









place in a peasant cottage already stuffed full of ablebodied farmhands.

Of course, as the dwarven proverb says, "Shite ain't good for making whips." So only fit lads were chosen, healthy of body and sound of mind—those whose physical and mental constitution showed the promise of surviving the rigors of our training.

Mutations and the Trial of the Grasses

Prospective witchers were trained at Kaer Morhen, also known as the Witchers' Seat. It is here that the Wolf School had its headquarters, and the entire set of alterations, tests, and mutations that would lead to the formation of a witcher was developed. Today nobody can remember their original source or creator. Even those who perfected the process over the years and mastered its intricacies are long dead. Sorcerers must have aided in the whole endeavor, for the final effect is impossible without the use of spells. Yet the initial stages did not require much magic. Mere infusions made from specific herbs were sufficient, combined with a diet of certain species of cave fungi which would regulate the metabolism and enhance one's growth rate. This all was done in preparation for the next phase: the mutation

process or infamous Trial of the Grasses. I personally do not have fond memories of it, not fond at all... I think anyone who survived would just as soon forget every moment of that terrible ordeal.

The procedure lasted several days. Over that time we were given magical mutagenic potions that completely altered our metabolism. Then we awaited the effects, which usually were unrelentingly awful. Nonstop fevers, vomiting, hemorrhages . . . Yes, not all rumors about the witcher order are mistaken, and at this point the cull was indeed very severe. The vast majority of those undergoing the trial did not live past this phase.

The few who did moved on to the next part—the Changes. At this stage we were given further infusions and potions, infected with filth of some kind . . . And again came fever, sweat, delusions, shit, and vomit beyond reason. Supposedly the process was "enhanced" from time to time, as a test of new elixirs and mutagens. Typically this meant even more pain, vomit, or worse for those chosen for these "special trials." Geralt emerged from these experiments with a lifetime of foul memories and the loss of pigment in his hair. The other members of that particular test group were not so lucky—not one of them survived.

Aside from Kaer Morhen, there were several other places where witchers were trained. Each had its own training program and slightly different process for the Changes. It has to be said that some of the mutations carried out in these other schools were less than perfect. The effects were sometimes lamentable.

as evidenced by the notorious Cat School. I have no idea whether they chose their candidates specifically from young outcasts with a penchant for aggression, or if some unforeseen cruelty was somehow unleashed during the trials, but the final effect was a cadre of psychopaths, madmen, and sadists. Needless to say, the ill fame of their deeds hangs like a dark cloud over our reputation to this day.

The Purge

Perhaps the actions of the Cat School were in part the cause of later events, or perhaps not. The Iello Massacre certainly did not improve our image, but the fact is that dark clouds had





trade, for fame, or simply to profit by snatching up our hard-earned coin. So the witchers, fully aware of the situation, never hesitated to relieve this dolts who were so thick headed as to threaten their lives. For that reason, in my day we called our steel swords "swords for fools." Unfortunately,

seeing as how mendacious and two-faced scoundrels of bitches seem to rule this world, a great many fools have been apparently spared this selection process.

Medallion

The witcher medallion is not only an insignia of our profession-it is also one of its tools. It has numerous useful capabilities that are accessible, of course, only to one who possesses the necessary knowledge and training. First of all, it reacts to the presence of sorcerous auras in the immediate surroundings, making us aware of nearby spell casting, active illusions, or magical creatures. It also warns the owner of sudden dangers, thus providing an additional moment to react. Keep in mind, though, that the medallion is not infallible. A very strong magical aura-such as those found in Places of Power or during the solstices-can provoke aberrant reactions. In large cities, where people widely use simple magical amulets or sorcerous alarm systems to protect their homes, coin, or ruttish wives, the medallion can also behave abnormally.

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Witcher Order). Rigorously ingrained during training, it is supposed to be a collection of certain principles and customs of these beast hunters. The code is chiefly concerned with a multitude of imperatives and prohibitions pertaining to witcher contracts. Most of the instructions it contains remain a secret, since the code itself prohibits mentioning them." -Albert Braas, "Nordling Tribal Customs"

"Witcher Code-A precise collection of strict rules and regulations governing the life of the witcher caste (see

THE CODE



Signs and Potions

A witcher's Signs may be almost childishly simple spells to the average sorcerer, but they are quite sufficient for our needs. One of the merits of the Signs is that they do not require an elaborate magical formula, but

merely concentration and a small gesture. This makes them particularly useful for witchers, whose one hand is usually occupied by a sword. Their other merit is that one needs only minimal talent to learn them, or, more precisely, it is merely sufficient not to be an antitalent. I suppose that is why someone decided that it is possible to teach Signs to those who dedicate the majority of their days not to scholarly study but to monster slaying. I must admit that Signs do make our work faster and easier, as even the most skilled swordsman can always benefit from the ability to set the enemy ablaze or knock him to the ground with a simple gesture.

