

# WSFA JOURNAL

## JULY/AUGUST 2013

### July 5th First Meeting -Virginia

Attendance: Drew Bittner, Carolyn Frank, Bill Lawhorn, Brian Lewis, Sam Lubell, Sarah Mitchell, Barry Newton, Kathi Overton, Judy and Sam Scheiner, George Shaner, Ivy Yap, Madeleine Yeh, Rohit Rastogi, Carla Aguiar

As Cathy Green was at the North American Discworld Convention, former Secretary Sam Lubell took the minutes.

Kathi Overton was there, recovered from her 4<sup>th</sup> of July extravaganza. She biked there.

President Barry Newton called the meeting to order 21:22 hours. No treasurer's report. Sam S. doesn't have the passwords and the ex-treasurer isn't here. Trustees have nothing, we had an election, new officers have been inducted. Bill Lawhorn noted he hadn't seen the new secretary yet. No new members at this meeting. Sam L. and Cathy G. are interchangeable (we are both New York Jews who are Harvard '89 and former residents of Mather House, so the confusion is understandable). Sam had to remind Barry that he was not the secretary anymore. Committee to Talk SF will do the Hugo nominees (except the novels which will be the third Friday discussion).

WSFA Small Press Award. Bill L. said Paul asked if you haven't got the password, email him. Same password as last year. Deadline is August 16. Bill has physical copies of stories, see him if you want to look at those. Bill said to vote for Small Press. Carolyn said someone else has to read the stories. Cutoff is August 16<sup>th</sup>. Sarah said: we have stories, read them. They are right here.

Capclave Present - Sam S. said 306 attendees, including members from New Orleans, Chicago, Indiana, Ireland, and two from Sweden. (The Swedes happened to be coming here anyway and they saw the announcement.) A lot of people registered in May and June, but not this week so not worried about going over hotel capacity. Still need volunteers. There is a link on the website that will go to Sam L. Need assistance with Registration, consuite, door guards. Bob said each room has limited capacity. Bill asked Barry about ribbons. Sam S said we have lots. Some over-ordered. Noted on Facebook page, soliciting program ideas. Bill said stopped into hole in the wall books, people have been taking bookmarks.

Capclave Future - proposed book for 2014, original novella by Genevieve Valentine. Title is Dream Houses. She has attended Capclave before. Bill read the opening. To move forward, we have to authorize the spending, preferred run, 250 limited, 1000 trade hardbacks (not signed and numbered), chapbook size, no reprint. \$8 - \$10 thousand, covers author, artist, print run. Assume \$20-\$25, assuming half sold to dealers at discount would be about \$4,000 surplus. Break even would be about half, depending how many sold full price versus dealers. It will be about same length as the Valente book. Don't know if it is already done. Can have the book done early so no last minute scramble. Sam L. said we authorized discussions, not spending. Bob seconded the motion, tabled because no quorum, so will officially be old business. Sam L. said don't count the nominations before the story is written.

Kathi asked about past books. Sam S. said we did second print run on Valente because we sold out. We still have about a hundred Jeff Vandermeer books left in stock and some Carrie Vaughn. The old WSFA press books are being used for bundles. Clarksesworld may do a podcast version. On the Skin Trade book, Rick Berry has finished the illustrations and the check has been sent. The signature sheets were sent to GRRM.

Capclave Far Future: Brian said Check Hyatt in Tyson. Contact Barry about a website that lists all hotels and facilities. Not set on date if hotel makes offer.

Don't know of old business. New/Capclave business is tabled.

Two people here for second meeting – Carla, she writes fantasy and sf, does freelance graphic design. Found out about us from Capclave and Balticon. Rohit is here for his second meeting. Likes science fiction. Has time on his hands. Does IT. 10 years ago a friend told him about us, he moved out, found out about us again from Meetup.com. Suggested that the meetup page says people will come even if not signed up on meetup. <Contact John S.>

Announcements: Brian Lewis said Lee Strong and himself have been Tuckerized by Charles Gannon in David Weber Worlds of Honor 6: Beginnings. Brian disappears halfway through the story but both survive (unusual for tuckerizations). Kathi thanked WSFA for coming to the Fourth of July. We thanked her. Tree coming down on Monday, open canopy for a while. Hoping for a shed for Halloween. It will be haunted by default. Drew said Katherine is concerned over possible layoffs, so is looking for financial analyst/ reconciliation positions. Mr. Walsh not here so no commercials. Meeting adjourned unanimously at 22:00 exactly.

