

Sample 1

THE MASTER SUMMONED *his lieutenants* on the eve of the messenger's departure. The four men sat *in the conference chamber*, and discussed their affairs in Dühr. *Each apprised the others of recent developments within his sphere of control*. *I believe this sentence has confusing wording and is redundant, as "Each apprised the others of recent developments within his sphere of control" is already implied when you say "discussed their affairs")*, then conversation shifted to the Sathiians and Blaythe's mysterious messenger. *(visitor instead of messenger? Or his name? Messenger was already written in this text block)*.

The fat man grunted as he poured himself wine.

"What does this mean?"

"If he doesn't breathe, he's no man. Simple as that."

Arwynn eyed the speaker's fingers, plump like overstuffed sausages. It was a perfect deception, for Urath Lindrowe's bulk was not borne of gluttony, but the interaction of dozens of poisons carefully introduced to his system over many years. Poisons that were now a part of him, and therefore could not harm him. *I love this description and this idea behind his*

immunity, but it is quite wordy, because information is repeated, such as stating him to be fat several times (corpulence, rubbery, rolled, plump, fat, gluttonous, bulk, gluttony)

I will rewrite for conciseness, but you may reject it)

Arwynn stroked his bare chin with a pale hand.

"Continue, Lindrowe. I suspect I know where you are leading, but give me your reasoning."



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Sample 1

The fat man nodded.

“My friends,” he said to the table, “bear with me as I recount what we know.”

He snorted and counted on his pudgy fingers.

“The messenger did not sweat, not at all. Despite the heat of the day and a brisk walk from the White Raven Inn, he had no breath. His tongue was dry, his eyes—”

He glanced at Arwynn.

“Dry,” the master said.

“Dry,” Lindrowe repeated. “No scent of food or drink spilled from his mouth, nor any hint of oil from his hair or flesh. Yet he moved... he spoke! I can see no more lucid explanation than this: the messenger was not a man. At least, not in the living sense.”

(this is a really fun read! Very evocative and great characterization)

Across from the poisonmaster, Malaraphi (Cognition, Flame, Fortitude, Animus) why

are these in brackets? What does that have to do with Malaraphi, normally you would

only follow a name with brackets if it was an abbreviation) leaned forward on frail arms,

silver hair tumbling over bony shoulders. His bright eyes, more crimson than his robes,

narrowed under a tangled knot at the suggestion of the unlife. (I'm unsure what you mean

by “narrowed under a tangled knot”, also is unlife different from undeath? I am

leaving these questions whenever I have them, as if I have them, so would readers)

His voice slightly trembled. “Would you consider him a liche, Lindrowe?” (A LICH OH

MY GOSH! They are so rarely used in fantasy but soooooo fun, I play a lot of D&D and

they are absolutely ghastly to face)

The poisonmaster scowled at the timeworn wizard, then fell back heavily in his chair.

“Beya. Not in the conventional sense, of course.”



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Sample 1

He reached for his goblet, “Besides, we would detect such a creature well before they passed our gate.”

“Usually,” Malaraphi muttered, then again more quietly. “Usually.”

Lindrowe frowned and swirled the wine in his goblet, watching it smoothly coat the cup.

He looked back to the wizard. “Even if such a creature were to slip by our perimeter guard, a liche would stink to high heavens on such a hot day, no? After all, the flesh goes first, beya?”

“After the eyes,” the elf mumbled, more to himself than his cohort.

Lindrowe shrugged and drank his wine.

Malaraphi thought for a moment. “Unless masked.”

Lindrowe raised a thick eyebrow. “Uh?”

“Masked,” the elf repeated, loud enough for all to hear. “Masked! Magickally shrouded.”

“A liche, you mean? Disguised as a living thing?”

The old elf nodded. (why just elf, when someone has a human father, it is a “humani”

father, what is the internal grammar/naming convention that makes this man not go by elfin? Is it because singular? If so it goes against other instances, such as Rahain’s dad)

“By flowers?” Arwynn asked.

Malaraphi shrugged. “It’s possible, I suppose... but the power requirements would be... exhausting. A simple animated skeleton or revitalized corpse requires two powerful infusions of Aethic energy: one to enchant the dead form and another to control it. But for a liche? And to mask its rotting and give it voice?”

He slowly shook his head. “If Blaythe’s messenger is unliving, then it is by means unknown to me.” (excited to learn of the power system, is it a hard or soft magic system?)

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Sample 1

Arwynn tapped his lips with his thumbs. **(I have found that a crutch phrase for you is "for a moment" you use it quite regularly and it only adds filler + is already implied)** then poured himself more wine, and spoke casually.

"If this courier was indeed unliving, it would not have been fooled by so unsophisticated a disguise of a false beard and painted skin."

He looked over his men as he set the carafe back down on the table.

"Even my deceptive talents cannot fool the dead."

Lindrowe chuckled.

Malaraphi muttered under his breath, "No. I suppose not."

Arwynn carefully wiped his mouth with a linen napkin. **(dialogue should be separated from actions)** and turned to his blademaster, who had been silent for some time.

"You seem quieter than usual tonight, Rahain. What do you think about the Sathiiian messenger?"

