

Chapter 5

Vagabonds line the streets, and wretches beg for coins from every corner. King's Hovel is living up to its name under the oppressive rule of King Whittler. Poverty has never been more rampant, and you are taken aback by how it has affected everybody. Orcs, elves and humans reach out from the muddy streets, each desperate for help. You walk past them all, keeping your eyes ahead of you.

"Mundrug and his gang will be in Dove Street," Madam whispers out of the corner of her mouth. "They have several houses there. It's an open secret, although apparently it hasn't reached the ears of Whittler."

"How's that?" you ask.

"He'd have burned them to the ground if it had," she replies flatly.

You wander through the streets, taking several back alleys and ducking behind carts whenever Madam does. Wherever she is leading you, you are completely lost. Eventually, you emerge into one of the more well-to-do streets, where the roads are clear of beggars and the houses look more freshly painted.

"That one," she says, pointing at a squat building at the end of the rose. Bare rose stems grow forlornly in the front garden, holding on against the filthy air. They are the only signs of life, other than the two of you. "Top floor." Madam points to a candle burning in one of the upper windows.

"What about the king?" you ask, sizing up a way into the window. You spot a low outbuilding beneath it that should give you a good leg up.

"We have people taking care of the king as we speak. Silent people who don't leave a shadow. You need to focus on Thighshank. When Whittler is gone, there will be a vacuum. We need to make sure that orcs like Thighshank aren't drawn into it."

You nod. What she's saying makes sense. Stop Thighshank from taking the throne and get your revenge: the plan works.

The planks on the roof of the outbuilding groan under your weight, but against all probability, they hold. You steady yourself, a momentary lack of balance threatening to send you down into the mud, before pulling your chin up above the windowsill.



Beyond the soot-stained and chipped glass pane, you spot your foe. He's alone, sat at a small table, gorging himself on a whole roast turkey. Sickly fat dribbles down his chin, pooling on the table in a splattered, congealed mess. You can smell his orc stench from here; it drives you on.

The window gives way easily, flying open under the force of your shoulder. Time slows, and a bead of fat glistens on Mundrug's chin as his eyes widen in a mixture of terror and surprise. You feel the air around you thicken to treacle. Your sword slips easily from its scabbard, and you bring it round in a swift arc.

"You!" Thighshank grunts in his guttural orc voice.

"It's time to go," you hiss. You know that no matter what happens, you can't let him escape this time.

"I had the same idea," he says with a smirk. Underneath him, the floor gives way as a trapdoor opens. Mundrug drops into the darkness, his vile smile the last thing you see.

VOCABULARY FOCUS

1. What are "vagabonds"?
2. Find and copy a word that means "step out of somewhere".
3. Find and copy a phrase that describes something happening that seemed unlikely.
4. What impression do you get of how Mundrug is eating from the word "gorging"?
5. Which word can be used to describe a liquid that has started to thicken up?

VIPERS QUESTIONS

I

What evidence is there that King's Hovel is multicultural?

I

How does Madam know which room Mundrug is in?

S

How does Mundrug escape?

R

What is he eating?

P

What do you think happens next?