

Shila Methazar
A Character Background
for Heroes of Feonora RPG Board Game
by Josh Graye

In the world of Feonora the Malornians are a race of reptilian humanoids, tall and slender...intelligent, tough and agile. The natural body tone (or coloring) of a Malornian is usually solid and even, though the color itself may range from light green to dark blue, with hues of gray in between. It has been observed that some, or rather a rare few Malornians are adorned with a decorative "pattern" of scaly coating, in contrast to the plain and even coloring of most. Malornian society, though it has many distinct facets within, universally adheres to a staunch view of class, nobility, and a kind of fighting ethic that few fully understand...the closest analogy we may conjure is something the Humans might call a 'Warrior Code.'

The amber rays of the evening light filtered down upon the face and shoulders of Pethanlu, casting a long shadow across the oval-shaped room. His formidable size, tall and muscular even for a Malornian, belied the position of a noble or a warrior...the head of an important house...or, as it happens to be the case...all of these. The adornments of this well-decorated room, with its sturdy furniture and hand-woven tapestries, basked in the light coming through three magnificent windows, and as Pethanlu gazed at the distant mountains his mind and thoughts were fixed on the words that had just been spoken. "You've made up your mind then..." he spoke aloud without turning from the window. "Yes," came the confident reply from across the room. "I will go. I want to do this. And I DO believe I am ready father." Pethanlu turned to look at his daughter, so confident and strong, as she had always been, and felt a rush of pride, which quickly gave way to a current of concern. "You'll set out tomorrow, before the dawn breaks. Your companion has already been decided by the Group of Nine. The two of you will meet at the Yuanizu cliffs...from there you will depart together. Whatever happens..." He paused to choose his words, "...remember that you are...special. You always have been." Pethanlu placed his hands on Shila's shoulders and gave her a look of reassurance, and, not wanting to say 'goodbye' departed quietly. And though Shila didn't know it at the time, this would be the last she would see of her father for many years.

Shila had grown up in one of the most well-regarded Houses in all the land. The first of five children, she had been raised from the start to represent her family with honor, and to serve her people. Leadership, of course, is not a quality that can be fostered only through conditioning, for it is well known that leadership ultimately comes from within, a natural gift that very few possess from birth – *though many try in vain to coax it from within (or mistake other qualities for it)*. But that was a concern put early to rest, for Shila had always displayed such natural confidence and charisma that she had been one of the most well thought of younglings, always caring for the younger Malornians and keeping her oft-misguided peers out of trouble. It seemed her destiny had been set from the beginning, which was both a joy and a pride to her mother and father, both of whom carried a heavy responsibility as ranking members of the Malornian nobility.

The morning light touched the top of the cliffs above, signaling the start of a new day and, for Shila, a new adventure more exciting than any she had previously known. She of course had arrived early and in her usual, dutiful manner had been diligently tending her small crossbow, which was one of the most well-maintained and, in her capable hands, deadliest of weapons...

at least if you counted the Malornians in her age group. As with so many of her qualities this was an attribute she seemed to possess which somehow extended beyond her training. With a special buckle attachment the crossbow (no larger than her two hands placed side-by-side) stayed secured to her waist, leaving room for the small, rounded weapon she carried in her hand.

"Are you ready?" Distracted by so many thoughts Shila hadn't noticed the figure, her companion, approach from behind. She turned abruptly to find a calm, familiar face. "Agan?" Agan's physical features had long been a trademark, for he wore a pattern not of a solid hue, but one consisting of two discrete tones, a kind of dark green mixed with gray blue, that gave him a distinct quality of appearance. The two had known each other from childhood, he only a year younger than her, and they had practically grown up together - *Agan being from another of the noble families*. He had always been a serious one, bearing, like Shila, the responsibility of a future leadership role. Being a member of one of the few noble families brought with it a great deal of privilege but, as Shila had come to learn growing up, carried with it a heavy burden. "I'm ready." Agan watched her, much as he had always done, in a way that gave her mixed feelings...as if she were being tested, or compared to some unknown thing (or person). Their eyes were locked on one another for a moment longer, and then, without another word, they turned and departed.

The weather had favored them on the long journey, with only a few brief shower storms, followed by the bluest skies filled with large white clouds and flocks of Gulls and at one point Agan swore he caught a glimpse of a dragon passing through the clouds but Shila was sure that it had just been his imagination. He watched the sky intently for some time after that and she marveled at the thoughts and wonders they both were surely feeling on account of this special mission. The days passed. They had traveled and hunted together, taking special care to avoid notice of the occasional wandering bands of Goblins and Orcs, or loud blustering Humans (*who were usually best to avoid unless you were running low on supplies*). They had been seen by only one group of Elves, from a distance, and that had resulted in nothing more than a brief look, and a respectful nod. In the evenings they would set up a simple camp and talk about their families and childhood. There were occasional moments of laughter though, it seemed to Shila that Agan was being even more reserved than usual. They barely spoke of the task at hand, each knowing what was to be done, and their own role in the affair. Every so often one would catch the other watching or stealing a glance, which usually resulted in both of them quickly turning away in shielded embarrassment, and although neither would dream of openly admitting it, they were enjoying this time together...in spite of the circumstances.

