

## Within the 5shade

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# Within the 5shade

by [DarcSyster](#)

## Summary

During Sepulchre's undead invasion of Swordhaven, both sides demanded 5shade align herself with them. For a rogue like 5shade, this is no simple request.

## Notes

*Critique Fic* is fan-fic which points out the errors, inconsistencies, and other problems with the source material but attempts to do it in a fun way. The characters in the story point out the problems without breaking the fourth wall, unless they are critiquing breaking the fourth wall.

See the end of the work for more [notes](#)

Shadoe, carefully, silently, sneaked through the darkened streets of Battleon. She was lean and lanky, dressed primarily in black and dark brown leather armour, her black hair cut short in bangs and tied up at the sides in pony-tails. She pulled up her hood so only her blue eyes were visible. She soon found herself near a cottage. She peaked into the window, saw no one within, but diligently slipped beneath it. She pulled herself tight against the door, trying to appear as much like a dim shadow as possible. She tested the door. As expected, it was locked. She wouldn't need her lock picks for this one. Carefully, she pulled out a key and silently inserted it into the lock. She leapt silently into the room, spinning to face behind the door, her daggers drawn. No one was there.

She scanned the room quickly. Besides herself there were an empty bed, a small round table with a couple of chairs, a coat rack, a hanging lamp, and a statue of a dragon with a sword through it that every new home-owner got with the purchase of a house. Even so, she silently and quickly checked under the bed. Nothing and no one there either.

Satisfied that she was safe and alone, Shadoe slipped out of her armour and slid into the bed. She stared at the ceiling. "What am I doing?" she asked herself in disbelief. As a child, she had always dreamed of having a house like ordinary people, a place she could call home. A home was a place that said you belonged, but rogues like herself never truly belonged anywhere. It was a danger to get too attached to a place, any place. Yet here she was, lying in her own bed, in her own house, in a nice quiet little suburb of Battleon. She was becoming one of the neighbours. Would she start making cupcakes next? She was sure that was something neighbours were suppose to do. She didn't know the first thing about making cupcakes.

That wasn't all that was strange for her. She had been traveling through the forest, robbing the rich and giving the money to the poor, namely herself, when she had discovered herself on the path to Oaklore Keep. Apparently, the king's forces had been looking for volunteers and had asked them to go to Oaklore Keep for training and they had mistaken her for one such volunteer. Except the keep was under attack by undead so the training was incredibly brief. At the end of it, she had stepped onto a teleport disk and was whisked away to Swordhaven.

Doom Knight Sepulchre, Ruler of the Shadowscythe, had lead his undead army into battle against Swordhaven. Apparently, Sepulchre had been one of King Alteon's most trusted knights before becoming undead. Shadoe had found herself the only other living being standing in the throne room as King Alteon and Sepulchre battled. Unable to defeat each other, they had turned to her. "It is time for you to choose your allegiance. Will you side with the forces of evil or good?" King Alteon and Sepulchre had demanded.

"Can I choose *none of the above*?" Shadoe had enthusiastically asked in her perpetually perky pixie-like voice. The entire battle around her went still. The two stared at her in total shock and disbelief.

"What kind of question is that?" Alteon demanded. "A coin has two sides."

"You cannot pick the edge," Sepulchre asserted. "The very thought is inconceivable."

Shadoe sighed. "A staff is more effective a weapon when you hold it in the middle rather than at one end or the other," she responded. "Rogues don't believe in moral absolutes like good and evil. Rogues like me live in the shadows -"

"Exactly!" Sepulchre interrupted confidently.

"Not in the darkness!" Shadoe retorted. She turned to Alteon. "Nor in the light! We live between the two."

"You certainly have noble intentions, but when it comes to doing actual good, let's just say you come up a little short," Shadoe had began. "Here you sit, on this fancy chair, in this fancy room, in this fancy castle. What good can you do when you've practically locked yourself in here, effectively blind to what is going on beyond these walls? Peace, harmony, justice you say? Can you point to any you actually caused? I thought not. People mostly get along because it's in their own self-interest. By the time they're adults, they realize being nice to each other makes things better for everyone, including themselves, even when they're stealing from each other. All you really need to do is sit here and arbitrate the odd dispute. *But you're this city's protector* you say. But we both found you here, in this room, sitting on your fancy chair instead of standing on the battlements with that magical sword of yours, leading and inspiring your soldiers into battle the way a *good* leader does.

"And look at this place. It's a *castle*. In the old days, kings were as rich or as poor as their subjects and they lived not in fancy castles like this, but in much more defensible fortresses which were built for the citizens to take refuge in during an attack. *Castles* are for vain people who want to show off how rich and self-important they are.

"Beyond protection, people need food, clothing, warmth, and shelter. Many people in your kingdom don't have enough to eat, or warm enough clothing, or a place to call home. They're too poor. You say you're being noble for sacrificing your time and efforts for the protection of the people, but all of these needless luxuries here certainly aren't a sacrifice. The money you collect in taxes to keep this *castle* running, beyond any of its defensive purposes, could be used to feed, cloth, and house a great many people.

