

Carcrash Parker

**and the Haven
of Larper's**

IAN M. ROGERS



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Carcrash Parker and the Haven of Larpers

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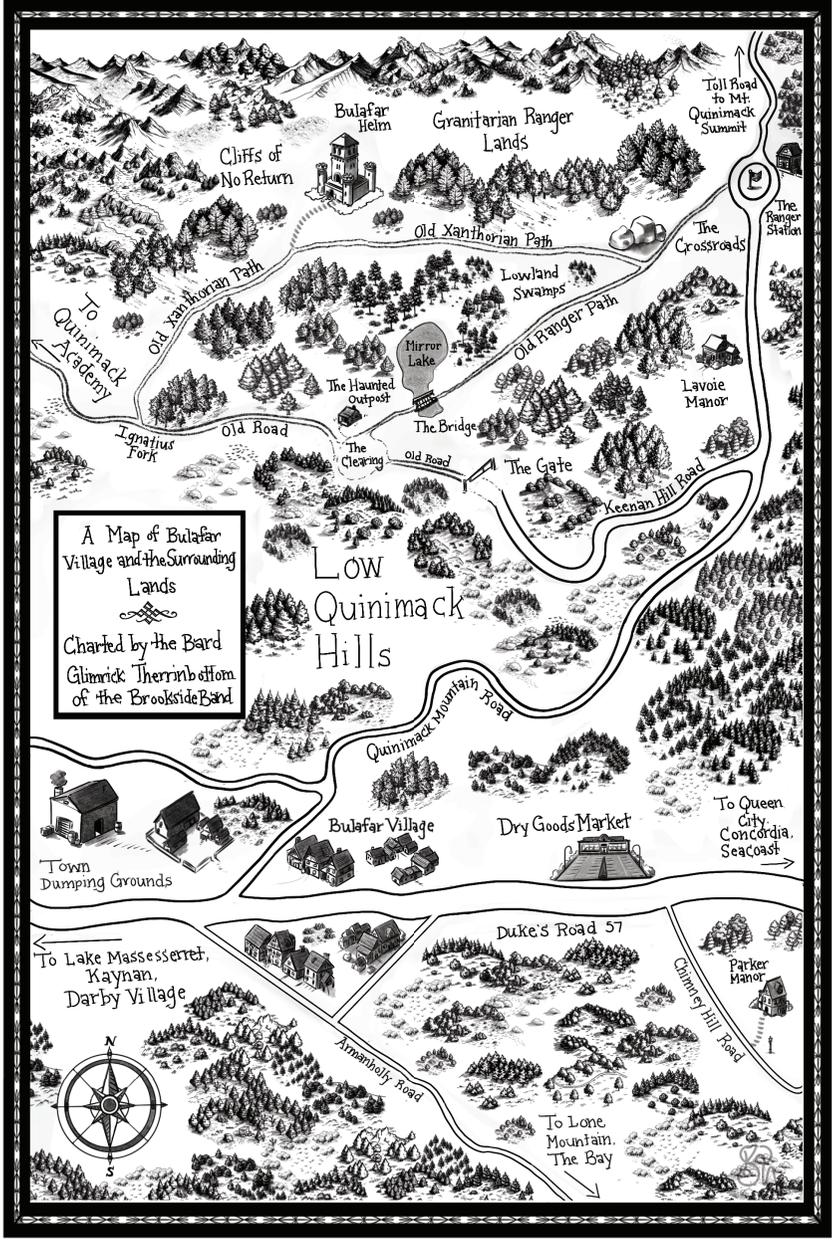
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For my Kearsarge friends, past and present.



The modern hero, the modern individual who dares to heed the call and seek the mansion of that presence with whom it is our whole destiny to be atoned, cannot, indeed must not, wait for his community to cast off its slough of pride, fear, rationalized avarice, and sanctified misunderstanding.

It is not society that is to guide and save the creative hero, but precisely the reverse.

Joseph Campbell, E pluribus scholar

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Read This First!

Hey gang, Carcrash Parker here. My friend Trent (or Glimrick, as he calls himself in the book) asked me to write an introduction to his awesome sort-of fantasy novel. Of course I said sure, because all the best books have introductions and I'm still impressed that Glimrick wrote an entire novel about some crazy shit we went through back in the day, but I'll get to that.

This novel is about LARPing, which stands for *Live Action Role-Playing*. Glimrick wisely decided to write *larp* in lowercase, though, since the all-caps version starts to look superformal real quick. (It's the same reason people started writing *scuba* in lowercase for *Self-Contained Underwater Breathing Apparatus*. Also, who the hell uses words like *apparatus*?) If you don't know what larping is, it's like a tabletop role-playing game where players act as their characters in real life, putting on costumes and dueling with foam-rubber swords like it's the fantasy days of yore. There are all kinds of larps besides the swords and sorcerers kind, though: vampire larps, steampunk larps, H. P. Lovecraft larps, and murder mysteries where guests play the role of the sinister butler or the crotchety great-aunt. At its core, larping's about becoming a character to engage in an imaginary world that you and the other players create. It's a cool concept, but not my jam—I draw the line at D&D and *Final Fantasy*.

