

Roh-kin

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This is a character study I did once for a contest. It introduces a character that will appear in a future novel. This, along with 'Seeker,' are intended to introduce readers to my writing style and to my setting known as 'The Land of Caern.'

Rylin Bas hadn't been invited to the Temple of Iruna. One day he simply appeared. A young priest noticed the fourteen year-old boy sitting in a corner, smiling, eyes wide, taking it all in. When questioned, Rylin pulled at his dirty blond hair and told a story of a dying mother and a year-long journey that had delivered him to the last temple of Caern dedicated to the *Child of Nobility*, Iruna. "What made you journey so far, my son?" Rylin was asked by an older cleric. Rylin shrugged and replied, "Iruna brought me here."

Being the last surviving temple to Iruna was far from a sign of weakness: as one of the few alternatives to the *Priests of Caern* (the followers of the *Child of Prophecy*, Iberian), the Temple of Iruna had become one of the most exclusive religious centers in all of Caern. As a result, only applicants of the highest order were accepted as acolytes at the temple, standards an orphan like Rylin could never hope to meet.

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So each evening the temple guards removed Rylin Bas from the grounds, closing the gate behind him.

And each morning, Rylin somehow reappeared within the temple walls, sitting in a corner, flashing his infectious smile, always ready and willing to serve.

Rylin's persistence garnered him respect—eventually. During that time it also became obvious that Rylin possessed certain gifts. Rylin Bas had a knack for treating the sick and injured. Rylin became a nightly fixture at one of the local churches, a chapel devoted to Az, *Father of all the Children*. The chapel was more of a hospital than a place of worship, as many of the poor and homeless in the city of Gerayn used the building as shelter. Over time Rylin Bas became known for performing what many called miracles. Broken legs healed in a week's time—several men and women on their deathbeds rising to return to work after just a few days in Rylin's care.

During this time Rylin didn't see status or wealth. He only saw people that needed his help.

While caring for the poor wasn't the mission of Iruna's temple, temple leadership recognized potential when they saw it.

So, even though Rylin Bas was never officially invited to stay, at some point the temple guards no longer removed him from the temple grounds at the end of each day. As Rylin had made friends with most of the older acolytes, he never lacked a place to sleep at night.

Soon Rylin forgot about the people that considered him a saint. The Temple of Iruna was where he belonged – Rylin Bas understood that he was destined for greatness.

Six years later, days before Rylin Bas was to become a fully recognized celebrant in the priesthood of Iruna, Rylin was pulled from a class he was practically teaching and escorted to one of the temple leaders' meeting rooms. Rylin Bas had grown into manhood and had realized much of his expected potential. Most of the clerical leadership believed Rylin would one day become the next great temple leader. As he entered the meeting room he saw that a long table separated him from several priests, including Tallos Langham, the region's High Priest.

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Unsure of what was going on, Rylin looked over to Derryn Talemaster, the temple's *information gatherer*. Derryn leaned against the room's far wall and Rylin found he was unable to get Derryn to look him in the eyes. Derryn Talemaster had been the acolytes' connection to the outside world. He was always quick to share stories with the students at the temple, forever smiling. Today however Derryn had no smile for Rylin Bas.

Many of the priests appeared uneasy, some even shifting in their chairs, openly uncomfortable. High Priest Tallos openly glared at Rylin, and it was he that spoke. "We have discovered something that will prohibit you from remaining here at the temple. You will pack your things and leave immediately. May Iruna and her Father have mercy on your soul."

High Priest Tallos had never personally spoken to Rylin Bas before that day. It would be the only words Rylin would ever hear from the man. No further explanation was given. No opportunity for rebuttal was provided. The priests and the High Priest stood and left the room.

Recovering from his initial shock, Rylin hurled questions and protests at the backs of the clerics as they left the room. His pleas fell on deaf ears.

Once more the guards removed Rylin Bas from the Temple of Iruna... this time for good.

Later that day Rylin confronted Derryn Talemaster outside the temple walls. Shaking with anger, Rylin grabbed the older man by the shoulder. "What *discovery* are they referring to? I have done nothing wrong. I am the best healer this temple has ever seen!"

Derryn saw the muscles tighten even further around Rylin's eyes. He sighed. "And modest, to boot."

