



Chapter 2 – In the City

Feng glares at the round man in front of him and at the men who he can see through the arrow-slits. "I will answer your questions," he growls and is the first of the newly released prisoners to speak.

As he continues, his voice becomes less coarse, "My name is Feng. A priest told us it is dangerous outside the town at night, so my business is to find shelter here. I carry what you see here," Feng raises his arms but keeps his hand in a fist to cover his money, "The names you rattled off mean nothing to me and I do not know anything of magic."

Stefan is the next to speak and he steps forward to make his response, his face a grim mask in response to the guards surly attitude. "I am Stefan Radescu. I am an Incomer -- as you've named me, so the answers to your questions should be clear. I seek food, shelter and tools in trade for my work. I have only the clothes that you see -- their value I don't know -- and the coins given me by the priest of Khara. I have no magic and I'm not in anyone's employ -- yet. I'm not a citizen... unless being brought here as an incomer makes me one, and I know nothing of any organizations in this land.

Taurek is next. He says very evenly in what is almost a monotone, "Taurek Aldereim of the Senitil Province of Gladsheel, to find work, no, no, no, none." He blinks once at the guardsman and nods after making sure in his mind that he's answered the questions in the correct order.

The guard scowls at the Dwarf's shortness in his response but seems to decide against taking issue with Taurek. Instead he turns to Wren. "And you?" he asks of the young man.

Wren still wearing a wide smile responds, "I am called Wren, and merely seek some work in the city. I have not even heard of the Caliphate of Auchray so I suspect I am not one of his citizens or in his employ."

Wren pauses slightly before continuing, "No magical powers, proscribed organisations - none. And I have only the clothes on my back. Anything else?"

"No, that will do" replies the guard. "Now you," he says to Elthian.

Since entering the gate Elthian has been looking up the street before him. He has noticed the strange jumbled style of construction of the buildings that are between two and three stories tall. Some have flat roofs some pitched. A number have balconies that jut out over the street at odd angles and none of which look particularly safe. There seem to be a mix of houses and business premises. Elthian can make the names of a few stores from signs hanging out across the street although some are too far away to read. Of the ones he can make out are, on the right, P Lean & Sons Butchers and Viggers Arrows, on the left Rent-a-Boat Boat hire and Almarath Carpets. Directly opposite at the end of the Street is the large tower that was visible from outside the palisade.

Whilst waiting for his turn to come to answer the questions, Elthian tries to remember what, if anything, he knows of the mentioned Caliphate of Auchray. Auchray... it does seem like a name he has heard of before. If only he could remember more of what that idiot Glentravers had written!

Elthian's attention is finally returned to the guard only by the question that follows Wren's response. Only a few months ago he would have protested loudly at the rough manner with which the guard was treating them. But he was starting to understand that for the moment his life wasn't worth much for the local authorities. So, until that changed, he decided to follow along as told without many protests.

Finally Elthian answers the questions one by one: "Well, guard, my name is Elthian Quethar of Thievyn, former student of the Freldian Academy. My business in Bluff Knoll is, as you well know, that I have been transported here, and thus have to try and earn a living in the city." he makes one of his usual pauses, then continues "Obviously I am not a citizen of Auchray, or any other realm of this continent. As you know I was just transported here from across the ocean. I am a citizen of the Treene Empire -or at least, I think that I still am. I'm not sure if they revoke citizenship before transportation. Do you know anything about that?" he asks the guard.

"Nothing" says the Guard "Now answer my questions quickly or I'll just throw you outside. The Guard was in no mood for this loquacious youngster at the end of his shift.

Elthian moves on to the other questions, starting to get a little irritated also, "Organisations I belong to? Well, I believe that I am still a member of the Ravens. You know, one of the student brotherhoods in Thievyn?" his tone is slightly sarcastic "As for items worth more than ten florins, well these 'fine clothes' as Hans the cabbage-seller

would call them, were once worth more than that, but not any longer." he shakes his head, and remains silent, apparently finished. Just as the guard is about to point out that he hasn't answered the question regarding magic, Elthian says "As for magic, before the hardships of the voyage I knew a few simple tricks, yes. Nothing advanced, I can assure you. Most performers at fairs and such can do more spectacular things than me." he smiles and shakes his head dismissively.

