

Osbert Weaver

Male human; age 23; lutenist; backing vocals

You have never met your father – your mother doesn't like to talk about him. It was difficult for her to raise a child alone while working for a pittance in an inn. You learned from an early age to be self-sufficient – your mother was kept so busy serving food and cleaning that she barely had time to sleep, and you were mostly left to your own devices. As soon as you were old enough you started running errands for the innkeeper for some extra coin, and sometimes delivering messages for busy patrons of the inn.

The inn was certainly not the best that Greatmarsh had to offer, but it was reasonably clean and respectable, and thus a frugal choice for many travellers who had no need for luxury when they only wished to stay in the city for a few nights. You saw a lot of soldiers and tradesmen – you found them interesting at first, but after a while they all began to blur together.

When you were ten, an elderly bard named Talbot came to stay at the inn – for a whole month. The innkeeper grudgingly gave him a discount on the understanding that he would play in the evenings. He had a modest following in Greatmarsh, and his performances reliably drew in a few more guests each night to buy the inn's ale.

You were enraptured by his music – every evening you finished your work early so that you would have a chance to creep into the common room and listen to him play. You thought that you were being sneaky, but Talbot eventually noticed your interest. He showed you how his lute worked and allowed you to play it – you were both surprised by the speed with which you got the hang of it.

The music seemed to call to you as if it were an old friend. You felt as if you had found something that you hadn't realised you were missing. You were very miserable on the day that Talbot was to leave – but he astonished you by giving you his lute before he left. He told you that you too had the magical gift of a bard, and instructed you to nurture it.

You practiced whenever you had the chance, rapidly progressing to more and more complex melodies. You had to write your own songs, as you did not know many, and could not afford written music. A few years later you were deemed good

enough to play in the inn. A few years after that you were playing in much better inns and getting paid a lot better. It was never enough money on its own, but when you took on other jobs during the day – usually various kinds of manual labour – you made just enough to rent yourself and your mother a small apartment from which she could work as a seamstress.

One evening, as you were packing up your lute after quite a successful performance, you were approached by a dwarf, Feldspar Shalecrusher. He told you that he was trying to put together a band, and asked if you were interested. You had always played alone, and hadn't given much thought to the idea – but it sounded like it would be interesting to play with other musicians, so you agreed. With you playing the lute, and Feldspar on the bass lute, you needed at least a vocalist and a drummer. Feldspar had heard of a half-elven woman who was said to have a wonderful voice, and a few days later he dragged you to one of her performances.

The woman's name was Merilinel Thynne, and her voice was indeed wonderful. Feldspar approached her after the performance to present your case, and managed to convince her to join your enterprise. Shortly afterwards you found a drummer, and after much deliberation decided to call yourselves Vorpall Mace.

Something in Merilinel's music really spoke to you. Her songs were at times sad and bitter, and it was clear that she'd experienced some unhappiness in her life – even though, as you soon discovered, she was the daughter of a local noblewoman. She was also the apprentice of a sorcerer, but didn't seem to enjoy her studies much – she was pursuing them to please her family. You soon began to collaborate, and together you composed some of the best music you have ever written.

Feldspar was perhaps not the world's best lutenist, but what he lacked in musical skill he made up for with his enthusiasm. He loved being in the band, and was always the glue that held it together. He also had a cart which you could use to transport your instruments – it was pulled by a mule named Matilda, which you all rapidly took to calling the Vorpall Mule.

It was a pity that you had such bad luck with drummers – you don't even remember that first fellow's name, since he lasted a mere two performances before being stabbed in a street brawl

in a sad case of mistaken identity. Thereafter one drummer was conscripted to the city guard, one became a monk after an abrupt drunken epiphany, two succumbed to unfortunate and unlikely fatal mishaps, and two simply vanished without a trace.

Your first few performances were decidedly uninspiring, but you soon moved your way up from the dingiest inns of Greatmarsh to some that were more reputable, and it did not take long for you to start playing larger venues and touring neighbouring cities. Soon you were widely regarded to be the best band in all of Greatmarsh and its surrounds, and your performances reliably drew enormous crowds.

