



## Blackengorge - Prelude - Empty Mansion - Scene #6 - Respite!

Sep 1, 2010

...continues from [Scene #5](#)

### Synopsis

*The 1st Day of Ches in the Year of the Sudden Journey*

Zero and Tradden have successfully infiltrated an old mansion overrun by bandits. Discovering a trapdoor in the floor of the house they have gone underground and found a restrained Dwarf, Khalin in one of the basement rooms. After surviving a swarm of bats, and an attack from savage giant rats, they found another captive, a half-elven Wizard, Kireth, trussed up in an old pit. After searching what looks like an abandoned camp within a mine they have also found an elven Cleric, Celestia. Leaving the mine via a lift platform in a shaft they encountered the owners of the camp - bandits! After successfully defeating the bandits, they have trudged back to Deepingwald to alert the watch, and to get the respite they have earned.

- [Khâlin Grundokri](#) - 1st Level Male Dwarven Warlord
- [Tradden Aversward](#) - 1st Level Male Human Fighter
- [Zero Uhlit](#) - 1st Level Male Human Rogue
- [Kireth Majere](#) - 1st Level Male Half-Elven Wizard
- [Celestia Gaia](#) - 1st Level Female Elven Cleric of Melora

### Scene Length

This scene starts on Wednesday 25 August 2010 and is expected to be completed by the end of Saturday 28 August 2010. Players are expected to be able to post at least twice a day.

 Me: *The walk back to Deepingwald took quite some time. The party set off at a good pace and in good spirit, led by Khalin's unearthly endurance and the thrill of victory in combat, but soon faltered as the injuries to Tradden and their growing exhaustion slowed them down somewhat. The fighter tried his best to keep up a good pace and to keep his cheery disposition, but the events of the day were taking their toll.* Aug 25, 2010

*All of the group had been trained how to fight in one way or another. There were many traditions still left within the Free Peoples, and being ready for armed combat was one of them, albeit not commonplace. With no enemies to speak of on the Islands, the only real need for armed aggression was a vigilance against attack from a horde across the seas. After generations of peace, the art was dying out.*

*The dwarfs kept the best trained militia in their Border Watch. An active and trained militia unit with hundreds of volunteers. Many times they were out on 'manoeuvres' and practising battle techniques. Khalin had spent some time within their ranks and learned his trade there, even to the point of leading one small unit recently.*

*Kireth had been schooled in the arcane arts in Deepingwald, by the few remaining mages keen to keep their art alive. With access to the remaining knowledge brought across from the mainland he had built up his skills, ever thirsty for more. Wizards' final tests were often combat based, and even sometimes deadly, but nothing could compare to the blood, sweat and tears of real engagement.*

*There were always a number of ruffians in Deepingwald, and those that could handle themselves with a blade or mace to help the Watch keep them under control. Tradden was one of these blades, self-taught and capable of overpowering a foe and bringing him to justice for a fee. Tradden was keen to collect such fees as he had amassed a not-inconsiderable amount of debt having recently got carried away with his early successes and the taste for fine clothing and premier living accommodation that they had allowed.*

*Born into wealth, Zero turned his back on the family business, having no desire to be a merchant. Like a number of the middle and upper classes he was smart and silver-tongued, avoiding or talking his way out of trouble. However, with the money to spend on training, he had learned blade and the crossbow, having to use both at times as well as his nimble fingers to avoid angry parents and the thugs they set upon him after 'honest mistakes' with jewellery and possessions and wives and daughters alike.*

*The elves were more secretive in their ways and although they were often masters of the bow they had no trained militia that is known. Their traditions were stronger, though, less generations had passed since The Downfall for them, and religion and ritual were important. Celestia was one of those chosen by her people to be trained in the clerical ways. For what end, only the elves would know.*

*For all their training, though, none of the group had ever experienced anything like today. The sheer violence, terror, pain, and ferocity of the attack from the bandits had ingrained itself on their memories. None had escaped unscathed. They had experienced something very few on the Islands would ever experience and it had had a profound effect.*

*For most part, the journey back to Deepingwald was silent - each of them contemplating the events and their future. Although the battle had been terrifying it had also been exhilarating, and they were all hungry for more. How this desire could be satiated was unknown.*

 Me: *As the walls of Deepingwald came into view a visible wave of relief passed over the party and they gathered speed. The river path led them to the North Gate just as the sun finally set. River barges were still loading and unloading and the bustle of the Gate made it hard for the party to get through.* Aug 25, 2010

"We should go straight to the Watch," suggested Tradden. "Our tale needs to be told as soon as it can be. Who knows what else these bandits were up to, or who else may be chained up elsewhere.

"Then to an apothecary with you, Master Dwarf, those rat scratches look rather red now. I could do with some salves, too. Maybe the Watch have their own healer who can help us - perhaps we should try there first?"

*Pushing past the crowds at the Gate the group made their way towards the main Northern Watchtower. Passing the Watch Guards out front they moved into the main entrance hall and asked the clerk on duty for the Watch Captain.*

"He knows me," grinned Tradden. "I've done some work for him before. This time I'm hoping for a bigger reward."

*After a short while a large burly man in Watch uniform strode out into the hallway. He inspected the assembled group in front of him - a rag-tag bunch they were. Bloodstained, filthy, and smelling faintly of rat faeces and bat guano the group were not an impressive sight or smell. The Watch Captain wrinkled his nose.*

"Oh, it's you," he stated flatly, looking at Tradden. "It's late and I am tired. What do you want this time?"

"We have some information that you may find, er, valuable," replied Tradden with a sideways wink at Khalin. "Maybe we should discuss in your office? We could also do with the assistance of a healer if possible."

*The Watch Captain reluctantly agreed and ushered the party into a large office adorned with paintings and tapestries of scenes of battle and rather gaudy ornaments. Sitting himself behind a large desk the Watch Captain nonchalantly ignored the usual etiquette of offering a chair.*

"What is it this time, then?" asked the Watch Captain wearily.

