

# **Iksom Alagast**

## **Backstory**

**Name:** Sometimes referred to as Master Alagast

**Species:** Lossian

**Nationality:** Woltischkan

**Sex:** ♂

**Age:** 48

**Birth Year:** 1859

**Height:** 6ft 2in (188cm)

**Weight:** 196lbs (89kg)

**Siblings:** Iksom is the third of four siblings. Other siblings are Feliks (male, 3 years older, birth year 1856), Basia (female, 2 years older, birth year 1857), and Pavel (4 years younger; deceased, birth and death year 1863)

**Occupation:** Master of Runes at the Magician's Ministry

**Disciplines Practised:** Runes, artificing, brewing, scribing, wands and staves

**Disciplines Mastered:** None



## **Species Notes**

Lossian are fox-like humanoids. Western Woltischkan lossian specifically resemble silver foxes. Their design is still a work in progress.

Khovan are wolf-like humanoids, and their design is also unfinished. Khovan and lossian are capable of interbreeding, unlike many other combinations of species, and for this reason they tend to live in communities together.

Koveria has a disproportionately high density of lossian or lossian-born nobles and wealthy elites. This leads them as a species to be more accepted by the overall population. The khovan (khovan commoners in particular, as the nobility/gentry don't much care) tend to resent lossian as a result, regardless of whether the lossian in question is rich or not.

## **Koveria**

Koveria, which bears similarities to Russia, is the country in which Iksom lives. It has a relatively high population density of lossian and khovan, which can make the country a tempting choice for immigrants.

“Koverian” is the term for the country’s nationality and ethnicity.

## **Woltischka**

Woltischka bears similarities to Poland, has an imperial leadership structure, and is of a similar technological level to Europe in 1905. The majority of the land is made up of plains and foothills.

“Woltischkan” is the term for the country's nationality and ethnicity.

The culture of this country is deeply masculine-centric with observance of hierarchy and notions of the dominance of one individual over another that may be expected, along with unspoken injunctions against being perceived as 'soft', or sharing any emotion other than anger or stoicism.

Woltischka and Koveria have an uneasy relationship with one another at times, so travellers (and much more-so, settlers) between the two countries can expect a mixed bag of response from the locals, at best. However, at the time Iksom was born, relations between the two countries were relatively good.

## **Other Countries**

In addition to Woltischka, Koveria is bordered by Byeskovia, Bizakh, Tsaraskana, Naskayat, and Osetka. This world has over 30 established countries but these are the most relevant for Iksom's story.

## **Magic**

Magic is a well-developed discipline in this world. It can be sorely misunderstood in rural areas to the point that the practice of magic is assumed to be easy, when it is not. It requires years of dedicated study to become a practitioner. Innate talent won't get a person very far; they must learn to understand the formulae involved. It has a fairly mathematical feel for this reason.

The magic in this universe can be broken down into various schools: Runes and Scribing are part of the Glyphics school, Artificing and Brewing are part of the Alchemy

school, and Staves and Wants are part of the Enchanting school, although there are more than this and these are only examples. The average magician achieves Master rank in three to four of these disciplines but takes the title of the discipline they master first. They achieve working functionality - that is, journeyman rank - in an average of five (but often more) other skills.

Runes can be expressed in a combination of written and spoken formats. Every rune has an associated sound-pairing—a very specific noise and tone that can be used in lieu of a physical rune. These sounds are chanted while using written runes to fill in the blanks of whatever spell is being cast. Incorrect pronunciation of the rune can be disastrous, either incorrectly directing the spell or making it fail entirely.

Rune work is a basic magic on which several other disciplines lean.

The Collegiate of Magic has a philanthropic system in place to allow it to accept, and support, disadvantaged students. However, it has limits to the resources it can provide to any one student (with the number of spaces on the programme being one of those resources).

