

Into the Shadow

Galatyne Knightwyng

In another life, Kiriannin Seflannin fought against the Lyfeian Order. He returns now in the human body of Beorhtric von Adlerheim along with a handful of friends, including Falana, to find information in the archprelate's library that may help defeat an evil entity. But more than just a nebulous darkness awaits them....

Galatyne Knightwyng strode across King's Isle behind Theta Tarn and a squad of six Illyrian Knights walking two abreast. Their breath steamed in the chill night air, and a full moon lit their way. Theta Tarn and the knights wore chainmail hauberks augmented with plate on the arms and legs. Over all, they wore black and gold Lyfeian surcoats and the white mantles and fan-tailed helmets of the Lit Salles - Wards of Light - knights in direct service to the archprelate. Each carried a longsword. Three also bore crossbows. Galatyne wore only a short-shirt of mail and a dagger under the hooded mantle and white robes of a Lyfeian priest. He felt woefully underdressed to be strolling into one of the most heavily fortified places in Westermarck.

Located at the mouth of the Artus River, King's Isle, also called Isle du Roi, was home to three of the most prominent structures in Westermarck - the palace complex and keep of Nivernai, seat of the western kings of old; Ninon de Lit, the great cathedral of Tyre; and Chateau Harbin, the grand preceptory of the Lyfeian Knights. A high stone wall studded with guard towers encircled the island. Access was afforded by only two bridges. The East Tower bridge spanned the east fork of the Artus from Tyre, the Lyfeian capital. The West Wing, a long, fortified bridge, crossed the Artus' main stem to the island from the kingdom of Lecarra.

The only other structure on the island, situated near its center, was the little Chapelle Eglise, birthplace of the Lyfeian Faith. Since the construction of Ninon de Lit, it had become little more than a historical landmark, and its bell tower now served as the island's alarm. Galatyne thought the quiet, unassuming chapel much better suited for communing with Lyfaye than the grandiose cathedral.

A signal horn called out in the distance, from the direction of the harbor. The party froze in mid-stride, uncertain for a moment, then continued on. It was not likely that their ruse had been discovered... not yet. As he walked, Galatyne had to make an effort not to massage his forehead in a futile attempt to wipe away the worry that had settled there over the last few days. Everything had been going so well...

The Vivacia, captained by a magically disguised Shadesong, had set sail from Toolibrie just after the Yule celebration in Borandur. Foremost among her passengers was Beorhtric von Adlerheim, the human mage who shared his body with an elven spirit - Kiriannin Seflannin. Hundreds of years ago, Kiriannin's people, the Annin, had warred with the Lyfeians. They had been destroyed by an evil entity with the ability to possess the bodies of others. As a guardian of his people, Kiriannin's spirit could not rest until the evil was defeated. In Tyre, Beorhtric would seek to gain access to Archprelate Tirell's library at Ninon de Lit. He believed that the Lyfeians and the entity were somehow connected and hoped to turn up information that would aid him in his battle with his dark

nemesis. He also hoped to speak with the archprelate himself and ascertain the nature of the leader of the Lyfeian faith.

To accomplish his task, Beorhtric was posing as the seneschal of Robert Alain, a Lyfeian noble, and bore Robert's heirloom engagement ring as proof. The ring had been given to him by Rodin Rae d'Cordelia who had seduced Robert under the name Lariandra and become engaged to him. Unfortunately, she had recently been forced to kill Robert in self defense. Beorhtric had to move quickly to stay ahead of news of Robert's disappearance.

Beorhtric was accompanied by the bard Hoot Dreamsinger and the paladin Galatyne Knightwyng as well as Captain Theta Tarn and two squads of Illyrian Knights. Once in Tyre they would seek to gather strategic information and gauge the Lyfeian tenor. Falana WyvernStryke and Satyir, also called "The Chaotic", had also decided to join the expedition. Falana desired to return to her homeland to see what remained following the Lyfeian betrayal. Satyir had volunteered to guide the ship through the astral realm in order to save them all nearly two months of sailing. His companions suspected he simply hated to miss an opportunity to stir up trouble in a land he could leave.

Contrary to Satyir's wistful recounting of calming voyages in the astral realm, the journey had been anything but relaxing. They had had a couple of minor skirmishes with some astral pirates and a brush with a multi-limbed creature that everyone could have happily gone through life without ever knowing existed. Fortunately, it had seemed to have more of a taste for pirates. Once, they had strayed too close to an astral fountain and had nearly been annihilated in its magical outwash. Then there were the astral storms. They were fierce, resembling more a battle between two insane wizards than any natural phenomenon.

Despite these travails, with Satyir's guidance, Beorhtric's magic, and the skill of Shadesong's hand-picked crew, the Vivacia had made it to the coast of Westermarck, scarred but whole, and with all hands accounted for. In order to avoid arousing suspicion, Falana and Satyir had disembarked in a quiet cove well east of Tyre to begin their journey to the former elven capital of Foristirilsartin Lisithir - First Light in the human tongue. Again, Satyir would shorten their trip with a "jaunt" through the astral realm. They would meet the Vivacia back at the cove in three weeks' time.

Once in port, everyone had set about their business in good order. Shadesong located the contacts she had made on a previous visit and secured the appropriate documents everyone would need to move about the city unhindered. She also wasted no time in finding the merchant and trade guilds and beginning new business ventures. In addition to building her merchant empire, Shade also learned that the Lyfeians had begun hiring shipbuilders from all over Westermarck, and beyond, to build a fleet.

As seneschal to Robert Alain, Beorhtric was readily granted access to the great library in Ninon de Lit as well as to Tirell's personal library. However, the archprelate was "a busy man but perhaps he will be able to meet with you another time."

Dreamsinger gained entrance to the palace at Nivernai to play before King Aleron of Cambrai and his court who were guesting there for the winter. As it turned out, Robert Alain was the son of the king's duke, and festivities were in full swing in anticipation of Robert's and "Lariandra's" wedding. After his first engagement, Dreamsinger was given a room in the palace and asked to make himself available for the duration of his stay in Tyre.

When he wasn't singing or playing, Dreamsinger was listening. He learned that the Lyfeian "army" that attacked Borandur over a year and a half ago had been raised by emptying the dungeons of Westermarck. He also discovered that Robert Alain was not the bumbling dandy Rodin Rae had believed him to be. Robert was the Lyfeian's most renowned fey-hunter and had earned the name

“Hammer of the East” for his promotion of the Lyfeian cause in E’atara and his skill at “gathering” information on E’atara’s organizational structures and military strengths.

Dreamsinger also helped Galatyne and Theta Tarn make contact with a faction of Lyfeian Knights who had formed an underground order, the Creuset de Lit - Crucible of Light - in opposition to the oppressive, anti-fey Lyfeian Order. These knights continued their service in the Order so as to keep abreast of its political maneuverings and place themselves in a position to resist its tyranny. They sought to restore the Order’s original purpose - the strengthening of the Light and the service of all people, regardless of race.