Rahain Morkainen was tall and lean. Well-proportioned and strong like his humani father. His silken white hair appeared blue in the chamber's light, accentuating the silver eyes his mother's elfin blood had bestowed. He was a lonely sullen man, deprived of any capacity for compassion. **As a half-breed, he was a lesser thing to be mocked and abused by both the elfin and humani.** Only within House Blackhand had he found a sense of worth and acceptance.

Morkainen frowned and shook his head. He disliked dealing with mages and priests, even Malaraphi to some degree, so their business with the Sathiiians naturally disturbed him. And now this talk of unliving creatures? It soured his stomach.

Morkainen rubbed his hands together and cracked the joints of his long fingers.

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Sample 1

“A liche?” he asked, letting the words hang for a moment. “Perhaps, I saw no signs and felt no portents. But if that were the creature’s true nature, then it seems that it would have activated a number of glyphs before reaching your door. At the very least, one of the hauhantu.”

He thrust his chin toward one of Arwynn’s macabre statues.

“Yes, yes, yes,” Lindrowe agreed. “Quite true, quite true.”

He shot a glance at Malaraphi. “Unless masked.”

He nodded. “Unless masked.” **(Just a warning! The names Malaraphi and Morkainen can easily be mistaken by readers, especially if written so close together, as they both begin with “M” and are exotic)**

Morkainen shook his head. “You, my friends, are men of philosophy and magick. I am not. My expertise is limited to flesh and steel and what can be killed by the two. **(great dialogue!)** Blaythe’s messenger? I saw nothing, and my Shadows reported nothing that would cause me to mark him a liche.”

“And what have they reported, your Shadows?” Arwynn asked.

“Nothing not already known,” Morkainen answered. “The courier approached the grounds from the White Raven Inn by the appointed route at the appointed time, **(I genuinely am so impressed with your writing, and I assure you that I’m not just trying to win you over to continue working with me! I am a writer myself and I like having random comments. let me know if you don’t)** met with you, and left by the same path. He took no food, or drink, and spoke to no one other than yourself.”

He glanced at Lindrowe and Malaraphi. “This is unusual, but certainly not unnatural.”

Morkainen turned to Arwynn.



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→ Lindrowe did not reply.¶

→ Neither did Malaraphi.

Sample 1

“Ciridan Lothloran took up the messenger’s shadow as he left the keep. Her orders were to follow him until relieved by Morgru Murgwei at Westgate Market, then return here.

Morgru will send back word of his activities through our agents in the west. With luck, he will lead us to Blaythe.”

“You still have not located him?” Lindrowe asked.

Morkainen shook his head. “He’s elusive. Despite being Wirith’s Lord Priest he does not reside in their Sathiiian temple. My morphanti have made every attempt to locate him before Arwynn accepted his emissary but the man is a snake in tall grass.”

“As is his reputation,” Arwynn said. “Perhaps his calling to the Church of Sathiiis is more apt than he realizes. In any event, while I hope Morgru succeeds we should plan for his failure. As for Ciridan, she is the Shade we discussed earlier, is she not?”

“She is,” Morkainen confirmed. “She stands Shade (she stands Shade feels like a grammatical error, but I cannot say until I know what this title means), but my needs will call for Sahadi soon enough. House Loquay is stronger than we believed. They have been too quiet for too long and will soon move against us. And this man Blaythe... disturbs me. Never before has a priest caused my Blades such consternation—and now this talk of liches.”

He shook his head. “Barring our involvement, it may require a Sahadi to bring Blaythe to heel. With your permission, I would have Ciridan tested by season’s end and trained in illusion under Mirithwin Mirroreye.” (Mirith Mirroreye rolls off the tongue far easier).

Arwynn folded his hands before his face and considered Morkainen’s request. Though costly, the idea of a Sahadi appealed to him, especially one trained in the Mindbender’s illusory weaves. Between the goblin, a likely attack from House Loquay, and their (who does



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Sample 1

“their” refer to? growing suspicions regarding the Sathiians, there ~~was~~ more than sufficient cause to initiate a Sahadi. Especially since Lyete...

“Her test would call for maddram,” Arwynn said.

Lindrowe squinted at Morkainen ~~and~~ placed his heavy hands upon the table.

~~Speaking slowly, his low~~ voice ~~low~~ emphasized his concern. “The test of maddram has killed more than one Sahadi hopeful, Rahain.”

Malaraphi chuckled. “And quite a few Vyahi as I recall.”

“Beya.”

Lindrowe brushed aside the old wizard’s wheedling and kept his attention on Morkainen.

“Ciridan is a valuable asset to this House,” he said dispassionately. “You are certain she can survive the maddram?”

Morkainen was not certain but nodded firmly. “Ciridan Lothloran is an extraordinary talent. As one of her teachers, I’m sure you’ll agree.”

“Hmm... yes.” Lindrowe licked his lips and carefully weighed his response.

“She is aware; ~~I’ll~~ give her that. Perhaps more so than we yet appreciate. And illusory training under old Mirroreye, you say? ~~Quite~~ interesting.”

Morkainen again addressed Arwynn.

“She has served me well as Shade; as Sahadi, her value will only increase, now more than ever, with Lyete’s... undoing. As we speak, House Loquay moves more sulari into the sewers, and this business with the Black Church grows more distasteful. We need a Sahadi.”

(I appreciate the confidence you have in your worldbuilding, and the restraint to not explain every small detail)

Morkainen paused a long moment, then added: “Ciridan will survive the maddram.”



