



*The Blacksmiths Guild*



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Time was when the Blacksmith's Guild had deep, near bottomless pockets. Their coffers were rumoured to be full even before the Century Wars, and they must have made a small fortune in outfitting armies during the conflict. But then, that age has passed by, and the years since have been far less kind.

The unification of the Empire of the Free Cities ushered in a new age of peace and prosperity, but with it also came a host of sanctions to protect the uneasy alliance. Most have been either forgotten or overlooked, but the laws limiting the sale of weaponry remain as strictly enforced as ever and have hurt the Blacksmiths harder than you can probably imagine. Their continued presence is no mistake. Drafted behind a pretence of peacekeeping, the laws were once spiteful measures orchestrated by the other Guilds, enviously eyeing the influence amassed by the Blacksmiths – and that has never changed.

Didn't stop the Blacksmiths though, they're a hardy and pragmatic breed. The least skilled of them still earn their way as armourers or by shoeing horses, but the most experienced masters now tie themselves to an institution and work under exclusive contract – those who are too haughty to deal on the black market, at least. Plenty a pretty penny to be made there for men and women of flexible morals who've no regard for the Lawkeepers. And the rest? They roam the land plying their trade, proud people too independent to be tied to a single place.

I've never seen the like when it comes to their Guild Ball team, though. The Guild stand a perpetually open invite to masters from all over to come and represent their trade, and those who make the journey are on the squad, master and apprentice both - as simple as that. With so many of equal rank competing for the captaincy, you'd think there would be a real clash of egos, wouldn't you? In my estimation it's a wonder that kind of arrangement doesn't end in bloodshed.

Regardless, it works. Your average Smithy is not only intensely proud but also traditional to a fault, and very few will lower themselves to bickering. Instead, the choice of team composition is left to the Guild officials and their internal politicking, something no master wants any part of. Once the decision is made? The team just get on with it, irrespective of how well suited the candidate may be. Madness, disguised as respect and professionalism.

It makes for a very varied playstyle though, I'll grant them that. You'll never know who you're going to face. Clever way of keeping your opponent guessing, but I don't know it's not their own worst enemy too. Must be hard to plan out your game when you don't even know who the team will be, let alone the captain...

**- Honour, Farmer's Guild Head Coach**



## **Furnace, Forsaken Swordsmith**

In the war's aftermath I have no purpose, an obsolete man with no duty to devote myself or my work to. My very craft is stolen, my weapons littered across battlefields, rusting slowly in the soil, never to be raised again by those with solemn honour. Life without conflict is beyond pity, one of the greatest travesties of our time and the denial of the sovereign birthright of all nations.

I am not alone in these thoughts. I see them reflected in the eyes of each of my old comrades, hollow despair mired with the sorrow of acceptance. Even the great teachings of Solthecius cannot provide serenity, no matter the countless hours spent in prayer. I fear the gaze of the August Lord has turned from us now that proud armies no longer march across the fields under bright and sacred banners. No matter. Honour demands I continue to serve the Blacksmith's Guild, and so I shall, as best I can in this forsaken new world.

Once I was renowned as the greatest swordsmith of a generation, but from this day let it be known that never again will I complete a blade, forever denying the world the true and deadly weapons for which I was famed. I shall exact my wrath with steel which remains molten and unfinished, my retribution borne by the unforgiving flames of the furnace itself. The same searing heat that once took my eye and scarred my face shall be turned upon those who have punished us so severely, a weapon tempered only by our righteous vengeance.

Though paltry compared to the vast wars of the past, Guild Ball is the only conflict which remains in this new empire, the sole enterprise left to those who would seek the purity of trial by combat. Through it I will remain true to the ideals of my noble caste, and in my deeds once again usher in prosperity for my house. It is time to forge a new future, one in which our sword arms may remain strong, and our hearts turn to bitter iron.

