

RenQuest: Chaos Rising  
Prologue  
by Julie McMillin

There was no sound in the darkness but the blood pounding through the thief's ears as he crouched in the brush. The pale waning moon illuminated the sleeping military camp and confirmed there was no movement on the far side of Bathhurst Basin. His crime had not been discovered. Good. The last thing he needed was that fool woman catching wind of their plans. With the grace of a falcon making a kill, the thief leapt from his hiding place and fled down the gravel path, clutching his hard-won prize. He had been running for not but one moment when the bells of Bristol began to ring. "Thieves!" they pealed. "Awake! To arms!" The thief smirked behind his black mask – it seemed the watch was not quite as blind as he thought. With one hand steadying his acquisition, he picked up speed. "The witch had better be right about this," he stewed.

\* \* \*

Morning.

The constable swaggered into the camp of the Band of the Twisted Claw with the full force of the Guilde of St. Michael behind him. "Grymm!" he roared.

An instant later Thoren Grymm burst from his wagon (the Vardo) with sword in hand, clad only in slops, chemise and eye patch. When greeted with the sight of 30 armed men at his door, his sword clattered to the ground.

"We'll be having an account of thine possessions, gypsy," the constable sneered. "Now." As had happened so many times in so many towns, the locals raided the Vardo for 'stolen' items.

Thoren fumed when the men found his pony keg. "What're'ya claimin we did now?"

The constable stepped up to Thoren, presumably to intimidate him, but Thoren stood head and shoulders taller than the pompous little man. "Last night a weapon of great value was stolen. We have arrived at its obvious resting place."

Irony stood in solidarity with Thoren as one of the men called, "Tis not here, sir."

From beneath the Vardo, Thoren saw two sleepy eyes blink at him quizzically. With an almost imperceptible shake of his head, the figure took the hint and remained hidden behind the stout wagon wheels. Thoren glared at the constable. "If'n ye be done? I have a care to put my boots on."

"We will be back, gypsy. I know thou hast it."

Thoren spat at the man's feet. "We've earned our right to stay. We take nothing that 'tis not ours." The constable jabbed his finger into Thoren's chest, "Thou art far from innocent." The constable turned with a harumph, snapped at the men of St. Michael's and stalked off into the morning light.

Once they were gone from the camp Thoren reached under the Vardo, grabbed a sleepy Lillith by the collar and hauled her out. "'Twasn't me," the small cutpurse protested firmly.

He knew she told the truth. Whatever weapon was taken, it had the men of St. Michael's on edge. Lillith would not dare take important items. But someone had, and that set Thoren to worrying. He set her on her feet and pushed her toward the main encampment. "Send the call for the

Heroes. Something is coming.” As Lillith ran through the tall grass, Thoren shuddered in the morning chill. “Something big,” he whispered.