

THE SLOW KNIFE

The Lament of Broken Glass



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THE PITCH

The Lament of Broken Glass is a grand story of good and evil, blending the classic fantasy culture of Tolkien's elves with the style and mystique of the Carnival of Venice. Our characters will be elegant and sharp, dressed in fine silks and ornate masks as they revel under the stars.

But they are flawed gems, not quite as serene as they seem, and as susceptible to scheming and squabbling as anyone else in this realm. After all, with such long lives to lead, it's easy to hold a grudge for a century or two. Perfect for a tale of patient revenge, no?

Use this playset to create a stylish fantasy microcosm with ancient evils, fashionable intrigue and forbidden magic.

THE PLAYSET

We'll complete these steps to work through the playset and set up our game. This replaces the usual *Prelude*.

We'll take turns reading text aloud, and add characters, threads and notes to our board as we make new choices.

1. Read *The Veiled Citadel* (3).
2. Read *Our Eldritch Home* (5) and make the four choices presented to customise your setting.
3. Create the *Knife* (8) together as a group.
4. Each choose one of the four *Conspirators* (9) to play as your character, then name & introduce them.
5. Outline the Knife's arrest in the *Incident* (13).
6. Define your Conspirator's role in the arrest by choosing options in *Under Starlight's Shroud* (15).
7. Ensure that all relevant characters, threads and notes have been added to the board. There are lists at the back of the book to help name characters (17).
8. You are now ready to begin your story with *Act 1*.

This process typically takes around an hour to complete.

The Veiled Citadel

Nine-hundred years ago, a great evil swarmed across the realm. The free folk banded together for one final, desperate stand against the dark host. But they failed.

A REFUGE IN RETREAT

Those that survived scattered to the winds, to hide, heal and wait for another chance. Our ancestors, well-versed in moonlit paths and secret doors, made their way to *Baradthur*, the Veiled Citadel—our home and haven.

Today, thousands of us live together in this fortress of glass, hidden deep below the earth under a sky of frozen stars. We have cultivated a society in perfect harmony, where each of us knows how we contribute to the whole.

A RULER IN REFLECTION

We are led by the *Aran Maril*, the Sovereign of Glass, whose strange, vitreous hand guides us towards prosperity.

Beneath them sit the *Cen'tirith* - an elite, self-selected group of elders who advise our leader and, most crucially, maintain the protective wards surrounding our home.

SUBJECTS IN SERVITUDE

The rest of us, *mohgrem*, are taught that for these exalted few to tend their burden uninterrupted, we must match their tireless dedication with tireless labour of our own.

We farm, make wine, raise children, weave silk, all without complaint—even as our finest produce is taken above.

This is how the story goes, at least. It lives in our schools, our poetry, our tapestries. It has sustained us for almost a millennium. But, in this moment, change seems inevitable.

CRACKS IN THE GLAZE

The *Aran Maril* is dying: their vision grows clouded and their melodious voice fractures. It will soon be time for a new Sovereign to be declared, and the *Cen'tirith* have been lost to ballroom intrigue and bitter infighting.

Meanwhile, below, the *mohgrem* have grown too numerous for our walls and poverty has taken root. Despite this, demand for luxury goods from those above only grows—and so thoughts turn towards insurrection.

For our story, we should imagine *Baradthur* as a failing haven, a vault that has been sealed for far too long. Our characters scramble to stay on top, grasping at power and readily stepping on anyone that gets in their way.

Our Eldritch Home

Baradthur is a remarkable, contradictory place. Buried deep below the surface within a huge cavern, a sprawling crystalline castle sits beneath a curtain of blushing, lustrous stars. In the tallest towers, our solemn protectors spend their evenings revelling at lavish parties. Come springtime, our ancient, sunless orchards erupt with iridescent blooms and we dance with clouds of butterflies. Further down, monstrous, pearly larvae gather in warm tunnels, tended like cattle for their fine, valuable silk.

Here, we will make this strange citadel our own.

As we go, we should make notes on the board, reference media touchstones and ask clarifying questions. We can always revise our answers if a better idea emerges.