Iksom Alagast is an original character from *The Iron Book*, the first book of Iskaa's trilogy (title and work currently in progress). He grew up in a horrifically toxic environment and, despite his best efforts and a measure of external help, failed to shake off the effects of this. In the 'current day' he is an embittered, ageing man with inadequate outlets for his frustrations and scant opportunity to improve his situation.

### **Trust & Confidence**

*(newborn)*

Iksom was born unexpectedly into a family in a desperate economic situation. His mother's name was Ingun and his father's, Farber. His parents and two older siblings had emigrated from Woltischka to Koveria only a few months before Iksom himself was born. This was a move on their part to escape a famine in Woltischka, and they had staked a lot on this move, including the majority of their meagre estate.

They chose Koveria as a destination as this nation had a high lossian population, so they expected to feel relatively 'at home', despite being outside of their country of origin.

His parents had not expected to fall pregnant again and when they did, they managed the best they could. However, the stress of the gambling of most of their assets on this move, their uprooting from a culture with which they were familiar to one where they were not, moving away from friends and family, and the demands of settling themselves and their children into live in Koveria meant that Iksom's mother had high adrenaline levels throughout her pregnancy with him.

The high levels of stress Ingun experienced during pregnancy impacted on Iksom's development, and he was born with a learning disability. This was not at all obvious, neither when he was born, in his general bearing as a child, nor as an adult, but it subtly hindered his ability to grasp the material he tried to learn as a profession.

There was little to nothing in the way of local resources for the Alagasts in their community: no cultural centre, priest, or minority school. They spoke pidgin Koverian; just enough to scrape by in day to day life, but nothing more. This encouraged the Alagast family to interact more with their fellow Woltishkans, as talking fluently with them in their shared native language was easier than trying to learn more Koverian. They got a small amount of help from these other expatriates, but it really wasn't very much.

When Iksom was born, his mother tried to grant him the best possible start in life by giving him what she thought was a Koverian-sounding name. Unfortunately she misjudged it so that the name sounded alien both to native Koverians, and to Woltischkans. As a result, Iksom's father and older siblings considered Iksom an outsider from the very start.

Iksom's mother cared for him as best she could during his infancy. She was used to raising children by this point so her practical skills were good, and as his mother she wanted him to thrive. Iksom sensed this. However, the Alagasts' extremely shaky overall economic situation, plus Farber's generally abusive attitude towards Ingun, was hard for her to ignore, and she was constantly exhausted and unsettled, if not outright fearful. Iksom sensed this too, but there was nothing he, as an infant, could do about it—indeed, he didn't even understand it beyond "mother is terrified; therefore I must be terrified too".

Given the nature of Woltischkan culture, many individuals would self-medicate with alcohol, and Farber was no exception. He had many reasons to want to escape his emotions, emotions that Woltischkan culture had rendered taboo for him as a man: a family history of abuse resulting in traumas that he had never directly tried to resolve and which still plagued him, fear of failure to feed his family, a level of introversion that

meant that he needed alone-time in order to function at his best but couldn't get it, and secret regrets about having children. All of this was merely the backdrop of his life situation at the time Iksom was born.

Iksom's symbiosis with his mother, as is standard for infants, meant that he felt that the two of them were one, so when she was afraid he could not calm himself down. He needed her to do that, and she often failed to convince him that all was well, because it wasn't. Exhaustion and extreme stress did not bring out her best acting skills.

During the years following their settlement in Koveria, Iksom's father did his best to find work to support his family. He found this difficult due to the poor overall relationship between Woltischkans and Koverians, and could only find the basest work for a low rate of pay. This was an imposition for which he blamed the Koverian populace as a whole, seeding a bitter hatred which would further poison his behaviour in the years to come. As time progressed he became more and more unstable.

### **Freedom & Self-Determination**

*(toddlerhood)*

Iksom grew into a toddler, and a very scared one at that. He hid behind his mother's skirts to keep away from his father, but Farber usually saw him and made his displeasure of Iksom's behaviour known—for Farber, any son of his should face him like a man. As a toddler, Iksom felt utterly powerless when presented with the dilemma of safety versus this quality of 'manliness' that he was expected—and, in his own way, wanted—to possess.