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Sample 1

But you are not sure, Arwynn thought. I can see it in your eyes. I can hear it in your voice. A Sahadi would prove most useful... but how can I be sure that she is truly worthy, Rahain?

“Very well,” Arwynn ~~said~~. “She will be tested tonight. Upon her arrival.”

Morkainen stiffened. “Tonight?”

Arwynn leaned forward in his chair and fixed his eyes on Morkainen’s.

His voice was soft yet stern, “Yes, Rahain, tonight. You are my blademaster, but this is my House, and its needs must come ~~first~~. You claim that a Sahadi is warranted, I agree. You tell me Ciridan is a worthy candidate, ~~again~~ I agree. But I see the pride you take in her success. Am I to believe that you ~~aren’t~~ concerned? Is it possible ~~your desires are clouding your judgment?~~”

Morkainen set his jaw and lowered his eyes. How dare Arwynn accuse him of such weakness! If ~~only~~ he knew of The Emptiness,

Arwynn released Morkainen from his gaze and looked at Lindrowe and Malaraphi. Each, like Morkainen, had pupils of merit in whom they found delight. He lingered long enough on each to silently pose the same question,

When at last his eyes returned to Morkainen, Arwynn said, “Your payment for this service will be your silence until ~~she has passed or lies dead~~. If she is as good as you claim, she will survive this night as well as any other.”

He paused, then added, “And be warned, Rahain, ~~One~~ word from you, one *hint* from you, and I will kill her myself.” **(Really great dialogue)**



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Sample 1

THE PRIEST AND THE SPY

WELBLEY BLAYTHE'S KEEP ~~was~~ hidden deep in Evereve Marsh, reclaimed from ~~ancient~~ ruins by magickal prowess and botanical skill. Over the years, it had become his sanctum, a place of quiet beauty where he could, ~~at least for a time,~~ escape his holy obligations. ~~He~~ particularly enjoyed its garden. ~~(unnecessary to say that he enjoyed its garden, if you say so in the next paragraph and elaborate on why on greater detail and if you already said he loves this place in general)~~

As a rule, Welbley (*Transmutation, Flux*) ~~(why these brackets? It is unclear here and in its last instance, possibly add little details in the footer as footnotes to explain this with a x¹ the late and great Terry Pratchett often used them, as details obnoxious to elaborate on within the plot but useful regardless)~~ preferred to enjoy his garden alone and in darkness, with only the silver light of his staff to grant color and vibrancy to areas of his choosing.

Tonight, however, he was accompanied by a squat humani with a large nose and small eyes. The man's name was Tehru Shaddoht, and he was one of the many spies that Welbley employed in Dühr. ~~He hoped~~ Tehru's report ~~would shed more light on~~ House Blackhand ~~and enhance the assassination plots of~~ Dühr's Family Royal. ~~(Not very happy with this new wording but it was a bit too wordy before)~~

The two men walked in silence from the east hall of Welbley's keep to the middle of the garden. When they neared the well, Welbley ~~drew~~ aside his vestments and sat gently upon ~~a~~ patch of clover. ~~(from what I can find, sward refers to short grass specifically)~~ He closed his eyes and sighed at the achaelos blossoms' ~~sweetness~~ that drifted on the breeze. The spy



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Sample 1

rolled his eyes and shifted his weight nervously from leg to leg before finally dropping near the priest.

“Does something trouble you, Tehru?” Welbley asked, eyes still closed.

There was a modicum (try not to overuse this word) of derision in his voice.

Tehru feigned respect. “No, m’lord.”

“You are comfortable in my garden?”

“Yes, m’lord,” the spy lied. “It’s quite lov’ly.”

“Mmm.”

The priest and the spy were silent for a time. Welbley relaxed and carefully composed his questions, while Tehru considered the information he’d discovered and debated what to withhold.

Tehru had learned enough about House Blackhand to earn himself a great deal of wealth if he played his hand wisely. His task tonight was to deliver just enough information to satisfy Blaythe, and no more. He could sell the rest to others such as Loquay Yellowhand, or the Crimson Witch. Either would pay handsomely for information they could use against Blackhand. First, however, he had to contend with Blaythe.

Tehru appraised the priest. His age was unclear. Blaythe was human of uncertain descent, dark-haired, fair-skinned, and unremarkable in size or stature. He was dressed in holy vestments of black and green. He wore a serpentine torque of braided silver about his

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→ “Tell me, Tehru,” the priest asked at length, “what have you learned for me?” [49]
→ Tehru decided to begin his report with general information and yield specifics when pressed. Enough to demonstrate his value as a spy, but not enough to jeopardize his second... [49]

Moved up [5]: His age was unclear.

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Moved up [6]: His voice was thick with ennui.

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Moved up [7]: Lindrowe frowned.

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Moved up [8]: Arwynn stroked his chin thoughtfully.

Sample 2

“...Fuuu—” **(I cut many words from this, these were all either cuts because they were unnecessary wordiness, repeating information already stated, stating things that treat the reader like an idiot rather than allowing them to infer such information, or things that West has no way of knowing such as the hidden thoughts of others. As tracked changes are on, you may accept or reject any of these changes, while I believed them all to be necessary cuts, it is your story, and you may keep whatever you wish)**

“Westley!”