End of Part 1

It was late in the evening when they reached the village, deep in Bogwood Swamp. As usual the misty haze that permeated this marshy lowland, gave poor visibility to the surrounding vicinity, blurring the shapes of structures and inhabitants alike. "Are you sure this is the place?" whispered Shila without turning around. "Yes" came the reply, "I've been here before, and remember it well." Shila turned to look at Agan, whose eyes were fixed on the buildings below with a look as though he were recalling a very specific memory. This he had never mentioned before. *What would Agan, someone of his social status have been doing in a place like this? Had he been sent here on a prior (secret) mission...or was it something more personal? Why hadn't he mentioned it until now?* The tribal Malornians who occupied this village went about their daily business, unaware that they had visitors...unwelcome visitors. "Can you see him?" Shila said, half in an attempt to

avoid the topic of Agan's connection to this place. "No. And I don't think we will. At least, not until after nightfall. We'll scout the perimeter, and then wait." Agan reached over and took her hand, and slowly they faded back into the tall reeds.

The strumming of crickets and burps of Purple bugs joined the chorus of unseen swamp life filling the night air, and continued even as a light rain began to fall. The trees were thick here and the cloudy sky and dense canopy colluded to form a darkness that only the swamps could manage, the kind of darkness that even a strong torch would struggle to overcome. The sounds of swampy night and the murky blackness would serve them well. The two intruders made their way slowly toward one of the larger structures, sturdy looking, but pieced together with all manner of materials, some clearly not native to the swamplands. A few well-placed torches managed to cast a dim glow over the center of the village, which was already forming mud puddles illuminated by the firelight. Voices could be heard, faintly through the ambient noise and steady rain, but no audible words as the inhabitants went about their nightly business. The occasional sound of laughter emanated from the largest structure, which seemed to be serving as a public house or meeting place. There weren't but two guards on patrol, each positioned on opposite sides of the village and Shila thought it strange that there should be so little security. Very few of the Malornians she had observed, aside from their unusual attire & adornments, carried weapons. And yet they seemed calm and confident in the safety of their village.

Shila's thoughts were interrupted when a lone Malornian stepped outside, pausing to survey the surrounding landscape, casually emptied the contents of his smoking device into the mud, and then faded into the fog. "That's him" said Agan, with noticeable excitement in his voice. Checking carefully to see that no others were lurking about they bolted from their hiding spot toward the fog that had enveloped their target. The tracks were easy to follow but they had moved quite a distance into the surrounding swamp, at a quicker pace than it seems they should have. The two found, at last, that the footprints ended abruptly at the base of a giant fallen tree. Shila half expected to see a cadre of warriors standing atop the half sunken tree trunk, waiting for their arrival...but instead there was only the pitter-patter of a lone Goblin fleeing frightfully into the distance. The sack of mushrooms spilling over the ground indicated they had probably startled him away from his foraging duties. With the swiftness of a Khajathi Agan leapt up onto the tree and slowly began surveying their surroundings. "What are you doing!?" Shila exclaimed in a whispered shout. "You'll see in a moment," came the reply, and already Agan was looking across at something. Shila glanced over to see the Malornian, the same who had led them here, to this strange place, and her senses shouted the word "trap" in her mind. Instinctively she whipped out her crossbow and aimed at the target, who stood calmly, first taking the time to assess Agan (who hadn't moved a muscle), and then looking down at Shila. The fog was still thick, but when he looked at her she was almost sure that he had somehow recognized her, though she had never seen this Malornian in all her life. Surely she would have remembered the scar that ran diagonally across his neck. No one spoke. Shila could feel and hear her heart beating. "Put it away!" Agan whispered sternly. "This is Gelden; he's one of us!" Shila's eyes narrowed as she assessed the information. "Do you have it?" Gelden spoke for the first time, calm and collected. Agan nodded respectfully and then, approaching the stranger, pulled out a folded leather cloth. *So this was our real mission...to deliver a message to this...spy?*

Shila allowed herself to relax as the pieces slowly fell into place. She looked on inquisitively as Gelden took the cloth, unfolded it, looked it over but for a brief moment, and then handed the cloth back to Agan. As Agan placed the message back into his satchel Gelden was again looking

down at Shila, and that's when everything took a deadly turn. A band of warriors burst forth from the surrounding trees. Agan leapt down to stand beside her and in no time at all they were surrounded by a contingent of fierce-looking 'tribals.' She looked at Agan as if to question what they should do (*to fight or flee*) but just as their eyes met Agan reeled in pain, grasping the back of his neck. Within seconds he had fallen, a tiny dart had found its mark and as Shila turned to look up at the Malornian traitor she caught a glimpse of the small device being calmly tucked away. There was no chance for a fight. Only now she held the limp body of her companion and knew that all was lost. In her rage and fear she turned her crossbow to Gelden, who didn't flinch. His eyes were locked on hers and she found that, somehow she couldn't bring herself to pull the trigger. Perhaps it was her survival instinct, knowing that she would be cut down by the warriors the moment she loosed the bolt. Then Gelden spoke, addressing the men, "He's finished. Take her to Argyle; I'll deal with the body."

