**Chapter 2: Freedom Songs**

Over the course of the next tenday, Landorin moved into his new space across the street from the inn, and followed up on his investigation of the anarchist fellow, though word had it that he’d left town when he got wind of the Municipal Guards coming for him with an arrest warrant. There was no word of where he’d gone, but Landorin would keep an open ear for any straggling news of the human. He’d also paid off his debt, and thrown himself into his voice technique.

Over the next few months, the bard began to take a more liturgical interest in the lyrics of many of the poems and chants he’d recently learned, and started coming to terms with a calling to action that had previously been dormant in his mind. He began researching the taking of holy orders by those faithful to Selûne, and with this faith, he gained a newfound appreciation for the craft of performative canting, and for its role in the battlefield. He was also instrumental in solving the problem with the rats in the city; these were the byproduct of an invasive cell of wererats who had come from an inland village that was now entirely razed and inexistent, and Landorin had seen to it that all of the unrepentant lycanthropes were eliminated from this world.

Over the next few years, Landorin spent a good amount of time away from Hlammach, mainly focusing on gaining the favors of his goddess in her service. He vanquished a rampaging pack of xvarts from a peaceful gnomish hamlet, and even caught up with the Wyverns during their last tour. Mali was still with them, and they caught up on old times before the band struck camp and went on to the next town, and it gave Landorin a sense of peace to know that they were all doing well.

Eventually, he became a full-fledged paladin of freedom, a holy warrior sworn to a life of strife against tyranny, and service to the freethinkers of this realm. He traveled as far east as Kara-Tur and as far west as the Sword Coast, and in all that time, he took only temporary followers and apprentices, preferring to travel alone.

Since his experience with the wererats, the bardic warrior had come to take a more-than-academic interest in lycanthropy, and had heard of similar infestations of wererats, wereserpents, and other shapeshifters across the land, sometimes pursuing them with a resolve to try to convert them to the ways of Good, and upon failure, to cull them before they could do any harm to others.

The 1350s came and went, and with them, the historical malaise now known as the Time of Troubles. Specifically, 1358 was an ominous year of the Dale Reckoning, when the gods walked among mortals and a few slew one another. Bhaal, the God of Murder, was himself slain, and Cyric had taken his place within the pantheon, usurping the worshippers and domains of the now-dead deity, whose half-mortal progeny populated a dozen or so countries on the supercontinent.

The elven hero spent the majority of the early 60s in contemplation, taking up residence at an abandoned mountaintop monastery, and converting it into a shrine to Selûne, but in time, Landorin came down from the mountain to rejoin the world of humanoids.

After some bouncing around the Pirate Isles and other parts of the Sea of Fallen Stars, Landorin found himself right back in Hlammach, and presented himself at the Viscount’s manor, which was in a state of disrepair. The majordomo let him in, and he soon learned that the Viscount had died some years ago, and his daughter, Urmeena, was now in charge of the estate. She’d been a preadolescent girl when he last saw her, but now that she entered the main hall, he could not believe his eyes.

A person with tattoos and a black corset

Description automatically generated

“The Viscountess, Urmeena of Bergère,” the majordomo announced the lady of the house, and took a few steps towards the dining room, asking, “Will you require anything else at the moment, milady?”

She said no, and greeted Landorin warmly, recounting the last time they’d spoken. They’d apparently discussed the power of harmony, and its effects on humanoids’ moods, a topic with which he was quite familiar, though he admitted that he’d forgotten their prior conversation.

“Well, I can’t say I blame you,” Urmeena smirked. “You were pretty involved with your studies, and with the ladies, if I recall.”

He blushed, always having had the attention of one or more gals while he lived here. “Well, heh, hmm,” he opted to not end the sentence.

“I’m afraid your room has been converted to a legal study for my cousin Smoor, who now practices law here in town, though I believe we have some of your instruments in the closet if you want those.”

“I accept your proposals. We’ll need to discuss the distraction service further of course, to work out the details, but I have no qualms assisting in the recovery of stolen property.”

“As for use of your study, I appreciate the privilege you offer me! Furthermore, it would of course be my honor to entertain in your service! I do have one stipulation, which I’m sure you’ll understand—I prefer not to break any commitments already made, as I sometimes perform at various locales in the city, and wish to maintain good relations with those who have provided me the opportunities. And of course, if you request my services for a specific time in advance, be assured that I will be ready, willing and able to entertain!”

They settled the deal on a handshake, and Landorin went about preparing his first performance for the familiar family.