It is this dilemma that gave Iksom such a hard time during his toddlerhood. Like all toddlers he needed to develop a sense of individualism from his mother. At its core this was a need to exercise his autonomy, but autonomy felt all but impossible with a terrifying figure like Farber around. For Iksom, the safest option was to keep close to his mother, but that did little to help him learn about the world and himself on his own terms. The fact that Farber was male—Iksom's first-ever masculine role model—only made the dilemma more confusing.

Farber manifested his dislike of Iksom by presenting him with a dilemma in which he couldn't possibly win. On the one hand, he passed down the message his father had passed on to him: *Any son of mine will be a real man. You must be strong, stoic, unbeatable, and never by needy. Never let me see you deviate from that!* On the other,

he expressed his hatred of Koverians in his unspoken attitude towards Iksom which was: *You lot are to blame for everything and I'm going to beat you into submission for it.*

Farber had little idea that he was sending Iksom two separate messages; he was only aware of the 'be strong' message he was giving out, and on the odd occasion he thought about his desire to see Iksom (the 'Koverian' member of the household) look defeated. He hand-waved it as just being in a bad mood, that it was only reasonable for Farber to be irritable sometimes given that he was supporting a whole family, and any son of his would barely even notice a little bit of aggravation.

Iksom certainly felt that his father's unquenchable resentment of him was unfair but had no hope of articulating the impossible double-bind in which he found himself. The only part of all of this that looked acceptable to him was that he could—and should—be angry, even if that anger must not be expressed towards his father.

Like any child who felt like there wasn't enough to go around, Iksom clung to things like dolls or other toys. Farber saw this as unbecoming of a 'needless' man and took them away. It took Iksom all the will he had and a great deal of emotional pain, but he learned to express this 'needlessness' by rejecting toys, at least when in the company of any other member of the family and usually even when they weren't around -which was rare, given his age, the Alagasts' small house, and the fact that his mother was rearing Iksom and his siblings full-time.

By this time Feliks was between four and five years of age. He had a much more secure position in the family. His conception had been planned and he had been conceived and born during a much more stable time in Farber and Ingun's lives. This meant that Farber favoured him over Iksom, and Feliks sensed this.

He also sensed the dynamic between Iksom and their father and sided with the one who seemed to be the stronger of the two of them: their father. Being so young—not yet thoroughly schooled in how best to manage interpersonal relationships, coming from a family with a dog-eat-dog culture, and largely led by his sense of intuition—his reactions were generally antagonistic towards Iksom and could be anything from passively smug about his superior position to outright aggressive. This continued as a background dynamic of Iksom's experience at home until he left, many years later.

However, to truly understand the relationship between Feliks and Iksom it makes sense to look at Feliks' relationship with their father. Farber was prone to giving Feliks dual messages just like he did with Iksom, but these two messages were far more in accord with each other. The overt message was: *You're my first-born son and you will grow up*

*fast and become strong, just like me. You will learn to support yourself and contribute to this household in gratitude for all I have done for you. The covert message was: Grow up fast (no, that's not fast enough. Faster!) Get big and strong, learn how to need nothing (especially from me), and that will be good.*

This was certainly a harsh message and did its own damage to Feliks, but it wasn't as much of a double-bind. His main difficulty here was the implication that he should create something out of nothing: a strong, capable adult with minimal support.

Feliks' position as first-born had an impact on the overall family dynamic. Whether rightly or wrongly, he perceived his younger siblings to have an easier life than he'd had, and that they were coddled in a way he had never been. He resented this, but tended to disproportionately hold Iksom 'responsible' for 'taking' the resources that should have been reserved for him.