The taller man continued. "Rylin, you came here as an orphan. You were never invited to study here. As a result your name doesn't officially appear on any temple records. They aren't formally obligated to give you an explanation. You don't even get a hearing, however unfair that may be." With a flick of his arm Derryn Talemaster had Rylin by the wrist, applying pressure against both nerve and bone. The resulting waves of pain dropped Rylin to his knees. Through tears Rylin looked up to see Derryn brushing off his tunic, removing any evidence that

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Rylin had touched him. Derryn had released his arm, but Rylin's pain continued to bring tears to his eyes.

Derryn leaned down to Rylin and winked. "In their eyes, you were a problem easily erased."

Years later, a young rogue and his master crouched in an alley. They had lain in wait for nearly two *cykes*. A man fitting their target's description crossed the street: the right build, the right clothes—but there was something else the master saw—a tightening of the muscles around the man's eyes as he turned to look behind him. The master clamped a hand on his protégé's shoulder.

"What are you doing?" he hissed.

Derryn Talemaster held a finger to his lips, waiting for the mark to round the next corner and disappear from view. "Saving your life—our patron left out some vital information concerning our target."

"What do you mean?"

Derryn kept looking at the corner across the street, half-expecting the man to reappear. "He is the one the guild calls *Roh-kin*."

The young man's eyes widened in recognition. "I have heard that name, but only in whispers. Who is he?"

Derryn Talemaster pulled back his hood, exposing a long scar that ran from his forehead to his chin. "He was a priest at one time, or nearly one at least. Rylin, as he was called, was cast out of the Temple of Iruna when I informed them his father was Karev of Grozh."

"The master of assassins?" Derryn nodded. The younger man pointed at the scar on his master's face. "Roh-kin did that to you?"

"Yes. I continued working for the temple for several years. Funny thing was, the boy never even knew his father, much less what he was." Derryn shook his head from side to side. "Years later he kidnapped me and... got the information out of me—although I'm sure he would have enjoyed it had I kept silent a bit longer."

"Why did they cast him out if he didn't even know his father?"

Derryn shifted his weight from one foot to the other in an attempt to get his circulation going. “Over the years Karev, presumably under the orders of the Council of Grozh, orchestrated the murders of several clerics within the *Noble-order*, including the High Priest of Iruna in Pendar. It was guilt by association, even though Rylin Bas was simply the result of a dalliance between the guild master and some farmer’s daughter. Little did those priests know that they were creating a far greater enemy. ‘Roh-kin’ has made the Temple of Iruna his own sacrificial altar ever since he discovered the truth.”

“Why ‘Roh-kin’?”

“For a time, while I still worked for the temple, Rylin Bas joined and worked for our guild. But it only took a few months for the masters to understand that Rylin would never play by our rules. We began to call him *Roh-kin*, which means *One who creates his own Path*. Our guild served his purposes until he gained the experience he desired—”

First came the sharp sound of blade entering flesh and striking bone; it was soon followed by the sucking sound of Derryn Talemaster sliding off the knife and the dull thud of his body meeting the hard unforgiving street.

Rylin Bas, now only known as Roh-kin, knelt down so one knee rested on Derryn’s back. The younger would-be assassin could only stare open-mouthed as Roh-kin held his bloody blade inches from his face. The rogue started to speak but Roh-kin used his free hand to hold a finger to his lips, the same way Derryn had moments before. All the man could do was listen—Roh-kin waited patiently until the gurgling breaths of Derryn Talemaster slowed and finally came to an end.

Roh-kin spoke. “To think—for years I couldn’t get Derryn to talk about my *family history*. Now you can’t shut him up—well, I guess I just did.” He smiled the same infectious smile from his youth and winked at the younger man. “You have a decision. You can die, or you can be useful. Your choice...”

The man was still on his knees completely at Roh-kin’s mercy. “I choose to live, ‘Roh-kin’.”

Roh-kin stood, pulling the knife away from the young rogue’s face. “Good answer. Come with me.” He began to turn, but the younger man interrupted him.

“So, what is this *Path* Derryn spoke of?”

“Why, unleashing Hell upon Caern, of course.” Roh-kin struck quickly, slicing muscle and tendon, leaving the young rogue an arm that would never be used to

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hold a knife or a lock-pick again. Roh-kin continued walking, knowing he would not be followed. “Next time, don’t talk so much.”

Rylin Bas often wondered if the Temple of Iruna still considered him a problem *easily erased*.