"And let's talk about those taxes. You have your tax collectors collect taxes so you can use the money to do good works, and you may try to be fair, but you don't see your tax collectors robbing a little extra from each citizen to line their purses. Thankfully, I'm good at cutting the purse strings of those same tax collectors. You also don't see the hardships being imposed on those who don't have the resources to pay those taxes, many of them being thrown into prison effectively for the crime of being poor. I suppose you could say it's a way of housing the poor but it's not a good one. And look at all the good works you've done with those taxes, like that new well in the village over yonder, dug where the locals told you not to dig, and dried up not three days after it was finished. I could go on, but all of the so called good works you do end up the same way. People would be better off if you taxed them less and let them solve more of their problems themselves.

"If you really want to do some good with those taxes, how about spending more on the kids sent to the orphanages because their parents can't afford to look after them. Aren't the children suppose to be the future of the kingdom? You could give them some land, maybe a few animals, and teach them to farm. Have you actually been to an orphanage? Often the

only meat they get is whatever I have poached from the King's *own private* forest and it's shared amongst hundreds. What do you need a private forest for? Your own personal hunts? You feast while your subjects starve! The best we can say about you is you've simply kept things from getting worse. But as a representative of the moral absolute of good, I'm sorry to say but you're a failure.

"But I could not do those things, poaching from your forest or robbing your tax-collectors today," Shadoe had continued. "Do you know why?" She turned to Sepulchre. "Because there is a legion of undead attacking the city! What are you going to do if you win?"

"I shall rule the world!" Sepulchre had asserted confidently.

"And after that?" Shadoe had asked. Sepulchre was clearly stumped. "Think about it. You're undead. That means you're basically immortal. You have all the time there is. You could wait until the king here has died and someone easier to conquer or even willing comes along. But no! You have to have it now! Why the rush? You're not like him. He's mortal. He has a limited lifetime to make things good for himself with the hope of making a better life for his kids. But not you. Even if you did have kids, if you were truly evil, you wouldn't *care* about them. You wouldn't care about anyone except for yourself. *Good* cares about others. Evil just sees others as tools or obstacles, even if they are family.

"Just think about the world you're going to rule over. If you're truly evil, you'll want everyone to do everything you say. That sounds great until you realize that, out of fear of your wrath, no one will do anything *unless* you tell them. You're entire existence will be bossing around servants to do the most menial of tasks. The rest of the time, you'll be sitting on your throne twiddling your thumb bones. It'll be so frustrating and boring you'll *wish* for death. *That* is what you get for being the immortal ruler everyone is afraid of. Even if you succeed today, even it must eventually crumble as you lose your mind to it. Sure, you have all the accoutrements of evil, the legions of undead and the like, but just as he never really thought about what it would mean to be truly good, you've never really thought about what it would mean to be truly evil. As a representative of the moral absolute of evil, you too are a failure.

"That's the problem with you, both of you. You put a crown or whatever on your head and what ever is left of your brain seems to shrink. You're so hung up on thinking of yourselves as moral absolutes, neither of you can see how flawed you are representing those moral absolutes or how futile they are. And you want me to swear allegiance to a moral absolute neither of you really understands?"

King Alton and Sepulchre had stood in stunned silence. "Well actually -" Sepulchre had begun haltingly.

"More like to one of us," King Alton had said.

"Knowing which ever side you don't pick will kill you," Sepulchre had added.

"And knowing that whoever I side with will defeat the other, even if I do end up dead," Shadoe had responded. She had looked over at Sepulchre. "Wealth and power, if you're truly evil, is all you care about. It's clear, that's what you want even though you obviously didn't do your planning well enough. I know there are those who will join you because they think by

joining you they'll get some share of that wealth and power. Mortal evil leaders share their power and wealth because they know they're not powerful enough on their own, that they need loyal followers to help them stay in power. Bribery works well for that! But when those followers cease to be assets and become liabilities, they usually end up dead! Or if they become too powerful, they end up replacing the previous leader. That's how evil works. But no one can kill you and you certainly don't need *my* help to stay in power. So I guess I can't really expect you to make it worth my while."

She turned to King Alton. "And what can I expect from you? If you gave me any kind of wealth and power, especially after today, wouldn't that just be sliding into evil? Glory! That's what all the nobles talk about. Gloriously defending the kingdom! It's really just a rationalization for saying *dying*. Medals, titles, honours? Those are for vain people who need to feel they're important. But their blood, and your blood, is the same colour as my blood. So I guess I can't really expect you to make it worth my while either."

"But I need to choose one of you," Shadon had begun. "Realistically, when this is all over, I expect one of you to throw me in prison and the other to stab me in the back." She had pulled back, her brutal battle blade at the ready. "I can probably escape from prison."

