1 The Shadow Cabinet

Not since the War of the Crown has the state of the Realm’s underground structure been as chaotic, as precarious, as it is now. It seems likely that if those of you who call yourselves the Shadow Cabinet, and who claim to represent the Realm’s criminal population, wish to see the organization that has been your livelihoods continue to survive, you will have to move quickly, accurately, and ruthlessly.

Over the last five years, while the Realm as a whole has been engaged in a war with the East, the Thieves’ Guild has been fighting a war of its own, against what at first appeared to be a small group of thieves who were striking off as independents. This happens all the time, of course, and is fairly easy to quash, but in this case more was going on than met the eye. These thieves were organized, and had access to considerable funds -- you quickly had a fight on your hands.

As this war continued, it began to show parallels to the more established war between the two nations; in other words, the enemy turned out to be a lot tougher than anyone had thought, particularly since you *still* haven’t managed to identify them exactly. In the last month, they’ve taken to violence in the streets, attacks on the shops your thieves were supposed to be protecting, and tipping off the Guard of the Realm to your activities. Messengers and couriers have raised their prices, casinos and fronts started closing down, and the House of Guilds stopped paying protection money.

Of course, those kinds of problems tend to put a drain on budgets, and sure enough, after nearly a month of these guerilla street tactics, your operating expenses became hard to meet. That was bad enough -- but Barak chose that particular moment to betray the Cabinet, and the Guild.

Barak had been in charge of the Guild’s gambling operations, which has been its major source of revenue. As of about a week ago, though, he vanished off the face of the earth, leaving behind him a vault full of black rock which had once been a treasure trove. The last person to see him was Leannot Hiram, and Barak was running from the vault then. You don’t know where he is now, but there is the sneaking suspicion that he is planning to do the unspeakable, and turn Realm’s evidence. If he manages to do this, he will do considerable amount of damage to the Guild directly, but will have far more lasting and damaging effects to its morale.

Of course, that is why the Shadowlord, decades ago, created what is known as his "insurance file" of data on each of his employees, in order to keep them from betraying him. The Shadowlord is on the Castle, or at the very least intended to be before the teleport platforms stopped working; Barak’s fate will surely be enough to dissuade others from following his course. Still, his testimony will be damaging enough, if he’s given a chance to talk. If the Shadowlord *hasn’t* reached the Castle, you’re on your own. And as far as you can tell, only two of you have made it up: Gilead Joel, new head of the gambling ring (Barak’s replacement), and Leannot Hiram, head of the black market.

In either case, Barak has left you with the major problem of not enough funds to continue operating. If you want to win this war, you’re going to have to outwit your enemies as well as amass enough capital to beat them at their own game. Even then, it may be a moot point if the traitor Barak is allowed to go free. Each of you has a number of agents on the Castle, representing a considerable amount of manpower. Properly organized, they should be able to do the job.

There are many questions you need to answer, and some that you have. The black rock that took the place of the mythril in your vaults turned out to be spent mythril, say the mages in your employ, which is left behind when mythril is used to power magical spells. You knew that mages had use for mythril -- that was the mechanism whereby you converted the glowing rock to usable currency, through contacts in the Wizard’s Conclave (Maskilla Ishmael is one, and on the Castle -- not that you have any mythril to supply him with). But as far as any of you knew, Barak wasn't a mage.

Odd clues have indicated that Barak's identity was discovered by an undercover Guardian, which resulted in his disappearance -- finding the Guard "moles" in your organization would be a good first step toward finding Barak. Though your agents know your identities for the most part, it's likely that the Guardians are waiting to find the Shadowlord before making a move, assuming -- correctly -- that the arrest of Shadowlord the Undying would probably destroy the Guild. And if they get Barak to testify against the Guild, you'll be in even worse shape. You have to find and stop him.

On your side, you do know a little something about Barak's history. He used to be a soldier in the Knights of the Crown during the border wars thirty-five years ago, and was associated with Lord Soeth during the betrayal that traitor has become infamous for (it appears he has reverted to type). He is said to have had some connections to the Horsemen for a while, but they kicked him out. Finally, he became connected with the Guild and stated working his way up the ranks (possibly with help, since Soeth was at the time a guilded thief as well; in fact, he disappeared shortly after the altercation with the Assassin, Storm Bluemist...but this is all digression).

It's too much coincidence to assume Barak's betrayal and the territory war are unrelated; although how he, your unknown enemies, and the Guard of the Realm tie together is still a mystery. Whoever your enemies are, they clearly have some intimate knowledge of your general workings, although their information doesn't appear to be current. One of their most recent assaults was on Ireani Terhanna's alchemist shop a few days ago, by the same team of renegade thieves responsible for the others -- perhaps it was just another assault, but that seems unlikely. Terhanna's shop is a crucial node in your financial arrangements, for it is there that you transfer your ill-gotten funds into mythril, which can be stored untracably. You've been using that system for roughly twenty years, though Terhanna became involved only a few years ago, and remains unaware of the precise nature of your activities.

In any event, the attack on her shop was stopped rather bloodily. Found at the scene was an old man in plate mail, very dead, and the girl who owned the shop: Ireani Terhanna, granddaughter of Zephaniah Reuben the Horseman, the man who stopped the attack. According to the grapevine, one man escaped the massacre after killing Reuben. It's also said that Reuben was heard saying something about Lord Soeth as he died--though what a traitor from a war that happened 35 years ago can have to do with the attack on his granddaughter's shop is manifestly unclear.

Another mass murder might shed some light on who your enemies are. A day or so before you arrived at the Castle, a dozen bodies were found, killed by a single swordstroke through the heart and left soulless -- the mark of the Circle of Bloodletters. The Circle and the Thieve's Guild have been at each other's throats for years, ever since Storm Bluemist the Assassin vowed to kill Shadowlord the Undying, ten years ago. The Assassin failed, and was never heard from again (presumably he took off for safer pastures), but his disciples spent several years trying to redeem their mentor's honor by fulfilling his vow. Whether this particular mass murder has anything to do with your situation remains to be seen -- but you can be pretty sure that the other problems you've been having aren't due to the Circle. That sort of manuevering just isn't their style. On the other hand, neither is mass murder, usually.

Still, the 12 bodies have been brought up to the Castle, so it seems reasonable that the Circle is here, as well. You should make sure your people know to keep an eye out for them, as well as for the Guard spies in your organization, so they can be properly "dealt with". In the meantime, of course, you and your agents will be busy enough trying to amass the funds you'll need to survive this underground war and find the identity of your unknown enemies. Nobody can say this week won't be interesting.

Good luck.

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