

The Roses Anthology

*Kira's main friend group and resident super bestie team, the Roses.
Learn more about Tobbin, Drake and Rosie.*

Meet the Roses, Act One

“I’m sorry. Who are you four meant to be again?”

“I’m Kira! I work at the tailor’s down by the canal.
But I’m also an Earth Wielder.
Watch this! HIYAH!!”

The dirt in the plant pot on the countertop wobbled and spilled over, cracking the pottery in one fell swoop. “Shit, didn’t mean for that to...”

“Hey! Hey, down here...!” A small hand waved, and looking under the countertop revealed a gnerdy looking gnome with the sort of vestments an altar boy would usually wear while swinging around a censer. He swiped the beads of his abacus from one side to the other and said “I’m Tobbin Nebert... I ran the numbers, the Light says you have a one-hundred-and-one chance of helping us.”

Suddenly, a figure appeared from nowhere sitting on the countertop and ran his fingers through long, raven hair. “We don’t need the Light. There must be something here, I just know it... I may not remember everything but even through my amnesia I know that there is something important waiting here. It must be related to my horribly traumatic past...!” He waxed lyrical until Kira pounded him in the chest. “Shut it, Drake! You don’t have amnesia, you just want attention!” In sheer embarrassment, he slinked back into the shadows and became unseen. “Says you...”

Finally a red-hatted woman stood at the back of the group. Her tall pointy wizard hood made her look even taller than Drake did, but her words were so important and meaningful she barely needed to utter a few words. Her lips weaved a simple phrase...

“I am Rosie”

Kira grabbed Tobbin and dramatically posed!
“And together we are; THE ROSES!”

The lady behind the countertop, nor the group of people waiting in line behind them, seemed particularly interested.

“Look... I’ll check but I don’t think there’s going to be anything here.” She got off her chair and walked down the hall.

They were at King Llane Library, one of the oldest in the city (at least of those to survive all the cataclysms and orcish hordes and giant death dragons), on a mission to uncover a mystery.

They waited and waited and waited...

Tobbin pulled out his notebook and did some maths for fun like the little fuckin' nerd he is.

Drake sat upside down on a chair, invisibly, but when someone came in and thought it was an empty seat they understandably freaked out.

Kira tried, and failed, to put the plant pot back together and just made more of a mess.

Meanwhile Rosie was the only normal person and she just stood patiently.

Finally, the librarian lady came back with her glasses hanging off those weird little chain things that only absolutely ancient people wear and pushed a book forward.

"Consider me surprised, there's actually something for it."

Kira grabbed the tome and dramatically swept off a layer of dust to reveal its name...

The Treasure of South Ward.

"We got it! Haha!" triumphantly cried Kira.

"No way..." Tobbin's mind was blown and splattered on the floor.

"So it's real, then?" Drake kept his cool and acted like he wasn't impressed.

"Interesting." Rosie added importantly.

"That will be five copper," Librarian Lady asked.

Kira patted her trousers down, then her jacket pockets, then her socks for good measure.

"Shit. Anyone got some spare change on them?"

Meet the Roses, Act Two

Ah, South Ward! You can say a lot about Old Town. You can say it's smelly, and damp, and unclean, and run down, derelict, forgotten by anyone of actual repute, known only for being exceedingly dangerous, full of gangs, drunkards, and worst of all: old people.

But there was one thing you could never say!

That this damn place doesn't have damn history!

South Ward was unique in the sense that the people here actually had a chance to rebuild after getting their houses burned down three times but that's a story for another day.

All you gotta know is that this one district was built on three layers of ruins... there was The Surface, below that Midtown, and even further than that? We don't talk about that.

But exposition is boring, right?

Who needs lore!

Kira and the Roses walked down to the canalside market, picked up a steaming hot curry from Uncle Ling (and they're basically his best customers at this point) and slammed down the book they brought.

"Who will read it?" Drake asked, assuming already that it won't be him.

Everyone looked at their resident four-eyes, and Tobbin scoffed.

"Why do you guys always assume I'm the one who should read?"

"Come on, you love reading, Tobbers!!"