**- Furnace, Blacksmith's Guild Master**



## **Cinder, The Fated Urchin**

Not everyone from behind the tall white walls bends the knee to the Bacchal throne. Piervo is like any other city with its dirty streets and forgotten alleys, no matter the boastings of the holy men and their contemptuous order. In these places my kin dwell, the abandoned and runaway urchins for whom every day is a battle for survival. Priests are not kind with the scraps they throw to such children, and most of us starve before we reach our tenth name day. The ones that don't get gutted by the undercity scum, at least. I never once believed that fate could be mine.

Even now I am not possessed of the foolish pride of my peers, nor was I too bashful to hound the man I now call master into accepting me as apprentice, following him like a pup with her tail between her legs. For as far back as I can recall, whilst I prowled the streets I wanted nothing more than to escape, and Master Furnace has delivered me precisely that salvation. Under his tutelage, I have been shown his resolve, patience, and determination, coupled with selfless devotion beyond anything I encountered amongst priests towards their church.

While I dare not hope to emulate my master's untold skill, I do at least offer other appreciable talents to my Guild, born of a desperate childhood surviving on the streets. It is with these I am best able to serve, a simple fact not unnoticed by Master Furnace, for he in truth is as pragmatic a soul as those forced to live the life of the destitute. I may never truly attain the hallowed title of master myself, but service at least affords me a full belly, and my nights on a soft bed rather than unforgiving stone.

And in all honesty, I could ask for little more.

**- Cinder, Blacksmith's Guild Apprentice**





## **Anvil, Noble Patriarch**

Amongst all of the Smith masters, Anvil is about the closest to a real leader the Smithys have. He's been around just about as long as time itself, and every man jack of them bends the knee in respect. Those steely eyes of his betray nought but years of experience and wisdom, matching the words he speaks when he offers advice or answers a question. If you might look to Furnace for honour, Burnish for pragmatism, and Farris for dedication to duty, it's in Anvil you'll see pride - the true rock, the immovable object against which his enemies break.

Anvil might look intimidating with his scarred hide and stern expression, but he's never been one for putting out the pain himself. Oho, don't mistake that for weakness, lad. He's tough as old nails, more than capable of sending a man to the dirt and keeping him there - but setting up the apprentices is really how the old boy prefers to work. Even when he's playing the game Anvil is teaching the young 'uns something about the trade, showing where to strike for the most effect.

Woe betide anyone foolish enough to go after the Smithys' patriarch on the field. That's a grave mistake, likely to earn a whole world of hurt - Anvil's apprentice isn't the only one devoted to him. Several of the other masters were once apprentices themselves under Anvil's steady eye, learning their trade thanks to his stewardship. The Blacksmiths are an old Guild which values tradition and respect, and most take severe affront at anyone hounding such a revered figurehead.

Besides, it's difficult not to like a man with a willingness to take a seat and break open a bottle of mead with you after the game, even if you don't care for the rest of his kin. I've called him friend for a fair few years myself, and I don't see that changing any time soon. Trust me, underneath his long beard is a warm smile, the kind that belongs to a man proud of his work, and secure in what the future will bring after his days are past.

**- Tapper, Brewer's Guild Captain**



## **Sledge, Tempered Steel**

'Aye, he was an ill-tempered bastard when he first arrived with us, I doubt even he would dispute that. Some rooks just have a little too much fire in their belly for their own good, and that's all there is to it.' Anvil stood with the other masters at the edge of the proving grounds, watching the apprentices sparring over the dry dirt. Sledge towered over his peers, the lad's sheer size intimidating even at distance. 'But you can take that kind of man and turn his mettle to good use, with careful guidance.'

Farris and Ferrite both nodded at the wisdom of his words, and Burnish grunted in agreement. Furnace alone did not seem convinced, a scowl written across his scarred face. 'Pfft. There is only so much to be achieved with flawed material, only so far that a bent blade can be beaten into place.'

Anvil stroked his beard thoughtfully, remembering Sledge's wild anger and resentment during the early days. It had taken long hours to teach the boy to master his rage and impetuosity. Just stopping him from smashing the metals to the point of ruin took far too long, before tutelage could truly begin. Anvil had found even his prodigious patience tested more than once. Yet in spite of this, Sledge's hulking frame had always hinted at a rich natural talent, and his raw strength was second to none. Anvil respected Furnace and his oft-vaunted experience but knew the man to be wrong here. The boy was phenomenal. It had just taken extra care to shape him was all.

