



Chapter 1 - Arrival

It has been seven long months since the prisoners had last stepped out into the light of day. Seven long months since they were ordered to be transported from the city of Rhydall in Eastern Treene to the wild continent of Sebba. Seven long months inside the stinking hell that lies below the decks of an imperial prison ship. The rats team all around. The grating noise of them scuttling about can be heard at night over the gentle lapping of the waves that strike against the ship's hull. The screech of them can be heard during the day as they are beaten away from feeding on the corpses that remain chained up and festering in the silent gloom all around you. Once in a while, some poor soul is forced to come below and proffer the prisoners a small piece of hard dry bread and a drop of water, but it is never enough to take the pain of hunger away. The prisoners ache for this nightmare to end, for the taste of clean water and the smell of air undefiled by human putrescence. They ache for freedom...

Suddenly, a shout can be heard faintly from high above, "Land Ho!". Are they nearing their journey's end.... or is it just their journey's beginning?

<Two Days Previously>

A feint voice in the darkness, quivering with fatigue cries out "Stefan, my lad are you still there. I think...I think my time is coming...yes coming it is." A strange rasping sound floats from the old man's throat as he takes breath. "Yep, Old Torvin here is not going to see the light of day again. But you will my lad, I know you will. You and the others here will make it." The deck hangs heavy with the abject resignation in the old man's voice.

Elthian "Don't give up, sir." a tired voice that does it's best to sound comforting, is heard from another dark corner of the ship "You haven't endured seven months of this hell only to give up now, have you?" A cough is heard, the lack of water apparently taking it's toll already "We can't be far from Sebba. This sea isn't endless, even if it seemed so half a year ago. Don't give up." The voice seems to be speaking to it's owner, as much as to the old man. "Don't let them win..." it adds at an even lower tone, then falls silent.

Old Torvin: "Elthian, is that you son? Save your strength, lad. You are going to need it. Do not waste your breath on hollow words for my benefit. I am an old scoundrel..." The old man breaks of into a fit of coughing and

weazing before finishing" ..and I am dying an old scoundrel's death. T'is only fitting, and may Khara have mercy upon me".

Stefan: The tall, still muscular figure to which Torvin had been speaking made no answer. He lay stretched upon the deck motionless as he had for the last three hours. It was possible that the lack of movement on Stefan's part had prompted the words from Torvin who hadn't talked except in grunts for weeks now. It was possible that Torvin thought him dead or near to it; many of the other nearby prisoners did, as did the rats who had been edging closer and closer for the last hour, anticipating a meal.

One rat, braver than the rest, crept up and begin to nibble on exposed flesh. Suddenly a hand flashed out with blinding speed, caught the rat and slammed it down on the decking. Stefan sat up as he brought the rat to his mouth, ripping open the throat of the still quivering creature with his teeth and began to suck at its body like a fruit.

Having had a drink, Stefan flipped the rat to Torvin. Blood continued to drip from his mouth into the matted, seven month growth of beard and down onto the filthy, fringed leather shirt as startling green eyes peered out from beneath the long mass of tangled brown hair. "Eat, Torvin," Stefan said, more a command than a suggestion. "You'll be fine! We all will! Anyone tough enough to survive this long, isn't giving up now."

Taurek: Taurek remains exactly where he's been for the duration of the trip, huddled in a little ball off in a corner. He's not fond of water. He's not fond of ships. He likes ground and earth and dirt, not rocking and swaying. When the earth shakes, it rumbles, none of this swaying nonsense. So for now? For now he stays where he is and waits for everything to pass, waits for the horrid swaying to finish.

Wren: In the middle of the deck a short man lies on his front, a long black cloak wrapped around him. He raises his head at the voice trying to spot its owner before his head slumps again as if the effort was too much for him. The face was very young - the raggedy beginnings of a beard fail to disguise his youth. "Don't die old man. Please don't," he mumbles almost incoherently.

The tone is pleading, almost begging. "Who's that," he asks hearing the second voice,

"You're not going to die are you?" The man raises his head again, half-heartedly looking around.

Feng: Feng remains silent. What was the death of some old, tall thing to him? He thinks of telling the voices to shut up, but settles on neutrality: neither giving comfort nor being outwardly mean. It gives

the halfling pride to think he is stronger than them and he smiles in the darkness.

Elthian: "I'm not dying." the voice replies to the black-cloaked man on the floor, with a decisiveness that cannot be mistaken despite it's weak tone. "And yes, it's Elthian." it says, now speaking to the old man "You're not going to die any death, old scoundrel's or otherwise. If you only believed in it, as you believe in those non-existing gods of yours..."

"I wouldn't be eating too many of those little pests, if I were you." the voice comments, as Stefan kills and then starts consuming a rat "One never knows what kinds of diseases they carry..."

Stefan: Stefan smiled to himself with renewed hope, *There are still a few who haven't lost all shreds of humanity while chained in this pesthole,* he thought to himself. *The voyage MUST soon be over. With good companions perhaps there is still a chance of regaining our freedom and finding our way home.* He had been forced to live like an animal - they all had. But others had survived and kept their humanity. He could and would as well!

"If you've managed to last all this time on the scraps they feed us, without eating such as this," he says aloud, indicating the rat, "then you're a better man than I am by far. As for disease, if the rats carried any we'd have caught it anyway packed into this filth. I'd sooner keep up my strength and stave off starvation with the meat these vermin can provide than worry about what disease I may catch from them.... Still, thank you for the concern."

Elthian: "Well, I have tried to." Elthian replies slowly "I would rather be hungry, than be sick and hungry. But suit yourself -perhaps your resistance to disease is better than mine..."

Stefan: Stefan didn't wish to argue... or even talk much; he was still, after seven months overwhelmed by the number of people around him. There were more people packed into this small filthy area than he had seen before in his life in total. Still... people had and were dying from starvation and he couldn't bring himself to let more starve because of fear when food was available. He had been able to (at least occasionally) supplement his meagre diet as he had today and had shared the meat with those prisoners close by and none had sickened from it that he knew of.

"Perhaps resistance..." Stefan said with hesitation, "but knowledge is more important. I'm a hunter. A sick animal acts differently. Diseased meat looks, smells and tastes different. I can't catch enough for all, but I can tell you how, and if you catch it I can tell if its safe to eat."

Elthian: "That may be so..." Elthian says "I cannot claim I have much experience of hunting, myself. But I still won't touch that meat until I'm at the very doorstep of death." he makes a short pause, to regain powers "Though I guess learning how to distinguish healthy from sick rats could prove quite an interesting, if somewhat disgusting, passtime, down in this dungeon of boredom." the sound of a short, low chuckle is heard. There is no malice or sarcasm in it, except perhaps an irony directed toward the whole situation.

Stefan: *I hope,* he thought to himself with sudden misgivings, as he lapsed again into silence. *Two long speeches today! I'm not used to stringing together so many words! What if I'm wrong? What if I've only been lucky so far or worse if already some disease is festering in my body? I THINK I'd know.... but can I be sure? I don't want to see anyone starve but I don't want to cause them to become sick either.*

Wren: Hideous fascination at the conversation starts to get the better of fatigue and illness in Wren. Lifting himself to sitting up he stares one of the rats nearby him straight in the eye tilting his head quizzically then smiles rather amused. He twists around straining his eyes to see in the darkness hoping to catch a glimpse of these people.

"S-sirs, I don't know who you are or why you are here but I'm feeling a lot better for hearing that little conversation," he says quite clearly pausing only to chuckle occasionally. "I'm sorry, I know I shouldn't but it is so dreadful down here - anything remotely funny is just beautiful."

Elthian: Elthian smiles in the darkness "Actually I was quite serious; but if I have in any way made this dreadful journey more pleasant to you, so much the better." another short pause "By the way, my name is Elthian, if you didn't hear previously. What's yours?" Somehow it felt utterly pointless to introduce himself, but any distraction was a good one, he reasoned.

Wren: Feeling rather silly but sharing Elthian's sentiments on any distraction being a good one, "I am called Wren and am very pleased to meet you I'm sure."

Conscious he is being perhaps a trifle formal for the setting but pressing on regardless, afraid of giving offence perhaps, he continues "Elthian, an interesting name. Is it Elvish perhaps, or am I mistaken?" More relaxed now his hand moves almost subconsciously down onto the deck and he begins to drum his fingers lightly.

Elthian: "Indeed, elven it is." Elthian replies "My father is half-elven, and speaks the language well. I guess he liked the culture of his

mother's kin, though he never was a real part of it. All my brothers and sisters have elven names..." He makes a prolonged pause, as he is reminded of loved ones that he has left behind. Finally he says "Am I right in assuming you are a speaker of the language as well? Though Wren doesn't sound particularly elven to me, if I am to be honest..." Searching his tired mind for a language he hasn't spoken since childhood, he finally comes up with the desired words "Well met, friend."* he says in the elven tongue -with a quite obvious accent.

Wren: Wren tenses at the words then relaxes before replying in elven "Well met indeed." He speaks the words in a dead monotone and continues with a few more empty pleasanties - he speaks the language well but seems to have little love of using it.

Returning to Common he answers the question asked.

"No I'm human but my father was.." There is a slight pause here - barely noticeable but there nonetheless. "A very intelligent man - he spoke many languages and felt it vital I should learn the important ones - elvish was one of these. I don't like the language much but it's sometimes useful to speak it."

There is a little bitterness in his words, or possibly just weariness recalling lessons from childhood - it's hard to say. At any rate he changes the subject quickly.

Elthian: "Personally I find it quite melodic, and nice to listen to." Elthian comments "Though on the other hand, thus far in life I have found minimal use for it." he shrugs in the darkness.

Wren: "Tell me, Elthian, what do you know of this Sebba?"

Elthian: "What I know about Sebba? Well, I had read a book once..." he says, and then says nothing more, as he tries to remember what he'd read "I think it was by P.T. Glentravers, so those of you familiar with geograpy know what that means... about half of it's contents are just fabricated tales to impress young ladies..." he smiles to himself, reminded of an instance when he had tried the same trick. "Well, according to Glentravers, Sebba is just about as unfriendly as Nature can get: stinking swamps, fog-covered everglades, unending forests, hot deserts, sky-high mountains... you name it.

Stefan: Stefan interupts with a whoop in dwarvish, *Paradise!* Switching back to the common tongue, he continues, "It sounds like home. I can't think of a place other than home where I'd rather be going!"