Sophia gasps as I realize what just happened. I am completely freaking out **(it could be more impactful to show this, such as saying, my ears are ringing, I see others around me speaking but I can't make out their words, my chest is tight etc.)**, using more profanity in one sentence than I have ever used in my life. I may have overdone it, but in my defense, **I believe I maintained my composure better than most would have in** the last two days of enduring this tournament. Rhodain was supposed to walk into the castle and take the crown **easily**, but he was betrayed **by the Queen, who wanted power for herself. His dying act stopped her from fulfilling this desire but thrust** the responsibilities of the kingdom on me. **Me? Of all people**, I am barely thirteen! How am I supposed to run a kingdom? I can barely run a block! I have been thrown around, beaten, shot at, grabbed, scared for my life, and now **this**.

“I’m sorry, Sophia. It won’t happen again...”

I **inhale deeply** and close my eyes, **feeling myself** relax. As I exhale **and let go of that momentary peace**, I see all of Baronune, **all of my kingdom**, and it all comes flooding back.

“I’m sorry... **I lied**, just one more. *What the fuck!*”

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Sample 2

In a fit of kicking, screaming, and flailing, I completely forget that Sophia is not the only one watching me. The ~~(cut armed as saying armed then armor reads a bit clunky)~~ knights in their plate armor and lizard-shaped helmets surround her with readied weapons as Inspector Roxette stands off to the side. Roxette pats down his long brown coat exhaustedly as his sunken eyes drag over the scene before him.

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Deleted: armed ...nights in their plate armor and lizard-shaped helmets surround her with readied weapons as well as...s Inspector Roxette stands off to the side. Roxette pats down his long brown coat exhaustedly as his sunken eyes drag over the scene before him,...a private detective in a long brown coat whose eyes sag with exhaustion as he was solving the case of King Sorenson's murder. ... [1]

They all wait in the doorway leading to the roof, the final test to anyone who is foolish enough to seek kingship. I didn't want or ask for this. I asked Rhodain to keep us safe from thugs and the other contenders while he fought his way to the throne. I want to go home and take a shower. We slept in sewage last night. I need a shower! That will be my first royal decree...my first royal decree; that feels so strange.

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Deleted: They are all standing around her ...n the doorway that leads...eading to the roof, the final test of strength ...o anyone who is foolish enough to come up here to be...eek kingship. Which perfectly describes me, except for wanting to be king. ... didn't want this...r. I didn't ... [2]

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"Oh, Gods damn it... I'm the king now."

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As if on cue, what's left of the roof crumbles. The knights quickly shuffle Roxette and Sophia into the ring, which marks entry for the final battle royale participants. If that line is crossed, they must fight for the throne. Something I foolishly did when Rhodain fell off the castle after being stabbed. I have a bad tendency to react without thinking in tense situations, which led to me claiming the title of king once I was thrown onto the throne. If Rhodain wasn't dead right now, I'd kick him. He's dead... Rhodain, the once Triumphant Knight of Fire, and I never got to thank him for protecting my cousin and I. I never got to say goodbye.

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"You weren't supposed to die... You were supposed to be king."

Slumping forward, I bury my face into my hands that are still soaked in Rhodain's blood. My elbows rest on my knees as I block out the world, failing to notice that we ~~(why is this "we" here? It has all been I before this and I cannot tell who this refers to)~~ are leaving the world

Deleted: I slump forward with my face in my hands, disregarding that they're still soaked in Rhodain's blood. ...y elbows rest on my knees and ... [5]

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Sample 2

behind. We sink back through the tower's shaft into the castle. The remains of the roof close and move into the throne room whose walls are decorated in sapphire and gold. A cerulean rug spills out across the floor from the base of my feet. I glance up. Sophia has moved to my side and places her hand on my shoulder. She examines the cut on my cheek and the nip in my ear. The clang of armor grabs my attention as all the knights kneel before me.

"Please, correct my understanding," Roxette keeps his same exhausted expression as he fixes his gaping jaw. "How have you become our king?"

Sophia pleas in conjunction with Roxette. "Yes, West. Please explain what happened."

I mouth out everything that happened from the moment I reached the rooftop, yet failed to apply sound to my muted voice.

Minutes pass and I remain fastened to the throne, not because it's the softest thing I have ever sat on, which it is, but because I can't find the strength to stand. Sophia's hand is glued to my shoulder while Roxette Jeans against a wall behind the kneeling knights. During the time I was explaining everything (did he explain everything? I thought he simply mouthed it out), a tall, slender man in a gold and emerald robe had entered. He's Terrence Sollace, the Grand Advisor to the late King, and now to me.

We could mistaken as brothers, both sharing dark brown hair and eyes, dusty tan skin, long legs, and gangly arms. He's quite more sophisticated, taller, and older than me. Possibly in his mid-twenties. He wears thin rimmed spectacles across the bridge of his nose and made me by comparison look like rolled up garbage in my sweat-soaked and sand-covered blouse.

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Sample 2

His presence strangely made me feel self-conscious towards the scars that etched across my arms and face from being thrown around in the tournament. He adjusts his spectacles as his hazel eyes run between Sophia and I.

“Is she your queen?”

“Ew...” Sophia and I answer in unison.

“No, we’re cousins.”

“Forgive me,” Terrence apologizes. “This is quite... *unexpected.*”

“Tell me about it.”

“Well...”

Terrence pauses, seemingly having as much difficulty accepting this situation as me.

“That is my role, to fill you in and educate you on... your duties.”

