



## Chapter 3 – Elthian in the Tower

Elthian is shoved from behind by one of the Guards. "Get a move on!" a gruff voice barks at the young man.

"I had imagined that this backwater is still at mankind's most primitive reaction to magic: fear. And as is the case also in some barbaric tribes, magic users are killed." Elthian mumbles silently to himself, as if commenting on something he has read in a book. Turning to the guard again: "I might perhaps have some knowledge of the arcane arts, but I am by no means foul." he comments. Whispering under his breath, he adds "Unless you have reversed the meanings of foul and fine in this hole and consider your laws fine." Speaking aloud again, he asks the soldier: "The war? I know nothing about it. What happened?"

"You know nothing about the Great Orcan war!" the guard exclaims a little too loudly in his surprise. The guard receives a harsh glare from the Corporal who is leading the little procession as it nears the tower and says nothing further. "I can't talk to you further or the corp will 'ave me on spud duty again" finishes the guard.

"No, I have no idea what the Great Orcan War is. I must remind you that I just arrived here from the Empire." Elthian says to the guard, disregarding the Corporal's glares "Isn't it a little presumptuous to think that a man that has been on this continent for less than two hours should know of all it's petty wars and politics? Much less it's absurd laws, of course..." Elthian shakes his head and continues walking.

The guard starts to respond to Elthian but checks himself as the Corporal catches his eye again. The thought of peeling all of those potatoes obviously weighing heavily upon his mind, he does not respond further.

The procession passes the Singing Serpent at the top of the street and moves around to the eastern side of the massive tower where there is a large double wooden door reinforced by huge black

metal supports. The door is open and behind it there is a huge portcullis made of the same black metal used for the reinforcement of the door. Beyond the portcullis the interior of the tower is dark and difficult to make out in the fast fading sun light but, from the light of a torch, there seems to be a long corridor with several doors off it. The guards and Elthian approach the portcullis and it begins to open with a low groaning sound...

When they reach the tower, Elthian regards it with a non-too-impressed look "So, is this where the magistrates reside?" he asks "Does it have a name or do you simply call it 'the tower'?"

The Corporal, hearing Elthian's questions, turns to him and says "Sir, you would do well to stop with your questions. The time approaches for you to answer our questions and not the other way round. However, on the assumption that you really are a stranger to this city, the Magistrates have nothing to do with the City Guard's operations here in the Tower of Brigg. The Court house is across the way there." He nods in a northerly direction to the side of the square that lies opposite the road down to the city gate and docks which approaches the square from the south.

Elthian can just make out in the twilight a low wooden two story building with a grandly ornate entrance flanked by carved pillars. It is too dark to make out the nature of the carvings however.

"Thank you for your information, Corporal. And you do not need to assume that I am a stranger to the city -I AM a stranger to this settlement. As I stated I just arrived with the ship from the empire. You must have seen it yourself -and if nothing else the state of my clothes can reveal as much..." Elthian replies to the corporal.

"Don't worry, Sir. I have a feeling that you will get a closer look at it in the morning" finishes the Corporal and with a chuckle to himself he escorts Elthian through the gate and beyond the portcullis which is then lowered behind them with a thud that makes the ground beneath Elthian's feet shake for a moment.

Elthian is now in a passageway. The interior of the tower is made from the same large timbers as the exterior. There are two doors off the passage way on the left and two opposite on the right. Immediately to the right of the portcullis adjacent to where Elthian and the guards are standing there is a counter.

The Corporal moves briskly up to the counter, snaps to attention, salutes and says "Corporal Saubrant reporting, Sergeant Snart Sir! I

have a prisoner". A booming sonorous voice comes from back behind the counter "By the suns, Lothgorn, not again!". The counter is lifted and a huge man emerges, he is at least six feet six inches tall, with an enormous barrel chest. He has long grey hair tied in a pony tail and is dressed in the same uniform as the Corporal.

"What has this one done? Failed to declare a hamster hidden on his person like that poor chap yesterday? Or perhaps you didn't like his smile, like the fellow the day before?" says the Sergeant to Corporal Saubrant sarcastically.

"Sir, no Sir!" replies the Corporal loudly "Prisoner was arrested for a suspected breach of section 3 subsection 4 of the Trade Protection (Anti-Magic) Act of 1341, Sir! He said he was a magic user, Sir!"

"Well, well, well. That is more interesting. After all these years you might finally have made a legitimate arrest. I supposed it had to happen eventually." says the Sergeant turning to look at Elthian. "he doesn't look like much of threat to city trade though does he?"

"Sir, no Sir!" replies the Corporal "but you never can tell with magic users can you Sir?"

"And how would you know Lothgorn? You ever met one before?" sneers the Sergeant.

"Sir, no Sir! But it's what I've heard Sir" says the Corporal earnestly.