Basia, Iksom's sister, had her own place in the family's dynamic. She was the only daughter of the family. Generally she was disregarded beyond being given household tasks to do. This was consistent with Woltischkan culture. She escaped the worst of Farber's violence, but not his scrutiny. Iksom and Feliks, in their pain, understood this as an unfair leniency towards their sister. On this score they maintained the Woltischkan values their parents were teaching them: of not being as physically violent to Basia as they were to each other, so long as she got on with helping their mother with the housework. Despite Basia largely honouring this 'agreement', the boys let her know in their own ways that they had spotted the 'iniquity' and believed that one day justice would be served to her.

In and amongst all of this, Ingun fell pregnant again. Farber, whom we have established as having already been under a great deal of pressure, found it difficult to bear this impending addition to his responsibilities. He already had a habit of lashing out at his family but during Ingun's pregnancy, began to attack her too. This included striking her more often, the further along in her pregnancy she got.

Neither of them knew it, but this damaged the unborn kit.

### **Ambition**

*(young childhood)*

Tragedy hit the family while Iksom was four: the new addition to the family, a boy, was born, and died soon after birth. The injuries he had sustained during his gestation were too severe. He was posthumously named Pavel.

Ingun took the mortality very hard indeed and it showed. Farber's alcoholism and generally abusive behaviour worsened and this, the infant's death, and their financial situation all prompted her to shut down.

Neither half of the couple knew why they hadn't had more children previously; it's possible that one or the other had fertility issues, but after this event she became far less inclined even to try, and the Alagasts had no more children.

Farber reacted to this in his own way, which came out in stages: first, he railed against the idea that Pavel had died, and convinced himself that if one of his children had to die, it should have been Iksom. Pavel had had no opportunity to anger Farber, even given Farber's tortured perceptions, so as such Farber saw him as a 'perfect' child.

He festered with these thoughts, and they evolved into, "my wife killed my baby and kept that Koverian bastard instead." From there, it became "he had that bastard because she wants to have other lossians' kits instead of mine. She's cheating on me."

He confronted her about this. Ingun had tolerated years of physical abuse from him and had done so mainly because it was widely considered forgivable in Woltischkan culture. Cheating, however, was considered far less so, and so to be accused like this was more than she was prepared to accept. She was unable to leave him (and may not have even if she could; Woltischkan and the wider lossian culture placed a high value on the sanctity of family and a similar level of disdain for those who estranged themselves), so she did the next best thing: she refused thereafter to accept him in the marital bed.

Farber took her rejection of him and Pavel's death as an affront to his masculinity, that he was unable to bear strong children and undesirable to his wife. He found it easier to blame Ingun than bear this negative image of himself, but she did not make as satisfying a target as Farber wanted. As ever, his rage came out on Iksom.

Ingun had always offered whatever small amount of comfort she could, to Iksom. However, due to the combination of her post-natal grief, Farber's accusations that she only protected Iksom because he was a bastard child of some anonymous secret lover of hers, plus Farber's hostility towards both her and Iksom whenever he saw anything that he could interpret as proof of his claims (such as protecting her son), she found it safer and more effective not to protect Iksom.



Of course, Iksom was unaware of her thought process and simply felt abruptly abandoned when he needed her protection the most.

Between them, the children reeled. They hadn't encountered death before and were unsure what to make of it, but that uncertainty quickly resolved into anger. Feliks copied Farber and continued pushing Iksom around. Iksom reacted angrily to protect himself, and the two of them continued to be mutually antagonistic. Basia did her best to keep away from her brothers and out of the picture generally, and quietly held on to her own grief, fear, confusion, and anger.

With the culture at home becoming all the more intense, cold, and bitter, Iksom made a special effort to protect the one relationship in his life that offered him any warmth: he tried to protect his mother whenever their father attacked her. He was only a small child, so he was often scared off, and these encounters invariably left him feeling powerless and full of rage.

Another element of difficulty that arose in Iksom's life at this age was the concept of perfection. Farber demanded that his sons need nothing from him, so as such he expected perfect needlessness from both of them. If Iksom failed on this score and needed any help or guidance from Farber, he would be punished for it. In the longer run Iksom came to feel that the demands made of him were too exacting, that he was unreasonably expected to perform perfectly.

