

The Old Road bounced off the cliffs around the entrance of Castle Nighttail like a ray of light, curving back to the west - away from my destination. The only way forward was down.

Much of the town of Castle Nighttail was carved out of the rock inside the cavern, and stacks of chaotic houses built from stone and wood perched between the walls. Vents bored into the ceiling let in what little sunlight remained, but even as I entered, brave attendants from the castle proper were climbing up and sliding stone covers across them to keep in the warmth.

The Deep Fire was a monumental blaze, far below in the belly of the castle. It not only warmed the caverns, but would power the next stage of my journey: the Artery, a breathtaking steel device that provided transport between the underground castles Nighttail and Rattlefax.

The Artery ran from Rattlefax to Nighttail at dusk, then back at dawn. I paid for a seat on the next trip, then managed to get some rest during the night.

As I boarded the vessel alongside almost a hundred others the next morning, I tried to sneak a look at the workings underneath, but it was all carefully concealed.

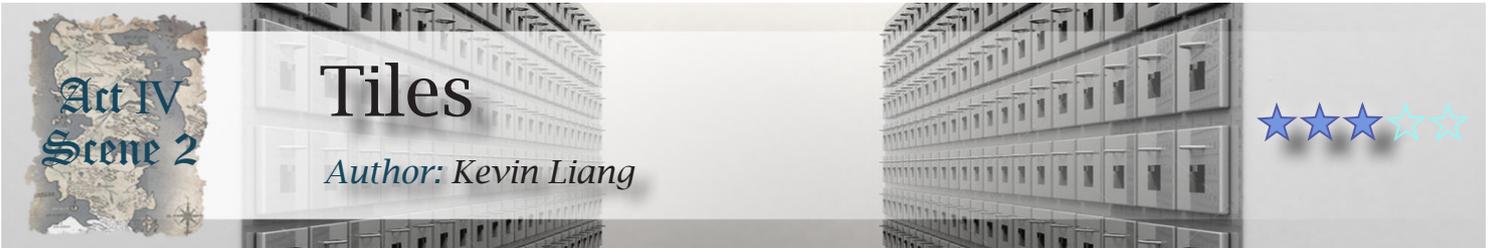
The old white-haired lady behind me caught me staring and chuckled. “Good luck. I’ve been trying to figure this thing out for the entire time it’s been here. Whoever built it wants to keep the secret to themselves. Something to do with heat and water, that’s all I’ve been able to figure.”

“So you don’t know who built it?” I asked over my shoulder as we shuffled along the carriage-like interior to our assigned seats.

“No. Some say it was Lord Fabrax. Others say it was Lady Gyrook.” She took the seat next to me. “They probably started those rumours themselves, trying to get credit for someone’s genius. Probably a bit of a neighbourly rivalry between them.”

She held out a hand. “Natron.”

I took it. “You can call me Envoy.”



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