit and raised his revolver, dust sticking to the sweat on his hand. He searched frantically for the one who'd fired at him. They'd missed. Perhaps the steel bubble had—

A body rolled off the top of the blacksmith's shop and thumped down to the ground with a puff of red dust. Wax blinked, then raised his gun to chest level and moved over behind the fence again, crouching down for cover. He kept an eye on the blue Allomantic lines. They could warn him if someone got close, but only if the person was carrying or wearing metal.

The body that had fallen beside the building didn't have a single line pointing to it. However, another set of quivering lines pointed to something moving along the back of the forge. Wax leveled his gun, taking aim as a figure ducked around the side of the building and ran toward him.

The woman wore a white duster, reddened at the bottom. She kept her dark hair pulled back in a tail, and wore trousers and a wide belt, with thick boots on her feet. She had a squarish face. A strong face, with lips that often rose slightly at the right side in a half smile.

Wax heaved a sigh of relief and lowered his gun. "Lessie."

"You knock yourself to the ground again?" she asked as she reached the cover of the fence beside him. "You've got more dust on your face than Miles has scowls. Maybe it's time for you to retire, old man."

"Lessie, I'm *three months* older than you are."

"Those are a long three months." She peeked up over the fence. "Seen anyone else?"

"I dropped a man up on the balcony," Wax said. "I couldn't see if it was Bloody Tan or not."

"It wasn't," she said. "He wouldn't have tried to shoot you from so far away."

Wax nodded. Tan liked things personal. Up close. The psychopath lamented when he had to use a gun, and he rarely shot someone without being able to see the fear in their eyes.

Lessie scanned the quiet town, then glanced at him, ready to move. Her eyes flickered downward for a moment. Toward his shirt pocket.

Wax followed her gaze. A letter was peeking out of his pocket, delivered earlier that day. It was from the grand city of Elendel, and was addressed to Lord Waxillium Ladrian. A name Wax hadn't used in years. A name that felt wrong to him now.

He tucked the letter farther into his pocket. Lessie thought it implied more than it did. The city didn't hold anything for him now, and House Ladrian would get along without him. He really should have burned that letter.

Wax nodded toward the fallen man beside the wall to distract her from the letter. "Your work?"

"He had a bow," she said. "Stone arrowheads. Almost had you from above."

"Thanks."

She shrugged, eyes glittering in satisfaction. Those eyes now had lines at the sides of them, weathered by the Roughts' harsh sunlight. There had been a time when she and Wax had kept a tally of who had saved the other most often. They'd both lost track years ago.

"Cover me," Wax said softly.

"With what?" she asked. "Paint? Kisses? You're already covered with dust."

Wax raised an eyebrow at her.

“Sorry,” she said, grimacing. “I’ve been playing cards too much with Wayne lately.”

He snorted and ran in a crouch to the fallen corpse and rolled it over. The man had been a cruel-faced fellow with several days of stubble on his cheeks; the bullet wound bled out his right side. *I think I recognize him*, Wax thought to himself as he went through the man’s pockets and came out with a drop of red glass, colored like blood.

He hurried back to the fence.

“Well?” Lessie asked.

“Donal’s crew,” Wax said, holding up the drop of glass.

“Bastards,” Lessie said. “They couldn’t just leave us to it, could they?”

“You *did* shoot his son, Lessie.”

“And you shot his brother.”

“Mine was self-defense.”

“Mine was too,” she said. “That kid was *annoying*. Besides, he survived.”

“Missing a toe.”

“You don’t need ten,” she said. “I have a cousin with four. She does just fine.” She raised her revolver, scanning the empty town. “Of course, she does look kind of ridiculous. Cover me.”

“With what?”

She just grinned and ducked out from behind the cover, scrambling across the ground toward the smithy.

*Harmony*, Wax thought with a smile, *I love that woman*.

He watched for more gunmen, but Lessie reached the building without any further shots being fired. Wax nodded to her, then dashed across the street toward the hotel. He ducked inside, checking the corners for foes. The taproom was empty, so he took cover beside the doorway, waving toward Lessie. She ran down to the next building on her side of the street and checked it out.

Donal’s crew. Yes, Wax had shot his brother—the man had been robbing a railway car at the time. From what he understood, though, Donal hadn’t ever cared for his brother. No, the only thing that riled Donal was losing money, which was probably why he was here. He’d put a price on Bloody Tan’s head for stealing a shipment of his bendalloy. Donal probably hadn’t expected Wax to come hunting Tan the same day he did, but his men had standing orders to shoot Wax or Lessie if seen.

Wax was half tempted to leave the dead town and let Donal and Tan have at it. The thought of it made his eye twitch, though. He’d promised to bring Tan in. That was that.

Lessie waved from the inside of her building, then pointed toward the back. She was going to go out in that direction and creep along behind the next set of buildings. Wax nodded, then made a curt gesture. He'd try to hook up with Wayne and Barl, who had gone to check the other side of the town.

Lessie vanished, and Wax picked his way through the old hotel toward a side door. He passed old, dirty nests made by both rats and men. The town picked up miscreants the way a dog picked up fleas. He even passed a place where it looked like some wayfarer had made a small firepit on a sheet of metal with a ring of rocks. It was a wonder the fool hadn't burned the entire building to the ground.

Wax eased open the side door and stepped into an alleyway between the hotel and the store beside it. The gunshots earlier would have been heard, and someone might come looking. Best to stay out of sight.

Wax edged around the back of the store, stepping quietly across the red-clay ground. The hillside here was overgrown with weeds except for the entrance to an old cold cellar. Wax wound around it, then paused, eyeing the wood-framed pit.

Maybe . . .

He knelt beside the opening, peering down. There had been a ladder here once, but it had rotted away—the remnants were visible below in a pile of old splinters. The air smelled musty and wet . . . with a hint of smoke. Someone had been burning a torch down there.

Wax dropped a bullet into the hole, then leaped in, gun out. As he fell, he filled his iron metalmind, decreasing his weight. He was Twinborn—a Feruchemist as well as an Allomancer. His Allomantic power was Steelpushing, and his Feruchemical power, called Skimming, was the ability to grow heavier or lighter. It was a powerful combination of talents.

He Pushed against the round below him, slowing his fall so that he landed softly. He returned his weight to normal—or, well, normal for him. He often went about at three-quarters of his unadjusted weight, making himself lighter on his feet, quicker to react.

He crept through the darkness. It had been a long, difficult road, finding where Bloody Tan was hiding. In the end, the fact that Feltrel had suddenly emptied of other bandits, wanderers, and unfortunates had been a major clue. Wax stepped softly, working his way deeper into the cellar. The scent of smoke was stronger here, and though the light was fading, he made out a firepit beside the earthen wall. That and a ladder that could be moved into place at the entrance.

That gave him pause. It indicated that whoever was making their hideout in the cellar—it could be Tan, or it could be someone else entirely—was still down here. Unless there was another way out. Wax crept forward a little farther, squinting in the dark.

There was light ahead.

Wax cocked his gun softly, then drew a little vial out of his mistcoat and pulled the cork with his teeth. He downed the whiskey and steel in one shot, restoring his reserves. He flared his steel. Yes . . . there was metal ahead of him, down the tunnel. How long was

this cellar? He had assumed it would be small, but the reinforcing wood timbers indicated something deeper, longer. More like a mine adit.

He crept forward, focused on those metal lines. Someone would have to aim a gun if they saw him, and the metal would quiver, giving him a chance to Push the weapon out of their hands. Nothing moved. He slid forward, smelling musty damp soil, fungus, potatoes left to bud. He approached a trembling light, but could hear nothing. The metal lines did not move.

Finally, he got close enough to make out a lamp hanging by a hook on a wooden beam near the wall. Something else hung at the center of the tunnel. A body? Hanged? Wax cursed softly and hurried forward, wary of a trap. It *was* a corpse, but it left him baffled. At first glance, it seemed years old. The eyes were gone from the skull, the skin pulled back against the bone. It didn't stink, and wasn't bloated.

He thought he recognized it. Geormin, the coachman who brought mail into Weathering from the more distant villages around the area. That was his uniform, at least, and it seemed like his hair. He'd been one of Tan's first victims, the disappearance that sent Wax hunting. That had only been two months back.

*He's been mummified*, Wax thought. *Prepared and dried like leather*. He felt revolted—he'd gone drinking with Geormin on occasion, and though the man cheated at cards, he'd been an amiable enough fellow.

The hanging wasn't an ordinary one, either. Wires had been used to prop up Geormin's arms so they were out to the sides, his head cocked, his mouth pried open. Wax turned away from the gruesome sight, his eye twitching.

*Careful*, he told himself. *Don't let him anger you. Keep focused*. He would be back to cut Geormin down. Right now, he couldn't afford to make the noise. At least he knew he was on the right track. This was certainly Bloody Tan's lair.