Out on the field, the ball came loose before being quickly snatched up by Iron, Ferrite's burly apprentice. Before the lad could use his bulk to shoulder his way free from the scrum, Sledge was on top of him. His oversized hammer clipped and unbalanced Iron with his first strike, before Sledge stepped firmly into the second blow, swinging his weapon into his opponent's helmeted jaw. Iron crumpled to the ground in an undignified heap, and Sledge snatched the ball away with surprising deftness. Before any of the others could tackle him, the lad made for the goal himself, long strides propelling him up the pitch and leaving them in his dust.

Still observing from the grounds, Anvil chuckled, although not maliciously. The hulking Eisnoran had unknowingly proven his master's point very concisely. Sometimes, with a little patience, a dulled metal could be tempered to shine just as bright as that which was master crafted after all.

**- Anvil, Blacksmith's Guild Master**



## **Burnish, Old Soldier**

It wasn't just the people, or their culture - Burnish had come to realise that even the air was different in the north. It was light and breezy here, free of the dry heat of Sultar, or the close warmth that plagued the distant east. Yet as much as he could breathe easier in this climate, the aged Numasai found he missed the oppressive heat of his homeland. There was a strange honesty to it, something that focused the mind to the task at hand, like working next to the sweltering forge. Enduring sweat had been no problem, but here he found the clean air distracting.

He knew he'd have to adapt until the late season regardless, until the caravans turned south and crossed the border into Indar. It would still be a long way from the familiar coastlines of his homeland, but the humid jungle terrain would be a step in the right direction at least. If he wanted a good night's sleep before then he'd just have to bed down next to a hearth in the workshop.

Still, Burnish was glad he'd made the step into the world of Guild Ball. It beat working his fingers to the bone for the military - or dealing with the ungrateful oafs that led them. All too often he'd forced himself to bite down a retort at their impossible requests, given limited timeframe or lack of materials. It had been easier during the war, when everyone's backs had been against the wall, and they were united against a common foe. In the aftermath, with no enemy to fight, it had all just seemed pointless. Petty politicking and bureaucracy ruled the day, no matter how poorly that sat with him.

But the game was urgent, vibrant even, and a man could find a sense of purpose and duty on the field.

Although Burnish was long a master, he wasn't fool enough to think he could advance himself through Guild Ball. He was old, and had no backer amongst the Guild officials besides, an arrangement he was entirely comfortable with. The Numasai knew he was no captain, something better left to more capable figures like Anvil or Ferrite. He didn't even like the lads acknowledging his title. Out on the pitch he was just another man on the team, covering the others with his Dragonthrower. Off the field?

A simple Smithy, nothing more. He knew his place in the world, and it wasn't being called "sir".

**- Burnish, Blacksmith's Guild Master**

## **Cast, Fiery Dervish**

Burnish watched Cast sparring out in the yard, darting between several wooden poles set into the ground. Hanging from each on a thin piece of string was a slim metal tube, coloured copper in the sun. As the young woman danced around the posts, she would deftly clip the tubes with the sharpened edge of a buckler, each impact emitting a sharp metallic chime. She had obviously been at it since dawn, her dark skin covered in sweat and her thin tunic spotted with wet patches.

Burnish was not surprised. Whenever his apprentice put her mind to something, she did so with remarkable dedication. It had been the same back in the days he worked the ships, Cast taking up with the mechanics despite her obvious indifference to her duties. It was of considerable relief his surrogate daughter had taken much more wholeheartedly to Guild Ball, the game seeming to suit her fiery temperament more. He owed her that much happiness, his debt to her blood father.