Your fall was as swift as your meteoric rise. Despite your success, you were struggling with several difficulties, which all came together in a perfect storm on the night of your last performance.

As Vorpall Mace became more famous, you began to focus on larger performances with longer gaps in between them, abandoning the frequent small appearances of your earlier days. This was all very well for Merilinel, who seemed to have access to a bottomless well of funds, and for Feldspar, who had a steady job polishing gemstones for a jeweller – but you had no savings whatsoever, so a regular income was important to you. You had to make up the difference by doing more work on the side.

Merilinel always disapproved of anything you did that might damage your hands – she didn't seem to understand that you didn't have much choice. You couldn't believe how casually she spent money – she once offered to buy you a new lute, just like that. Of course you declined – the old lute you got from Talbot was always on the verge of falling apart, but it had immense sentimental value to you. In any case, you were determined not to be in Merilinel's debt at a time when things had become very awkward between you.

You had always bonded over your shared love of music, and in time this bond turned into a romantic relationship. Unfortunately, you soon discovered that music was not enough to bridge the gap between your stations. Merilinel didn't seem to realise what an immense advantage her birth had conferred on her. No matter what happened to her, she could always fall back on her family's resources. Sometimes you felt as if she were just playing a game while you were struggling for survival. Your debates often turned into arguments,

and the arguments became angry. By the time of the performance you were barely on speaking terms.

Everything went wrong that night. The Vorpall Mule went lame en route, causing you to be an hour late. The magical amplification failed halfway through the performance, and the sound mage could not restore it. Merilinel's voice was hoarse from singing loudly enough to be heard, which made her irritable. You snapped several strings on your lute. Feldspar had eaten something that disagreed with him, and was in a foul mood the entire evening. You received lukewarm applause from a disappointed audience, and while you were packing up the cart afterwards in the pouring rain, the drummer went back into the inn to smoke his pipe and never returned.

You don't remember who started the fight, but you remember how it ended – when your throats were raw from screaming at each other, you decided to return to your mother's apartment on foot, Merilinel hailed a coach, and Feldspar was left to push a cart full of abandoned drums back to his house, rain streaming from his beard. That was the last that you saw of either of them for several months.

In the intervening time, you have been pursuing a solo career. Shortly after Vorpall Mace broke up, you were approached by a young woman, Cecilia Arkwright, who said that she could find you some lucrative work entertaining nobles at banquets if you would allow her to represent you exclusively. You were rather low on funds, so this seemed like an attractive offer – and in many ways it has worked out very well for you. You have more money than you have ever had before in your whole life, you have rubbed shoulders with Greatmarsh's nobility – you had never dreamed that you could rise this far in society.

And yet, you have found this new life hollow and unsatisfactory. Nobles don't want to listen to interesting modern compositions – they want pleasant, inoffensive background music. You haven't played anything you've written yourself in months – Cecilia has provided you with sheet music to learn. You also get the inescapable feeling that the nobles you meet during your banquet performances don't appreciate you as an artist, or even a person – they see you as something like a pet, or an ornate piece of furniture. Something to

show off, but ultimately completely interchangeable with other things of its kind.

That is why you were somewhat relieved when Feldspar tracked you down a few days ago and suggested that you re-form Vorpall Mace and compete at the Battle of the Bards – a prestigious contest which is run every five years outside the city of Whitecrest. It took you a while to give him your answer – you missed the band, but you were anxious about what would happen if you and Merilinel met again. In the end you decided that it was worth the risk. You would have to pass on an upcoming banquet job – you have left Cecilia an apologetic note.

Feldspar had found a new drummer on short notice, so you lacked only one member. He went alone to visit Merilinel in her master's tower to persuade her to join you. You were sceptical that she could be persuaded, but Feldspar assured you that she would not be able to say no once he showed her the poster for the contest – Adamantium, your musical nemesis, had been confirmed as attending, and you both knew that Merilinel felt the rivalry between you particularly strongly.