Elthian: Elthian continues "Oh, and great, wild plains. Common denominator: wilderness, and savage monsters. Basically the last place I would like to be." he makes a short pause "But don't forget that this is Glentravers, so the sky high mountains may only be an anthill, and the savage monsters just a hedgehog..." somehow he doesn't sound very convinced of this himself. "That's about all I can remember, I'm afraid." he says concludingly.

Stefan: "I don't know who this Glentravers is, nor do I care much," Stefan says excitedly but I'll take the wilderness he described over the cities anytime."

Wren: Wren sits quietly considering this. *Not what I'm used to at all. Still, it sounds interesting.*

"It, umm, sounds a little inhospitable. Presumably there'll be some civilization there - the Empire's been sending people here for quite a while. They can't all have been killed surely."

Wren pauses considering this last statement of his.

"Surely?"

Worry takes over again bringing him back down to reality. He looks over in the direction of the old man, "How is he, umm, Stefan wasn't it? He is going to make it isn't he?"

Stefan: The voice out of the darkness, drew Stefan out of his silent introspection, *So many people,* he thought in near agony of shyness, *and once you begin to speak they all want words with you. I'd so much rather stay quiet and listen... but it would be a rudeness not to answer. And yes, how is the old man?*

Stefan glanced over at Torvin, and again said, "Eat, Torvin! It will give you the strength you need to survive."

To the voice from the darkness he called, "Yes, I'm called Stefan. Torvin is still with us and should remain so if he'll eat."

Torvin: The old man could feel the warmth stickiness of the rats blood between his fingers. Trying not think of what he was about to do, slowly he lifted the mangle thing towards his mouth but, before he could take whatever sustenance it might have afforded a wave of revulsion, washed through his weary body. Flinging the rat away (in the direction of the surly halfling), Torvin breaks down into wretched sobs "I can't do it! I can't do it! Khara take me I cannot go on". His howls last but moments

before fatigue and hunger prevent such exertion further.

Feng: Feng listens to the exchange of the tall things in silence, still smiling. To him, it sounds as if they had gotten desperate and he lets a slight snicker escape his lips. So now they introduce themselves to each other - when they think they're about to die? He laughs and the sound is surprisingly less hoarse than that of the other voices.

Feng's laughter stops momentarily as the rat hits him. He picks it up to take a look at it and pushes it away. "It is not cooked," he says in a deep voice for one of his size. A voice that also sounds quite unused to speaking the common tongue - as if he has just learned it recently. He smiles in the darkness toward the voices and laughs quietly as if to himself.

Stefan: Stefan frowned and shook his head sadly as the old man flung the rat away, "Torvin, I can do nothing to help you if you will not let yourself be helped."

He listened to the conversations around him; as the voices out of the darkness gave their names. *Elthian and Wren!* he thought, *names to mark and remember. These were two of the strong ones... the survivors. If escape became possible, they would be its leaders. Good men to know.*

When a new voice broke in with the comment, 'It is not cooked,' Stefan's eyes widened momentarily in shocked surprise. Then understanding dawned upon him and despite the grimness of the situation he began to laugh.

"Oh stranger, that is rich," Stefan said, breath coming in gasps as he wiped the tears from his eyes. "It does feel good to laugh again; thank you, whoever you are! What is your name friend - are you a jester, to be able to make such jokes?"

And here was another to remember - one strong enough to make others laugh with his words.

Stefan's hope for the future grew stronger just knowing that such people were nearby.

Feng: Feng was outraged at the suggestion that he was some kind of jester and said in an angry voice, "I am Feng, son of Hrak, intruder and I am no jester!" His voice rose to a yell and they could hear him rush toward Stefan's voice but the chains cut him short.

"Is this the final insult? You destroy my people and then call what remains a fool?!" This was more energy than Feng had expended in

quite some time and he slumped to the ground where the chains stopped him in his tracks.

Wren: The anger at Stefan's harmless remark catches Wren by surprise. His fingers cease their drumming as he looks in the direction of the harsh voice momentarily. He stores away the halfling's words in his head for further contemplation.

Stefan: The anger in the other voice wipes the laughter from Stefan's own. Quietly he answers, "What do you speak of sir? I have destroyed no one. Please believe that my question was harmless and it was not my intention to insult. Your words brought amusement to me for the first time in long months and I assumed that this was your business. May I know your name so that I can express my regret properly?"

Feng: The halfling laughs bitterly and says, "You know what your people have done, intruder. Do not patronize me." He pauses a moment, in silent conflict with himself. If the others could see his face, it would be twisted in a frown and a furrowed brow.

Finally, he continues haltingly, "If you care, I am Feng, son of Hrak; warrior of the Gonshen tribe. We used to live in the Haljard desert."

Stefan: "What is a desert?" Stefan asks in all earnestness. "I have heard the word but never truly knew what it meant. My people... the only people I know of, were my mother and father; who lived in a cabin that they built for themselves in the Northern forest. They did nothing to anyone that I know of... let alone destroy anyone else's people. If you think for a moment, would I be sharing chains with you if I were one of the enemies of your people. I don't deserve your anger Feng. I'd rather be your friend."

Feng: Feng seems taken aback by Stefan's words. The intruder wanted to be friends and actually sounded like he was telling the truth? He remained silent for a minute and a part of him still remained on guard as he replies, "We are criminals, intruder. I was put in here because your people's attempt to 'civilize' me did not work as they wanted. We share chains because we have both committed crimes under your law, not because we are enemies, let alone friends."

Elthian: Elthian was getting quite irritated with Feng's aggressiveness. He disliked it when someone just snapped on an innocent because of his own problems. Thus, without much thought, he took up his bad habit of intruding in other people's conversations and getting involved in things that didn't actually concern him: "Excuse me, Master Feng son of Hrak, but your shouts make my ears hurt. Please calm down and try

to maintain a civilized discussion, despite our situation." he makes a very short pause "I believe that it is obvious that Stefan meant no insult to you. And how could he possibly have known about the fate of your people, and much more that you are one of its last descendants? To tell you the truth, I have studied History at the Freldian Academy of Arts and Sciences, and I have never heard of your people or their unhappy fate." he makes yet another pause "The loss of your people, for which you have my condolences, is obviously a most important thing for you -but you must realize that that is not the case for everyone else in the world. As I said most people don't even know about it, much less are a part of it. So you had better stop thinking that everyone else sees you through the perspective of the victor, and stop reacting accordingly, if you want to make any friends at all. Your anger is justified, but you have to direct it at the right people. Not everyone is your enemy." His 'preaching' done, Elthian goes silent, to rest his over-used mouth a bit.

Stefan: "Feng, it is not my law either," Stefan says, "for I did not make it nor did I agree to it. The same law sees me chained here for a crime I did not commit. Your anger is misplaced. You, I and everyone else here in the hold have a common enemy and the enemy of my enemy is my friend. Tell me of your people, please. What was done to them and you?"

Feng: Feng is taken even farther aback by the fact that this Stefan continued to insist he did not know. When the other broke in and said he did not know either, Feng breaks down and says in a smaller voice, "None of you know? Your people, the... humans, "he stumbles over that word, "have committed this atrocity and you do not know?"

Elthian: "By my word, there are MANY things that humans have done that I know nothing about." Elthian says, managing to keep himself from laughing only by remembering what Stefan got for it.

Feng: "Well, you must know of these things then," Feng's voice picks up its normal tone, "The Gonshen tribe lived in what you call the Haljard desert in peace. We lived off the land, taking what it provided us. A year before my last birthday, an army of int... humans... came to our land. They began killing our hunting parties and the tribe lived in fear and hunger. My father, a great warrior, led an army of my kinsmen against the... humans... but was defeated. They found our camp and killed any who fled, capturing all those who did not. We were taken to the city of Rhydall where we were taught to lose our identity. I refused and have found myself here for my efforts." Surprisingly, Feng's voice does not croak or anything throughout his entire speech. The effects of little water seem to be

minimal on him.

Feng continues, "Maybe it has not been history long enough for your people to put it in a book." This is directed at Elthien.

Elthian: When the halfling has told his sad story, Elthian says "I am very sorry about what has befallen your ..uhm.. tribe." he seems to kind of dislike the word, but continues anyway, his voice getting lower and lower "What was done was definitively not right. Although a more advanced culture has the obligation to share it's lights with the more primitive ones, that has to be done in a peaceful manner. Violence is not justified, for it produces the inverse results -and you are a walking proof for that. Though I doubt that what was done, was done in the name of bringing civilization to you -economic interests seem much more likely. So much the worse. You should have been left in peace." He makes a quite extended pause after his monologue, which seemed by it's tone to be more of a discussion with himself, than an expression of his views to the halfling. Finally he speaks again, this time unmistakably to the halfling: "I can assure you that I had no knowledge of it -and much less part in it, of course. And I don't believe Stefan had any part in it either. It's probably some powerful senator that you have to blame for your predicament -much like me." He smiles wily and goes silent.

Stefan: "I am sorry to hear of your people Feng," Stefan says with quiet sincerity, "People who would do such a thing are evil and should be punished. But I am not one of them. Such people are another reason for all of us prisoners to co-perate; to win our freedom and repay the evil that has been done."

Wren: Feng's tale of his people saddens Wren but he chooses not to speak - what small words of his could possibly comfort one who has lost his father and almost all his people? The other prisoners appeared to have calmed him down at any rate so little could be served by doing so anyway.

Feng: "What did you do to be put in a place like this?" Feng asks to nobody in particular. He thinks a moment and continues, "Maybe I have been quick to judge. We must worry about survival," he adds almost grudgingly, "Any help is needed and welcome. I know much of how to live in harsh areas. Where we are going sounds like I will have a test of my abilities."

Elthian: "I didn't expect something different..." Elthian mumbles under his breath, as a reply to the words of the 'savage'. Aloud he says "Obviously, I am not familiar with wilderness and uncivilized areas. I have always considered that the domain of the beasts, just as the

city is the domain of men. The fact that we are heading to an untamed and savage continent is naturally not something that fills me with joy. So, I guess if I want to survive I'll have to stick with you and Stefan -if I get a choice."

Stefan: "I was accused of trying to kill the emperor's son," Stefan says sadly in response to Feng's question, "It is a longer story than I wish to tell, but there was no truth in it."

Elthian: "Wow!" Elthian can't help but exclaim "That's really big. And tragic, since you are wrongly accused. I hate that. Did you manage to prove your innocence?" realizing that his question is quite pointless, he adds "Apparently not, since you are with us... At least you weren't executed, so you were a tad lucky in all your horribly bad luck. My own story is quite complicated and I don't care to relate it right now. Suffice to say that my family's, my friend's and my own honour were involved, along with some quantities of red wine and the son-of-a-medusa offspring of an influential senator."

