

# ISLE OF THE CHARRED MAIDEN

GLIK'S FABLES  
VOLUME ONE

H.D. SCOTT

A stylized, gothic-style signature logo for H.D. Scott. The letters 'H.D.' are positioned above 'SCOTT'. The text is rendered in a dark, textured font with a slightly distressed or ink-like appearance. The 'S' in 'SCOTT' is particularly prominent, with a long, thin tail that extends downwards.

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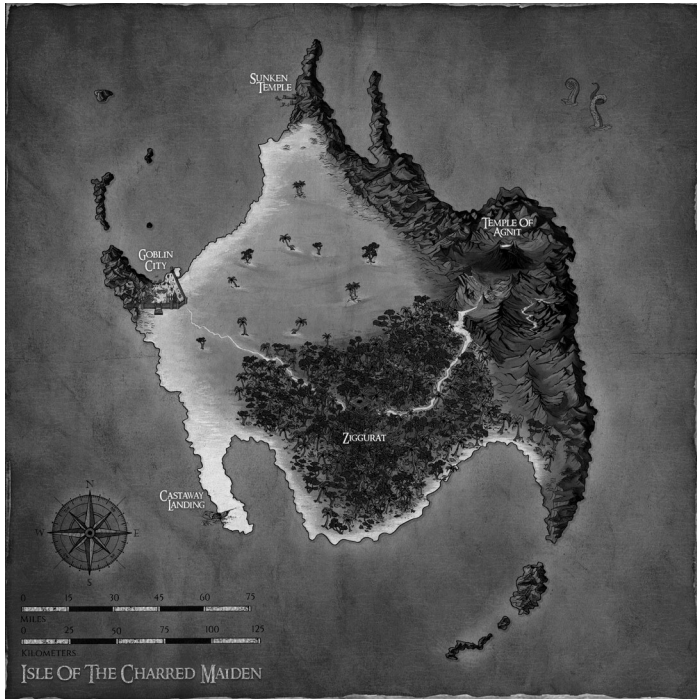
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*Dedication? Oh it took dedication all right! Thank you to everyone who made this book possible including my inspiring friends, brainstorm buds, beta readers, artists, editors, and my harshest critic (you know who you are). It's been a long roller coaster of a ride, and I'm hoping it's just the first of a long series of enjoyable reads to come.*

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CHAPTER I  
**BARNACLES & BIRD  
DROPPINGS**

**B**utts, butts, butts, everywhere! Why do humans and elves have to be so tall!? When I was with my tribe, I could look everyone in the eye. Not here. In Partha, my nose is at crack level every time I step out the door! Don't get me wrong, these people are fascinating. The things they've built, what they do, how they function, even why they do what they do. It's all amazing. But even the most elegant elf begins to look a bit foppish if you see nothing except their butt all day. Oh, what I'd give for a gnome to walk by, or a halfling! Anyone I could glare at, right in the eye! Butt cheeks just don't respond to glares as well as I would like.

Partha is a large port city. I had only been here for a few weeks, but I was sad to be leaving so soon. The sights, sounds, smells, and flavors were all an experience. There were giant constructs at the shipyard, tasty fish at the market, shady pickpockets in the grey quarter, and people over by the docks that never wore clothes and whistled as you walked by. All of it was fascinating. There was even a library where I acquired a couple of light tomes on history

and magic! They would spice up my fables nicely without breaking my back when traveling.

I had finally gotten enough coin to broker passage to the mainland, a three-month journey by ship across the largest ocean in the world. The tavern owner at the edge of town was originally planning to only pay for room and board in exchange for my entertainment services. Fortunately for me, he realized quickly that I ate less than half of the normal fare, and I was fine with whatever food he was about to throw out. In my defense, that food was infinitely better than EVERYTHING we had at the goblin lair!

On the first night, after reciting my two favorite fables, which gathered a fair crowd, I shouted to them, “Don’t bother tipping your storyteller, instead drink, drink, and drink some more! I want you up here where I am, telling the best stories you’ve ever heard!” It turned into one of the highest-selling nights the owner had ever seen. I, of course, got a few more tidbits of lore to add to my fables and learned a few dozen more things to avoid doing when telling stories. The owner was so impressed that he offered to give me a share of the profits if I could keep bringing in the crowds and the money. I didn’t do the same stunt every night, but when there was a good crowd, we all got drunk and had a merry old time swapping stories on the main stage. Good times, but it was time to move on to new adventures.

According to the tavern patrons, goblins are mean little monsters that are usually attacked on sight. But Partha is a town built on trade and money. Anyone and everyone with coin who can keep their weapons sheathed is welcome to spend here. I didn’t want to test that theory personally, and my gnomish clothing didn’t disguise me very well when my hood was down.