Things had indeed been going well. Then, less than a week ago, a priest had arrived at Ninon de Lit claiming to have been given a vision by Lyfaye that Robert Alain was dead, murdered by his fiancée. Beorhtric suddenly found himself “granted an audience with His Grace Archprelate Tirell VIII, Servant of the Servants of Lyfaye and Vicar of the Lady of Light.”

Unfortunately, Beorhtric’s “audience” came after sunset, when Kiriannin’s consciousness was dominant and his elven features manifested. Unable to decline the summons, Kiriannin wore a hat, but courtesy dictated that he bare his head in the presence of the archprelate. He of course declined, whereupon his hat was removed for him, and Kiriannin’s elven ears made their appearance before the most powerful personage of the Lyfeian Empire. Beorhtric/Kiriannin was promptly given new quarters in Nivernai’s deepest dungeon.

As soon as word of Kiriannin’s capture reached the others, Shadesong quietly began to prepare the Vivacia to sail while Dreamsinger, Galatyne, and Theta Tarn orchestrated a plan to free their companion. Dreamsinger had been asked to play in the palace of Nivernai one last time. The wedding of Robert and Lariandra had of course been canceled, but the king and the archprelate both agreed that Robert’s funeral should be combined with a feast honoring his achievements as a fallen hero in a crusade against evil. The event would provide sufficient distraction to allow the Illyrians to free Beorhtric - actually Kiriannin, as the rescue would take place after sunset.

Galatyne and Theta Tarn turned to their Lyfeian contacts for aid. The Creuset de Lit was only too happy to help get Beorhtric/Kiriannin out of Westermarck. His presence and knowledge of the resistance threatened all their efforts. They supplied Theta Tarn and the Illyrian Knights with Lyfeian garb and insignia and even secured a priest’s robes for Galatyne. They also arranged for a squad of Illyrian Knights to replace the guard in the East Tower of King’s Isle.

The plan seemed sound. Now, with just a little luck, Galatyne, Theta Tarn and the Illyrian Knights could have Kiriannin out of the dungeon and on board the Vivacia before anyone was the wiser. Dreamsinger would join them as soon as he could make a gracious exit. Then they could be on their way home...

The Illyrians marched passed the gold-flecked, white granite walls of Nivernai’s palace. It was still several hours before midnight and, though the iron-bound, oak doors of the great hall were closed tight against the cold, the sounds of the festivities within drifted invitingly into the night. Just ahead loomed the black silhouette of the keep wherein Kiriannin was being held.

Though simple in construction and plan, the square keep of Nivernai was nevertheless a formidable and foreboding place. A wooden drawbridge spanned the deep moat - more a crevasse - that separated the keep from the rest of the island. The moat joined the Artus at either end, and the water level rose and fell with the tides. The outer walls of the keep were daunting at twelve feet thick and thirty feet high, but the walls of the inner curtain rose to more than twice that height, due in part to the pitch of the rock on which the keep was built. The donjon rose higher yet.

Beyond the keep, and not visible from the main gate, stood “The Rock”, a triangular outwork on an island of stone connected to the outer walls by a narrow catwalk. Its base was pitched outward to prevent ships from hauling alongside, and the northern side was open, exposing it to fire from the higher walls of the keep should The Rock fall. A chain ran from The Rock to a tower on the far side of the harbor. In times of war, the chain would be raised to close the harbor to an enemy fleet.

All in all, the keep of Nivernai was not a place anyone would want to have to force their way into... or out of.

The party’s footfalls on the bridge echoed off the sheer stone walls of the moat as they approached the main gate. A door to the gatehouse opened, spilling warm light out onto the cold flagstones, and two watch serjeants emerged, rubbing their hands for warmth. Theta Tarn saluted the guards with a double clap of the right hand to the left breast, once with a closed fist, once with an open hand, and kept walking. The serjeants, recognizing the raiment of the Lit Salles, returned the salute and hurried back inside to the relative warmth of the gatehouse.

The Illyrians marched through the vaulted walkway of the gatehouse, with its three portcullises and two gates, to emerge in the outer ward. Before them towered the keep’s inner wall. A broad road led up and to the right, circling the inner wall and the rocky scarp on which it was built, to a second gate three quarters of the way around the outer ward. Theta Tarn turned left, ignoring the road, and led the Illyrians up a steep, narrow stair.

While it was a quicker route to the heart of the keep, the stair would be a brutal gauntlet for besiegers. With the donjon on one hand and the outer wall on the other, anyone on the stair would be subject to a punishing crossfire from the ramparts above. At the keep’s east corner, the stair ended and the ground leveled off for a space before another steep stair climbed to meet the broad road where it passed through the gatehouse to the keep’s inner courtyard.

Here, the two serjeants did not seek to hurry back inside, but demanded to know what business the party had within. Theta Tarn immediately saluted and pulled out a sheaf of parchment signed, courtesy of Shade’s contacts, in the archprelate’s hand and passed it to the nearest guard. Galatyne moved to stand next to her.

“The archprelate wishes the elf prisoner brought to him,” Theta Tarn said. “We are his escort.”

The serjeant holding the parchment looked to Galatyne in his priest’s robes.

Galatyne nodded once.

The serjeant handed the parchment back to Theta Tarn and indicated that they were to proceed with a nod of his head. “Donjon basement. The master serjeant will show you down.”

As they passed through the gate and turned the corner to enter the donjon, the voices of the serjeants carried to them from behind.

“A full squad for one prisoner?”

“...Darkness-damned elf... why they put him in the hole...”

“...all that ‘ave come through ‘ere... that one makes me nervous...”

“...expect ‘e’ll burn...”

Shadesong ri Lomenlindele hurried through the torchlit streets of Tyre toward the harbor. She wore a heavy wool cloak to ward off the chill. In her hands she clutched a long object wrapped in oiled canvas, a gift for her husband, Ghostdancer. It had not come cheap, and with the sudden change in plans, she had feared it might not be finished. The artisan, however, excited at having found a buyer for his masterpiece, had worked hard to put the finishing touches on the piece. He

had fairly beamed at the expression on Shade's face when he brought it out for her. Shade smiled herself, anticipating Ghost's reaction.

Shade slowed only slightly as she passed through the barrel-vaulted gatehouse in the wall between the city proper and the harbor quarter. The watch sergeants paid her no notice, and she continued on toward the waterfront.

She hadn't gone far when she saw ahead of her a Lyfeian priest and two knights of the Lit Salles standing in a crossroads. Considering everything else that had happened, their presence here could not bode well.