### **July 19<sup>th</sup> Third Friday Meeting – Maryland**

Attendance: Cathy Green, Madeleine Yeh, Mike Walsh, Drew Bittner, Brielle Bittner, Joe Gillan, John Madigan, Barry Newton, Joe Gillan, Eva Whitley, Brian Lewis, Judy Newton, Bob MacIntosh, Laura Somerville, Carolyn Frank, Sam Lubell, Mike Taylor, Ivy Yap, Randy Licht, Erica Ginter, Candy Madigan

Meeting called to order at 9:15pm.

There was no treasurer's report.

The May/June WSFA Journal was available. Publications – WSFA Press website is fine and selling books, WSFA website is plugging along, Facebook is active, as is Capclave twitter feed. Meet up is at around 162 people.

Entertivities noted that Pacific Rim, Red 2 and RIPD had opened. Also, Robert Picardo made an appearance at Fantom Comics in Union Station.

Capclave Present: Mike Walsh noted we're having a Capclave. GRRM book is coming along nicely. Cover art is worked out and pre-order ability should be set up on the website soon. Bill Lawhorn is busy programming away. Registrations are coming in consistently and we're on track to hit 600 with no problem.

Capclave Future: We're having a Capclave. GOHs are Paolo Bacigalupi, Holly Black, Genevieve Valentine. We're staying at our current hotel.

Capclave Far Future: Things are proceeding apace.

Committee to Actually Discuss SF will talk about the Best Novel Hugo nominees.

WSFA Small Press Awards: You have until August 16 to vote. Everyone should vote so Cathy has to bake chocolate stuff.

Old Business: WSFA voted that WSFA Press could spend up to \$10,000 on the Genevieve Valentine original novella for Capclave 2014. Vote was 14 in favor, 0 against and 2 abstentions. Madeleine Yeh noted she was abstaining in Bill Lawhorn's place.

New Business: We voted to send Steve S. a get well card and to send a sympathy card to Marty Gear's family and to donate \$100 to charity in Marty's memory.

People here for their first, second and third meetings: Brielle Bittner was there for her first meeting. Joe Gillan was there for his second meeting, Randy was there for his third meeting and blamed John Madigan.

Announcements: Secretary made the usual announcement about people needing to email her announcements so that they would be reproduced accurately and she also asked for content for the Journal. John Madigan made the usual host announcement about the bunnies, the dogs, the money, the donation hat and the bathrooms. Cathy Green read the obituary for Marty Gear that BSFS sent. Brian Lewis noted that the FYE in Annandale was having a 40-70% off DVD sale. Eva Whitley announced her company was hiring a web developer and interested people should see her after the meeting for more information. George Zeiner had emailed WSFA about SF paperbacks and Analog magazines he wished to give away.

Meeting was adjourned at 21:56.

Marty Gear Passes:

Marty Gear, 74, (Martin Gear) died in his sleep sometime early on July 18, 2013. Marty's son Danny plans to hold a memorial, however, no other plans have been made as yet. We will send notice when plans are finalized. Marty was Balticon 21 Con-Chair in 1987, coming back from the first of his heart attacks early that year, to lead his Balticon to a triumph. He received the Lifetime Achievement Award Recipient from CostumeCon in 1991. He managed and served as Master of Ceremony for almost every Balticon Masquerade since Balticon 15 in 1981. Marty served as committee on many science fiction and costuming conventions including WorldCon and CostumeCon and just weeks ago completed service as Hotel Liaison for Discworld Con. Marty served on the Baltimore Science Fiction Society Board of Directors as Parliamentarian and continued his long time role as Jack L. Chalker Young Writers' Contest Coordinator. He also served as the liaison to the school for the BSFS Books for Kids program . He had last week announced his intention to leave the BSFS BOD in September to concentrate on the Balticon Masquerade and Young Writers' Contest. He was active in the Costumers Guild of America and particularly the Greater Columbia Chapter of the Guild. In non-SF-fandom, Marty managed his own company Martin Gear Consulting Ltd. He will be missed by all of SF fandom.