“I’m sorry,” Sophia chimes in. “But... Is this allowed? He’s a kid! Can a child be a king?”

Everyone had been wanted to ask such a question since the bells marking the end of the tournament were rung.

“Unfortunately, the late King Augustus never specified such details when making the tournament’s rules, I’m sure he never considered that a child would be foolish enough to remain on the streets, let alone, make it to his throne.”

“I didn’t do anything.”

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Sample 2

“Yes, as you stated,” Terrence fidgets with his spectacles. “Rhodain pushed you into the throne ~~shortly before~~ his death. Still, the rules ~~as stated proclaim that now that~~ the tournament is over, ~~you,~~ Westley...”

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“West,” ~~I correct,~~

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“~~Westley...~~ are the new ~~King~~ of Baronune.”

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~~Silence falls heavily~~ across the room. No one cheers, ~~but everyone exudes~~ an air of concern. I can’t tell if it is for me, ~~the kingdom,~~ or both.

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“Am I allowed to resign?” I ask and Sophia ~~smacks~~ my shoulder.

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“Don’t be foolish! You can’t step down as king. You’ll send us right into another tournament... ~~probably.~~ I don’t know how this works.”

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~~Neither do I,~~ all I can do is glance ~~to~~ the knights, ~~Roxette and~~ Terrence.

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“Considering ~~that this land has~~ only ~~had~~ three kings ~~since~~ the Hellsfire days, this has never come up. ~~As~~ King Augustus’ death was an assassination ~~rather than a~~ timely demise, we never saw fit to ~~contemplate~~ the lesser details of who would be ~~most~~ qualified to ~~next~~ take the throne.”

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As Terrence ~~walks~~ me through this, a long agonizing groan stretches from behind the knights.

Deleted: is gradually walking ...alks me through this turn of events... [12]

“~~It’s~~ in writing,” Roxette ~~says,~~ muffled through a hand used to stifle a yawn. “The boy is the new ~~king~~. It was unorthodox but he found his way through the ~~changing~~ streets, ~~to~~ the top of the castle, and sat on the throne. He can’t step down. That ~~would~~ leave the kingdom vulnerable as the only others ~~who could be considered,~~ ‘runner ups’ ~~to the tournament,~~ are the girl and myself. ~~She’s~~ no better than the boy, and I simply don’t give a damn. I was here to solve the case of the

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Sample 2

murdered King. The boy says the Queen is guilty, I'm left to take his word for it. After all, he is the King, and the King's word is law."

"Wait, otherwise my testimony wouldn't have held up?"

Roxette studies me. "In your word against the Queen? No. Especially if she had taken the throne. If your statement had been true then you'd probably had been executed for witnessing her crimes, because..."

"The King is law," I repeat and Roxette shrugs.

I glance between him, Terrence, and Sophia. No one refutes my claim.

I let out my own groan. "Then as law, I am doing away with this ridiculous tournament."

"That...would be wise, my King," Terrence begins, and I feel my body shrink into the throne.

"Seeing how it can only be initiated in the death of the current King. And currently..."

"Our King can barely make his bed, let alone defend himself from an attack."

"Sophia!"

She shrugs as if to imitate Roxette. "What? It's true. I've seen your room."

I leer at her, taking my attention off the current turmoil, if only for a moment. My mind then

continues to race as her voice echoes in my head. My room. Her home. Our families. With

everything I've witnessed during the span of this tournament, there's been so much chaos, so

much pain. Families will return home and be forced to rebuild their lives from the damages

infllicted by thugs and fighting. The King's tournament to find his replacement wrought carnage

upon the people of Baronune.

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Sample 2

“We...” my mouth is dry as I turn to Terrence and the knights.

I struggle to form words and swallow repeatedly.

“We need to do something about restoring the kingdom... a lot of families lost their homes in this tournament. It is our responsibility to fix them.”

A long pause followed this, and while I can't see the knights' faces from under their helmets, I can feel all their eyes on me.

Terrence holds his hands behind his back. “Yes, my King, we'll make a list of all your orders and demands to be announced to the kingdom tomorrow when the citizens come to witness the public crowning of their new King.”

My breath escapes me again. I have to face the citizens of Baronune? All of them?! There's over a thousand of them. That's a lot of people to disappoint even if they do accept me as their new King. Besides our teachings, I rarely ventured out to my classmates in Old Country and they had a population of under fifty.

Both Sophia and Terrence rush to my side as I struggle to breathe. I explain that I'm gripping my chest where a thug's foot pressed into it, but they seem unconvinced. I can't help but recall the light that seeped through Rhodain's chest as he slowly turned to ashes. Sophia begins to shake me and even Terrence has real concern in his eye, most likely because he wishes to avoid immediately having another tournament.

“I'm okay, just... Tomorrow? That's so soon.”

“Would you have us hide you away in the kingdom?” Terrence asks.

“Yes! I can agree to those terms.”

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Deleted: That's like a thousand or so, or more. To put simply, a lot of people. A lot of faces to disappoint if they don't accept me as their new king. ...hat's a lot of a...people to disappoint even if they do accept me as their new Kk...ng. Besides for ...ur teachings, I rarely ventured barely went ...ut to show my face ...o my classmates out ...n Old Country and that...hey 's ...ad a population of nearly ...nder fifty. This is much, much more. (... [19])

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Sample 2

“King Westley...” Terrence forces through his lips.