Elthian says no further of these events.

Responding to Stefan Elthian says "I was amazed to hear you say that you actually like being in the wild" with a grimace "You can't be serious..." With that Elthian stops realizing that he might have said a little too much on a quite sensitive subject.

Stefan: "If I had remained in the wilderness," Stefan says moodily, "I'd not be here now. The wilderness has its dangers, but so too does 'civilization', the worst of which are the human predators that need little reason to kill or destroy. My parents always said so, and I've come to understand why."

Elthian: Always loving a good debate, and having much to say, Elthian speaks slowly so as not to tire his throat too much: "It is completely unreasonable -and that's the lightest word I can use- to say that wilderness is better than civilization. That a primitive way of life is better than organized society. Just think of all the scientific and artistic progress made possible by living in cities: civilization brings civilization. Our ancestors lived in the wild; man is now beyond that stage in his evolution." it is obvious that this is something he very much believes in. He takes a short pause to catch his breath "I will not deny the fact that many laws are unjust, and that they can be manipulated by the powerful to suit them as they see -I am myself a victim of just that. But still, think if all the human predators you mentioned were to live in the wilderness. Were would you prefer to face them? In civilization of course, because even the

most powerful cannot do entirely as they wish. In contrast, out in the wild, the weak is weaker and the strong stronger. The will of the stronger is the law, and there is nowhere to resort to -you are alone." he makes another pause "Of course, these are all theoretical arguments, but in the end what it all boils down to is that it is much nicer to have a roof over your head and warm food at your table with a good friend to discuss things with, than it is to roam the wild alone exposed to the elements and unsure what your next meal will be or where you will lay down your head to rest -and if you will wake up in the morning."

Stefan: "Elthian, your view of the wilderness is interesting but flawed, as probably is my view of 'civilization', by lack of experience. In the towns, gold is needed to live; the poor are at the mercy of the rich. The forest has its own simple beauty and will provide most of what is needed to live. In the towns, the people are packed tightly together; the strong have more opportunity to prey on the weak. In the forest, strength lies more in cleverness and skill than in gold or brute muscle. Even the dimmest of people can usually outwit an animal or plant if shown how. The town rules, which are supposed to protect people, are made by those who are rich and strong. What protects the poor and weak from the rule makers."

Elthian: "I believe this debate has taken a wrong turn: evil people that want to take advantage of the weak, will find a way to do so either they are in the wild or in a city. Although I believe that they have a harder time in a civilized society, let us assume that it is indeed so."

Stefan: "Perhaps..." Stefan interrupted, "Evil is evil everywhere, true, but the wolf will find it easier to take a sheep from the pen where they are crowded together than to pull down a deer that is free to move."

Elthian: "That may be so, but wouldn't the sheep be even easier pray for the wolf if it was out alone and not in the pen? And remember that a sheep is not as agile as a deer, and the fact that it would be free to move, would not help it much."

Stefan: "Perhaps that's a part of the problem," Stefan replied, "sheep flock together penned or not and will blindly follow a leader even to the slaughter. They will also graze their land to destruction. So perhaps you're right. Sheep would not survive in the wild, they are too tame and the instinct to flock is too strong. Nor, I suppose would most people. Most people seem in many ways like sheep, no offence to you or any of the

others here of course but the comparison seems fitting. I think though, that I prefer life as the deer. But to each his own - unless the sheep destroy all of the grazing land."

Elthian: "What we need to examine are the other aspects of life, and where they are better. And you will agree with me that life is more comfortable in a city than it is out in the wild. Furthermore, the fact that life is more comfortable, drives men to go beyond simple survival and create art and science. Now, honestly, where would you more expect to find a scientist or an artist -living in a city or struggling to survive in the wild?"

Stefan: "More comfortable for who," Stefan asked. "For those with the wealth to buy comforts, life must be good. How many poor does it take to support each person with wealth? And how comfortable are their lives? 'Artist and Scientist' are strange words and I have to guess at their meaning, but what they create must be traded for food and shelter, true? With whom do they trade, rich or poor? What I'm asking is, do all share the comforts you speak of equally, or only a few?"

Elthian: Elthian laughs "You have with your own words proved what I say: the ignorance and devolution which result from living in the wild -and I do not mean this as a personal insult to you. You do not know what art and science is -mankind's finest creations, the very crowning of our existence. Even the poorest city-dweller has a hum of what science and art is, and has witnessed at least some of their wonders -many of which are on public display in the cities. And no, art and science need not necessarily be traded for food and shelter -though that can be the case as well. Much research is made for the sake of knowledge alone, and much art is created only for its own beauty.

Stefan: Stefan laughed, "I am not quite so ignorant as you believe me to be - and no offence taken. Of course I know what art is and science means 'to study' doesn't it. I have just never heard anyone refer to themselves as artist or scientist. They would be people that make art and... make study? I can see why they would crowd to the towns then; if that was all they could do someone would need to feed and care for them... like young children I suppose. Still, I've seen enough of towns to know that without coin a person doesn't eat or have a place to sleep. I saw a few people like that... beggars. If the artists and scientists don't trade for food while they're making r-e-s-e-a-r-c-h (Stefan pronounces this unfamiliar word carefully) or art for its own sake, must they beg for food and shelter?"

Elthian: Elthian, apparently not liking these last comments, corrects Stefan seriously "Science is much more than simply 'to study', it is to discover, to understand, and to make life better for everybody.

Though, of course, these latter aspects only come after a lot of studying, yes. Science, in one way or another, would be what I would be doing, if I wasn't here..."

Stefan: "I'm not sure I understand yet," Stefan remarked, sounding puzzled. "Isn't that what everyone does, everyday throughout there lives? My parents used to say 'A person doesn't stop learning until he dies.' Why should your science stop because you're away from your 'civilization'? Isn't there more here and where we're going, for you to discover and understand than there would be in a place you've seen every day of your life?"

Elthian: "Well, there is some truth in what you say, that I won't stop learning because I'm here, but I can't be conducting science in the same way if I am a slave. When I'll have to work to the very limit of my strength, I'm afraid I'll be too eager to get some sleep in what free time we are given, that I won't have the chance to contemplate on things as deeply as science requires. And besides, I won't have access to all the reference material I would have back at the Academy with it's vast library. And even if despite all the odds I came up with some discovery -how would I make the world aware of it, being a slave on a continent seven months from civilization?"

Elthian sighs. "I think that your likeness of artists and scientists with small children is very unfortunate. Just because they do not provide food and shelter for themselves, does not mean that they are like children, that do not offer anything in return. This is one of the fundamental differences between the primal and the civilized: a single individual is not required to provide everything he needs for himself, instead he specializes in one or two things contributing these to society and expecting what else he needs in return. It may not always work due to the human factor, but that's the principle." he makes another short pause "Thus, what the artist and scientist contributes to society is many times worth many times the food and other things they get in return.

Stefan: "Very well, you provide science or art; but you said no trading was involved? If you give something and get something back in return, that's trading. We do -- did it all the time; meat, furs, leather and wood to the dwarves for metal. Metal to the elves for crafts. And the same back and forth to the towns on the coast, though we never 'expected'. If a person liked what we had, we traded for something of equal value; if they didn't like what we had there was no trade. How is this different? How can you expect to get something in return for what you provide even if it isn't liked or wanted? And who provides what you expect to get in return?"

Elthian: "I did not say that no trading was involved. On the other hand,

especially artists many times act as 'traders' as you would call it for their creation. But as I said, many times you don't even expect a return for what you provide -you do it for it's own sake. And if a scientist or artist might be forced by circumstance to begging, that is not a rule -it could as well happen to a baker or a barber, if you know what that is. Now, the fact that beggars exist at all, is another matter, and has to do with the human factor I mentioned. There is nothing wrong with the principle of civilization -it is in practice that some things go wrong because of the selfishness inherent in mankind. And this selfishness, would affect your wilderness proposal in the same way, as we already agreed, so that is no argument against civilization."

Stefan: "When we traded it was for things we wanted - 'little luxuries' - we called them. If we didn't trade... well, we still had food and a roof over our heads. The forest provided everything we *needed.* But in the towns, if you trade for everything, including food, and can't make a trade... Isn't that when people have to start to beg?"

Elthian: My point is that it follows that life is made more beautiful, through art, and more easy, through science. In other words, man as a species slowly rises to a higher level." he makes a short pause "And in the end, why did man leave his primitive kind of life in order to live in cities in the first place, if the latter wasn't better?"

Stefan: "My parents lived in both worlds, as I have not. Stefan answered, "My opinions are based on their words rather than my own experience; but they chose the wild because they thought it better. According to my them, people flock together because they breed like rabbits and soon there are too many to live in balance with nature. They group together to strip nature of all that is useful or filled with beauty in order to support themselves. That was the greatest complaint of the elves that we sometimes traded with and the reason it was so difficult to earn their trust and acceptance. The elves seem able to live as a part of nature and create great beauty without destroying the natural beauty around them as humans do. Are they more civilized for that or less?"

Elthian: "It is true what you say, that mankind is, sometimes recklessly, destroying nature for the sake of it's own evolution. But that is unavoidable, unless mankind should return to it's primal state of savageness -which as I have pointed out is unthinkable.

Stefan: "Only to the sheep," Stefan chuckled, but quietly to himself.

Elthian: What can be done, is to try to minimize the destruction caused by our

activities." he makes a short pause "But, honestly, if trees have to be cut down in order to make houses, I would say that the needs of man is more important than a few plants -as long as these needs are not exaggerated, but are kept in check."

Stefan: "I'm not sure people are able to do that," My parents say that humans already outnumber the other races 7 to 1 and continue to spread. Each year the untouched places grow smaller and the army is used to make this happen. My parents were part of that for 20 years; protecting settlers who moved through or into the wild, while at the same time trying - quietly - to protect the wild from too much damage. By the time they're term of service was done they had grown sick of it and left -- dropped out was what they called it. The damage continues though and its more than a few plants or the beauty of the forest. Look what was done to Feng's people."

Elthian: As I said, the system is not perfect, because of the human selfishness factor, which would in the same extent affect us if we lived in your primeval model." Elthian replies "As for Fren's people," he adds cynically "they would have to be assimilated sooner or later, I'm afraid. It is most unfortunate that it happened a it did, and I have already expressed my condolences, but it happened because of some people's greed and malevolence, not because of a flaw in the concept of civilization. And I honestly believe that Fren would improve his chances of survival if he tried to get along with human civilization, instead of fight it."