## **August 1<sup>st</sup> First Friday Meeting – Virginia**

Attendance: Cathy Green, Sam Lubell, Sam Scheiner, Judy Scheiner, Bob MacIntosh, Barry Newton, Mark Roth, Laura Somerville, Madeleine Yeh, Ivy Yap, Jim Thomas, Gayle Surette, Paul Haggerty, Sarah Mitchell, Bill Lawhorn, Jamie Todd Rubin, George Shaner, Alan Katerinsky, Michael Walsh

Meeting was called to order at 21:15.

Treasurer's Report: We have money.

Capclave Present: We're on track to hit at least 600 members. We'll have a fan table at Worldcon. People should please sign up for shifts as Cathy Green does not intend to man the table by herself. Planning for the con continues apace.

Capclave Future: GOHs are Paolo Bacigalupi, Holly Black and Genevieve Valentine.

Capclave Far Future: Everything is in the planning stage. Once we have hotel and date things can proceed.

WSFA Small Press Award: Voting ends August 16<sup>th</sup>. Cathy Green encouraged everyone to vote by saying "Go ahead. Make me bake."

Publications: We'll have a July/August combined WSFA Journal. Capclave twitter feed is active with dodo pictures, con info and links to interviews and articles about Capclave GOHs and program participants. The website and the WSFA Press sites are fine. Facebook is active. Meet Up has over 160 members.

Announcements: Secretary- if you want your announcement to be what you said and not what I thought I heard, email it to me. Also, please send content to [editor@wsfa.org](mailto:editor@wsfa.org). Host announcements about bathrooms, drinks and recycling were made.

## **August 16<sup>th</sup> Third Friday Meeting - Maryland**

Attendance: Cathy Green, Bob MacIntosh, Joe Gillan, Barry Newton, Judy Newton, Meridel Newton, Sam Lubell, Carolyn Frank, Michael Ikeda, Bill Lawhorn, Sarah Mitchell, Ivy Yap, Madeleine Yeh, Erica Ginter, Karen North, Shirl Phelps, Billy Aguir, Carla Aguir, Michael Walsh, Thomas Woldering, Serene Gyi, Brian Lewis, Elizabeth Twitchell, Candy Madigan, John Madigan, Kindra, Ron Jones

Meeting called at order by President Barry Newton at 21:15.

There was no treasurer's report, but we have plenty of money.

Capclave Present: 393 paid memberships to date. We are going to need lots of volunteers at con.

Capclave Future: GOHs are Paolo Bacigalupi, Holly Black and Genevieve Valentine.

Capclave Far Future: No hotel or GOHs yet. Brian Lewis again mentioned a new hotel in Tysons Corner that is either a Hyatt or a Hilton

There was discussion about the WSFA Small Press Award

The Committee to Actually Discuss Science Fiction will discuss beach books.

Publications: Website, Facebook page, twitter and WSFA Press were discussed.

There was no old or new business.

There were several people here for their first, second or third meetings: Serena Gyi (Tom's friend); Ron Jones, finally back for another meeting after 3 years now that he's not working Friday nights; Bill Aguir who was brought by Carla, who has freelanced for some tabletop gaming companies and wrote for the Serenity tabletop game, which got an Origins Award; Carla Aguir; and Joe Gillan

162 people are signed up for the WSFA Meet Up group. John Sapienza wants someone to take over. If Elizabeth Twitchell stays in town, she will do it.

Announcements: The bunnies are free range, watch where you step. The money on the floor is supposed to be there. Don't feed the dogs chocolate. We will send a get well card to John. Mike ois selling books. Tom is moving to Tennessee.