He began to avoid people and social settings, anything to avoid finding himself in situations where he would have to demonstrate that unattainable perfection.

With home being such a grim place, Iksom ventured outside the house to see what else there might be. Growing bigger gave him a brief flash of optimism that perhaps he could find something else beyond the oppressive walls of his home.

He met with other children in his neighbourhood, but when he introduced himself, they laughed at his name: it sounded downright odd to them. Iksom, feeling humiliated, retreated and didn't try again. It had taken him a lot of emotional energy to become optimistic enough to seek something new, and to be cut off so quickly and cruelly left him feeling discouraged.

This effectively cut Iksom off from the goal of this life-stage: he felt that any ambition he might have would be at best pointless, and at worst unattainable. He couldn't let go of the concept of achievement and how impossible it seemed to be, and started thinking

about all of his actions in terms of the potential for failure. He was trying to 'know his enemy' so that he could beat it and finally succeed, but it was far from a healthy mindset to take, and he felt far from empowered.

## **Productivity**

*(older childhood)*

Iksom grew old enough for his father to start pressuring him to go and find a job to help support the household. Iksom resented the idea of supporting his father and siblings, but saw no point in arguing and looked for work. Feliks, now aged ten, had quickly found a job working for a butcher and made good money delivering cuts of meat to customers, but Iksom found himself unable to find such steady work. Instead, he found various odd jobs for a lower rate of pay and was unable to stay in any place of employment for longer than a couple of weeks. Of course, his father and Feliks compared Iksom to both of themselves.

Although it didn't raise any concern, it was fairly easy to note that Iksom favoured a narrower vocabulary than most other people. His command of Koverian language was fluent so this didn't appear to be the reason behind it. In reality, this was a result of the learning disability he had developed prior to being born. His family, neighbours, and employers, however, dismissed it without giving it any thought.

Many children would be becoming more graceful by this point in their development, but Iksom remained relatively clumsy. In addition, Iksom's employers began to notice that he didn't concentrate on his work. Their reaction was somewhat mixed but generally tended towards thinking that he didn't respect or care about what he was learning, so they were often sharp and impatient with him. This didn't help, as his learning disability was the cause of his difficulties and impatience certainly didn't fix it. He continued to have difficulty focusing on his work for any length of time.

Although Iksom was capable of handwriting, his was worse than most other people's. This too was at least partly due to his learning disability, and as with his concentration issues, was put down to him not applying himself at work.

## **Child to Adult Transition**

*(adolescence)*

Becoming a teenager made life even harder for Iksom. He developed a sense of bull-headedness and started wanting nothing more than to defy his father and stand his ground, and the two had more altercations than ever.

Generally unwelcome at home, Iksom spent as much time outside of the house as possible. As a teenager he was no longer liable to be questioned for being away from home unchaperoned, but he had isolated himself so much by this time that he was a virtual outcast.

He started taking an interest in girls and did his best to approach them. He made a surprisingly large number of attempts given his overall feelings of hopelessness, perhaps because the girls he tried to woo were more low-key in their rejection of Iksom than his would-be childhood friends had been, but the truth was he had little to offer them: he was poor, of low status, lacked charm, and his family withheld their blessing when it came to the idea of him potentially finding a wife.

The closest he came to finding a girlfriend was a friendship with the daughter of a local baker. Her name was Karina. She felt sorry for him and talked to him to learn more about his situation. Iksom briefly fancied her but came to realise that she didn't feel the same way, so he accepted a platonic friendship with her instead. He felt cared for and listened to, and he talked with her whenever he could find the time.

Still, Iksom generally felt angry and needed to rebel against his dad. He started to run with a local gang of similarly-minded boys. The gang was nothing serious; they called themselves The Hounds, and sometimes Briarpatch, but no name ever stuck. Sooner or later Feliks saw Iksom with them and tattled on him to their father. When that happened Farber nearly broke Iksom's arm during the fight they had, and threw him out of the house, telling him not to return.