Filled with fury, Sepulchre had raised his sword towards her. Just then, Drakath had burst through a wall. What was clearly suppose to be *chaos* filled the room. "Not another totally flawed representative of another moral absolute!" Shadon had cried.

*Good*. That is who she had allied herself with. Word had spread about it. Most everyone called her "hero" now. How she hated that. Her, Shadon, a hero? Not her. Hero was a term for those who were truly good, like Artix. And that was another thing people were beginning to talk about, her and Artix. Sure he was nice, and cute, but the two of them a couple? Oh no! Artix was *good*. Shadon was certain she would never consider herself to be *good*. But she was fairly certain she wasn't evil either. And declaring an allegiance? That was something rogues were never suppose to do. Too impractical. It tied you to things, ideas, concepts, people. Rogues never liked to be tied to anything, not friends, not allies, not even a house they could call home.

Shadon rolled over and tried to sleep. Maybe she'd spend the next day fishing. Given her luck, probably not.

## End Notes

I wrote these notes in June 2016 before I knew where I'd be posting them.

AdventureQuest Worlds is the first game of its kind that I've played. I'm an old paper-and-pencils RPGer but I stumbled upon the game when trying to find out how common the word "evil" was and started playing. If you make it through the Oaklore Keep tutorial, you're told to open the map and go to Swordhaven. King Alteon tells us we'll need to make a big decision about choosing to be good or evil. And there it was. I needed to decide if 5shade is going to ally herself with evil or good. And the whole game stopped while I decided. A minute passed. Then another. Then, another minute. Then... another minute passed. Then another minute passed. And another. A further minute passed quickly, followed by another minute, when suddenly, a different minute passed, followed by another different minute. And another. And yet another further different minute. A minute passed. I glanced at my watch. It was a minute past. This was it. A minute passed. After a moment, another minute passed. I waited a minute while a minute passed quickly past. And then, a minute which seemed to last an hour but was only a minute... passed. (From Monty Python's "A Minute Passed") So there we were, many minutes later and I still hadn't made a choice. You might think it would be simple! But like I said, I'm a long time pencil-and-paper RPGer. I've played a lot of AD&D and the like in my life. Nothing, but most especially this, is ever simple.

Afterwards, I was telling a co-worker of mine about needing to make the choice. His response was that as a rogue, I should have picked evil because rogues are inherently evil. It was clear my co-worker hadn't really given the topic any real thought. That's what prompted me to write this piece.

5shade is a rogue because I thought the rogue outfit was really cool looking and I loved how cute she looks in it with her pony tails. But despite just popping up on the path to Oaklore Keep, humans do not just pop up out of nowhere. Every human has a past. You might say we know nothing about 5shade's past, except, we can actually make a number of educated guesses about it.

It's clear given what she starts with, a pair of daggers and leather armour, that she was born into her society's underclass. Daggers are street weapons. Her armour is black and brown leather, the most common colours for leather, meaning it was inexpensive and easy to get. From a thief's point of view, this is also very practical armour because the colours blend in, making it easier to hide while still giving the necessary freedom of movement needed to climb trees or walls in order to break into houses. It's a very nice game-version of armour which incidentally resembles what we know from history as being typical for real life late medieval rogues.

I could cite a number of historical rogues but none of them are likely to be known to most people. Instead, consider Artful Dodger and Fagin from *Oliver Twist*. Both are rogues. Neither is inherently evil but you certainly can't call them good. They're too busy stealing to survive to think much about concepts like good and evil. Rogues like them have seen evil turn in on itself and good collapse in on itself far too many times in their lives. As a result,

they're cynical. If we assume a similar background for 5shade, we know how she's going to want to answer the challenge when it's put to her.

Game designers are not paid to philosophise on the natures of evil and good and most likely don't make it a hobby. I did at one time. Even if I'm wrong, superficial comic-book villains in the age of Breaking Bad aren't acceptable anymore. Evil needs to be EVIL!

What do we know about Sepulchre when we meet him? He isn't evil enough to conquer Swordhaven. It's him an Chuckles versus Alteon?! NO! It should be him, Chuckles, and 20 of his best and most loyal warriors versus Alteon. Evil does not fight fair! Clearly he wasn't prepared enough and evil is always prepared to be evil. Just ask any serial killer.

What do we know about King Alteon when we meet him? He's sitting on his throne during battle like bad King John. He's clearly an incompetent who just happens to be good with a sword, good enough to win the crown. If he's anything like a classic Medieval monarch, he's thought well of by his subjects but is not actually good. More like King Alteon the Mediocre.

As representatives of moral absolutes, these guys are clearly failures! The real question for 5shade is, if either bonehead or butthead were in charge, which would 5shade have the better chances with? But that doesn't make 5shade "good". It simply shows her roguish pragmatic self-interest which is what her real alignment should be. I'd accept neutral but there seems to be no way to get that after /swordhavenundead.

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