Shade stopped, but the priest saw her and pointed a finger in her direction. The knights nodded and began trotting toward her. Shade turned to hurry back to an alley she had passed not long ago and saw two more knights hurrying toward her. They had likely just come from the gate. With nowhere to go, she simply stopped and waited... and loosened the string around the top of her bundle.

When the priest and the four knights stood around her, the priest looked her over and said, "That's the one. Put her in chains."

One of the knights reached for a set of manacles on his belt but said, "Are you sure, sir? She looks normal to me."

"Idiot!" the priest spat, his face livid. "She's charmed!" He reached out and grabbed the vial around Shade's neck, breaking the chain and hurling it to the ground where it shattered, spilling its foul-smelling contents over the cobbles. Where the droplets struck, the liquid bubbled and hissed as it burned pits into the stone. "See that!" the priest shrieked. "Demon's blood! The bitch is one of them!"

Shade's elven features immediately asserted themselves. The knights looked shocked. Shade was shocked. How could he have known? There was no way he could have known. Not that it mattered now.

Knowing her fate, and probably those of her friends, were sealed if she was taken away in chains, Shade took advantage of the knights' stunned hesitation, reached into the canvas, and pulled out a greatsword - forty-five inches of white steel, three fingers wide, with a slight taper near the point. The hilt was wrapped in black leather and silver wire. A guard of upturned antlers shimmered red gold in warm contrast to the blade's stark silvery-white. As the blade cleared the canvas, the knights flinched back in surprise and drew their own swords.

Shade leapt forward and swung the blade effortlessly. Two knights raised their swords. Shade's blade sliced through both as well as the armoured bicep of one of the knights. He fell screaming. The other knight leapt back in surprise, staring at his shattered blade and his fallen comrade. Shade smashed the priest in the face with the antler guard and sprinted off down the dark street. Behind her a horn sounded. This was definitely going to mess with the plan.

Inside the great hall of the palace, Dreamsinger plied his skill with voice and lute as the feast attendees sat in rapt attention. He sang a version of the *Ballad of Demon's Gate*, rewritten to be suitable for a Lyfeian venue. The audience, and the archprelate in particular, seemed to thrill to anything involving the vanquishing of evil. As he finished the song, a familiar figure in a tight, red dress detached herself from the shadows along one side of the hall and made her way to the head table and an until-now empty seat between the king and the archprelate.

As Sarpana took her seat, Dreamsinger gauged the distance to the nearest door even as he calmly packed his lute. Too far, and knights were stationed along the wall around the room. There would be no running this evening... at least not yet.

“Bard!” a voice called from the head table.

Dreamsinger turned to face the king, his most accommodating expression in place.

“Yes, Your Majesty?” he asked with a slight bow.

“Come forward. Someone wishes to make your acquaintance.”

Dreamsinger picked up his lute and casually strode to the high table. Dessert was just coming out and a servant was placing a saucer of honeyed cake in front of each person at the king’s table.

“Your Majesty. Your Grace.” He nodded to each in turn. “Mi’lady.” He nodded to Sarpana and kissed the offered hand ever so carefully, wondering as he did if he had just been poisoned.

“The Lady Sosanna from Nemur was most impressed with your ability,” King Aleron said. “She believes she may have seen you play before and wishes to know from whence you hail.”

“I was born in Carasonne,” Dreamsinger responded without hesitating, thankful that he had studied Westermarck geography enough to name someplace about as far from Nemur as one could get, “but I have not called one place my home for many a year. While it is possible for you to have seen me play when last I was in Westermarck, I think it unlikely, as I would surely have remembered so beautiful a woman as yourself.” He nodded to Sarpana.

She returned his nod and smiled sweetly. “You indeed have a silver tongue, my good bard,” she purred. “I was certain I knew you. Perhaps it was the ballad that was familiar.”

“Perhaps, although it is a recent composition.”

Sarpana smiled again, then turned to the archprelate.

“Your Grace,” she said, voice dripping honey, “I hear you have captured one of those awful elves.”

“Indeed I have, Lady Sosanna,” the archprelate replied, “but you have nothing to fear from it. It is well chained.”

Sarpana traced a finger through the honey sauce on the plate in front of her. Dreamsinger, watching her every movement, would have sworn she traced a rune, though he could not identify it.

She licked the end of her finger. “I should ever so much like to see it.”

The archprelate paused momentarily, as if puzzled. “Why not,” he said abruptly. “Captain Rabican!”

“Your Grace?” A burly knight in the white mantle and fan-tailed helmet of the Lit Salles stepped forward from his post behind the archprelate’s chair.

“Take a squad and bring the elf up from the hole. We will display our prize in honor of The Hammer. But... be sure to chain him well.”

“Yes, Your Grace. Of course, Your Grace,” the knight answered and immediately started toward the hall’s great doors.

The archprelate held up a hand. “Oh, one more thing, Captain...”

Rabican stopped and turned.

“If the elf gives you any trouble, teach him his place.”

The knight nodded.

The archprelate fixed his captain with a knowing gaze. “You can expect he will give you trouble.”

The knight smiled. “I’m sure he will, Your Grace.”

Sarpana looked to Dreamsinger for a reaction. Seeing none, she smiled demurely.

“If that is all, Your Majesty, Your Grace?” Dreamsinger asked.

“Oh, yes, of course,” said the king, offering a dismissive wave.

Dreamsinger took his leave from the high table and returned to his seat. The evening was not going well at all.

The Illyrians followed Master Serjeant Amycus down the murky hall, past dark empty chambers with no doors. The overweight, boisterous warden had been only too grateful for anything that eased the monotony of his post.

“The basement was originally designed for storage,” the master serjeant explained as he walked, periodically lighting a wall torch with the lamp he carried. “No one in their right mind would consider besieging this place, so they haven’t been used in quite a while. We keep these ready to lay in supplies, though. One never knows.”

“No,” Theta Tarn said. “One doesn’t.”

Descending a second stair at the end of the hallway, they encountered a heavy oak door. The master serjeant opened it with a key from the ring he carried. As the door creaked open, the party was greeted by damp air bearing a fetid odor. Soft moans and the occasional cough drifted out through the doorway. Amycus led them in and down another long hallway. Instead of walls, this hall was defined by rows of bars that ran from floor to ceiling and separated the walkway from large common areas on either side. Though dark, the nose and the ear left little doubt that human beings occupied both areas.

Master Serjeant Amycus continued his tour, “This used to be a storage area too, but it was too damp and supplies moldered. We converted it into a holding area.”

He led them past the dungeon area and down yet another stone hall. He finally stopped before a large grate across the hallway. Again, the master serjeant reached for his keys and opened a lock on the grating. Pulling on the bars, a section swung out with a loud squeal.

“Good thing you brought a priest,” Amycus chuckled. “He might not be able to climb out on his own otherwise.”