The lad had perished during the Century Wars, during the great siege of Burdana. Young and wet behind the ears, he'd nonetheless held an aura of honour about him that most could only dream of. When the rest of the soldiers manning the walls fled, he'd chosen to stay alongside Burnish to repel the invaders. For long hours they'd remained, the two of them comrades to the end. When eventually their position was overrun, the boy's efforts had earned him a spear in the belly as a reward. Burnish had thought to apprentice the boy come the end of the wars, but instead the lad had died far from home, staining the sand red under uncaring skies.

He left behind a daughter, a beautiful crying babe. Her mother had died in childbirth, and the lass was completely alone. Burnish had never once regretted adopting the child in the aftermath. Her father lived on through her, and his duty was met.

He was snapped back from his memories as Cast let out a shrill cry and launched herself into the air, coming down hard against the centre pole. Shields extended before her, she snapped it in two, her dance ending with a shower of splinters. Burnish smiled grimly. Guild Ball certainly did suit her much better. He only hoped it wouldn't lead her to a similar fate as her father.

**- Burnish, Blacksmith's Guild Master**



## **Ferrite, Rising Star**

Ferrite? She's a good, honest woman if ever there was one. Straight down the middle, and no bull to her. If she had been around during the wars, you can guarantee she would have been a career soldier. The type that wasn't afraid to get stuck in and muck in with the men and women under her command, if that's what it took to get things done. Stems from a solid upbringing, a very stern and proud family.

See those bars on her breast, and the badge on her sleeve? Ferrite used to be a Lawkeeper once upon a time. Always had an affinity for iron in her heart though, took to working it when she was but a wee lass. After signing up for the Watch she soon wound up spending most days in the shop with young Farris, learning as much of the trade as she could. Didn't take long for Lady Justice to recognise a natural talent and apprentice her proper.

Ferrite achieved her rank in record time, the youngest master we've ever known.

You can tell her roots in the way she plays the game, methodical and practised. Those tongs she wields have snapped bones more than once, just as I've seen them puncture armour or bend a blade out of shape. She always hobbles her opponents first, just like the Lawkeepers do, preventing their marks from getting away. Old habits, I guess. I don't think the woman has a malicious bone in her – it's just the most efficient way of taking advantage of her trade. That's precisely what you'd expect from a lass with a background like Ferrite.

I tell you, if she'd discovered the game before the iron? Well, she might be in the Watch still, playing on their team. Their loss though, and our gain. She's a real asset on the field, and a hell of an inspiration to the young 'uns - even that big bastard apprentice of hers. I'd say she's the closest to a natural captain we have, and I'm not alone saying it either. Her star is on the rise, both in the stands and the eyes of the men and women behind the scenes.

Here's to the lass, and the years to come. May her future be as bright as the metal she works, and her dedication rewarded with success to echo down the ages.

**- Anvil, Blacksmith's Guild Master**



## Iron, the Battering Ram

I know his story all right. Comes from royal blood somewhere down the line, a third or fourth son to a minor baron, far enough down the succession to give the lad a real hefty chip on his shoulder. I don't doubt it's where his vindictive streak comes from, as broad as his bloody great shoulders. That he's as ugly as sin probably doesn't help. It's best for all of us he wears that helmet most of the time. I'll tell you, tread carefully around him. He doesn't care for anyone much, friend or foe, and he'll shove both out of his way just the same. Not a bone of respect in his body, not a one.

I have no clue what possessed the Guild to lumber a good lass like Ferrite with an oaf like Iron. It's scant reward for her contribution to the team. I mean, the man refuses to even play the game like most people, insisting on making a scene and carrying the bloody ball instead of kicking it. To hear him explain, he prefers some other game, old and forgotten by all except the nobility in his homeland. Rugger, they call it.

Raedlanders and their bloody sports - I lose track of how many they've invented. No wonder their empire fell, all too busy playing games instead of manning their stations I shouldn't wonder. Never a day passes that I'm not thankful my ancestors forced them from our lands. I couldn't stomach being associated with the weakling southerners.

But ach, that's another story.

At least Iron has sense enough to listen to his master. I wonder how many of the arrogant pig's bones she had to break before he learned that lesson, eh?