"Well, Elthian Quethar, if that is your real name, for a start I am no Guard. I am the Corporal of the Watch!" barks the Corporal "But more importantly, sunshine, you are under arrest on suspicion of a breach of section 3 subsection 4 of the Trade Protection (Anti-Magic) Act of 1341 namely that you are a magic user and have entered the city without permission. You will come with me now to the tower for questioning by the Constable. If you are found to be a magic user you will be tried and sentenced in the morning. Try any funny business and my men here will fill you with so many crossbow quarrels you will look like a porcupine before they are through." The Corporal's last sentence is punctuated with a smirk.

The Corporal turns to the other PCs. "You other men are free to go. If it wasn't past curfew I'd arrest you as accessories but I've had enough for one day. Go on, clear off!"

The Corporal then shouts up to the murder holes overhead. "JACK! JACK! Where are you, you useless lump? I need you down here with five others to escort the suspect to the tower this instant."

"Oh, great!" Elthian exclaims "First I'm treated like the worst scum of society, and now I get arrested for having done nothing but enter this hellhole!"

Turning to the corporal directly Elthian continues "The representative of local law that met us on the ship earlier today said nothing about permits, or anything of the kind. Do you expect all incomers to be diviners, in order to know about your backwards and barbaric laws?"

Before the red-faced Corporal can respond however, Stefan steps forward.

"Corporal," Stefan says, in a puzzled yet respectful tone, "surely there must be some mistake. We are strangers here and have no knowledge of your laws... you know this. How can our companion have committed a crime just by entering your gates? If permission is needed for him to enter, can he not ask it here and now? Or can we not simply leave again and not enter?"

Stefan is supported in his entreaty by Wren. Wren turns away a moment and starts to mutter again - "Just once....just once!" Turning back, "Corporal this is nonsense, I mean, good grief, we've only just arrived today. My friend is not even aware of your law but you intend to prosecute him for taking a step inside your little city. I imagine you'll find some other offences to fit the rest of us when you've had time to think about it." Wren's face is bright red with anger and his breathing heavy.

talking

The Corporal gives a snort, shuts his eyes and shakes his head. "I had a crown for every time some-one said to me 'Oh but I didn't know it was wrong Corporal' I'd be a rich man indeed and not have to waste my time

to the likes of you. I'll leave that issue to the Constable and the Justices. I don't make the laws, I just enforce 'em. As for permission, you have already entered the City gates without the required consent and a crime appears to me to have been committed. Anyways, I have never heard of permission ever being granted."

"Your friends are free to go as I have already said, although if they continue to suggest that I as an Officer of the City Guard am somehow corrupt they too may soon find themselves joining you." These last words are said with a long hard stare in Wren's direction.

"You, Suspect," says the Corporal pointing at Elthian, "are to be taken to the Tower for further questioning and that is the end of the matter...unless you or your friends here want to try anything foolish?"

Elthian responds wearily "I shall of course accompany you to the constable and protest about this absurd arrest. You need not fear that I will cause any problems to your men, if they in turn respect my dignity." he looks the corporal in the eyes, to underline his point.

"DIGNITY!" thunders the Corporal suddenly, "you stand there in stinking rags having been sent from a Empire that deems you unfit to continue to live within its protection and you talk to me of dignity! You will be treated as any other suspect would be treated. No worse and no better! Men! Take him away."

Before being taken away, Elthian says to the others, and especially Stephan "Obvious civilization works only when the laws work. This is obviously not the case here. I trust that in one way or another this idiotic situation will be resolved. Maybe I'll see you then. In the meanwhile, good luck surviving..."

As the Corporal moves off with the guards that have now arrived and Elthian, Stefan addresses the Corporal once again. "If this foolishness

must come to an arrest and trial, where and when will it take place? Will it be of help to him if we that know him were to speak of his worth?"

"Sir, the matter will be properly investigated and if a trial is to be conducted it will occur before the Magistrates tomorrow. The Court house is just the other side of the Tower. As for whether any words from Incomers such as yourselves would assist your friend I haven't the least idea. I am no attorney merely an Officer of the Guard." With that he marches off to lead the procession towards the Tower.