Meeting adjourned at 21:52 hours.

This month we are fortunate to have short fiction by L. Blankenship in addition to the minutes of the WSFA meeting:

"Entry Point 8" was published in the crossover anthology *The Battle of Ebulon*, where fantasy authors sent their novel's main characters to help defend the besieged city of Ebulon. The anthology is available for free on Smashwords.com. I sent Kate, the main character from my gritty fantasy romance series, and this story "takes place" between *Disciple, Part II* and *Disciple, Part III*.

*Disciple, Part III*, will be available September 1, 2013. More information at [discipleofthefount.blogspot.com](http://discipleofthefount.blogspot.com).

### Entry Point 8

by L. Blankenship

The portal of woven kir let me pass, tearing like cobwebs across my arm held before my face. Fresh snow on paving stones crunched under my boot. And the moment my ears reached this new world, this place that had begged for help, the crashing and shouting of battle filled them.

I stood in a small square, at the foot of a snow-covered statue of a knight on a rearing horse,

within sight of city walls and a barred gate. The battlements stood above the timber-and-shingle houses, full of men fighting and surging back and forth.

A shadow fell across me; I turned and saw a riveted brigantine over a mail shirt. Shoulders wrapped in bear fur. Above that, a scowling, scarred man in a battered helmet.

“Who else comes?” he demanded, glaring at the green cloud of kir I’d stepped through. It faded now, shedding tiny stars. “Who else! King Yadi begged for aid and you —” The knight gestured at me, half shrugging. “Who are you?”

I gripped the strap of my medicine bag, across my chest, in both hands. That steadied me. “I’m Kate Bockmann.” I straightened as much as I could, but I still didn’t reach his shoulder; he was a huge man. “Saint Qadeem heard your call for help and sent me.”

A second knight, striding across the square from a formation of some hundred, looked puzzled by me, but not so angry. “Vess, what do we have?”

“We have a girl,” Vess answered, stepping aside and presenting me with a sweep of his arm. “Fifty thousand orcs at the gate and they send us a fucking handmaid. One with — what the hell are those?” He pointed at my Blessing ridges, which parted my blonde hair in two lines across the top of my head.

My resolve quavered as the shouting on the walls above drowned in a rising, inhuman howl. No; Qadeem and my teacher had seen fit to trust me with this, as they had the secret mission.

“I’m a Blessed of Saint Qadeem and the student of the Elect, sir, and I’ll aid you however I can. These are my Blessing.” I ran my fingers over the ridges where they pushed up through my scalp. Being so tall, Vess must have a good view of them. “I remember every moment of every day since I received them. All my skill, all my kir, are at your service. We face invasion, as well, and Wodenberg could hardly spare me, let alone — Prince Kiefan, or...”

The howling on the wall broke and men’s voices surged. I glanced up and saw a red banner with gold crowns advancing across the battlements. Who were they fighting, up there? Orcs — what manner

of men were those?

“And what do you do, miss?” Vess asked.

“I’m a Physician.”

His brow furrowed in a frown, then he threw up his hands and turned away.

“We begged for aid,” the second knight told him. “King Yadi begged, and you know what that cost him. If her people face war as well, that they sent anyone at all — oh, have a little faith, will you?” His reasoning tone slid toward anger. “We’re all to die under the sword, if we fail, and your hangman’s humor only feeds the men’s fears.”

“Watch your tongue, lieutenant.” The bigger man took a sharp step toward him, pointing.

“Sirs!” My standing there was poor use of my healing skills. They both looked to me, the scarred officer scowling, the lieutenant — well, he looked doubtful, but far kinder. “You must have an infirmary?”

Across the square, metal clashed, rattled. We all startled; I whirled around. A grate bounced, among the paving stones, and then flipped open. A drain, it was a grate covering a drain. Up leaped a stocky, mail-shirted man with a heavy spear in both fists. With a roar, he charged as his brothers followed him.

