



THREE WORSHIPPERS

A Pathfinder RPG Story

H. Rad Bethlen

Three Worshippers
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In hole—like you say. Nude. Ground moist—moving—biting. Big moon up. Made eyes hurt. Now, little lights. Never knew about little lights—Oh! Voices!

“Why couldn’t we talk inside?”

Woman—not dwarf—like me. I tell—not sound like Mamma. Elf?

Woman: “And why come here, of all places, and at this unholy hour?”

“Walls have ears.”

A man. Know voice? Can’t remember—.

Man: “Besides, I want to do something for you.”

Woman: “Start by giving me your robe, I’m cold.”

She need blanket like mine—alive—warm—hungry.

Man: “Use a spell.”

Woman: “I didn’t ask Calistra for that particular spell.”

Man laugh at funny name.

Man: “Ah, here we are. A friend of yours?”

Woman: “Amir Magus?”

Sound like read aloud. Mamma read to me—when I young. I like. She read stories of heroes. She tell when we fight gods. They make us go into rocks. Good thing, say Mamma. We like rocks better. Mamma say gods can have sky. Mamma say sky no good—no ore in sky. Never heard Mamma say funny word woman say. Name? Sound like name hear before—can’t remember.

Man: “I saw you at the service.”

Woman: “No, you didn’t.”

She terse. I learn word. I tell people terse. Mamma terse. She taught word.

Man: “Come now, disguise self is a paltry illusion. You didn’t have the discipline to stick with the arcane, did you? That’s why you switched over. Faith is easier, perhaps? Especially a faith that involves so much—.”

Woman: “If you brought me out here to insult me—.”

Man: “Amir was a worshipper of Calistra, wasn’t he?”

Woman: “No, he was a hypocrite and a betrayer.”

She unhappy. She cold still. I give her blanket—when I done. You say use every night—even if not cold or tired. You say worms hungry. Bite so much!

Man: “Yet, here he lies, in the graveyard of the temple of Abadar.”

Woman: “Yes, *your* temple. I know.”

Man: “Why is he here?”

Woman: “I’ve already told you.”

Man: “Did you know that Magus left a substantial part of his estate to the church. My church, not your church.”

No talk. What they do? Can’t hear—down in hole. Get up, Master? Worms full. They no bite so much. Put worms in mouth—to eat—like you want. There. Just like you say. Now—standing—see out—hear better. Don’t step on ladder—it talk.

Man: "I suppose he tired of the endless debauchery that Calistra offers. At some point one has to get serious. He seems to have had a change of heart."

Woman: "It happens. Why gloat?"

Man: "What is it that Calistra says about revenge?"

Woman: "Get it."

Man: "You can't 'get it' now, can you? A little late, eh? How does your goddess feel about that?"

Woman: "What makes you think I know?"

Man laugh. Hear before—can't remember. Like name. Should know.

Man: "Pray to her and ask."

Woman no talk. What she do? Me look, Master?

Man: "Then again, maybe that won't work. Seeing as you don't *really* worship her."

Woman: "Excuse me?"

Man: "Let us be honest with one another."

Woman: "I've had enough of this. I should have known better than to have come out here with you."

Her voice get small. Step on ladder. It talk—only a little. They no hear. Can see now. Man close—he look away. Woman mad. She walk.

Man: "We have that in common. As I no longer worship Abadar."

Woman turn. Come back. Don't see me! Get down!

Woman: "What are you talking about?"

Man laugh. He like laugh. Oh, remember! Work for him. He hire me. He give me copper. Dig graves. Copper for you. Under bed. If you need—you have. Okay, Master?

Man: "I began to realize that certain passages in the *Order of Numbers* fascinated me more than others; which, since we're being honest, bored me."

Woman: "And?"

Man: "It dawned on me that what I enjoyed most about Abadar's teachings were the rewards that come from the so-called invisible hand that guides our labors. I wasn't so taken with all the hard work, self-sacrifice, and waiting to get the rewards."

Woman: "So, you're lazy and greedy? I'm not surprised."

Man: "Just as you're lustful. But that isn't what appeals most to you about Calistra, is it?"

Woman: "If you're trying to get at something—"

Man: "How long have we known each other?"

He have bad memory—like me. You help me remember—like to eat worms. Sometimes I can remember on my own—then I feel smart.

Woman: "A decade or more."

Thirsty. Get drink now, Master? Swallow worms—like you say. Have spicy drink. On cart—by pick and shovel. Get out? Want to look at people. Good at climb. Quiet. Remember I quiet, Master? Like when you first show—when I see you.

Remember when they come? They come to see what happen. They think more rocks fall. Master do that. You make rocks fall in cave. You make tunnel. No blame you. Rocks tired—lay down. You dig so much. You no get tired. You say one day I walk—*Spiral Path*. You say—all will.