There was also my past to think about. I escaped the disgusting caves I grew up in only a couple of months ago, and I'm certain my old tribe would love to see me dead. I gave the leaders no end of trouble. I would be disappointed if someone had not taken up my mantle of insanity and trickery, but either way, if they ever spotted me again, I was rat food. Best be on the other side of the world. Besides, if I successfully made myself famous, I could always come back with enough fame and fortune to hire bodyguards and keep people happy enough that they wouldn't want to kill me!

Thoughts of death in mind, I meandered my way toward the docks. I stopped by the market and grabbed my favorite fish (some kind of tuna or swordfish, I was told). I flipped Marco a tip as usual, then stopped by the mushroom vendor to get a nice little fungus that reminds me of home. It paired excellently with the raw fish. I had once tried to get the tavern to carry this recipe, but the tavern owner found it disgusting. He always burned his fish, the numpty. In retrospect, most of my memories of home involved some form of saving my own skin. Usually from the chief, his guards, the cook, or some form of monstrosity. Perhaps not remembering home too often was a good thing.

I was still chewing on the head of the fish when I reached the first prospective ship at the dock. It was a fine-looking, three-mast ship with golden sails and a mermaid at the prow. *The Elegant* was written on its side in wispy elven letters that were barely legible. Surely fine elven sailors would love to have a storyteller on board.

"Get off my ship, you miniature troll!"

"1000 marks. Do you have 1000 marks? Then stop wasting my time!"



“You look positively ill, little gnome. I don’t want any disease on my vessel. Begone!”

“Only people on this ship are crew, and you look way too weak to be holdin’ yer own on my ship. Off with ya!”

“Are you chewing on a raw fish head? Disgusting! Bugger off before you make the other passengers sick!”

“We don’t haul nuthin’ but cargo, n ya ain’t no kinda cargo I’m willin’ t’ haul.”

So much for the generosity of elves and humans. I had gone through every ship in the port that was bound for the mainland. Every one of them either jacked up the price, shot me down, or flat insulted me.

That’s when she caught my eye. Hidden around the corner of the last pier in the harbor was one final option. Her sails were riddled with so much patchwork that little of the original sail remained. The boards of the hull had numerous repairs and obviously second-hand replacements. They were probably scavenged. It appeared to be held together by barnacles and bird droppings.

There was one little gem that stood out. Her name sparkled in mother-of-pearl lettering on her side with clearly legible and tasteful calligraphy. “*The Dolphin’s Tear*”. It looked like a good way to commit suicide, but also like it had seen a great many adventures.

I had a great feeling about this!

“You’re eyeballing my vessel mighty hard there, little one.”

His voice was bright, his smile brighter. He seemed to be a short human, but his ears had a slight point to them. He was stockier than most elves, so not one of them. Halfing blood, perhaps? Who knew? Nobody in this town really cared anyway.

“Hmm, a cloak, large pack, light books with heavy

material. If I had to guess, I'd say you were a gnome quite far from home. But you don't move like any gnome I've ever seen. Most gnomes don't have that fine greyish-green skin like you do either."

The stranger straightened his collar and took a shallow bow. "No matter! I'm Raylin. Raylin Yfrit, first mate of the *Dolphin's Tear*."

"Oh, I'm eying your vessel all right! Are you headed to Shael? And do you have any cats on board?"

Raylin paused at the last question, blinked a few times, then smiled radiantly. "Nope. No cats. Our rat troubles have gone to nothing since Skia, the kobold, joined our crew. Suspicious since she's our cook, but the stew tastes damn good and we don't have any rats on board, so who am I to question the gods of luck?"

Ugh, kobolds. The only creatures I've ever seen that can be both hairy and scaly at the same time. Not the soft, fuzzy fur of a small animal either. More like the creepy, prickling hair of a spider. They all had a snout like an alligator, claws, and tiny holes where ears should be. They were usually short and gangly like a goblin too.

Raylin continued, "To your first question, yes. If you care to join us, fare is 300 local coins, 400 Shaelian marks, or 600 of that Imperial papyrus crap."

Dammit. I only had 200 of the local. Last week that was enough. We must be getting close to winter or something. Then again, maybe they just didn't want a goblin on their boat.

"How about 150 local, and I provide entertainment every night of the voyage? I might even be persuaded to find out about this cook's recipes. Have you heard of Glik's Fables?" It was a long shot, but if they had been in the city

long, word may have spread from my tavern on the outskirts.

Raylin grinned. “No, but I’m sure I’ll hear of them before long. No worries about the cook. I’m sure she’ll try any recipes you give her. The crew might not, though.” He glanced at the last bits of fish head still in my hand, his eyebrows cocked in suspicion. “Either way, we’ve got open spaces left and we leave at high tide one hour from now. You’d better hurry if you have anywhere to go first. The captain waits for no one.”

