

Feldspar Shalecrusher

Male dwarf; age 77; bass lutenist

You have led quite an unusual life for a dwarf. Your people have traditionally not expressed much interest in bardic music. Today, of course, things are changing – you see more and more beards at music festivals, and of course everyone has heard of the all-dwarf industrial metal band, Blöodhämmer – but when you were a boy you didn't even know that bards existed. You thought that you would spend your entire life underground, working in your uncle's mine, much like the rest of your family.

Then, one day, a group of human travellers passed through the mine on their way to some ancient archaeological site or other. Your uncle graciously invited them to spend the night in the miners' lodge instead of camping out in a bare shaft somewhere, and to show their gratitude they entertained you with stories – and music. One of them had a zither – the first musical instrument you had ever seen – and he played it very well.

Something drew you to that music – something that you had never felt before. You knew then that you would never again be content in your uncle's mine – you wanted to be somewhere where people played music like that. You wanted to learn how to play music like that. You couldn't explain to your family why you felt this way, and you wouldn't shut up about it, either. Eventually your exasperated parents gave you all the money they had been saving for your first adult mining gear and sent you to live with your cousin in Greatmarsh. They hoped that in a big, cosmopolitan city you might find whatever it was that you were looking for.

Upon arrival, you found yourself a steady but not overly time-consuming job as a gem polisher for a jeweller, and immersed yourself completely in Greatmarsh's bardic culture. As soon as you could afford it you purchased a bass lute and began to take lessons – you lacked the easy aptitude that so many of the best bards seemed to have, but you were determined to work hard in order to learn.

It did not take you long to join your first band. You found playing with other musicians far more rewarding than playing alone – you enjoyed the camaraderie and the spirit of cooperation, and you liked always having someone to talk to about

music. As the only band member with a steady job, you were the one who invested in a cart and mule for ferrying instruments around. You called the mule Matilda, but she has had many other names.

Your original band was called Kobold Victory, and achieved moderate success in Greatmarsh and a few neighbouring cities. Sadly, they did not stay together for very long – despite your best efforts, creative differences between the other members drove them apart after a few years. You were despondent after the break-up – you got a few solo jobs, but it just wasn't the same. You tried to join new groups a few times, but things never seemed to work out – you seldom stayed with them for more than a couple of months.

A few years ago you decided to try forming a new band, hand-picking musicians who would work well together. You started with a lutenist – you had heard stories of an extraordinarily talented young man named Osbert Weaver, and you recruited him at one of his performances. Next you found a vocalist – a half-elven noblewoman named Merilinel Thynne, who had a wonderful voice. Finally you found yourselves a drummer, and after much deliberation decided to call yourselves Vorpall Mace. It did not take long for you to start calling Matilda the Vorpall Mule.

Despite his humble origins, Osbert was indeed an excellent lutenist and songwriter. He had little time for practice, since he needed to supplement his income with a variety of odd jobs. For Merilinel, music was an escape – she studied sorcery in a local mage's tower, but did not enjoy it much, having been forced to follow this path by her family. Together, Merilinel and Osbert composed some of the best music that you had ever heard.

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.

Osbert was not happy that you were focusing your efforts on large performances with longer gaps in between them, abandoning the frequent small appearances of your earlier days – which resulted in less reliable pay. Merilinel's family discovered how much time she had been spending on her musical career – of which they had never approved – and away from her studies. To make things more complicated, their shared love of music had by this time driven them into a romantic relationship – but they were both discovering that music was not enough to bridge the gap between their stations. Merilinel did not quite understand the implications of Osbert's poverty, and he did not quite understand the severity of her family obligations. Their debates turned into arguments, and the arguments became angry. By the time of the performance they 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. Osbert kept snapping strings on his elderly lute, which annoyed Merilinel. You had eaten something that disagreed with you, and felt terrible all 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, Osbert decided to go home on foot, Merilinel hailed a coach, and you were left to push a cart full of abandoned drums back to your house, rain streaming from your beard. That was the last that you saw of either of your band mates for several months.

The loss of your second serious band hit you hard – you spent the past few months in a deep fugue,

wondering where it had all gone wrong. You thought several times of contacting the others, but after the things that had been said you were fairly sure that only an extraordinary event could bring you back together. You heard that Osbert was playing solo for wealthy patrons and that Merilinel was hardly ever seen outside the tower out in the marshes. All your attempts to locate the drummer had failed. You thought that the situation was hopeless – until you saw the posters for this year's Battle of the Bards.

This prestigious contest takes place every five years on the outskirts of the city of Whitecrest, at the site where the legendary band of bards known as the Clerics turned back an invading army of orcs with the power of their music. Vorpall Mace hadn't been ready to go five years ago, but you had always hoped that you would make it there this year. Surely you could convince the others that this was important enough for you to put your differences aside?

First you had to find a new drummer. This turned out to be more difficult than you had anticipated – all the best drummers had already been snapped up by other bands well in advance of the festival. What you had to work with was a sad collection of the incompetent, the inexperienced and the chronically unreliable. You had begun to despair of finding anyone of the right calibre when you were approached by a young lady who had overheard one of your unsuccessful recruitment attempts.