"It's what you've heard, ha!" says the Sergeant looking at the bristling Corporal before him "Oh, for Khara's sake Lothgorn, relax. I'll take it from here. Go home to Matilda and get your supper. I don't want her in here again having a go at me because she thinks I've kept you late like last week. I have seen many things in my life but none as frightening as that wife of yours!"

"Sir, yes Sir!" replies the Corporal and with that he turns sharply on his heel, marches off and enters the first door on the left further down the corridor. As he leaves there is muffled laughter from the remaining guards.

"Brin! Jack! Take this man down to the guard room and prepare him for questioning. I'll be down in a moment once I've finished this damn paperwork. The rest of you men are dismissed." The burly Sergeant lifts the counter and disappears from Elthian's view.

During this conversation Elthian decided not to speak with the immense Sergeant but to show him some respect -both because of his mere size, and because he might directly influence the duration and nature of his detainment. Thus he remains silent, following the discussion of the two men. When the corporal leaves, he considers speaking to the sergeant about the unfairness of his arrest, but decides against it as he will probably get a chance to do all that during the forthcoming questioning.

All the guards but two move off towards the door that the Corporal went through. Two guards remain including the one that Elthian was taking to on the walk up to the Tower. They motion for him to walk to the end of the corridor.

Elthian realises that the name of the guard he was talking to previously is Jack from the Sergeant's nod in the direction of the man when barking his orders. As the triumvirate pass down the corridor Elthian turns to Jack "Now that the immediate danger of peeling potatoes is gone, could you please enlighten a newcomer to this place, regarding the Great Orcan War?" he says in as kind and friendly a voice as he can muster in the circumstances.

"Sure," says Jack "now that Saubrant's off my case. By the suns, I believe I truly hate that man". Brin, the other guard, grunts in agreement. "The Great Orcan War? Well, I don't rightly knowed all that much about it, I weren't never very good at school see, but I guess I knows what most do. You sure likes questions Sir, so as you do."

Jack explains that until about two hundred years ago Bluff Knoll was ravaged by the Great Orcan hordes who crossed the Dragonspire Mountains to the East and overran the unsuspecting humanoid population. After many years fighting, the orcs eventually besieged the City of Bluff Knoll itself which was ruled by the ageing King Mallow. The City held out for many years against the siege due to the heroism of the City Guard in no small measure. Eventually reinforcements from the Duchy of Saltmarsh, the Principality of Briarton, the Dominion of Stonehill and from Ellandvenholme courageously fought their way through the vicious Orcan horde and relieved the city with the City Guard slaying 50 Orcs per man.

The wars ended suddenly and spectacularly when, in the heat of battle, a magic spell of enormous power went awry in one blinding terrible white flash of heat and energy. The landscape of the Plain of Feuds (to the north east of the City), where the battle raged, was left scarred and blackened. All the Orcs had gone, destroyed in the cataclysm along with a thousand men. It is a day that is commemorated each year in Bluff Knoll as Orkshell Day (pronounced "orksawl").

As this story is recounted, the three men pass through a double door at the end of the corridor, turn right and then right again and begin to descend a wide stone spiral staircase. Brin leads, followed by Elthian and then Jack the story teller behind him. They pass by one floor and then arrive at a door that Brin opens and beckons Elthian to enter. "That's about the shape of it Jack" says Brin nodding at Jack's rendition "Them were grim times, so they were. But City Guard is as good today as it was back in them days" he finishes. Jack then says "Aye, we are the best of the best so we are." Jack pauses and then says to Elthian "But Sir, you knowed all this yourself already, surely you do, one like you who speaks with a voice of learning and books and reading and such?"

Elthian nods as the story is recounted "That was most enlightening. Obviously the Guard showed great courage, and I am sure that you are following in exactly the same footsteps. Thank you Jack." he says when the guard is finished "I have indeed studied quite a lot, but unfortunately back in the Empire almost all books concern only the Empire itself. Thus I had never heard of this War, which seems to have been of quite some import in the history of these parts. There is however one thing that I did not understand -since that spell extinguished all those orcs, why are you afraid of spellcasters in this town and treat them this way?" he looks at the guards.

"What's your game, Sir?" exclaims Jack looking at Elthian with suspicion. "All the world knows that Magicks are the works of the Dark Lady herself. A thousand men were killed that day on the Plain of Feuds. A thousand men taken by her evil hand including almost a hundred of the Guard. Why, if we were to let Magick within Bluff

Knoll, we might as well open our gates and invite the minions of hell to take us all straight to the abyss."

"Tis an evil thing right enough," adds Brin solemnly.

"Since your definition of 'all the world' certainly only includes Bluff Knoll, I am not surprised by your answer, Jack." Elthian replies in a friendly manner "But I must inform you that in most civilized parts of Gondar the arcane arts have been elevated to the status of science. Why, there's an entire institute at the Academy only devoted to arcanology. And the Academy is not evil, as is not the Empire that sponsors it. That I speak the truth about this, you can check with anyone who's been to Thievyn."