Straight at me. The man, the... orc had tusks. Piggish ears sticking from his helmet. Dusky grey skin. I froze for a heartbeat. They’d brought me to the Winter Wood itself, to face kobolds?

The spear plunged at me and I threw up my arm, kir spinning out. The stubby green shield I knit stopped the iron blade. The blow threw me to the ground with a numbed arm. The orc raised the spear again and a sword took him through the ribs. Blood spurted when the lieutenant kicked him off the blade, and the dying monster fell. He met the second orc head-on — and I was scrambling away, out from underfoot.

The knights rushed across the square before the stream of orcs could organize. I pressed against the statue’s pillar, watching them cut the monsters down. True enough, I was no knight. Surely Kiefan

or Anders would've been better suited to this.

But surely I could help, too.

Vess carved through the enemy, sword slinging off blood with each stroke. Soon enough, they'd fought their way to the open drain, and the big captain threw a dying orc down the hole. Two men flipped the grate back into place, and a third jammed a spear in to wedge it shut. A cheer went up.

I was already slipping from my safety, running to the first fallen knight. Touching his bare cheek, I called his kir-pattern but it didn't answer. He was dead, bled out on the trampled snow. The second was weak and wilting, the whorls of kir in his flesh stumbling and fading as I watched. Among the whorls, the bright lines of his meridians pulsed, fighting death and losing.

Kir powered all charms, and all flesh was kir bent into shape and set to dancing — life was its own charm, my teacher had said. Wounds and sickness broke the flesh's patterns, sending the whorls and threads into tangles and jumbles. Too much confusion, and the patterns lost their dance. Died.

The third was the lieutenant. The spear jammed through his gut wobbled in his hands as he gasped for air. Knuckles white, he tugged at it, and the pain curled him on the paving stones.

"Don't touch it!" I pulled his hands away. His pattern, whirling up in all its dance, frothed around the blank space of the spear shaft. It had missed his prime meridian, along his spine, thank Mother Love. And the cruel thing held in his blood, for now. "The infirmary! Where's your infirmary!"

"Del! Fucking whoreson —" Vess dropped to one knee beside the lieutenant, catching his hand and gripping it. "I shouldn't have let you stay, little cousin — you had to sign up!"

"Who else is wounded?" I glanced around the other knights, seeing some blood. None too serious; they were still on their feet. "Come with us. Where's your infirmary?" I dared shove big Vess, to get his attention. "Let him lie here, and he'll die."

Vess blinked at me, as if I'd told him Del would sprout wings and fly. Then he scrambled up and hoisted his cousin by the shoulders. A second knight took his ankles and they carried him between them. I had to run to keep up.



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The tavern was just a block up from the square.

Its main doors stood open, as did full-length shuttered windows, to let in the clear, winter sunlight. The bustle of wounded soldiers and goodfolk pressed into service for them was dense, but my Blessed memory recognized it. I'd seen as much while assisting my teacher in the surgery during the battle at Ansehen.

When the knights slowed, uncertain what to do, I strode ahead of them toward the man by the door. By how the traffic swirled around him, he had triage duty.

He saw me coming, and the spear through Lieutenant Del, and put up one hand. "Light bless you, child, but he'll not last the watch. Pray with him till he passes." He pointed toward the open doors of a chapel across the street.

"I can mend him. Lend me a table and a pair of hands, no more," I said, stopping before the man. Past his shoulder, I saw the large common room arrayed in a fair infirmary, if over-stocked with patients and thin on physicians. The goodfolk served as orderlies and nurses.

"Miss, you can't know what to —"

Enough of this. I put some kir in my voice, to strengthen it. "Your King Yadi begged my saint for aid, and I came. Now let me save what lives I can. Who has charge, here?"

That cut through the noise. All froze and stared at me. Vess stared, too. I folded my arms; yes, I was only a slip of a girl, sixteen, with a long braid wrapped around my head. I'd watched my teacher cheat death and saved my share of lives. I meant to do more.