At around the same time, war broke out between Koveria and Osetka. Given the political interrelationships between the countries, Woltischka was pulled into the conflict. However, Woltischka's involvement was not common knowledge by any means and the implications of it wrong-footed a lot of people, including the Alagasts.

Feliks saw an opportunity. Although Iksom had seen him as the favoured son, Feliks still found living with Farber difficult to bear; he had simply had favourable enough circumstances to be able to put on a confident or stoic face whenever needed. Posters, news clippings, and other literature about the army life made it sound exciting, profitable, and patriotic, so he decided to try and register himself, to escape Farber's influence and make his fortune elsewhere in the world.

All of this appealed to Farber, so Feliks found himself actively under pressure by his father to go off to war 'like a real man'.

He was too young to legally register to be drafted as a soldier but believed that if he was lucky, he wouldn't be discovered, as he looked old enough to be believed if he did lie. Record-keeping at the time was poor so he took the official 'plan B' route of having his age vouched for by his father.

Farber was supportive of Feliks' desire to join the army. To him, a military career was a solidly masculine choice that he would support almost regardless of context. Feliks needing him to lie in order to get him into the army was fine by Farber, because it earned him 'man points' but perhaps also because he was able to 'get one over' on the Koverian authorities.

Feliks was drafted and sent to fight in the war. Iksom, however, was too young to convince anybody that he was old enough to join the military, so this escape route wasn't available for him.

Iksom spent a couple of years effectively homeless. He continued to find odd jobs and tried to make enough to provide for himself, but this was largely ineffective.

He remained with Briarpatch. Although Iksom sorely lacked persuasive skills, the other members of Briarpatch were in similar circumstances to him so let him stay with them out of sheer group-loyalty. This homeless period of his life prompted Iksom to begin cheating and stealing to get the food he needed.

During the earliest part of this period, Karina offered Iksom regular food, in the form of unsold bread at the end of each day. He took advantage of this, but as he spent longer on the streets he came to look more bedraggled and increasingly ragged. Karina's parents eventually forbade him from coming to the shop anymore—his appearance was putting off their regular customers. Iksom tried stealing from the shop as he had come to know the family's routines by this time, but when this was discovered Karina ended her friendship with him.

Feliks died at war by the time Iksom had been homeless for six months and, a while after this, Iksom learned of Feliks' death while spying on the family home.

As he and the other boys in Briarpatch got older the gang took a more serious turn. They started to practice organized pick-pocketing, property theft, and robbery. While he

was morally accepting of stealing enough to fill his stomach, anything more than that felt like too much. And so, Iksom parted company with them—on bitter terms.

His first move after leaving Briarpatch was to take the train to the capital in search of a fresh start.

As part of this fresh start, Iksom re-evaluated his thoughts about work. He believed that any work that he could get would be poorly paid and disappointing, but that if he applied himself then he would be able to find work that offered less opportunity for failure.

He spent a year testing this hypothesis and finding it to be extremely limiting. There were few jobs entirely devoid of the potential for failure that weren't also highly unpleasant, paid an unlivable pittance, or both. This was when Iksom had another idea: to train in the art of magic.

### **Closeness in Relationships**

*(young adulthood)*

Iksom's understanding was that magic was easy; that with a few gestures and words, a magician could create just about anything he wanted to. The way he saw it, if he could enrol himself in a school of magic, that would solve all of his problems.

He applied to attend Koveria's national school of magic, the Collegiate of Magic, and was invited to an interview to demonstrate his current level of ability. His performance was poor and his magic weak. Perhaps there were very few Woltischkan applicants or the course offered a limited number of places to disadvantaged individuals, but Iksom was accepted.