That title sounds like screeching metal to my ears. “You don’t have to call me that.”

“You’re going to have to get used to it... my King.” Terrence frowns as if coercing himself to remain professional against his will.

“Everyone is going to be calling you that and you must face your people. You cannot show cowardice, you cannot falter. If you show weakness, people will question the tournament and revolt, and then we’ll be right back where we started. More carnage too, only this time the whole kingdom will have their sights on your head, and unlike our former King, you are not untouchable.”

Terrence pokes me to prove his point. King Sorenson used unbreakable barriers of light with his own protection Divinity, making him impervious to outside attacks. Which is why Susan poisoned him. as he couldn’t protect himself from internal hazards. Unlike Sorenson, I don’t have any Divinity. The only reason I was able to make it this far was because of Rhodain. He should be the King. Not me.

“We’ll give you the rest of the day to get used to your title and come up with all your demands for tomorrow,” Terrence instructs.

“Not too many though, my King. You wouldn’t want to spread your forces too thin on your first day. Some may come for your life on the spot. Ceasing the King of the Round Table Tournament is a good start. It might cause hesitation in their attempts to kill you if they know that they will not immediately be able to take your throne afterwards.”

“That’s true...”

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Sample 3

“Are your parents home, young man?”

The little boy ~~peeking at me through the door’s small opening~~ couldn’t have been older than six. His eyes were wide, ~~he sported a milk-mustache, and had disheveled hair that suggested he’d just rolled out of bed.~~ The ‘Angry Birds’ pajamas added a nice little touch, and I could see his toes curling and uncurling as he studied me. It was nine in the morning, why he was ~~he~~ not at school?

Such questions were unimportant, so I beamed my broadest salesman smile plastered on my face, and ~~leaned in a little closer,~~ pondered whether or not to call out for his parents. The boy looked over his shoulder, as if reading my thoughts, then turned back to me. He said ~~nothing.~~

“Could you tell them that Mr. James Alcott is at the door?”

The ~~only reply the boy gave was~~ continued to stare at me, a hint of a smile, ~~played on his lips~~ before he blinked a few times and returned to his somber state. His hand ~~absently fiddled~~ played with the knob, ~~as his~~ small pink tongue licked at his milk mustache.

I sighed.

This gig is slowly getting old.

~~It had been months since selling encyclopedias door-to-door had seemed like a good idea.~~

~~Selling encyclopedias door-to-door had seemed like a good idea a few months back, but the more I did it, the less promising it was panning out to be.~~ People were too cautious, too distrusting, and for a good reason. Besides, the damn volumes were heavy, and dragging them about was taking its toll on my back. ~~Not to mention the damn fake accent~~ was driving me insane.

“Young man, it is quite imperative that you tell your parents that I am here, ~~I continued.~~ I have a few things in my suitcase. I would love to show them ~~what I have brought.~~” and it is quite uncomfortable to do this from out here.”

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Sample 3

“What’s in the suitcase?”

The boy’s words came out as barely a whisper, but I wouldn’t ignore the opportunity his interest had given me, no matter how insignificant. the attention the boy suddenly gave my Samsonite spoke volumes. I jumped at the opportunity. I couldn’t help but smile.

“Ah, you see, that is a secret, inform your parents that I am here, and we can take a look inside, yes?”

Recognition flickered in the boy’s eyes as he smirked. The boy looked up at me, and smiled. Slowly, he pushed open the door wide enough for me see inside the house, a feat made harder by the shadows which drenched the interior. to take in the scantily furnished hallway that extended into the house. Despite the morning sun, the house was quite dark, and shadows drenched the interior.

I half-expected the boy’s mother or father to pop into view, but no one appeared. All that was visible inside and through the darkness was a scantily furnished hallway.

“You can come in,” the boy said.

I hesitated.

Walking in uninvited by an adult won’t sell me any books...

Walking in uninvited, at least uninvited by an adult, would not play out well for me.

“Well no one’s home, and won’t be for a while,” the boy said, again making me feel like he was in my head. “They won’t be for a while.”

I feel like he’s in my head.

I took a step back and smiled, hiding my discomfort.

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Sample 3

"I'm sorry, but I really need to speak to an adult, besides, it's not very safe to let in open the door for strangers, young man. I'd have thought you would have been taught that."

The boy looked at me puzzled. "You're not a stranger, you're Mr. James Alcott. Oh, and I'm Peter."

And just like that we're friends?

And just like that, the boy decided we were friends. He held out a small hand, which I looked over my shoulder before shaking, shook, and then he pushed the door open wider. Standing aside from the doorway invitingly, I remained hesitant.

Peter furrowed his brow. "You promised to show me what was in the suitcase."

I nodded. "That I did, but I also said I needed to see your parents."

"But why?"

The never-ending questions reminded me of why I never had any kids.

How long will I spend here explaining things?

I licked my lips, wondering how much time I would need to spend here explaining things before eventually moving on. The sun was beating down hard, and I could already feel sweat the water trickling down my spine and to the small of my back. I needed to keep moving, and hopefully somewhere down the line someone would invite me in and I'd get, but I also needed some relief from the scorching heat.

Still, the way Peter looked at me, doe-eyed and smiling, I just didn't want to let the little bugger down.

"Do you know what a door-to-door salesman is, Peter?"

The boy shook his head.