Stefan: "Why?" Stefan asks, and you can hear a slight edge of temper creeping in, "They could have been left alone to live as they wished. They harmed no one. They weren't assim... - whatever you said - they were wiped out for trying to keep their way of life."

Elthian: "I did not say that what happened was good. I only said it was unavoidable. When the world progresses, you either have to follow along with the progress, or be swept away. And, honestly, if there hadn't been a war, but instead Feng's people were peacefully shown the merits of civilization, and they had accepted, the standard of their living would eventually have been much higher. The fact that a war did occur cannot be blamed on civilization, but on the evilness of this world. It could as well have been a horde of savage bugbears that annihilated the tribe. It's not civilized, but it's evil."

Elthian: "You speak of the elves. Their culture is indeed admirable and, although they might be a bit lacking when it comes to science, the level of civilization they have reached is something to be a goal for mankind to achieve as well. Though I do not think that will ever be possible, if I am to be honest, because the elven mind-frame and philosophy is

far removed from that of humans. The fact that they live in such harmony with nature is a result of this philosophy and it is impossible to demand from the humans to act in the same way."

Stefan: "I demand nothing," Stefan says sadly, "I just regret that it can't be different than it is. If things continue, someday there will be no forest and all of the freedom and beauty it holds will be lost. The Elves, Dwarves and other peoples will be dim memories; the wonders that they created will be only tales told to entertain children, and not believed at all. The deer will be gone because they have no room left to run and all that will be left are sheep. I'm not sure that it's worth the trade, if we lose that to gain more 'civilization' without the balance and harmony that the elves have.

Elthian: "I think you are overdramaticizing things a bit there, friend. Things are not that dark, nor do I think they will ever become so. Human civilization will advance, and eventually surpass the elven, but I do not think that things will become as hopeless as you describe them, even though we lack the elven sense of harmony."

Stefan: "I truly hope you're right," Stefan says, sadly, "but I think it began long ago and will only get worse. I think - and I mean no offence - that even with the science you speak of, the people of the towns are blind to what goes on outside their boundaries. I'd wager that you never saw a true forest, or knew that the towns are protected by rangers or that Feng's people existed, or that his wasn't the first race to be wiped out on Treene to make room for human settlers. I think that if civilization overlooks the greed and evil that is done in its name, then it is flawed."

Elthian: Elthian's voice gets weaker and weaker as he speaks "Excuse me, but I think I have spoken a bit too much, and my throat is starting to suffer. Maybe we can continue this debate later."

Wren: Wren muses to himself that his companions appear to include some very capable people. Must keep close to them especially the ones who know about the wilderness - their experience will be far more valuable than mine where we are headed. Besides they seemed a nice lot.

"Have any of you any ideas about what to do when we reach Sebba?" he enquired tentatively.

Elthian: "Become a slave, probably." Elthian replies pessimistically "That's the fate of most prisoners..."

Stefan: "Then perhaps we should'nt wait until we reach Sebba." Stefan comments, to no one in particular. "How many prisoners are aboard this ship, and how many crew?"

Elthian: When Stefan proposes a mutiny to gain our freedom, Elthian shakes his head: "While I am looking forward to slavery as little as you, my wilderness-loving friend, I am afraid that what you propose is quite unrealistic. It will simply get us all killed. We are exhausted and defenseless -plus we are bound by chains. Our guards are armed and well-fed. They would destroy us in no time."

Wren: "Slaves hmm. Umm, take over the ship? No, please don't try anything unwise. They're armed and healthy - much better to wait until we reach land - so much easier to escape than to fight. The rough spoken one is correct."

Wren recalling his lessons thinks - nothing precipitate, wait for the moment where least can go wrong. Remember, Murphy was an optimist. Still it might be as well to check if he could - lying back he slackened his wrists. An object, another chain, anything for leverage. Placing his first hand against a raised board he began to push lightly against the link hoping to open it slightly while he slips his hand back trusting the sweat from it might lubricate the wrist somewhat. He is careful not to slip out entirely but just determine if he can. For a moment all around him disappears and he focuses purely on the restraints.

Hmm, apparently I cannot. Oh well wait for a better opportunity. His mind refocuses on the real world to the sounds of shouting. He catches the word 'duel' and blinks.

Taurek: Finally, Taurek decides to speak up. His voice just comes out of the darkness as if he'd been a part of the conversation

throughout. While it would be wondrous and prophetic to say that his voice was smooth as silk and spoke volumes just from the sound of it, it would also be a lie. His voice is plain and simple, if a bit rumble. There's a distinct accent there, an accent that those who are familiar with the Dwarven tongues would place as connected to that dialect.

"What do you plan to do, madman?" He asks, "Tear the chains off of your body? Perhaps use the links as a

bludgeoning tool? Lead a mighty revolution against our oppressors?" He laughs weakly, a grating, choked sound,

"Perhaps you haven't noticed: We're prisoners. Prisoners left with little more than sand for food and piss for drink.

You may have the strength and willingness to shred open the throats of thousands of vermin, but many here have no more strength or desire than to keep breathing."

Stefan: "Madman?" Stefan asks. "I had thought for a moment that I heard the Dwarven tongue in your speech stranger, but my ears must be deceiving me. I had thought Dwarves were a proud and mighty people. No Dwarf I have met would love his chains so much, or be beaten into submission so greatly, that he would condemn another for speaking of freedom. Among the clans, I would be honour bound to seek justice for an insult such as you've just delivered, or risk losing my own honour. It is well that I am not speaking to a true Dwarf."

Taurek: There is the sound of chains shifting from Taurek's direction. His voice carries across the area, growling out, "You are an honorless coward to throw insults while we're all chained. I'll remember this, rat licker." His voice reflects that he's quite clearly displeased with Stefan's words, ignoring the sound of all others speaking around him.

Stefan: "Beardless Son-of-an-Orc! YOU would need to HAVE honour and courage to see its lack in another," Stefan growled in reply to the continued insults from the unseen voice, obvious anger in his own. "Who threw the first insult? You have so few enemies that you seek to make me into another with your insults? A time will come when we may speak of this without chains; I too, will remember. Give me your name and clan stranger, that I might give them word of your fate should I ever meet them."

Taurek: Taurek's chains can be heard jangling as he gets to his feet and starts to move in Stefan's direction, trying to determine exactly how close he can get to the other man. As he moves, straining on the chains in an effort to get to him, he snarls out, spittle flying freely as he speaks, "How **dare** you! **You** threw the first insult, you babbling idiot! A time will come that we **will** speak of this without chains **and** without words, **mighty** chewer of rats. And when you beg for mercy, you beg by my full name, dog. As soon as we're off of this boat, you have a duel arranged, child, a duel with Taurek Aldereim of the Senitil Province of Gladsheel, speaker and teacher of the Heline order, son of Khorek Aldereim of the Senitil Province of Gladsheel, son of Aradin Aldereim of the Senitil Province of Gladsheel." With that final, snarled word, he jerks hard on his chains in the

futile effort to get even closer to his antagonist. The chains hold firmly.

Wren: "Please no," he mutters audibly.

"Sirs, you are sick and tired, and so am I" the last words thought rather than said. "Please don't say things like that when you are not entirely in command of your wits."

Feng: Feng's eyes widen quite a bit in the darkness as he listens to Taurek recite his full name. "I thought having two names, like the intruders was strange but this... I can not think of words to describe it. Do you ever get tired of saying that long name?"

Not really waiting for a response from Taurek, he continues, "We need to stop this petty fighting amongst ourselves and fight against the common enemy when the time comes. I admit I have been quick to judge and realize I could be wrong. In this new land we will need each other, so stop this."

Stefan: "What do you plan to do, madman?" Stefan laughs when it seems that Taurek has finished

his rant, "Tear the chains off of your body? Perhaps use the links as a bludgeoning tool?"

"Perhaps you haven't noticed: We're prisoners. Those were the words of the insult you

first threw at me, though now it seems they fit your actions as well. If nothing else, my

words seem to have helped you find the strength that had failed you."

Taurek Aldereim, son of Khorek Aldereim, son of Aradin Aldereim of the Senitil Province of

Gladsheel, speaker and teacher of the Heline order," Stefan says with formal and ritualized

dignity, "know that Stefan Radescu of the northern Ishar Mountains, son of Payter Radescu

and Mara, retired rangers of the Imperial army, heroes of the battle of Ballic Pass and friend

to the Balduric Dwarves and Silverwood Elves, accepts your challenge. If we survive to

gain freedom from these chains and you still seek my blood I will be pleased to meet you

according to the time honoured duelling rituals layed out by the Dwarven peoples. Until then,

by the ancient forms, I am sworn to protect your life until I may take it myself or you take

mine. Does this satisfy your injured honour? If so, let's stop this needless ranting and name calling as Feng has suggested."

<Back to the Present>

...But all that was two days past.

None of you have heard from the old man in a long time now. It seems he was right and that he cast off his mortal coil quietly and with the little dignity that his circumstances could allow, although quite when it happened you are not sure.

Suddenly, a shout can be heard faintly from high above you "Land Ho!". There is a deep silence in the gloom that surrounds you. A silence that speaks of the fear and dread in each of you. Then as time passes the anticipation of being let out of this stinking hole that has been your prison these months becomes almost unbearable. The longing to breathe fresh air and feel the sun once more makes you strain in your bonds.

Then high above once a new sound. A sound you never thought you would live to hear again. The distant cry of a bird. A Gull! Land is near.

Now you can hear a burst of activity up on deck; the sound of many pairs of feet running on the deck above, the cries of orders and shouts of men preparing the ship for arrival. This frantic activity carries on for a few minutes. Finally there is a jolt and a loud scraping sound comes from behind the hull near where Feng is chained up. It is a dreadful noise that makes the hairs on the back of your filthy necks stand on end.

You hear voices very close by. Voices not of the crew but coming from the side of the ship's hull. The voices of men standing on the dockside of a new continent.

Elthian: "At last!" Elthian lets out a sigh of relief when the voice from above is heard "At last I will get out of this filthhole and see the dear sun again."

Then a few hours of anticipation that seemed like ages.

"Just a few minutes left..." he whispers when he hears the voices from outside "Just a few minutes..."

He waits, trying not to go mad from his impatience...

Stefan: Stefan sits quietly, grieving for the old man he hadn't been able to help and trying to prepare himself for... whatever came next.

"It seems our voyage is ending at last," Stefan says at last, with relief, "I'm hoping that whatever comes next will have to be better than the last seven months. If nothing else, perhaps once clear of this ship someone will at least throw water at us and we can get free of this filth. Some decent food would be nice as well. If they plan to make us slaves and have us work, they'll want to keep our strength up don't you think?"

