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## UNDER LOCK AND KEY

The never-ending city of Haark is where most of the commerce of the Seven finds its epicenter. Amidst such sprawling wealth, naturally there are those who wish to keep their precious hoards well secured and out of reach of the greedy and desperate. To this end, there are two guilds that specialize in such work—the Lock Wardens and the Keysmith's Guild. Most would agree that to acquire any latch, bolt, or key from any other source in the city would be scarce worth the time.

Alas, for would-be hoarders of treasures and artifacts, dealing with either of these organizations is a frustrating proposition, for they have been locked in a state of unseen war since the bygone time when they were a single guild.

The Lock Wardens are a dour and industrious lot. Their lock-makers are tireless and precise in their

craft. The workshops and smithies are places of immaculate order, and they ask premium prices for the perfect work that comes out of them. The Wardens have strict codes of transparency and spend a great effort vetting honest, ingenious craftsfolk from across the Seven. Artists are proud of their organization and will openly proclaim their membership in any situation where there is status or reward to be gained.

To many outsiders, the Keysmith's Guild appears as a secretive religious sect, one with mysterious tenets and obscure rituals. Their delicate work is rife with enigmatic symbols and subtle occult designs. They aspire to a standard in which no key of theirs may be successfully duplicated but by the smith that worked it from its raw origins to its final exquisite form.

The secrets of their key-making are passed through initiatory rites that involve branding the arms, back and shoulders of the smith with



key-like forms that create an interlocking pattern of labyrinthine complexity. The design of this scarification is unique to each journeyman (or master) and identifies both lineage of apprenticeship and the famous deeds of the initiate's mentor.

So why are these two groups at odds?

That answer lies in the odd fate of a master artisan known as Marato the Lonely. In the original guildhall—now a ruins and rotting in some forgotten corner of the city—Marato was the singular judge of keys and locks fashioned by his countless novices and apprentices. For many cycles, his oversight assured the growth and security of the guild's future.

It was not until his two most famous protégés—an Aurumel artist named Zaedra and a Pyroi blacksmith by the name of Roska—came to him with their respective masterworks and laid them at his feet. The two had long been rivals and had agreed to this moment.

"We have achieved the pinnacles of our craft, Master Marato, and we now ask you to judge us. If

one of us is to be your successor, then you must tell us which work has achieved greater perfection."

Looking at the delicate key and the armored lock, a smile spread across the venerable master's lips. He then lifted his eyes to meet those of his apprentices, parted his lips to speak, and then promptly dropped dead.

In the wake of his passing the debate concerning his unspoken opinion spiraled into heated argument, then scattered infighting and, after a terribly short period of time, full blown guild war.

Nonetheless, their works remain the absolute best of their kind. And a lock and key commissioned from either organization would be masterworks indeed. But if one wishes to have both a lock and a key of unsurpassed quality, one would have to have a lock from the Wardens and a key from the Keysmiths. Although you would be well-advised to keep your intentions clandestine, as both guilds refuse to work with the other, and will not serve those who have sought the business of the other.