*A little taken aback, Tradden composed himself and gave the basics of the last day, somewhat over-illustrating the party's superiority in battle but giving a fair view nonetheless.*

*The Watch Captain remained calm and attentive throughout once Tradden had started the story, his demeanour changing throughout.*

"Show me these amulets, please," requested the Watch Captain. "And the parchment if you still have it."

 Matt: *Tradden fished out the amulet he and Celestia had recovered from the Bandit leader and handed it over. He couldn't really explain why, but there was something about the Guard Captain that was different today. Maybe it was him - the toils of the day, the battles, his tiredness, but he found that he now had no compulsion to hand the other items over, and for the merest of seconds he caught Kireth's eye (whom he believed held the other amulet and parchment) as the Captain was distracted whilst studying the amulet, turning it over and over in one hand.* Aug 25, 2010

"Erm... that is one of them - I think we lost the other items in the last fight. There was a lot of fire."

Tradden coughed nervously behind a clenched fist.

"Ahem - about that healer?"

 Me: *The Watch Captain spent a brief time studying the amulet, then cast it aside onto a side desk.* Aug 25, 2010

"Nothing much to see there. Do you have the other one? The parchment, too?" he asked.

 Neil: "No we do not" Kireth coldly replied "as you were just told." He moved forward "So, if there is nothing about that pendant we want mind if we take it back" He reached forward, expecting to be stopped, and watched the captain's response carefully. Aug 25, 2010 ▼

 Me: *The Watch Captain remained calm and composed, looking at each of the party in turn before continuing.* Aug 25, 2010 ▼

"I think you'll find that we'll need to keep this trinket. It may be needed for evidence - perhaps even one of the *qualified* mages may be able to use it to scry out any further plots," *drawled the Watch Captain, placing emphasis on 'qualified'*. "It's a shame you didn't find out more - it's bandits like these that we need to eradicate from these lands, our own people conspiring against us, it's sickening."

*For some moments the Watch Captain was silent, his face far away, thinking. His mood then seemed to change, a little more jovial.*

"I suppose we should thank you and your group, Aversward, for a job well done," *he said, standing up and slowly walking around the desk. He sat on the front of his desk and regarded the party once more.* "It looks like you could all do with a rest and a good bath - I'll see that the Warden's Rest have rooms set aside for you and a good meal ready by the time you get there. I'll also have the Watch Healer sent across to tend to your rash, Master Dwarf."

*He continued quickly, waving away any thanks or protests before they began, "We'll have some fresh clothes sent for you as well - I don't want to be accused of sending vagabonds in rags to one of the best inns in town. However, I do have a condition - one which many of you may find interesting."*

 Me: "It may, or may not, be connected to the group you have routed, but we have information that an individual may be on the next ship to the mainland for villainous purposes. If you could follow and track this individual, find out what he, or she, is up to, and report back it would be of great benefit to us. And of great benefit to you," *the Watch Captain said, pointedly smiling at Tradden on the last phrase.* Aug 25, 2010 ▼

*"'The Guiding Fire' makes its voyage tomorrow morning at sunrise. I can ensure you have comfortable board and passage if you'll take the job."*

*The Watch Captain walked back around his desk and sat down in his chair. Opening his desk drawers he took out some parchment and began scribbling with an ink pen. After a few moments, he blew the ink dry, folded and then sealed the parchment with some wax and his signet ring. He left the parchment on his side of the desk.*

"Do we have a deal, gentlemen? And lady," *he intoned, nodding out of courtesy to Celestia.*

 Matt: "You mention 'benefit' - what kind of benefit are we talking about here?", his mouth shooting off before he had given any real thought to it or before any of the others had even had chance to consider the offer. Aug 25, 2010 ▼

 Me: "Well, enough to get you out of your debt for a start," *quipped the Watch Captain.* Aug 25, 2010 ▼

 Matt: "Ah. You know about that," said Tradden. He sidled up to the table, close to the Watch Captain and between him and the group behind him. *"That's around 100 gold pieces!?"* he whispered, although given the proximity of his fellows they could all hear him quite easily, thus detracting from the overall attempt at secrecy. Aug 25, 2010 ▼

 Me: "I know," *replied the Watch Captain flatly.* "Monies to be paid on return, of course. We'll keep your creditors at bay until you return - it should be no longer than a month, or maybe two, in any case." Aug 25, 2010 ▼

 Liam: Celestia was staring at the Captain suspiciously. *"Perhaps you are under the impression that I, for one, am in some way a mercenary willing to work for some, as yet, unknown reward; I fear you are mistaken"*. She had no intention of working for vague promises, and she was not too sure that she would be willing to work at all. Aug 25, 2010 ▼

*"You will need to be a deal more specific if you require my services, you may well have young Tradden deep in your pockets, but not I".*

The fact that she was exhausted, hungry, bruised and, well, battered did not help her to temper her words. She surveyed the rabble that surrounded her and considered them all closely; she barely knew them and although they had fought together in battle this was more a convenience in the circumstances than it was friendship or comradery. Could she really trust to work with them and for whose purposes.

*"Precisely who do you need us to track and what do you expect us to do with them when we find them?"* Celestia shrugged her shoulders and grimaced as the aching that was set into them sent shooting pains across her back. She looked to the envelope perched on the edge of the desk with little but distrust in her mind. She was quite sure that she would not be going anywhere on the basis of the scraps she had thus far been fed.

 Me: *The Guard Captain turned his attention to the elven cleric.* Aug 25, 2010 ▼

"M'lady," *he started,* "the reward is a simple one. Two hundred gold, for each of you, should you board 'The Guiding Fire' and cross the ocean to the main continent to keep an eye on a certain individual.

"We would like to know what this individual does when they get to the main continent, who they see and who they talk to, and what they do and where they go after the return journey. That is all. We believe the information will not just be valuable to us, but all of the Free Peoples on The Islands, including your fair kind."

"Most of us Watch are known by face around the city, and would certainly arouse suspicion should we be the ones to board the ship. You would be ideal - a group of adventurers keen to settle across the waves - a perfect cover."