If you've larped in real life, you'll probably notice about four hundred things in this book that would never, ever happen in a real larp, but don't start sending the publisher angry emails yet! First off, you're probably right, but the bad-guy larpers in this story aren't the kind who play well with others. (For example, fun fact: I found out later that Miles Glangworth got kicked out of a bigger larping group for committing ye olde assholery a year before this story began.) More importantly, Glimrick's book isn't about

this more established larping world: it's about a home-brew larp, where anything goes as long as players agree to it.

Glimrick's language in this book can also feel pretty old-timey, which might throw some of you off. On one level, while Glimrick grew up in the '90s reading fantasy novels with busty maidens and impossibly muscular dudes on the covers, he also knows his J. R. R. Tolkien and his T. H. White and the canon of nineteenth-century lit, so being a larger bard and all, he shoots for more of that vibe. I swear, don't knock it till you try it—you ever read *The Count of Monte Cristo*? That motherfucker was way more than just a *Shawshank Redemption* reference. Also, how about all those bloody Shakespeare histories that were basically the *Game of Thrones* of the 1500s? (That's a plug to visit your local library, kids!)

Like I said, this book takes place back in the day—2009 to be exact, when most of us were in the midst of what social scientists call “early adulthood.” It was a different time, and things weren't going that well for most of us, but I'll let Glimrick tell that part.

Finally, I'd like to clear up two inconsistencies:

1. In this book, Glimrick has me cursing a lot. This is a blatant product of narrative license, since I curse way more in real life than I do here.
2. Even though all this basically happened the way Glimrick tells it, I'm pretty sure I remember a few slipups that didn't make it into the novel. Just sayin'.

Glimrick was also worried that modern-day readers would hate prologues (which this introduction technically is), books with extradiegetic narrators (that's the literary name for a narrator writing from outside the story's world), and books that constantly reference pop culture from the 1980s. I disagree with all this, though, because I think readers are smart and look for smart books that do cool shit well, even if it means breaking the quote-unquote rules most novels follow and that stuck-up writing teachers preach as gospel.

Welp, I've never been much for rules, and Glimrick's book is pretty awesome, so you should totally read it. Also, I'm not just saying that because I'm in it.

Have fun!

Carson “Carcrash” Parker

Manchester, New Hampshire, June 20, 2025

Chapter 1: The Message

This, dear reader, is a story about Heroes. Not Heroes of the dragon-slaying, damsel-rescuing kind (if indeed damsels ever needed to be rescued), though such Heroes embody many of the traits I wish to speak of. No—this is a story about Heroes of an everyday variety, whose accomplishments are simpler, whose manners are rougher in appearance, and who perhaps hold a penchant for enchanted spell games from earlier eras. The Heroes in this tale (or, to be honest, the one Hero) are those who speak Truth in the face of falsehoods regardless of what the society around them preaches, and who inspire others to do the same. But I fear I'm getting ahead of myself!

Our story begins long, long ago, in the Third Age Year 9 in the dukedom of Granitaria, a far-off forested land in the northeast corner of Epluribus, which had then fallen on dark times. In those days, the Great Ebbing had unleashed devastating economic upheaval upon the land as vile charlatans manipulated the people's will through the Twisting—but these, dear reader, are only the circumstances against which this adventure took place, and even the most patient readers will soon tire of such background!

In an attempt to adhere to more established conventions, allow me to start at the beginning ...



Our story proper begins on a sunny morning in the sixth calendar month, the day before the summer solstice. On this beautiful morning, I, the humble bard Glimrick Therrinbottom, had joined my fellow Brookside Band members around the breakfast campfire after a night of storytelling and revelry. Being only eight members, the Brookside Band was small by High Realm standards, and though only some of us were skilled in swordplay, we

found as much enjoyment in our adventuring as any group you might find in Granitaria. I'd only just sworn my oath to the Adventurer's Code the previous evening, and as I sat in the crisp morning air of the outpost clearing where we'd pitched our tents, I felt an anticipatory reverence at the promise of an adventure ahead.

On the other side of the fire, the reformed bandit princess Quetalina must have been thinking the same, because she set aside her plate and fork to announce, "The Xanthorian messengers will soon be arriving."

"Great!" spoke Brantly from the granite slab beside me. "When they get here, I want to give my speech!"

Here I should introduce Brantly Vanderswoggin, my boyhood schoolmate from Darby Village and the Brookside Band companion with whom I was most familiar. His adventuring manner was often cruder than I would have liked, but because he was apt to assist me with matters I couldn't handle on my own, I tended to turn a blind eye to his transgressions.

It was most fortunate that Phaeton Birch, the sagacious earth mage who had cofounded the Brookside Band with Quetalina the previous autumn, was more rigid in following our adventuring plan. "There'll be no time for speeches," he said gravely, "for we may have to move quickly once the Xanthorians arrive."