His first few lessons included demonstrations of advanced magic that showed its true potential, and for the first time in his life Iksom felt truly inspired. He fell in love with magic and became determined to learn the craft. It looked like a way for him to 'get it right', to make the impossible possible. For somebody who had had so much failure and hardship in his life, that was a tempting reward indeed.

The fact that magic of this level was normally only available to the wealthy and educated offered its own seductions. Iksom's family had been thoroughly working class, and at times he had heard somebody in the family (usually his father) talk in derogatory terms about the middle and upper classes. As somebody who had never fitted in with his own family, Iksom wondered now, whether he had always been meant to be of a

higher class. If only he could master magic, then perhaps he might find a place where he might fit in!

He worked hard to make this dream his reality, but he struggled sorely with it. He quickly learned that magic was a great deal more technical than he had ever imagined, and required precision for even the simplest spell. Iksom's clumsiness had never cleared up and made his Alchemical work seem all but impossible. He often made mistakes such as calcifying material at one degree Celsius off of the prescribed temperature, or by adding half a pinch too much of something into a mixture which either damaged, or completely negated, its efficacy. No matter how much one-to-one time he got with his teachers, he couldn't seem to get this right -and it impacted his grades.

In addition to this, Iksom had never honed his focus, and continued to be easily distracted. This didn't cause him too much trouble during the foundation levels of his training, as his tutors didn't grade particularly thoroughly so the finer points of a student's lack of comprehension went unnoticed.

However, during the first two years, as Iksom's tutors taught him material that built upon his foundational knowledge, the seams began to show. What started out early in the course as a few cracks quickly turned into a worrying gap in his knowledge, and finally a ravine that he felt unable to cross. He tried to patch up his lack of knowledge but his difficulties in focusing, especially on what seemed to be unimportant or pedantic nuances of the material, left Iksom far behind his peers.

It was around this time that an old facet of Iksom's learning disability reared its head again, in the form of a disruption to his Runes training. He had never had any noticeable difficulties with speech, but the requirements with Runes to be incredibly precise in the noises and tones required were too precise for him to consistently master. His spells often failed or misfired—sometimes with dangerous consequences. Once again, his tutors tried to help him improve his skills but the danger this represented, along with their growing weariness and his lack of ability to improve past a certain point, left them reluctant to try.

Iksom hadn't become much more eloquent since his childhood. Any kind of formal discussion brought his limited vocabulary to the fore. He tried to improve it, especially during the conversations about theory and practice that he needed it for, but he found it such hard work that more often than not, he would just get frustrated.

Iksom tried just about every magical discipline on offer, in the hope of finding one that 'worked for him', that he would find less challenging. The closest he got was Runes, but even those were far from easy for him.

His tutors held a conference together and agreed that Iksom should be dis-enrolled at the end of the year. He would have been, if not for a change in his luck.

A new student was enrolled, named Nikolai Rashinov. Rash, as he was known, was young, had an incredible amount of latent magical potential, and had boundless reserves of enthusiasm and optimism. He joined one of the classes that Iksom had been in for a long time. He heard that Iksom had been there for longer than any other student and assumed that he therefore had the best understanding of the subject material of anybody in the class. He took to studying with him.

Rash quickly worked out that Iksom's comprehension of the material was quite poor, and so helped him. His approach was quite different, and Iksom found that when he studied with Rash, Rash would explain things in a way that made the material make sense to him! In this way, Iksom clawed his way off his tutors' dis-enrollment list. In time Iksom graduated from a novice to a journeyman in the use of Runes and Alchemy. This cemented his position as a permanent practitioner in the State Corps of Magicians.

The cementing of this role was more than just official. By this time Iksom believed that magic had failed him just like everything else ever had, and he felt disappointed in his professional journey. However, he believed that he would never have a position in life like this again, so kept it.

Rash had also graduated to journeyman status, and soon graduated onwards, which meant that he left Iksom's class. After this happened Iksom's progress stagnated again. Iksom felt that the progress he had made, and therefore the work he produced, was not truly his own, and that he was an imposter.