On the way to the Constable, Elthian calmly asks one of the guards walking to his right "Guard, please tell me where one can obtain such a permission as is required, so I might avoid all this hassle next time I come here..."

The Guard continues looking straight ahead but mutter under his breath "Hah! If you are a foul user of magicks there will be no next time, Incomer. We don't like magic round 'ere, not since what happened during the war."

Feng watches indifferently as Elthian and Stefan talk to the guards about the situation. Just to add insult to injury to the pompous ass, Feng waves, smiling to Elthian as they take him away. Elthian scowls back at the little halfling.

As the situation seems to get settled, the halfling starts to look around for something that might look like shelter for the night, such as an inn. He doesn't see anything nearby.

Taurek's response to the situation isn't terribly different from Feng's. He's much more interested in the moment in getting some shelter and to safety than worrying about someone who's likely just going to get himself muddled up in paperwork. Unlike Feng, however, Taurek's quite aware of the fact that he's penniless. He's going to look around for something that might look like shelter for the night, but something free and more or less natural.

Taurek and Feng wander further up the street, following Elthian's procession into a cobbled square. They pass a number of buildings that appear to be residences and some more business premises: On the right 'Everseekers Chandlery' and at the junction of the street with the square a small door marked 'G Halthrop - Attorney at Law'; on the left they pass a shop marked by a large garish sign which states Roglio's Finest Tailors and a more modest premises above which hangs a rusted metal sign 'Sam Ashe - Blacksmith'.

As the twin suns now set, the cobbles in the square release the warmth they have stored from the day into the cooling air and the smell of warm stone wraps around you like a soft blanket. Taurek and Feng are drawn to the sound of loud talking coming out from a door to the right next the Attorney's office under a sign marked "The Singing Serpent"...

Feng moves slightly ahead of the others up the street. As he passes up Feng makes a mental note of the various signs as he passes by them - especially the blacksmith - keeping them in mind for some errands tomorrow.

Having received short shrift from the Corporal, Stefan repeatedly balls and unclenches his fists in anger, his shoulders hunched, his face sullen as he follows the procession down the street, lengthening his stride to catch up to Taurek and Feng who appear to have wandered away in disinterest. As he passes the sign marked 'G Halthrop - Attorney at Law' he pauses, looking at it thoughtfully. "Wren," he calls out, "you know more of city life than I. This is the type of person that the guard spoke of is it not? Attorneys are in the trade of working law? Perhaps it would be helpful to talk to this man.

Wren comes over together with Taurek. Wren tilts his head thoughtfully. "Perhaps taking advice on legal matters from me is not advisable but attorney's have a tendency to be expensive. I fear our present finances would not cover one. Besides which I fear these people want rid of us - I'm not convinced they'll be swayed by a attorney arguments. Still if you wish to talk to him I suppose it can't do any harm. I think other measures may be necessary though."

Taurek appears to be in a poor mood, though that seems to be his normal state of mind. With his arms crossed over his chest and a faint frown on his face, he starts to move along with Wren, apparently having decided that the all-encompassing statements to the group must certainly include him. He looks displeased with the entire state of affairs, his brow furrowed deeply down, and he still says nothing as he walks. He intends to keep up with Wren, having decided that he seems to be the type to know how to get into, and more importantly out of, danger.

Wren's eyes twinkle as the red fades from his face and a grin crosses his

face once more. He skips ahead to the tavern and catches up with the others. Taurek follows behind more slowly. Skipping doesn't seem to be something he has ever done and doesn't look like he is in the mood to try it this evening.

"Wren, Taurek, Feng," Stefan calls out to his companions who are all now slightly further up the street, at the same time reaching to try the latch on the door, "I'll join you in a short while. If this man is still open for trade, I would seek to talk to him."

Stefan grasps the cool metal of the latch and feels it click. As he pushes against the door though it does not move. It is firmly locked.

Feng hears what Stefan has to say and looks back at him, to let the man know he understood and was paying attention. The halfling points toward The Singing Serpent and says, "I'm going to check this place out." "Yes," says Wren who, along with Taurek, has now caught up with Feng outside the Inn. "Shall we go in?"

With that, Feng walks to the door, opens it and takes a look inside.