Beyond the grate yet another stair, steep and with neither walls nor rails, descended into darkness. Down below, Galatyne heard the faint splash of running water. The paladin glanced at the master serjeant questioningly.

Amycus laughed. “You’ve never seen the hole before,” he said in understanding. “When they dug out these chambers, they hit a spring. The river leaks in here. It drains out through another crack, and it’s only a couple of inches deep, but it takes the fight out of the tough ones.” He laughed again.

Galatyne gave the man a hard look, and the master serjeant’s laugh ceased with an uncomfortable cough as he handed over a key.

“You’ll need this,” he said.

Galatyne took the key and stepped onto the stair behind Theta Tarn. One of the knights followed.

“Want some light?” the master serjeant asked, reaching for a torch on the wall.

“No thanks,” Galatyne answered curtly. “Dame Lyfaye, me donnent lit.” A soft bluish light radiated from the paladin as he descended into the darkness.

The water at the bottom was indeed only a couple of inches deep, but it was frigid. Crossing the chamber, Galatyne and Theta Tarn found Kiriannin chained to the wall. He had pulled his feet out of the water and locked them in a meditative position in order to stay dry. All of his weight was borne by his arms. Blood seeped from his wrists where the manacles took up the strain. He was

pale, and his breathing was weak and shallow. His eyes were open, but he seemed to see nothing, concentrating on staying alive.

“Hold him up,” Galatyne said.

Theta Tarn and the knight gripped each other’s wrists, forming a seat with their hands. They slipped their arms under Kiriannin and lifted him up. Galatyne unlocked the shackles and Kiriannin’s arms fell around the knights’ shoulders, and his chin dropped to his chest.

“Now, hold him steady. Rest easy a moment, Kiriannin.” Galatyne placed his hands on Kiriannin’s chest and began a soft chant. “La lumière soit à votre coeur. La Dame guérira votre corps. La Dame guérira votre esprit.”

As Galatyne chanted, a blue light spread from his hands and enveloped Kiriannin’s body. Gradually Kiriannin’s breathing became stronger. Blood ceased to flow from his wounds, and a healthy color returned to his skin. When his head came up, Galatyne ceased his chanting, and the glow faded.

“How do you feel?” Galatyne asked, keeping his voice low.

“Better,” Kiriannin answered. “Thank you.”

“What happened?”

Kiriannin knew what the paladin was asking. “Our entity friend had a hand in this. I could sense its presence during my audience with Tirell. I suspect it can glean knowledge from those it possesses and everyone it has inhabited knew that Rodin Rae killed Robert.” The elf’s eyes flashed. “I believe a reckoning is long overdue.”

Galatyne smiled. “All in good time, my friend.” He motioned to Theta Tarn. “The manacles?”

“On my belt,” she replied.

Galatyne found the manacles and turned back to Kiriannin. “I’m afraid were going to have to put these on you to get you out.”

“And here I thought I was a free elf.” Kiriannin smiled and held out his hands.

Galatyne snapped the iron about his wrists.

“You do have the key, don’t you?” Kiriannin asked belatedly.

Galatyne shrugged, then smiled. “Let’s go.”

Theta Tarn and the knight carried Kiriannin to the steps.

“We’re coming up!” Galatyne shouted. “Stand ready!”

At the top of the stair, three crossbows swung up to point down the stair.

Shade raced across the pier where the Vivacia was moored and dashed up the gangplank. The crew was making the final preparations to get under sail. She grabbed the nearest sailor.

“Haul in the plank,” she said. Then louder so the rest of the crew could hear, “Cast off the moorings. We’re getting underway. Now!”

The crew leapt to their tasks, and almost before Shade had found the helmsman, the Vivacia was sliding away from the dock. She found the grizzled helmsman up on the quarter deck calling out orders. As Shade approached, he took in the bloody sword and her pointed ears and frowned.

“What’s app’ned, lass?” he asked. “What about the others?”

“We’ll get them,” Shade answered. “Don’t worry, but I want you to get the Vivacia out of the harbor. Once you’re clear, make for the cove where we dropped off Falana and Satyir.”

The helmsman looked concerned. “What about you, lass?” he asked. “It don’t sound like ye be comin’ wi’ us.”

“I have to make sure the watch doesn’t raise that chain at the harbor entrance. I also expect a couple of Lyfeian man-o-wars will be getting ready to set sail any minute now. I’ll have to see what I can do there, too. Then I’ll find the others and we’ll meet you at the cove in two day’s time.”

Shade took a quick look around for anything she might be of use. She grabbed a boarding hook and tucked it in her belt, then looped a length of fine rope over one shoulder. A horn sounded in the distance. She didn’t have time to go gathering equipment. She would have to make do with her wit and.... She looked down at the sword she held. The mastersmith had put more into it than he would tell. It wouldn’t cut the harbor chain, but it just might fit into one of the links and jam the winch mechanism long enough for the Vivacia to get free of the harbor. She sighed, and dove over the rail into the cold water.

Shade was part sea-elf, but she hadn’t made much use of those skills in the desert, and she was shocked by the cold and the sudden need to breathe water. After a few disorienting moments, however, her old skills came back and she called out through the deep.

Soon a pair of dolphins appeared at her side. She clicked at them. They bobbed their heads earnestly in response. Shoving the greatsword through her belt, she looped an end of the rope over each of the dolphin’s noses and sped off through the dark water toward the harbor entrance.

The Illyrians made sure to keep their crossbows trained on Kiriannin as he was marched through out of the donjon. As the party rounded the corner of the donjon’s wall and started toward the gate in the inner curtain, they saw the watch serjeants conversing with a squad of Lyfeian Knights. They were Lit Salles. Bits of the conversation drifted up to them.

“...said they had come for the elf...”

“...had papers...”

“Wait... here they come now...”

They kept going. Nothing could be gained by turning back. After all, there was no other way out of the keep.

When they reached the gate, they were forced to stop as the squad of Lit Salles had formed a line in the gateway, blocking their passage. Three of them wore crossbows slung at the hip. The Illyrians fanned out behind Theta Tarn. Galatyne stood with Kiriannin behind them. Theta Tarn scanned the Lit Salles. Picking out a captain’s insignia, she approached the bearer.

“Is there a problem, Captain?” she asked.

Rabican folded his arms across his chest. “As a matter of fact, there is,” he said. “We were sent by the archprelate to escort the prisoner in your company before him at the palace. I was told by the night watch here,” he nodded toward the serjeant beside him “that you claimed to be escorting him to the archprelate. It would seem we have quite a problem.”

Theta Tarn turned to the watch serjeant. “You saw the signed order yourself?”

The guard, clearly uncomfortable but not timid, spoke up, “Yes ma’am, but I know Captain Rabican. I don’t know you.”