There was another patch of light in the distance. How long was this tunnel? He approached the pool of light, and here found another corpse, this one hung on the wall sideways. Annarel, a visiting geologist who had vanished soon after Geormin. Poor woman. She'd been dried in the same manner, body spiked to the wall in a very specific pose, as if she were on her knees inspecting a pile of rocks.

Another pool of light drew him onward. Clearly this wasn't a cellar—it was probably some kind of smuggling tunnel left over from the days when Feltrel had been a booming town. Tan hadn't built this, not with those aged wooden supports.

Wax passed another six corpses, each lit by its own glowing lantern, each arranged in some kind of pose. One sat in a chair, another strung up as if flying, a few stuck to the wall. The later ones were more fresh, the last one recently killed. Wax didn't recognize the slender man, who hung with hand to his head in a salute.

*Rust and Ruin*, Wax thought. *This isn't Bloody Tan's lair . . . it's his gallery*.

Sickened, Wax made his way to the next pool of light. This one was different. Brighter. As he approached, he realized that he was seeing sunlight streaming down from a square

cut in the ceiling. The tunnel led up to it, probably to a former trapdoor that had rotted or broken away. The ground sloped in a gradual slant up to the hole.

Wax crawled up the slope, then cautiously poked his head out. He'd come up in a building, though the roof was gone. The brick walls were mostly intact, and there were four altars in the front, just to Wax's left. An old chapel to the Survivor. It seemed empty.

Wax crawled out of the hole, his Sterrion at the side of his head, coat marred by dirt from below. The clean, dry air smelled good to him.

"Each life is a performance," a voice said, echoing in the ruined church.

Wax immediately ducked to the side, rolling up to an altar.

"But we are not the performers," the voice continued. "We are the puppets."

"Tan," Wax said. "Come out."

"I have seen God, lawkeeper," Tan whispered. Where was he? "I have seen Death himself, with the nails in his eyes. I have seen the Survivor, who is life."

Wax scanned the small chapel. It was cluttered with broken benches and fallen statues. He rounded the side of the altar, judging the sound to come from the back of the room.

"Other men wonder," Tan's voice said, "but I know. I know I'm a puppet. We all are. Did you like my show? I worked so hard to build it."

Wax continued along the building's right wall, his boots leaving a trail in the dust. He breathed shallowly, a line of sweat creeping down his right temple. His eye was twitching. He saw corpses on the walls in his mind's eye.

"Many men never get a chance to create true art," Tan said. "And the best performances are those which can never be reproduced. Months, years, spent preparing. Everything placed right. But at the end of the day, the rotting will begin. I couldn't truly mummify them; I hadn't the time or resources. I could only preserve them long enough to prepare for this one show. Tomorrow, it will be ruined. You were the only one to see it. Only you. I figure . . . we're all just puppets . . . you see . . ."

The voice *was* coming from the back of the room, near some rubble that was blocking Wax's view.

"Someone else moves us," Tan said.

Wax ducked around the side of the rubble, raising his Sterrion.

Tan stood there, holding Lessie in front of him, her mouth gagged, her eyes wide. Wax froze in place, gun raised. Lessie was bleeding from her leg and her arm. She'd been shot, and her face was growing pale. She'd lost blood. That was how Tan had been able to overpower her.

Wax grew still. He didn't feel anxiety. He couldn't afford to; it might make him shake, and shaking might make him miss. He could see Tan's face behind Lessie; the man held a garrote around her neck.

Tan was a slender, fine-fingered man. He'd been a mortician. Black hair, thinning, worn greased back. A nice suit that now shone with blood.

"Someone else moves us, lawman," Tan said softly.

Lessie met Wax's eyes. They both knew what to do in this situation. Last time, he'd been the one captured. People always tried to use them against one another. In Lessie's opinion, that wasn't a disadvantage. She'd have explained that if Tan *hadn't* known the two of them were a couple, he'd have killed her right off. Instead, he'd kidnapped her. That gave them a chance to get out.

Wax cocked the hammer of his Sterrion and sighted down the barrel. He drew in the trigger until he balanced the weight of the sear right on the edge of firing, and Lessie blinked. One. Two. Three.

Wax fired.

In the same instant, Tan yanked Lessie to the right.

The shot broke the air, echoing against clay bricks. Lessie's head jerked back as Wax's bullet took her just above the right eye. Blood sprayed against the clay wall beside her. She crumpled.

Wax stood, frozen, horrified. *No . . . that isn't the way . . . it can't . . .*

"The best performances," Tan said, smiling and looking down at Lessie's figure, "are those that can only be performed once."

Wax shot him in the head.





Five months later, Wax walked through the decorated rooms of a large, lively party, passing men in dark suits with tailcoats and women in colorful dresses with narrow waists and lots of folds

through long pleated skirts. They called him “Lord Waxillium” or “Lord Ladrian” when they spoke to him.

He nodded to each, but avoided being drawn into conversation. He deliberately made his way to one of the back rooms of the party, where dazzling electric lights—the talk of the city—produced a steady, too-even light to ward off the evening’s gloom. Outside the windows, he could see mist tickling the glass.

Defying decorum, Wax pushed his way through the room’s enormous glass double doors and stepped out onto the mansion’s grand balcony. There, finally, he felt like he could breathe again.

He closed his eyes, taking the air in and out, feeling the faint wetness of the mists on the skin of his face. *Buildings are so . . . suffocating here in the city*, he thought. *Have I simply forgotten about that, or did I not notice it when I was younger?*

He opened his eyes, and rested his hands on the balcony railing to look out over Elendel. It was the grandest city in all the world, a metropolis designed by Harmony himself. The place of Wax’s youth. A place that hadn’t been his home for twenty years.

Though it had been five months since Lessie’s death, he could still hear the gunshot, see the blood sprayed on the bricks. He had left the Roughs, moved back to the city, answering the desperate summons to do his duty to his house at his uncle’s passing.

Five months and a world away, and he could still hear that gunshot. Crisp, clean, like the sky cracking.

Behind him, he could hear musical laughter coming from the warmth of the room. Cett Mansion was a grand place, full of expensive woods, soft carpets, and sparkling chandeliers. No one joined him on the balcony.

From this vantage, he had a perfect view of the lights down Demoux Promenade. A double row of bright electric lamps with a steady, blazing whiteness. They glowed like bubbles along the wide boulevard, which was flanked by the even wider canal, the still and quiet waters reflecting the light. An evening railway engine called a greeting as it chugged through the distant center of the city, hem- ming the mists with darker smoke.

Down Demoux Promenade, Wax had a good view of both the Ironspine Building and Tekiel Tower, one on either side of the canal. Both were unfinished, but their steelwork lattices already rose high into the sky. Mind-numbingly high.

The architects continued to release updated reports of how high they intended to go, each one trying to outdo the other. Rumors he'd heard at this very party, credible ones, claimed that both would eventually top out at over fifty stories. Nobody knew which would end up proving the taller, though friendly wagers were common.

Wax breathed in the mists. Out in the Roughs, Cett Mansion—which was three stories high—would have been as tall as a building got. Here, it felt dwarfed. The world had gone and changed on him during his years out of the city. It had grown up, inventing lights that needed no fire to glow and buildings that threatened to rise higher than the mists themselves. Looking down that wide street at the edge of the Fifth Octant, Wax suddenly felt very, very old.

“Lord Waxillium?” a voice asked from behind.

He turned to find an older woman, Lady Aving Cett, peeking out the door at him. Her gray hair was up in a bun and she wore rubies at her neck. “By Harmony, my good man. You’ll take a chill out here! Come, there are some people you will wish to meet.”

“I’ll be along presently, my lady,” Wax said. “I’m just getting a little air.”

Lady Cett frowned, but retreated. She didn’t know what to make of him; none of them did. Some saw him as a mysterious scion of the Ladrian family, associated with strange stories of the realms beyond the mountains. The rest assumed him to be an uncultured, rural buffoon. He figured he was probably both.

He’d been on show all night. He was *supposed* to be looking for a wife, and pretty much everyone knew it. House Ladrian was insolvent following his uncle’s imprudent management, and the easiest path to solvency was marriage. Unfortunately, his uncle had *also* managed to offend three-quarters of the city’s upper crust.

Wax leaned forward on the balcony, the Sterrion revolvers under his arms jabbing his sides. With their long barrels, they weren’t meant to be carried in underarm holsters. They had been awkward all night.

He should be getting back to the party to chat and try to repair House Ladrian’s reputation. But the thought of that crowded room, so hot, so close, sweltering, making it difficult to breathe. . . .

Giving himself no time to reconsider, he swung off over the side of the balcony and began falling three stories toward the ground. He burned steel, then dropped a spent bullet casing slightly behind himself and Pushed against it; his weight sent it speeding down to the earth faster than he fell. As always, thanks to his Feruchemy, he was lighter than he should have been. He hardly knew anymore what it felt like to go around at his full weight.