 Matt: "Two hundred?" said Tradden, already seeing a hazy, golden image of rack of tailored shirts hanging up in a walk in wardrobe within one of the really nice luxury apartments overlooking Council Square. Aug 25, 2010 ▼

He looked back towards his fellows, trying to look like he was playing it cool, but his lack of skills in that respect meant that he failed utterly. "Ahem, we will of course have to discuss this as a group", he said back over his shoulder.

Tradden motioned to the Elf, the Half-Elf, the Dwarf and his fellow Human that they should huddle around. "I am all for it," he began, completely failing to hide the excitement in his eyes over a bumper pay day. *"Alright - we have all heard the legends, but a trip over to the mainland can't be too bad can it? By all accounts the new town they have founded is a mini-Deepingwald, so it's not like we would be roughing it in some wild, far off land - it's civilised!"*

He looked at each of his companions in turn, meeting their gaze as he spoke. *"No old mansions, no cellars, no pits, no wierd campsites. With the five of us we can surely follow one fellow, find out what he does and come back - its easy money!"* Tradden had been concentrating intently on a copy of Deepingwald Fashion Monthly when his mother had lectured him about the fact that if something is too good to be true it probably is, which was a shame as he would probably not have been so eager had he taken in that piece of sagely advice.

 Mark: Khalin had watched the conversation silently, and though his (not inconsiderable) stomach rumbled in protest at the apparent delay in heading to the Warden's Rest and its promise of a hearty meal, his interest had most definitely been piqued by the mysterious offer. Here was an opportunity to finally see the mainland of myth in person. Of course it might be nothing but a simple infant-minding mission, but who knew what it might lead to? What riches lay in wait for the dwarves to reclaim? And he would be amongst the vanguard on this road back to glory! Aug 25, 2010 ▼

Khalin had stood shoulder to shoulder with this gallant band of manic strangers in battle, and still buoyed by the thrill of real combat despite his weariness, he could think of no better way to quench the thirst for adventure that had gnawed at his soul of late.

He turned to Tradden. *"You have my axe ...um, I mean ...hammer!"*

 Matt: Tradden was heartened by the Warlord's words - he knew that no Dwarf would say such a thing lightly. He was also pleased that the stout Dwarf would be around to have his back - Tradden had always seen himself as a lone avenger style of fighter, but his recent experience had made him appreciate the benefits of having others around. He hoped the others would also agree to the trip, especially Zero, whose company he had begun to enjoy. Aug 25, 2010 ▼

 Neil: Working for people he didn't know, jobs that paid far more than seemed reasonable and, urgh, don't get him started on 'group huddles'. Kireth wasn't liking any of this. Aug 25, 2010 ▼

Tradden was clearly going to follow the first thought that flew into his tiny mind; the Dwarf seemed convinced and, if he had read Zero correctly, it seemed likely he would be drawn to this endeavour. The elf, she might just walk away, that's what her kind were good at.

*"Well Tradden, if you say it is easy money, who am I to argue. Surely you are correct."* He bowed his head slightly to the young man "Perhaps, if I might be so bold?" Tradden's mouth hung slightly open so the mage continued "Many have died, or perhaps worse, on journeys to the mainland. 200 gold can not be utilised by dead men. A small payment upfront to each of us might be requested?" he backed out of the huddle "You're call of course"

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Matt: That did, of course, make sense to Tradden. Why hadn't he thought of that. He whirled around, with a dramatic flourish. "Your offer is of some limited interest to our group," he began, appearing to absentmindedly inspect the nails on one hand as he spoke to the Captain, "but as you can see, we have already suffered much on behalf of this fine, fine city and perhaps a small payment up front would help assuage our concerns that we may encounter similar problems on this trip and help us to prepare accordingly? One does hear tales of the mainland... So, shall we say fi..." he caught Kireth's eye, and saw a warning eyebrow raise, "te..." oh, there was the other eyebrow, "twe .... twenty? Twenty gold pieces. Each. Now. Please?"



Me: The Watch Captain hesitated for a moment, calculating in his head.

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"Hmm, let's see. I believe I've already offered to provide you with rest and recuperation in an excellent inn for a night, clean clothes and baths, as well as the expensive services of an experienced healer. I'm not sure what else you expect.

"Perhaps to fund some of your own rations to take on the journey, or repairs to your rather shoddy equipment we could offer you ten gold each, with the balance upon return."



Matt: Tradden turned back to the group, conspiratorially. "Any thoughts?"

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Mark: "I think it's dinner time," sighed Khalin. "You captain does have a point," he continued more helpfully. The dwarf was a warlord, and his negotiating was generally done with the sweep of his hammer in the heat of battle, not haggling like a cackling merchant in Deepingwald market.

Aug 26, 2010

"I will accept ten."



Liam and Random: Celestia was little impressed by the lofty offers made by the Watch Captain; certainly 200 gold pieces is a big figure but should it fail to materialise upon the completion of this very mysterious and not to mention vague mission that number becomes simply insignificant.

Aug 26, 2010

"You offer a significant reward for an apparently elementary task Captain, I agree to travel across the sea is no small feat but still..." She looked towards Tradden, who at this stage was beginning to pant with excitement, the drool from his chin about to succumb to the force of gravity and accrue on the floor.

"I do not like this at all, however if you all go I suppose you will need someone with sense to temper young Tradden. Indeed I have long wished to travel across the water, there are rumours told by my people of such places".

"I must say however Captain, that I will need twenty gold pieces before we depart, simply because I do not fully trust you. I feel sure you are holding back information about this quest".

[Diplomacy Check: 1d20-1: 9]



Me: "The offer stands at ten, m'lady. There is risk on our part that you may never return and simply pocket the down payment, although where you'd spend it on the mainland would be a mystery to me. Nonetheless, the offer is ten and the night at 'The Warden's Rest' as stated. I will not be pushed higher."

