



A Shady Gamble

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Written by Wendi Coffman Porter

World Design by Richard W. Porter III

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*Oh, fair warning ... If you are expecting some explosive fireball of an intro, you will be sorely disappointed. The origin of *Shade*, starts out oddly mundane, with a friendly game of *dathalu* none the less. There will be no bang, or apocalyptic event, but rather a whisper, a portent of things to come. For true legends never start out legendary. Or do they?*

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-Leon Hamilton

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The elegant elf, going by the alias Sadie Feelari, which was her first alias, padded barefoot out into the large open kitchen with a wide yawn. Her long white hair brushed freely across her bare back. The house had more guests than it had in the entire time Leon was alive. Which meant that she'd taken to being at least partially dressed when she got up in the mornings. But a bra and sleep shorts covered little.

"Good morning, Ma'am!" A loud, cheerful voice screeched at her from the other side of the counter.

With a blindingly swift movement, Sadie snatched up a kitchen knife and sent it flying at the entity that dared to speak to her before her coffee.

The knife thunked, with deadly precision, into the cutting board in front of the metallic sphere. As it continued to vibrate from the impact, the board lowered cautiously. The holographic face of Leon's personal doctor, maid and cook, glanced over it at the elf.

"Would you like me to make breakfast?" She jerked the board back up, only just blocking a second knife. "I'll take that as a no." The floating droid grumbled and drifted off.

Pouring herself a cup of hot coffee, Sadie inhaled the unique aroma of her long dead partner's homemade roast. She leaned back on the counter to face the woman behind her. She had short dark hair, and was wearing leather pants, and a thick long sleeved cotton shirt.

"She's just trying to be helpful." Anna said after she was sure that Sadie had gotten several sips.

"No, she's not."

Reaching past the elf, Anna filled her own empty cup with the delicious black liquid. She'd already been to the forge this morning, if the soot and sweat were any indication.

"What do you mean?"

"She's a bitch." Sadie replied coolly. "She does it on purpose. She's been doing that every morning for hundreds of years. She thinks it's funny." Sadie shrugged. "So, I humor her."

"Ah." The ex-government agent shook her head and rolled her eyes as she moved a good ten feet away and rested against the counter, much like the elf.

The two women stood sipping their coffee for several minutes, each lost in their own thoughts.

"How the oraculem coming?" Sadie was the first to break the silence.

Shaking her head, the agent answered, "not well. It's harder to mix than I expected. I almost blew myself up yesterday."

"You're still here. What are you whining about?" Sadie teased.

"You're a bitch, you know that. Right?"

Sadie smiled brightly at the woman, her eye sparkling. "Why thank you for noticing. I try."

"I bet you do." Placing her empty cup on the counter, the human woman turned to storm of back into the basement smithy.

"Want to do dinner tonight?" Sadie called after the woman.

"Yeah, I guess. If I can make any headway at all today." She waved her hand over her shoulder as she disappeared through the doors that lead to the highly secured stairwell.

Fascinated by the secret order of Althenian smiths, Leon had spent a sizeable chunk of his life researching their methods. According to the history texts, they worked a kind of magical based alchemy into their metalwork. With their secret techniques, they created the most advanced artifacts and metals in the known galaxy.

In an astounding failure, that almost killed him, Leon attempted to recreate one of their masterpieces. He hired Shade to steal several very illegal books, which he then used to build a strangely archaic smithy in the bowels of his floating island home. But on mixing the metals, like the books showed, he created a catalyst that produced an explosion so devastating that it knocked the island off its axis. It took almost five months for Shade and Joan to get the island repaired and floating back on course.

And now, that five thousand plus years later, that that same forge was being used by one of the actual members of the Althenian order. Sadie chuckled, good thing he was dead already. Anna would have killed him already from sheer annoyance.

“Right.” Sadie sighed and turned to fill her cup.

As she made her way to the balcony outside, she noticed a book sitting on the table next to a vase filled with white roses. The cover was white leather with a blue embossed title that read, *A Shady Gamble*. Chuckling, she picked up the book and made her way to one of the lounge chairs. Evidently Joan wanted her to read this one, and since the ship design was on hold until Anna finished the oraculem wiring, she had spare time.

For years now, my fans have been begging me to tell them the origin story of the master thief Shade. I’ve shied away from the story for fear that it might give away too many of her secrets. And even lead my readers to the truth about who she was. But it doesn’t look like, she will return to us anytime soon, here it goes.

Oh, fair warning. If you are expecting some explosive fireball of an intro, you will be profoundly disappointed. The origin of Shade starts out peculiarly mundane, with a friendly game of dathalu none the less. There will be no bang, or apocalyptic event, but more precisely, a whisper. A portent of things to come. For true legends never start out legendary. Or do they?

“I raise you one million.” A heavily jeweled hand with a cigar between the fingers tapped a button on the table. A single platinum chip printed and spit out onto the green felt in front of him. The large man locked eyes with the woman across the table from him and tossed the chip onto the pile between them.

“Too rich for my blood.” The tall, thin man to his left shook his head. Brilliant green eyes belied his lack of interest in the game. Placing his cards face down on the table, he leaned back into his chair, smirking as he folded his arms.

“Stop cheating, Glen.” The blond-haired woman to his left didn’t look at him as she kept her gaze locked with the large man across the table from her.

He raised both hands, palms up, and shrugged, “what? I folded.”

“Exactly. Now stop signaling Jani.” Regina snapped and printed out two platinum pieces. “I’ll take your bet and raise you another mill.”

The large man, with several rings on each hand, that said more about who he was, rather than his fashion sense, glared at the smaller man. "If I find out you're cheating, I will break you in half and feed you to the sharks."

Glen Horthman grimaced and nodded his understanding. "Of course, your grace." Standing up from the table, he took a step back. "On that note, I am going to go get something to eat. Anyone else?"

Next to Regina, Janicia Amanda Tellerman, a tall thin super-model, who was most recently on the cover of the Imperious Gala Times, smiled eagerly and folded her cards face down on the table. "I think I will come with you, Glen. My hand is awful anyway."

"Wise choice." The large duke chuckled.

"I thought so." The model smirked and followed Glen from the room.

"Have I told you how much I love this ship?" The duke grinned at her, showing a row of perfect white teeth that seemed to sparkle in his darker complexion.

The light-skinned blond woman with deep blue eyes nodded. "Every time you come to play dathalu with me."

"Willing to bet it?"

"Nope."

"Fine, then I call." Laying the cards down dramatically, his grin widened as he burst into a full-throated laugh. "Kalune!"

Regina grinned and nodded leisurely. "You win again your grace." She didn't look down at her hand as she folded the cards neatly and slid her own hand to the bottom of the deck. Picking up the rest of the cards around the table, she shuffled them.

"You are having an off week, my dear." He chuckled.

"Apparently." Agreeing, she dealt the usual six cards to the four seats at the table.

As they waited for the other two to return, from wherever they'd wandered off to, she got up to pour herself a drink from the bar behind her.

"Get me a scotch, would you love?" He asked.

Without turning, she nodded.

"Now that it's just the two of us, I have a problem I hope you can help me with."

She raised an eyebrow in curiosity as she leaned far over the table, so he could see down her deep cut blouse. Setting his drink in front of him, she smirked. She placed a knee on the seat of her chair and leaned against the back, sipping her drink as she waited for him to continue.