"Never call me that again, Kira." He frowned. "Anyway I read it on the way here."

"Knew it! Thought we was gonna have to have a whole like, twenty minute montage of us pouring through. Whatsit say?"

Tobbin flipped to page sixty nine.

"Snrrk."

"Hehehe.."

"Are you two children *seriously* laughing at that?" Drake snatched the book away and read it.

"Hm... a secret tunnel, through the southern wall down to Midtown... leads to a hidden

bunker a noble used to escape the Horde? That must be where the General Store is now!"

And so the four set off on their grand quest! They travelled over hill and dale, a rousing soundtrack following their every step, they met many people and fought many monsters, learned of the secrets of the world and of themselves and made memories along the way... Nah, just kidding.

They walked down the road and were at the general store in like, five minutes.

"No" Sam replied. This was General Store Sam, which isn't his legal name but no one knew that one. He ran the General Store (as the name suggested), and the little hanging sign outside literally labelled "General Store" showed that that was its actual name too. But it was a tiny little thing nestled into a tunnel built under the wall blocking South Ward off from the canal. Wait, where were we again? Oh right!

"No to what? No you haven't seen anything or that you don't know anything?" Drake was insistent, showing Sam the book and the excerpt that quite clearly described what the general store was now was actually once a tunnel into the bunker.

"No, I haven't seen anything and I don't know anything." Sam hated being more verbose than he needed to, which was probably why he and Rosie got along so well.

"Well that's completely unhelpful..." Drake sighed, flicking his hair out of his eyes again, but Sam wasn't done talking. "I do hear things though."

"Like what?"

"Footsteps."

Meanwhile, Kira and Tobbin had split up to investigate elsewhere and frankly weren't paying attention to Drake across the room. There had to be a false wall somewhere of course... Tobbin ran the numbers, calculating exactly where such an entrance would have to be in an area to not crack wide open under the weight on top of them. and figured it was behind the shelf with all the canned goods on it.

"Through here?" Kira pointed at the wall.

"Mhm." Tobbin nodded.

"Are you *sure*?"

"Of course, Kira. The Light is never wrong."

"Well, if it's never wrong then let's spill the beans!"

Kira stepped back, got a good distance, stretched, jogged on the spot to limber up, and then charged straight at the shelves!

"Wait, Kira! Stop! Not like that!"

It was too late. Kira smashed clear through the wall, everyone watched and gasped in slow motion, they saw her charge headfirst into the secret bunker room which was right where Tobbin said it was me...

The only problem?

The room was full of armed thugs.

And they had just got to the treasure first.

Meet the Roses, Final Act

Kira burst through the wall into the bunker.

“Oh YEAHHH!!”

Sixteen guns from the bad guys pointed at her, cocked and ready.

“Oh no...”

A hail of gunfire spat out through the broken wall into the general store, peppering it with powder, bullets ricochetting everywhere! Rosie sighed, couldn’t they just have one sensible outing? Kira hid behind a chunk of cover she created and waited until the bullets stopped, and turned back around to peek out.

“Oof!”

“Hrrk!”

“Biff!”

“Pow!”

It seemed like the bad guys were fighting ghosts for how they were smacked with their own floating weapons, their pressure-points pinched, tumbling to the ground. A voice from the Great Invisible Drake spoke to Kira. “Are you hiding or are you helping?”

“Was just waiting for an opening!” She snarked, flipped over her wall and in one fluid rotation ripped the thing off the ground to send it hurtling into their ranks.

Tobbin wobbled in amidst the smoke and dust and the pewpewpew of all the guns to call out.

“Uhm... does anyone need healing?

No?

I’ll uhm... I’ll be over here...”

Tobbin turned, Tobbining over to the other side of the room, until the shockwave from Kira raising the roof then subsequently dropping it onto a bunch of villains toppled him and sent him tumbling away. Rosie held out her arm without looking and caught him, before putting him down and briskly brushing him off.

Rosie stared at the bad guys, an expression shadowed under her hood.