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Sample 3

“Well, young man, that is what I am. I go from one home to the other and sell things to the lovely people I meet, all in the comforts of their own homes.”

“Like toys?”

“Yes—”

The excitement in his eyes almost made me laugh.

“—Many do, but not me.” “Yes, and no,” I explained. “I sell encyclopedias. Do you know what those are?”

The boy shook his head once more, again.

“Well, they are books that have information about everything you could possibly think of!”

Peter’s eyes widened even more. “Everything, really?”

“Yes.”

“Can I... Can I see them? Please?”

I shrugged. “Well, that is why I need to see your parents Peter. I would have loved for them to look at my encyclopedias, and maybe even buy you one.”

“I can buy one!”

I laughed and ruffled the boy’s hair, disheveling it even more. “Maybe another time?”

“B-but I have money,” Peter stammered. “And I know where dad keeps his money. Show me the books, encyclopedias, and I’ll buy the whole lot!”

My smile faltered as I saw dollar signs disappear, if only for a second. My head was making a ka-chinging sound, and the devil in me, the one that had bills to pay and was late on rent, suddenly began to ponder the implications.

No, I can’t. I’d lose my job if his parents complained that I took advantage of their child. You can’t. Don’t be stupid.

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Sample 3

But ~~not if they didn't know my name...~~ I could. And I really wanted to, ~~Or I could wait inside where it is cool.~~ Besides, it would make sense that I go in and keep the boy entertained. If he was naive enough ~~to invite me in~~ and tell me ~~where the money was,~~ there was money in the house, who knew who ~~else~~ he'd do ~~the same for after I left.~~ I could explain the situation to his parents when they ~~returned. I bet they'd be~~ came back. Tell them I was actually looking out for the little rascal. They'd be so grateful, they'd buy anything I ~~sold~~ them.

"Well..." ~~I began, but Peter didn't give me the chance,~~

~~Peter didn't give me a chance.~~ Quickly grabbing my hand, ~~he pulled~~ and ~~pulling~~ me into the house, ~~closing.~~ He closed the door ~~behind me and leading me to~~ and started to immediately push me towards the living room.

Why the hell is it so dark in here?

~~It was much cooler the deeper inside we went, and I doubted that'd be the case if the blinds were open so I could hardly complain.~~ ~~The house was a lot cooler the deeper inside we went, and I found myself breathing a sigh of relief. If I did get into some conflict with the boy's parents, at least I'd have gotten out of the heat, if only for a bit.~~ Peter ~~led~~ me to a plain couch, to a two-seater,

and sat ~~beside me,~~ ~~down~~ next to me. I legs folded under him, as he ~~Peter~~ impatiently ~~bounced,~~ ~~staring intently at~~ for me to unzip the small carry-on I ~~used to drag~~ged the encyclopedias around with. I looked at him with a smile that faltered a bit when I saw the windows behind him, blinds drawn and the splendid world outside on full display.

Then why the hell is it so dark in here?

~~After taking off my suit jacket,~~ I pulled the first volume out and set it down on my lap, then took off my suit jacket.

"So, this is the first volume..."

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Commented [BR21]: "to a two seater" has clunky wording for the repeated sound.

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Commented [BR22]: It is rarely necessary to write, sat down, or bed over, or lean forward as it is implied with the action.

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Sample 3

Peter didn't let me finish and grabbed the book from me. He opened the large volume and eagerly flipped through its pages, eyes growing wide.

~~"Be careful with it..."~~

"It has pictures!"

I chuckled. "That it does, young man."

~~It was almost cute, the way his tongue stuck out of the corner of his mouth as he concentrated on what he was doing and sounded out the words. It was easy to feed off his childish excitement, but after a few minutes, when he reached the final page he seemed somewhat deflated and began flipping through it again. I watched him for a few minutes, and when he reached the last page, he frowned and started flipping through it again. I took the time to look around the small living room.~~

~~The couch we sat on was part of a three-piece set, the larger one placed strategically in front of the TV and the single-seater looking like it had seen better days. The shelves were lined with memorabilia and books, but no photo frames that would give me some idea of the people who lived here. I wondered if Peter were a single child, and if so, why his parents would leave him alone on a school night.~~

~~"You lied to me."~~

I blinked, and shook my head, startled by the statement. "Excuse me?"

Peter's tone was both angry and disappointed. "You said it had everything in it."

I reached out to ruffle Peter's hair once more but he pulled away.

~~Apparently we aren't friends anymore. Sighed and ruffled his hair, but this time he pulled back. Apparently, he had decided we weren't friends anymore.~~

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Moved up [I]: It was almost cute, the way his tongue stuck out of the corner of his mouth as he concentrated on what he was doing. I took the time to look around the small living

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Commented [BR26]: I would suggest moving this description to when James first sat down or cutting it entirely as it only serves to add unneeded filler here in an interesting moment.

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Sample 3

"I'm sorry, young man, but ~~this is the first of twenty-four volumes. You didn't give me a chance to explain.~~ I might have needed to explain further," I said. "This is the first volume. The entire collection is twenty-four volumes."

Peter frowned ~~and looked at my suitcase.~~ "Well which one of them talks about the Gibbins?" ~~he asked.~~

"Well, you know that the world is full of many wonders. And to gather them all into just one book is impossible. So there are twenty-four."

The what?

I frowned. "Gibbins?"

He nodded quickly.

"Well, I'd assume they're in the volume labeled 'G.'"