- Anvil, Blacksmith's Guild Master





## **Hearth, Bitter Matriarch**

Hearth, eh? Never been a name less suited to the owner. A hearth is warm, welcoming, and comforting, a place a man can rest by after a hard day out on the fields and enjoy a quiet drink. Don't expect anything like that from the crook-backed old crone. She's a real bitch, and always has been. Vindictive, spiteful, and cantankerous? All that and more. But there's far more to her than harsh words. The old crone is not one you should cross, in this lifetime or next. She has a mind sharp enough to rival that of the old Ferryman.

Hearth is at least like her namesake in one sense of the word - she's the heart of her Guild, another old hand like Anvil. They're as different as night and day though. Anvil, strong, proud, and patient, respected by all. Hearth? Oh, I'm sure she has the good of her Guild in mind, but her position has been achieved through scheming, manipulation, and guile. Her rivals fear her, for the word of the Bitter Matriarch can be the end of your advancement at best, or death from the shadows at worst. Even a master learns to treat her with caution, and treads carefully enough not to earn her ire.

A familiar figure to the denizens of the undercity and the scum hanging around the black markets, I hear she can't work the iron anymore, down to how frail she's become in her advanced age. I can believe that to see her hobble about, but if you ask me, there's more than a hint of pantomime in how she uses her weapon like a stick. Never let it stop you from putting the boot in if you get the chance, gods know she deserves it.

She might be old, but there's plenty of life in her yet, more's the pity. The day can't come quick enough when she slips from her perch. I doubt the world will miss her, either.

**- Tapper, Brewer's Guild Captain**

## **Alloy, Huscarl**

It is a unique kind of warrior who does not seek glory or renown in their duty, preferring instead to strike silent and unseen from the shadows. Those men and women will never know adulation or recognition of their feats, nor shall the tomes of the Scholar's Guild recall their names for future generations. It is in darkness they live, and in the same darkness they remain when they die.

Alloy is of such a brotherhood, belonging to a family which has pledged fealty to the Blacksmith's Guild since time immemorial. His servitude will only end with death, his calling unable to earn him prestige enough to be granted a house of his own, nor pay the debt of honour that he has inherited.

I am sure those from outside of our lands might call his bondage cruel, but Alloy surely does not understand his servitude as anything other than duty. Few amongst our number truly comprehend the necessity of such individuals alongside the more traditional disciplines, but the knowledgeable few at least have always accorded them respect and coin enough.

Aye, I have heard the stories that he is my watchman and no bodyguard at all. Know that I spit at those amongst you who call him gaoler, and name me his prisoner. Alloy might be taciturn, yet do not mistake that same spirit for indifference. Of the man himself, I could ask for no greater companion, one as far from an enforcer as can be. He is a guardian and a protector to me, and only that. Where I go so too shall Alloy, no matter his misgivings or opinions, my loyal shadow at all times.

**- Hearth, Blacksmith's Guild Master**

## **Farris, Lady Justice**

Farris looked about her workshop, taking in every minute detail. As usual, the space was immaculately clean, Bolt having led the servants in their duties with his usual diligence. Farris found his character remarkable. In every task, he could be guaranteed to devote himself to the utmost, irrespective of what it was. The boy would become a remarkable master one day, just like Ferrite before him.

She was disturbed from her thoughts by drunken shouting out in the yard. Obnoxiously loud and coarse, it broke through the calm like a blade through bare skin. Farris sighed. If society shared only a fraction of the obedience or zeal of Bolt, there would be no need for Lawkeepers at all. She didn't need to go outside to know how the scene would look, another old drunk dragged in from the streets, his ruddy face a tale of a wasted life spent in the gutter.

Her time attached to the Watch had been well spent, a civic duty in which she had served justice above all, but that era was coming to an end. The pitches of Guild Ball called to her as much as service to her Guild. She was wearisome of riding out on match day, her intimidating stallion aiding the Lawkeepers in marshalling the crowds peacefully, only to see lawlessness unfold on the field. Once the games began, Farris would always remain astride the towering animal, watching with enough irate displeasure to dampen the enthusiasm around her. The last time, during the Championship final, Farris had finally seen enough. The sight of Hammer openly throttling his opponent had pushed her too far.

