



Deep Shade of a Villain

DEEP SHADE OF A VILLAIN

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World Design by Richard W. Porter III

“ *...the number one problem with living longer than the younger races, is the children you raised and loved, grow old and die in front of you. The result often makes older races appear harsh or uncaring, when the reality is that they have just learned to harden their feelings against the loss they know will come all too soon. Remember that as you listen to this story unfold before you.* ”

-Leon Hamilton

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“Good evening, captain. What can I get you tonight?” A gentle voice cut through the dull roar of conversations and gambling. It belonged to an elegant, yet slightly older human named Mary. One of the many servers at the Rusty Anchor.

This tavern was a unique five story building nestled in the wealthier end of the docks district. The original builder has set it up against the firewall, high on the hill, overlooking the large man-made harbor. It was a spectacular vantage point that allowed the sailors, and captains, that frequented the tavern to see everything happening below.

To take advantage of the amazing view, the owner had built a massive glass window, composed of hundreds of one-foot by one-foot panes of glass. A feat that just didn't exist in this primitive modern world. It made this tavern not only a one of a kind, but the best location to not only eat, drink and relax, but keep any eye on every single ship in the harbor of the capital city of Bugrasi.

For the white-haired elf in the corner who was used to a high-tech society, the only part of the five-story architecture that was unusual, was the size of the panes. In her time, they had built entire skyscrapers from clear glass like materials. But this was a backward world of dinosaurs, knights, kings and barbarians.

Glass was almost entirely unheard of. Unless you were very close friends with the barbarian tribes that wandered the irradiated sand-wastes. Which made this tavern not only unique, but a beacon for all of those with enough money to buy their way in. Which Sadie had accomplished, despite her circumstances.

“Evening, Mary. I'd like a bottle of wine for myself. And when more people are in tonight, I'd like to buy a round.” Sadie smiled at the shorter human woman and pulled out a chair from one of the smaller tables on the ground floor.

The woman beamed brightly. “Then you found your ship after all?”

Sadie nodded as she set a blue bound leather book face down on the table.

“Congratulations!” The woman seemed genuinely pleased by the news.

“Thank you.” As Sadie sat, the woman bounced off towards the bar.

Looking out over the spectacular view of the harbor, she smiled fondly at the hundreds of ships sprinkled across the harbor. In her day, shipping by water was rare, assuming it happened at all. Most ships were leisure vessels, or spaceships. And while many things annoyed her about this alternative version of hell. The return to the sea hadn't been one of them.

Turning her attention inside the massive tavern, she allowed her gaze to pass overhead. Ironically, the fifty-foot tall window wasn't the only unusual thing about the Rusty Anchor. Inside was also a rather impressive feat of engineering, for this backward time anyway. The main ceiling was fifty feet high, with four massive masts used as pillars to support the ceiling. Around the masts, and along the walls, were various balconies. Each balcony was slightly different in design and christened decks. They each had railings, like you would find on a ship, and they varied in size. Some decks even had multiple tables on them. However, the majority only held a single table, large enough for an average ship's officer compliment. All the decks, however, attached to each other via catwalks, rope bridges and the occasional single plank tossed in here and there for drunk entertainment.

Throughout the room, they had strategically scattered several sets of stairs, to make it easier for the wait staff to get to the various levels quickly with heavy loads. The main floor was for general crew or smaller vessels. And the Lion's Shade, captained by the beautiful elf currently going by the name Sadie Feelari, was a small ship in comparison. Sadie was of course not her name, it wasn't even one of her preferred names, but it was the name Robert had stuck her with. Until she could get rid of him, anyway.

The main floor was open seating, unlike the decks overhead. The decks overhead linked the guests with a specific ship or company. Captains could rent the decks by the week. Or longer if they were willing to pay in advance. The decks at the very top of the tavern even had mounted figureheads, signifying that the captain rented them for years or longer.