A single flare of bright light burned from her right eye as she whispered a word of raw pyromantic power. “*Ixen.*”

The room lit up, and a blaze swept across its length. One by one the villains ignited, consumed by the flame, their flesh turning black, eyes bubbling in their-
“Rosie! We can’t hurt them *that* bad, remember?”

Rosie turned towards her and quickly replied, “Oh”, and without a second of hesitation the flames quickly swirled and combusted only their trousers instead.

“Cheers, Rosie! Time to finish these fuckers.”

Kira kicked the ground and manifested a massive maul, made of hard granite, and swung it around and around and around and around until it landed and...

[STONE CYCLONE!!]

Blasted them out from the room, through the wall, and into next week!

Tobbin hi-fived Kira, Drake rolled his eyes and seemed aloof, and Rosie looked down at Kira with a judgy sort of glance.

“So... how’d I do?” Kira grinned.

“You were average.”

“YES! LET’S GO!!”

Now they had a chance to look around, the four soon realised that maybe finding the treasure wouldn't be so easy.

Sure, this place was a bunker... there was a bed, stashes of food, clothes, plenty of water... but no riches like they had been promised.

“Guys. Over here.” Drake pointed to a safe he had managed to jimmy open.

Opening it with the correct combination revealed the contents to be a note.

“My name is Sir Journathan Southerway

For any who see this, I must be long gone.

The orcs have killed me and my family.

You want my treasure? Go ahead and take it. I left all I owned in this one spot. Just see if you can find it!”

Drake flipped the note over to find a map more cryptic and complex than any they could ever have imagined.

Kira yanked the map out of his hand and spoke.

“Oh come on! With a letter like that, it makes it sound like we've barely just started!!”

My Mission

It was a frigid Thursday morning, absolutely unbearable for any sensible person's standards if they found themselves inside a drafty chapel before the sun had even risen or the candles lit. Sometimes, Mr. Mangetout wondered if he deserved it. Those burning shadows might have scoured the world in flame but he knew he would never feel the warmth coming off them. They would only burn him like ice.

So why? Why do this? Why keep up a charade he no longer felt he believed in? Why the secrets, the prayers under the moonlight reflected from his Devil-God's jaw, why come here and still think that anyone would come to the next reading from a false prophet.

He thought so, until he heard footsteps from creaky floorboards. It was only when Tobbin walked out from behind the pews and came down the aisle that he saw who it was.

Mangetout's face became grim, stern. He had shared too much already with them, bore his soul only to be told that he was wrong and to rebuke or be annihilated. He expected this boy to be the same, like those zealous knights who destroyed the community he had before and left him with barely anything else. He looked at Tobbin and confronted him.

"What do you want?"

"I uhh... wanted to see if you were still doing another service this week."

Mangetout was taken aback, but found it hard to do anything but double down. All too easily the words he spoke came filled with venom when he did not need to pretend who he was.

"Why would I? What's the point of anything? Your friends will just come around and kill me soon enough anyway and hope I will have saved them the effort by then."

Tobbin frowned. The words hurt him as much as they seemed to for Mangetout. It was difficult to hear. After all, in their meeting he thought the two of them had made a connection. Both Tobbin and Mangetout felt like outcasts within their own communities, expected to act a certain way or withstand a pressure they weren't built to handle. He saw a little bit of himself in Mangetout, when he spoke of finding the cult to be his home not because he cared about being the one ending the world but only because he was too scared to see it end alone. But Tobbin's answer was different and he saw Mangetout might see it too.

"Are you scared of your vision?" Tobbin asked, and Mangetout replied and stammered with weak resolve. "I will survive it anyway that I need to." Tobbin was stubborn and did not let up. "I believe you. I believe your vision is real, and that you're gonna survive it. I just don't think it will be the burning shadows that does it. You don't really believe in it... you said so."

"But I have nothing else!" Mangetout snapped. "Even you three, who I thought saw what I saw, would rather toss me aside."

"No... I'm sorry. Rosie didn't mean what she said, she isn't good with words. I don't know her history with the cult or why she has the symbol on her wrist if she hasn't but we do want to help you."

"You're lying... it's just another trick." He was like a beaten dog, thrown onto the streets. Any sign of kindness was taken as a threat.