Both Jack and Brin react with obvious horror at the mention of the academy.

"Why, Sir, if there is indeed a place where they teach these evils, I am glad that it is such a distance away." says Jack.

"Let me tell you this, and work it around in your brains a bit and you'll see I'm right: Magic is just like a hammer -in the hands of a good master it can create wonders, in the hands of an evil destroyer it can smash anything to pieces. In other words, the effects of magic depend entirely upon the person that wields it. If he is good, magic is good -if he is evil, magic is evil. Just like a weapon can protect or murder depending on it's holder, so can magic."

"I don't know nothing about what you are saying with your clever words and your education. I am just a humble soldier" says Jack. "Yeh, humble soldiers we are" adds Brin. Jack continues "I should save your words for the Court House, if I were you."

After they have answered, they escort Elthian through the doorway and into a little room about 20 feet square. There is a large desk with three drawers against the west wall with a large wooden chair with arm rests in front of it. The desk is covered with scrolls of parchment, some opened and others not. Above the desk is a watercolour painting (of questionable taste and quality) depicting a view of the city from the docks. In the north-east corner of the room there is large wooden trunk. There are two wooden chairs and a wooden stool against the east wall. The floor is of large grey flagstones and the walls of a sandstone brick.

As they enter the room from the door in the south eastern corner of the room, Elthian says "One more question, if you will, dear sirs.

What do people here in Bluff Knoll know about the Empire? Besides the Incomers, of course. Do you know anything of your political connection?"

"The Empire? You mean the Empire of Treene? I dunno anything 'bout it" says Jack. "Me neither" says Brin. "I knows about Incomers though" says Jack, "We give 'em a fresh start and generally they behave themselves. I have heard that some of 'em have skills too. We lost a lot of skilled men in the War you know. 'Course there's always one or two rotten apples that we get, but the Guard usually deals with them pretty quickly."

Elthian nods "I thank you for your answers. Unfortunately I don't have much to pay you back with. Unless of course you are interested to listen to what I know of the Empire's history and geography -or other matters I might have knowledge of. I would be happy to relate anything that I know that might interest you." he says, internally doubting that the guards really want to broaden their intellectual horizons.

"Nah, Thanks all the same" says Jack shaking his head. "I'm done with learning and I don't need payment for telling you what you already know! Besides we doesn't even know if you're from Treene does we?"

"Please." Elthian says starting to get a little angry "Spare me that. You know very well that I come from the Empire. You probably saw me yourself as I left that ship. And if you didn't, I have more witnesses than I can remember: all the other Incomers for instance. The ship's crew. And last but not least, the priest of Khara that welcomed us with these two coins." he takes out the coins and shows them "You know that that is exactly how much an Incomer gets. Besides that, if I had been here longer than a few hours, I would certainly not be smelling like this." He looks at the guard awaiting an answer to his arguments.

Jack looks at Elthian suspiciously but reaches out to examine the coins. "Hmmm..." he says they do give out two florins on the dock to Incomers."

Whilst Jack is responding, Brin goes to the wall and fetches the stool which he places in the middle of the room.

"Now Sir," says Brin to Elthian "you heard the Sergeant, we've orders to prepare you for questioning. We need you to take off that red jacket and trousers and also your shirt. Then if you could sit on the stool facing the desk with your hands behind you back."

When ordered to strip, Elthian opens his mouth to protest. But he

reconsiders in the last instant, considering it unwise to bring any resistance, as the guards would have their way sooner or later anyway. Thus, he does as instructed. "It is a bit cold. I hope the Sergeant comes soon so we can get this misunderstanding over with..." Elthian says as he hands over his stinking and dirty clothes to Brin, all the while wondering how he will ever get himself into putting on these clothes again.

Jack and Brin start to go through Elthian's clothes holding them at arms length as if that would be sufficient to keep the stench of them at bay. "Wh..Wh.. Whats this?" exclaims Jack suddenly. He pulls his hand from the pocket of Elthian's trousers which he had been searching to reveal two further florins. "Oh ho! You're no Incomer, Sir. Not with four florins in your possession. Four florins Brin! Can you believe it?"

"Four! Why, that's more than a months wages! He's no Incomer alright. We'd best remember to tell the Sergeant of our discovery." says Brin excitedly.

"I shall look after these in the meantime, Sir" Jack says to Elthian putting the four gold florins into his own pocket.