Wren: Wren breathes a sigh of relief. He speaks excitedly in half sentences,

"Made it. Rather be a slave in the open air than cooped up in here any longer. Keep our strength up? Hmmm, slaves expendable I fear, but perhaps the Empire more civilized than that?"

He flexes his fingers irritably waiting to be led outside after all this time.

Feng: Feng sits calmly in his spot until that big sound starts grinding behind him. He jumps up and stumbles his way as far away from the sound as possible.

When the ship stops, Feng sits back down gingerly. As welcome as the open sky sounds, he will not let himself look as eager as the rest. He tries to maintain any form of civil disobedience to anyone coming down and just remains quiet. Feng will give anyone who tries to move him a little bit of a hard time, just to piss them off enough that they might kick him or something (assuming who tries to move him is one of his captors).

Taurek: Taurek does little more than struggle to get up to his feet. He doesn't care so much about open air and the sun as he does about getting away from the filthy salty air and the horrid rocking ship. Rolling his shoulders, he closes his eyes and waits to find out what happens next.

DM: Suddenly, the prison deck is filled with a blinding, searing light as a hatch is opened. You are forced to cover your eyes with your hands the light hurts so much.

You can hear the sound of many men clomping down the short stair and you feel a waft of clean air enter the putrid place that has been your prison for so long.

"Right you dogs, I want no messin'. I've got ten crossbows down here and my men can see, see? Anyone tries nay fancy stuff an' he'll be fish food, Got it? Right release 'em one by one George."

A figure, presumably George, releases each of you from your bonds in turn. There is slight struggle from the direction where Feng sat but it is soon ended when a low deep voice growls "Go ahead an' try it midget, this 'ere bow in your backs's got a hair trigger so's you know..."

"Get up the stairs you stinking dogs, go on move yourselves!" cries the first voice ou heard.

You get up slowly moving gingerly on tired aching limbs and walk up the stairs and out onto the deck. You emerge from the stinking hole that has been home for so long into bright golden sunlight.

The twin suns of Coper and Helios are setting in the West and have turned the wisps of cloud in the azure sky into fronds of fire. It is still hot and humid from the day, but the sea breeze feels like a soft caress across your brow.

The last of the crossbow wielding sailors finally emerges from below and closes the hatch. You are jostled into a small group and then one sailor goes over to two men standing by the rail on the Port side of the ship furthest from the shore who are talking to one another.

One of the men, wearing fine blue pantaloons, a white shirt with a frock coat over it, brown leather boots and carrying a length of rope, is clearly a sailor. From the quality of the clothes you surmise that he is the captain. The other is a short but tough looking human male wearing a white tabard with a large yellow lion on it over chainmail. At his side he carries a large sword in its sheath. The conversation pauses as the sailor arrives. Words are exchanged briefly followed by a quick shake of hands. The man in the tabard strides over to address you.

"I am Constable Cerys, of Bluff Knoll, I hereby announce that you are permitted to enter the Confederacy of Bluff Knoll as Incomers. This means that you will be tolerated within our borders. However, one step out of line, one transgression and we will put you filth to the sword faster than you can pull down your own breeches. Any questions?"

Stefan: Stefan has offered no resistance through the long drawn out process of being unshackled and herded off the ship. Now encouraged by the constables announcement, he lifts his head and in a courteous but unwavering voice,

replies, "Yes Sir, I for one do. What's to be done with us now? What rules are we expected to follow? and is it possible to get a bath and a meal somewhere?"

Constable Cerys: "What! You're free to go of course! What did you expect, a slaver waiting for

southern you?" replies the Constable incredulously. "No, young man, unlike the

lands of Auchray, we do not accept such barbarities in this nation of ours. We need men to help us rebuild this once proud nation. You all have the chance to be a part of that if you choose. If you do not, and you transgress the laws of this land, as I said before, you will die. As for your personal hygiene I care not. Good evening." With that the Constable bows curtly, turns on his heel and strides off down the gangplank.

Elthian: Elthian does as he is told by the sailors without any resistance. The twin setting suns blinding him, it takes a while until he can see anything at all. "Outside, at last." he whispers. Instinctively, his hands free at last, he tries to catch his hair in a tail, but has nothing to bind them with, so he abandons the attempt.

Still wincing he listens as Constable Cerys announces that they are free, not slaves. He feels a jubilant feeling boiling over inside him, but on the outside he appears quite unmoved.

DM: Gradually as your eyes get more used to the brightness of the sunlight around you, you are able to stop shielding your vision with your hands and can begin to take in longer distant views. Looking about you, you can see that the dock has berths for 4 galleys but the only one occupied is that holding the ship you are on.

In front of the berths is a large cobbled area, which looks as if it is the site for a market during the day judging from the detritus left behind. Behind the docks to the North, stands a large Wooden Palisade about 40 foot high which appears to surround a large town. Looming over the Palisade but located some distance behind it, you can see a large tower which must be 80 or 90 feet high.

To the East you can see that the river that flows out here to make the natural harbour is quite wide and swiftly flowing. You can make out a small island in the river and a road running to the south that passes over a bridge at this point.

Across the river to the South you can see a shanty town of dishevelled looking hovels squatting like a desperate dog before a small assortment of fishing boats

on the south shore of the river.

“Get down the plank you stinking dogs. Go on be off with ye!” cries the first mate and you are shove down the gangplank. You stumble down the gangplank and onto a large cobbled dockside. There is a bored looking man staring at you from the base of the gangplank wearing a white hooded robe with a silver moon attached to his belt.

Wren: Landing on one foot Wren spins gracefully and plants the second foot declining to even look unbalanced. "Well that wasn't very nice at all. Still we don't seem to be going to be slaves." He pauses to glare at Elthian.

"Anyway, nice to be out of that hole at last." He jumps about some more, exhilarated by his freedom, almost bumping into the man at the bttom of the gangplank. "Oh dear me. Awfully sorry about that, ummm.. Sorry I don't seem to know your name."

Priest: "Blessed Khara, 'tis another madman" says the man shaking his head and staring wide eyed at Wren. "Here," he says holding out his hand to you "a gift from the Silver Lady of two florins to you Incomer and may Holy Khara have mercy upon your soul. Next!"

He thrusts two gold coins into Wren's hand and look's up at Stefan who is next in line coming down the gangplank.

Wren: Wren pockets the money quite willingly.

"Oh thankyou, you're too kind. And us not even introduced. Oh and I'm as sane as the next man i assure you."

Wren turns around to the others who were on the ship to show the coins given to him, delight written plainly over his face.

"Khara, hmm? Oh yes, of course," he carries on, searching his mind vainly for some scrap of knowledge about the subject. "Well I'm sure she'll smile on your generosity sir."

Stefan: Stefan stands for long moments in open mouthed surprise at being so abruptly released. He holds his position on the gangplank as the crowd of former prisoners are pushed toward the cobbled dockside. Like a stone in the stream, he stands while the others break and flow around him to either side. In those few minutes he uses the higher vantage point to take note of his surroundings and the landmarks before allowing himself to be swept along

with the crowd.

Standing on the cobbles with the others, he continues to look about himself, trying to match the appearance of those in the crowd with the voices he has only heard. He spots a figure that he believes to be Elthian in the group, and moves to stand beside him, "Elthian? This is more your civilized world than it is my wild one, I admit to feeling lost. What do we do now? How does a person make their way in civilization when we start with nothing?"

Elthian: "To me it almost seems closer to your wilderness, I'm afraid..."
Elthian mumbles with some disappointment as a reply, comparing the squatty village with the architectural wonders of Thievyn (or it's idealized image that his nostalgia had created during the long trip).
"This is far from what I had in mind when I described civilization. It's as I had read: Sebba is still quite primitive and savage. If we ever get back to the Empire, I will take you to see the glorious palaces of Thievyn and the splendid wonder that is the Library of the Academy. There you will see civilization..."he sighs audibly.

Stefan: "Well, there's no point in us crying over what we don't have." Stefan replies, "This looks more than 'civilized' enough for me at the moment, and at least we're free.

Elthian: Turning his attention to the matters at hand, and the question he was asked, he replies "What do we do now? Well, work, I'm afraid..." he looks at Stefan with a look as if he'd announced that his mother had died. "I severely doubt that this hole has any intellectual life whatsoever, so I'll probably be relegated to manual labour as well. And being as desperate as we are, we will in all probability be given the worst jobs available -if any." he sighs, apparently deciding that he'll have to live with it. "But whatever our fate, right now I'd sell my soul for a warm bath and a clean change of clothes..."

Stefan: "Getting clean would be nice..." Stefan continues, "I've gone as long between baths in the cold winter months, but you're not living in filth then. I thought of diving off the dock and washing there, but my clothes are deer skin and getting them that wet makes them go hard and uncomfortable if you don't work at softening them up afterward. And I wasn't quite ready to strip down with all the people around. Besides the water around the ship was filthy. There is the river. That might be a good place to bathe."

"As for getting work," Stefan goes on, "couldn't you do some of your science in trade for coin. If this land is as backward as you say, maybe there's those that would trade for it. I'm a bowyer, perhaps there's people that would let me build one for them, and I could make a trade that way. I need some tools and materials first of course...."

Elthian: "I'm afraid that this little community hasn't reached the level of evolution where scientists can be supported. As I explained to you I can't just 'do science' and sell it. There must exist a need for it as well..." Elthian replies pessimistically "I wish that I be proved wrong." he adds almost immediately. He thinks for a few moments then says "Oh well, somebody might need a person who is literate enough to write a letter for them, or so. Maybe I could earn a living as a scribe or something. But nobody would take me seriously if I presented myself like this. I definitely need new clothes."

Elthian: Despite the bitterness and pessimism in his recent words, Elthian seems to be enjoying that he is free at last. He takes long, deep breaths of the clean air and looks up at the sky and the setting suns. Ripping a line of cloth from his white shirt, he binds his long hair into a tail, trying to make it as neat as he can. If Stefan had any idea what fashion was, he might know that this was the latest one amongst young men in the northern parts of the Empire.

Feng: Feng remained silent through the ordeal of getting off the ship and seeing the man who told them they were free. He looked surprisingly unmoved by the fact that they were set free here and he only grunted as any sign that he comprehended what happened.

