

Chapter 6

Fangs of Scarak

“You will not be going,” Garm said once again. Wylinth had insisted on having a shouting match with him before he left with Hariter and Foster, and it left Garm grinding his teeth in frustration. Muldrix lowered his head in shame, but Wylinth refused to be told what to do.

“I will not stand idly by while you put yourself in harm’s way for my sake.”

“And we went over this yesterday, Wylinth,” Garm said, rubbing his forehead. “Until we are sure that Lord Trellin’s presence doesn’t reach here we need to keep you safe.”

“And what should I do if you are captured? Should I just wait out my days with Muldrix and remain unaware of what has become of you? What if General Mortiz is here? He could help—”

“Wylinth, I said no!”

Wylinth stepped back a few steps, clearly surprised from his sudden burst of anger as she folded her arms protectively over herself. Garm died a little as he peered into her face. It reminded him very much of Kitia, before... Shaking his head of the thought, Garm held firm. “I’m sorry princess, but my word is final. You are *not* going.” He turned and walked away before she could say more. He wasn’t sure he could say no if she made that face one more time, and he needed time to think about how he felt.

Within a few steps he had joined Hariter and Foster, and together the three of them headed towards Carag. The awkward silence followed, and Garm’s mind began to withdraw into

itself. *How could she think going into the city was a good idea?* he wondered. *It's like the woman has no sense! One moment she's playing it safe when guards are patrolling the road, and the next she's demanding to march straight into one of the most populated cities to possibly see one of her generals.*

He shook his head, baffled at her idiocy.

“Does that staff seem brighter,” Hariter asked, interrupting Garm’s thoughts.

Distractedly he glanced at his staff, unsure what Hariter was referring to. “Possibly. It never got brighter when we were on our way to you.”

“Uh, huh.” Reaching into his bag, Hariter pulled out a book and wrote a few things down as they walked.

Garm gave Foster a wink and a nod towards Hariter. The boy gave a smile and a nod of his own, and together they made sure the blacksmith stayed on course. Occasionally, a simple nudge or push from one side or the other helped keep Hariter on the road while he wrote his thoughts down. This didn’t last too long as soon the road began to slope a little and the smith put away his writing utensils as they walked the incline, mumbling about time lost that couldn’t be spent writing one thing or another. Garm agreed with his sentiments, if for his own reasons, but was grateful for the chance to focus on something other than Wylinth. Eventually the three of them came to the crest of the hill that overlooked the city of Carag.

“It’s beautiful,” Foster said, his eyes bright with excitement and unable to contain it as he bounced up and down on the balls of his feet. “You can even see the twin towers of Scarak.”

It was hard not to notice them as the towers rose above everything else in the city, their marbled surface alternating between white, red, and black that twirled into dagger-like tips. One

appeared taller than the other, but it was hard to tell for sure. They connected closer at the base, the building becoming one structure as the marble colors swirled around it. It held an otherworldly beauty that Garm was not ready for. *It's a miracle Muldrix didn't impale himself on one of those last night*, he thought. *But, that name...*

“Scarak of Carag?” Garm asked, raising an eyebrow. “I’m assuming there’s a significance to the name.”

“Indeed, there is,” Hariter said. “To bad no one can remember it.”

Garm’s eyebrows furrowed as he looked to Foster for an answer, but he just shrugged.

“I’m sure they have something about it in the city,” Hariter said with a chuckle as they resumed walking. “Whether in a library or from someone living in the city, I imagine we can discover it’s secrets. It just isn’t a story that is spread around the kingdom as much as the things that go on inside it do.”

“Then what kind of things happen in there?”

“It’s said to have the world’s biggest library,” Foster said, his eyes lighting up. “They say that it has records going back to the Founding of the Three Kingdoms.”

“You mean during the War of Three?” Garm asked. “I’ve never heard it called the Founding of the Three Kingdoms.”

“I doubt that would be common knowledge among the people of Trollox,” Hariter said with a snort. “Considering it was Trollox that caused the split to happen, I’d say we’re lucky to even have a history of those events.”

“Really? That’s not how I heard it.”

