The Price of Power
(A Fantasy Adventure)

The Assassins' guildmaster, Darvonac, was hated by the people of Desneck, a large city located in the middle of the Gravin Forest. He was about six feet tall and weighed around 259 pounds. He had black hair and green eyes.

This day, Darvonac was extremely upset with an agent known as Reynard. Reynard had given a very important assignment to a novice, one Maskor Buckleknife. Not only that, he had offered him an entire mage's tower of treasure. "Well," he thought, "I really can't fault Reynard. I mean, all my operatives have been giving this Maskor dangerous jobs. This Maskor even won the heart of the princess. Well, Maskor Buckleknife, playtime's over. Prepare to die!"

Maskor and his friends—Arten Trenneric, a sea-elven bard of some renown, Kef-thom, a halfling arch-druid, Starshaft, the pseudo-dragon familiar of Arten, and the newest member, Terin Spellsword, a ranger they found in the tower's dungeon—decided to go into Dresneck the same day Darvonac was planning Maskor's murder.

This was no ordinary-looking group. Starshaft looked like a miniature red dragon except for his platinum eyes and stingered tail. (He was never far from Arten's side.)

Arten was five feet three inches tall and weighed about 109 pounds. His silver hair, topaz eyes, and blue skin made more than one fair lady ask him to a ball at court. His fine alto voice and kind manner made him much liked by children the world over. Arten would help out his friends but hurl a Lightning Bolt at his enemies.

Terin was about five feet seven inches tall and weighed slightly less than 131 pounds. He had a nice tan, dark brown hair, and sapphire eyes. He was kind to all he met, with one exception—he hated most assassins.

Kef-thom was three feet three inches tall and weighed 42 pounds. The brown-haired, green-eyed halfling loved the wilderness more than anything. He was suspicious of everyone, paranoid. He always wore his magical armor and carried his magical javelin in his hand. He mainly carried curative spells, but, when angered, he'd throw globes of fire.
The pale, blonde-haired, rainbow-eyed, snow-elven assassin, Maskor, made them all look like halflings. He was 28 years old. He stood six feet five inches from the ground and weighed only 117 pounds. Whenever he looked at a lady, she would always blush.

Before the friends arrived at the city, a group of assassins jumped out of the bushes. Terin automatically reached for his blades, a pair of rapiers. "Hold," said Maskor calmly, "I'll see what's going on."

"Maskor! Darvonac wants you dead," said one of them. "We came to warn you that he's jealous of your popularity in the guild." After so saying, he and the other assassins quietly left the area.

"What do you plan to do?" asked Arten.

"Well, gentlemen, I think Terin may get his wish," replied Maskor, checking his Colt Python, one of the few guns in existence after the Great War. "I vote that we attack the stronghold tonight!"

"But, Maskor," complained Kef-thon, "don't you think that's a little rash?"

"Not at all," replied a smug Maskor. What his friends had no way of knowing was that he had infiltrated the guildmaster's place before.

They set up camp in a nearby clearing. Nothing bothered them the rest of that day. They awoke that night and set out for the guildhouse.

The front door of the guildhouse was a cinch to open. All Arten had to do was cast a knock spell, and they were in. Maskor detailed the place on a map he had "borrowed" from a member a few years ago. They split up, each going his own way, with Maskor taking the way that contained major traps, which he removed, even though he could have just passed through them.

Arten ran into a pool of water. He decided to go for a swim while Starshaft flew over him. The piranhas didn't stand a chance. Arten and Starshaft met up with Kef-thon and Terin (after finding a secret door at the bottom of the pool and using a potion that allowed Starshaft to breathe underwater to get through it). The four of them started killing assassins left and right since Maskor wasn't around to stop them. They caught Darvonac by surprise. He was in his room alone.

"Who are you, and what are you doing in my guildhouse?" yelled Darvonac.

"You had my guildmaster killed awhile back," replied Arten.

"The operative's name was Maskor—go kill him," said Darvonac hopefully. He thought he just might get rid of Maskor yet.

"Sounds good," said Terin, "but there's a problem with that. You see, we're Maskor's hired protection." Arten and Kef-thon couldn't believe that Terin had actually lied to Darvonac, but, then again, Terin didn't consider most assassins to be intelligent.
A gunshot sounded right behind them. They all turned to see the smoking barrel of Maskor's gun.

"You fool! You ruined my hand! Guards! Kill them!" shouted Darvonac.

"The guards can't hear you. They've been sleep-poisoned by a guild member. Oh, by the way, I wouldn't go for your bow, or your arrows that can kill a humanoid with a mere scratch, if I were you," said Maskor sweetly. Fire hit Darvonac at the same time that lightning ripped through him, claws and fangs tore into his leg and a rapier beheaded him.

"Nice work, my friends!" laughed Maskor. "Come! Let us enjoy the rest of our time in this wonderfully mysterious city."

Matthew Cutlip

Knowing

A trust broken
Two lives in tears
Still I blame you
Though I could have said no
You asked for my love
I gave it
Knowing the time wasn't right
Words of wisdom
Spoken in vain
You were still confused
Still unsure
I knew better
And still said yes
I am to blame
That is my pain.

Vern S. Johnson