Theta Tarn appeared unruffled. “Well then,” she answered, “perhaps we should all go pay a visit to the archprelate.”

Behind her, Kiriannin looked nervously at Galatyne and was not comforted when he received a similar look in return.

The Lyfeian captain narrowed his eyes. “Perhaps we should,” he answered, cautious now. “But if you don’t mind-”

A signal horn from the keep's south tower pierced the night air, cutting off the captain's words. For a moment there was an uncertain silence on both sides. Then, Theta Tarn yanked her sword free of its scabbard, smashing the captain's face with the pommel. Blood sprayed from his shattered nose and he stumbled back into the knight behind him. Theta Tarn smoothly redirected the blade's momentum and sliced the throat of the watch serjeant next to her.

As soon as her sword had cleared its sheath, three crossbow bolts flew from the Illyrian line, and the three Lyfeian crossbowmen fell. Theta Tarn stepped up to the knight who had caught the Lyfeian captain and hammered his armoured wrist with her sword as he tried to draw his blade. Stepping in close, she grabbed her blade with her left hand, reversed her grip on the hilt with her right and thrust the point above his mail shirt, into his throat. As he fell, she stepped behind him and swung her blade around in an arc, connecting with the back of another knight. The blow sent him reeling forward onto the sword of one of the advancing Illyrians.

The fight was over in seconds. The other Illyrians had quickly rushed in to bring down the other knights and remaining serjeant.

The party looked around them. There had not been much noise, but this would not go undiscovered for long and there was no way to quickly hide all the bodies, let alone the blood.

Theta Tarn cleaned her blade on one of fallen knight's tabards. "Let's go," she said. "That was a trouble horn. They'll be sealing this place up. We have to move quickly now."

A door opened on the far side of the courtyard and light streamed out around an armoured figure in the doorway. They left the bodies in the shadow of the archway and hurried to the steps.

As he passed through the archway, Galatyne paused briefly by the fallen knights. "Mai la Dame eclairer votre voie d'accès," he said. "I'm sorry."

Kiriannin watched him, a studied expression on his face, but said nothing.

The party raced down the steps to the main gate, slowing as they approached so as not to raise concern. Two serjeants stood watch in the gateway. Two more were on the other side of the moat heading toward the palace. As the party walked through the gatehouse, three rapid horn blasts sounded from the keep above. Everyone froze. The guards at the other end of the bridge turned to look back at the keep. The horn sounded again - three blasts. The bridge guards took one look at the party standing in the gatehouse and took off at a run toward the palace. At the center of the Island, the great bell of Chapelle Eglise rang. Nivernai was under attack.

The two remaining watch serjeants drew their swords. They knew they had no chance, but would not turn away from their duty. Galatyne stepped forward to stand before one of them. Perhaps it was the priest robes, but the serjeant made no move to strike, but nor did he lower his guard.

Galatyne lowered his hood. "Put down your sword and you will live. We came for the elf. Nothing more. You don't need to die for mistakes made by your leaders. Please... stand aside."

"No sir," the guard replied flatly.

Galatyne had expected as much, but had to make the offer. He stepped in and to the side as the serjeant's sword snapped out toward his chest. He let the thrust slide along the mail under his robes and trapped the blade with his arm. He twisted, wrenching the guard's arm and slamming his mailed elbow into the guard's face. The serjeant dropped without a sound.

All eyes turned to the remaining serjeant who had not yet struck. He quickly sized up the situation, dropped his sword and slumped against the wall, hitting his head hard as he did so.

"Good man," said Theta Tarn.

The party ran across the bridge, then angled east toward the East Tower and the bridge to Tyre.

Dreamsinger was watching belly-dancers whirl around the center of the hall, hoping the Illyrians and Kiriannin were already on board the Vivacia and planning his own exodus, when the great bell rang. All activity and conversation in the great room ceased. For a long moment, the hall was filled with a stunned silence, then the oaken doors to the hall burst open with a bang. Everyone jumped.

Two serjeants raced up to the king and archprelate. Words were hurriedly exchanged in whispers; then a flurry of activity broke out as both Aleron and Tirell began shouting orders - knights ran to find their posts and prepare defenses; nobles hurried to organize their retinues; guests and performers fled the hall. Dreamsinger rose to follow them - at least he no longer had to worry about slipping out of the palace unnoticed.

At the head of the hall, the archprelate gathered a squad of Lit Salles and hurried out into the night, Sarpana close behind. Dreamsinger paused. He did not like the idea of the archprelate and Sarpana working on the same side. The astral witch had not betrayed the bard's identity, but that did not mean she was on his side. She was playing her own game. The question was, who was manipulating whom in this round. He quickly decided the two should be watched and hurried to catch up.

Outside, the archprelate halted as another knight ran up and informed him of the dead squad of Lit Salles and the other squad who took the elf. The archprelate was furious.

"Lyfaye will not let these traitors and that demon-elf escape," he growled. Then, calming, he began to chant, "J'invite les puissances accordées à moi et rassemble les chiens de chasse de la Lumière. Entendez-moi et servez-moi."

A white glowing mist formed just above the ground about fifty yards away. Out of the mist ran a pack of huge, dire wolves with snow-white coats. Their eyes burned with a blue-white luminescence. Once clear of the mist, they stopped, looked once at the archprelate, then howled and ran off toward the East Tower.

The Illyrians and Kiriannin quickly gained the East Tower. It was an impressive structure - the road from Tyre ran right through it. Inside, each of three floors had ramparted balconies that opened over the passage through the tower, allowing fire to be rained down onto assailants from all three floors. Fortunately, this night, only three knights occupied the tower, and thanks to Galatyne's and Theta Tarn's contacts, those were Illyrians. It wouldn't be long, however, before real Lyfeians began reporting to their posts from the palace and Chateau Harbin.

As they entered the torchlit tower, the group was joined by their three brethren. One of them handed a bundle of cloth to Kiriannin.

"Here," he said. "Put these on... quick."

Kiriannin looked over at Galatyne, held out his hands and raised his eyebrows questioningly.

"Oh, sorry." Galatyne pulled a key out of a pouch on his belt and opened the manacles.

Kiriannin unfolded the bundle and shook out a priest's white robes.

"Oh no," he said. "I think I'd rather be shackled."

"We don't want to have to explain why we are bringing the elf down to the harbor," Galatyne explained. "This was easier to cart around than Lyfeian armour, and the hood hides your ears. Now get dressed."

The knights all discarded their Lit Salle mantles and characteristic helmets.

Kiriannin sighed, stripped off his prison rags and shrugged into the clean priest garments. “Shut up,” he said, apparently to himself. “Just you wait. One of these days I’ll make you wear armour.” Turning to Galatyne, he said, “I’m ready. Let’s get out of here.”