“And what do they teach the people of Tollox?” Hariter asked, sounding genuinely curious. “The people of Tollox don’t often come here, and only the people of Valibumn make the journey to trade with us so we don’t often hear from those come from your country.”

“I know a Valibu tradesman, although I’ll admit no one from my home ever made the trek out further than the country’s borders. Even with the tradesman I never really talked history or politics with him,” Garm said, rubbing at his beard. “All they really share in Tollox about the War of Three is that the people of Valibumn and Marbrent took the lands our people had been given before then. At least, that’s what they say.”

“I believe it’s the same problem we have now,” Hariter said, once Garm was done. “The Lord of Tollox had wanted more land and took some from both Marbrent and Valibumn. In the end he lost it to them when the two kingdoms fought him together, however, even that victory was short lived as the two kings couldn’t agree on who’s lands were who’s. So in the end a war started that engulfed all three lands.”

“Is that why they call it the War of Three?” Foster asked.

“I guess so. I’m not entirely sure why the Lord of Tollox even wanted those lands,” Garm commented. “I’m not even sure why Lord Trellin wants to be king over Marbrent now.”

“Hm, interesting,” Hariter said, rubbing at his bare chin.

He didn’t add anything more and they continued on in silence, the city wall and gate looming ever closer. As they neared it, some of those from outlying homes were making their way into the city, and many of them were beginning to give Garm’s staff a strange look, sometimes even scooting away from the trio.

“You need to keep that thing from glowing,” Hariter hissed out of the corner of his mouth.

“I was just beginning to think that too.” Lifting the staff, Garm set it on his shoulder and the light on top vanished.

“Don’t set it down until we’re well past the guards,” Hariter whispered. “That should help us appear inconspicuous.”

Once the staff stopped glowing the people around them allowed themselves to wander closer. They didn’t get too close, however, and Garm was worried that they would stand out too much because of it. But, as they came to the gate, everyone crowded together to fit through, and the guards took no notice of them as everyone filed in.

Garm relaxed, almost feeling like he could place the staff down when he saw it.

A red plume was making its way to them through the crowd, and Garm’s heart pounded in his chest. Memories of the Village Tam flooded his mind of soldiers wearing a red plumed helm filled his mind and he glanced around to make sure he had a way of escape. When the feather came into his view, he nearly collapsed with relief, and he chuckled little. It hadn’t been a soldier of Trollox at all; rather it was a shawl worn by a woman who had decided to add extra feathers to the already bejeweled cloth. Garm began to laugh, and he raised a nervous hand to his head. He really needed to look harder before coming to conclusions so soon.

“What’s the matter? You alright?” Hariter asked.

“I’m fine, just scarring myself.”

Hariter glanced back and Garm assumed he saw the red feather too, for he soon smiled. “I’m glad you can laugh, my friend. But please remember that we are trying to hide from the soldiers of Trollox. Let us go over here, this alley should be perfect for what we need.”

Garm’s mirth evaporated as they entered the alleyway. “What do you mean? I didn’t see any soldiers out there.”

“Yes, but that is not the same as finding them within the city walls, and your laughter drew a few eyes. Now, get your staff to glow, the sooner we know where we are going the better.”

Garm set his staff upright, the space between its branches started to give a faint glow. Leaning it forward toward the Scarak Towers, however, caused the once before empty space to flare with a bright light, showing them where they should go.

Hariter and Foster appeared pleased with this result, but Garm had his doubts about the item. Ever since the Seer had given him the staff he had doubts about the true nature of this quest they were on.

“That staff has been imbued with magic and will now lead you both to the thing you seek.”

But what was *he* looking for and what was this *magic*? The staff did glow without a fire, and it reminded him of stories he had been told as a child of men and warriors who held great power and could command the elements to their bidding. But he had never heard it described before as magic, and as far as he was concerned this quest was for Wylinth, not him. He had everything he’d ever wanted with Muldrix, so what could he possibly need that would require this staff to find it.

Hariter finished the last of his notes, jotting down the direction that the staff was glowing and then measuring the how far the light glowed from the staff.

“What are you doing that for?” Foster asked, sharing in Garm’s curiosity over the Blacksmith’s actions. “We already know it’s pointing that way.”