When the casing hit the ground, he Pushed against it and sent himself horizontally in a leap over the garden wall. With one hand on its stone top, he vaulted out of the garden,

then reduced his weight to a fraction of normal as he fell down the other side. He landed softly.

*Ah, good*, he thought, crouching down and peering through the mists. *The coachmen's yard*. The vehicles everyone had used to get there were arranged here in neat rows, the coachmen themselves chatting in a few cozy rooms that spilled orange light into the mists. No electric lights here; just good, warmth-giving hearths.

He walked among the carriages until he found his own, then opened the trunk strapped to the back.

Off came his gentleman's fine dinner coat. Instead he threw on his mistcoat, a long, enveloping garment like a duster with a thick collar and cuffed sleeves. He slipped a shotgun into its pocket on the inside, then buckled on his gun belt and moved the Sterrions into the holsters at his hips.

*Ah*, he thought. *Much better*. He really needed to stop carrying the Sterrions and get some more practical weapons for concealment. Unfortunately, he'd never found anything as good as Ranette's work. Hadn't she moved to the city, though? Perhaps he could look her up and talk her into making him something. Assuming she didn't shoot him on sight.

A few moments later, he was running through the city, the mistcoat light upon his back. He left it open at the front, revealing his black shirt and gentleman's trousers. The ankle-length mistcoat had been divided into strips from just above the waist, the tassels streaming behind him with a faint rustle.

He dropped a bullet casing and launched himself high into the air, landing atop the building across the street from the mansion. He glanced back at it, the windows ablaze in the evening dark. What kind of rumors was he going to start, vanishing from the balcony like that?

Well, they already knew he was Twinborn—that was a matter of public record. His disappearance wasn't going to do much to help patch his family's reputation. For the moment, he didn't care. He'd spent almost every evening since his return to the city at one social function or another, and they hadn't had a misty night in weeks.

He needed the mists. This was who he was.

Wax dashed across the rooftop and leaped off, moving toward Demoux Promenade. Just before hitting the ground, he flipped a spent casing down and Pushed on it, slowing his descent. He landed in a patch of decorative shrubs that caught his cloak tassels and made a rustling noise.

*Damn*. Nobody planted decorative shrubs out in the Roughts. He pulled himself free, wincing at the noise. A few weeks in the city, and he was already getting rusty?

He shook his head and Pushed himself into the air again, moving out over the wide boulevard and parallel canal. He angled his flight so he crested that and landed on one of the new electric lamps. There was one nice thing about a modern city like this; it had a *lot* of metal.

He smiled, then flared his steel and Pushed off the top of the streetlamp, sending himself in a wide arc through the air. Mist streamed past him, swirling as the wind rushed against his face. It was thrilling. A man never truly felt free until he'd thrown off gravity's chains and sought the sky.

As he crested his arc, he Pushed against another streetlight, throwing himself farther forward. The long row of metal poles was like his own personal railway line. He bounded onward, his antics drawing attention from those in passing carriages, both horse-drawn and horseless.

He smiled. Coinshots like himself were relatively rare, but Elendel was a major city with an enormous population. He wouldn't be the first man these people had seen bounding by metal through the city. Coinshots often acted as high-speed couriers in Elendel.

The city's size still astonished him. Millions lived here, maybe as many as *fivemillion*. Nobody had a sure count across all of its wards—they were called octants, and as one might expect, there were eight of them.

Millions; he couldn't picture that, though he'd grown up here. Before he'd left Weathering, he'd been starting to think it was getting too big, but there couldn't have been ten thousand people in the town.

He landed atop a lamp directly in front of the massive Ironspine Building. He craned his neck, looking up through the mists at the towering structure. The unfinished top was lost in the darkness. Could he climb something so high? He couldn't Pull on metals, only Push—he wasn't some mythological Mistborn from the old stories, like the Survivor or the Ascendant Warrior. One Allomantic power, one Feruchemical power, that was all a man could have. In fact, having just one was a rare privilege—being Twinborn like Wax was truly exceptional.

Wayne claimed to have memorized the names of all of the different possible combinations of Twinborn. Of course, Wayne also claimed to have once stolen a horse that belched in perfect musical notes, so one learned to take what he said with a pinch of copper. Wax honestly didn't pay attention to all of the definitions and names for Twinborn; he was called a Crasher, the mix of a Coinshot and a Skimmer. He rarely bothered to think of himself that way.

He began to fill his metalminds—the iron bracers he wore on his upper arms—draining himself of more weight, making himself even lighter. That weight would be stored away for future use. Then, ignoring the more cautious part of his mind, he flared his steel and *Pushed*.

He shot upward. The wind became a roar, and the lamp was a good anchor—lots of metal, firmly attached to the ground—capable of pushing him quite high. He'd angled slightly, and the building's stories became a blur in front of him. He landed about twenty stories up, just as his Push on the lamp was reaching its limit.

This portion of the building had been finished already, the exterior of a molded material that imitated worked stone. Ceramics, he'd heard. It was a common practice for tall buildings, where the lower levels would be actual stone, but the higher reaches would use something lighter.

He grabbed hold of an outcropping. He wasn't so light that the wind could push him away—not with his metal minds on his forearms and the weapons he wore. His lighter body did make it easier to hold himself in place.

Mist swirled beneath him. It seemed almost playful. He looked upward, deciding his next step. His steel revealed lines of blue to nearby sources of metal, many of which were the structure's frame. Pushing on any of them would send him away from the building.

*There*, he thought, noting a decent-sized ledge about five feet up. He climbed up the side of the building, gloved fingers sure on the complexly ornamented surface. A Coinshot quickly learned not to fear heights. He hoisted himself up onto the ledge, then dropped a bullet casing, stopping it with his booted foot.

He looked upward, judging his trajectory. He drew a vial from his belt, then uncorked it and downed the liquid and steel shavings inside it. He hissed through his teeth as the whiskey burned his throat. Good stuff, from Stagin's still. *Damn, I'm going to miss that when my stock runs out*, he thought, tucking the vial away.

Most Allomancers didn't use whiskey in their metal vials. Most Allomancers were missing out on a perfect opportunity. He smiled as his internal steel reserves were restored; then he flared the metal and launched himself.

He flew up into the night sky. Unfortunately, the Ironspine was built in set-back tiers, the upper stories growing progressively narrower as you went higher. That meant that even though he Pushed himself directly up, he was soon soaring in open darkness, mists around him, the building's side a good ten feet away.

Wax reached into his cloak and removed his short-barreled shotgun from the long, sleeve-like pocket inside. He turned—pointing it outward—braced it against his side, and fired.

He was light enough that the kick flung him toward the building. The boom of the blast echoed below, but he had spray shot in the shells, too small and light to hurt anyone when it fell dispersed from such a height.

He slammed into the wall of the tower five stories above where he'd been, and grabbed hold of a spikelike protrusion. The decoration up here really was marvelous. Who did they think would be looking at it? He shook his head. Architects were curious types. Not practical at all, like a good gunsmith. Wax climbed to another shelf and jumped upward again.

The next jump was enough to get him to the open steelwork lattice of the unfinished upper floors. He strolled across a girder, then shimmied up a vertical member—his reduced weight making it easy—and climbed atop the very tallest of the beams jutting from the top of the building.

The height was dizzying. Even with the mists obscuring the landscape, he could see the double row of lights illuminating the street below. Other lights glowed more softly across the town, like the floating candles of a seafarer's ocean burial. Only the absence of lights allowed him to pick out the various parks and the bay far to the west.

Once, this city had felt like home. That was before he'd spent twenty years living out in the dust, where the law was sometimes a distant memory and people considered carriages a frivolity. What would Lessie have thought of one of these horseless contraptions, with the thin wheels meant for driving on a city's fine paved streets? Vehicles that ran on oil and grease, not hay and horseshoes?

He turned about on his perch. It was difficult to judge locations in the dark and the mists, but he did have the advantage of a youth spent in this section of the city. Things had changed, but not *that* much. He judged the direction, checked his steel reserves, then launched himself out into the darkness.

He shot outward in a grand arc above the city, flying for a good half a minute on the Push off those enormous girders. The skyscraper became a shadowed silhouette behind him, then vanished. Eventually, his impetus ran out, and he dropped back through the mists. He let himself fall, quiet. When the lights grew close—and he could see that nobody was below him—he pointed his shotgun at the ground and pulled the trigger.

The jolt punched him upward for a moment, slowing his descent. He Pushed off the birdshot in the ground to slow him further; he landed easily in a soft crouch. He noticed with dissatisfaction that he'd all but ruined some good paving stones with the shot.

*Harmony!* he thought. This place really was going to take some getting used to. *I'm like a horse blundering through a narrow marketplace*, he thought, hooking his shotgun back under his coat. *I need to learn more finesse*. Out in the Roughs, he'd been considered a refined gentleman. Here, if he didn't watch himself, he'd soon prove himself to be the uncultured brute that most of the nobility already assumed that he was. It—

Gunfire.