Her name was Rosalind Mott. She was a merchant's daughter, and only fifteen, but it was clear that she was already a bardic enthusiast. She had, of course, heard of Vorpall Mace and been to some of your performances, and worshipped both Osbert and Merilinel. She told you that she could play the drums, and would love nothing more than to be in a real band – especially if that band were Vorpall Mace. You gave her an audition – her demonstration was a little unpolished, but she could hold a beat and seemed eager to learn, which made her a lot more appealing than most of the other candidates. She even already knew a lot of Vorpall Mace's songs. You invited her into the band without hesitation. That left you with the more daunting task of luring the remaining members back in.

You knew that Osbert's new solo career was working out very well for him financially, so you

approached him with some trepidation. To your relief, it wasn't too difficult to convince him to join you, despite his misgivings about a reunion with Merilinel and his scepticism that she would agree to your plan.

Fortunately you had a secret weapon – a poster listing the bands which were confirmed to be attending the contest. Among them was Vorpall Mace's long-time nemesis, Adamantium. Their musical sub-genre overlaps with yours, which has always invited comparisons – although their sound has been getting much darker and more brooding lately.

You knew that Merilinel felt this rivalry particularly strongly – privately you suspected that this was due to a brief and ill-advised fling with Adamantium's tiefling lead singer, Reginald Sable. Of course when you told her that he might win if Vorpall Mace didn't show up she was unable to resist the challenge.

You agreed that you would come to the tower tonight with the whole band to help her to sneak away. You have taken a few days' absence from your job and given the Vorpall Mule a good wash – you're happier than you have been in a long time. This will be just like the old days! You hope that if this performance is a success you will be able to convince the others to re-form the band permanently.

You also hope to make it to Whitecrest in time to attend the widely advertised auction of what is said to be the authentic theorbo of Mika Carter, one of the legendary Clerics. This is the only original instrument of the Clerics ever to be recovered – you can't possibly afford to bid for it, but just being in the same room as the instrument would be an enormous honour.

You've booked space for the band to stay at the Kettle Drum in Whitecrest. The owner, Korlak Steelfoot, is an acquaintance and has given you a good rate.

Your fellow band members:

Osbert Weaver: a barmaid's son; a completely self-taught lutenist and songwriter. He is very talented. He briefly had a romantic relationship with Merilinel, but it ended badly. He has been performing solo at banquets in the city – he has a manager called Cecilia Arkwright.

Merilinel Thynne: a half elf; the daughter of a local noblewoman. She studies sorcery under Master Baldwin in a tower on the outskirts of the city – but you know that her real passion is for music. Her family does not approve. She and Osbert briefly had a romantic relationship, but it ended badly.

Rosalind Mott: your new drummer; a merchant's daughter. She is young and inexperienced, but very enthusiastic, and a great fan of Vorpall Mace. She is really interested in local bardic lore – it's nice to have someone to talk to about it again. You hope that she will last longer than Vorpall Mace's previous drummers.

Matilda: a.k.a. Vorpall Mule; your trusty steed. She pulls the band's cart. Although often stubborn, she has stuck by you through difficult times.

Equipment

Cart: Used for transporting the band and their instruments.

Small trunk: Clothing and travelling supplies.

Large trunk: Pots, pans and other items needed on the road.

Tent: For the band to sleep in when they're on the road.

Bass lute: A serviceable instrument that you're very fond of.

Money: 200 GP (mostly needed to pay for the band's board and lodging).

Feldspar Shalecrusher

6th level Bard

Race: Dwarf

Hit Points: 50

Alignment: Lawful Good

Base Attack Bonus: +4

Stats

Strength: 11 (0)

Dexterity: 11 (0)

Constitution: 14 (2)

Intelligence: 10 (0)

Wisdom: 16 (3)

Charisma: 12 (1)

Saving Throws

Fortitude: +4

Reflex: +5

Will: +8

Combat

Initiative: +0

Melee attack: +4

Ranged attack: +4

Armour class: 10

Skills

Appraise: +3

Bluff: +4

Concentration: +7

Handle Animal: +9

Knowledge (History): +5

Perform: +10

Ride: +8

Spot: +7

Feats

Animal Affinity: +2 to Handle Animal and Ride (already included).

Leadership: You can attract loyal companions and devoted followers (i.e. the band).

Toughness: +3 HP (already included).

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

Class features

Bardic knowledge: Make a check at +8 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

Calm Emotions: Calms creatures, negating emotion effects.

Delay Poison: Stops poison from harming subject for 6 hours.

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

1st Level

Alarm: Wards an area for 12 hours.

Animate Rope: Makes a rope move at your command.

Identify M: Determines properties of magic item.

Silent Image: Creates minor illusion of your design.

0th Level

Detect Magic: Detects spells and magic items within 60 ft.

Know Direction: You discern north.

Mending: Makes minor repairs on an object.

Message: Whispered conversation at distance.

Open/Close: Opens or closes small or light things.

Resistance: Subject gains +1 on saving throws.