Aug 26, 2010



Matt and Random: Tradden was not well versed in the ways of negotiation, but he had learned very well the signs of someone who just wants to end a conversation - he had seen the same look in the eyes of many a girl up and down the dance circuits in Deepingwald.

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"Look," he said, perching on the end of the desk next to the Guard Captain, "Captain - Mr Jerod - you know me, I know you - we go back a long way."

Seeing the look the Captain gave him, Tradden continued on.

"Well, a few months anyway. My point is - you know I won't just skip off with the money. There is no where to go on the islands, and as you say, no where to spend it on the mainland as far as we know. I can vouch for my comrades here. I know you are a busy man - shall we just say 15 each now, and we shall be on our way to the Warden's? Perhaps if you were to drop by later, after your shift, we could buy you a drink or two as well?"

Tradden gave his best persuasive smile - it was nearly enough to prevent him looking like a gurning idiot, but not quite.

[Diplomacy check 1d20-1: 14]



Me: "If you know me so well, sir, then you'll know I don't drink. Nor do I continue to bargain once my mind is set. Enough!" replied the Watch Captain, tersely.

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The Watch Captain then turned his gaze for the first time towards Zero, who so far had remained silent and hidden from the conversation.

"What about you, sir? Do you too wish to continue to bargain, or are you ready?"



Liam: Celestia wondered whether she was being a little too mistrusting and grumpy; by now she was exhausted and reluctant to make any important decisions.

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"You must excuse me Sir, I am hungry and more than a little in need of rest. I will join with the others" she said in a moments weakness, although she had no doubt that they would need her at some stage.

She looked around wearily for somewhere to sit and found a long cushioned seat. She dropped into it, her eyes now sagging; still she was unwilling to show her weakness to the rabble and sat bolt upright with an air of apparent alertness.



Me: "Then it is done," stated the Watch Captain. He pulled open one of his drawers and withdrew a velvet bag. From the bag he counted out five piles of ten gold pieces and placed them carefully on the table.

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"Here is your downpayment - use it wisely," he said, looking at Tradden. "The balance will be paid on your return."

He picked up the sealed parchment he had prepared earlier and offered it to Tradden. Before the youth could take it, the Watch Captain added, "The name and description of the individual you seek is written in here. I ask that you do not look until you get to the mainland - there's no sense in you arousing suspicion on the voyage across, you're supposed to be adventurers seeking fame and fortune, not spying on people. Do I have your word?"

Tradden impulsively replied in the positive, before anyone else could speak.

"I will arrange your board and passage on 'The Guiding Fire'. Make yourself known to shipmate Kassar, he's, uhm, one of us, but would be unsuitable to follow anyone, too dim-witted. Kassar will get you on board and assist you on the journey where possible. Once you're at the mainland, you're on your own.

"The ship departs at sunrise - make sure you're there in time. You can't miss 'The Guiding Fire' at the docks, she's the largest - three sails all higher than the Wizard's Tower."

The Watch Captain rose and looked at the group dismissively.

"Well, 'The Warden's Rest' awaits, what are you still here for? Oh, and don't enjoy yourselves too much tonight - I hear the crossing can get quite, uhm, 'rough'," he added, with a smug smile.



Liam: Celestia stood almost before the Captain had finished speaking and sought the exit, the time for conversation and negotiation was over. Now it was time for food and sleep before the morning voyage.

Aug 26, 2010



Me: The group picked up their monies and headed out of the Northern Watchtower into the gloom of the evening. Picking their way along the winding streets lit by flickering lamplight they found their way to 'The Warden's Rest' and were shown to their rooms.

Aug 26, 2010

As promised clean clothes and a hot bath, a rare luxury, awaited them, followed by a hearty meal. The inn was one of the more expensive ones in the city, and as such was not a rowdy place. The group were able to relax and enjoy themselves in a subdued environment.

After a while a man in faded blue robes approached the party, introduced himself as the Watch Healer, and withdrew with Khalin for a while. Khalin reappeared shortly after, looking at little embarrassed and holding a pot of salve.

Some of the group disappeared into the night to pick up last minute forgotten items or to spend a little of their down payment, but they were soon back at the inn.



The.brainbuster@googlewave.com: Zero stood at the bar, chatting to a buxom young lass whose family he knew to be disgustingly wealthy. He hoped very much to kill two birds with one stone before the dawn arrived

Aug 26, 2010

He smiled in his most charming manner and clinked his wine goblet against hers.

 **Matt and Mark:** Tradden was bruised, sore and tired. However, the hospitality of the Warden's Rest had re-invigorated him somewhat. He knew it couldn't last – this was about his 10th second wind of the day after all– but it seemed to make sense to nip back home and collect some things. He packed as many of his finest clothes into his stylish, sturdy adventurers pack, left a note for his landlady that he was away on important Guard business and that he would resolve any outstanding rent issues on his return, and then ambled back to the Warden's. Aug 27, 2010 ▼

It was getting late by the time Tradden's lank form slipped in the side door, slinked upstairs and dropped off his gear. Finding no response to his knocks on any of the doors belonging to his companion's rooms, he went back downstairs and was enthused to see both Khalin and Zero sat at a booth at the far end of the main room, quietly enjoying a drink.

"Gentlemen," he said, making a flourishing bow, "Allow the next round to be mine – a token gesture for the debt I owe you both after today's events. It shall not be forgotten!" he finished, with clear conviction.

"And where, may I ask, are our charismatic friends?" he asked.

"Not here...", replied Zero, staring over the rim of his drink as if looking through a window into another world. Tradden thought he could see a red mark on the side of Zero's face, which could have been the outline of a slim feminine hand, but before he could question the rogue, Zero continued, "The party is sooo much less without them."

"Aye", spoke up the Dwarf, "Master Zero is right young sir - they didn't say much just excused themselves with talk of other things to do before the big off tomorrow."

"Oh", said Tradden, disappointed that he might not see Celestia again that night, and also slightly forlorn that both might have been in their rooms, but just ignoring his knocks a few minutes back.