Wax responded immediately. He Pushed himself sideways off an iron gate, then ducked in a roll. He came up and reached for a Sterrion with his right hand, his left steadying the shotgun in its sleeve in his coat.

He peered into the night. Had his thoughtless shotgun blasts drawn the attention of the local constables? The guns fired again, and he frowned. *No. Those are too distant. Something's happening.*

This actually gave him a thrill. He leaped into the air and down the street, Pushing off that same gate to get height. He landed atop a building; this area was filled with three- and four-story apartment structures that had narrow alleyways between. How could people live without any space around them? He'd have gone mad.

He crossed a few buildings—it was handy that the rooftops were flat—and then stopped to listen. His heart beat excitedly, and he realized he'd been hoping for something like this. It was why he'd been driven to leave the party, to seek out the skyscraper and climb it, to run through the mists. Back in Weathering, as the town grew larger, he'd often patrolled at night, watching for trouble.

He fingered his Sterrion as another shot was fired, closer this time. He judged his distance, then dropped a bullet casing and Pushed himself into the air. He'd restored his

weight to three-quarters and left it there. You needed some weight on you to fight effectively.

The mists swirled and spun, teasing him. One could never tell which nights would bring out the mists; they didn't conform to normal weather patterns. A night could be humid and chill, and yet not a wisp of mists would appear. Another night could begin dry as brittle leaves, but the mists would consume it.

They were thin this night, and so visibility was still good. Another crack broke the silence. *There*, Wax thought. Steel burning with a comfortable warmth within him, he leaped over another street in a flurry of mistcoat tassels, spinning mist, and calling wind.

He landed softly, then raised his gun in front of him as he ran in a crouch across the roof. He reached the edge and looked down. Just below him, someone had taken refuge behind a pile of boxes near the mouth of an alley. In the dark, misty night, Wax couldn't make out many details, but the person was armed with a rifle resting on a box. The barrel was pointed toward a group of people down the street who wore the distinctive domed hats of city constables.

Wax Pushed out lightly from himself in all directions, setting up his steel bubble. A latch on a trapdoor at his feet rattled as his Allomancy affected it. He peered down at the man firing upon the constables. It would be good to do something of actual value in this city, rather than just standing around chatting with the overdressed and the overprivileged.

He dropped a bullet casing, and his Allomancy pressed it down onto the rooftop beneath him. He Pushed more forcefully on it, launching himself up and through the swirling mists. He decreased his weight dramatically and pushed on a window latch as he fell, positioning himself so he landed right in the middle of the alleyway.

With his steel, he could see lines pointing toward four different figures in front of him. Even as he landed—the men muttering curses and spinning toward him—he raised his Sterrion and sighted on the first of the street thugs. The man had a patchy beard and eyes as dark as the night itself.

Wax heard a woman whimpering.

He froze, hand steady, but unable to move. The memories, so carefully dammed up in his head, crashed through and flooded his mind. Lessie, held with a gun to her head. A single shot. Blood on the red brick walls.

The street thug jerked his rifle toward Wax and fired. The steel bubble barely deflected it, and the bullet tugged through the fabric of Wax's coat, just missing his ribs.

He tried to fire, but that whimpering . . .

*Oh, Harmony*, he thought, appalled at himself. He pointed his gun downward and fired into the ground, then Pushed on the bullet and threw himself backward, up out of the alleyway.

Bullets pierced the mists all around him. Steel bubble or not, he should have fallen to one of them. It was pure luck that saved his life as he landed on another roof and rolled to a stop, prone, protected from the gunfire by a parapet wall.

Wax gasped for breath, hand on his revolver. *Idiot*, he thought to himself. *Fool*. He'd never frozen in combat before, even when he'd been green. *Never*. This, however, was the first time he'd tried to shoot someone since the disaster in the ruined church.

He wanted to duck away in shame, but he gritted his teeth and crawled forward to the edge of the roof. The men were still down there. He could see them better now, gathering and preparing to make a run for it. They probably wanted nothing to do with an Allomancer.

He aimed at the apparent leader. However, before Wax could fire, the man fell to gunfire from the constables. In moments, the alleyway swarmed with men in uniforms. Wax raised his Sterrion beside his head, breathing deeply.

*I could have fired that time*, he told himself. *It was just that one moment where I froze. It wouldn't have happened again*. He told himself this several times as the constables pulled the malefactors out of the alley one at a time.

There was no woman. The whimpering he'd heard had been a gang member who'd taken a bullet before Wax arrived. The man was still groaning in pain as they took him away.

The constables hadn't seen Wax. He turned and disappeared into the night.

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A short time later, Wax arrived at Ladrian Mansion. His residence in the city, his ancestral home. He didn't feel like he belonged there, but he used it anyway.

The stately home lacked expansive grounds, though it did have four elegant stories, with balconies and a nice patio garden out back. Wax dropped a coin and bounded over the front fence, landing atop the gatehouse. *My carriage is back*, he noticed. Not surprising. They were getting used to him; he wasn't certain whether to be pleased by that or ashamed of it.

He Pushed off the gates—which rattled at the weight—and landed on a fourth story balcony. Coinshots had to learn precision, unlike their cousin Allomancers, Ironpullers—also known as Lurchers. Those would just pick a target and Pull themselves toward it, but they usually had to grind up the side of a building, making noise. Coinshots had to be delicate, careful, accurate.

The window was unlatched; he'd left it that way. He didn't fancy dealing with people at the moment; his abortive confrontation with the criminals had rattled him. He slipped into the darkened room, then padded across it and listened at the door. No sounds in the hallway. He opened the door silently, then moved out.

The hallway was dark, and he was no Tineye, capable of enhancing his senses. He felt his way with each step, being careful not to trip on the edge of a rug or bump into a pedestal.

His rooms were at the end of the hallway. He reached for the brass knob with gloved fingers. Excellent. He carefully pushed the door open, stepping into his bedroom. Now he just had to—



A door opened on the other side of his room, letting in bright yellow light. Wax froze in place, though his hand quickly reached into his coat for one of his Sterrions.

An aging man stood in the doorway, holding a large candela- brum. He wore a tidy black uniform and white gloves. He raised an eyebrow at Wax. “High Lord Ladrian,” he said, “I see that you’ve returned.”

“Um . . .” Wax said, sheepishly removing his hand from inside his cloak.

“Your bath is drawn, my lord.”

“I didn’t ask for a bath.”

“Yes, but considering your night’s . . . entertainments, I thought it prudent to prepare one for you.” The butler sniffed. “Gunpowder?”

“Er, yes.”

“I trust my lord didn’t shoot anyone too important.”

*No, Wax thought. No, I couldn’t.*

Tillaume stood there, stiff, disapproving. He didn’t say the words he was undoubtedly thinking: that Wax’s disappearance from the party had caused a minor scandal, that it would be even *more* difficult to procure a proper bride now. He didn’t say that he was disappointed. He didn’t say these things because he was, after all, a proper lord’s servant.

Besides, he could say them all with a glance anyway.

“Shall I draft a letter of apology to Lady Cett, my lord? I believe she will expect it, considering that you sent one to Lord Stanton.”

“Yes, that would be well,” Wax said. He lowered his fingers to his belt, feeling the metal vials there, the revolver at each hip, the weight of the shotgun strapped inside his coat. *What am I doing? I’m acting like a fool.*

He suddenly felt exceedingly childish. Leaving a party to go patrolling through the city, looking for trouble? What was wrong with him?

He felt as if he’d been trying to recapture something. A part of the person he’d been before Lessie’s death. He had known, deep down, that he might have trouble shooting now and had wanted to prove otherwise.

He’d failed that test.

“My lord,” Tillaume said, stepping closer. “May I speak . . . boldly, for a moment?”

“You may.”

“The city has a large number of constables,” Tillaume said. “And they are quite capable in their jobs. Our house, however, has but one high lord. Thousands depend on you, sir.” Tillaume nodded his head in respect, then moved to begin lighting some candles in the bedroom.

The butler's words were true. House Ladrian was one of the most powerful in the city, at least historically. In the city's government, Wax represented the interests of all of the people his house employed. True, they'd also have a representative based on votes in their guild, but it was Wax they depended on most.

His house was nearly bankrupt—rich in potential, in holdings, and in workers, but poor in cash and connections because of his uncle's foolishness. If Wax didn't do something to change that, it could mean jobs lost, poverty, and collapse as other houses pounced on his holdings and seized them for debts not paid.

Wax ran his thumbs along his Sterrions. *The constables handled those street toughs just fine*, he admitted to himself. *They didn't need me. This city doesn't need me, not like Weathering did.*

He was trying to cling to what he had been. He wasn't that person any longer. He couldn't be. But people did need him for something else.

"Tillaume," Wax said.