“I believe there is a direct correlation between the distance of the staff with whatever it is we are looking for and its effect on how bright the illumination is,” Hariter said, as he recorded a few more measurements. Looking up to Garm and Foster and, seeing their confusion, he added, “I believe that the closer we get to the thing we need, the brighter the staff will glow.”

“Ah,” Garm said. He thought he understood the first part but was grateful for the explanation, nonetheless. “Well, let’s get moving. We shouldn’t let this shine for too long. Even if Lord Trellin’s influence isn’t this far North we should make sure that we aren’t drawing too much attention to ourselves.”

Together, the three of them made their way through the streets of Carag. The staff continuing to lead them in deeper to the heart of the city where the towers of Scarak loomed over everything. What he had seen and felt was beauty from a distance now made Garm’s skin crawl with discomfort. The Towers’ hulking shapes were like the fangs of a snake waiting to sink their teeth into something as venom and blood dripped down it’s sides in rivers of black and red. He shivered, despite the early summer air.

The bustling crowds did nothing to sooth Garm, either. As they walked through the main market, people all around were offering their merchandise to them, calling out for new furs, or another offering to sell him some amulets that could be tied to his staff for good luck. One of the amulet’s looked as if it could have been one of Muldrix’s teeth, pulled from a dragon’s mouth and drilled through to allow a rope to let it hang from the wearers neck.

This last one had given Garm pause as he stopped to stare at the necklace.

“Would you be interested in buying one, sir? It would help bring an end to some of your troubles with finding the right woman...” the shop keeper with his thick Valibu accent said, his voice trailing off as his eyes grew wide at Garm.

“Come on,” Foster said urgently, grabbing Garm by the shoulder and pulling him along. “Don’t make eye contact. Keep your head down and follow me.”

Garm nodded dully but found it hard to keep his eyes on the road, especially when the merchants would try to shove things under his nose to grab his attention. But his mind kept going back to that fang the merchant had been trying to sell him. *I thought dragons were only being hunted in Trollox*, he thought, concern for Muldrix and Wylinth rising within. *I shouldn’t have left them alone together. They’ll likely cause some more trouble if I know those two.*

He was about ready to turn around and leave when Hariter and Foster pushed him into another alleyway.

“What was that?” Hariter hissed at him. “Are you trying to get us arrested?”

“Arrested?” Garm repeated. “I have no idea what you—”

“That man, with the dragon tooth,” Foster said, his eyes wide with...shock? Awe? Wonder? Garm wasn’t sure what it was, but he hadn’t seen that look on the boy’s face before and something about it unsettled him. “When he was trying to sell you the necklace, you sort of froze, and your hands began to glow.”

“They began to...glow?” Garm asked, the uneasy feeling making its way to his limbs.

“Uh-huh, but not like the staff. It was more of a reddish glow, like an ember.”

Garm had to force himself to swallow. *This isn't right. That Seer woman did something to me.* He looked down at his quivering hands. What *did she do?* he wondered. It had been a few months since they had last seen her, but nothing else had come of their encounter. Why had this taken it's time to manifest? Was it because of his reaction to the Valibu tradesman and the dragon tooth? Thinking back to it, all Garm could remember was feeling anger, welling up inside of him.

He glanced at Hariter, and the man seemed to know what he was thinking, for he spoke up quickly. "Let's get some measurements while we're here. No sense in wasting our time worrying about things that can be explored back with the others."

Garm nodded, grateful for the excuse to turn his mind to other things.

Taking the new measurements, the trio made their way back into the crowded street and towards the center. Garm was worried that his mind would focus too much on going back to Muldrix and on what Foster had seen, but, luckily, they were starting to pass by the all the food merchants. The smells of freshly baked bread and pies reached all their noses, and Garm couldn't resist using a few scales to buy a few treats for them and a loaf of bread to have for later. It didn't erase what he had done, or tear his mind away from the problem, but it did help give him something to do while he mulled it over.

I can focus on this after we're done here, he reasoned with himself. Once I am out of the city I can evaluate my actions then.

Satisfied with his answer, he pressed on.

It took them about another hour before they reached the gates to the towers of Scarak.