So, he ordered a drink for himself and his two companions. And then another. And another. Zero, with the good sense to stop at that point then watched with curious interest as Tradden proceeded to try and match Khalin drink for drink. Tradden had an average constitution for a human, but that was nothing to that of Dwarf, and as Khalin was drinking ale and Tradden wine, things got messy, fast. Certainly Tradden could not remember being hauled over the Warlord's shoulders and being dumped, not ungently, onto his bed just a few hours later.

Come the next morning Tradden *could* remember exactly why he had a self-imposed two drink limit policy, but it was not until he was crouched over a bucket in the corner of his room, holding his hair back with one hand to prevent it getting covered in vomit that he remembered that he was about to get on board a ship for a long voyage. If anything, his face drained of even more colour as he looked up from the unpleasant sight and foul stench coming from the bucket.

"Oh...", was all he could muster...

 **Me:** Just before sunrise, the group were woken by the inn-keep. They collected their belongings, making sure they were well packed, and walked through the streets to the docks. Aug 27, 2010 ▼  
The city was quiet at this time, with only the faint sound of a dawn chorus to break the spell.

As they approached the docks the party spotted 'The Guiding Fire' easily, it's masts stretching up into the sky. A sleek vessel kept spotless by the crew she was a beauty to behold - a picture of speed and strength and a fitting sign of The Islands' aspirations to reconquer to main continent.

As they approached the gangplank leading up to the vessel they spotted a short, squat man waving them over conspiratorially. The group joined him and he introduced himself as Kassar. He motioned the group to follow him up the gangplank and onto the ship - the gangplank being withdrawn behind them.

Kassar showed the group to a common bunk room in the aft of the ship with a dozen or so rickety bunks - some of them already occupied.

"Ere's yer bunks, lubbers. Y'e'll be 'ere for a tenday on the crossin', so get yerself comfy like," he uttered, barely comprehensible.

With that he spun around and left the group to study their surroundings as a great lurch nearly knocked them off their feet. 'The Guiding Fire' was under way.

 **Me:** Celestia was appalled by the state of the accommodation she had been assigned, not least because she would be sharing with a multitude of men and dwarves who, in her opinion, were not blessed with the greatest of personal hygiene standards. As she stood there surveying the rickety old bunks, two rats scurried across the floor apparently quite comfortable within this environment and certainly better suited to it. Aug 28, 2010 ▼

"I assume that this is not where I will be expected to bunk," she exclaimed indignantly. Celestia was far from comfortable in the company of such companions, never mind whilst sleeping - she required peace, quiet and solitude or better still the company of her own people who might provide some more enlightening conversation.

She noted the eyes of two of the present occupants staring blatantly at her, either they had never seen an elf before or perhaps more worryingly they had ulterior motives.

"I cannot remain here, it is impractical and indeed inappropriate!"

The more she thought about it the more distressed she became and with that she turned about and strode purposely out of the common room, towards the main deck and the ship mate who had left mere moments ago.

"Excuse me, sirs," she exclaimed as she left...

 **Me:** The rest of the group looked forlornly at their temporary living quarters. Four of the bunks were already occupied - two men sat at the top of two of the bunks looking leeringly at the group, and two others had packs on them. Aug 28, 2010 ▼

One of the men was as tall as Tradden and yet as stocky as Khalin - shaven-headed and wearing a black suit of leather armour with dull metal studs. The other was more slender and lithe, not able to sit still on the bunk, and forever moving. He was just dressed in simple clothes - obviously prepared for the voyage.

Both of them studied the party without a word - a smile of victory on the shaven-headed one at the departure of Celestia. After a while, he settled back into his bunk - lying down and picking his fingernails with a sharp-looking knife. The other simply kept moving in his odd way and then started messing with his own pack.

Khalin was the first to move and head towards a bunk - his skin taking on a pallid green colour. Tradden moved next, flopping onto the next bunk face down and moaning ever so slightly. Zero and Kireth stood back a little, examining their surroundings and new-found ship mates more closely. Kireth moved to the top bunk above Khalin and took out his books - starting to study. Zero threw his pack up onto the top bunk, and then went out on deck to see the ship leave the harbour.

 **Me:** The first full day at sea passed slowly for all of the party on board. Aug 31, 2010 ▼

Tradden spent the majority of the day in his bunk sleeping off the excesses of the previous night and trying to find his sea legs. Khalin suffered the most from sea-sickness and only managed to overcome his queasiness and embarrassment by the evening. Zero fared a little better, being a little ill over the side of the boat, but moping around trying to find a lady of substance to talk to. Kireth either kept his constitution in check by force of will or magical means, studying some of his small leather books in silence at the top of a bunk. Only Celestia revelled in the first day, especially when 'The Guiding Fire' entered the deeper ocean after the bay of Deepingwald and she could feel the ocean breeze on her skin and the spray on her lips.

Fortunately for all the weather was good for this time of year and the ocean was quite calm. Winds were strong to build up a fair speed, some eight or nine knots when it blew just right. All of the mainsails were hoisted and the crew busied themselves with their chores.

Celestia watched intently during the first day their comings and goings and felt she had a fairly good feel for their routine by the evening. She saw Kassar pacing the deck a few times during the day, but no sign of the rest of the party or the other passengers.

Within the bunk room, those that could keep an eye open for more than a few minutes without feeling queasy noticed the other pair of travellers sharing their accommodation - a short halfling bundled in a plain brown cloak most of the time, and a tall and dour man who sat and prayed at his bunk silently every few hours over the top of his rather bulky luggage.

As the sun set over The Islands, Celestia and Zero watched the faint silhouette of the shoreline disappear, and then 'The Guiding Fire' was all alone.

 **Me:** As the group became used to the rise and fall and swell of the sea they gained their sea legs. The days still stretched on, partly in boredom, partly in anticipation of their destination, but all of them managed to busy themselves in one way or another. Aug 31, 2010 ▼

 **Me:** Celestia spent much of the time above decks, quite alone in the morning air, only the sound of waves lapping against the prow of the mighty waterbourne beast providing reassuring comfort to her. As the sea air filled her lungs she often closed her eyes and smiled to herself, tears sometimes flowing from her eyes perhaps only as a result of the strong winds carrying them along; perhaps not only...