~\*~

A person in a hood holding a sword

Description automatically generated

Malicia turned to face the creature that now stared at her with cold, lifeless eyes. With kneejerk reflexes, she poised her palms forward as the red of her hair turned black, then sunlight yellow, and twin beams of eldritch magic coursed through the vampireling.

~\*~

27 Alturiak, 1364 DR

It was a cold winter night after a spell of fair but brisk weather for the last tenday, and Hlammach was once again shrouded in an icing of snow 3’ to 5’ on average. Within a tenday of his agreement with Urmeena, Landorin had established a routine of performing for the House Bergère in the afternoons prior to their dinner, and then heading to one of a handful of venues on a rotating basis. Some of the locales were in the Temple District, and thus the audience was a bit more intellectual; consequently, he chose numbers that complemented the theologically oriented clientele that provided much conversation after his performances. He had come to learn much about the local interpretations of the liturgical elements in the songs he covered, and it gave him inspiration to rewrite some of his own pieces.

*Landorin gained +2 circumstance bonus on all Bardic Knowledge checks related to Hlammach.*

The elf sat at a table after his performance. Now that most of the patrons had left the Pointy Elfboot, he sat with a few fellow adventurers whom he’d met here a few days ago during his last gig. The three friendly humans had been sharing lore with Landorin, particularly around the topic of lycanthropes.

A person in armor with red cape

Description automatically generated

Fatima Færwell, a pious templar in the service of Sune—whom Landorin had recently heard called the ‘poor man’s Selûne’—was the spokesperson for the trio, who had taken down a cell of evil-aligned wereboars recently. “It’s a rarity to see werebears and wereboars go the way of evil, but it happens,” she remarked, confirming what Landorin already knew. He learned that she—too—had taken the path of the paladin of freedom before receiving her holy orders to ascend to the station of pious templar of Sune.

Her accomplices were two Turmish siblings, a locksmith named Fingers and a dancer named Fuchsia, and while they were quieter than the templar, they told their versions of events related to their liberation quests.

“As we’re speaking,” one paladin said to another, “I’m wondering if you’d be inclined to join us on the next trek.” Fatima clarified for Landorin that they had gotten news that a cell of wererats was once again in the region, this time in the Gray Forest just beyond Lyrabar. “We’ve booked passage for ourselves and a guide who knows the area, but we need a chronicler to hang back and document the events.”

From what Landorin had just heard, what they intended to do was well beyond his scope as a combatant, but scribing the high deeds of these heroes was well within his scope as a bard; maybe he would learn some tactics from these seasoned heroes. He’d already discussed with Urmeena the contingency of a job that might take him out of Hlammach, and she’d sighed and agreed that with enough anticipation, the family could do without singing while they dined for a few days.

~\*~

Wielding in one hand her short sword, and in the other carrying the disembodied head of one W. D. Lychenstone III, whose prior name was something closer to Frank Sonofjohn in the Chondathan dialect of Common. Now the man bore no name at all, for he had been unrepentant *and* susceptible to eldritch blasts, and with enough of them, the vampire-to-be met with a bitter end.

The huntress held the bleeding head by its dark locks, placing it into an absorbent, velvet wrap before stowing that into a luggage-like canister with two handles, which she used to tote the thing on one shoulder once she’d secured the skull into the locking container.

~\*~

Landorin responded to Fatima’s proposal. “It would be my pleasure, and an honor, to join you! I think I’ll pick up a few silvered arrows, I might be able to get a few shots in while I’m there observing the action, if you have no objection.” He smiled at the three humans, as he thought about where the best place to pick up a few silvered arrows would be.

And with this agreement, a Rube Goldberg of events was put into motion, and by sunset tomorrow, they would be on a balloon headed to the gig they’d just discussed.

~\*~

Highsun, 28 Alturiak

After about 6 months in Hlammach, Korik was glad to get a job with these adventurers that would take him back out to the wilderness again, where he felt most at home. He’d spent the morning making sure all his weapons were sharpened and cleaned, and making sure he had all the gear he could carry while not being slowed down. He’d settled up with the folks he’d been staying with, in their stable loft—he’d slept in worse places after all—and they’d needed the coin he could spare.

Then he took a bit of a walk about, thinking it would be good to get away from being surrounded by people and buildings. As he walked by one building, he noticed a spot where the foundation looked like it could use some repair, and started towards the door to let the owner know there was an issue, until he realized it wasn’t really his business as he’d be leaving. He mumbled under his breath in Goblin, reminding himself that these city folks didn’t appreciate being told they needed stuff fixed anyways.