The last day—when you eat all. We walk and you wait at end—wait for us—like worms wait for us. You biggest, hungriest worm. I saw. I know.

Remember? I came alone. I look at tired rocks—to see if they fall and sleep. I good at that. They let me do it. They say I brave. They say I skinny and fast. Not big and slow, like other dwarves. They say a dwarf need to be all of those things when rocks get tired and fall and sleep. I special. They told. No more rocks fall. They come. They see. They scream and cry. They say, I remember, they say:

“Your beard!”

“Your skin!”

“What happened?”

I show you. They mad. They hack—like at ore. I mad. I make stop. I get long worms out, like you say. They fall. They sleep. They quiet. No mad. I leave. Remember? Be quiet, you say. Leave, you say. Remember? You make hair fall out. You make skin like yours. They angry for what you do. They quiet now. Worms eat.

Man: “I’ve been observing you.”

Woman: “Creep.”

Man: “Don’t flatter yourself.”

Woman: “Well—.”

Man: “I’ve noticed that all of your enemies are ruthlessly dispatched, while your lovers are left to linger. That doesn’t fit Calistra’s teachings. I’ve noticed that, over the past few years, you’ve gone out of your way to make new enemies, perhaps to justify expressing your wrath.”

Woman: “Or maybe people are rude and sometimes get their comeuppance. Perhaps you should choose your words wisely.”

Get out hole? Okay? Be quiet. I drink—hide—watch.

Man: “Eiseth.”

New funny name.

Man: “Ah, I can tell by your expression that the name holds meaning for you. A Queen of the Night, I believe, yes? What are her particular obsessions? Battle, revenge—wrath?”

Woman: “Damn you.”

She stand close to man.

Woman: “How—?”

Man: “Like any usurer, Mammon has no mercy for those who owe him debts. He’s had cause to appeal to Eiseth. Such alliances work in Hell, why not here?”

They quiet. Get clothes now, Master? Man and woman funny. They look—no talk. Why? Touch lips? No—no touch lips.

Woman: “How long have you known?”

Man: “Long enough. Don’t worry, your secret is safe with me. Besides, I’m not overly eager to anger one of Eiseth’s followers. Is my secret safe with you?”

Woman: “I suppose it has to be, doesn’t it? Now, if I’m not wrong, you wanted to do something for me?”

Man: “As I said, I saw through your attempts to hide your identity at the service. The look of hatred did nothing to mar the beauty of your face.”

Woman: “You could have complimented me indoors.”

Man: “Certainly, but I couldn’t have divulged the truth, now could I?”

Woman: "Go on."

Man: "I suppose you're not familiar with the funeral rights of Abadar. If you were, you might have noticed that I omitted a few choice phrases, corrupted a few others, and in general, botched the service."

Woman: "No one raised a fuss."

Man: "Oh, after the first few minutes most people stop listening. The living have their own concerns. Even those who attend services regularly haven't quite figured out that some of the new teachings are from Mammon's scripture, not Abadar's. Not that they're overly familiar with the former. Yet, more and more are being converted to the 'new way.' There is a sizable and growing cult to Mammon—regulars in the church."

Woman: "I still don't see the point of all this."

Man: "An alliance. You've shown great skill in dispatching those you dislike. Maybe you can lend your services to a growing church who, despite the obvious benefits of membership, is forced to keep that membership a secret."

She laugh.

Woman: "You don't want to get your hands dirty?"

Man: "Something like that. To show you how generous I can be, I give you Amir Magus. You can have your revenge."

Woman: "I don't get you. He's dead."

Man: "Well, not quite. He's been poisoned. He reposes, yes, not in death, in a coma. All that is required is a bit of—." He pat side. What in pocket? "We had to go through with a burial to ensure the bequeathing of his estate was accomplished."

Woman: "You buried him *alive*?"

Man: "Well—."

Woman: "You're worse than I am."

Man: "You want him or not?"

Woman: "Oh, I want him."

Man: "Do you remember enough of your arcane teachings to read from a scroll? If not, we'll have to use shovels."

Woman: "That's your plan? Trust me to read a scroll or we dig?"

Man: "Well, while the gravedigger has few, if any friends, he might still spill our little secret."

Woman: "Give me the scroll."

Grave—digger? Me! I bury Amir. Ah! I remember. But—oh no. She say funny words. Oh no. Amir. Trouble. Run away? Afraid. Maybe they no dig. I watch. They can't see. Hiding. Woman say funny words. Oh! All the dirt! Flying! She point. Dirt fly over, make big pile.

Man: "Wonderful. I'll fetch the ladder."

He get ladder. Take to new hole. Amir? Will they see? I can't see. Ladder talk. Man opening box in hole. Oh no, he scream. He mad. Woman looking.

Man: "I don't understand."