They hurried out of the tower and onto the bridge that spanned the east fork of the Artus River. As they crossed the bridge, one of the knights pointed out toward the harbor and shouted, “Look!”

Everyone did. Out near the harbor mouth a Lyfeian man-o-war was burning. In the fire’s glow, another ship could be seen heeled over to one side, its deck almost at the waterline.

“This can’t be good,” Theta Tarn groaned. “Let’s move!”

They started off again, but a howl froze them in their tracks.

Galatyne whirled around to face the island. A faint blue glow encompassed his hands. “Something dark approaches,” he said.

Another howl pierced the night air. From the East Tower emerged a pack of six white dire-wolves. They were huge, their heads reaching nearly to shoulder height of an average man. They padded forward onto the bridge, gauging their quarry. As they approached, the unnatural fire in their eyes became apparent.

“I don’t suppose these are standard Lyfeian castle mutts, are they?” Kiriannin quipped.

No one responded.

A low growl issued from the pack leader, then with a loud bay, they charged forward. Galatyne opened his hands, and blue fire roared from his palms. Two of the beasts fell immediately, burned to ash. A third stumbled to one side, the flames eating away its body as it screamed in agony. As it burned, its form flickered between the white wolf and a blackened, leathery form with sickle claws and hooked, fanged beak.

Two of the wolves darted to either side of the bridge, around the fiery blast. The last leaped straight over the paladin. One of the wolves, as it dodged to the side around Galatyne, leapt up onto the raised low stone wall that served as the bridge’s railing.

“No you don’t,” growled a weaponless Kiriannin as he rushed the beast. He hit it square in the side with his shoulder and the thing toppled from the bridge, its claws gouging the stone as it slid away. Kiriannin rolled to the side to keep his momentum from carrying him over the side with it.

“So,” he said to himself, “this big, clumsy body does have a use after all.”

As Kiriannin sprang to his feet, he saw one of the wolves bury Galatyne under its snowy bulk.

The last wolf landed in the midst of the Illyrians who scrambled to get out of its way. As it landed, it grabbed one of the knights by the throat and shook, spraying red blood across its white coat. The wolf dropped the lifeless body to the stone. The other knights, recovering from the wolf’s landing, immediately rushed upon it, longswords drawn. The wolf lunged to one side. It caught one of the Illyrians with its massive shoulder and sent him tumbling over the low wall of the bridge into the air. His scream echoed off the stone walls on either side of the river.

Theta Tarn swung low and cut two of the beast’s legs out from under it. The wolf fell towards her. Unable to back up quickly enough, Theta Tarn found herself lying on the stone, her legs pinned beneath the wolf’s bulk. Unable to rise, it turned its snapping maw toward the Illyrian captain. Theta Tarn jammed her sword into its mouth and throat, burying it to its hilt. Still, the creature refused to die. Theta held onto the hilt, keeping the beast’s head away from her while the other knights literally hacked it to pieces and pulled her free.

Galatyne was borne to the ground by a mass of white fur. He couldn’t breathe. Struggling, he succeeded in freeing one hand and reached up and placed it against the creature’s belly. He

unleashed his fire, and the flames roared through the beast. It exploded in a blue blaze and a cloud of ash that left the paladin and a charging Kiriannin coughing and choking.

The wolves dead, the party hurried from the bridge, leaving two of their own behind. As they passed through the gate on the Tyre side, they were joined by the last three Illyrian knights who had been posted to the watch there. Everyone looked at one another in silence. They all knew this was going very badly.

“We can make it,” Theta Tarn said. “So far, we’re still ahead of everyone who is looking for us. I don’t know what happened in the harbor, but we have to find out if the Vivacia is secure. That’s still our best way out of here.”

They took a moment to compose themselves, then marched into the city looking like nothing more than a two squads of Lyfeian Knights and a couple of priests on official business.

The Illyrian entourage arrived at the North Harbor Gate to find the portcullis down. According to the watch serjeant, the South Harbor Gate was closed as well. Theta Tarn tried to get the serjeant to open the gate. They didn’t have much time before word from King’s Isle caught up with them, or worse, a company of knights.

“Lieutenant! Open the gate! We have to get down to the harbor!” she demanded of the serjeant on the other side of the portcullis.

“I would, ma’am,” the lieutenant replied shaking his head, “but they found another elf in here. We’re under orders not to open the gates for any reason.”

Theta Tarn looked over to Galatyne and Kiriannin in concern.

Kiriannin stepped up to the gate. “The elf escaped from the dungeon,” he said. “You heard the horns and the bell?”

The serjeant nodded.

“That’s why we’re here. He escaped and killed a score of knights before going over the wall into the harbor. If we don’t find him, many more people are going to die.”

The serjeant looked very nervous now, torn between orders, both of which made perfect sense.

“Besides,” Kiriannin continued, “If the elf is on that side and wants through this gate, a couple of watch serjeants aren’t likely to stop him.”

“It’s all right, lieutenant,” a voice called from behind the watch serjeant. “Let them in.” A tall, strongly built man wearing a lance marshal’s insignia and armour strode up the road toward the gate with two squads of knights.

Galatyne and Theta Tarn both let out a sigh of relief. He was their Lyfeian contact.

The guard sighed in relief as well, the burden of decision lifted from his shoulders. “Yes, sir, Marshal Brede, sir,” he said and raised the portcullis enough for the Illyrians to slip under.

When they were all through, the steel bars rattled closed again.

“I don’t like this,” Kiriannin said as they all set off toward the harbor. “If things don’t work out down here, we’re going to have a hard time getting back out.”

“Maybe we should just have heaved you over the wall,” Theta Tarn said. “You could likely have brought the watch to their knees within the hour.”

“Hey! It was working,” Kiriannin retorted. “He was getting worried. He’d have opened that gate any second.”

“Maybe we should just get to the Vivacia,” Galatyne interrupted.

“There’s a slight problem with that,” the marshal said.

Everyone stopped.

“The Vivacia fought its way out of the harbor just after you left for the keep,” Brede continued and began walking again.

The Illyrians followed.

“One of Tirell’s priests uncovered her captain’s elven nature and they had to make a run for it or they all would have ended up in chains. The ship took some damage from the tower ballistae, but got away.”

“What are we going to do, now?” Theta Tarn asked.

“I expect they’ll make for the cove where we dropped off Falana and wait for us there as long as they can,” Galatyne answered. “We need to find a way to get there.”

“We have a seahawk waiting at the docks to get us out of the city,” Brede said in answer to the anticipated question. “The seahawks are race-built galleons - fast and maneuverable. We didn’t have time to stock it for a long voyage, but I gather from our previous conversations that that won’t be a problem?”

Galatyne and Theta Tarn both nodded.

“That elf captain of yours did something to the harbor chain. The watch is still trying to unjam it. Once we’re clear of the harbor, we’ll follow your lead.”