Throughout all of this time he had no contact at all with his family. Part of this was the expectation that a grown man would not be overly close to his family of origin, but Iksom was also unwilling to risk having any letters that he might send home be intercepted by his father. He suspected that if his father was angered by his letters—and he was probably right about that—then his father would backlash against his mother. Iksom didn't want to be the cause of that.

Rash had become the Grand Master by this time. He pulled the necessary strings to have Iksom named as a Master of Runes while Iksom was 39 years of age, which

meant that Iksom was answerable to him. Iksom had long-since given up the dream of being an esteemed professional in this field by this time, but he accepted Rash's benediction regardless; it was a better outcome than he had believed possible—on paper, at least. He recognised the naming for what it was: nepotism, but he felt he couldn't reject it.

As one who had been named a Master he was given an estate, in a remote region of the city of Dobryn. Technically, this manor didn't belong to him, and Rash had the majority of authority over who was permitted to live there. Iksom was aware of this too, and it only served to further entrench his position relative to Rash.

### **Passing on Responsibilities**

*(older adulthood)*

This is where Iksom's life stagnated. He had not had a family so had no children, no pride in his own professional abilities, and no hint of any legacy.

His relationship with Rash was strange: on the one hand, he considered Rash the only friend he'd ever had but, on the other, he feared and resented him for the ease with which Rash could remove him from his position if Iksom were to act out of line. At Rash's direction, he went on various road-shows as a way to collect funding and information, and the endless cycle of these became Iksom's life; he didn't look beyond these, nor the binge-drinking and smoking sessions that tended to occur after each show.

He was approached by a young urchin: a boy named Azalf who came to him wanting to be the apprentice to a Master so as to begin an education with the Collegiate of Magic. Iksom happened to be the Master he crossed paths with first. Iksom accepted because he believed that doing so would improve his image. Azalf seemed to be in an even weaker position than Iksom, so he believed that if he could bend nobody else to his will then he could do so with Azalf. Iksom's plan was to have Azalf perform with him during the travelling shows and pass off Azalf's magic as his own. His show had been performing poorly for a long time so this looked like exactly the kind of boost he needed. Indeed, Iksom counted this new situation as good luck, a proverbial golden egg handed to him. He reported Azalf's new position as his apprentice to the college, as per formality.

Iksom quickly saw that the boy had better magical potential than he did and could easily bypass Iksom's own skill level in only a few years, so he worked on keeping him as



under-resourced and scared as he could to prevent the humiliation of a mere child outperforming him. He provided the most half-hearted training imaginable, partly to avoid preparing Azalf for greater things, but also because he himself was simply not an adept teacher.

Eventually, Iksom could tolerate the situation no longer and sent Azalf on a fool's errand into the woods, in the hope that he would never see him again.

### **End of Life**

*(old age)*

Like almost everybody, Iksom will eventually die. He feels angry that this will be his fate and considers death to be the final failure, the moment that he will inevitably have to give in, regardless of how he has survived this life of his. Given his deeply entrenched tendency to self-isolate, the weeks and days before his death are likely to be full of bitterness and despair, and he is very likely to die alone and remain undiscovered for quite some time.

### **Credits**

Based on theory by:

Erikson, E., (1951) 'Childhood and Society', W.W. Norton & Company, Inc. chapter 7.

Iksom Alagast is © [Caervec](#)

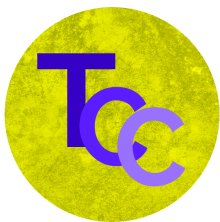
Kinalka world / *The Iron Book* story is © [Caervec](#)

Lossian species is © [Caervec](#)

Artwork by [Lingrimm](#) and used with their kind permission

Wording by [The Character Consultancy](#)

---



Want to upgrade to an Infographic or video, or expand your setting further? Email me and I will be happy to help you!

~ Hayley, Founder of The Character Consultancy

hello@thecharacterconsultancy.co.uk | thecharacterconsultancy.co.uk