

Jeffra Cox

Backstory

Species: Human

Sex: ♂

Age: Adult

Height: No official height given

Weight: No official weight given

Siblings: None

Trust & Confidence

(newborn)

Jeffra was born into a noble family, which means that right from the start (and true to the custom of the time) he was cared for by a wet nurse instead of his biological mother.

It seems that she did a reasonably good job of caring for him, at least on a superficial level, as Jeffra became a high achiever as an older boy. Ultimately, despite the insecurities he developed about living up to others' expectations, he always believed he was safe. This allowed him to feel secure enough to take risks.

However, it seems he failed to learn something that is integral to trust – in particular, the concept of constancy. Perhaps Jeffra sensed that the woman caring for him was not his true mother, or maybe the wet nurse had other charges to look after or was more interested in the payment and prestige that came with being the wet nurse of a noble family than in the care of her charge. However it happened, Jeffra's ability to connect with others remained lacking, particularly in the sense of trusting in the genuineness of their feelings towards him. This coloured his interactions throughout his life.

Freedom & Self-Determination

(toddlerhood)

As a toddler, Jeffra stayed in the castle of his birth and continued to be looked after by his wet nurse, at least until he was weaned. Given the fact that his wet nurse was not his mother and may have had other priorities (as mentioned earlier), Jeffra grasped onto everything he could get in the hopes of keeping it – whether that was physical items such as food or comforters, or attention. Letting go didn't feel like an option to him.

Then his tutelage started. Small children were given a basic education, plus instruction in good manners and etiquette, and Jeffra soon learned that achieving in these areas got him some positive attention, if not affection. It would have been a stretch for such a small child to meet the challenges of good etiquette, but he stretched himself, and often he succeeded. The affirmation he got for meeting his elders' expectations was what made it worth it for him. Here was something approaching the warmth he had wanted from his wet nurse! The feeling made an impression on him and he committed himself to getting more of it, although it should be noted that the positive attention he got was for behaving in a particular way. Feedback about his being – his non-doing self – was not forthcoming. He didn't consciously make the distinction but it affected his attitudes nonetheless.

Children of this age in our era get the chance to start expressing choices, partly because many of them get to grow up in a safe and bountiful environment. By contrast, choice was hard to come by for Jeffra, as small children had to be seen and not heard. Striving for, and gaining, affirmation was the nearest he could get to feeling like he had autonomy. The choice between compliance and

defiance wasn't really much of a choice, so he went for the option that had a more pleasant outcome.

And so began a twenty-year long career (give or take) of working hard for affirmations, congratulations and achievement, while blanking out most expressions of genuine human warmth.

Ambition

(young childhood)

Young Jeffra had a rude awakening when he reached this stage: he was sent away to the castle of another lord to begin the long path of his training to become a knight.

This started with becoming a page.

To the lords of Jeffra's world, connections with other noble families was paramount, so this loaning of him to another family was a commonplace practice. That doesn't mean it was pleasant. However, by now Jeffra had settled on his modus operandi: to comply, to conform, and to achieve.

How he felt about leaving the castle of his birth is unknown but it looks like he threw himself into his new environment and routine as best he could. But then again, what choice did he have?

Jeffra didn't have siblings, but for the first time in his life he had peers in the form of other pages, boys loaned to other castles and with whom he had occasional contact. He came to see these other pages as competition, as he already felt that resources (read: affection from distracted or mildly dismissive elders) were scarce and had to be earned. Rather than warming to his fellow pages, Jeffra competed with them to be the best – and be the one to get that coveted attention.

His biggest wish, one that he held so deep he could not have articulated it himself, was to be loved and to be 'good enough', to finally be a part of the family that had been denied him by birth and tradition. He never really got it and it wasn't really a reachable goal given the culture he lived in, and as stated before, he almost certainly couldn't have articulated what he wanted, but deep down he had a desire to be cared for irrespective of adequacy.

Productivity

(older childhood)

As a growing boy, Jeffra's tutelage got more varied, challenging and intensive, and he began to learn a wide range of different skills: horsemanship, hunting, hawking, the mastery of musical instruments, a little reading and writing, chess, and basic combat techniques.

He was mainly looked after by the ladies of the castle, who also taught most of his lessons. In return for this tutoring, plus his upkeep, he worked as a messenger, cleaned weapons, and helped his resident lord to dress. All of these were routine tasks and, true to himself, he was conscientious about doing them all.

This shift in his responsibilities and training meant that he saw other pages a little more often. As before, he saw them as competition – more specifically, as a threat to the undivided goodwill of his caretakers - and made a point of outdoing them. He remained on tenterhooks to be the first one to offer to deliver messages and he was proactive in cleaning weapons, always ready take his lord's weaponry as soon as the man returned to the castle, lest he be unfavourably compared to other pages.

His caretakers noticed his eagerness to work, and on the odd occasion that Jeffra saw another page, his proactivity and conscientiousness was praised, either by his own lord or the elders of the

other castle. It even became a running joke that his caretakers would brag about their excellent page. Sometimes, other pages would be shamed in front of him for their laziness.

This had a mixed effect on other pages, ranging from sourness to hilarity at his blind eagerness to please his superiors. The pages weren't in much of a position to develop relationships with one another, but as such, Jeffra developed a reputation with the sparse page network in which he operated.

This started Jeffra on a career marked by competition with his peers and of honing the skill of being the first or the fastest. He began to use this to improve his status - such as it was, given his position as a page.

