

A young halfling warrior with short, light brown hair and blue eyes. He is wearing dark, intricately detailed armor with a brown leather tunic and a dark scarf. He holds a sword with a dark hilt and a silver blade. The background is dark and smoky, with glowing orange embers and flames scattered throughout, suggesting a battlefield or a volcanic landscape.

Mephix the Halfling

By
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Mephix ran down the dark alley. He jumped over a barrel landing lightly on the other side but didn't break stride. It was an impressive sight given that he was a halfling standing only three and a half feet tall.

He turned right down the street then left at the next one. He didn't look back because no one was chasing him, except time. He was very late and knew the guild master would be furious.

Mephix was a member of the thieves' guild in the city of Lunas. The guild dealt in information and trade goods, both legal and illegal, along with an assortment of other services. The only jobs they didn't take were murder or kidnapping.

In the distance he saw his destination, the Blue Goose Inn. He noticed no silhouettes on the roof, maybe he would get there first this time. He pulled out one of his daggers, this one allowed the wielder to teleport short distances. He activated it disappearing in a puff of black smoke only to reappear on the roof.

Glancing around he saw no one. The dark, flat roof was empty except for a single chimney that rose to the star-filled night sky. He adjusted his leather armor, making sure every strap and dagger was in place. He pulled up the green hood on his cloak after straightening his short brown hair. The guild master hated it when he looked sloppy.

He took in a deep breath smelling the food of the tavern in the air. *Thank the gods, I made it...* he thought as the hairs stood up on the back of his neck.

Mephix spun around barely bringing his daggers up in time to deflect the strike. Another halfling was here dressed in black leather armor, his face completely covered by a cloth wrap, daggers in his hands. Over the assailant's eyes were a silver pair of goggles.

An assassin! Mephix thought. *Here to kill the guild master!*

His opponent was fast, stabbing and slashing at him from all angles. Metal on metal rang out as Mephix deflected the strikes backing up along the roof attempting to keep his assailant at bay. He dared a glance back noticing the edge of the roof was getting closer.

After deflecting a series of strikes, Mephix stabbed straight out as he disappeared only to reappear behind his opponent. The other halfling dove forward into a roll coming up throwing two daggers at Mephix. Again, Mephix disappeared letting the daggers fly through the space he had been, reappearing next to the assassin, but his opponent was ready.

Another set of daggers appeared in his hands deflecting Mephix's strike. Stabs and slashes came at Mephix. He was backing up once again the other

halfling stabbing both daggers straight in for the center of his chest. Mephix blocked the strikes with his daggers only to have both of his weapons pushed out wide. His opponent took another step in head butting him in the face. Mephix staggered back, his eye watering from his now broken nose. His opponent stepped in, spinning low, their right foot extended sweeping out both of his. He was on his back, his opponent's dagger at his throat.

"Please no," Mephix barely squeaked out.

The assassin held the dagger for a moment before snorting and laughing out loud.

"Ha ha ha. Did ya see that? Haha. I told'ya I still got it!" the assassin asked looking at the chimney where another halfling stood. The assassin removed the wrapping and goggles from their head.

"Mom?" Mephix asked.

"Haha you should have seen your face!" she laughed rolling around on the roof.

"Come now Delila, poor boy's had enough fer now," the other halfling said stepping out of the shadow.

"Dad?" Mephix said as much as asked.

Delila scowled, "who's guild master here Morgan?"

Morgan put his hand up. "Aye ye are, I'm just saying."

Delila stood up then extended a hand to Mephix. "Yer late Mephix."

Mephix accepted the hand. "Geeze mom, you didn't have to break my nose."

He gently touched the end of his red, swollen nose, "ouch."

"Quit being a big baby an drink this," she said throwing him a vial with red liquid in it. "Next time show up on time or it'll be worse."

Mephix lowered his gaze, "yes ma'am."

Delila bonked him on the head with the pommel of her dagger.

"Err I mean yes guild master," Mephix said rubbing the top of his head.

"Better," Delila said looking satisfied, "now that that's settled, we can get to business. We got a job, you an I are going to the city of Sardin."