The butler looked back from the candleas. The mansion didn't have electric lights yet, though workmen were coming to install them soon. Something his uncle had paid for before dying, money Wax couldn't recover now.

"Yes, my lord?" Tillaume asked.

Wax hesitated, then slowly pulled his shotgun from its place inside his coat and set it into the trunk beside his bed, placing it beside a companion he'd left there earlier. He took off his mistcoat, wrapping the thick material over his arm. He held the cloak reverently for a moment, then placed it in the trunk. His Sterrion revolvers followed. They weren't his only guns, but they represented his life in the Roughs.

He closed the lid of the trunk of his old life. "Take this, Tillaume," Wax said. "Put it somewhere."

"Yes, my lord," Tillaume said. "I shall have it ready for you, should you need it again."

"I won't be needing it," Wax said. He had given himself one last night with the mists. A thrilling climb up the tower, an evening spent with the darkness. He chose to focus on that—rather than his failure with the toughs—as his night's accomplishment.

One final dance.

"Take it, Tillaume," Wax said, turning away from the trunk. "Put it somewhere safe, but put it away. For good."

"Yes, my lord," the butler said softly. He sounded approving.

*And that*, Wax thought, *is that*. He then walked into the washroom. Wax the lawkeeper was gone.

It was time to be Lord Waxillium Ladrian, Sixteenth High Lord of House Ladrian, residing in the Fourth Octant of Elendel City.



### SIX MONTHS LATER

“How’s my cravat?” Waxillium asked, studying himself in the mirror, turning to the side and tugging at the silver necktie again.

“Impeccable as always, my lord,” Tillaume said. The butler stood with hands clasped behind his back, a tray with steaming tea sitting beside him on the serving stand. Waxillium hadn’t asked for tea, but Tillaume had brought it anyway. Tillaume had a thing about tea.

“Are you certain?” Waxillium asked, tugging at the cravat again.

“Indeed, my lord.” He hesitated. “I’ll admit, my lord, that I’ve been curious about this for months. You are the first high lord I’ve ever waited upon who can tie a decent cravat. I’d grown quite accustomed to providing that assistance.”

“You learn to do things on your own, when you live out in the Roughs.”

“With all due respect, my lord,” Tillaume said, his normally monotone voice betraying a hint of curiosity, “I wouldn’t have thought that one would need to learn that skill in the Roughs. I wasn’t aware that the denizens of those lands had the slightest concern for matters of fashion and decorum.”

“They don’t,” Waxillium said with a smile, giving one final adjustment to the cravat. “That’s part of why *I* always did. Dressing like a city gentleman had an odd effect on the people out there. Some immediately respected me, others immediately underestimated me. It worked for me in both cases. And, I might add, it was unspeakably satisfying to see the looks on the faces of criminals when they were hauled in by someone they had assumed to be a city dandy.”

“I can imagine, my lord.”

“I did it for myself too,” Waxillium said more softly, regarding himself in the mirror. Silver cravat, green satin vest. Emerald cuff links. Black coat and trousers, stiff through the sleeves and legs. One steel button on his vest among the wooden ones, an old tradition of his. “The clothing was a reminder, Tillaume. The land around me may have been wild, but I didn’t need to be.”

Waxillium took a silver pocket square off his dressing stand, deftly folded it in the proper style, and slipped it into his breast pocket. A sudden chiming rang through the mansion.

“Rust and Ruin,” Waxillium cursed, checking his pocket watch. “They’re early.”

“Lord Harms is known for his punctuality, my lord.”

“Wonderful. Well, let’s get this over with.” Waxillium strode out into the hallway, boots gliding on the green velvet-cut rug. The mansion had changed little during his two-decade absence. Even after six months of living here, it still didn’t feel like it was *his*. The faint smell of his uncle’s pipe smoke still lingered, and the decor was marked by a fondness for deep dark woods and heavy stone sculpture. Despite modern tastes, there were almost no portraits or paintings. As Waxillium knew, many of those had been valuable, and had been sold before his uncle’s death.

Tillaume walked alongside him, hands clasped behind his back. “My lord sounds as though he considers this day’s duty to be a chore.”

“Is it that obvious?” Waxillium grimaced. What did it say about him that he’d rather face down a nest of outlaws—outgunned and outmanned—than meet with Lord Harms and his daughter?

A plump, matronly woman waited at the end of the hallway, wearing a black dress and a white apron. “Oh, Lord Ladrian,” she said with fondness. “Your mother would be so pleased to see this day!”

“Nothing has been decided yet, Miss Grimes,” Waxillium said as the woman joined the two of them, walking along the balustrade of the second-floor gallery.

“She *did* so hope that you’d marry a fine lady someday,” Miss Grimes said. “You should have heard how she worried, all those years.”

Waxillium tried to ignore the way those words twisted at his heart. He *hadn’t* heard how his mother worried. He’d hardly ever taken time to write his parents or his sister, and had only visited that one time, just after the railway reached Weathering.

Well, he was making good on his obligations now. Six months of work, and he was finally getting his feet under him and pulling House Ladrian—along with its many forgeworkers and seamstresses—from the brink of financial collapse. The last step came today.

Waxillium reached the top of the staircase, then hesitated. “No,” he said, “I mustn’t rush in. Need to give them time to make themselves comfortable.”

“That is—” Tillaume began, but Waxillium cut him off by turning the other way and marching back along the balustrade.

“Miss Grimes,” Waxillium said, “are there other matters that will need my attention today?”

“You wish to hear of them now?” she asked, frowning as she bustled to keep up.

“Anything to keep my mind occupied, dear woman,” Waxillium said. Rust and Ruin . . . he was so nervous that he caught himself reaching inside his jacket to finger the grip of his Immerling 44-S.

It was a fine weapon; not as good as one of Ranette’s make, but a proper, and small, sidearm for a gentleman. He’d decided he would be a lord, and not a lawman, but that

didn't mean he was going to go about unarmed. That . . . well, that would just be plain insane. . .

"There is one matter," Miss Grimes said, grimacing. She was the Ladrian house steward, and had been for the last twenty years. "We lost another shipment of steel last night."

Waxillium froze on the walkway. "What? Again!"

"Unfortunately, my lord."

"Damn it. I'm starting to think the thieves are targeting only us."

"It's only our second shipment," she said. "House Tekiel has lost five shipments so far."

"What are the details?" he asked. "The disappearance. Where did it happen?"

"Well—"

"No, don't tell me," he said, raising a hand. "I can't afford to be distracted."

Miss Grimes gave him a flat look, since that was probably why she'd avoided telling him about it before his meeting with Lord Harms. Waxillium rested a hand on the railing, and felt his left eye twitch. Someone was out there, running an organized, highly efficient operation stealing the contents of entire railcars. They were being called the Vanishers. Perhaps he could poke around a little and . . .

*No*, he told himself sternly. *It is not my duty. Not anymore.* He would go to the proper authorities, perhaps hire some guards or personal investigators. He would not go chasing bandits himself.

"I'm sure the constables will find those responsible and bring them to justice," Waxillium said with some difficulty. "Do you think that's long enough to make Lord Harms wait? I think that's long enough. It hasn't been too long, has it?" Waxillium turned and walked back the way he'd come. Tillaume rolled his eyes as he passed.

Waxillium reached the stairs. A young man in a green Ladrian vest and a white shirt was climbing them. "Lord Ladrian!" Kip said. "Post has arrived."

"Any parcels?"

"No, my lord," the boy said, handing over a signet-sealed letter as Waxillium passed.

"Only this. Looked important."

"An invitation to the Yomen-Ostlin wedding dinner," Miss Grimes guessed. "Might be a good place to have your first public appearance with Miss Harms."

"The details haven't been decided!" Waxillium protested as they stopped at the bottom of the staircase. "I've barely broached the topic with Lord Harms, yet you practically have us married. It's entirely possible that they will upend this entire matter like what happened with Lady Entrone."

"It will go well, young master," Miss Grimes said. She reached up, adjusting the silk square in his pocket. "I've got a Soother's sense for these matters."

"You do realize I'm forty-two years old? 'Young master' doesn't exactly fit any longer."

She patted his cheek. Miss Grimes considered any unmarried man to be a child—which was terribly unfair, considering that *she* had never married. He refrained from speaking to her about Lessie; most of his family back in the city hadn't known about her.

“Right, then,” Waxillium said, turning and striding toward the sitting room. “Into the maw of the beast I go.”

Limmi, head of the ground-floor staff, waited by the doorway. She raised her hand as Waxillium approached, as if to speak, but he slid the dinner-party invitation between two of her fingers.

“Have an affirmative response drafted to this, if you would, Limmi,” he said. “Indicate I'll be dining with Miss Harms and her father, but hold the letter until I'm done with my conference here. I'll let you know whether to send it or not.”

“Yes, my lord, but—”

“It's all right,” he said, pushing the door open. “I mustn't keep the . . .”

