



# Silhouettes in the Shade

*Written by Wendi Coffman Porter*  
*World Design by Richard W. Porter III*

“ There is an old adage, that professionals don't make big mistakes, they make little ones. And while that is true, even in the case of a professional like Shade. The true mark of greatness is when, that professional, plans for the mistakes they know will eventually happen. There is of course no way to know what the mistake will be, so the plan needs to be broad, and more flexible than typical. And all too often, utterly final. ”

-Leon Hamilton

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## **Rune 23rd, 26552 (Starting of spring)**

Sadie halted on the corner of Foundry and Keller and scanned the surroundings. She'd locked herself in her lab for over a week, doing research. She needed a break. A stiff breeze kicked up and blew her silky white hair into her face. Brushing back, she finally saw what she was looking for. Bugarasi was a decent sized city for this fourth-age apocalypse. It's lack of running water or power, originally annoyed her to the point of rage. But she was growing accustomed to it. The last trip to Viniccia taught her to suck it up and try new things. So that was the goal today. To explore a new section of the city that she had never considered before.

Down thirty yards, and across the street, there was a cute-looking restaurant, with outdoor seating. The covered patio had several flowering vines that wove intricately through the strategically placed trellises, which separated the patio from the sidewalk. It looked perfect. Overhead, thunder rolled leisurely across the city. The storm was still miles away, but she could already feel the barometer dropping as the rain threatened.

Swiftly crossing the street, she made her way down the raised sidewalk to the woman standing at the entrance. She wore a simple work dress, with an off-white apron. Her hair was a beautiful deep shade of red, which matched nicely with her lighter complexion and emerald green eyes. It was the first red-head that Sadie had seen in Bugarasi.

"Good morning, ma'am." The woman smiled sweetly at her.

The elf returned the smile and nodded her head. "Good morning. Do you have room for me on the patio?"

"I think we can fit you in." The woman chuckled and waved her open palm towards empty patio tables. "Pick anyplace you like. Though I recommend in the center near the door. It'll remain dry, even when the storm hits."

"Thank you." Picking a table near one of the large open double doors, the elf pulled a book from her bag and set it down on the table.

The woman set a warm loaf of bread on the table. The steam rising off it smelled amazing. "Would you like some tea, or perhaps some wine? We have several good elven vintages."

"Do you have anything harder?"

The woman beamed brightly, her emerald green eyes twinkling. "We have several. But I highly recommend our Tepani Cognac."

"That sounds wonderful. I will take that, and whatever the special is today."

The woman nodded. "Rendali, our chef, anticipated the weather. So, our special is bouillabaisse."

"Perfect." Sadie smiled brightly. She might not regret this after all.

Bowing slightly, the woman hurried off into the restaurant.

Overhead, the sky flashed. It was several seconds before the thunder chased the flash across the city. As the first large drops of water fell, the elf smiled. She loved the smell that came with the first drops of rain. It always made her think of Jostten Nine. There was something magical about that place. But it was likely just the purity of it. A purity which was missing on most of the worlds that Sadie had been to in her long lifetime.

Tearing a piece of bread from the loaf, she inhaled the warm fragrance. It smelled amazing. And she wondered what kinds of spices they had mixed into the bread to give it the amazing aroma. As she took a bite, her body sagged in the chair. It tasted like it smelled, amazing! She had a new favorite restaurant, and she didn't care how the rest of the food tasted.

Chewing the bread happily, she skimmed the cover of the book resting on the table. Like the other Shade novels. The book had a thick leather binding with heavy tooling. The image appeared to be a digi-board of some kind. On it, several images hung that showed various types of weapons and pieces of jewelry. Smack in the center of the other images was a silhouette of a humanoid, from the waist up. Carefully tacked into the leather was a red silk thread which tied each of the images to the single silhouette in the center. The title was pure gold and mounted tightly to the wooden cover under the leather. It read: *Silhouettes in the Shade*.

As she folded the cover open, the sky flashed overhead, followed almost immediately by a torrential downpour.

There is an adage that professionals don't make big mistakes, they make little ones. And while that is true, even with a professional like Shade. The true mark of greatness is when that professional plans for the mistakes they know will eventually happen. There is of course no way to know what the mistake will be, so the plan needs to be broad, and more flexible than typical. And all too often, utterly final.

When one of those minor mistakes led to Imperial Investigative Officers showing up on Shade's doorstep with badges in hand. She already had a plan. A game, if you will. A bloody game of shadows and misdirection. Using the bright spotlight of the law, she traced her little singing canary. And eliminate two annoying birds, with one well-placed two-ton boulder. Well, bomb actually.

"Ms. Dalmoore?"

The blonde-haired human looked up to her beautiful dark-haired aide. It was the third secretary in the last two years, but this one seemed to her job with some level on competency.

"You have..." the woman hesitated, she clearly wasn't sure how to finish the sentence. "Guests."

Arching an eyebrow, Regina pursed her lips. Her aide knew better than to just let anyone without an appointment. Which meant there was something wrong. Leaning back in her chair, the CEO of Seasprite Engineering folded her arms across her chest. "Show them in, I suppose."

To most, folding her arms was just a sign of annoyance. But for the elf pretending to be human, it was a sign that she felt the need to be near her weapons. Her specially designed shoulder holster was a stealth rig. Specifically designed to hide weapons from any form of scan, including visual. It did so by tucking the weapons into quantum space, making them not actually on this plane of existence.

A woman in a well-tailored dark grey pant-suit stepped into her office. She had brown hair and eyes, and a confident air that told Regina all she needed to know. Government.

Behind her, an orcish male with dark brown skin, and piercing green eyes stepped into the office. He wore a spectacular black, tailored suit with a green power tie that matched his eyes perfectly. He was clearly the one in charge. Based on the value of the suit alone.

"Welcome to Seasprite Engineering. How can I help the Helandigari Empire today?" Regina beamed brightly, but didn't move her arms.

The human female narrowed her eyes angrily, but the male smirked.

"Thank you for seeing us on such short notice, Ms. Dalmoore." The orc reached inside his coat and pulled out a badge. Imperial Investigate Service. "We want to ask you a few questions about an associate of yours."

Regina smiled and finally waved a hand, palm up, towards the chairs facing her desk. "I am, as always, a loyal citizen of the Empire. Have a seat, I will answer anything I can."

The woman seemed to hesitate, but when her lead passed her to sit down, she sighed and followed suit.

"Thank you." His voice was deep, which was often the case with the species.

Regina smiled warmly and wondered how seriously he took his job. He was handsome, with those deep green eyes and genuine smile. His broad shoulders and square jaw belied a strong build underneath that perfectly tailored suit, which was more common in the orcish species than it was typical of humans or elves. A few nights with him might be entertaining, especially if she could get a few drinks in him.

"We are looking for a person who goes by the alias Shade." He watched her intently as he said the name.

Regina knew this game well. She gave him the tell he was looking for. Her breathing shifted slightly, and she blinked several times at the mention of the name. To pretend that she didn't know the name was ridiculous. Even in her brief career, Shade was gaining some rather serious notoriety. And to pretend that there was no link between herself and the thief, she'd been brokering work for, was folly.