She could often be seen whispering softly to Melora, she who was the gentle breeze, the raging wind, the steady tidal flow and the raging tempest. Her words were of no real consequence, Melora often provided a friendly, uncritical ear in uncertain times for Cele and had always protected her in the face of adversity when at sea or in the wild lands of the world. Cele had a certain feeling that she (and indeed they) would need Melora at some stage in the coming months.

Her words were quiet and calm, "Bless this voyage, sacred mother of the sea and wilds, protect us as we pass into the little known lands." As she spoke her prayers she held a small amulet within her hands that was engraved in words of her people. It was only a mere trinket, almost worthless in value, but was gifted to Cele by her father, Alborne, when she was only a child and not long before his death. She had treasured it all of her life - it reminded her of him and she felt closer to Alborne, and also Melora, when meditating with it.

 Me: Once **Khalin** had found his sea legs he spent more of the time pacing the decks shouting welcomed words of encouragement to the sailors as they went about their chores. Aug 31, 2010  
He was often found helping on some of the simpler or more strenuous tasks, accompanied by slaps on the backs for his sailor partners and shouts of joy. It was noticed that Khalin was rarely seen by the edge of the deck, however, and never more than five feet above the main decking.

In times of little labour he was usually seen trying to extol the virtue of a warhammer to Zero, and scratching out combat tactics on some of the tarred decking, much to Zero's amusement. Khalin's unending thirst to relay the party's adventures on The Islands were met with equal measures of interest from the crew and chastisement from Kireth. The stories grew in scale and proportion until they were almost unrecognisable from the trials the group had endured only a few days previously.

When he did have the sailors' attention, however, Khalin did manage to ask questions about their destination and the 'fabled' stronghold of Blackengorge. He didn't learn a great deal more than the group already knew, but at least gained the information that an inn had been established, and the beer was a beauty to behold.

 Me: Of all the members on board **Kireth** seemed least interested or bothered by the voyage. He spent most of his time in the common room on top of his bunk with his books and a far away look on his face. The teachings from his schooling fueling his desire to be well prepared for whatever they would meet on the mainland. The stories he had heard and some that he had read made him understand they may encounter beasts or situations that would need all, and maybe more, of his training. Aug 31, 2010

When he wasn't studying, Kireth was admonishing Khalin for giving so much away of their background and history, or watching the comings and goings of all of the passengers that shared the common room. He slept with the words of a spell upon his lips, ready for anything.

 Me: **Tradden** spent most of the first day either in the common room or with his hair tied back and his head over the side of the ship, much to the amusement of the crew - here was Aug 31, 2010  
the stereotypical airy-fairy landlubber that they thought all non-sailors to be. The rest of that day he spent in his bunk, usually sleeping or groaning softly, even the slightest of ship motions seeming to him to be violent jerks left, right, forward and back.

Once over his self-inflicted illness he soon fell back into his convivial old ways and spent much of his time mixing with his new companions, particularly Khalin, who was always happy to chat, especially about all things Dwarven, which was fine for Tradden.

Tradden's involvement with the crew started as no more than a few questions about ship operations - he always liked to learn about things of which he knew little. The crew mostly found him quite hilarious, especially after one of the early nights where he was invited to one of the evening sing-songs, where his offer of dance performance was well received, with many a Tar rolling around on the floor by the end. Of course, Tradden did not quite appreciate exactly why they sniggered and laughed so much when he danced and skipped along deck to the shanties and songs that were an integral part of the 'The Guiding Fire's' daily operations, but in a short time the crew had, almost to a man, taken him to their hearts. His obvious good natured naivety made it difficult to truly dislike him - it would have been like disapproving of a cute puppy.

By the end of the voyage he was even spending time on the rigging and in the Crow's Nest, his natural athleticism and nimble agility allowing him to match even the best of the rigging boys in terms of progress up and down the masts. He also started sporting a red and white striped head scarf in true sailor style, which brought a typically derisory snort from Kireth, but brought an unexpected reaction from Celestia, whose melodic Elven laughter was a new and wonderful sound for all within earshot, including the young fighter.

 Me: It hadn't taken **Zero** too long to get used to the sense of vertigo and unending swell of the ship. He found it ran in a pattern, however, and he began to gradually feel better Aug 31, 2010  
and go with the flow, being able to stop being sick over the side of the boat after only a couple of days.

Most of the time he found himself pacing up and down the length of the boat, pining in his heart for the companionship of some female, preferably rich. He missed the solidity of the streets, the crowds, the shadows, and the smells. He had a fairly good life in Deepingwald and spent many a moment mulling over the whole strange and sinister affair, wondering whether he had made a huge mistake by joining the group and taking this voyage for a rewards that didn't interest him.

Some of his time he spent half-listening to Khalin's tactical manoeuvres and stories, others watching Tradden swing around the rigging with misguided grace, and in all his spare time trying every trick he could think of to read the sealed message without breaking the seal.

 Me: Eight days passed in this manner and anticipation grew among the crew and passengers. The voyage had been smooth so far and fairly uneventful and all hoped it should Sep 1, 2010  
remain so. Captain Abrahams has the crew at a high level of alert at all times now, with two men in the Crow's Nest during day and night.

In the afternoon bad news reached the ears of the group, however. A storm was approaching from the east. Black clouds could be seen on the horizon, with flashes of light within them, and even the heavy groan of thunder could be heard racing across the wave peaks towards them.

As the minutes passed the swell became more pronounced and the waves and wind grew higher. Captain Abrahams ordered two of the sails to be furled and all of the hatches to be battened. He ordered all of the passengers below decks and into the common room, asking them to strap anything down that could move, but mentioned that storms often looked worse than they actually were. He was just being cautious.