Through the doorway the room is dark and smoky. There are three long tables with benches lined across the path to the bar beyond. There is a fireplace to the left although in the heat it is obviously not lit. There are two or three groups of people sat at different locations on the benches drinking from large ceramic tankards. Each of these groups is talking loudly and laughter rings out from a group of three men sitting close to the bar. To the left of the door there are four or five round tables. A number of well-dressed men are sat dining at these tables. All the people in the inn appear to be human.

Behind the bar stands a large man drying a tankard. He is nearly completely bald and laughing loudly with the group of three men. To the left of him at the end of the bar sat on stools are two youths; a boy and a girl. The barman looks up from his work and is clearly startled for a moment to see a halfling wearing faded red face paint and dressed in rags standing at the doorway opposite him. He regains his composure however and beckons Feng to come in and close the door.

Pounding his fist against the closed and locked door of the attorney's office one more time in frustration, Stefan turns away and hastens to catch up with the others at the Inn door. In a quiet voice, though one still colored by barely contained indignant anger, he informs Wren, "The Attorney-at-Law man's door was locked. I suppose he's not at home. You had said that we might need 'other measures' to aid Elthian; what did you have in mind. I don't at all like the idea that one of us can be made a prisoner for breaking a rule that we don't even know about. It could be any one of us next, at any minute. Who knows what other strange rules they may have. That is no proper way to treat a person -- any person. Elthian did nothing to harm anyone!"

Wren hangs back from the tavern a moment to speak to Stefan. "I hesitate to use other measures in this town since it'll be pretty obvious who took them. Besides.." he trails off a moment before restarting "Umm, I need equipment to work with, and I don't believe they sell it in the shops. It is alas expensive also. I will see what I can do but might I suggest you try speaking to the priest - so far he is the only man to have treated us decently. Maybe he can help?"

Wren steps back and seems to decide against the tavern.

"Let me catch a bit more fresh air first - I won't be long" and with that moves into the night.

Stefan momentarily watches Wren as he walks away, wondering if he should go along with the man, but as Wren's form quickly fades into the darkness mutters to himself, "No, give the man some privacy. He's been locked up with others too long and needs some time alone. You can understand the feeling, can't you."

Feng the halfling walks determinedly into the bar, holding the door open behind him for the others to follow him. Taurek supports the door as Feng passes through it. Frowning a bit to himself, he glances back to see if Wren and Stefan are following as well. Taurek's quite sure that a halfling immediately followed by a dwarf walking into an establishment of any kind is liable to cause trouble.

Seeing that Taurek is still holding the door open and waiting for him, Stefan hurries to enter the bar nodding at Taurek, "Thank you Taurek. Wren said that he needed some air -- truth be told, I think he wants some time alone to adjust to our circumstances here -- He said he'd be

along in a bit." With that Stefan enters the bar with Taurek following closing the door behind him.

Feng then walks toward the bar, looking at the people at the tables as he goes by. They stop their conversations and return his gaze, although they can see but his head and shoulders above the height of the tabletops as he is such a small fellow. To Feng's eye they appear to be a crowd much like any other that you would find in a city tavern at this time of night. As he passes they lose interest and turn back to their conversations and tankards of beer.

It is only as he turns his attention to the bar once again, that Feng notices that the Barman has stepped from behind the bar and is approaching him rapidly.

"Gentlemen! Gentlemen! How marvellous to see you this pleasant evening. I'm Fred, Fred Crumblepatch. Welcome to the Singing Serpent, yes welcome indeed!" he exclaims extending a hand to Feng. Feng looks blankly at the man's outstretched hand and simply asks him "How much for a meal?"

"Ah, um a meal?" says the Barman slightly flummoxed by the lack of a hand shake "Yes, yes, of course. Dinner this evening is urmm... lovely fayre cooked by my own darling wife Nellie. We have broiled catfish, leeks, succotash, some delicious coarse rye bread followed by the nicest walnut cake you have ever tasted. It melts in your mouth so it does. All for a mere five shillings. But, I think that you may be special guests of mine this evening. Tell me if I'm wrong" he says with a broad grin "but you're just off the boat from Treene aren't you? I can tell you know. It's that smell. It never leaves you. Khara forgive me, I'll never forget that voyage as long as I live." He pauses for a moment as memory clouds his eyes and then abruptly turns to the two youths by the bar. "Rod!" he cries, "get these here fellows a dinner each and tankard of best ale. Its on the house mind!" The Barman turns back to Feng "It's my rule for new arrivals such as yourselves that has never been broken these past fifteen years. Gerty! Have a look in the lost clothes hamper and see if we can't find these gentlemen some cleaner clothes. We'll get you fed and watered and a bit spruced up. You see I remember what it's like. I'm an Incomer meself."