“It’s something inside there?” Garm asked in disbelief, a sinking feeling coming into his stomach at the thought of going into the dark towers.

“That’s not for certain,” Hariter said as they stood in another dark alleyway just a block away from the tower walls, taking down the last of his notes. “There is a good chance that we are meant to keep going beyond the towers. Let go around for a little bit and see if the light points us somewhere else.”

They kept going, deciding to wait to check the light until they were about a quarter of the way around. Garm fidgeted with the staff the whole way, worried that he would point it the wrong way and reveal themselves to people. Unable to shed his fears, he made sure he was constantly pointing the end of the staff away from the towers, while trying to make it seem normal he was doing so.

“This is a good place to stop,” Hariter said, walking into another alleyway to the East of the towers as Garm and Foster followed. “I think we’re plenty far from prying eyes. You should go ahead and point your staff, then that should help us determine which way we need to go.”

He pointed the staff Northward, hoping that the light would continue to glow that way still.

It remained dull.

The space between branches on top of the remined dark and Garm’s stomach dropped as he turned the staff towards the towers of Scarak. The blossoming end of the staff grew brighter until it was clear that it was pointing at the center of the city. Garm cursed, moving the staff away so it would no longer shine.

“Well, I guess that was to be expected,” Hariter said, writing down a few notations. “So, shall we go inside?”

Garm looked at him with a bemused expression. “Go inside? Isn’t this supposed to be the building for the City Lord, or whoever governs the area? And how do you propose we manage a feat like that?”

Hariter smiled. “Well, Foster did say it was the world’s biggest library, why don’t we start by going in and seeing if the thing we need is on that side first. If it isn’t, I’m sure there will be a way for us to switch sides after the matter.”

Garm hesitated. Could he do this? This whole thing had seemed contrived ever since the Seer woman had given him the staff. What could he, Muldrix, and Wylinth need that resided within those towering structures? What twisted sort of fate would bring them together for the sake of achieving something that required them to go through so much?

Unless she couldn’t do it on her own, he thought, the idea popping into his head as Foster and Hariter lead the way towards the tower gate. Muldrix and I could have the peace of life we want if she was queen. No more running, hiding, or scrimping for food. It would be good to stop running, gods only knew I could use the breather. But was this all necessary? Wasn’t there an easier way to accomplish the same goal?

Garm followed slowly, uncertain where fate would lead him.

They were able to get in through the gates without problem. Garm did have to pay for their way in, and worried about the guards stopping them, but Hariter brushed the concern aside. “These men see hundreds of faces a day, and we aren’t wanted fugitives. Adding three more faces to their day won’t hurt us.”

He's right, I'm just being paranoid. But Garm still couldn't shake the worry of their need for speed.

As they walked towards the tall towers, they welcomed the shade and coolness that the towers supplied as they set to finding a place where they could point the staff. Down by the doors, just as they entered, they found a secluded alcove just inside the tower but with a clear view of the tower grounds. Garm let himself relax a bit, knowing that he had a path of escape if he needed it. Taking his staff, he held it forward pointing between the two towers to see if it would still light up. It began to glow faintly, which made him frown. Until Hariter had mentioned it, he had never considered the brightness of the light from his staff and it surprised him that it could vary in it's intensity.

"Point it to the right," Hariter requested, indicating the doorway that was heavily guarded with soldiers.

Garm did so and the staff became dimmer, the light eventually fading to nothing.

Nodding, Hariter pointed to the library entrance and Garm complied. The staff immediately lit up, causing their alcove to shine bright enough to be noticeable. Jerking the staff away, Garm killed the light before anyone could precisely pinpoint where it was coming from.

Two guards from the City Ruler side of the Scarak Towers, however, came over to investigate. Hariter and Foster started to search through their packs and Garm did his best to look casual, which was pointless as his face turned a bright flame red. *At least I've got my beard to hide half of it*, he thought, hoping that his facial hair would make a difference.

"What's going on here?" one of the soldiers asked, looking between the three of them.

Garm opened his mouth to speak, but Foster beat him to it.

