

In the middle and final volumes of The Deed of Paksenarrion, Arvid Semminson is a suave, urbane mystery man dressed in black, an expert swordsman, possessor of many knives, most of them hidden. He's associated with the Thieves' Guild, though he insists he is no thief. When he first met Paks, he considered himself far superior to the unsophisticated country girl. He gave her a necklace to impress her; she wasn't that impressed and later gave it away. Neither of them knew its worth.

Shortly after saving Paks's life, he is certain he's the only man who can save the thieves of Vérella from the fury of the Girdish Marshals eager to avenge the attack on their paladin. After all, having saved Paks, they owe him.

But as Paks told him the last time they met in the Deed of Paksenarrion, her patron—the hero-saint Gird himself—might have something planned for both Arvid and the Thieves' Guild. Arvid will find that being involved with a paladin has brought him to the attention of Gird and embroiled him in ancient mysteries. He is now doomed to have a far more interesting life, as we will see in Oath of Fealty and its sequels.

Point of Honor

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"I didn't cause this mess," Arvid Semminson said to the group of thieves crammed into a small back room above a weaver's workshop, a hand of days after the paladin had escaped alive. "But I may be able to get us out of it." He polished the dagger he held with a scrap of silk, turning it to catch the light as if to be sure no speck marred it.

"You!" The speaker was the tallest of the group, a heavy-shouldered man Arvid knew had led the local guild's rougher members. "You never been around Vérella that much. I don't know anything about you. How do we know it's not all your fault?"

Arvid smiled. "You don't know me because I was Guildmaster Galin's appointment." Galin, who had died four years before, supposedly of a fever. Arvid had his doubts, now. Galin had been an orthodox follower of Simyits, the patron of thieves. "I collected accounts due all over Tsaia."

"You're the enforcer!" said one of the women. "I heard about you." She was a plump, motherly woman and the best pickpocket in the city; street boys learned from her.

"The *senior* enforcer," Arvid said. "And, at the moment, the man you most want to be Guildmaster."

"I'm the ranking member," the tall man said. "I was thirteenth in line from Terin Guildmaster; Galat there can vouch for it. If the books hadn't burned--"

Galat nodded. "S'true," he said. "And all the others in line ahead of Harsin But them others was caught and killed."killed."

"Interesting," Arvid said. He ran his thumb along the dagger blade. "And what would I find if I slit your shirt below the waist, Harsin? Is there by any chance a Horned Chain tattoo just there at the small of your back? Or is yours lower down?"

Harsin paled, as Arvid had expected.. Most of the Guild toughs had the mark, and Right right now, in this city full of angry Girdish Marshals, the merest rumor of a Horned Chain tattoo would lead to arrest and death.

"You wouldn't," Harsin said. "Thieves' honor--"

"We are all thieves here, are we not?" Arvid said. He slid that dagger into his boot. "And among thieves, loyalty to the Guild is our first duty, is it not?"

"Yes..." came mutters from them all.

"Then of course I would not betray one of us to the Girdish. But at this time, friends, we need a Guildmaster who has--if not the favor, at least the tolerance--of the law. And I, having saved their paladin's life--"

"Why?" asked Harsin. "Why bother with her? Because you fell for her yellow hair two or three years ago in some country town? What was she like in bed, that you risk the Guild--"

Arvid moved so suddenly that the flat of his alley blade--five fingers wide, two handspans long, sharp both edge and point--was against Harsin's throat before anyone else moved. The man could not even swallow without cutting himself. "Because I foresaw that Terin Guildmaster's plot would fail, that allying the Guild with the Horned Chain cult was stupid and would, at some point, have exactly the result it did--exposing the Guild to the Girdish and getting most of us killed." Without looking away from Harsin's eyes, now white-rimmed with fear, he said to the others, "Either you accept me as Guildmaster, because I was wiser than Terin and also have at least some tolerance from the Girdish, or I will leave you all here to be hunted down as the others were--the Girdish have not exhausted their anger yet--and go to a place where the Guildmaster is not a fool."

Harsin blinked in the thieves' code for *Your lead*. Arvid stepped back, shifting his grip on the alley blade to the ritual position for accepting obeisance, point toward them all.

"Do you then accept me as your Guildmaster?" he said to Harsin.

Harsin swallowed, nodded, and then knelt, both knees thudding on the floor. Arvid hoped no one was downstairs to hear. "I, Harsin, master thief, formerly thirteenth in rank to former Guildmaster Terin, accept Arvid Semminson as Guildmaster of Vérella, and to him swear obedience and loyalty. On my honor as master thief."

Arvid held out the blade; Harsin nicked his left thumb with the tip, swiped blood on the upper half, and then kissed it. The others quickly followed, one by one kneeling--more silently than Harsin--drawing their own blood, kissing the blade, making their oath. Finally Arvid nicked his own thumb, rubbing his blood into the mark made by theirs, and then wiping the blade clean with another square of silk, this one white so the stain showed.

"By this blood, we are agreed," he said. "I am Guildmaster, and you are my people. Obey me, and I will see you safe, to the last drop of my own blood. Honor among thieves; deceit to our enemies."

"Aye, Master," they all said.

Arvid looked them over: the fourteen women, the six men. A finger of the hand the Guild had been in this division of the city; the situation was as bad everywhere, he knew. And yet, he had now been proclaimed Master in more than half the divisions. He had won. He sliced the bloodstained cloth into fragments with the same blade they'd sworn on and gave a piece to each, folding the rest carefully and tucking it in his belpouch.

"So," he said. "Now we get to work. Harsin, I choose you first for this division, and may choose you my second if you please me this next tenday. We must find you all safe lodging; our weaver friend is like to be discovered if there's too much traffic here."

Later, in his comfortable room at the Bells, Arvid pulled out the alley blade and looked at it thoughtfully. Everything had gone very smoothly, all things considered. Paks had said Gird might have a use for him--might care about the

Thieves' Guild. Surely it wasn't Gird who had made it so easy to take over...surely it was Terin's stupid alliance with those fiends of the Horned Chain...he shuddered at the memory. Thieving and killing and even a spot of scaring the fools who didn't pay their Guild dues was nothing like what they'd done. But he could despise torturers like the Horned Chain without changing himself...couldn't he?

Maybe. The word came from nowhere and made no outward sound. His skin pulled up into gooseflesh as if someone had poured a mug of cold water down his spine. No. He was not listening to any voices. Not now, with a Guild chapter to manage. He shrugged his shoulders, rammed the alley blade back into its sheath, and went downstairs. A good hot meal and a mug or two of mulled wine would ensure a good night's sleep with no bothersome thoughts.

Maybe.

The End



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