“Deal! Name’s Glik. Where do I put my stuff?”

Raylin smirked, entertained by my antics already. “Let me show you your bunk.”

He led me up the gangplank to the deck. A crew of twenty was moving quickly, hauling the last provisions below, readying the sails for a quick release in an hour’s time. The deck itself was immaculately clean, as was everything that was not currently in use. It was quite a contrast to the overall condition of the ship. The crew was also unexpectedly, quite efficient. They were rarely distracted and never needed instruction or reminder of their duties. Impressively, they were quite the diverse crew as well. Most showed primarily human and elven characteristics, but a handful of dwarves, halflings, and surprisingly, an orc appeared on board. The captain, however, was nowhere in sight.

Raylin took me below deck next. It was quite a shift from the bright daylight above. A few magical lanterns were placed in a few key spots between the stairs and the cargo hold. Other areas had dimly lit oil lamps. It was clean, like the deck above, but it was a cramped space to begin with, and box after box of cargo crowded it further. Far to the back of the ship, Raylin gestured toward a row of double-

high hammocks. There were two trunks below each, securely fastened to the hull.

“Here’s where the passengers sleep, unless of course, you paid a stupid amount of money for the two cabins in the back.” He pointed his thumb over his shoulder to two wooden doors that could easily be mistaken for closets. “I’d love to give you the tour, but it will have to wait. In the meantime, I’d suggest staying either here, or up top near the front of the ship. Wherever you choose, stay out of the way.”

It wasn’t hard to see what he meant. Raylin almost got knocked on his butt trying to work his way back up deck. Too many people going to too many places, and all of them are in a hurry. Despite the challenge, I decided I’d be better off up top where I could see the sights. I only got knocked into a box twice on my way up!

It was there, on the bow of the ship, that I met a few of the other passengers. They were easily recognizable because they weren’t running around carrying things or shouting at each other. Most of them were looking out to sea, deep in thought. One lady was busy looking inward at all the ship’s commotion. She stood apart from the rest. Her clothes were a mottled green and black, like she wanted to blend into darkness. She actively sized up every person on board, judging how they would act around her.

“Best escape route is overboard once we leave.” I smiled a toothy grin from under my wide-brimmed hat, craning my neck upward just enough for my eyes to connect with hers.

“I’ll keep that in mind if you need ‘help’ escaping later.” Her voice was a warm timbre, but had a sharp and irritating edge to it. Then again, most human speech was irritating to

goblin ears, so maybe it was just me. “Is there a reason you are giving me your attention?”

“You seem to be the smartest person on the ship. I figure you have the best stories. Probably the best chance of survival when the bird droppings wash off and the ship sinks too.”

Her eyes made a quick judgement. Then, with a slight hesitation, she forced a thin smile. “Of course. What makes you think that?”

“I thought that was obvious! Everyone else is gawking at the scenery. You’re gawking at the crew and everyone else. Either you are quite the people person” *unlikely*, “or you’re judging everyone’s uses and any threats. Sadly, I’ve had to do both my entire life as a goblin. You seem potentially useful and practical. Care to form an alliance? I’d rather not worry about people rummaging through my things while I slept. Goblins aren’t usually welcome anywhere you know.”

Her eyebrows knitted together in a look of concern. “An alliance. With a goblin? I think not.”

Her eyes darted away from me briefly, distracted by something or someone I couldn’t hear. She started fidgeting with her amulet as her gaze returned to me. “Then again, you seem quite forthcoming and informed. Perhaps we’ll speak more on the journey.” Well, that was quite a quick shift. Maybe she’s crazy and hearing voices? I’ve made worse friends.

I shrugged. “Okay.” She was a strange one, but her initial lack of trust made me like her even more. I didn’t trust her either, especially after that quick shift from a “piss off” attitude to, “you’re useful. Let’s talk later.” But humans have a weird saying, something about “friends close, enemies closer, and lovers as far away as possible”.

I suppose I should have expected it. She had been

fidgiting with her amulet the whole time. It was the closed eye of the goddess of secrets.

I really liked my most recent literary acquisition. It was a book on religious history and was surprisingly useful. It was why I recognized that symbol and why I knew we would definitely talk later. Those who followed the goddess of secrets were directed to find new information wherever possible, especially if it was uncommon or secret information. A curious goblin storyteller in gnomish clothes mingling with “civilized” society was bound to have some uncommon secrets, right?

The book also mentioned that the truly devout followers wouldn’t lie, but that sounded too good to be true. Then again, the best liars I had ever known technically just omitted key details and never actually lied. Half-truths I believe humans call it. In *Goblin*, we describe it using the same word we use for “lie”.

Another passenger caught my attention. This one seemed exceptionally out of place with her elegant clothing trimmed in gold and silver. She also smelled of flowers and had long, thin ears that twitched as I approached. She was short enough that I could look up at her face without hurting my neck too! She turned toward me, a confused look appearing on her face.