“I’m sorry, sir,” Foster said, trying to appear downcast. “I wanted to try flash powder and didn’t think it would startle anyone.” He held out his hand where he held a handful of shiny gray powder.

The guards frowned and Garm wondered if they were going to ask for a demonstration. He had never heard of flash powder, but he was fairly certain the boy had made it up on the spot to help get them out of trouble.

“Try to keep that out of the Tower grounds, there’s enough books here to keep the city lit for a week if they caught fire.” The guard looked to Hariter. “Master Smith, I expect you’ll keep an eye on the boy to make sure he’ll behave?”

“Of course. It won’t happen again,” Hariter said, giving them a low bow but unable to hide the shock on his face.

The guards nodded to Garm as well before moving back over to the City Lord’s tower.

“Do you think he recognized you?” Garm asked, unable to feel the relief the other two clearly felt with their relaxed postures.

“No, I don’t think they did. Good job, boy,” Hariter said, scratching his chin. “That was some quick thinking.”

“How did they know you were a smith?” Garm asked, still not satisfied with Hariter’s answer.

“Must have been my beard. I thought it was something only my master did when he had taught me smithing, but perhaps it is more prevalent here.”

“Maybe,” Garm said, unable to relax. “But we need to make sure we aren’t singled out again, otherwise people will start to question who we are.”

Without giving them the chance to agree, Garm led the way into the library. He didn't have any expectations of what a library might look like. Lights above, he barely even knew how to read. But walking into the first room took his breath away.

Filled from floor to ceiling were rows and rows of books, some rolled up neatly as a scroll, others bound in hard leather with pages you could turn. A thing Garm had only heard of being possible just before he had found Muldrix. The whole place was amazing, beautiful, and he suddenly had the desire that he could have it all to himself. He closed his mouth, just realizing his had been gawking at the awesome sight before him and hoping he hadn't stood out with his face looking like a fish.

Glancing to Foster, he smiled to see that the boy had on a similar expression. Hariter's jaw hadn't been hanging like theirs, but he had on the biggest grin as his eyes roved the building.

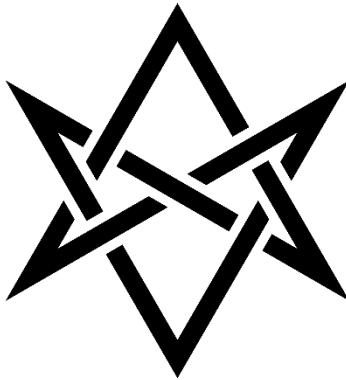
"This place is beautiful," the Smith said, mirroring Garm's thought from a second before. "Would that I could spend my whole life in these books."

Garm let them both have a few more seconds to enjoy the scene before leading them away. "Come on. We should keep going."

Hariter reluctantly agreed, but with Foster they had to practically drag the boy as he continued to remain oblivious to everything around him except for the library itself. Even as they half dragged, half lead, his eyes gazed sorrowfully at the rows and rows of books they passed by.

"I could spend an eternity in this place and never be satisfied," Hariter muttered just loud enough that Garm could hear. "Is that what I think it is?"

They stopped, and Garm looked to where the smith was pointing. Up on the side of a bookshelf was a unicursal star. Its six lines intertwining and weaving around each other.



“What is for?” Garm asked. Something about the symbol seemed familiar but he couldn’t quite place it.

“That is the Hyrare, symbol of the gods and their elemental powers,” Hariter said turning down the row. His fingers fluttered as he mumbled off the names of books from the shelves. “I have been waiting almost a lifetime for a chance to get my hands on a book from here.”

“What book?” Garm asked as Foster followed his master down the aisle. Garm reached out to stop him but found that both boy and master were beyond his reach. Breathing out a heavy sigh, he followed them down the rows of books.

“It was a book called *Truths of Hyrare*. It’s an older text, dating back to before the War of Three, and is said to contain the basic understanding of Hyrare,” Hariter said, his eyes dashing back and forth across the shelves. “With your staff, and what happened earlier, I think it would be an excellent idea to have a book on the topic.”

Garm glanced at his staff. This wasn’t something from the gods. It had been from the Seer, a crazy old lady in Capilu Mountains who helped weary travelers on their way home. It was special, but he doubted it was something of the gods like this Hyrare was. “What *is* Hyrare anyway?” he asked, hoping to get some clarification.