The next day she had formally accepted her Guild's open invite, spending the weeks since casting steel barding at the forge, preparing for the trials ahead. The Guild officials had tried to wave her down at first, hiding behind regulations prohibiting her from taking a mount to the field, but were quickly cowed. Farris would ride out atop Judgement regardless and refused to take no for an answer. Her higher purpose demanded it.

It was time to ride out and bring law and order to the Guild Ball pitches, rather than leave it at the sidelines. Justice had to be served, at all costs.

**- Farris, Blacksmith's Guild Master**





## **Bolt, the Winner**

The afternoon sun beat down exhaustingly over the proving grounds, as hard and unrelenting as it was blindingly bright. Sweat soaking through his clothes and blurring his vision, Bolt ran alongside Farris as she circled the pitch, her mount kicking up great explosions of grit. It was an impossible exercise, trying to beat the horse's canter. Whenever he threatened to overtake, Farris simply drove Judgement into a soft gallop until Bolt dropped back again. Her apprentice didn't care, refusing to give up. He wore a huge grin despite his fatigue, unable to keep the excitement from his face.

Bolt had always been driven this way. When the going got tough and others fell by the wayside he would simply push himself harder. It wasn't hubris which drove him, though. It was determination. Determination to be the best, to win. For as long as he could remember, he'd always wanted to achieve victory at the expense of all else. He always had to be the last man standing, to win the race.

Guild Ball was his new outlet for that focus. When his master had announced they would be joining the team, Bolt's expression had lit up with glee. At the forge he had been unhappy, pitted against inanimate and dull metal, with no victories in sight. But in this new world he would be afforded real opposition – challenges to overcome, opponents to defeat. Bolt hadn't known true competition like that since winning his place as an apprentice, rising above his rivals.

He could barely wait.

Alongside, Farris dug her spurs into Judgement's flank once more, causing the beast to gallop away in a sudden burst of speed. Bolt filled his lungs with a sharp intake of air, before reaching deep and hurling himself forward in a dead sprint, the spiked shoes on his boots giving him extra purchase in the baked dirt.

No way he was going to be beaten. That was for losers.

And Bolt was anything but a loser.

**- Bolt, Blacksmith's Guild Apprentice**



### **Culverin, Silver Admiral**

Culverin has made her fortune and fame far from the pitch as the Silver Admiral, a well respected leader of a fleet powerful enough to rival that of a Sovereign State.

She arrived to the pitch to command her Guild Ball team instead, heralded by the titanic blast of cannonfire and a deadly burst of grapeshot.

**- Flint, Mason's Guild vice Captain**

### **Cutlass, Sly Privateer**

Drafted to the smiths in the Free Cities Draft, Cutlass might not have been the Blacksmith's Guild's first choice, but she's certainly aiming to establish she was the right one!

Working in tandem with Culverin to protect her team's goal, the Sly Privateer apprentice is a perfect accompaniment to her master.

**- Flint, Mason's Guild vice Captain**

Cutlass is a young woman with a hard past. The kid cut her teeth on the seas, a pirate who signed up under the new tyrant. I'd laugh that off from another, but the fierce look in her eyes? I can tell it's true.

The way she tells it, the life wasn't for her. Too much blood shed under the Pirate King's lash, and no where near enough plunder and romance I imagine. I just hope her past won't earn her a pair of shackles, or worse, a bloody end on some cutthroat's knife.

She's a keeper, and believe me she's been tested. There are some damned strong players around, but that hasn't stopped her facing them down each time, with success enough to hold her head high. In the keeper position, this kid could become a maverick.

Don't mind admitting I'm real sweet on Cutlass. You couldn't tell her dark past from her confident grin, and she always wears an approachable air. First to break out the wineskin after practice, she's the glue that binds others together after a rough day, and the lass who drinks them all under the table on a good day. If she has any scars from her time at sea, she hides them well. This kid is worth the investment.

**- Free Cities Rookies Draft Scout**