Elthian is absolutely stunned by the discovery of the additional coins. The usually talkative man is actually left speechless for a moment. Finally his memory recalls: Stefan had given him his own coins to buy an axe or knife with when they were back on the dockside! "What the..?" he starts after the initial shock, and then remembers "I can explain that!" he says "I had completely forgotten about it in all the confusion, but these two coins were given to me by another incomer, so I could buy some things that he wanted for him. But I never got the chance since I got arrested at the gates..." he looks at the guards "Two and two makes four, right? The coins of two incomers. By the way, the other incomer is called Stefan and you can probably find him somewhere in this town..." "Oh, save it for the Sergeant will you? Honestly, Brin! The stories people make up when they've been caught out. It never ceases to amaze me..." says Jack to his fellow guard.

Once the guards have finished searching the clothes, Brin takes them over to the chest which he opens and goes to place the smelly rags within it. He changes his mind however. He pulls some cord from the chest. Shuts the chest, places Elthian's clothes neatly on top of the chest and walks back to stand behind Elthian.

"Sir, please put your hands behind your back" Brin says to Elthian.



As Brin tells him to put his hands behind his back, Elthian looks up "What? Are you going to bind me? Look at me -I don't exactly look strong and tough, do I? Would I have any chance on this world to overpower you and escape?" he shakes his head. If the guards insist: "Oh well, I don't have a choice now do I?" and puts his hands behind his back "Don't tie too hard, please. I promise I would never even think of trying anything funny..."

"The cord is just a precautionary measure, Sir." says a booming voice suddenly from the doorway. Elthian recognises it as belonging to Sergeant Snart. Sure enough as Elthian turns his head to the left he sees the huge Sergeant enter the room. "My men are acting under standing orders in cases of suspected magic users. We in the City Guard are aware enough to know that a magician with bound hands is unlikely to...what was the phrase you used? Ah yes.. "try anything funny".

Brin finishes binding Elthian's hands behind him. He did the job efficiently but Elthian's hands are not bound so tightly that he is in any pain. The Sergeant moves so that he is in front of Elthian perched on the desk with his hands clasped in his ample lap.

"Brin! Watch the door." says the Sergeant and Brin moves immediately to the door way. Jack moves to the Sergeant and whispers something to him. Elthian cannot hear what is said but the conversation ends with Jack wresting four gold florins from his pocket and placing them in the Sergeants palm.

The Sergeant looks up from the coins directly at Elthian "So what part of Gondar are you from friend?" he growls. "Although you look and smell as an Incomer, you carry too great a wealth for that to be the case. Are you a spy from Auchray? Or perhaps one of the Brothers of the Red Cord?"

Elthian looks back at the Sergeant as he asks his questions "I am

afraid that you are mistaken, Sir." he replies "My name is Elthian Quethar, son of Vaelor Quethar, and I come from the city of Thievyn, in the province of Freldien, in the Empire of Treene. I assure you that I have not even heard of the places or organisations you mention -much less am I a spy in their employ!" Elthian tries to sound as upright and truthful as he can (after all he is telling the truth!)

"Although I had four florins in my pocket I am indeed an Incomer, and please allow me to repeat the explanation I gave to the two guards: During the seven months of the voyage, I made the acquaintance of another Incomer -a man named Stefan. When we finally arrived earlier today, we were each given two florins by a cleric of Khara. This Stefan I mentioned is a man who has spent most of his life as a woodsman and is not well acquainted with the ways of the cities. Therefore he was planning to make a camp outside the city, while I would go to the city and purchase some things I needed -and still need. Clothes for example. Anyway, this Stefan also wanted some items and therefore entrusted me with his money to buy them for him since I was going to the city."

Elthian makes a short pause to see if the sergeant is following him. The Sergeant simply remains perched on the desk staring at Elthian his lips pursed and his arms folded.

Elthian continues:

"In the end, the priest of Khara advised us that it was unsafe to remain outside the city in the night, and thus Stefan followed me into the city -along with a few other incomers that we had met on the ship. But upon entering I got arrested and never had a chance to return Stefan his money, and then in the confusion of all that followed I forgot about it -and that explains why I told your guards I only had two."

The Sergeant lets out a small sigh. He appears to becoming weary of Elthian's tale.

Elthian keeps his eyes on the sergeant "Of course this Stefan will also tell you that this is the way things happened. He can also tell you that I am indeed an Incomer." He proceeds to give as detailed a description of Stefan as he can "The guards at the gate will no doubt verify that I was in the company of this man." he looks briefly at Jack and Brim.

"It's true that he was with another man of that description, Sir. I saw him talking with the Corporal before we brought this one up to the tower here" interjects Jack. "Quiet Jack!" barks the Sergeant "I've told you before, do not interrupt during interrogation. Now let us allow Quethar here to finish..."

Elthian returns his look to the Sergeant "This is how things happened and it is the truth. Besides, maybe the cleric of Khara that met us upon disembarking remembers my face and will verify that I am indeed an Incomer. I realize that he meets hundreds of Incomers, but he might

remember me because I had a short discussion with him." He lifts his eyebrows "And doesn't the Empire send you some kind of list over what Incomers it is sending? The bureaucracy of the Empire is so extensive, I can't believe they have missed such a thing?" Elthian silently awaits the reaction of the Sergeant to all his arguments.