The bulk of the storm hit just after sundown - waves and rains crashing against the ship, but 'The Guiding Fire' stood firm and proud against the onslaught. Even the lightning and thunder that accompanied the storm had little effect on the ship, it's course held towards the mainland, an arrow coursing along it's path.

As the intensity of the storm grew to its crescendo, Celestia sneaked out of her storeroom quarters, given to her as a semi-private bunk room, and headed towards the prow of the ship, to take in the full majesty of the ocean storm that only Melora herself could have granted. She moved with the grace of her people and was almost right to the prow before she nearly bumped into a figure at the front of the ship under a black tarpaulin - she managed to drop down behind one of the balustrades almost on instinct.

Her keen sight soon picked out the squat figure of Kassar under the tarpaulin, a bullseye lantern in one hand, the other covering the light and uncovering it in rapid succession. It took some moments for it to sink in - Kassar was signalling someone. Celestia was puzzled, surely they weren't close enough to the mainland to be signalling yet.

Then, as a vast bolt of lightning crashed over the sky, Celestia looked out to the sea in front of them and her stomach plummeted. A single striped sail could be seen on the horizon, moving straight towards them. The crew had talked about the striped and black sails near the main continent, 'The Guiding Fire's' first battle, and the loss of 'The Epideixis' - Celestia knew that an attack was imminent!

As she looked back to the prow, Kassar had disappeared into the night.

 Me: Celestia was momentarily frozen with fear, hit by a blind panic. After a moment to regain her composure she checked the vicinity, searching through the gloom with her keen Sep 1, 2010  
eyes for Kassar, but in the darkness his outline was indecipherable.

With caution she began to move back towards the common room, steely determination now taking over from the fear that was slowly ebbing away. As she moved she continued to survey the deck looking for Kassar in all the dark places.

Another flash of lightning illuminated the path before her and a crash of thunder masked any noise. The driving rain that had hit with the storm had now built into a tumultuous downpour, dousing Celestia completely - her hair was now sodden as she flicked it back behind her ears revealing their elvish pointiness in all their glory.

She proceeded swiftly towards the common room hatch, which she opened easily, and in one swift motion she was below decks. She closed the hatch silently so that she did not arouse the suspicion of any seamen that might be on duty. It seemed highly likely that Kassar could be close by and although she did not fear meeting him she certainly believed that strength in numbers would be more beneficial.

She proceeded down the corridor towards the common room, a trail of water leaving slippery prints behind her clearly marking out her path. As she prepared to turn the final corner towards the common room she felt an arm grasp for her from a shadowy nook and she was pulled into the darkness with brutish force. Her instinct was that Kassar had waited for her to return below decks and she swiftly grabbed the assailant's other arm above a hand that was claspng a dagger. The two stood there holding each other tightly before Celestia recognised the determined eyes of Kireth staring back towards her.

Celestia slowly released his arm and he proceeded to do the same with hers.

"What do you think you are doing?" he barked at her, spitting at her a little as he did, his prickly stubble against her face; hopefully only a product of the extremely confined environment in which they were stood.

Celestia recognised the silvery trim of the hooded cloak now as she moved a little towards the light in the corridor and spoke quickly to Kireth, "This is no time for games, we are all in danger".

 Me: Kireth peered through the shadowy darkness of the corridor at Celestia. That look she had momentarily given him, "Did she think they had just shared a 'moment'?" He would have laughed out loud, the thought of it, but this sterner look as she delivered the news of danger quickly shook the thought from his head. Sep 2, 2010 ▼

"What danger?" he scowled, folding the dagger back away into his deep sleeves. Irritated that they were still stood in the corridor and not acting faster Celestia quickly imparted brief details of the approaching vessel and their most likely intentions, at this point omitting any information about Kassar.

"Then go!" he commanded, ushering her towards the companions' quarters.

Celestia started to move, but then momentarily turned back to the mage. "You are not coming?" she hastily queried.

"I am confident in your ability to regurgitate this information one more time, without me holding your hand," he intoned. Pulling his hood tight around his face the bitter mage moved towards the hatch.

Celestia wanted to bite back, why did he have to be this way, but now was not the time. She quickly gathered her thoughts and headed into the common room, startling some of the occupants out of their reverie with her sudden appearance.

"There's a ship approaching, from the east!" she relayed, "Heading straight towards us. We need to ready ourselves."

The group all looked up at Celestia, then at one another, and then gathered their belongings and made themselves ready. The other four passengers did the same, donning their armour and readying their weapons.

The small halfling looked up at the larger, dour man, who was strapping large pieces of plate armour over his padded clothing. "Yer wearin' plate out at sea? Are yer mad?", he drawled.

The dour man turned towards the halfling with barely a hint of surprise at the outburst. "Can't swim anyway," he replied in monotone. "If I go overboard, I'd rather go down with it rather than let some pirate take it from me. It's blessed by Kord himself, this armour." He banged on his breastplate and smiled at the halfling, a look which completely transformed his dour face into a gentler, happier one.

"Let's just see what the elf woman has seen first," spat the larger bald man in his black studded armour. "Might not be anything interesting anyway, you know how these elves 'see' things normal folk don't need."

Khalin, Tradden, and Zero were all ready fairly quickly, and followed Celestia and the other passengers swiftly and silently out into the night.

 Me: Kireth opened the common room hatch onto the main deck and stepped out into the dark. The torrent had not abated, and soon his robes were heavily laden and soaking him to the skin. The rain lashed across the deck mixing with the spray of the rising waves, and Kireth had to grab hold of the stair-rail behind him to keep from falling. Sep 2, 2010 ▼

"Where is everybody?" he thought, angry at the lack of information and clues to help him work out his next move.

A flash of lightning struck across the sky and lit the ship for a moment. Kireth took in the great white sail above him suspended from the main mast, taunt and stretched, billowed out by the gusting wind; the quarterdeck, past the mast, rising up in a looming shadow; and the thin film of spray lining the deck, making it treacherous for a novice sailor, reflecting the glare of the electricity flash and making the ship seem ghostlike in appearance.