Stopping at a soup and suds kitchen, he got a bowl of fish stew and a mug of ale for lunch. That was something he might miss; he’d have to get back in the habit of carrying rations, maybe, or just shooting small game for his meals. Heh.

That reminded him he needed to fill up his quiver, so after lunch he headed to a fletcher’s shop and bought a handful of cold iron tipped arrows, getting back to 20 arrows total; he still had a handful of silver tipped arrows, so if they found those wererats they wanted to kill, he’d be able to shoot them. He stepped out of the shop and almost shoved the door into a moon elf. He muttered “sorry, mister” in Goblin and held the door open until the elf grabbed it, and stepped out of the fellow’s way; the elf nodded and went into the shop.

The afternoon was dragging on, so he decided it would be good to get down to the boardwalk and be there on time or early, it wouldn’t do to show up late... He wasn’t sure why they thought they needed to take a balloon—Lyrabar and the Gray Forest weren’t that far away—but then, humans always seemed to be in a bit of a hurry. Heh. Short-lived folk were weird...

~\*~

Afternoon

Landorin had just left the scribe’s shop, having loaded up on some high-quality parchments and a nice, new vial of ink for his quills. Having touched up some of his existing poetry recently, this would be a good occasion to work on brand-new material, particularly one that put him in the perspective of the audience, and outside the limelight of the composition.

Landorin was almost to the door of the fletcher’s shop when a dwarf shoved the door open and stepped out onto the street. He muttered under his breath in some guttural language the elf didn’t recognize, and held the door open, so Landorin nodded in thanks as he grabbed the door, and after the dwarf stepped away, Landorin went inside.

After a bit of banter with the shopkeeper, Landorin had replaced 6 of his regular arrows with silvered arrows, and was lighter by 13 gold, as well as 6 regular arrows he’d tossed in as part of the deal to make room in his quiver.

The guy had also tried to sell him some cold iron-tipped arrows—apparently the dwarf who’d just left had bought a handful of those, and the shopkeeper wanted to sell the rest of the bundle, but Landorin didn’t figure he’d need those. But the guy seemed happy enough to sell the silver tipped arrows, and that pretty much finished Landorin’s shopping for the day. Humming a tune he’d been working on, Landorin sauntered towards the meetup at the boardwalk.

~\*~

Sunset

Fatima had specified the time and place, and as Landorin arrived at the boardwalk that led to the general store where he’d vanquished a pair of rats just the other day, he spotted the pious templar, along with the other two humans he’d met last night, and the dwarf they’d mentioned. Fatima greeted him first, then the others did. The senior paladin of freedom then said to the man who might have been her apprentice, “We’re glad you agreed to come. This is Korik, the Quick. You’ll find him to live up to his namesake, and he’ll be guiding us to our destination in the Gray Forest.”

Chatting with the leader of the trio of adventurers, Korik learned that they’d hired an elf to chronicle their upcoming exploits, and as he was mulling that over and checking his gear again, making sure everything was properly stowed, the paladin, Fatima, said “there he is now.”

Korik turned, and recognized the elf he’d seen going into the fletcher’s shop. As Fatima introduced the dwarf and elf to each other, Korik raised an eyebrow. Landorin smiled in return, and held out his hand, saying “it’s a pleasure to meet you, Korik.”

Korik hesitated only briefly before taking the elf’s hand, and replied “same.” Both had firm handshakes, Korik’s slightly stronger, but neither felt a need to assert dominance.

As each eyed the other’s gear, it was clear they had similar tastes in equipment, with well-made studded leather, rapiers and strong composite bows. Landorin grinned as it was clear they were sizing up the bows. “Mine’s longer,” the elf said, to which Korik replied “mine’s stronger,” grinning back.

Landorin shrugged, and said, “fair enough.” He continued, “I’m originally from Gildenglade, spent some time on the sailing ship Wavedancer, then spent some time performing here in Hlammach, singing, then wandered around quite a bit. I’ve found my true calling in the service of Selûne, who has granted me the boon of paladinhood in Her cause.”

Korik sighed a bit. “Earthspur Mountains. Laviguer. Hlammach. Been around a bit, mostly around Impiltur. Stonemason. Hunt a bit. Waukeen. That about covers it.”

The two continued to get to know each other a bit better, Landorin using 2 or 3 words for every word Korik spoke. While Korik was a bit lacking in the social graces, the two seemed to generally be of similar morals at least. And while Landorin did enjoy conversation, he had no problem doing most of the talking, while Korik didn’t mind listening....