The city of Sardin was a large metropolis, housing thousands of people, it was the third largest city in the Kingdom of Dravencroft. Delila and Mephix were riding their ponies through the main gates.

“Are ya still sulking because I won?” Delila asked looking at Mephix out of the corner of her eye.

Mephix scowled, “no.”

“Then what are ya sulking for?” Delila asked knowing he was lying.

“You haven’t told me why we’re here, or what the job is,” Mephix said quietly.

Delila smiled, “all in good time, and don’t ya worry, your pa couldn’t beat me either, even before the injury.”

Mephix couldn’t hide his surprise. His father used to be one of the best fighters in Lunas, or at least that is what the stories said.

Delila laughed. “Now don’t you be tell’n him I said that, I let him get close a few times.

Mephix smiled as he shook his head. “So where to?”

“The Purple Squirrel,” Delila said with a smile.

A look of dread came over the Mephix. “No... Not that crazy Tun Hardel.”

“The very same, an don’t ya call him crazy. You know how sensitive he is,” Delila said shaking a finger at him.

“Ugh. Can I just wait outside?” Mephix asked.

“No. Yer gonna be guild leader someday. Ya better start acting like it,” Delila said sternly.

Mephix shoulders slumped a little. "Yes ma'am."

The Purple Squirrel was busy for this time of day. The tavern always attracted people from the ships in the harbor of this port city, most coming to see the owner, but this time there were more than usual.

Delila looked around finally spotting Tun straddling a man on a table. Tun was punching the man over and over. After several more punches, Tun hopped down off the table. He grabbed the man by the ankle spinning around while pulling him as he went finally letting go tossing the man right out the door. Mephix had to dive to the ground to avoid the limp missile.

Tun brushed his hands off as he glared around the room. "Anyone else got something to say?" he asked in a high pitch voice, his tail twitching so hard Mephix thought it might fall right off.

Tun was a half-man half-squirrel, and to top it off his fur was purple. He wore an eye patch over one eye and was usually wearing a suit of armor, his sword at his side.

Mephix had heard the stories many times. They said that Tun was once human, until he was bit by a

lycanthrope, or better known as a werewolf. On his first transformation he attacked a wizard that changed Tun into this, calling it a cure. Of course, Tun being the fighter he was severed the mage's hands for refusing to cure him, then turned him over to the authorities. After that Tun accepted his new form, even grew to love it so much that he would attack anyone that insulted him.

"I got something to say, you purple fuzzy cutie." Delila called out putting her hands on her hips.

The whole room gasped, holding its breath as they looked back at Tun. The squirrel man quickly grabbed his sword, drawing it in one smooth motion as he leapt toward the halfling. She didn't flinch as the sword stabbed straight out passing her neck so close that a few strands of her long blond hair tumbled off her head. The two held the pose for a few seconds before embracing in a hug.

"Delila, I could kiss you!" Tun said.

"Morgan might be jealous," Delila said with a smirk.

Everyone in the tavern let out the breath they were holding as they went back to their drinks.

"Ha-ha," Tun laughed as he pat her on the shoulder. "An Mephix, how are lad?"

Mephix shrugged, "good, Mom kicked my ass the other day."

“Again?” Tun asked looking at Delila.

The halfling shrugged. “He was close this time,” she said smiling with pride at her son.

“Did ya tell him that he’s mine yet?” Tun asked Delila.

“Na,” Delila said, “figured he would figure that out when the tail sprouts.”

“By the gods mom!” Mephix exclaimed trying to get the image out of his head causing several people to laugh.

“So, what brings two of my favorite halflings here?” Tun asked.

“Business,” Delila said with a serious tone.

Tun nodded, “right, I’ll fix your usual room.”

“Thanks Tun,” Delila said handing him a small pouch.

The three sat around a small table, the only other furniture in the room was two small beds. A single candle provided the main source of light with a little coming from the dirty window in the room.

“Hmm,” Tun said leaning back in his chair, “it is very strange that you are asking about this Delila.”

“Why’s that?” The halfling asked leaning closer as she took a bite of her mutton.

“A dwarf came through a week ago asking about these Minos Gates,” Tun said. “Three days later a group of dwarves came in looking for him, the not nice kind of dwarves.”