As they were herded off the dock, he shared the others' confusion as far as what to do but didn't say anything as Stefan had already asked the question and it wasn't important to repeat it. Feng smiled to himself as he noticed the others' discomfort at being this dirty. He didn't really seem to mind at all. In fact, he didn't. Feng had never taken a bath until the intruders had captured his tribe and even then they had had to force him into the tub of water: the most water he had ever seen in one place before. He smiled bigger at that recollection.

It seemed like the best idea to stay close to some people he could say he knew, so he followed the humans.

Stefan: About this time Stefan notices the halfling nearby, "Hello... Feng isn't it? Come join us. We were just talking about how we can get along in this new land. Is that Wren over talking to the man in the white robes? Maybe he has some ideas... and what happened to the Dwarf... Taurek."

Feng: Feng nods to Stefan and looks up to where he can see Wren make a slight fool of himself. He keeps smiling, laughing inside at the young human. When Stefan mentions the Dwarf with the long name, Feng looks around for him. Now that he thinks about it, all of these

people have had really long names except for Wren and him. This thought makes him laugh out loud. Maybe it's partly the happiness of being outside once again.

Stefan: Stefan approaches the Priest. "Greetings Sir," Stefan says, coming up beside Wren and the man in white,
"Do all new comers to your land receive such a gift? and what is expected of them in trade, if I may ask?"

Priest: "You'll find, my lad, that there is little charity in this harsh land. These two florins for you are a gift from the Church of Khara to extend welcome to you to this place. Many of us here arrived as you have just done, or our fathers and mothers did. We do not judge Incomers by what they are said to have done in lands far away. We judge Incomers by what they do once they are here. Spend it wisely. We want nothing in return. Next! Come on. Next!"

Stefan: "Thank you then Sir," Stefan says, tucking the coins safely away in his boot top. "Your gift is gratefully accepted. May I ask, before I go, where strangers such as ourselves can find a market that offers the best trades for our coin?"

Priest: The man points towards the palisade and says "If you enter the city you find merchants selling all manner of items, although not at this time of night. Dear, dear it is approaching vespers. I really do need to get on. Next!"

Stefan: After listening to the man's advice, Stefan moves over to stand beside Wren, "Greetings, Sir. It was your voice I heard urging Taurek and I not to fight when we had our disagreement, was it not? I've been thinking that it might be wise for strangers to this land such as ourselves, to band together for a time; at least until we learn the way of things here. Would you like to join us?" Stefan nods toward himself, Elthian and Feng, then continues, "Have you seen the Dwarf? I've lost sight of him since we left the ship. I still have a duty to him left unfilled."

Wren: "Strangers? Oh yes indeed how right you are - indeed it would be a pleasure." The words come out quickly - the young man is obviously still excited about his freedom. "I'm very much a man of the big city myself, although I fancy I could be of some use to you."
"The dwarf? Oh the one that called himself Taurek, umm, no," before pausing to scan the deck for the individual.
"You're not really going to stick to that duel are you? That Constable, umm, Cerys, positively itching for an excuse to be rid of us, I fancy. Besides I'm sure the dwarf's not a bad sort - just under a lot of stress y'know."

As Wren begins to calm down somewhat he realises what the horrible smell is that's been bothering him.

"Hmm, whoever mentioned bathing has a point. Have you any idea how difficult this makes..umm, well anything."

He smiles weakly.

Priest: The old man stares at Elthian and Feng who are speaking together. He is looking anxious, as if he has to go somewhere soon. He could have sworn there was a Dwarf here somewhere too...

Elthian: Elthian listens to what the white man tells Stefan, and then approaches as it is his turn. "A priest, eh? Should have guessed that they have such here, as well. I'm in great need right now, so I'll take your money, though you seem to give it away as a chore and not a gift of compassion. I never accept charity, but this is really no charity. It's but a return of some of the fortunes that your organization has amassed from simple people that have placed their hopes for a better future in the wrong place. Only through man's own work can a better future be achieved -not through believing that some non-existent entities will provide for us..." Elthian, having said his provocative little speech, waits to see if the man will indeed give him the money, or instead give him the opportunity to display his atheism even more.

Priest: "Unbeliever," smiles the Man in White, "you can hold on to your cynicism if you will. I am but a humble priest who has seen the miracles produced through love and the worship of Khara with my own eyes. I would hope that you too might see these things in time. Take this money for it is a gift as aid to you. If you do not wish to use it for yourself then, please, give it to another that they may benefit. Next!"

The priest looks expectantly towards Feng and Taurek.

Elthian: Elthian smiles back to the priest "At least you're not completely blinded. You're more tolerant than most clerics I've met. Elthian Quethar is my name, and we may meet again. Have a good day." he gives the old man a friendly, if slightly exaggerated, pat on the back, and then moves up to Stefan and Wren. "Wonder what kinds of clothes one can buy with these..." he indicates the coins in his hand. "If any." He then looks in the direction of the palisades "Shall we go have a look what the local market has to offer? I for one, no matter how much I would like a bath..." he strokes his involuntarily-acquired beard "and a good shave, feel that I could never force myself into these rags again if I ever got them off my body. So, since I don't care much for walking around naked, I'm off to the market. Anybody else heading in that direction come with me. Otherwise I say we meet

here in two hours' time from now."

Stefan: "Judging by the litter around us," Stefan said, "I'd say we were in what is the market by day. There may be shops in the town itself as well, but from what the priest was saying they'll be closed for the night now. It looks like we'll need to wait on our trading until morning's light, though we should be able to find a place that offers food and rooms. If that's how we choose to spend our gift."

"If the four of you are willing," Stefan continues, addressing Feng, Wren and Taurek as well as Elthian, "I've an idea. I don't know what can be traded for these coins here, but in the towns at home like coins wouldn't last long or get all that much in trade. What if we were to pool our coins together and use them to buy the common things that we'll all need and can share. Our coins would go further that way, would they not?"

"As for going into the town, Elthian.... If they'll let us in after dark, I'm willing to go along for a look. A moment though, please..." Stefan begins scanning the ground in the cobbled market, turning over piles (if any) with his foot, searching through the refuse left behind by the day time peddlers. (OOC: He's looking for anything useful, but mainly for a bit of lumber that could be turned into a quarterstaff or club, rope and anything that might have a cutting edge, i.e.: bits of sharp metal, broken glass or pottery, any pieces of cast off rope or cloth, and stone made of flint. He moves around the group in a widening circle as he looks but won't spend too long looking - if he hasn't found anything useful after 10 minutes he'll give up.) I'd like to see if there's anything useful in the litter of the day market."

Taurek: Taurek, unlike the rest of the crew, has still not quite adjusted to the stunning brilliance of the sky that has unfolded before him. Clearly happy to have been leaving the hold when all prisoners had been released, he has stopped with heavily shielded eyes throughout most of the conversation to date. It's only now that he has finally removed his hands from his eyes and, squinting, is peering out at the world around him.

He's got a scowl on his face, though the face surrounding the scowl gives the impression that this particular expression is a fairly regular one. His eyes quickly pass from face to face, settling on the man in white, meeting his gaze directly. He still doesn't move, standing where he is, almost as if he's too stunned to do much else.

Feng: Feng walks up to the man in white with his hand out, expecting the gold. He does not say anything and looks at the man with a blank expression. When/If the gold drops into his hand, Feng murmurs a, "Thank you," in his native tongue and bows his head slightly. He

then finds the rest of the group and looks back at the dwarf with the long name.

Keeping his gaze on Taurek, he remarks to Ethian, "You are long-winded, intruder."

Elthian: Elthian looks at the setting suns "Of course you are right." he tells Stefan "The deprivation of sun light for so long made me mistake the evening for bright afternoon. Oh, my eyes are going to hurt tomorrow."
He makes a pause and looks around "I don't really know the customs of this country, but I think I won't get far in these rags for clothes. I know I certainly wouldn't, back in Thievyn. If they have closed the gate, I doubt they'll let us in, and the gate probably closes at sundown, that is any moment now. Still, we have nothing to lose if we try, so let's go."

Elthian doesn't appear very enthusiastic when Stefan suggests pooling their money "I don't think the money will last much longer that way. And, anyway, what would you suggest we buy with our amassed fortunes? I'm sure that everyone has his own priorities and it will be impossible to satisfy them all."

Stefan: "Of course it won't last long," Stefan says over his shoulder as he searches, "which is why I suggested pooling it in the first place. What I was thinking of were things that would help us survive.... Tools, a knife, a fire starter, rope... things like that that would be useful to all and that could be shared by all. However if pretty clothes are more important than survival...."

Elthian: "If I am to make any money whatsoever as a learned man, I have to look respectable. And that can't happen while I'm clad in these rags, as you surely can understand." he indicates his clothes "I do not plan to live outdoors longer than absolutely necessary, and thus can't see why all the equipment you mention is necessary. One or two nights I can stand living without fire, although of course it won't be nice." he shrugs "But, I realize that I'm still part of this group and if everybody wants to follow your idea, I'll do so as well. I don't want to worsen my survival odds by alienating myself from the only people I know in this damned continent." he says.

Elthian will wait for Stefan to complete his search, and then leave with him and any of the others that wish to come along.

Feng: Feng watches Stefan look through the trash, interested in what the man would find but not interested enough to aid the search. He is

somewhat annoyed with Elthian and his constant talk getting new clothes. "You are too concerned with fashion, Elthian," Feng says suddenly, "And you talk too much." He adds the last remark because it seemed like the fellow hadn't heard him the first time.

Elthian: "I don't think it's wrong to be concerned about the way one looks. On the other hand, it affects the way people regard you and their reactions toward you. A guard is much more likely to respect a well-clad person, than he is one clad in rags." Elthian replies when Feng says he's too concerned with fashion. When the halfling says that he speaks too much, he gives the halfling a rather angry look "Speaking is the first great achievement of the intelligent races, and I will exercise it as much as I want. If you have not evolved far beyond grunts it is not my concern or my problem. Instead of complaining, you might consider listening to how others speak so that you might expand your vocabulary. Or is that something that scares you?"

Feng: "Why do you insult a man bearing a gift?" Feng refers to the man in white and gestures toward him, "I do not believe in his gods either, but you have no manners!"

He bares his teeth at Elthian, kind of like a smile but not really.

