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## Session 0-4: Jeudi, 5 Harvest 882 (Tierce)

A crew like yours sees action more often than folk in tamer lines of work, sure, but sometimes a job is just dull. You plant a charge, blow up the dam, the water flows, you go home; you dig a pit trap for some poachers, they fall right into it and immediately surrender. This week's run was like that. *Five aureals* to go up north with one Malthus to a pile of ruins in the shadow of Palingene Monastery, dig up an old cedar box, and escort him and his prize back to Dock Town. The generous offer was ostensibly because he expected to be jumped by bandits as soon as you unearthed the thing, but not a dagger was bared the whole trip except to stab your food.

Milk run or no, contract says five aureals, you expect to see five aureals at the end. Not a slip of paper with, in so many flowery legal words, "I owe you five aureals" scrawled on it.

"Terribly sorry," says Malthus from behind his desk in the dockmaster's building. The gray cat's tone carries far more politeness than give-a-shit. "We will honor the promissory note as soon as the funds are available. But they are, at this time, still pending."

The badger's eyebrows knit only slightly, seemingly less in irritation than uncertainty. After a space of two breaths, he slowly reaches up to fish in his vest pocket and draws out a cheroot. After a moment, he bites off the end and spits it into a corner of the office.

"Pending." He chews the word like a bit of jerky of uncertain provenance. Pursing his lips, he contemplates the cigar, blinking a few times, as if it might contain a secret.

Fishing in the opposite vest pocket with his other hand, he pulls out a long match. He strikes it on the rough fabric, and brings the flaring tip to the end of the cheroot as he brings the cheroot to his lips. A few long intakes of breath suffice to start its slow burn, and he leans back, pulling smoke into his mouth as he waves the match out.

Tilting his head up, he exhales a long stream toward the ceiling, where it pools into a substantial cloud that will probably linger a while before settling slowly onto everything.

Shadow leans forward once more, finally making eye contact with the cat. The hand with the cheroot waves slightly, trailing a wisp of smoke from the smoldering end, as he asks, "Whazzat mean, exactly?"

"I very much want to pay in honest coin. But the funds to close out for this trip haven't come in yet. I'd thought they would arrive while we were on the road, but apparently not. Something seems to be holding up our account with Tamurello." His nose twitches, maybe as commentary on the situation, maybe at the smoke. "Would you like some tea? I still can't believe I didn't think to bring some for the journey."

Shadow takes another long drag, letting the smoke issue from his mouth and nose like a censer, eddying around his gruff visage as he counts days until the next tuition payment is due, and weighs the chances this rat in a suit won't stiff him against the chances some future client will think it's safe to pass him an IOU instead of coin. His small, dark, flinty eyes peer through the haze at Malthus as he gestures toward him with the cheroot.

"Is it five aureals worth of tea?"

“Haha, no, nothing so decadent.” He seems to be studiously ignoring the edge in your voice and posture, though a note of nervousness does carry through in his chuckle.

Shadow lets the moment hang just a little too long before breaking the uncomfortable silence with a slight but not especially friendly smile.

“Well then I guess I'll wait.”

He stands abruptly, gratified by any slight twitch in his opposite's demeanor, and shoulders his pack. Turning for the door, he plants the cheroot between his teeth, and only pauses for a moment in the jamb to growl around it, “One week, or it's the Bursar.” before striding as well as his short legs can manage out of the building, making note of every access point and line of sight he may have missed on the way in.

He'll have to come in underneath, he thinks, from below the waterline, after dark. Couple hours with a hand drill and a wire saw to keep it quiet. Waxed satchel to keep it dry. Shouldn't be too difficult, unless there was a guard, but he was betting the old cat couldn't afford that either. Only one real dilemma to consider.

Should the note read “I owe you one cedar box”, or just “Pending”?

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