One of the surgeons, who hadn't so much as looked up from his work, pulled an arrow free of a soldier's thigh — the man screamed, writhing on the table, and a spurt of blood flew over the surgeon's head. In the quiet, all heard him curse as he reached into the wound. He looked up at last.

Across the room, he answered me with a bitter twist in his voice. "Doctor Ceros at your service, miss. If you're such a wondrous life-saver, come see to this."

I could guess what it was as I trotted across the common room, weaving through patient-laden tables and more laid on the floor. When I reached Ceros' side, he started to speak but I held up one hand. The patient's kir patterns told me all.

The arrow had nicked his artery, in the thigh, and his meridian wavered. The wound was full of blood; Ceros' fingers, pinching the nick shut, were buried in it.

"Think you can stitch through the spray?" he asked, snide.

I'd had a belly-full of such attitude, at home. On the tip of my finger, I wove a little patch charm. "Don't move," I told Ceros, and slipped my finger in next to his. The patient's patterns glowed under my call, showing me just where to place the patch. "Done."

Ceros snorted. I shrugged one shoulder and turned away. "The bar." I told Vess, pointing. It was the only surface left to claim.

"I'll be damned," Ceros said, behind me. He'd let go of the artery, no doubt. "Luzan, assist our little miracle-worker. Who are you?"

"I am your surgeon. Kate."

"Clear that table!" Ceros snapped his fingers, pointing at one in front of the open, full-length windows. The soldier on it lay too still, and looked too pale, to be alive.

"Bring Del," I said.

Luzon, my new assistant, looked to be a scrawny boy with a shock of black hair, but he dragged the dead soldier off the table on his own. The infirmary's bustle whirled back to life. Vess bulled his way through it, carrying Del by the shoulders. He and the second knight laid Del on the table, spear jutting up. Del still clutched it in both hands, chest heaving.

"Get his brigantine loose," I said, putting my medicine bag on a stool and opening it. "And the mail. Luzon? I'll need a —"

When I looked, the boy was sliding a piece of belt-leather into Del's mouth, to bite. Luzon knew his business, then. I reached into my bag, looking for the wallet with my scalpel and curved

needles. I had some catgut, and a spool of wool thread. Iron shears. A few cleansing charms, bound to little bone figures of Mother Love. Some boiled bandages.

“Tell Peren he has command,” Vess told the second knight, as I turned. “Watch those fucking drains.” The man saluted and went; the company of knights moved off, first checking the drain in the middle of the street before the tavern.

Vess eyed me up and down, taking in the bright little blades in my open wallet. “You won’t just magick his wound shut?”

I laid my wallet and a cleansing charm beside Del’s head. His brown eyes flicked to it, showing panicky whites. “I have only what kir my saint gave me, before I came here,” I said, taking my larger scalpel. “With it, I must save as many as I can, before the kir runs out and my mind tires such that I lose focus. Should I lose that, I’ll only cause more harm.”

My friend Ilya, lying pale and dead, flicked through my perfect memory. I nodded to the spear shaft. “You must let go, Del.”

Vess took it in both his hands. Del’s hands twitched, unwilling to obey. I put mine on his, worked my fingers between the wood and his skin. Called his pattern as I did it; he’d bled, but his dancing kir-whorls and pulsing meridians were still strong. The cruel, barbed spear-head was blackness invading his pattern. As Del’s hands loosened at last, I flipped aside his loosened brigantine and the mail underneath. Slicing through his thin gambeson, I found skin at last.

A cut, and Del’s hands slammed onto the edges of the table. I went deeper, widening the gash where the barbs would catch and rip. He bit into the belt leather, screaming through it. The spear had jammed through three coils of gut, stopping just shy of his back.

Vess, despite being such a bear of a man, had a fine touch. He and I eased the spear out, the barb catching only on Del’s mail along the way. Blood gushed, stinking and tainted by the contents of his gut. Vess swore as he threw the spear aside. I shoved Del’s layers up higher and reached into the wound — he screamed around the leather clenched in his teeth and convulsed — to stop the bleeding.