"Good evening, Mr Crumblepatch Sir," Stefan says to the bar tender. "I am sure that we are all most grateful to you. Your generosity is almost overwhelming. We are all three most grateful and indebted to you. There is one small favour further that I would ask though. I was hoping you could tell me -- the attorney-at-law seems not to be at

home next door; would you know if he'll be away long, or where I might find him? Also do the Khara priests have a worship house nearby?"

"It's Fred my lad, not Mr Crumblepatch and not Sir! Just plain Fred. Now you're wanting a lawyer and a priest at the same time! My word you do get into trouble quickly, young fellow! Well, you are in luck. Mr Halthrop is sitting over there talking to Mr. De Tocqueville" says the amiable Barkeeper pointing at a rather thin, elderly but red-faced lawyer drinking heavily from a goblet and a tall, dark, stern looking man in his fifties with black hair and a goatee beard sitting at a table in the far corner of the room. They are engrossed in an animated conversation. "Those are the only two attorneys in town at present. As for a priest, why the Temple of Khara is diagonally opposite us here in the square. But they will be in the midst of evensong now. You won't be able to get hold of anyone there for a couple of hours now. The moon's out tonight see?"

Rod returns from the bar with a tankard of ale for Fred, Feng, Taurek and Stefan and hands each of them their drink carefully so that not a single drop is spilt. "Well, Gentlemen. Here's to you and your new life here in Bluff Knoll. May it be long, peaceful and prosperous!" says the Barman by way of a toast and raising his tankard before taking a large swig of ale.

In the meantime, Wren moves quietly making sure he is not being watched or followed. His paces are quiet but to anyone watching will appear to be normal walking. He draws his black cloak around him making it hard to see the figure in the darkness. He moves quicker, his gestures and movements are no longer languid and tired as they were on the ship. This is his time of day and he feels alive once again to be hiding in the many shadows of the city square.

He approaches the Tower carefully, hiding in the penumbra cast by the structure itself. Hugging the wall closely he examines the building. It has five floors to his eye. On the ground floor and first floor (OOC: first and second floors to US citizens (not sure about Canadians)!) the only entrance into the structure is via the gateway and portcullis that swallowed Elthian a few moments before. On these lower floors there are four arrow slits in each side. On higher floors there appear to be windows although from the angle at which he is standing it is difficult for Wren to tell. As far as Wren is aware, from his current position, against the Tower's southern flank, no one has seen him.

Taurek sits down a bit warily, clearly out of sorts and preoccupied with the situation. Unlike the traditional Dwarven stereotype, he doesn't down his ale with a boisterous clamour but, rather, just holds it for a few very long moments, staring down at the mug. Eventually, he takes a sip of the liquor inside. He's not totally trusting of this situation and this open friendship; people aren't so friendly, regardless of the shared hardships they've gone through.

Feng looks dumbstruck at the way the barkeep has treated he and his companions. A look of wonder paints his face. None of the intruders he ever encountered has been this congenial and he does not know how to react. The halfling just sits, gulps his drink quickly and stares at the barkeep as he talks with Stefan.

"Thank you very much Sir... er, I mean Fred," Stefan says in obvious relief, almost gushing. While he had been strong up to now due to the harsh conditions and the adversity they all had faced, this simple homey act of kindness was almost overwhelming to him and he reacted true to his youth; not really a man at all.

"It is so very good to hear a kind, truly friendly voice again. I... I had almost given up hope of ever hearing another. Yes we're in trouble, I think. Not us personally," he says indicating Feng, Taurek and himself, "but a friend of ours. Elthian, our companion, was arrested as we entered the gates and hauled away to the tower. And he had done nothing. Nothing at all. He only said he could do party tricks when asked if he knew magic. And for that the watch man arrested him. Something about breaking a trade act or something. What harm is there in party tricks?"