"Talkative fellow aren't you Quethar?" says the Sergeant with a smile. "Now, I will come on talk to you about this 'Stefan' fellow and the florins in a while, but for now I want you to concentrate on telling me of Thievyn. I want to know about its government, your home, your education and how you ended up on the Incomer's ship as you say you did. I want to see just how good your Auchran spy training is. Come on impress me..." finishes the Sergeant.

Elthian stares hard at the Sergeant: "I don't have a spy training, my dear sir, since I am not a spy. Besides, wouldn't it have been really idiotic of my, if I were a spy, to openly declare to the guards that I know a few tricks? Why not say a small lie then, and be spared all this trouble? Oh no, sir, I was honest because I want to eventually become a respectable citizen of your community, and see where that brought me!"

The Sergeant begins to rub his chin and look thoughtful. "Well," he says "I suppose that er... you could simply have been a badly trained spy, or an extremely well trained one engaging in some form of double bluff."

Elthian looks at the Sergeant for a short while then says "You want me to tell you about Thievyn? I don't think you picked a better man on the entire ship of incomers to do just that, though I would prefer if it were under more relaxed conditions. I can tell you everything you want to know of Thievyn... and much more."

"Please Sir, it would be most enlightening I am sure" says the Sergeant brightly.

Elthian pauses for a moment and then begins to speak. "Thievyn is as I told you the capitol of the Imperial Province of Freldien, in the Empire. The city is located on the eastern shore of Freldien to the great ocean and is a very important harbour, with many merchant houses operating out of it. The great poet Tacsicus called her 'the pearl of the north' and I would certainly agree with him."

"Excepting some slum districts in the harbour area, the city is filled with beautiful statues and monuments, and many architectural marvels such as the Seat of the Freldian Senate, the Thievyn Theatre, the mansions of many prominent families and, highest of all, the complex of the Imperial Freldian Academy of Sciences -the most renown institution of Thievyn."

"The Academy, for short, has a reputation across the empire for it's quality, and many emperors have received part of their education

here. Under its roof work such luminaries as Cadius Achemon, Held Dervinden and Uenius Icheliban. It has been my honour and privilege to study at this lighthouse of civilization." he says and almost beams.

"Hmm an Academy. That explains some of your knowledge, but tell me what did you study there?" enquires the Sergeant.

The Sergeant looks thoughtful after Elthian's answer and says "Now tell me what you of the history of this Thievyn".

"The history of Thievyn? Well, it is first mentioned in a tax collector's report 943 years ago, as a small fishing village. It is subsequently mentioned in all reports concerning the northern parts of the continent, and it seems to be gaining in size and wealth, if judged by the increasing sums that it was being taxed. 702 years ago it was recognized the status of Township, and only twenty years thereafter it got promoted to City. At this time, Thievyn seems to be really blooming, taking advantage of its strategic position and developing its trade. 540 years ago it was pronounced capitol of Freldien - something that led to an even greater increase in both size and wealth. Two years later, the Academy was founded. This period of prosperity continued for another fifty years."

"Then, 488 years ago came the plague, that decimated Thievyn's

population and consequently it's wealth. It took the city almost a hundred years to fully recover and start expanding again. This expansion was checked a number of times by internal strife caused by power hungry senators and merchants. However, for the last fifty years, the unavoidable intrigues of the Senate have stayed within the Seat's walls, and thus Thievyne can easily be described as a prosperous and blooming city."

"If you want to, I can quote what some famous historians have got to say on the subject..." seeing that the Sergeant is not so interested in that, Elthian proceeds to describing the government "Obviously, the ruler of Freldien and Thievyne is the Emperor. However, in fact, internal matters are under the authority of the Freldian Senate, overlooked by the Imperial Curator - elected by the Emperor himself. Senators are elected for life by the other senators, when a place becomes vacant. Unfortunately this has led to senator positions being bought, or that positions are being handed down from parent to child. As you understand there is much intrigue going on in the senate, as most senates look more after their own pouch and personal advancement, than the good of the province. "Gluttonous pigs that compete with each other in self-glorification." the orator Preximus once called them. However, with an experienced staff of bureaucrats, that handle day-to-day issues, matters are being run quite efficiently."

"Most interesting Sir, but come tell me how it was that you came to be transported from this land that you seem to know so much of?" asks the Sergeant.

Elthian's voice becomes deeper, and he shows that it is a matter he doesn't like to discuss "It is something that makes me angry and ashamed whenever I think of it." he says and shakes his head "The charge was 'cheating in a duel'. And, well, I admit it, I did cheat and it is something I am really ashamed of. But transportation is a far too tough sentence in the situation and everybody agreed too that. I was the first ever person convicted to that for this charge. Most others get away with a monetary penalty or a few weeks in prison. Only problem was, that in my case, my opponent in the duel was the son of a senator..." he shrugs with a sad expression on his face and says nothing more.