"Please... just listen okay? I'm just some kid. We're not out to hurt you," Tobbin said, holding his hands out in an empty and dark church under a wavering candlelight. He continued, "You said that you wanted certainty... that it seemed like the bad guys always had the upper hand because they had the power to destroy the world. But what did that do for them? The scourge lost, the Legion lost, the void lost! Where is Deathwing now? He's dead... his jaw is

hanging up for everyone to see, not 'cause they wanted to rub it in but to remind people that he lost. He's a loser! But you know what the winner is? The Light... every single bad guy got beaten by good guys using the light..." Tobbin gestured to the flame then, seeing it flickering madly from the words he spoke filling the space. "When you took your first service here, I could feel the light from you. It was here. It was real. If you want certainty, and to have people to stand by against hopelessness, and you want that hope... then maybe I can help you."

Tobbin thought that was a great speech. He thought it addressed every problem that Mangetout had, to consider the logical argument in that very gnomish way. The light, ostensibly, was success. To ally with it completed everything and more that Mangetout wanted. It never lost, it was pure, in the church he could find a community and Tobbin knew that if he could make it then surely someone far more pious at heart than him in Mangetout would soon find friends and his own success in the clergy. The light meant redemption. It would not care he was a cultist before, only that he had found his calling now. So many of the clergy were criminals or outlaws who sought a home and they found one. Tobbin found courage in certainty too, and this speech had a ninety-nine percentage chance of success.

But it's always the one percent that gets you.

"No. I've gone through too much. I've seen too much. It's not... just go, Tobbin. I don't want to see you here again. Just go." Mangetout said, waving his hand to sweep him away with a cloud of ash from the candle.

Tobbin went back out into the dark, fists clenched tightly in his pocket.

What had gone wrong? What variables had he failed to consider?

He wasn't ready to give up yet.

This was his mission, and Tobbin knew the light always won.

Statistically Perfect

It was the start of the new year.

Like everyone else, Tobbin had resolutions.

For Mr. Mangetout, it was to spend more time with the community he once believed was fated to die.

For Sister Radiantstar, it was to refresh the Cathedral gardens with new growth.

And for Father Cohen, he was already statistically perfect but still decided to make an effort to raise more funds for the local orphanage.

Maybe that was why he was perfect?

Tobbin, however, had no resolution.

In fact he had already ran the numbers, and resolved that he was not perfect.

All of his friends,

Drake,

Rosie,

Kira,

They were perfect.

Drake was cunning, quick-witted, his invisibility made him reliable.

Rosie was kind, strong, and never said a word if she wasn't sure it would make a difference.

Plus it helped that she was a smokin' hot dragon lady.

And then Kira too. She was fearless, she never let anything get her down, and she always tried as hard as she could.

Their perceived shortcomings were just that. Perceived. They didn't really exist.

His did though.

He was weak,

Scared,

Useless.

Didn't even have a resolution.

Tobbin sat in a quiet prayer room by the candlelight.

He needed a sign. He needed anything. The Light had to give him one, didn't it?

Sixty six point six recurring. Those were the odds.

But Tobbin wasn't too familiar with that calculation.

Odds for, or odds against?

At this point, he saw it more like fifty-fifty.

But then, by this complete chance, utter happenstance.

Tobbin stood up.

The prayer room he was in, now, it was lightly decorated.

It had a few idols from the various faiths across the world.

An incandescent set of crystal wind chimes, invoking the comforting song of the Naaru.

A hammer bearing the emblem of Khaz'goroth,

The Silver Hand shield,

Pandaren Prayer Scrolls,

Holy burning incense,

Depictions of the saints.

But as the candlelight reflected all of these, and from where Tobbin sat, a reflection only bounced off one item.

An item seemingly forgotten among the other more popular symbols.

One item that did not reference one faith or creed in particular,

Like even the Cathedral had placed it just to fill the space.

But Tobbin saw it so clearly,

Shine so brilliantly,

That he knew this was his sign.

Tobbin had seen a metal cogwheel.

“Father Cohen?” Tobbin came to his chamber and kneeled down. “I know what my resolution is.”