The cold wind tugged at Kireth's robes, pulling him with the lurches of the ship over the ship's side rails, but he clung on perilously to the rail with bony fingers as he worked out his balance.

Cautiously he moved down the main deck, to the aft of the ship, hoping to find a sturdy outcrop to hold on to, and a better vantage point. It took some moments to get there, slipping on the decking more than once and nearly losing his staff in the process, and managed to clamber up the wooden stairs on to the quarterdeck. Once there, he spotted a couple of young sailors holding the wheel, trying to fasten it down with rope to keep the ship on an even keel.

"What news?" he shouted across to them, assuming they were aware of the oncoming threat. "How far off are they?"

 Me: The two sailors looked at the drenched half-elf in disbelief, as though he were a spectre in the night. Not sure why one of the passengers was out here in the rain and gloom asking odd questions, one of the sailors shouted back over the driving rain, "How far are who off?" Sep 3, 2010 ▼

Kireth scowled back, about to admonish the impudent young sailor for his flippant reply when he suddenly realised that the crew had no idea that a ship was heading directly towards them. Thoughts flashed through his mind, then he turned and looked up towards the top of the main sail, his hand sheltering his eyes from the downpour.

Zero was the last to leave the common room, allowing everyone to pass before him. As he stepped onto the deck and into the rain and wind his fears about the journey flooded back to him. "I knew this was all a bad idea," he muttered to himself. "I could be in bed with Meredith Kilner right now. She bloody well told me I was welcome anytime."

He slipped over, crashing his arm into the floor near the fo'c's'le stairs and continued his grumbling, "But no, I had to go with my friends instead, didn't I? And now I'm soaked through, freezing, and about to be chopped up by some bloody pirates of all things!"

He steadied himself before another lurch of the ship took his feet from under him and he was thrown face-first towards the main mast, grabbing hold of the ropes at the base just too late. "Bloody pirates!" he repeated, spitting out blood from his split lip.

Khalin brought him out of his reverie, barking orders in his booming Dwarven voice. It seemed louder than the roar of the storm and could be heard clearly across the night.

"By Clangeddin's beard, why are none of your crew out here, Abraham?" Khalin bellowed across the deck searching the night. He looked up to the Crow's Nest to see what the watchmen were doing, his keen Dwarven sight making out the Nest easily in the gloom.

Both Kireth and Khalin saw the two slouched figures at the same time, one inside the Nest pinned to the mast, the other hanging out of the Nest, dangling by the very rope that was there to tie him into the small lookout point. Their silhouettes against the lightning filled sky revealing a crossbow bolt or arrow sticking out in mockery from their necks.

The Dwarf reacted first, his combat and tactical training coming to the fore. "Tradden," he commanded, "strike that bell there for your life!" and pointed his warhammer at the great bell strapped to the base of the mast. "Tradden. Get on with it. Tradden?" he repeated, looking around for the lithe youth, nowhere to be seen.

Celestia picked up quickly on the Dwarf's urgency, and skipped lightly across the deck to the bell and rang it furiously, alerting the crew to their previously unknown peril.

"We need advantage," continued Khalin, booming out instructions. "Get thee to the quarterdeck, Master Zero, and you m'lady Celestia. Where is that damn boy?"

Celestia clasped her amulet in her fist and whispered a silent prayer to Melora before removing the morningstar from her belt, comforted by its weight in her hands. She peered into the gloom, still trying to locate Kassar, the treacherous vermin, but only shadows greeted her gaze.

Hatches and doors began to open as the trio headed towards Kireth and his vantage point, and some of the crew came out to see what the alarm was for. Captain Abraham seemed to be the best prepared, a sharp cutlass held ready in one hand.

As Abraham quizzed Khalin and Celestia for the cause of the commotion, a great flash of light erupted in the sky as a lightning bolt fizzed down and struck the top of the main sail followed by a deafening boom. In the brief moment of illumination the party all saw as one the giant black sail mere yards from their own ship and began to hear a rhythmic clash of spear on shield, almost mocking the echo of the thunderbolt.

Zero's thoughts sobered in that instant and a calm and focus came over him. He unclipped his crossbow from his belt and took up position at the top of the stairs on the quarterdeck.

"Prepare to repel boarders!" he shouted, his voice clear and true, as sailors darted about frantically, setting rigging and pulling out knives and belaying pins ready for action.

 Me: All waited for the impact of the enemy ship, holding on to keep their footing. However, no impact came. Sep 3, 2010 ▼

"She must be coming about," shouted Captain Abraham. "Man the ballista, get that catapult loaded!" Seamen scurried about, loading a huge bolt into the fo'c's'le ballista, and a trio of younger sailors heaved the ropes on the catapult to prime it.

"Wait for it, boys, wait for it!" continued Abraham, scanning the gloom, trying to make out the other ship.

*Then the beating of metal on metal started again. Slowly it started, echoing around, its location hard to determine. A rhythmic beat, seemingly never ending, and striking fear through the hearts of the sailors. Then suddenly it was over, and the noise was gone. The wind died, and the rain slowed at the same time, and an eerie silence took over the deck.*

*Celestia spotted them first, her keen elvish sight picking the shapes in the darkness, a dozen or so grappling hooks thudding over the guard rail on the starboard side of the foredeck. "There!" she cried, pointing. "Lines - we have visitors!"*

*"Kalina!" uttered Kireth, and a clear mote of light sprang up on the main mast as he rose his staff, illuminating most of the main deck and sending playful shadows across the foredeck.*

*Silhouettes of bodies appeared over the guard rail, and then the silence was turned into a cacophony of roars as ugly mishapen forms with bronzed shields and spears tumbled onto the foredeck. They searched out the nearest seamen instantly and struck them down before they could act and dashed the ballista in two.*

*A roar came from Abraham's lips, "At 'em, boys. Give 'em everythin' you've got!" and he charged across the deck to enter the fray.*



Me: [Continued in [Scene #7](#)]

Sep 3, 2010 ▼

Tags: +

Next wave ➡