Taurek snorts softly, grumbling gently, "Not a friend of mine, the babbling monkey." Feng nods in agreement with this remark, "I thought he talked too much anyway..." adds the halfling.

Taurek takes another long gulp from the ale, inwardly finding this entire situation overly pointless. He needs to be out trying to find a means of income, not babbling with a barkeep about the antics of someone daft enough to proudly proclaim his magical prowess. Nonetheless, he finds it quite difficult to leave the relative security of the known threats to venture into the world of the unknown ones. That's what got him into this mess to begin with.

Taking a deep breath and calming himself somewhat, Stefan sips at the ale before continuing, "I had thought we might get help, or at least

advice from the Attorney-at-Law man. Thank you for pointing him out, I'll speak to him directly. Do you suppose he would be willing to help us? And if he did, what would he want in trade?"

"I have no idea whether Mr. Halthrop or Mr. De Tocqueville would help you or what payment either of them might require. Best to ask them yourselves I think" replies Fred taking another swing of his ale.

Stefan thinks about this for a moment and continues "I had also thought of the priest who met us at the docks with the coin-gift. The Khara priest also offered help and kindness. Would they go further and help in a case such as this?"

A frown creases the expanse of Taurek's face as Stefan makes his declaration and inquisition, the Dwarf speaking up, "We don't need help from a follower of Khara. There's nothing useful that one of them is going to be willing to do for your friend anyway, ratli-- Stefan." Shaking his head, he takes another quaff of the ale, "Khara's followers are great for peace talks and catching arrows, but they're damnably useless in the face of adversity."

Taurek glances up at Stefan again before once again gulping from his ale and staring down into it. He's said his bit and now, it seems, he's done talking.

Fred smiles expansively at Taurek and then turns to Stefan and Feng. "Your friend here is a follower of another, I believe. Helios, the God of War, if I am not mistaken from those battle axes on your tunic, Good Dwarf. But your other friend, Elthian was it? He is in trouble if he knows anything of the Arcane arts. Such practices are not tolerated in the Nation of Bluff Knoll, not since the cataclysm at the end of the Great Orcan War when so many died. Arcane magicks are seen here as the tools of the Dark Lady herself. Why none have even seen an arcane enchantment cast in these parts for generations. I don't know that the Kharan priests would wish to interfere in such a difficult area for them, politically I mean, but what do I know about such matters?"

During the conversation, Feng keeps to himself but stares at the barkeep. He occasionally looks away to see if the food is coming.

The Barman turns and looks about "GERTY!" he cries "Have you found that hamper yet? Come on girl!" Turning back to the table Fred smiles ruefully "I am sorry about my daughter taking so long, she's a bit out of sorts today..."

Just then Gerty appears dragging a large hamper towards the table. When she looks up at first it appears that her face is red from the exertion of moving the hamper. On closer inspection, however, you can all see that the redness in her face is from weeping and that the front of her white apron is wet from being used to dry her eyes.

"Ah, excellent!" says Fred putting a protective arm around the lass, "Now come on girl pull yourself together. It will be alright." With this Gerty bursts into floods of tears and buries her face in Fred's shoulder.

"Gentlemen, please help yourselves to whatever you wish to wear. You can change in the storeroom if you wish. I seem to have my hands occupied here. Come now Gerty, come, come." says Fred comforting the girl but unable to move due to the clinch Gerty has him in.

Wren looks at the tower darkly. If anyone could read his thoughts they would hear the following: "No equipment, and that to get into to. Not a hope and you know it."

He slides back from his vantage point and walks normally back in the direction of the inn trying to get a little bit of a feel for the town's layout whilst he wanders.

Wren discovers from a distance that there is another city gate in the middle of the road that leads north from the Tower on the other. The road leading west out of the Tower square passes what appears to be a Temple but then becomes a mostly residential area. The road leading east out of the square goes on for some distance with mostly shops and other commercial uses all closed for the night. Apart from this, the only other building of note is the Court House on the northern side of the square.

Wren decides to return to the Singing Serpent before he loses track of his new companions. When he arrives back he opens the door and strolls in casually. His face shows some degree of irritation as he makes for where the others sit. Wren arrives just as Fred asks the others to choose whatever they wish from the hamper.