Feldspar's tactic worked – he returned from his mission quite pleased with himself, and took you to see the new drummer. Her name is Rosalind Mott, and she is the daughter of a local merchant. She can't be a day over fifteen – but it would be hypocritical of you to underestimate her because of her age. You haven't heard her play yet, but Feldspar assures you that she is capable. She certainly is enthusiastic, and seems very excited to be involved.

Tonight you are all going to help Merilinel sneak out of her master's tower – you are nervous about seeing her again, but you hope that you can all overcome your previous disagreements for at least one more performance.

Your fellow band members:

Merilinel Thynne: a noble-born half-elf. She is incredibly talented. She is studying sorcery under the supervision of Master Baldwin, but you know that her real passion is for music. You briefly had a relationship with her, but it ended very badly – something you often regret. You both dread and long to see her again.

Feldspar Shalecrusher: a dwarf. He works for a jeweller during the day. He plays the bass lute and is a great fan of bardic music, which is quite unusual for a dwarf. Before Vorpall Mace he was in several other bands which broke up – you think that he has taken your falling-out the hardest.

Rosalind Mott: your new drummer. A merchant's daughter; very young. You suspect that she is all that Feldspar could find at such short notice. You hope that she will last longer than Vorpall Mace's previous drummers.

Equipment

Small rucksack: Clothing and travelling supplies.

Lute: Given to you by your mentor. It's seen better days and needs constant attention but still has a beautiful sound.

Money: 200 GP (your earnings from the last three months – more money than you've ever seen before)

Osbert Weaver

6th level Bard

Race: Human

Hit Points: 42

Alignment: Neutral Good

Base Attack Bonus: +4

Stats

Strength: 13 (+1)

Dexterity: 12 (+1)

Constitution: 14 (+2)

Intelligence: 10 (+0)

Wisdom: 14 (+2)

Charisma: 17 (+3)

Saving Throws

Fortitude: +4

Reflex: +6

Will: +7

Combat

Initiative: +1

Melee attack: +5

Ranged attack: +5

Armour class: 11

Skills

Climb: +9

Concentration: +8

Handle animal: +6

Knowledge local: +5

Listen: +5

Perform: +15

Profession: +8

Search: +2

Survival: +9

Swim: +9

Use rope: +4

Feats

Athletic: +2 to Climb and Swim checks (already included).

Self-sufficient: +2 to Heal (untrained) and Survival (already included).

Toughness: +3 HP (already included).

Skill focus (Perform): +3 to Perform (already included).

Proficiencies: Armour (light), Shield, Simple weapon.

Class features

Bardic knowledge: Make a check at +6 to see if you know something about an important person, item or place.

Bardic music: 6 times a day, use your music to produce magical effects on people around you or yourself.

Bardic music effects

Fascinate: Make a Perform check to cause someone to be fascinated by you.

Suggestion: Make a magical suggestion to someone you have fascinated.

Inspire competence: Give someone else a +2 bonus to a skill check.

Countersong: Make a Perform check to counter a magical effect that depends on sound.

Inspire courage: Inspire courage in anyone who can hear you.

Bard spells

Spells per day

2nd level: 2

1st level: 3

0th level: 3

2nd Level

Alter Self: Assume form of a similar creature.

Cat's Grace: +4 to Dex for 6 min.

Eagle's Splendor: +4 to Cha for 6 min.

1st Level

Cause Fear: One creature of 5 HD or less flees for 1d4 rounds.

Charm Person: Makes one person your friend.

Sleep: Puts 4 HD of creatures into magical slumber.

Unseen Servant: Invisible force obeys your commands.

0th Level

Dancing Lights: Creates torches or other lights.

Ghost Sound: Figment sounds.

Mending: Makes minor repairs on an object.

Message: Whispered conversation at distance.

Prestidigitation: Performs minor tricks.

Resistance: Subject gains +1 on saving throws.