"Aha! so you admit to being the type of scoundrel that would cheat in a duel," the Sergeant exclaims.

"I think that I have already been tried and sentenced for this crime once." Elthian says with a sigh, still not wanting to speak about the matter "And as I told the court then, I can tell you now, that no, I do not have the habit of cheating. In fact I dislike cheating and cheaters. But the person in question had offended my family, my friend and myself repeatedly. Add to that the fact that I had had a few glasses of wine too much, and that I am by nature worthless with



a rapier, and you might begin to understand my action." he sighs again "I do not say that it was something good -as I said it is something I am ashamed of- I just want to point out the circumstances that led me to do what I did."

The Sergeant glares at Elthian and asks "But how exactly did you cheat? Did you have your opponent's sword blunted or some such?"

Elthian sighs for the third time "As I told you it is not something I want to discuss deeper -it is an act that I regret and that causes me anguish whenever I think of it. Besides I don't see in what way it is related to the actual case. It is a crime that I have already been punished for and I thought that it was over the moment I put my foot on this continent. Most incomers have some crime behind them, and I'm sure that mine isn't the worst. After all the duel was only to first blood -I didn't kill him. I thought the idea behind all this incomer business was that they should leave their past behind and start a new life here -without worrying about old sins that they have already more than paid for." Elthian doesn't sound aggressive in any way, only like it's truly something he really wants to leave behind him.

"Come now Sir. I am sure that you do not wish to add a charge of refusing to answer when questioned by the City Guard to your indictment do you " says the Sergeant with a hint of exasperation in his voice. "Answer the question NOW!" he barks suddenly raising his

voice to a level that leaves his words reverberating around the room.

"Exactly how did you cheat in this duel?"

The drunk masses that were on my side, needed little more than a triumphant cry on my part to swarm the dueling arena, lift me up in their arms and start celebrating - without ever bothering to check if I had actually hit and wounded my opponent. Until the morning, that is, when I got arrested." he sighs "Are you happy now? Can we please move on to questions relating to the ridiculous charge that brought me to your dungeon?"

"Hmm..." says the Sergeant watching Elthian closely, "Tell me more of this academy then. What exactly did you study there?"

"Myself, I studied a variety of subjects, including geography, history and arcanology -that is the \*theoretical\*" Elthian is careful to stress the word theoretical to the extreme "study of magic and all things arcane. I don't know how you have it here, but in the Empire it is a fully recognized science just like physics and law."

"Some here would say that the study of such things is the study of evil itself." says the Sergeant.

"Oh! it is, it is! Evil so it is!" exclaims Brin. The Sergeant glares angrily at the guard. "Sorry Sarg..." says Brin meekly looking down at the floor.

"For me," continues the Sergeant "it is simply a question of what is legal and what is not. You admit that you have studied magic. Whether it was a study of theory or not is a distinction without a difference as far as I am concerned. You have also explained that you know how to perform feats of magic to my Corporal at the Gate. That is sufficient evidence for me to be able to prove that you are a magic user. As a magic user you are only allowed to enter the city with permission and you have none. I have no choice but to charge you formally with an offence under section 3 subsection 4 of the Trade Protection (Anti-Magic) Act of 1341. You will be prosecuted before the Magistrates tomorrow, and believe me when I say... your life will be forfeit. And just so you know, we burn magic users here....slowly... unless of course you are prepared to co-operate?"

The Sergeant pauses for a moment looking straight at Elthian. The silence in the room seems to weigh heavily. Jack shifts uncomfortably in his position against the wall making sure that he avoids catching Elthian's eye.

"Now I have listened to your denial of any association with Auchray and the Red Cord scum. If that is the case then that will be unfortunate for you because you will be tried convicted and burned tomorrow. Now, if you are an Auchran spy tell me what your mission for the Grand Kaliph was and you may be spared. If you are one of the

Brotherhood, I need to know where and when the next attack will take place. We found poor Tonark Crackblund two days ago barely alive at the Northern Pass. Again, if you tell me what I wish to know you may be spared. But if you persist in your denials... a burning stake awaits."

Elthian almost jumps up from his chair, except that he is bound to it

"I don't believe this! Are you serious? Can this place possibly be so backwards...?" he shakes his head, sighs and informs the sergeant "I already told you that I am no spy, at least seven times! I haven't even heard the names you mention. I have been speaking for half an hour, going through memories I had decided never to touch again, only to convince you that I am indeed an incomer, haven't you been listening? Obviously not. Instead you continue with this absurd practice, of which your law must be the master, of punishing the innocent and letting the guilty go free. If I were a damn spy, I would not have said anything at the gate and now been free. Instead I said the truth, because I am innocent and had nothing to fear, I believed -wrong! Here I am in your dungeon facing the death penalty. If I were a damned spy and stupid enough to say what I said at the gate, you still plan to bend the law and spare me death. But I am innocent, and therefore you will execute me. This is so idiotic, that it would be funny, if the consequences weren't so severe."