Elthian: "Is the barbarian going to teach *me* manners?" Elthian exclaims with an honestly amused smile. "Sir Feng, son of Hrak, I humbly beg for your forgiveness, for my flagrant breach of etiquette. In the future I shall always follow your luminous example in gentlemanship." he states sarcastically. Then he states much more seriously "To answer your remark, and at the same time illuminate your ignorance, let me tell you this: these 'priests' are not worthy of any respect, besides the respect reserved for all living being. They are either fools, or skillfull liars and manipulators. In both cases, they deceive and take advantage of the masses, for the furtherment of their own organizations. The money they gave us, they have taken from these deceived masses -it is not their own, even though they claim so. In the name of their various 'gods' they take the poor people's gold, and then in the name of the same 'god' and their church they return part of it to those same needy people, who then feel grateful and in awe of them. And if that is not bad enough, the great problem is that most of the gold they take they do not give back. Rather they invest it on their own organization, and themselves. Thus many of these 'priests' end up aspiring to affect the political fortunes of our world, wanting to become temporal as well as spiritual rulers." he looks in the direction of the white clad man, who is too far away to hear this "That is why I don't feel especially grateful to them."

Feng: Feng glares at Elthian and says, "I feel sorry for you. You claim to be enlightened," he pauses to laugh bitterly, "But you have much to learn."

Stefan: "Pompous, pampered and rude." Stefan mutters not caring if he is overheard or not, then he raises his voice to be sure he is, "There is a saying 'Its better to be silent and thought a fool than to speak and remove all doubt.' For all your opinions and your desire for knowledge and understanding, you know very little. The gods are real! As is the power that they and their speakers wield. That so many have stopped believing is one of the reasons that so much evil exists. Even if that were not so, everyone deserves respect until they show they don't deserve it... as you are quickly doing here. Perhaps you should go and find your pretty clothes."

Elthian: "And there is another saying as well" Elthian says quite irritated with Stefan's words "It goes 'When arguments do not exist, insults take their place'. I never uttered an insult, yet here you are, calling me all kinds of names." he lifts his eyebrows "As for the gods that you claim exist -do you have any proof whatsoever of what you say? I for one have never seen a god, or even the most remote sign that they exist. Nor have I ever read about any trustworthy witness that has seen any....."

Stefan: "There is no point to this," Stefan says with a sigh, standing upright and pausing from his search, "You don't even realize that you've been rude, do you? To both the priest and Feng? I apologize for my words, since you did not intend insult I suppose. We can discuss the gods another time, though it would do little good since you've closed your mind to all truths but those found in your books."

Stefan turns back to his search; hearing but not allowing himself to be drawn into debate and away from his focused task. However, he finds nothing amongst the detritus left from the market that could be used as a weapon.

Elthian: "I don't see how I was rude to Feng; and as for the priest, if you consider it rude that I told him the truth about what I believe, then I won't bring an objection 'cause that is exactly what I did. Only that that is not considered rude in my books. Now I was saying, I have I never met somebody who had ever read about someone who had seen a god. And I have met many learned men." he makes a rhetoric pause, then continues "All of the supposed miracles can be explained either scientifically or arcanelly. As for the powers of the clerics you mentioned, that is why I say that they are either manipulators or themselves manipulated by others. Let me explain. Magic obviously exists and is very real. Just as any wizard

or sorcerer in the world can create diverse supernatural effects through the use of magic, without being a god or even believing in one, so can the priests; only that they then claim that their powers are given from some god. I will not deny that many, nay most, clerics actually believe this. These are the manipulated ones, I mentioned. They are manipulated by these few who understand the truth, but also realize the political and economical power that a church can have, and thus choose not to reveal it, as well as the detrimental effects that admitting such a thing would have on the believers. Probably the founders of the churches were of this kind." he states matter of factly "As for the fact that the effects of the clerical 'powers' are different than those of wizards' or sorcerers', it can be easily explained by the fact that they have tapped other facets of the universe's magical potential. Just like bards, for example. A skilled wizard that devotes enough time to it, can master any of the clerical spells that he has the power to cast. This has been proved, and there is an excellent book on this subject by professor Marcus Scarl. I readily recommend it." suddenly remembering that he is not engaged in a friendly debate with a fellow student at the Academy, Elthian's tone gets harder "I would like to hear some arguments this time, Stefan. If they exist. Otherwise I suggest you follow your own advice."

Stefan: "We can argue this later, Elthian. It would be... interesting. But now is not the time! I'm trying to find materials that will be helpful to us all. You're welcome to help if you wish."

Elthian: "I still think that I'll take the walk up to the gate and see what I can learn. Anybody care to come with me? Or won't you associate with an unbeliever?" he smiles, though the smile is quite cold.

Stefan: "Elthian," Stefan chuckles good naturedly, his irritation of moments before gone as quickly as it came, "whether you believe or not is between you and the gods. You are an interesting person as much as I disagree with many of your words and thoughts or as much as they may occasionally irritate me. So, I'll be happy to continue to associate with you. But for now, I'll stay, and with Feng's help if he agrees, try to set up a camp and find food... which I'll be happy to share... even with unbelievers."

Stefan pulls the coins from his boot and presents them to Elthian, "If you do find a trader, will you trade these for me, please? A hand axe or knife; if there are coins left from such a trade, more the better. Just please, don't spend them on clothes."

Elthian: "Obviously I won't buy you clothes. The ones you are wearing do not

seem to have suffered much from the voyage. At least compared with mine." Elthian says, then turns to Wren "When you're ready, let's go. Don't worry, I'll keep an eye on you."

Stefan: Turning to the others, Stefan says, "Elthian shouldn't go alone. 'A man alone carrying coins in a town is victim looking for a place to die,' my father used to say. If I or Feng go, we've no fire, food or camp, rough as they might be. Who'll go along with him?"

Wren: Wren looks to the town mournfully.

"I suspect our welcome will be less than warm. I can accompany Elthian if he wishes it but just don't leave me alone in the town at any stage - I have something of a talent for finding trouble in any town and our names are already mud as it is."

"I believe I will leave the driftwood- I have no desire to march into town carrying a weapon."

He moves the coins in his hand skilfully in a circle, only half aware of what he is doing, then closes his hand sharply hearing..

Stefan: "Feng, between your skills and my own we could likely set up a decent camp out of the way past the bridge over there," Stefan says, pointing eastward, "and likely hunt up a meal that we don't have to trade for.... Interested? Wren, Taurek, what are your plans?"

Taurek: Now being addressed very directly, Taurek blinks a few more times at the brilliance of the sun. Scowling still, he starts to waddle himself down towards the man in white. His eyes, however, have locked onto Stefan and, as he moves, he growls out, "We have unfinished business."

As seems to be his way, Taurek is presently ignoring everything else. He's found something that he's focusing on, and the rest of the world can go to Hell in a handbasket in the meantime.

Stefan: "I haven't forgotten," Stefan says gravely, "I await your pleasure, though I believe as challenged, the choice of weapon is mine. Until then, I'm aware of my responsibilities. No harm can come to you except by my hand, until this matter is settled... which I take as including letting you starve or fall prey to robbers. Where you go, I go also. You will share my camp and my food if you are unable to provide it for yourself."

Feng: Not caring to get into any philosophical debate with Elthian has a lot more mastery over the language he's speaking, Feng turns his back to Elthian and walks over to Stefan. "I like you, but what will

we use to hunt? I have no spear or bow to take down animals."

Stefan: "Given time and tools, I could arm us both with bows..." Stefan muses, half to Feng, half to himself as he looks about the ground, "but, no use thinking of that for now. For now, a sling or javelins with fire hardened tips should be possible to make; or snares and traps for smaller game. There are possibilities. We need wood... fire can be made with a fire drill or flint... something sharp to cut with...."

Taurek: Taurek growls softly as Stefan begins to speak to Feng, and then just sneers at the man as he continues to babble on as if Taurek weren't even there. Moving slowly towards Stefan, still dutifully ignoring everyone else around him, he speaks in a rather gruff tone.

"You will pay me at least marginal attention when you speak to me, long-winded one. Choice of weapon may indeed be your prerogative. I have neither the desire nor the patience to have you chase me as a lackey until you have decided that you have found your ideal weapon of choice. You may choose from what is presented, as is the normal custom." Rolling back his shoulders, Taurek continues, "Which in this case appears to be your long-winded companion's rags of clothing, bare fists, rocks, or driftwood."

Having spoken his angry speech, the dwarf stands there, waiting for his reply. Nothing else seems to matter at the moment, his single-mindedness quite apparent.

Stefan: "This is how you wish it to be done then?" Stefan asks in shocked surprise, "Without the selection of seconds to arrange terms and details? With common weapons? Your people must be very different from the dwarven people I knew

and called friends. I thought you wished a duel, not the bar room brawl that might take between drunken miners. Have it as you will, though. The time and place was always yours to decide as the challenger, as the choice of weapons was mine as the challenged. In that at least the customs we know are the same... though I'm left with little to choose from."

"If you must have it here and now," he continues, drawing himself to his full height, "then go collect your coins from the priest; he's anxious to leave, and won't wait for ever. Then we'll fight. My weapon of choice will be fists. What are your terms and conditions; first blood, death or something in between?"

Feng: Feng picks up a couple pebbles off the ground and begins throwing them at the dwarf with the long name's head, hoping to grab that idiot's attention. "I do not understand your problem, dwarf with the long name, but this is stupid," he says, "The time you two waste on

this worthless duel would be better spent on finding and building a camp for the night... not to mention hunting." He throws a pebble at Taurek's head with the last word for emphasis. If Taurek responds or not, Feng will continue to throw small pebbles at his head, just to annoy him.

Wren: "Taurek, wasn't it? Umm, we are on a strange new land, if we cannot postpone the contest perhaps first blood will satisfy your honour? I suggest this merely because your honour was besmirched, so to speak, by a mere half baked argument between two men only half aware of what they were saying."

Wren flinches back involuntarily nervous at speaking to the dwarf. he lapses into silence.

Priest The priest has stood by whilst the row between Stefan and Taurek erupted once more. His dismay at the argument is written across his face. The Priest steps forward to Stefan and Taurek.

"Gentlemen, Gentlemen..." he interrupts. "I would ask you in the name of Khara to reconsider this petty squabble that is running beyond anything reasonable. I am surprised that the two of you, who have just survived such an arduous journey full of death, would take the importance of life so lightly."

He turns to Feng just as a pebble narrowly misses his head "And you Sir, what manner of childishness is this that you throw stones at your companion? Can you not find respect for those who have survived the hardship of the journey with you?"

Stefan: without ever taking his eyes from the dwarf, Stefan calls, "Feng, please!" over his shoulder as pebbles fly past him and the priest. "This is a matter of honour and you're not helping at all. I found nothing to use for tools to set up camp or hunt. If we're to find food or shelter this night, perhaps we should follow the others into the town -- but first I must make peace with Taurek."