“We?” asked Galatyne.

“Yes. Myself, these two squads, and two more on the ship will be going with you. I have no cover left here and we needed a couple of squads to leave to make it look like all my supporters went with me.”

“I’m sorry, marshal,” Galatyne said.

“Never be sorry for acting in support of a good cause,” Brede answered. “We knew this was a possibility. I’m glad I was in a position to help. There are others to carry on here, and we will continue to fight with you in Illyr. The Creuset de Lit will burn bright in two lands.”

Galatyne smiled. “Illyr will be happy to have someone of your experience, marshal.”

The group met no trouble on their way down the hill from the gate to the wharf, only a few searjeants running between the harbor and the gates. The harbor itself was another matter. It was in chaos. Ships were ablaze. Some were sinking at their moorings. The streets were packed - people running away, people trying to find out what was going on, crews running to their ships, knights and serjeants running everywhere.

“What happened?” Kiriannin wondered aloud. “The crew of the Vivacia did this?”

“My guess is Shade did this,” Galatyne answered.

“Shade? By herself?” Kiriannin asked, astonished.

“It has a Ghostly feel,” Galatyne replied. “Only someone who spends a lot of time around Ghostdancer could make this much of a mess.”

They made their way to the dock where their seahawk was waiting, only to find its rigging lying in tangled heaps on the deck.

“What happened!” yelled the marshal to one of the knights on the ship.

“I don’t know, sir!” he replied. “Everything was fine. We were just hauling up the main yard when everything came loose. Someone cut the rigging.”

Galatyne rubbed his temple in exasperation. “Shade.”

Brede swore. “We can try to find a ship at the Rose Wharf or head back to the commandery in the city and pick up some mounts-”

“I don’t think we are going to make it that far,” interrupted Theta Tarn as she drew her sword. “Look!”

Everyone turned to see what had concerned the Illyrian captain. Down the hill marched nearly two score knights followed by men in white robes, likely the archprelate and his priests.

Brede turned back to the ship. "Can you get one sail up?" he called. "We don't have any other way out of here now!"

"If I have to hold it in my teeth and lash my feet to the yard, I'll get a sail up, sir!" the knight yelled back, "but we won't be fast!"

"Just get me something to catch the wind!" The marshal turned back around and drew his sword. "We need to give my men some time."

A knight passed Kiriannin and Galatyne longswords from the ship.

"Ugh," Kiriannin complained. "How unwieldy."

The Illyrians, new recruits included, met the Lyfeians at the edge of the dock where the Lyfeians' greater numbers would not give them as much of an advantage.

From his position behind the archprelate and his attendant priests, Dreamsinger watched the battle. The King's Isle had been quickly secured following Kiriannin's escape. After unleashing the white wolves, Tirell had gathered two score knights from the preceptory at Chateau Harbin and set off for the harbor, leaving orders for a full company to be assembled and sent after him. Dreamsinger had followed them down the hill from the North Harbor Gate, intending to slip away and rejoin his friends once beyond the harbor walls.

Once near the quay, however, it became apparent to the bard that rejoining the others would be no easy matter. There was no Vivacia, and the Illyrians were forced into making their stand by an apparently crippled vessel. With beginning odds of nearly two to one and the outlook that they would only get worse, Dreamsinger figured he might do more good on this side of the battle line than the other, even were he able get there some how. He was not a warrior, after all. His skill lay in intrigue and guile.

The Illyrians started off well. They were able to defend the pier against the Lyfeians with little difficulty, the narrow approach evening the odds. But as reinforcements drifted in, the Lyfeians began to push the Illyrians back. Soon they were fighting next to the ship where men scurried about in the rigging, desperately trying to get a sail aloft.

Suddenly, a glowing mist formed out beyond the harbor entrance and grew steadily brighter. A long, winged shape appeared within and glided out onto the water. A smooth neck arched out in front of its graceful body, terminating in a serpentine head. Flame flickered in its open maw.

As the beast entered the harbor mouth, it became obvious that it was not a beast at all, but a boat. The hull was constructed of overlapping strakes of golden wood, giving the appearance of scales. The ship bore three masts - a square foresail, and two lateen sails, main and mizzen. It was these lateen sails, with their angular pitch that gave the appearance of wings. At the stern, a steering oar protruded from either side of the ship, more resembling legs than a guidance mechanism. The ship's stem arced up and out to a two-tiered forecastle shaped like a dragon's head. Elven archers stood poised upon the head and within the mouth where the fire glowed.

The ship glided up to the dock where the Illyrians were battling for their lives. As it came alongside, a hail of arrows rained down from the castles fore and aft as well as from the topcastles on the masts, and flaming arrows streamed from the mouth of the dragonheaded forecastle.

A boarding plank was pushed from the ship to the dock and elves rushed down to the pier led by Falana and Satyir, the former with face set in a mask of contained fury, the latter with a smile only chaos would wear.

The elves threw themselves against the Lyfeians, driving them back with lightning steel and feathered shafts. The Illyrians, exhausted, retreated toward the elven ship. As the elves fell back, Galatyne, Theta Tarn, Kiriannin, Falana and Satyir were left guarding the ramp. Two knights succeeded in grappling Falana and pulling her away from the others.

Falana's voice rose above the tumult, not in anger or fear, but in song. There was a thunderclap and lightning arced from her body to the knights, dropping them instantly. The lightning jumped to a half dozen more knights before expending itself. The rest of the Lyfeians nearly fell over themselves trying to backpedal from the "demon elf".

Dreamsinger was impressed. Unbeknownst to him, Falana must have been studying spellsinging. He wondered briefly if it might be something he could add to his repertoire. He also wondered how it was that Falana always seemed to know when Galatyne was in trouble and where he was. He would have to ask her... later.

"That is just about enough!" Tirell roared. "It's time to end this," and he began to chant. "Dame de lit et d'umbre, je vous invite pour me prêter le feu pour vaincre mes ennemis."

A faint white glow enveloped the archprelate. Around him, the priests took up the chant and the glow spread to encompass them all, growing brighter as their voices rose. Suddenly, there was a blinding flash. Dreamsinger reflexively squeezed his eyes shut. When he opened them, he saw an orb of white fire descending lazily toward the elven ship.

Below, Kiriannin grabbed Galatyne and pointed to the light on the hillside. As the white fire descended, Galatyne raised his hands. The orb turned ever so slightly toward him. Kiriannin swore and ducked. At the last second before impact, a wall of blue flame erupted between the paladin and the fiery orb. White flames rolled over blue. When they faded, Kiriannin and Falana were half leading, half dragging Galatyne aboard the ship. The dock was charred black around the place where the paladin and Kiriannin had stood.