She gave a slight nod before her gentle, mid-ranged voice articulated the words “Saleth, dwa’er” crisply and slowly.

“La duala!” I responded in High Elven with the most grating voice I could come up with.

She cringed at the obvious butchering of tone. “Quan, eomath?”, which roughly translated into “you speak elven?”

“Ioa (yes).” I replied, and we continued our conversation in High Elven.

Her eyebrows knotted in confusion. “How is it you know my language? Few know it well. Far fewer that aren’t elves. Sorry, I must apologize. Your appearance and unexplained knowledge have caught me off guard. My manners forget me. I am Orinne of the House Windwalker.”

“No apologies necessary! I am Glik, soon-to-be famous author of the fabulous anthology known as Glik’s Fables! As to your question, I once had a friend named Rakit. His disappearance saddled me with an almost endless stint of guard duty in the goblin holding pens where we kept the prisoners of... crap, I forget the elven word. Carnage? Fighting? Battle? Whatever, the important part is that prisoners will talk endlessly and tell you anything if they think you’ll befriend them and set them loose. I couldn’t do that without dying myself, but I learned a great many things from the endless hours of conversation. It truly is amazing how many languages some fighting people know!”

Her expression paled. “That’s, um, quite a tale, little one. I suppose you withheld some gruesome details, thank you. Was there something I could help you with?”

“Not at all Orinne, or should I call you Miss Windwalker?”

She smirked at the breach of etiquette. “Orinne is fine, in your unique case.”

“Orinne it is, then. I’m curious. What brings you here over all the other, more hospitable ships?”

“Hm, I shall not bore you with the details, but in short, the *Dolphin’s Tear* once belonged to my family centuries ago.”

She sighed and placed her hand on her temple. “Was there anything else? If not, I must apologize, but I am not in a fit state for conversation. My mind is elsewhere.”

I took the hint, but made a note in my journal. Previous ownership, along with the ship's age, could be useful. "Until next time then, Lady Windwalker." I bowed and backed away.

I scanned the deck and decided against talking to the few remaining individuals I spotted. A pissed off human in silken robes was screaming at the crew, something about how valuable the merchandise was and how they were treating the crates. Something about "Manhandling them like a pig farmer". I may have to avoid him all together. But that was a lot of shiny stuff on just one outfit. Perhaps a visit to his quarters would be a good idea on the last few days of our voyage.

There was also a short, fat fellow with a long, red beard. He looked like he could split a person in half with a belch. The armor was quite intimidating as well. A look of irritation in his eyes let me know he would be better to approach later, if ever. That look, it clued me in. Well, that, and the oddly well-kept eyelashes. That wasn't a short guy at all. It was a dwarf woman!

With little left to focus on while everyone was busy, I risked a little venture. I worked my way to a semi-private area at the front of the ship, then settled my shoulder bag onto the rail and clicked my tongue softly to signal the all clear.

*Tck, Tck...Tck, Tck*

Long whiskers emerged from my bag, followed cautiously by a tiny black nose on a long snout. Round ears and beady eyes twitched every which way to make sure the environment was safe.

"It's alright, Tinky. You probably won't get much air for the next day or two while we settle in. Once we get close to the mainland there's a lot of fun to be had, but until



then I suggest you stay close to me. There's a kobold cook on board who likes rat."

"Squeak."

"Help yourself to the bread. You did excellent today. Not a single noise, and I didn't have to remind you to not take anything from the market this time!"

Tinky squinted her grey eyes in the wind, enjoying a bit of fresh air. The little monster was probably the only loyal friend I really had. We had met in the holding pens of the goblin lair a few years ago. I assume she had come in with some adventurer as a pet or something. She was far too intelligent to be a regular wild animal. That's probably how she learned to steal so well too. It was sheer luck that let me catch her with the keys while she was filching them off of me. Rather than eat her, I let my curiosity guide me. After some time, we learned to communicate. Still, I can't speak rat. We ended up escaping together, finding mutual benefit in Tinky's keen senses and my knack for confusing guards.

"ALL ABOARD! *If not, too bad for you, ya lazy overfed bastards...*" Raylin was true to his word. With only that shout of warning (and the not-so-subtle comment under his breath), the gangplank was brought up, the anchor weighed, and the ship lurched forward. The city of Partha shrank behind us, along with all my worries of home. Only adventure on the endless blue horizon remained.

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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Glik is an adventurous goblin storyteller, out to make his name known and spread the wealth of stories that he is collecting on his adventures. When not out adventuring, he spends his time at whatever tavern he happens to be staying at, regaling the regulars with embellished stories and adding to his repertoire of recipes, per Tinky's request. There's simply too much good food and drink to not try as much as possible.



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