Child to Adult Transition

(adolescence)

When Jeffra reached puberty he was granted a promotion from page to squire, which brought with it a change in his circumstances. His lord took him out to tournaments and both local and distant raids and battles.

As before, he strove to be the best. And as before, he had limited contact with his peers, but what he did see prompted him to outperform them at all costs.

As the stakes were higher and the squires overall more dedicated to their roles, the culture of competition in which Jeffra found himself became more serious. The less-invested boys had either shaped up, died or been sent home in disgrace, and Jeffra found that with the change in culture came an intensification of the pressure to perform and prevail.

He continued to perform well by a significant margin. After all, that was how Jeffra defined himself and how others had come to define him.

At this time Jeffra also graduated from the care and tutelage of the ladies of the court. His relationship with them had always been a somewhat serious one, as he had always seen them as the ones giving him the tasks at which he must excel. But now, freed from their care, he slowly developed a less regimented relationship with them. The relationship did not bring with it any significant easing of his attitude towards achievement, but in a small way they became allies – cheering their graduate on as he served his lord.

Closeness in Relationships

(young adulthood)

Jeffra reached adulthood and with it, graduated from a squire to a knight.

He carefully managed his affiliations with the other knights who had graduated from squiredom at this time, as connections were of vital importance to a knight. However, they lacked much in the way of warmth, especially given that Jeffra was not the only knight to have had a loveless childhood. Some others had been fortunate enough to learn the skills of emotional warmth, but he had difficulty responding to this. Instead, he treated the whole situation – his career and all it entailed – as a task to be performed as perfectly as possible.

He gradually became emotionally exhausted. In his younger years he had been able to cope, but as Jeffra settled into the long haul as an overachieving knight he realised that this was it, there would be no major change. Perhaps his wealth would increase – indeed, he had great wealth to his name – but the pressure would never ease. He married, however it was a marriage of convenience and not of love, so although he succeeded in finding a wife with the ability to manage his wealth

and castle while he was away, the marriage was loveless.

He might have continued to do his duty as a knight regardless, if not for an unusual opportunity that came, quite literally, to his door.

Jeffra's own page came to him with a rumour: that the castle had recently taken in a handful of new servants. That in itself was inconsequential. Not so what his page told him next. The page had overheard a conversation between two of these servants. They were lower-ranking members of a clan of bandits who wished to take the castle. These newcomers were able to operate within the castle without suspicion, but when the rest of their clan came, instead of fending them off they would let them in. The clan would gain access to the castle and attack from the inside, kill Jeffra, and take the castle and all his wealth for themselves.

At first Jeffra began preparations to remove the newcomers, but the ingenuity of the clan's preparations intrigued him. It would be expected for him to defend his castle, but as he looked around at all he had built, he realised that he did not want it.

What he did want – what he had been silently yearning for, for a very long time – was change.

He quietly made preparations of his own, including stockpiling the equipment that he wanted to keep. He had his weapons put into storage outside of the castle away from the prying eyes of the spies, arranged for a nearby stable to be populated with two of the best horses money could buy, and moved a healthy portion of his wealth to investments that could sustain him after his plan came to fruition. He placed spies to keep tabs on the infiltrators, and waited for the clan to make their move.

The seizure came at night. When the clan attacked it became clear that it was large, well-equipped, honed by practice, and hungry. But all of that was good news to Jeffra. After all, his plan depended on their success in devastating his castle's defences, and Jeffra's desire for change didn't translate to a desire to lead a group of amateurs. He watched and listened from one of his castle towers, and was reported to by his men. He counter-attacked but used the most over-used by-the-book counters. If this new clan could overcome those, they would be worth leading. They advanced and he allowed himself to be backed into the top of the tower.

At last, the leader of the clan, eager to make the single most important move of the operation for himself, came to his chamber. This was what Jeffra had been waiting for. After a brief discussion where he established that this was a murder attempt and not a kidnapping – knights, being nobility, could be captured and ransomed - he used his years of dedication to honing his skill to kill his would-be murderer.

One of Jeffra's favourite moves in hand-to-hand combat (but not one that he often got to use) was a move in which one engaged, slipped through one's opponent's defences, and took their weapon from them before they realised what was happening. This was the move that Jeffra used on the clan leader. The leader's weapon was a sword, and Jeffra swiftly killed him with it.

It stood to reason that at least some of the clan would recognise the sight of their leader's sword. Jeffra left his chambers and went in search of the nexus of the clan within his castle. The fight was more or less over by this time and he found them enjoying the contents of his pantry. When he opened the door, two dozen men quit their banter and singing to see who had come.

In a loud and clear voice he gave a speech, raising the sword above his head so that its pommel and crossguard could be seen by all present – along with the blood along the blade.

He told them that their leader was dead, and that they should seek his carcass in the top chamber of the south-west tower if they wished to check for themselves.

He told them that he was their new leader, and that he could promise them better living and greater riches than if they stayed in this castle, which would serve them poorly as a base of operations: the king would surely send enough troops to slay this clan. Instead they would take the riches the castle had to offer and live comfortably where their faces would not be recognised.

There were challenges to this, as Jeffra had expected. But a combination of martial skill, initiative in leading his clan in gaining more wealth, and in rewarding loyalty and stirring them with speeches, he cemented his position as their new leader.

That is where we find him in the present day.

Credits

Jeffra Cox is © [Hale-art](#)

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Dungeons and Dragons created by Gary Gygax and Dave Arneson

Based on theory by:

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

Want to organise your updates and talk with me about integrating them into your character? Email me on thecharacterconsultancy@gmail.com and I will be happy to help you!

~Hayley, The Character Consultancy