End of Part 2

It had been a long walk back to the village, blindfolded and with her hands bound in front of her, Shila had fallen more than once in the thickened mud of this forsaken place. Always she was picked up and pushed to continue ahead, as if they had some schedule to keep. No one spoke. Without the ability to see the sounds around her took on a new life. Suddenly, it seemed, she could hear things she hadn't noticed before, like the subtle differences in the slurp and plop of footsteps (or the absence thereof) depending on the viscosity of the mud. The sounds of the swamp, still mysterious and so alive, reminded her how far she was from home. Thoughts drifted to home, familiar faces, and one beautiful face in particular...*Her sole companion, and close friend, had been murdered by a traitor, and there's no telling what they might do to a prisoner...especially one who belonged to a great noble house. She must not let them know her true identity. Or maybe, that was the test that now lay before her, to face her fate with dignity, to triumph (in some small way) in spite of her failure.* Her mind turned to Gelden then, the traitor spy, and cold murderer who had, like these filthy tribals, not an ounce of honor running through his blood. The rage in her heart boiled at the thought of him and her mind danced at the thought of bringing justice to Agan's betrayer. Only she would not sneak up from behind, or deliver poison from the shadows. She would face him.

They had descended a small, twisting stairway and made a few turns; the surface beneath her feet was, to Shila's surprise, made of solid (smooth) wood and barely creaked under the weight of them. They must have entered a room for the sounds gave a different echo now and she could feel the illumination of torches or candlelight. They had come to a full stop; there was only the sound of footsteps and low murmurings and then, the blindfold fell loose, untied from behind. Her eyes strained to adjust to the light and the blurry figure now standing in front of her, untying the binds to her wrists. By the time her eyes had adjusted she could see that this room was not a prison cell or torture chamber, as she had half expected, but what appeared to be a Study of some kind, complete with an array of bookshelves, several comfortable looking chairs and an elegant desk of a most unusual design. Her brief survey of the room revealed that she was also now completely alone and for a moment Shila wondered how she had not heard the tribals leave the room. There were only two doors, the one behind her, from which they had entered and another in the opposite corner. Inspection revealed both were bolted shut from the other side and, as she immediately noticed, also fashioned of solid wood...good Cheramu wood such as they had back home, which she was sure did not grow out here in the swamplands. *What is this place?* Shila looked over the room again, more carefully this time. The top drawer of the desk revealed

several sheets of paper, unused, and a small letter opener, also ornamentally crafted...possibly Elvish, maybe Human. *What fools would leave her in this room to find such a useful weapon? Unless it was a trap.* Shila brushed off the thought as she gently slipped it under her left bracer.

Something chirped from across the room and the sound of it breaking the dead silence startled Shila so that she knocked over the chair behind her (and very nearly had leapt across the desk). *What was that!?* *There it is again...*a single low pitch chirp, with a distinctive trill. Though her nerves were on edge Shila quickly composed herself and strode cautiously to the source of the strange sound. There, on a small stand (which had been obscured by a large overstuffed chair) was a metal cage, half covered by a decorated piece of thin cloth. Again, the craftsmanship of this cage was an impressive sight, no doubt stolen or looted from a wealthy noble, or perhaps even from one of the Elvish clans. Shila lifted the cloth to reveal the mysterious creature and instantly found herself gazing into the tiny round eyes of a curious, delicate looking thing. The shape of it resembled that of a small bird, with a brilliant deep brown (almost orange) outer coat and a fuzzy belly of light blue. The tiny beak was unlike any she had seen on a bird this size, except that instead of feathers its coat seemed almost unreal, as though it had been fashioned from the lightest, fluffiest cotton and then tinted with color. It had no wings or appendages other than two little bird-like legs, and the thing was perched comfortably on a bar. At first it didn't move, just watching, with its eyes as Shila studied her new discovery. She tilted her head, trying to recall if she had ever encountered such a creature and in unison with her movement so too did the little wingless *bird*. This was followed by a low purring, almost rolling rumble, though its mouth didn't move, and the thing just gazed adoringly into Shila's weary face. "Another captive..." she spoke aloud, "...probably taken away from your mate. And now trapped." *Like me*, she thought to herself. Shila's thoughts returned to Agan, and like a flood her heart began to ache and she felt the tears welling up, blurring her vision of this poor and lonely creature.