I rummaged through my bag until I found it and handed it over.

"I've never heard of them, though."

"Sure you have... Everyone knows about Gibbins."

"I don't," I said, handing him the volume. "Care to elaborate?"

Peter flicked through the pages as his grin grew wider, ~~forgot all about the book and clapped his hands together.~~ "They're like us. But different."

"How so?" "Different how?"

"They look just like us at first glance, but when you really look you can see that their eyes aren't normal but red, and their hair isn't even hair, its prickly like a porcupine's needles, and they have heaps of rows of teeth just like a shark, and—"

"Look kid, I don't think I've seen the show they're from, these books don't really have characters or creatures in them like that."

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Commented [BR27]: Would suggest changing the creature's name. "Gibbin" is very close to "Gibbon" the ape, and I see a significant concern with this name as if Peter did say "Gibbin" to James, he'd just think of the ape as they cannot hear this spelling distinction, nor would trust a 6-year-old to know proper spelling.

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Moved up [2]: He looked at my suitcase, then back at me. "Which one of them talks about the Gibbins?" he asked.

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Sample 3

Peter flicked through the pages faster. "It isn't like that..."

"They have eyes, and ears, and a mouth just like us. They look like us, which is why we don't always see them. But my dad says if you look closely, you can see how they're different."

"Really?"

Peter nodded. "Yeah, like, their eyes, they're red. And their ears are all pointy-like. And they have very sharp teeth, like a shark. And their arms, they grow really, really long. Longer than a snake. And their hair is like needles, prickly like a porcupine, and they are really, really fast, and they can eat you real quick-like. They just eat all your meat and leave your bones."

"Like a piranha?" I asked, playing along.

The boy clapped and jumped in his place. "Just like that, yeah. And the thing is, you never really know if the person is a Gibbins until it's too late. My mother says that they're really sneaky like that."

"Okay, well keep looking then. They sound awful."

"They are!" Peter exclaimed. "And they're really fast and can eat you real quick, leaving just your bones."

He's left home alone on a school day and allowed to watch trash like this? I should have a word with his parents.

I laughed, shaking my head at the ludicrous stories this boy's parents had been telling him. I remembered some of my own dad's fake monsters he'd used to scare me into bed early.

"That sounds awful," I said. "It's like you can never know if you're safe or not."

"Exactly!" Peter exclaimed.

I laughed. The boy was definitely entertaining.

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Commented [BR31]: I believe this section should be rewritten as it completely takes away from all reveal or surprise as it is clearly evident that Peter is one such creature. Along with this, the many different descriptions are quite overbearing and exhausting all together like this.

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Sample 3

“They don’t like the light either, because it hurts their eyes, that’s why you’re usually safe in the morning.”

“But aren’t you scared that it’s dark in here?”

Peter ignored me and continued flipping through the encyclopedia’s pages. “No it’s not.”

“Sure it is,” I said. “The blinds are open, but it is far too dark in the house, Peter. Maybe you should turn on a few lights.”

The boy looked around him, confused by what I was implying, then shook his head. Instead, he grabbed the volume I had given him and began flipping through the pages.

“I don’t think you’ll find Gibbins in there, young man.”

“But You said that it had everything.”

“But not things like that, I have a feeling that maybe your parents made that one up, or you saw it on Tv.” I chuckled.

“No, they didn’t,” “I’ve seen one before.” Peter said, whispered, now.

“You have?”

His imagination is incredible.

Peter nodded. “I don’t want to talk about it.”

His intensity made me bark with laughter and the way he was now looking at me only made me laugh harder. The resolve he said that with made me bark with laughter, and when I caught

the way he was looking at me, it just made me laugh harder. By the time I calmed down again, he had closed the book and put it back in my suitcase.

“I don’t think I want to buy any of these,” he said seriously.

“Are you sure? I didn’t mean to embarrass you.”

“I think you should go.”

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Sample 3

Fearing I had offended him, I put on my best salesman smile. "I'm sorry, Peter. It's just that when I was your age, my father used to tell me a lot of stories, too. Things to scare me when I was misbehaving. wasn't being good. The Gibbins just reminded me of that. I really am sorry."

Unmoved, the boy stood up with his head down, and I took that as a sign that we were done here. A part of me wanted to try and convince him that I should stay. The prospect of getting something out of his parents when they came home was strong.

I want to try to convince him to let me stay, but then again, he doesn't like you right now, what would happen when they his parents return and see how upset he is? Doubt they're gonna be happy about that.

"Are you sure you want me to leave?" I asked.

Peter only stood there, and I sighed. I stood and pulled my suit jacket back on. I adjusted the suitcase and stood up. then Peter walked. He led me to the front door and opened it, allowing in a heatwave that made me recoil. The heatwave that hit me made me recoil.

I said, trying to prolong my stay a little more. At least until the heat eased up a bit.

"You know, I work for the encyclopedia people... If you'd like, we can sit down and write an entry about the Gibbins, and I can have them include it in their next volume edition."

The boy's eyes widened. Peter perked up. "Really?"

"Sure, if you'd like. But if you really want me to go... then that's okay."

A thoughtful expression came over the boys face, and when he looked up again, his smile made my heart melt. He seemed to think about that for a bit, eyes downcast. When he looked up again, his smile made my heart melt. "Could I write it?"

"We can do anything you want," young man.

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