~\*~



The party had boarded the Lead Zep’lin, an airship outfitted for transcontinental journeys that would make its first stop at the edge of the Gray Forest before continuing on its westbound itinerary.

A person holding a bow and arrow

Description automatically generated

The main heroes were fully equipped, and ready for their encounters with werebears and wereboars, while Landorin and Korik discussed how best to stay out of the way once trouble ensued.

The trip was rather scenic, and from time to time, they spotted a few known landmarks based on their respective journeys.

Korik and Landorin took the airship trip as an opportunity to get better acquainted... After a while, with nobody making rude comments as to his accent or demeanor, Korik loosened up and became a bit more talkative.

Landorin compared the airship movement to those of sailing vessels, noticing the use of sails to steer and get a little extra traveling speed but a bit unnerved by the lack of wave motion.

Korik seemed a bit more concerned about not having his feet firmly on the ground, but managed not to think too hard about how far above the ground they were. He even made a joke. “I guess the bright side is, we’d likely die rather than just be crippled by a fall from this height.”

Landorin grinned. “The craft seems pretty sturdy, it might absorb most of the impact.”

The dwarf just shook his head, and changed the subject. “So, tell me, you ever thought of getting a band together? I worked on the stonework for fancy theatre for a bit, and made some extra coin running errands for a few band managers, picked up a few pointers.”

“Thought about it,” Landorin replied. “I had a chance to join a big group as a backup singer, and it was tempting, but I like being the lead singer. Need some instrumentalists but would want to keep the group small. Do you play anything?”

“Naw,” Korik replied, “I don’t play or sing, but I did learn how to show off my weapon skills, guy I learned from called it ‘weapon drill’ and said the more cool combat stuff you can do the more it impresses the audience. I need to learn some cool combat stuff, but I got the basics down.

The elf had heard of that type of performance but never seen it, so he asked Korik to show him, and the dwarf obliged, after first clearing it with one of the ship’s officers. The adventurers were nearby, and seemed interested as well.

He kept the performance fairly short, and was careful not to screw up. “I know I’ve got a lot more work to do to make it a reliable money-maker, but as a so-called jack of all trades, I’ll do whatever jobs I can get, and it would be nice to have a skill most folks don’t to call all mine.

Landorin was intrigued by the idea, and thought about how that was a bit like a dance, albeit a dangerous one, waving blades around rather than fans or silks. “I could maybe incorporate that into a few songs, you could work out what sort of moves might complement some of the more martially oriented tunes...”

They continued chatting, gradually building the beginning of what might lead to a longer-term friendship.

~\*~

Evening

The Zep’lin arrived at the edge of the Gray Forest, just like the brochure said. Under the light of a full moon, their landing was serene and unspectacular, which was preferable, and the heroes disembarked from the craft onto a hilltop overlooking the city lights of Lyrabar to the southeast, and the sea beyond it, which reflected only the moon as it rose still. To the north, the elf and dwarf could barely see an expansive plain that eventually gave way to mountains, and to the west was their destination.

A map of a fantasy world

Description automatically generated

The scribe and guide had talked a good while, and were considering founding a troupe once they could agree on the wheres and hows. For now, they both chewed on the idea as they surveyed the tree line that would become the canopy above them.

The Zep’lin did not stay on the ground a minute longer than it needed to, and the rest of the passengers were off to the craft’s next destination, the outskirts of Tsurlagol. The Alturiak evening was unexpectedly warm, with no signs of snow or freezing temperatures. “This high ground is the best place to set up camp.”

Landorin and Korik had not come with anything more than the most basic preparations for travel, and were about to say it when Fingers produced a wand, shook it a few times, and caused it to light up a bit.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Skill** | **Rank** | **Ability & Mod.** | **Misc. Mods.** | **Total** | **Roll** | **Check** |
| **Fingers, Use Magic Device** | ?? | **Cha (+?)** | ?? | ?? | ?? | ?? |

*See below.*

A rendition of *Leomund’s tiny hut*, a useful spell for avoiding fatigue before a decisive event, manifested on the hilltop, and they promptly went in and lit a candle before settling into five corners of the circular hut that might have been about 20’ in diameter.

As the party settled in, Landorin suggested that they establish a watch order, so that at least one person would be awake at all times. “Though we cannot be seen from outside, creatures can still enter, right?”

He volunteered to stand watch most of the night, as he only needed 4 hours of trance to be refreshed—he normally called it ‘sleep’ when around others, and ‘slept’ in a bed when in civilized habitats, but out here he didn’t feel a need to hide his differences from his comrades. But he definitely wanted someone to be alert while he was in trance state.