GRIM VISAGE, GRACIOUS VEIL

Cen'tirith are never seen without their masks. **Choose one:**

- ♦ *The wards demand a great deal of those who maintain them, so they wear masks to cover their withered, decaying faces.*
- ♦ *The masks are ancient magical heirlooms, carefully passed down through generations to strengthen our lauded protectors.*

GLASS CROWN, GLAZED VESSEL

A new *Aran Maril* will soon be crowned. **Choose one:**

- ♦ *The old Sovereign chooses their heir freely from across the Citadel, marking them with a laurel of blue glass and bay.*
- ♦ *When the Aran Maril is depleted, the mohgrem decide upon a candidate to replace them. Vitrification is the highest honour.*

INCANTATION, DIVINATION

Magic is at the core of our society. **Choose one:**

- ♦ *We cast spells: potent sorceries of flashing colour and explosive change. Education is reserved for the Cen'tirith, of course.*
- ♦ *Magic courses through everything all the time. Its power and prophecies resonate in patterns that only a few can truly hear.*

BLESSED BLOOD, SACRED CLUTCH

We form deep, lasting bonds with our kin. **Choose one:**

- ♦ *Family lines are thick with history and expectation. Matriarchs scheme to win favour and fortune for their house.*
- ♦ *A birthing elf bears ten to twenty waxen eggs in their brood, each marked with the same distinctive pattern of pigmentation.*

*"Some things that should not have been forgotten were lost.
History became legend. Legend became myth."*

— J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings*

Characters

First we'll introduce **Lyari**, the *Knife*. We should answer their two questions together and note their pronouns.

Next, each of us will choose a *Conspirator* to play for the rest of the story. There are four to choose from:

- ♦ **Jovalor**: *the would-be sovereign, rejected and bitter.*
- ♦ **Azghul**: *the self-serving leader of the Cen'tirith.*
- ♦ **Lindir**: *Lyari's lesser, jealous twin sibling.*
- ♦ **Virrento**: *an odious leech, exploiting the helpless.*

Read their description and make their choice, then introduce them and add them to the board. Choose their pronouns freely when you introduce them.

Elves in our setting typically use a single name with no family name, but may gain epithets over the course of play.

Consider their appearance, choosing a portrait card to represent them on the board if desired.

“Dress like you are going to meet your worst enemy today.”

— Coco Chanel

Lyari *The Knife*

Well-spoken, hard-working and resolute, Lyari was viewed by many as the best of the *mohgrem*. They had their faults of course—a few too many bright ideas and a penchant for mischief—but they were beloved by most.

Still, it caught the *Cen'tirith* utterly cold when they found out that Lyari was about to be named the next *Aran Maril*.

LIONHEART

They were renowned for a single valiant act. **Choose one:**

- ♦ *The slaying of Goengola—a terrible, rancorous spiderhag that once preyed on silkworms and tunnellers alike.*
- ♦ *The saving of Sylphine, adored songstress and outspoken critic of the Cen'tirith, from a very public, political assassination.*

FIREBRAND

As heir apparent, they were a radical choice. **Choose one:**

- ♦ *They believed the time was right to lead a campaign up and out of Baradthur, to reclaim the lands above from evil.*
- ♦ *They believed the Cen'tirith should come down to reside among the mohgrem, living as respected—but equal—artisans.*

Jovalur *Conspirator*

You were supposed to be the next *Aran Maril*. Shaped and schooled from birth, you were afforded every advantage within this place to get ahead.

You had an invite to every fashionable party, supported by a wardrobe of vogueish finery and a coterie of admirers. You received tutoring from the *Cen'tirith* on their fussy customs and precise manners. You even, somewhat reluctantly, worked hard enough to keep your academic and athletic prowess up to standard. Yes, you were simply waiting for your time to arrive and ascend.

And yet this upstart, this unwashed nobody, is going to try and steal your throne? Not likely. It's time to take matters into your own hands, no matter the wretched price.