Woman: "Maybe he did it himself. If I woke up and found myself buried alive I would —."

Man: "He couldn't have. The poison—I don't—."

Oh no. Big trouble. If I—? Will they—? Help me say the words—please—Master.

Me: "I let the big worm out."
Woman: "What in the Nine Hells—!"
Ladder talk. Man come out of hole.
Man: "You!"
Me: "The worm—inside—the big worm."
Woman upset—back away. She look at me mean. She look like dwarves look when they see me—after you change me. I no like that look.
Man: "What did you do?"
Me: "The—worm—."
Man angry. He reach for weapon. He take from belt. Tip glow. Don't like. He point at me. No! Bad man! Need help. Help!
Me: "Yhidothrus!"
Sorry! Sorry, Master. You say not to say. I scared.
Man: "What did you say?"
Me: "R-R-Ravager Worm."
Stomach hurts. Big worm inside angry.
Man: "It seems my gravedigger has a secret of his own."
Woman: "What did he say? What was it? A name?"
Me: "Yhidothrus."
Man: "A demon lord, one of those brought over from the, ah, previous inhabitants of the Abyss."
Woman: "What's wrong with him?"
Man: "Leprosy?"
Woman: "Is that a dwarf?"
Me: "Dwarf!"
Woman: "I've never seen a dwarf without a beard. It's—Why does he keep—? Oh—."
She laugh.
Woman: "The big worm. I get it."
She no afraid. She stand by man.
Woman: "He must be stupid or something. He thinks the intestines are a big worm."
Man: "He's robbed you of your revenge."
Woman: "I guess he'll have to take Amir's place."
Man: "This is a rod of withering. It will weaken him, not kill him. If you'll accept such a worthless worm as a substitute for Amir—?"
Woman: "I don't have much choice, do I?"
No! No! Man angry. He hit me! Ugh. Feel funny tingle. I strong. You make me strong—because I ate worms. Green light no hurt. He bad man. He no do what he did. Bad man! Let his worm out! Use knife. Big worm come out. He try keep in. Woman scream. She no weapon. She looks at green-light-thingy. She look at me. She run. I brave, and skinny, and fast. Not slow, like others. Tackle her.
She wiggly. I hold on. I strong. Turn over. Ugh. She hit. She claw. She bite. She bad, like man. I let big worm out. Good. Come out. No more mean words. No more mean look. They make sad sounds. Now they quiet. They sleep—like dwarves who hit you. Worms free. What now, Master? Put in hole? Put dirt?

You say worms eat. You say feed worms. I do. Keep bad man's stick? Hurt people—if need to. Trouble now? I let big worms out—like with dwarves—in cave with sleeping rocks. You say, no go home. You say, leave—be quiet and leave. Leave now, Master?

Yhidothrus: *Yes.*

THE INNKEEPERS



H. Rad Bethlen

Eternal Rest: The term entrepreneur takes on a new meaning when the ruins of an ancient city are discovered by an enterprising innkeeper. He sets up shop and invites adventurers from far and wide. When he receives a lone patron desiring a night's peace he strikes a bargain that can't be undone. In this humorous tale a man asks himself what it takes to get a decent night's sleep.

A Voice so Pure: Tybalt, a half-elven bard and one of the innkeepers, recalls a shameful—but heartwarming—tale from his past. In it he sets out to win a singing contest by any means necessary, foul-play be damned. When a goblin arrives hilarity ensues. But when the goblin sings—.

These and other stories await those who overhear the tall-tales of the innkeepers.

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A man on a spiritual journey must uncover his past, confront his nemesis, right a wrong, and free his friends from an unjust punishment, in order to achieve inner peace.

Parallax was trained by his father for a position in the royal court but he's never wanted it. As his father lies on his deathbed he makes his son promise to visit the emperor. This begins a journey whose end is uncertain.

What Parallax wants is to achieve moksha, to escape from the cycle of rebirth. He feels it is his fate to reject court life, to reject comfort, wealth, and prestige and go into the forest. There, alone, he will purge himself of the chaos and confusion within. Yet the sins of the past are not so easily purged.

Ravik, once Parallax's teacher, has become a powerful, evil spirit, a rakshasa. He has achieved all he has desired. His rewards have been great—the cost greater. Yet all can be taken away by those he serves, those whose power is akin to that of the gods.

Parallax and Ravik, their fates are intertwined. They are destined to confront one another in order to decide not only their fates but those of many others. Guilt and innocence, justice and injustice, love and hate, enlightenment and escape or another turn of the great wheel of life—all this and more must be decided.

In *Parallax*, the award-winning fantasy author H. Rad Bethlen marries western storytelling with eastern mythology. Here the gods and spirits of Hinduism are shown as they are no where else. No story like this has been written since William Buck retold the ancient, epic poems *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana* in a novelized form.

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