“Hyrare is the power of the gods,” Hariter said, going up and down the books still. “It is the power of control over the elements. Once blessed you can call on them for aid or bend them to your will in fights against evil.”

“So the legends say,” Foster added, rolling his eyes. “The legends say a lot of things, but that doesn’t always make them true. Obviously your people forgot about how the War of Three started, and—”

“And scholars have already agreed that Hyrare couldn’t exist,” Hariter said, cutting Foster off and sighing. “I need to quit having debates with you.”

Foster grinned and Garm couldn’t help but join him. But with each second he could feel time pressing on him to hurry back to Muldrix and Wylinth. “We should get going,” he said, passing the staff back and forth between his hands. “I don’t want to leave those two back there longer than we need.”

Hariter grimaced and tugged on his chops with both hands. “It must be here!”

Garm walked over and laid a hand on Hariter’s shoulder. The blacksmith turned to him reluctantly. “If we have time, I promise we will come back and look for your book.”

Hariter gazed at him, making his insides churn with guilt. Garm hated confrontation, and when he had to look at someone, it made him feel like they were trying to peer into his soul as they stared back.

“Alright, Garm. We’ll go,” Hariter said, his shoulders slumped as he led the way.

Again, Garm felt a twinge of guilt but didn’t allow himself to hold onto it for long. They needed to find what the staff was leading them to, and he couldn’t wait for a book that might help Hariter understand more about this Hyrare.

So, they pressed on, the staff eventually stopping them down an aisle of books, with no direction to go next. After debating for a few minutes, Foster suggested tilting the staff up, and as Garm did so, the light grew even brighter.

“It seems whatever we are looking for it just up above,” Hariter commented, rubbing his bare chin. “Perhaps we should go higher up the tower to see if it does the same thing?”

Annoyed at the prospect of wasting more time, Garm frowned, but reluctantly agreed. They went up the library stairs to the second floor and tried again. The staff lit up once more and Garm felt a trickle of excitement at the prospect of progress. “Whatever we need must be up the tower. Quick, the higher we climb the faster we will find it.”

Although what that thing was he still wasn’t certain, but he knew it must be here for the staff continued to lead them up through the Scarak tower. Eventually they came to the last floor of the library, or at least according to the sign posted at the top of the steps when they reached the fifth landing.

The floor was empty, except for a few tables that had been set up where the cities locals were studying books they had gathered from down below. This was also the first floor that had windows open to view the city, and Garm walked carefully across the room to the nearest one. He made sure he didn’t hit anyone with his staff while keeping its top pointed down to avoid lighting the place up. He hated being this high up in a building with only one escape, but it had to be done. *The last thing I need right now is to get caught in this accursed tower. But do I even need to be here?* He still wasn’t sure what could even be here that could help him.

Foster and Hariter followed close behind him, the blacksmith puffing along, as they all looked out from the window. Looking out at the city around them, the view from their location in

the Scarak tower was amazing. Garm could see for miles further than he had been on the ground level, and he thought he saw the road they had taken to get into the city by.

“This is amazing,” Foster said softly, his mouth hanging open. “It’s almost like you can touch the clouds.”

“Almost. But not quite,” Hariter said, grunting as he sat down in a chair behind them. “So where are we to go next?”

Garm turned to the room filled with patrons reading their books, writing, or even just relaxing. “I can’t shine the staff here. Everyone will see, and I don’t think those guards would do well having something light up if it could be confused with fire,” he whispered to them.

Hariter opened his mouth to argue but was cut off by Foster.

“How about a distraction?”

“What kind of a distraction?” Hariter asked slowly, eyeing the boy suspiciously.

“I’ll run across the room and shout that I see something out a window,” Foster whispered, his eyes wide with excitement. “That way I’ll draw their attention away from you two and you can see where we need to go.”

Garm and Hariter looked at each other. “I don’t know Foster, that seems—” but before Garm could finish his sentence, the boy was racing across the room.

“Dragon! Dragon, dragon. There’s a dragon outside.”