My memory brought me all the small vessels of the gut, from when I'd seen them on other patients. A little blood-stop charm was enough for such. Vess held his cousin down with both hands, talking to him in a tense mutter. I kept my focus on the wound.

The gash in Del's belly was wide enough to clamp open. I gently shifted wounded coils of gut aside, seeing the flesh's patterns rather than the blood and greenish slops. It overflowed, ran onto the table and floor. The smell would need hard scrubbing to get out, I knew.

Luzon had threaded the correct needle with catgut; I spared him a smile as I took it. "Bring water," I told him.

One slice, deepest in, I could simply stitch. The second coil was worse off, having been nearly cut in half. Del sobbed, clutching the table, honestly trying not to thrash. Not entirely succeeding. Luzon poured water, when I asked him to, and much of the gore rinsed away. What I could see, at least; I knew that it was loose among his guts, now, and would kill him with fever. The cleansing charm would mend that, though.

For the topmost coil, the first to take the spear, I had to reach for my scalpel and cut away the shredded hand's-width of tube. Stitched one trimmed end to the other carefully, as if it were a sleeve. My mother's lessons, before I'd been apprenticed to the Elect, had proven their worth often enough.

"Must he suffer?" Vess asked, his voice strained. "If he's to die..."

I looked up at the big man, then glanced to Del's slack face. He skimmed the edge of consciousness, lost in the haze of pain. Luzon turned his head, to be sure he didn't choke on his tongue. "He's not dying," I said, taking the last few stitches and knotting my catgut off. "I'm nearly finished."

"You are?" Vess frowned at my work.

"Do you still think me just a fucking handmaid?"

His mouth opened, then shut again. I cut my thread free.

Metal rattled. Vess and I looked for it, in unison, but there was nothing that would rattle so. The tables were all wood, and — my memory flicked to it.

“The street drain.”

A second rattle, a bang, and the grate fell to one side. It was a small one, barely wide enough for the pig-headed orc who sprang up. Those lightly wounded sitting just outside the full-length windows, and the orderlies bandaging them, tried to scramble to their feet. Shouts and screams drowned out the infirmary bustle. Orcs popped up from the drain.

The lead monster snarled, whirling his spear as a staff. Its shaft cracked off two orderlies, knocking them down. One soldier drew his sword in time to take the spearhead through his chest.

Vess roared in fury, yanking his sword from its sheath, and hurdled the window’s low sill. He sliced the first orc’s head clean off and met the second with a crash. The monsters charged the wounded soldiers who dared try to face them while the orderlies and nurses fled deeper into the tavern. Spears cut the weak men down. Vess caught one by its haft in his free hand, cut the guilty arm clean off with one sweep of his sword. The rest turned on him, rather than chase the helpless goodfolk.

“Vess!” Del, snapped to clarity by the screaming, fumbled for his own sword.

“No!” I touched his head, snapping a little charm into his mind. Del slumped, unconscious. I caught him by the hair, lowered his head gently. Only one man, only one bit of faith offered when I stepped into this dark place. I’d not let him die.

Further up the road, a squad of Vess’ knights rounded the corner at a run. No time; half a dozen orcs were already in the street. More coming. Vess held three at bay. Another charged past him, slapped Luzon down with his spear butt and then there was only me between him and Del. The orc grabbed my shoulder to throw me aside, spear swinging toward Del.

I shot my kir up the orc’s arm and stabbed his prime meridian, at the neck. He dropped like a sack of flour, bouncing off Del’s sturdy table. His spear skittered away, doing no harm. My kir snapped back to me, through his flesh.

With a yell, Vess’ knights met the orcs and slashed into them, spears clanging on shields, swords biting through iron mail. Blood splashed across the paving stones, followed by falling bodies. A

knight went down, spitted. I saw one more orc pulling himself through the drain. The monster was too big, too much a hog to simply leap through.

A chance to stop them. I ran, bent low, dodging behind orcs; they fought for their lives, and hardly noticed me. The orc in the drain spotted me, snarled, and hauled himself up to the waist. Caught there. I lunged to grab his ear, and he jabbed his spear one-handed. I fell on my knees, in trying to dodge it. His filthy hand clapped down on my wrist, pulling his spear back to stab me.