THE REEK OF PRIVILEGE

You blame Lyari, but in truth nobody likes you. **Choose one:**

- ♦ *Your sneering, nasal voice and pinched features make for a repellent first impression that your convictions only reinforce.*
- ♦ *Despite costly attempts to suppress the truth, it is now widely known that you killed one of your kin in a fit of prideful pique.*

Azghal *Conspirator*

You are the leader of the *Cen'tirith*, second in rank only to the *Aran Maril* themselves. From your crooked roost in the highest tower of *Baradthur*, you and your privileged kin squabble and scheme against one another, vying for greater sway over the pliant masses below.

Your rule over this preening, entitled class has been challenged many times, giving you ample opportunity to demonstrate your ruthless grasp on power.

Of course, *Baradthur* is a trifling dominion on the world stage, so you have turned your avaricious sights on the realms above. Deals are being made. The *Aran Maril*, frail and doddering, has been easy to fool. But this newcomer, Lyari, seems a little too sharp for your liking.

A CAT IN THE EYRIE

Lyari would expose your diabolical scheme. **Choose one:**

- ♦ *You made a pact with the Dark Lord, and under the veil of your authority you erode the wards protecting Baradthur.*
- ♦ *The Dark Lord is dead. As you shift your power above, you see no need to enlighten—and thus free—your servile mohgrem.*

Lindir *Conspirator*

You and Lyari are identical siblings, born within minutes of one another. You arrived second, and though you were raised as equals you've been trying to catch up ever since. Where they are bold you are meek. Where they are buoyant, you are melancholy. This familial inferiority has taken root in your mind, festering into a mean and duplicitous streak that you struggle to contain.

Worst of all is your jealous longing for Lyari's sweetheart, their betrothed. You glare at them hungrily from the shade, yearning to trade places with your selfsame twin.

It wouldn't be so difficult, you look the same after all. But of course, it would never work—Lyari would best you, just like they always do. You will forever be their shadow.

A COVETED JEWEL

You are obsessed with Lyari's beloved partner. **Choose one:**

- ♦ *Radelia, the orchard master, golden-haired and gleeful. They loved Lyari's wild eyes and mellow singing voice.*
- ♦ *Orrian, a sentinel of the wards, solemn yet tender. They loved Lyari's courageous spirit and gentle hands.*

Virrento *Conspirator*

You run a shabby little criminal enterprise out of *Baradthur*. Your operation has been taking advantage of Lyari for years. They aren't special—you have quite the collection of *mohgrems* under your dominion—but they are probably your most troublesome thrall. They simply don't know when to quit, when to yield, a lesson which you have tried to teach them more than a few times.

But now, suddenly, it seems like a real possibility that Lyari could soar to the most prestigious position in the citadel, the *Aran Maril*, where they would utterly dwarf your little fortress of fear and exploitation.

You have no doubt that their retribution would be swift. You'll just have to make sure they never get the chance.

THE WOLF AND THE LION

You are exploiting Lyari, and they know it. **Choose one:**

- ♦ *You lent them money in a time of need, and now hound them for dues while raising the rates so they will never be rid of you.*
- ♦ *You uncovered a scandalous truth about Lindir, which their sibling Lyari now pays an exorbitant toll for you to keep secret.*

The Incident

So, now we have our central cast of characters and know a little about Lyari's life. They were a rising star, poised to lead their people into a defiant new era. A reckoning of ill-gotten power and unchecked privilege was impending.

But then, of course, our villains played their part. They plotted together over charts, courts and cocktails to cast Lyari out of society in shadow or disgrace, each of them playing a pivotal, active role in the conspiracy.

Lyari's promising reign never had a chance to begin, and they were outcast to the squalid depths of obscurity.

To establish the truth of this incident, we'll first sketch the basic facts of their arrest by making three choices: the crime they were framed for, the site of their arrest, and their place of imprisonment.

Once we have this sketch, we'll work out how our Conspirators were involved.

Add notes to the board as you make these choices.