Priest: The Priest turns back to Stefan and Taurek. "Incomers, please take a moment to reconsider what it is that you do. You have arrived here and know no-one. You do not realise it yet but after dark this is a dangerous place outside the palisade. If you are to succeed and thrive in this land you will need the friendship and support of your companions. This anger that I hear you express, is it really an anger at each other or is it an anger at the world that rejected you that you merely lay at the feet of the other? Come, put aside your pride and join with each other as comrades."

The Priest reaches out and takes Taurek's arm and Stefan's arm and brings their hands together towards a handshake, smiling at each of them as he does so.

Just at that point, a loud bell starts to sound from within the Palisade.

"Oh, gracious" says the Priest "It is Curfew. I must go or the gates will close and I shall miss vespers. Please heed my words and let love into your hearts. May Khara protect you."

With that, the Priest gives two coins to Taurek and rushes off towards the palisade.

Elthian: "The priest indeed speaks the truth. Stop this childishness, and let's try to get inside the gates before they close!"

Stefan: "Well Taurek?" Stefan says, looking askance of the Dwarf. His stands poised to either shake the dwarf's hand or dodge a blow, depending on Taurek's reaction. "This began when you called me 'madman' and built from there. Now Khara's speaker has asked that we put this aside. I will do her honour by agreeing, if you are also willing."

Taurek: Growling at the priest as he is accosted and maneuvered against his will, Taurek refuses to take the coins, letting them fall to the ground. He glares openly at Stefan, saying, "Again you insult me. Let us finish one assault on my honor before you begin a new one, rat-licker."

Squaring his shoulders back, Taurek continues to speak, "If you are not willing to accept my duel in the terms and conditions that I have requested, then you forfeit and are required to withdraw your repeated insults. Otherwise, we will duel to first blood, here and now." Glancing around, he frowns and quickly clarifies, "Where we are not likely to inadvertently hit others."

Stefan: Resigning himself to what must come with a sigh, Stefan spreads his arms wide in a gesture of surrender, palms open and outspread toward the dwarf, "Taurek, I didn't throw the first insult, but by your anger its clear that mine was more telling and hurtful. I regret what I said, but if only my blood will clear the stain between us, then take it now. It's yours; let it wipe away the anger between us."

Taurek: Taurek glares at Stefan for a few very long moments, a sneer etched into his large, Dwarven nose. He brings his arm back and balls up a thick fist as if ready to punch Stefan. Once again, he rolls his shoulders back, however, and

lets the arm fall back to his side, the fist remaining.

He growls out, "You're very long-winded. And you throw insults like water."

Bringing up the fist again, Taurek molds his hand so that he's pointing up at Stefan's face before continuing his small speech, "Your regret I take as an apology. And for that, I'm willing to revoke the duel. If you ever again insult my heritage or my family, you will bleed, rat--" He frowns, taking a slow breath, "Sirrah."

He juts his lower jaw out, the long speech clearly straining on him, "That's my offer. If you refuse it, we duel. If not..." He shrugs a little, "Then we get to shelter and food." His eyes glaze over very slightly, "And water."

[NB. From this point on it was agreed that the DM would summarise events and the style of the writing changes to reflect this change.]

DM: As you watch the Priest scurry off you realise that two market stallholders remain packing up their wares; one is a small thin human male. He is messy and dirty, clothed in a few rags. It is hard to tell his age. He is carrying a dirty old sack that is full of holes and looks rather glum.

The other stallholder is a very large rotund woman, whose bosom is barely distinguishable from her large belly. She is packing away her stall, wiping fish scales from a spotless white flat pushcart whistling contentedly to herself. They are both packing up rather wearily.

Apart from these two there are one or two others passing by, making their way to the bridge or to the gate in the palisade.

The bell continues to toll.

Meanwhile the others have become bored of this contretemps, their thirst and hunger overcoming their interest in what may yet come to pass between Stefan and Taurek. Elthian, Wren and Feng all realise the potential for sustenance to be gained from the dirty looking man and the rotund woman.

Feng and Elthian walks up to the dirty man carrying the sack, "Excuse me, sir" says Elthian, "but do you perhaps have any knives or hand-axes for sale? or perhaps you know were I could purchase clothes in this community?"

The Man looks somewhat startled at being addressed. "W w w w what did thee say sir? knives or axes? Oh No s s s sir no" he shakes his head. "All poor Hans has sir is these 'ere cabbages." he opens the sack and reaches in. As he does so Elthian is stood close enough to catch a waft of rotting cabbage, which even over the smell of his own filthy body nearly makes him wretch. Hans produces a large cabbage from the sack and holds it up proudly. "Grew it myself sir. This one's called Mabel." "Mabel" is half-rotten and maggoty. "An' clothes was it thee wanted? I ain't rightly got no idea, to be sure sir's own clothes are in perfect condition anyways. much better than mine. I ain't made a sale all week an' I couldn't buy no clothes like that. I don't suppose that sir would like to buy Mabel, would he sir? would he?" Hans's question seems almost desperate.

Whilst Feng and Elthian are discussing matters with Hans, Wren runs over to the rather large lady. The sight of even the scales awaken Wren's hunger having not eaten properly in so long. He smiles brightly as he speaks to her. "Good evening to you madam. Looks like you've had a good day. Are there any fish left - oh and how much are you selling them for?"

The lady scowls at Wren, picks up her push cart and barges past him with her nose in the air. "Incomer, my Jack's told me never to speak to the likes of you an' that's just what I am goin' to do. I have sold all Jack's catch today an' I'm off home" she says somewhat haughtily and with that she heads off at some speed considering she is pushing the cart, in the direction of the bridge.

All the while, the bell still tolls from within the palisade as the twin suns set slowly in the West and the shadow cast by the prison ship's mast grows longer and longer.

Feng wrinkles his nose at the man and his rotten cabbage. He turns away in quite a bit of disgust. Elthian too can't help but make a grimace at the stench of the cabbage. "Uh, no Hans, I'm afraid I won't buy Mabel. I don't... I don't think I can afford it. Have a nice day, and good luck." Both Feng and Elthian then turn and walk towards Wren and the woman.

"But, sirs, good sirs, with clothes as fine as yours surely you can afford Mabel." says Hans to their backs as they walk away "Look!" he cries "she misses you already". But the two former prisoners just keep walking.

Wren in the meanwhile has suffered a lash of the woman's tongue. He steps back neatly out of the woman's way as she smartly moves off

towards the bridge pushing her empty cart before her. He breathes in deeply a couple of times muttering something in between the breaths that is inaudible to Feng and Elthian as they approach. His hands close tightly on the coins he carries. He watches her leave then turns to his new companions all signs of agitation gone.

However, Elthian decides to pursue the woman a little further. He catches up with her and says "My lady, that cart seems quite heavy. Please allow me to assist you with it."

"Aaargh!" cries the woman dropping her cart and holding her hands to her mouth clearly afraid. "Another foul Incomer has beset me. Be gone beast" she cries swatting at Elthian's arm with her hands, "Begone or I shall scream for the town guard and have you arrested. Be gone I say." With that she picks up her cart and hurries off once more.

Elthian is perplexed by her behaviour but decides that frightening women is something to be left for another day when his belly is full and his pockets lined with considerably more gold than at present. He turns and rejoins Feng and Wren.

Whilst Wren, Elthian and Feng have been conversing (or at least attempting to) with Hans the Cabbage Grower and the surly fish-wife, Taurek and Stefan have almost resolved their contretemps on the dockside.

"Your regret I take as an apology. And for that, I'm willing to revoke the duel. If you ever again insult my heritage or my family, you will bleed, rat--Sirrah." blusters the angry dwarf Taurek at Stefan. "That's my offer. If you refuse it, we duel. If not..." he shrugs a little but continues "Then we get to shelter and food." His eyes glaze over very slightly, "And water."

"Agreed, Sirrah!" Stefan says, breaking into a smile, "You'll hear no more insults from me. I'd rather have you as a companion than a blood enemy. It looks like their readying to close the gate for the night. Shall we see if the others have found anything worth trading for?" Stefan asks, taking a step toward the others. Pausing, he stoops down and gathers up the gold florins from the paving stones, "Did you not want these, Taurek?"

Taurek shakes his head, frowning for a moment at the coins, "I need no charity from the likes of Khara." Lifting his head up again, he catches sight of the others moving towards the city, finally. Nodding once at

Stefan, he starts heading quickly towards the other three. Stefan tucks the coins away for safekeeping and follows the dwarf's lead toward the others heading for the town gates.

They catch up quickly and Feng explains "there is nothing here I think we'd want." He points to the woman leaving, and then the man with the rotten cabbage standing near Elthian and himself. Feng continues, "All he's got is some cabbage that is not worth eating. I say we head into the gates before they close if it is as dangerous out here as the priest man suggests."

The group all seem to agree with this proposition and turn to head for the large gates in the palisade. As the group approaches the palisade, you can see that it is made from huge lengths of timber cut from what must be enormous trees, the like of which you have never seen before. Each timber must be 40 foot high and 10 foot across. The joints of each timber are covered with a black substance that looks like some kind of pitch. In front a huge double gate has been cut, wide enough for two large wagons to pass through at the same time.

When the group gets to within about 20 feet one half of the huge wooden gate slams shut with a loud clang. You catch a glimpse beyond of a wide town street lined with 2 and 3 storey buildings which ends with an enormous wooden tower.

The group breaks into a run to get to the gate before it finally shuts. With an astonishing turn of speed little Feng gets to the gate slightly before Stefan and Wren. Elthian follows closely behind with the dwarf Taurek cursing under his breath bringing up the rear. You all tumble in past the gate as it closes with a deep foreboding thud behind you.

"Oh, that's just great. That's just great. Just at the end of my shift and what do I get a bunch of filthy Incomers to check." cries a voice from within a little guard post to your right. Then out steps a short little human who is rather round and red faced, he sports a white uniform with a great golden lion on the front.

"Right you miserable lot" he barks, " I have had another miserable day and I want to get this over with. I have to ask you a few questions before you stinking wretches can come into the city. I want each of you to answer in turn." with that he reels off a number of questions as if he has asked the same thing of many hundreds of people before.

"What is your name? What is your business in the city of Bluff Knoll? Are you a citizen of or in the employ of the Caliphate of Auchray? Are you a wielder of Magical Powers? Are you a member of a proscribed

organisation? What items worth more than 10 florins do you bring into the City? And be quick now. Curfew has fallen and my dinner is ready." He stands before you all arms folded looking very annoyed. To your left and right and above you through murder holes in the gate you can see at least a dozen guards all of whom seem to be heavily armed.