Lord Harms and his daughter were *not* in the sitting room. Instead, Waxillium found a lanky man with a round, sharp-chinned face. He was about thirty years of age, and had a few days of stubble on the chin and cheeks. He wore a wide-brimmed Roughs-style hat, the sides curving up slightly, and had on a leather duster. He was playing with one of the palm-sized upright clocks on the mantel.

“'Ello Wax,” the man said brightly. He held up the clock. “Can I trade you for this?”

Waxillium swiftly pulled the door shut behind him. “Wayne? What are you *doing* here!”

“Looking at your stuff, mate,” Wayne said. He held up the clock appraisingly. “Worth what, three or four bars? I've got a bottle of good whiskey that might be worth the same.”

“You have to get out of here!” Waxillium said. “You're supposed to be in Weathering. Who's watching the place?”

“Barl.”

“Barl! He's a miscreant.”

“So am I.”

“Yes, but you're the miscreant *I* chose to do the job. You could have at least sent for Miles.”

“*Miles?*” Wayne said. “Mate, Miles is a right *horrible* human being. He'd rather shoot a man than bother actually finding out if the bloke was guilty or not.”

“Miles keeps his town clean,” Waxillium said. “And he's saved my life a couple of times. This is beside the point. I told *you* to watch over Weathering.”

Wayne tipped his hat to Waxillium. “True, Wax, but you ain't a lawkeeper no longer. And me, I've got important stuff to be about.” He looked at the clock, then pocketed it and set a small bottle of whiskey on the mantel in its place. “Now, sir, I'll need to be asking you a few questions.” He pulled a small notepad and pencil from inside his duster. “Where were you last night at around midnight?”

“What does that—”

Waxillium was interrupted by chimes sounding at the door again. “Rust and Ruin! These are high-class people, Wayne. I’ve spent months persuading them that I’m not a ruffian. I need you *out* of here.” Waxillium walked forward, trying to usher his friend toward the far exit.

“Now, that’s right suspicious behavior, innit?” Wayne said, scrawling something on his notepad. “Dodging questions, acting all anxious. What are you hiding, sir?”

“Wayne,” Waxillium said, grabbing the other man’s arm. “Part of me is appreciative that you’d come all this way to aggravate me, and I *am* glad to see you. But *now is not the time*.”

Wayne grinned. “You assume I’m here for you. Don’t you think that’s a pinch arrogant?”

“What else would you be here for?”

“Shipment of foodstuffs,” Wayne said. “Railway car left Elendel four days ago and arrived in Weathering with the entire contents of a single car empty. Now, I hear that you recently lost two shipments of your own to these ‘Vanishers.’ I’ve come to question you. Right suspicious, as I said.”

“Suspicious . . . Wayne, I *lost* two shipments. I’m the one who got robbed! Why would that make me a suspect?”

“How am I to know how your devious, criminal genius mind works, mate?”

Footsteps sounded outside the room. Waxillium glanced at the door, then back at Wayne. “Right now, my criminal genius mind is wondering if I can stuff your corpse anywhere that wouldn’t be too obvious.”

Wayne grinned, stepping back.

The door opened.

Waxillium spun, looking as Limmi sheepishly held the door open. A corpulent man in a very fine suit stood there, holding a dark wooden cane. He had mustaches that drooped all the way down to his thick neck, and his waistcoat framed a deep red cravat.

“. . . saying it doesn’t matter whom he’s seeing!” Lord Harms said. “He’ll want to speak with me! We had an *appointment*, and . . .” Lord Harms paused, realizing the door was open. “Ah!” He strode into the room.

He was followed by a stern-looking woman with golden hair fixed into a tight bun—his daughter, Steris—and a younger woman that Waxillium didn’t recognize.

“Lord Ladrian,” Harms said, “I find it *very* unbecoming to be made to wait. And who is this that you’re meeting with in my stead?”

Waxillium sighed. “It’s my old—”

“Uncle!” Wayne said, stepping forward, voice altered to sound gruff and lose all of its rural accent. “I’m his uncle Maksil. Popped in unexpectedly this morning, my dear man.”

Waxillium raised an eyebrow as Wayne stepped forward. He'd removed his hat and duster, and had plastered his upper lip with a realistic-looking fake mustache with a bit of gray in it. He was scrunching his face up just slightly to produce a few extra wrinkles at the eyes. It was a good disguise, making him look like he might be a few years older than Waxillium, rather than ten years younger.

Waxillium glanced over his shoulder. The duster sat folded on the floor beside one of the couches, hat atop it, a pair of dueling canes lying crossed beside the pile. Waxillium hadn't even noticed the swap—of course, Wayne had naturally done it while inside a speed bubble. Wayne was a Slider, a bendalloy Allomancer, capable of creating a bubble of compressed time around himself. He often used the power to change costumes.

He was also Twinborn, like Waxillium, though his Feruchemical ability—healing quickly from wounds—wasn't so useful outside of combat. Still, the two made for a very potent combination.

"Uncle, you say?" Lord Harms asked, taking Wayne's hand and shaking it.

"On the mother's side!" Wayne said. "Not the Ladrian side, of course. Otherwise I'd be running this place, eh?" He sounded nothing like himself, but that was Wayne's specialty. He said that three-quarters of a disguise was in the accent and voice. "I've wanted for a long time to come check up on the lad. He's had something of a rough-and-tumble past, you know. He needs a firm hand to make certain he doesn't return to such unpleasant ways."

"I've often thought the very same thing!" Lord Harms said. "I assume we're given leave to sit, Lord Ladrian?"

"Yes, of course," Waxillium said, covertly glaring at Wayne. *Really?* that glare said. *We're doing this?*

Wayne just shrugged. Then he turned and took Steris's hand and bowed his head politely. "And who is this lovely creature?"

"My daughter, Steris," Harms said. "Lord Ladrian? You didn't tell your uncle of our arrival?"

"I was so surprised by his appearance," Waxillium said, "that I did not have an opportunity." He took Steris's hand and bowed his head to her as well.

She looked him up and down with a critical gaze, and then her eyes flicked toward the duster and hat in the corner. Her lips turned down. Doubtless she assumed they were his.

"This is my cousin Marasi," Steris said, nodding to the woman behind her. Marasi was dark-haired and large-eyed, with bright red lips. She looked down demurely as soon as Waxillium turned to her. "She has spent most of her life in the Outer Estates and is rather timid, so please don't upset her."

"I wouldn't dream of it," Waxillium said. He waited until the women were seated beside Lord Harms, then sat on the smaller sofa facing them, and facing the doorway. There was another exit from the room, but he'd discovered that there was a squeaky floorboard leading to it, which was ideal. This way, someone couldn't sneak up on him. Lawman or lord, he didn't fancy getting shot in the back.



Wayne primly settled himself in a chair directly to Waxillium's right. They all stared at one another for an extended moment. Wayne yawned.

"Well," Waxillium said. "Perhaps I should begin by asking after your health."

"Perhaps you should," Steris replied. "Er. Yes. How's your health?" "Suitable." "So is Waxillium," Wayne added. They all turned to him.

"You know," he said. "He's wearing a suit, and all. Suitable. Ahem. Is that mahogany?"

"This?" Lord Harms said, holding up his cane. "Indeed. It's a family heirloom."

"My lord Waxillium," Steris cut in, voice stern. She did not seem to enjoy small talk.

"Perhaps we can dispense with empty prattle. We all know the nature of this meeting."

"We do?" Wayne asked.

"Yes," Steris said, voice cool. "Lord Waxillium. You are in the position of having an unfortunate reputation. Your uncle, may he rest with the Hero, tarnished the Ladrian name with his social reclusiveness, occasional reckless forays into politics, and blatant adventurism. You have come from the Roughs, lending no small additional measure of poor reputation to the house, particularly considering your insulting actions to various houses during your first few weeks in town. Above all this, your house is nearly destitute.

"We, however, are in a desperate circumstance of our own. Our financial status is excellent, but our name is unknown in the highest of society. My father has no male heir upon which to bestow his family name, and so a union between our houses makes perfect sense."

"How very logical of you, my dear," Wayne said, the upper-class accent rolling off his tongue as if he'd been born with it.

"Indeed," she said, still watching Waxillium. She reached into her satchel. "Your letters and conversations with my father have been enough to persuade us of your serious intent, and during these last few months in the city your public comportment has proven more promisingly sober than your initial boorishness. So I have taken the liberty of drawing up an agreement that I think will suit our needs."

"An . . . agreement?" Waxillium asked.

"Oh, I'm so eager to see it," Wayne added. He reached into his pocket absently and got out something that Waxillium couldn't quite discern.

The "agreement" turned out to be a large document, at least twenty pages long. Steris handed one copy to Waxillium and one to her father, and retained another for herself.

Lord Harms coughed into his hand. "I suggested she write down her thoughts," he said. "And . . . well, my daughter is a very thorough woman."