Everyone, the guards included, got up and ran to one of the windows near Foster as everyone tried to grab a glimpse of Foster’s imaginary dragon.

“Certainly is an effective whelp,” Hariter mumbled. “Well get on with it before someone see’s us. That boy needs a good talking to when we’re all done here.”

Garm’s mouth twinged a little, threatening a smile as he lifted up the staff and pointed it around the room. It didn’t light up at anything, but it did as soon as he pointed it towards the ceiling. “Great, now how are we supposed to get up there?”

“Simple. We’ll walk.”

Garm responded with a flat stare.

“What?”

“There are soldiers guarding the stairs. I don’t think its something that we can easily access now.”

“We could sneak past those guards now,” Hariter said, pointing towards the crowd by the window. But just as he said it, the guards sidled on over back to their spots. “Or not.”

“Where’s Foster? I think I know how we can get our way up there.”

“I’ll grab him,” Hariter said as he moved into the crowd.

Garm watched, surprised to see that Hariter wouldn’t have just called the boy over. The blacksmith made his way through the crowd until he was beside the boy and then froze. The action sent thoughts of Muldrix flying around the city through Garm’s mind, and his hands began to sweat, becoming slick against the cold wood of his staff, and his breathing coming in quick short gasps. He rushed over to the window only to be stopped by Hariter.

“It’s not Muldrix,” the blacksmith hissed into his ear. “But there is a dragon out there.”

Garm nodded and then proceeded to take deep breathes, hoping he could control his panic before it took control of him. *And I'm the leader of our group? Perhaps someone else should lead?* He let the thought go and asked Hariter, “How can you be certain?”

“Well for one, its bigger, and its scales are browner than his,” Hariter said, still keeping his voice lowered, “and this one has a rider.”

Unable to calm himself enough, his heart still pounded away in his chest. Reaching out, Garm grabbed onto a window some onlookers had left to help steady himself. Down below was a dragon more than double Muldrix’s own size. Its scales still carried a faint tint of green, but for the most part they were a muddy brown. Unable to believe that Hariter had been right, Garm watched, mesmerized, as a man hopped off a saddle that had been strapped to the dragons back. Around the man and his dragon were soldiers marching towards the tower of Scarak. At the front of the line was the flag bearing a red spider on a field of black. The symbol of Lord Trellin of Tollox.

“I guess it’s a good thing the Lady didn’t come here with us,” Hariter whispered to Garm’s right.

“Yes, but now it means that we need to get what we came for and get out of here,” Garm replied, touching Foster of the shoulder, and whispering it was time to go. His heart refused to slow. Even if he didn’t have Wylinth just outside the city he did not want Lord Trellin to find out that Muldrix was here either. *And how is he riding his own dragon?* Garm wondered. *I thought he had killed all the dragons in Tollox.*

With his thoughts weighing him down, they made their way to the stairs guarded by Carag soldiers. They hadn’t talked about what to do next, but Garm was fairly certain he knew how he could get past the guards with hopefully little to no trouble.

“Where do you think you’re going?” a guard asked.

“We wish to see the museum,” Hariter answered, and Garm wished he had thrown more authority behind the words.

“It’s closed today, by order of General Mortiz for the official parlay between Tollox and Marbrenth.”

“We saw him just land, surely we could have a look around before they make their way up?” Garm said, pulled out a bag of scales and making sure to clink them together as he loosened the top, allowing the soldiers to take a peek as it shimmered emerald, green scales inside.

The guards paused, and Garm knew that he almost had them. Reaching to his waist, he pulled out a second bag and placed it on top of the first one. Both guards stared at his hand in shock, and he could see a light in their eyes as they looked over the scales he was offering them. What he held was easily a few years’ worth of pay for a farmer, so it wasn’t hard for him to guess that this would be at least a year’s pay, possibly more, for a soldier.

He allowed them another moment to gawk over the money he held before clearing his throat. The pair shook themselves as the closest one reached out and took both bags. He handed the second one to his companion before he nodded to Garm and his companions. “You may go but be quick. General Mortiz and the Lord Trellin will be meeting up here soon.”

Garm nodded to the guards as he and the other two passed by.