Foolish. I cut his meridian at the neck. His spear clattered to the paving stones. He slumped, stuck in the drain.

Grabbing my shoulders, Vess jerked me back. Then he saw the monster was dead, and frowned down at me. “Did you —?”

“Oil!” one of the knights shouted. A short man in filthy, plainspun clothes unstopped a skin and poured oil on the corpse. Two knights grabbed spears and rammed the corpse back through the drain. From below came grunts, guttural shouting — and a whiff of stink. The filthy man kept pouring, emptying the oilskin.

“Candle!” Vess yelled. “A flame! Someone!”

My memory flickered to what my father had told me of that smell, long ago. Swamp gas. Careful, the stuff burns. “I have it!” I shouted, over Vess. I held my hand over the drain, gathering kir in my fingertips. Knotted down, squeezed, the kir ignited into a candle-sized spark. Below, I saw bodies moving, heard more piggish snarling. A grey-skinned hand grabbed the rim of the drain.

“Get back!” I shouted, and with a snap released the spark. The filthy man yelled it with me, already running. “Get back!” Ran, myself, toward the tavern windows. The knights scrambled to fall back, too, as flame roared up in the drain for a moment —

— and the earth shook, rumbling. The explosion burst through the hole. Earth flew up from the paving stones. The drain widened. Crumbled. Cracks ran between the stones and the road sank along its center line. A dying orc, trying to crawl, was dragged down. Vess snatched me up by the waist and

carried me into the tavern itself, with the huddled, shouting infirmity. Down into the square, the gash ran. The statue of the knight shifted, tipped as its ground collapsed. It settled at a wild angle in the rubble.

The wound cut the street in half. A tangle of stone and corpses half filled it, leaving a sheer drop of perhaps a yard. A ragged cheer went up, and I had to smile. “Light bless you!” Doctor Ceros patted my shoulder, with a laugh. “You’re more than you seem, aren’t you.”

“Peren!” Vess shouted, beside me, and he strode out onto the street. His officer, across the split, saluted him. “What the fuck happened?”

“We cut them off at Binder’s Street, sir, and some of them doubled back. The sewers, well —” Peren gestured to the filthy man beside him.

“That’s the main cesspit,” the man shouted, pointing at the fallen statue. “Them all must’ve come in by there. Had to! Won’t be coming up here no more, sir!”

“How many doubled back?” Vess asked. Peren gestured openly, trying not to shrug. Vess swept one arm up to summon his men together up the street. “Back to Binder’s Street, then, to hunt the bastards down — and Kate! You keep Del safe!” He swung around, pointing at me.

I saluted in return. There was work to do, still. Del’s wound still needed stitching. I found my needle and catgut I’d dropped, and called his pattern again. The muscle healed best if matched grain to grain. Luzon righted the fallen stool and collected what had fallen from my medicine bag in the confusion. He considered one of the figures of Mother Love a moment, and tossed it in.

Del breathed easy, peacefully sleeping through the rest of the stitches. I’d only knocked him lightly, as I couldn’t spare much kir, and it wouldn’t last much longer. When I knotted off the thread at last, I took my cleansing charm and held it over the wound. A squeeze with my mind, and the kir bound to the bone figurine unwound. The charm fell onto Del in a green mist, destroying any patterns that would fester into abscesses or gangrene.

That made him twitch. He groaned. His hand moved toward the wound.

“Don’t.” I nudged him away and laid a bandage on it.

His head lifted from the table, but the pain made him hiss. “Fuck, it wasn’t a dream.”

“No. But you had a little faith and you’re going to live.”

Luzon brought a pair of orderlies to help Del off the table. They’d see that he was properly bandaged. A third man stood waiting with the arm of a soldier across his shoulders, his own arm holding the man up by the waist. The soldier was wilting fast; an arrow jutted from his ribs, the blood frothing as his punctured lung leaked through it.

“Next.” I patted the table.