“What did ya tell’em?” Delila asked.

Tun shrugged. “Go to Targas.”

“And he knew where that was?” Delila asked getting more intrigued.

“Aye, the first dwarf did,” Tun said. “The other dwarves didn’t, so I told them to go to Lunas.”

Delila started laughing. Targas was one of the underground cities beneath the trade city of Lunas, but you didn’t go to Lunas and ask around about it. People who did tended to disappear. Targas itself was where all manner of things were traded. Information, goods, services of every kind, even slaves could all be bought or sold there, given you had the coin.

“What else can ye tell me about the first dwarf?” Delila asked.

“His name’s Fruben an he’s a cleric, nothing else,” Tun said with a shrug.

“So, what are these Mino Gates?” Mephix asked.

Tun scratched his chin. “Well, if I remember correctly, they were magic gates of some kind. Stories

say they could take you from one city to another in the blink of an eye. Then for some reason they destroyed them all, something about bad people coming through."

"Hmm. Anything else?" Delila asked.

"Yes. Be careful out there. Strange things have been happening lately, along with a lot of strange folk around," Tun said growing very serious.

"What kind?" Mephix asked.

"Order of the Dark Sun for one, asking a lot of questions around lately; bullying good people too. They're up to no good if you ask me," Tun said.

Delila nodded. "Heard the same thing, we'll be careful."

Tun stood up. "Well, if you need anything else, just ask. The lads have been left alone too long as it is, I better get back while I still have a bar."

"Thanks Tun," Delila said with smile. "I mean it."

"Anytime, and tell that husband of yours, he still owes me a drink for the frog," Tun said.

Delila laughed. "I'll be sure to mention it."

"Frog?" Mephix asked after Tun had gone.

"Long story," Delila said taking another bite of her mutton.

"So, what's our job mom?" Mephix asked.

Delila sat quiet for several moments, staring off into the distance.

“Mom?” Mephix said waving his hands in front of her.

“Our client hired us to find information on the Minos Gates. Everything and anything said or unsaid about them,” Delila said before taking another drink from her mug. “We meet up with an informant in the morning.”

“Why not go to Targas with this?” Mephix asked looking at her with concern.

“That’s what your pa is doing,” Delila said with a smile. “I got another lead.”

Mephix stared at his mother, something was wrong with this job, it must have been the reason she was coming along personally.

The tall skinny human shifted nervously from foot to foot. “This is different,” he said. “It’s getting dangerous.”

Delila rubbed her temples trying to stop the headache that was forming. “Skinny... Ya done this a hundred times before, what’s different?”

Skinny looked around. "People asking questions, the wrong people."

"Who?" Delila asked getting curious. "Who would care about some old magic gates."

"Dwarves," Skinny whispered. "A dwarf come through asking about them gates. Couple o days later, more dwarves show'd up asking for him, said they have info on the gates. Bad dwarves these were, not like the first."

Delila scratched her chin, "hmm."

"Others too," Skinny whispered leaning in closer. "Men, from the order."

"Order?" Delila asked.

"Dark Sun," Skinny said pointing at his chest.

I knew it. Delila thought. The same ones that hired us. I knew there was something off about them. But who are these dwarves? I guess there is one way to find out.

"Set us up with the dwarves Skinny," Delila said.

"You want me to do what?" Skinny asked appalled at the idea.

"Do it, for tonight," Delila said. "We'll meet them here."

The cloud covered night sky was dark and the alley smelled like refuse. Mephix was perched on a rooftop overlooking the alley, invisible thanks to a ring his mother had given him. She had warned him something was off about Skinny; he was spooked bad about something. She had him arrange a meeting with someone with knowledge about the gates, but mom smelled a trap.

Mephix watched her casually leaning on the side of the building at the end of the alley. *Nothing ventured, nothing gained.* He thought to himself with a smile. It was a saying she was often telling him.

Delila shifted her weight, standing a little taller. It was her sign that someone was coming. Mephix saw movement on the building across the alleyway. Two dwarves with crossbows were coming up to the edge of the roof. They looked around their rooftop then over to where he was perched invisible. Not seeing anything they focused on the alley. Two more dwarves approached Delila, one holding a small box.