"I can see that," Waxillium said.

"I suggest that you never ask her to pass the milk," Wayne added under his breath, so only Waxillium could hear. "As she seems likely to throw a cow at you, just to be certain the job is done thoroughly."

“The document is in several parts,” Steris said. “The first is an outline of our courtship phase, wherein we make obvious—but not too speedy—progress toward engagement. We take just long enough for society to begin associating us as a couple. The engagement mustn’t be so quick as to seem a scandal, but cannot come too slowly either. Eight months should, by my estimates, fulfill our purposes.”

“I see,” Waxillium said, flipping through the pages. Tillaume entered, bringing a tray of tea and cakes, and deposited it on a serving table beside Wayne.

Waxillium shook his head, closing the contract. “Doesn’t this seem a little . . . stiff to you?”

“Stiff?”

“I mean, shouldn’t there be room for romance?”

“There is,” Steris said. “Page thirteen. Upon marriage, there shall be no more than three conjugal encounters per week and no fewer than one until a suitable heir is provided. After that, the same numbers apply to a two-week span.”

“Ah, of course,” Waxillium said. “Page thirteen.” He glanced at Wayne. Was that a *bullet* the other man had taken from his pocket? Wayne was rolling it between his fingers.

“If that is not enough to satisfy your needs,” Steris added, “the next page details proper mistress protocols.”

“Wait,” Waxillium said, looking away from Wayne. “Your document allows *mistresses*?”

“Of course,” Steris said. “They are a simple fact of life, and so it’s better to account for them than to ignore them. In the document, you will find requirements for your potential mistresses along with the means by which discretion will be maintained.”

“I see,” Waxillium said.

“Of course,” Steris continued, “I will follow the same guidelines.”

“You plan to take a mistress, my lady?” Wayne asked, perking up.

“I would be allowed my own dalliances,” she said. “Usually, the coachman is the object of choice. I would abstain until heirs were produced, of course. There mustn’t be any confusion about lineage.”

“Of course,” Waxillium said.

“It’s in the contract,” she said. “Page fifteen.”

“I don’t doubt that it is.”

Lord Harms coughed into his hand again. Marasi, Steris’s cousin, maintained a blank expression, though she looked down at her feet during the conversation. Why had she been brought?

“Daughter,” Lord Harms said, “perhaps we should move the conversation to less personal topics for a span.”

“Very well,” Steris said. “There *are* a few things I wanted to know. Are you a religious man, Lord Ladrian?”

“I follow the Path,” Waxillium said.

“Hmmm,” she said, tapping her fingers against her contract. “Well, that’s a safe choice, if somewhat dull. I, for one, have never understood why people would follow a religion whose god *specifically* prohibits worshipping him.”

“It’s complicated.”

“So Pathians like to say. With the same breath as you try to explain how simple your religion is.”

“That’s complicated too,” Waxillium said. “A simple kind of complicated, though. You’re a Survivorist, I assume?”

“I am.”

*Delightful*, Waxillium thought. Well, Survivorists weren’t *too* bad. Some of them, at least. He stood up. Wayne was still playing with that round. “Would anyone else like some tea?”

“No,” Steris said with a wave of her hand, looking through her document.

“Yes, please,” Marasi said softly.

Waxillium crossed the room to the tea stand.

“Those are very nice bookshelves,” Wayne said. “Wish I had shelves like those. My, my, my. And . . . we’re in.”

Waxillium turned. The three guests had glanced at the shelves, and as they turned away, Wayne had started burning bendalloy and thrown up a speed bubble.

The bubble was about five feet across, including only Wayne and Waxillium, and once Wayne had it up he couldn’t move it. Years of familiarity let Waxillium discern the boundary of the bubble, which was marked by a faint wavering of the air. For those inside the bubble, time would flow much more quickly than for those outside.

“Well?” Waxillium asked.

“Oh, I think the quiet one’s kinda cute,” Wayne said, his accent back in place. “The tall one is insane, though. Rust on my arms, but she is.”

Waxillium poured himself some tea. Harms and the two women looked frozen as they sat on their couch, almost like statues. Wayne was flaring his metal, using as much strength as he could to create a few private moments.

These bubbles could be very useful, though not in the way most people expected. You couldn’t shoot out of them—well, you could, but something about the barrier interfered with objects passing through it. If you fired a shot in a speed bubble, the bullet would slow as soon as it hit ordinary time and would be moved erratically off course. That made it nearly impossible to aim from within one.

“She’s a very good match,” Waxillium said. “It’s an ideal situation for both of us.”

“Look, mate. Just because Lessie—”

“This is *not* about Lessie.”

“Whoa, hey.” Wayne raised a hand. “No need to get angry.”

“I’m not—” Waxillium took a deep breath, then continued more softly. “I’m not angry. But it’s not about Lessie. This is about my duties.”

*Damn you, Wayne. I’d almost gotten myself to stop thinking about her.* What would Lessie say, if she saw what he was doing? Laugh, probably. Laugh at how ridiculous it was, laugh at his discomfort. She hadn’t been the jealous type, perhaps because she’d never had any reason to be. With a woman like her, why would Waxillium have wanted to look elsewhere?

Nobody would ever live up to her, but fortunately it didn’t matter. Steris’s contract actually seemed a good thing, in that regard. It would help him divide himself. Maybe help with a little of the pain.

“This *is* my duty now,” Waxillium repeated.

“Your duties used to involve saving folks,” Wayne said, “not marrying ’em.”

Waxillium crouched down beside the chair. “Wayne. I can’t go back to what I was. You sauntering in here, meddling in my life, isn’t going to change that. I’m a different person now.”

“If you were going to become a different person, couldn’t you have chosen one without such an ugly face?”

“Wayne, this is *serious*.”

Wayne raised his hand, spinning the cartridge between his fingers and proffering it. “So is this.”

“What *is* that?”

“Bullet. You shoot folks with ’em. Hopefully bad ones—or at least ones what owes you a bar or two.”

“Wayne—”

“They’re turning back.” Wayne set the round on the tea-serving tray.

“But—”

“Time to cough. Three. Two. One.”

Waxillium cursed under his breath, but pocketed the round and stood back up. He started coughing loudly as the speed bubble collapsed, restoring normal time. To the three visitors, only seconds had passed, and to their ears Waxillium and Wayne’s conversation would be sped up to the point that most of it would be inaudible. The coughing would cover anything else.

None of the three visitors seemed to have noticed anything unusual. Waxillium poured the tea—it was a deep cherry color today, likely a sweet fruit tea—and brought a cup over to Marasi. She took it, and he sat down, holding his own cup in one hand, taking out

and gripping the cartridge with the other. Both the casing and the medium-caliber bullet's jacket looked like steel, but the entire thing seemed too light. He frowned, hefting it.

*Blood on her face. Blood on the brick wall.*

He shivered, fighting off those memories. *Damn you, Wayne*, he thought again.

"The tea is delicious," Marasi said softly. "Thank you."

"You're welcome," Waxillium said, forcing his mind back to the conversation. "Lady Steris, I will consider this contract. Thank you for producing it. But really, I was hoping this meeting might allow me to learn more about you."

"I have been working on an autobiography," she said. "Perhaps I will send you a chapter or two of it by post."

"That's . . . very unconventional of you," Waxillium said. "Though it would be appreciated. But please, tell me of yourself. What are your interests?"

"Normally, I like plays." She grimaced. "At the Coolerim, actually."

"Am I missing something?" Waxillium asked.

"The Coolerim Playhouse," Wayne said, leaning forward. "Two nights ago, it was robbed in the middle of the performance."

"Haven't you heard?" Lord Harms asked. "It was in all the broadsheets."

"Was anyone harmed?"

"Not at the event itself," Lord Harms said, "but they did take a hostage as they escaped."

"Such a *horrid* thing," Steris said. "Nobody has heard from Armal yet." She looked sick.

"You knew her?" Wayne asked, his accent slipping faintly as he grew interested.

"Cousin," Steris said.

"Same as . . ." Waxillium asked, nodding toward Marasi.

The three regarded him with confused expressions for a moment, but then Lord Harms jumped in. "Ah, no. Different side of the family."

"Interesting," Waxillium said, leaning back in his chair, tea sitting ignored in his hand.

"And ambitious. Robbing an entire playhouse? How many of the robbers were there?"

"Dozens," Marasi said. "Maybe as many as thirty, so the reports say."

"Quite a band. That means as many as another eight just to drive them away. And vehicles for escaping. Impressive."

"It's the Vanishers," Marasi said. "The ones stealing from the railway also."

"That hasn't been proven," Wayne replied, pointing at her.

"No. But one of the witnesses from a railway robbery described several men who were at the theater robbery."

“Wait,” Waxillium said. “There were witnesses to one of the railway robberies? I thought they happened in secret. Something about a ghostly railcar appearing on the tracks?”