Elthian is apparently very angry, as he is literally shouting at the

sergeant

"Just stop and think a little of what absurdities you are saying. If I am innocent you will have me die, but if I am guilty you will allow me to live! Just think, if you are capable of it! Is that really what your law is for?" Elthian looks at the sergeant really angrily.

When it seems like he has finished, he takes a breath and continues, with a somewhat calmer voice, though still betraying his anger "Well, if you haven't figured it out yet, I am not going to tell you anything, 'cos I am not a spy. And I am not going to just come up with a story as many would probably do to get away with their lives either, because I want to go to your pyre with my head high, and let you and your judges deal with your conscience -if you have one, of course- for having executed a totally innocent and honest man."

"Ha!" exclaims the Sergeant "Do you know, Brin? Part of me almost believes him."

"Yeah, Serg" says Brin in response "He's one o' the best I've seen, that's for sure. Should we hurt him a little to see whether that will make a difference?"

"Oh no," says the Sergeant "I can't be bothered. Take him downstairs. I've finished with him. I'll write the report for the Magistrates now." With that the Sergeant pulls the chair out and sits down at the desk. He begins to write with a slow laboured hand.

"This gets only harder and harder to believe. All this interrogating has only centred around me being a spy or not. You have hardly touched the matter I was actually arrested for. Do you just assume that all magic users are spies? And that all spies are magic users? And stupid enough to tell it to the first guard they meet? Your paranoiac counter-intelligence really needs much improving if it is ever going to bring any results." says Elthian with a wry smile.

"Spy or magic user, as long as one is proved your life is forfeit. I can prove that you are a magic user. If you wish to die a noble death for whatever cause it is that you follow be it for the Grand Kaliph or the Brotherhood that is a matter for you. I offered you a chance to live and you brushed it aside. Now be gone!".

When the time comes to leave, Elthian shakes his head and does as the guards tell him to do, offering no resistance. Just as they take him out of the room he turns and says to the Sergeant in a calm voice "Just think of your conscience, when you decide if you will send an innocent man to his death."

"Oh Ho! You are no innocent Sir. Whatever else you may be you are a user of magicks. You have contravened the law and you will be punished according to the law. However tommorrow may turn out for you I shall sleep as I always do, like a lamb. Rest assured my conscience is clear but I doubt that, with the lies and

falsehoods you have spoken to me here this evening, you could say the same."

Jack bundles Elthian out of the room. The air in the stairwell is cooler than it had been in the torch lit room where the Sergeant had questioned him. As he descends the spiral staircase behind Brin the chill brings up Goosebumps upon Elthian mostly exposed skin.

At the bottom, Brin opens a small wooden door and Elthian is lead into a room about 40 foot long and 20 foot wide. It is lit by a single torch on its northern wall. By the stairs are a couple of old looking barrels. At the southern end of the room a passageway looms flickering from the light of a torch beyond.

"Number three I think Brin. Number one still hasn't been cleaned out yet and we've got old Rebus in number two." says Jack from behind Elthian. "What!" exclaims Brin "but that vomit must have been in number one for a good week or so now." "Well if you're so bothered about it you clean in out but I'm damned if I am going to" chuckles Jack. "Old Rebus doesn't seem to mind anyways."

With that Elthian is pushed in the direction of the passageway...

"Who the hell is Rebus?" Elthian asks angrily when he hears the name, ready to snap at anything, as the severity of the current situation makes itself even clearer than before. He had hoped the sergeant would

be a reasonable person, but he proved anything but it.

"Oh you'll meet him soon enough" says Jack shoving Elthian forward once again towards the passageway.

It is about 40 feet long with large smooth grey flagstones and walls made from a similar rough cut stone. On the left three further passageways run from it. Elthian is taken down the first of these where he can see three small cells of about 10 foot by 15 foot. The front wall of each cells facing onto the passageway is made completely from iron bars that extend from floor to ceiling every four to five inches. With two horizontal bars one at waist height and one at head height. On the right hand side of each cell is a small door with a lock.

As Elthian passes the first cell he smells the stench of the vomit the guards has spoken of earlier. How quickly has he returned to the conditions that he experienced on the Prison Ship?

They pass the next cell. It has an occupant, a rather elderly man dressed in fine clothes, who is leaning against the right hand wall of the cell. He lifts his head slowly and his seemingly heavy eyelids. "Ah, Barkeep there you ish!" says the man. "I must say the service in thish place ish terrible. I would like three tankards of your finesht honey ale and a bag of pork scratchings for the lady."