The final component of a witcher's equipment is his potions. Brewing them requires various ingredients both common and scarce, such as organs of certain monster species or rare herbs. In most cases these decoctions are lethal, or at least exceptionally harmful, to a normal human. Witchers, however, are inured to them from youth, though that does not mean the potions have no ill effects on us. They must therefore be administered in very precise doses.

Potions have a multitude of applications. They increase our resistance to toxins, amplify our regenerative abilities, or enhance concentration, allowing





for easier accumulation of the magical energy necessary to cast a Sign. Most are imbibed before combat to speed up our reflexes tenfold, magnify the strength and precision of blows, or take our pain tolerance far beyond normal limits. A witcher on potions is damned fast and murderously effective. No man can match him without the aid of sorcery. Yet as I said, extreme care must be exercised when consuming potions, since they have the potentially disastrous side effect of poisoning you. "Died of an overdose while preparing for battle" would make a rather pitiful epitaph for a witcher's tombstone.

Witcher Work and the Question of Price

Witchers spend their winters in Kaer Morhen. Here we can quietly rest, replenish our stocks of rare potions, repair our equipment, and meet up with friends. Come spring, we venture once more out into the world and search for work. We ask innkeepers, reeves, and village aldermen, and look for proclamations and notices nailed to trees or signs at crossroads. Most of the time, people cast hostile stares our way upon our arrival at a settlement. In the worst cases, they might cast horseshit or even stones, making a hasty departure usually the

best course. But if they leave their cottages, greet you, invite you inside, or offer food, this usually means they have a job for you—or maybe they simply want to hear the latest news from the world at large. It is a good idea to occasionally visit the places where you have already worked. People are less wary and distrustful there, and it is easier to learn what might be going on in the area or to stock up on supplies. Sometimes grateful folk will even spare a room for you to spend the night, or will buy you a few rounds at the local inn, so it pays to cultivate your reputation. In some places, the fourth or fifth generation still recognize me on sight.

Picking jobs comes down to personal preference. No witcher is obliged to accept a contract if it is beneath his dignity, if the money offered is inadequate for the risk involved, or if he simply feels he won't stand a chance of succeeding. The price for our services is negotiable, but you must take care not to damage the market for everyone by working for a pittance. The exact fee depends on how complex the matter is, how much time it will likely take to complete, the foreseeable personal expenses, and any special request made by the client.

The details concerning payment are typically agreed upon before accepting a job. Usually remuneration takes the form of a single sum handed over after the contract is completed. We do not normally take coin up front, Neutrality is a key witcher principle. They take no sides in the world's many coefficts, and thanks to this can practice that trade no matter the current political or religious situation.







THE STORY OF GERALT OF RIVIA

eralt of Rivia is a truly exceptional individual. Admittedly, a brief encounter might tempt one to label him a mere swinger of swords, a simple monster catcher, a rough-and-tumble practitioner of a dirty trade-but peer closer and you will soon discover he is a man of unplumbed depths, unique views, and vast, world-spanning experience. On the surface, he is introverted, tight lipped, one might even say gruff, but underneath lies an overflowing sea of goodwill, good humor, and an honest readiness to help his friends, be it with a bit of sound advice or the masterful application of his blade. He is a man of rugged and sometimes ragged appearance and manners who nevertheless enjoys a great deal of esteem from the fairer sex. He is, in a word, a walking contradiction. And this is precisely why he makes the perfect hero for poems both epic and lyric. I predict that, sooner rather than later, someone will write down his story and make of it a ballad that will be on the lips of every bard in the North for centuries—and I hope, dear reader, that someone will be me.

Geralt and I have been friends for years, ever since the moment we met nearly a quarter century ago. Throughout this time we have shared each other's company more often than not. Thus, allow me to shed any cumbersome false modesty—always a particularly onerous burden for one such as myself—and say that I know his story better than any man alive. This being so, it is my duty to put down in writing, even if only in the form of a rough sketch, the more important events of our acquaintanceship.

-Dandelion