“Yes,” Wayne said. “The railway engineers stop to investigate and—probably—panic. But the phantom railcar vanishes before they can investigate it. They continue on, but when they reach the end of the line, one of their train’s cars is empty. Still locked, no signs of forced entry. But the goods are all gone.”

“So nobody sees the culprits,” Waxillium said.

“The recent ones have been different,” Marasi said, growing animated. “They’ve started robbing passenger cars as well. When the train stops because of the phantom on the tracks, men jump into the cars and start going through, collecting jewelry and pocketbooks from the occupants. They take a woman hostage—threatening to kill her if anyone follows—and go. The freight car is still robbed as well.”

“Curious,” Waxillium said.

“Yes,” Marasi said. “I think—”

“My dear,” Lord Harms cut in. “You are bothering Lord Ladrian.”

Marasi blushed, then looked down.

“It wasn’t a bother,” Waxillium said, tapping his teacup with his finger. “It—”

“Is that a *bullet* in your fingers?” Steris asked, pointing.

Waxillium looked down, realizing that he was rolling the cartridge between forefinger and thumb. He closed his fist around it before his memories could return. “It’s nothing.” He shot a glare at Wayne.

The other man mouthed something. *Push on it.*

“You are *quite* certain your unconventional past is behind you, Lord Ladrian?” Steris asked.

“Oh, he’s certain,” Wayne said, grimacing. “You don’t have to worry about *him* being unconventional. Why, he’s downright boring! Unbelievably, comically, nonsensically *boring*. You could squeeze more excitement out of a beggar waiting in line at the soup kitchen on rat meat day. It—”

“Thank you, *Uncle*,” Waxillium said dryly. “Yes, Steris, my past is just that. Past. I am committed to my duties as head of House Ladrian.”

“Very well,” she said. “We will need a formal entrance into high society as a couple. A public event of some sort.”

“How about the Yomen-Ostlin wedding dinner?” Waxillium said absently. *Push on it.* “I received an invitation just this morning.”

“An excellent idea,” Lord Harms said. “We were invited as well.”

*Push on it.* Waxillium reached into his left sleeve and covertly took a small pinch of steel shavings from the pouch he kept there. He dropped it into his tea and took a drink. That didn’t give him much of a reserve, but it was enough.

He burned the steel, the familiar lines of blue springing up around him. They pointed to all nearby sources of metal.

Except the one in his fingers.

*Aluminum*, he realized. *No wonder it's light.*

Aluminum and a few of its alloys were Allomantically inert; you couldn't Push or Pull on them. It was also very expensive. It cost more than even gold or platinum.

The bullet was designed to kill Coinshots and Lurchers, men like Waxillium himself. That gave him a shiver, though he gripped the round more tightly. There were days when he'd have given his best gun for a few aluminum bullets, though he hadn't heard of an alloy that would produce a bullet with sound ballistics.

*Where?* he mouthed to Wayne. *Where did you find it?*

Wayne just nodded to the guests, who were looking right at Waxillium.

"Are you quite all right, Lord Ladrian?" Steris asked. "I know a good zinc counselor if you have need of some emotional aid."

"Er . . . no. Thank you. I am quite all right, and I think this has been a very productive meeting. Wouldn't you agree?"

"That depends," she said, rising, apparently taking that as an invitation to end the conversation. "The wedding party is on the morrow, I believe. I can count on you having reviewed the contract by then?"

"You can," Waxillium said, rising as well.

"*I think this meeting was wonderful,*" Wayne said as he stood. "You're just what my nephew needs, Lady Steris! A firm hand. None of this rabble-rousing he's been used to."

"I agree!" Lord Harms said. "Lord Ladrian, perhaps your uncle can attend the dinner—"

"No," Waxillium said quickly before Wayne could say anything. "No, unfortunately, he has to return to his estates. Told me just earlier. He has a very important foaling to attend."

"Oh, well then," Lord Harms said, helping Marasi to her feet. "We will send you word of confirmation once we have accepted the Yomen invitation."

"And I will do likewise," Waxillium said, escorting them to the door of the room.

"Farewell until then." Tillaume bowed to them there, then escorted them out. Their departure felt rushed to Waxillium, but he was relieved to see them go. Considering Wayne's sudden intrusion, that had actually gone pretty well. Nobody had ended up trying to shoot him.

"Nice bunch," Wayne said. "I now see what you're doing. With a wife and in-laws like those, you'll feel quite at home here—just like the jailhouse and its occupants back in Weathering!"

"Very nice," Waxillium said under his breath, waving one last time as the Harms family walked out the mansion doors. "Where did you get the bullet?"

“It was dropped at the theater robbery. Traded the constables for it this morning.”

Waxillium closed his eyes. Wayne had a very liberal interpretation of what “trading” entailed.

“Oh, don’t get that way,” Wayne said. “I left them a nice cobblestone for it. I think Steris and her pop are convinced you’re a loon, by the way.” He grinned.

“That’s nothing new. My association with you has been convincing people I’m insane for years now.”

“Ha! And here I thought you’d lost your sense of humor.” Wayne walked back into the room. He slid his pencil out of his pocket as he passed a table, trading it for one of Waxillium’s pens.

“My humor isn’t lost, Wayne,” Waxillium said, “just strained. What I told you is true, and this bullet doesn’t change anything.”

“Maybe it doesn’t,” Wayne said, retrieving his hat, duster, and dueling canes. “But I’m still gonna see what I can find.”

“It’s not your job.”

“And it wasn’t your job to start hunting down criminals out in the Roughts. Doesn’t change what needs to be done, mate.” Wayne walked up to Waxillium, then handed him the hat. Once Waxillium took it, Wayne threw on his coat.

“Wayne . . .”

“People are being taken, Wax,” he said, taking back his hat and putting it on. “Four hostages so far. None returned. Stealing jewelry is one thing. Taking food from Roughts towns is another. Kidnapping people . . . well, there’s something goin’ on here. I’m gonna find out what it is. With or without you.”

“Without me.”

“Fine.” He hesitated. “But I need something, Wax. A place to look. You always did the thinking.”

“Yes, having a brain helps with that, surprisingly.”

Wayne narrowed his eyes at him. Then he raised his eyebrows, pleadingly.

“All right,” Waxillium said, sighing and fetching his teacup. “How many robberies now?”

“Eight. Seven railway cars and, most recently, the theater.”

“Four hostages?”

“Yeah. Across three of the latest robberies. Two were taken from one of the trains, then one from the robbery at the theater. All four hostages are women.”

“Easier to overpower,” Waxillium said idly, tapping his cup, “and more likely to make the men worry about getting them killed if they try to give chase.”



“Do you need to know what was stolen?” Wayne said, reaching into the pocket of his duster. “I traded one of the constables for a list. . . .”

“It doesn’t matter.” Waxillium took a drink from his cup. “Or, at least, most of it probably doesn’t. It’s not about the robberies.”

“It’s . . . not?”

“No. Large gang. Well funded—too well funded.” He pulled out the round and looked it over. “If they really wanted money, they’d be robbing gold transports or banks. The robberies are probably a distraction. If you want a man’s horses, sometimes the best thing to do is let his hogs loose. While he’s chasing them down, you ride off.

“I’d lay money on these Vanishers being after something else, something unlikely. Perhaps an item that is easy to overlook in all that has been taken. Or maybe it’s really about extortion—and they plan to start asking for protection money from people in town. See if anyone’s been contacted about that. I haven’t, by the way.

“If that goes nowhere, look at the hostages. One of them might have been carrying something that was the *real* target of the robbery. I wouldn’t be surprised if this turned out to be about clandestine blackmail.”

“But they robbed a few trains before taking any hostages.”

“Yes,” Waxillium said. “And they got away with it. There was no reason to expose themselves by robbing passengers if they could make off with cargo unseen and unstopped. They’re after something else, Wayne. Trust me.”

“All right.” The wiry man rubbed his face, then finally pulled off the fake mustache. He stuffed it into his pocket. “But tell me. Don’t you even want to know? Doesn’t it itch at you?”

“No.” That wasn’t completely true.

Wayne snorted. “I’d believe you if you could say that without your eye twitching, mate.” He nodded toward the bullet. “I notice you didn’t offer to give that back.”

“I didn’t.” Waxillium pocketed it.

“And you still wear your metalminds,” Wayne said, nodding to the bracers hidden mostly by the cuffs of Waxillium’s sleeves. “Not to mention that you’re still keeping steel inside your sleeve. I noticed a gun catalogue over on the table, too.”

“A man must have hobbies.”

“If you say so,” Wayne said, then stepped forward, tapping Waxillium on the chest. “But you know what I think? I think you’re looking for excuses to not let go. This thing, it’s who you are. And no mansion, no marriage, and no mere *title* is going to change that.” Wayne tipped his hat. “You’re meant to be helping people, mate. It’s what you do.”

With that, Wayne left, his duster brushing against the doorframe as he walked out.

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