"By Khara Rebus really tied one on today, eh Jack?" says Brin



chuckling. "He must of had a good day at the market alright." agrees Jack.

'Oh great, my only companion in this dungeon of idiocy is a madman. How fitting...' Elthian thinks to himself as he passes by the cell with Rebus. To the guard beside him he whispers "What'd he do? Enter town without a permit for being mad?"

"HA!,Where have you been living young Sir? Can't you tell a man what's had too much to drink?" says Brin "Come on yours in the next one."

When they have taken him to his cell, he restates his request before entering "I would really appreciate it if you brought me some clothes to put on. Apparently I'm going to die tomorrow -at least let me spend my last night in relative dignity. Or is the sentence for me to freeze to death?"

"Sir, I am sorry but orders are orders. You clothes have to stay up in the guard room. We don't know what foul magick's they might contain now do we" says Jack, "I could get you some food and some water to wash with though. That is if you would like. You don't seem to be one who has a habit of either eating or washing if you don't mind my saying so."

From the cell next door Elthian hears "I shay barkeep where are those damn ales I ordered." Rebus seems to be getting more frustrated with the poor service in the bar!

"Well, you don't need to get me my clothes -actually any clothes that

fit and will keep me warm will do right now." Elthian says, starting to feel real cold in the dungeon. When the guard offers to bring water and food, Elthian exclaims, almost pleadingly and ignoring the insult "Yes, please! I beg you. I haven't been able to wash for longer than I would ever imagine possible - as I told you I was in that ship for 7 despicable months! And some food would be nice too. Even though I dare not hope for the likes of the delicacies that Luculus, the Academy Chef, prepares..."

"Ha," snorts Brin shaking his head. He turns and he and Jack walk away leaving Elthian in the gloom of his cell. The yellow fingers of the flickering torchlight do little to dispel the dank cold of the dungeon, a place that feels as though it has not accepted warmth for hundreds of years. Only the occasional hiccup from Regus in the cell next door and the quiet drip of condensing water from the walls breaks the silence.

After a few minutes Elthian begins to fear that the guards are not going to return, that the promise of food and water was but a cruel joke. However his fears are allayed when he hears footsteps approaching. Straining to see who is coming down the passageway Elthian is relieved to see Brin carrying a bucket of water and a canvas bag closed with a cord draw string.

"Ere you are Sir, food and water as promised" says Brin setting down the canvas bag "I asked the Sarge about some clothes but 'e says rules is rules." Before Elthian can voice his dismay, Brin picks up the bucket and hurls its contents through the bars soaking Elthian from head to foot with ice cold water.

"There you are. Water for your wash, you piece of Auchran scum!" he grins and walks off leaving the bucket and canvas bag just within reach beyond the bars.

"Oi, where are thoshe ales barkeep" cries a slurred voice from the cell next door "Barkeep, BARKEEP" shouts Regus as Brin walks off. "Shocking service in this place" mutters the drunken merchant to himself.

"Thanks..." Elthian says drenched in cold water, though obviously the tone of his voice would have fitted a lot better to a series of insults.

When the guard has left, he reaches out for the food and bucket. There is still a good pint of water left in the bucket and, for prison food, some relatively fresh bread. Elthian then promptly and hungrily starts consuming the meal. When he is done eating, he curls up in a corner trying to keep as warm as possible.

The cell is however cold and bare. The sparse straw on the floor provides little in the way of heat. Elthian begins to think over the events of the day, and what he is going to say to the magistrates the following day.

"Say, is that ale in that bucket you've got there good sir?" Elthian recognises the languid slurred voice as belonging to Rebus in the next cell. "Only, the barkeep seems to have forgotten my order. You couldn't spare a drop could you?"

Elthian slowly turns to look at Rebus. "I'm afraid it's not ale at all, dear sir." he responds slowly, and with a certain distance in his voice "It's merely water. Water." he takes a last sip from the bucket, feeling his thirst totally quenched "But if you still want some -by all means, be my guest." He offers the man the bucket.

"Ah!" exclaims the merchant, "You are most gracious. The water of life indeed. That is how I too refer to honey ale." The merchant grabs the bucket and gulps down a swig of water. "Hmm, a bit watered this ale but fine nonetheless. Just what I needed. Sir, you have been most generous. Is there anything I can give you in return? I have some fine items in my wagon just outside." The Merchant grins revealing a number of gold teeth and beer breath that could knock down a child at twenty paces.

"A wagon, eh?" Elthian asks Rebus, in an attempt to make time pass "So, what kind of fine items do you have? Clothes perhaps?"

"Clothes? Is that all you want? There's no need to go to the wagon good sir. Here take my cloak. It's yours." The drunken takes off his red cloak and hands the fine garment to Elthian before returning his attention to his thirst.

Ethian wraps his shivering form in the cloak and huddles in a corner of the cell in an attempt to sleep.