The archprelate cursed and began the chant anew. Again, the priests took up the spell and the white glow returned. Dreamsinger doubted there would be any more shields below. As the glow approached the flash point, Dreamsinger noticed those about them turn their heads and close their eyes in anticipation. Impulsively, he rushed forward and pushed one of the priests... hard.

He didn't see what happened for there was instantly a blinding flash and he was thrown backward to the ground amidst a shower of flames. He quickly rolled away, beating out flames on his clothes, and leapt to his feet. Two priests lay dead. The rest, including the archprelate were down, but moving, if slowly. White flames burned around them. On the wharf, a portion of the dock and the Lyfeians who had been on it were gone. The crippled ship the Illyrians had originally been defending was in flames.

Around Dreamsinger, other bystanders were climbing to their feet and stumbling away. No one was paying him any attention. He looked again to where the archprelate lay on the ground and reached for his dagger. Out of the corner of his eye, Dreamsinger caught a movement and a flash of red cloth. Following the motion, he looked and saw Sarpana standing but a little ways off, unruffled and unscorched. Where she had come from, he had no idea. He hadn't seen her since leaving the island. He let his hand fall away from his dagger.

Sarpana threw the bard a withering look, but said nothing, so he waited and watched the elven warship as it glided away from the dock, swung gracefully around and headed toward the harbor entrance, picking up speed as it went.

As the ship approached the entrance to the harbor, a metallic clank rose echoed from the harbor watch tower. The great chain had been freed and was rising. It settled into place before the

elven fighter gained the entrance, but the ship didn't slow. A feminine voice rose from the ship's deck and carried aloft on the air. Those gathered in the harbor heard it clearly. Dreamsinger did not recognize the voice; it wasn't Falana's. They must have spellsinger on the ship. As the song continued, a great swell of water rose beneath the ship, lifting it over the chain. The elven fighter sailed out of the harbor into the night and freedom.

The archprelate rose to his feet and watched the elven warship slide away.

"Sosanna," he said, "meet me in my study in an hour. This is not yet finished."

Sarpana nodded and cast another withering glance in Dreamsinger's as the archprelate stalked down the hill.

Dreamsinger sensed that the time had come to make himself scarce and slipped off into the dark. He ran up the street to the North Harbor Gate where a watch serjeant stopped him.

"Message for the palace from the archprelate," Dreamsinger said. "The priests have taken casualties. They need help."

The serjeant opened the gate and let the bard through.

As Dreamsinger ran up the street, he was grabbed and hauled into a dark alley. He struggled and received a knock on the head with a knuckle for his efforts.

"Stop it!" hissed a voice.

Dreamsinger turned to see a wet, shivering Shadesong frowning at him.

"I didn't know bards were so wiggly," she said.

Dreamsinger rolled his eyes but let out a sigh of relief. "We need to get to a commandery," he said.

Archprelate Tirell sat in his private study tapping a quill pen on his desk. His face was a mask of barely controlled rage and the muscles in his face twitched slightly as he unconsciously clenched and unclenched his jaw. Suddenly he stopped his tapping.

"You say that ship was brought through a portal from the astral realm?" he asked.

"Yes, Your Grace," answered a silken voice from beside his desk.

The archprelate turned to face Sarpana, a scowl on his face. "Who could manage such a thing?" he asked.

Sarpana pursed her red lips and frowned as she pondered the question. One finger toyed absently with a stray ringlet of hair that hung down by her cheek. Finally, she shrugged. "I know not, Your Grace."

The archprelate resumed his tapping. "Very well. I will deal with this. You may go."

Sarpana curtseyed and glided out the door. When she had gone, Tirell rose and walked to the silver cage across the room. Inside sat a white dove. The dove cocked its head to one side as the archprelate approached the cage. He studied the bird for a moment, then smiled.

"I want you to find out who brought that ship here," he said, "and make them suffer. You will return here when you have accomplished your task. You will not stray from what I have bid you do."

The dove's eyes flashed red. It snapped its beak once and vanished.

Galatyne leaned on the rail of the Dawnspray as it glided smoothly over the astral sea, watching the swirling colors in the depths below. They had sailed around the coast and found the Vivacia in the cove as expected. It was badly wounded. Her hull was pierced in two places near the water line

and the stern bore fire damage. Rigging for one of the yards had been cut by a ballista bolt designed for such purposes.

Shadesong and Dreamsinger had shown up a day later, escorted by a squad of Lyfeian Knights sent out “on patrol”. They immediately prepared to set sail, but Satyir would be able to guide only one ship through the astral realm. Theta Tarn, Marshal Brede, and the elven commander had agreed that abandoning the crippled Vivacia in favor of the Dawnspray, the elven warship, was the best plan.

Shade would hear nothing of it. The Vivacia was her ship and she had acquired quite a bit of “merchandise” in Tyre, merchandise that would not fit in the hold of the sleek elven fighter. She had absolutely refused to leave the Vivacia, her first real command, or her acquisitions behind.

Galatyne, already frustrated at the loss of life associated with this venture, could not believe that anyone could place so much value on material goods with lives still at risk. He had stalked off without another word.

In the end, it was decided that Shade and her crew would remain behind with the Vivacia. The elven spellsinger and a company of Lyfeian - no, they were now Illyrian - Knights would stay with them. They would sail around the coast to Foristirilsartin Lisithir, the Dawnspray’s home port, and make repairs. There were indeed still elves on this side of the world that would not be leaving anytime soon.

Everyone else had boarded the Dawnspray and sailed off into the astral realm.

Kiriannin joined Galatyne at the rail.

“Good evening, paladin,” he said.

Galatyne looked at his companion and noted his pointed ears. “How can you possibly distinguish ‘evening’ in this place?” he asked.

Kiriannin shrugged, smiling. Then his face grew more serious. “Something troubles you, my friend.”

It was Galatyne’s turn to shrug. “It just seems like everything we try to do ends up in people dying. Many of those Lyfeians died doing their job - died because their leaders are misguided.”

“And worse than that,” Kiriannin continued for him, “they all died over one person. You’re thinking that if you had just left me in that dungeon, only one person would have died.”

Galatyne shook his head. “No. If we had left you in that dungeon, the archprelate would have extracted information, real or imaginary, that would have allowed him to fan the flames of hatred for fey in the people of Westermarck. Likely more people would have died had we left you there - people no less innocent than those that did.”

“So what vexes you so?”

“I just want to make sure I am not rationalizing what we did.”

“You want to make sure you were considering the greater good and not just coming to the aid of a friend.”

“I suppose. But then, I also suppose that in a world of self-interest, coming to the aid of a friend sometimes *is* the greater good.”

“Well, then,” Kiriannin said jovially, “Remember what Marshal Brede said? ‘Never be sorry for acting in support of a good cause.’”

Galatyne smiled.

Kiriannin clapped his friend on the back, and they both watched the colors slide by in the water.