The door crept open and through stepped Gelden. His attire was different now. Shila stood slowly, turning to face the traitor, full of questions – but mostly rage – and casually her hand moved toward the bracer on her left forearm. Gelden's face was different somehow, his expression difficult to read for it almost resembled...concern. He was still several paces away from her and she would have to be swift and fierce, choosing her moment carefully. "We have very little time," Gelden spoke without a hint of urgency. "Yes, we do" said Shila as she stared into him. To that Gelden reacted, slightly, and then, as if her meaning had suddenly clicked into place his expression changed again. "Ah, yes...Well, before you avenge your friend – at the expense of your own life – there is something you should know about him..." Shila froze. And a sense of dread enveloped her. "He's alive, and well...and as we speak on his way home." Shila began breathing again (not realizing she had been holding her breath). "How..." Shila struggled for words. "How is that...possible?" "The poison you mean?" At that Gelden pulled the tiny device out and held it up. "That dart did carry a poison, yes. A special mixture that saved your friend...by giving the appearance of having killed him. In fact, it probably saved both your lives, because if the two of you had stood and fought you would both be dead now." Shila scoffed at the thought, but Gelden paid her no mind. "You are confident and skilled young one; but you underestimate these people." He was making his way to one of the bookshelves. "You can never rely too much on the stories of others...Some things can only be learned, and understood, firsthand. But there's no time for this. If I had not administered the antidote in time he may never have recovered. It was good that you did not fight back there, a brave and sound judgment." Shila's eyes narrowed, "How can I know you're telling the truth?" "You can't. Not now." Gelden had taken a small book from the shelf. "As I said, some things you will have to

figure out for yourself.” Shila's emotions wavered between joy and suspicion, hope and confusion. “When you are ready, when the time is right, you can give me a message. I will see that he gets it. You may also write your parents.” Gelden emphasized his next point, “But keep the messages brief. They will already know your fate.” “So I'm not to be executed then,” Shila replied. “That is up to them.” Gelden's tone was serious and he looked deeply into her eyes. “I cannot rescue you. The risk is too great, and there is too much at stake...things I cannot reveal. You can search for a way to escape, but don't count on my presence or aid.” Gelden paused and then continued as if he had just thought of something. “You should know they have trackers, competent as the best Elvish scouts. You would never know you were being followed.” Gelden had placed something in the book and, glancing over at her, replaced the book back on the shelf. He then pulled something out of a pocket, glanced at it quickly before putting it away and then, without another word, left the same way he had come in.

Shila was alone again. Well, not completely alone. Her little bird was still there, quietly perched and watching her contentedly. Shila began moving toward the bookshelf when the other door opened for the first time. Two figures stepped into the room. The first was a horribly disfigured Malornian, older in years, and looked as though he had been trampled in some terrible way or attacked by Orcs and left for dead many years ago and only barely survived. And yet, he walked mostly upright with an unnerving degree of confidence. The second was a woman, similar in years and possibly the most beautiful Malornian Shila had ever seen. For the longest time they stood there and watched her, studying her, and she couldn't understand what they were looking for. A feeling of defiance welled up inside her and Shila said nothing for she would give them nothing they sought. Perhaps sensing her discomfort the man spoke at last, “I am Argyle.” Gesturing, “This is my life-mate Ilthune.” “May we have the pleasure of knowing your name?” Shila steeled herself, knowing that whatever courtesy or emotion she displayed must not betray the survival of her companion, or tip them off that she knew of his return journey home. *Agan is safe now, she thought, and this path is mine to walk alone.* Shila lifted her head and spoke, “My name is Shila, firstborn and daughter of house Methazar, to whom you owe your allegiance.” The two of them looked at each other as if they had heard the words they had hoped for. *No doubt she would make for a prized captive*, though Shila also knew that her people were not predisposed to paying out ransom. Perhaps in defiance at whatever plot they had in mind, or in a desperate attempt at seizing the momentum Shila spoke again, more defiant as before, “You would make a great mistake keeping me a prisoner. It would be better for you and your people if you let me go...or kill me.” Argyle responded visibly to the suggestion, “Kill you? Is that what you think we do?” Then he seemed to consider for a moment. “Although, you have been caught a spy. Do you deny it?” Shila mustered up her courage. “I do not deny it.” “But you admit you know very little about us,” interrupted Ilthune. Thinking back to Gelden Shila wasn't sure how to answer the question. She hesitated. “I know what I know.” Her confidence was quickly betraying her. The disfigured one moved forward and spoke again, with a much different tone. “Though you have committed a grave crime, you won't be executed. We could never kill our own daughter.”

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