Mephix slowly drew his daggers, he knew nothing would happen yet. If this was a trap, which it certainly was, they would likely try to capture her, that was going to be their first mistake.

“Oi, you be the one that Skinny fella be talk’n bout?” One of the dwarves asked Delila. “Da one ask’n bout dem gates?”

Delila smiled, “yeah, that’s me.”

“Got what ye want ere,” the dwarf said holding up the small box, “but it’ll cost ya.”

“How much?” Delila asked casually.

“Five hundred,” the dwarf said.

Delila scrunched up her face. “High price. How do I know it’s worth dat?”

“Ye can have a look,” the dwarf said holding out the box.

Delila looked around, “perhaps we should take this in the alley.”

“Aye,” the dwarf said, “a fine idea.”

They walked further back in the alley, away from the prying eyes of others. Delila made two gestures with her hands as she walked.

Not yet, Mephix thought reading the signs.

Delila stopped halfway down. “This should be good enough.” She reached out taking the box from the dwarf. It appeared to be a simple jewelry box no special markings, but she knew looks could be deceiving.

Mephix glanced at the two crossbowmen, both were covering their eyes. *Shit!* he thought covering his eyes with his right forearm. The bright flash of light

caught Delila by surprise. She let out a startled yelp as she dropped the box covering her eyes. *Smart devils*. She thought trying to rub the darkness from her eyes.

Something hard hit her in the stomach knocking the wind from her lungs then forced her down to her knees.

“No!” Delila managed to say with a raspy voice which led to several seconds of coughing.

Mephix knew she was talking to him, urging him to wait. One of the dwarves grabbed her by the collar tossing her into a nearby barrel.

“Heard ye been ask’n round bout dem Minos Gates. Now who be ask’n ye to do dat?” the dwarf asked giving her a kick in the ribs.

Delila coughed as she lay on the ground holding her ribs. “No one.” She managed to say which earned her another kick from the dwarf.

“I ain’t be ask’n again,” the dwarf said standing over her, warhammer in his hand. “Who ask’n ya to do dat? Was it Fruben? Another dwarf?”

Delila blinked several times, but her vision was still dark. She started to laugh, “is that what this is about? Yer trying to find this Fruben?”

“Last time, was it him o no?” The dwarf asked.

Delila’s hand moved so fast Mephix could barely see it. A dagger appeared in the dwarf’s throat spilling his blood on Delila and the ground around her. The

dwarf grabbed at his throat, dropping his hammer as he staggered back a step before falling dead.

Mephix vanished in a puff of smoke appearing right behind one of the dwarves on the roof. He jabbed a dagger into both sides of his neck, almost taking the head clean off. The other dwarf turned to shoot but Mephix was already gone.

The halfling appear next to the dwarf but his opponent was quicker. The dwarf brought the crossbow up to deflect Mephix's strikes before kicking out. Mephix side stepped the kick driving a dagger into it his leg. The halfling grabbed the hilt pushing the dagger up with all his strength causing the dwarf to cry out as he tipped backwards over the edge of the roof.

Mephix looked down to see the dwarf laying in a tangle in the alley, his head bent at an odd angle. He also saw his mom holding the last dwarf against the wall, her daggers against his throat.

"Now, yer gonna tell me everything you know, or you'll be picking up your inards as you try to make it to the end of the alley," Delila said as Mephix appeared next to her.

"Aye," the dwarf said holding his arms out wide, "sounds fair."

"There's a good lad," Delila said. "Now, let's start with yer name."

“Rak Dagkin of Clan Dagkin,” the dwarf said.

They rode their ponies hard heading back to Lunas. Mephix gave a concerned look over to Delila. She wore a bandage across her eyes. The light in the box turned her pupils white, robbing her of her sight. They had the information they needed for their client from the dwarf, but it came at a heavy cost. Mephix had hired a cleric in town to restore his mother’s sight, but the divine magic had been unable to. So, they rode for home, already sending word to their client that Mephix would be meeting them in a few days with the information. Mephix didn’t know what the future held for them, but he would be ready.