Sadie was a content to be a lowly floor goer. She enjoyed being among the riffraff, seeing as she was riffraff herself. Leaning her chair back against the wall, she propped her feet up on the table and pulled the blue-bound book into her lap. The waitress set a loaf of bread and a plate of cheese, down next to a slightly dusty bottle of wine, and a perfectly spotless crystal goblet.

With a nod of thanks, Sadie poured the dark red wine into the glass and sniffed it carefully. It was older, she could tell by the bottle. And it smelled sweet and somewhat smoky. Taking a sip, she allowed a contented smile to settle into place.

Turning her attention to the elf behind the bar, she raised her glass in a toast. Unlike her, he was the typical elf found in this fifth age world. All elves were tall, but the more modern versions were also thin, almost emaciated, with high cheekbones and sharply pointed ears that were far too long for their cranium. This elf also had sparkling golden eyes and black hair, though his hair was greying at the temples.

He smiled warmly and nodded to her.

Taking another sip, she turned her attention back to the book. Running her fingers over the scaled leather, she wondered what kind of snake or lizard Leon had found to use as the cover. The scales were slightly iridescent and shone with a faint rainbow in the lantern light. That the scales were blue seemed odd, but taxidermy wasn't really one of her skills. Leon had decorated the cover with a sea motif. Affixing shells to the cover and embossing the leather in a beautiful fishnet pattern. All to enhance the title, Deep Shade of a Villain. Which he had embedded into the cover using what appeared to be scales, or perhaps abalone? As she tilted the book to catch the light, she grinned. No, it was pearl, how à propos.

Opening the cover, she took another sip of the wine as she read the forward.

Age is a determinant variable. And yet we often assign it an indeterminate perception. Are you confused? That was my intent. In this vast universe of ours, one can travel for their entire lifetime and never see the same place twice. No matter what species that individual is. There are common races that live thousands of years, and races that live only a few decades.

Younger races, is the general term used for races that live less than 200 years on average. These younger races are in every corner of the various galaxies. They are also the most prolific, making them the most numerous. They also make up most of my readers. I only bring this up to explain my point about age being an indeterminate perception.

I have traveled extensively in my lifetime. And the most often asked question I encounter centers on Shade and her age, or the length of her prison sentence. My critics like to use the length of her sentence as proof that she never existed. After all, 5000 years is impossible to a younger race's, perceived notion of time, anyway.

Yet, as any older race will tell you, there is a fundamental difference between the younger and older races. Younger races often find it fascinating that a race could live for thousands of years. If you were to ask an elf, for example, what it was like to live for a thousand years or more, the first thing they would tell you is that it is not as wonderful as it may seem.

By now, my dear reader, you are likely bored by all of this prattling on about age. I assure you this applies to the story. You see, the number one problem with living so much longer than the younger races, such as a human, is that friends and loved ones grow old and die. While the elder races, such as elves, continue on, seemingly unchanged. The result often causes the elf, as in our example, to appear harsh or uncaring, when the reality is, that they have simply learned to harden their feelings against the loss they know will come all too soon. Remember that as this story unfolds before you.

“Mr. Gafaldi, I understand the importance of prototypes. And yes sir, I believe the threat to your prototype is credible. However, according to the anonymous threat you received yesterday, you have a week to get the money together. That is more than enough time to get the security measures in place. Trust me, this is my specialty. You will have a team there by morning, they are already in route. We will find the perfect solution for your security needs.”

The tall, elegant elf stepped up the clear wall, and allowed her gaze to drift across the sprawling city lights below, out over the moonlit ocean in the distance, then back to the stocky holographic image of a male dwarf to her left. A soft smile played across her lips as she attempted to calm the panicked dwarf. “I assure you Gendral, Shadowband Solutions will secure your prototype. No one will get their hands on it but you. These threats will be mitigated. We will take care of everything, including forensics, in case you wish to turn over any evidence to the authorities.”

“No!” the dwarf snapped suddenly, and Helena arched a single eyebrow. He shook himself and looked off to the side, clearly avoiding her gaze. “I mean, the