DESCENT INTO EXILE

Lyari was banished from Baradthur. **Choose one:**

- ♦ **In disgrace**—*they were framed for the murder of the old Aran Maril and cast out in dishonour, branded a traitor.*
- ♦ **In shadow**—*they were ambushed, beaten, smuggled out of the citadel and left for dead. Everyone believed they had fled.*

A FLEETING JOY

Before their abrupt exile, they were happy. **Choose one:**

- ♦ *They were delivering a speech to their supporters, dreaming together of a brighter, fairer future for the people of the citadel.*
- ♦ *They were relaxing with friends and family at an intimate dinner, wine flowing freely as they laughed and sang together.*

A BLEAK DURESS

Now they are lost to desolate imprisonment. **Choose one:**

- ♦ *Far beneath Baradthur amid the unplumbed tunnels of the Warren, sealed away with society's most deplorable sinners.*
- ♦ *Cast to the surface and the blinding gleam of sunlight, kept out by a troop of rancorous sentries and their disfavoured captain.*

“Moonlight drowns out all but the brightest stars.”

— J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings*

Under Starlight's Shroud

Now it's time to figure out how our Conspirators were involved and the sequence that led to the Knife's arrest.

We'll take turns choosing a prompt for our Conspirator.

It will establish a truth about their role and also provide a question that we should ask the player to our left. They answer as their Conspirator, weaving our plot together.

Continue discussing the conspiracy until we've each made our choice and we're clear on the order of events.

Then, we should go back and make sure we've added everything important to the board and given them names.

Then we can begin drawing cards from Act I.

THE ROLE OF JOVALUR

A small price to pay for your crown. **Choose one, ask left:**

- ♦ *You needed me to keep Lyari busy while you moved against them. What insult did I have to ignore as they sipped my wine?*
- ♦ *You goaded me into a rash move that almost had me cast out instead of Lyari. What reckless ploy did you have me attempt?*

THE ROLE OF AZGHAL

Even the thorniest of vines can be cut. **Choose one, ask left:**

- ♦ *I could summon the law to appear wherever I desired. What trap did we set for Lyari to spring, sentinels at every exit?*
- ♦ *You needed me to make something impossible happen. What forbidden magic did I tap into, and what did it cost me?*

THE ROLE OF LINDIR

A chance to ruin or replace your twin. **Choose one, ask left:**

- ♦ *I am Lyari's twin. What duplicitous role did you ask me to play, acting as them, and what did you promise me in return?*
- ♦ *How did I betray my love for Lyari's betrothed to endanger them, and what did we demand my twin do to keep them safe?*

THE ROLE OF VIRRENTO

Even the beautiful get ugly sometimes. **Choose one, ask left:**

- ♦ *I have thralls and minions in every corner of this starlit citadel. What underhanded ploy did you have me orchestrate?*
- ♦ *My practical skills were essential to execute this plot. What did you ask of me, and what price did I know you would pay?*

Conquerors live in dread of the day when they are shown to be, not superior, but simply lucky."

— N.K. Jemisin, *The Stone Sky*

People of Baradthur

These are names for the people and places of *Baradthur*. While elves are often portrayed as poetic and patient, feel free to create nicknames and contractions as you see fit.

ELVISH NAMES

Amara, Anatar, Balchar, Baradon, Beluar, Calarel, Celantiel, Darunia, Dinalagos, Elaith, Elora, Falenas, Fibaz, Goren, Haemir, Hastor, Isarrel, Jhairos, Kailu, Keryth, Laizet, Lhoris, Merith, Neia, Noriel, Orm, Pentos, Quinlan, Renna, Saerphen, Silveril, Talindra, Telion, Theoden, Uwenna, Vamir, Wynn, Yabaaza

PLACES

Macarindo (merchant's house), Lomelingtar (night aquarium), Merethrond (hall of feasts), Anganta (face of iron), Nostarlam (ancestor's echo), Vaireladen (weaver's den), Huevelhad (seat of the nine fires), Silmursant (argent vineyards), Linduin (singing river), Gar Ainion (place of the gods) Lotarwaran (king's garden)

SOCIAL EVENTS

Fuin Maica (night of knives), Mereth Mirybin (grapebloom faire), Asardin (silent carnival), Polcaran Nosta (swine king's birthday), Ruinaire (pyre of regret), Quaime Naina (lament of ten thousand)