"But Captain Dormaxian promised we could make speeches," Brantly said in an obvious whine.

"I believe Captain Dormaxian said that we *may* make speeches," Phaeton Birch corrected. The earth mage wore a tattered brown robe several shades darker than his skin with its sleeves hanging loose at the wrists, and he shifted on his rock, his discomfort clear at having to curtail another of Brantly's requests.

Quetalina shook her head, tossing her raven-black hair from side to side. "There may or may not be time for speeches," she agreed, raising her arm in her billowing violet cloak. "And we must remember that this adventure is but a trial to determine the compatibility of the Xanthorian Order and the Brookside Band—our partnership hasn't yet been finalized."

"Ere 'ere," called out Squim Sanderschmidt the metalworker with a stamp of his patten boot. He had been Quetalina's romantic partner for some years, and I was fond of his jovial nature.

Brantly's voice once again took on a whining tone. "But we want Lord Mylos to take our group seriously so he'll give us a bigger role in the action."

Squim Sanderschmidt appeared skeptical. "I ain't so sure it's 'at simple, yah?"

"I agree with Brantly," said Nanaya the elven warrior. She wore a rough yellow buckskin jerkin with lines of fringe dangling from the sleeves and hem. "I, for one, think we could benefit from some sounder planning after the failure of our last adventure," she said, resting her gaze heavily on Quetalina.

The bandit princess's face reddened. "I think it would be best if we didn't speak of earlier mistakes."

"Why not?" Brantly said, jumping onto Quetalina's embarrassment. "The Sacking of Lone Mountain was a disaster. Lord Mylos and the Xanthorians have more resources and are more skilled in crafting adventures—definitely better than our bard Glimrick is at narrating them." He laughed as he slapped my shoulder.

Here, dear reader, is where a more courageous adventurer would have corrected such derisions, but in those days I was naturally timid in both word and deed and could only stutter an excuse. Such weakness was the reason I'd taken on the role of the bard, thinking it would give me cause to observe and record the words of others while hiding behind my parchment and pen.

"Please don't place such pressures on me," I protested, "for it is not the bard's duty to dream up new adventures, but to recount the adventures we embark on so they may be remembered for all time." (Again, dear reader, behold how naïve I was in eschewing my chance to engage others with my tales as more skilled bards so often do!)

Brantly, his boredom having mounted as I spoke, began poking Squim Sanderschmidt's iron rod into the coals of the fire, which clearly didn't require poking. "Yeah, yeah, bard's duty and all that jazz," he said, lapsing into Granitarian dialect. "Sounds like an excuse to sit on the sidelines rather than take action."

My face reddened at this dismissal, for I hated it when Brantly pointed out my reluctance to enter battles.

Sitting on my other side was young Pennyfarthing, a strapping lad of barely fourteen, out on his first adventure and still growing accustomed to

the High Realm Laws. He wore a simple brown adventuring tunic, though his robust patten boots were of the Mundane variety. As Pennyfarthing was the son of my mother's second husband, he'd joined our adventure at my behest, and I felt a sense of responsibility for his care. He spoke in my defense, albeit with hesitation:

"I think your tale-telling is of great importance, Bard Therrinbottom. And when the Xanthorians arrive, surely your bardic skills will be more valuable than ever."

Squim Sanderschmidt raised an eyebrow as he brought the last slice of bacon to his mouth. "O' course, the ages need storytellers to recount great deeds, but the highest honors always go to those performin' the deeds themselves—ain't that so?"

"That's what I was going to say!" Brantly interjected, ever eager to take credit for others' ideas. "Bards have no real function in society, and the real honor should go to the fighters, along with those who actually create great things rather than just writing about them in books—people like bridge-builders, stonemasons, and swordsmiths."

"Now 'at weren't exactly what I meant," Squim answered, though I sat silent, too overwhelmed to respond.

"Brantly's got a point," Nanaya agreed.

Pennyfarthing, too, had no answer to Brantly's accusations, and I feared I was once again doomed to suffer humiliations at the expense of those who were bolder of tongue than I. However, a moment later I was saved by none other than Desirae Shining Star, the final member of our band, and the one with whom—excepting my longstanding companionship with Brantly and brotherlaw status with Pennyfarthing—I felt the closest bond.

"I don't think storytelling is secondary to other kinds of work," Desirae Shining Star said, her voice clear despite her tiny stature and unassuming features. She wore a light green adventuring dress embroidered with symbols fitting of her ability to read fortunes from the stars, and her flowing blonde hair reached to the small of her back. "Is storytelling not akin to music, painting, and theatercraft in that it brings illumination and enjoyment to the world around us?"

Desirae Shining Star didn't meet my eyes as she spoke, but I knew she was thinking of me, as we'd more than once shared our opinions on the arts. How I respected her for her opinions, and for daring to speak them freely!

“But you can’t put art and music on the same level as the technology that holds society together,” Brantly argued.

At this insinuation, Quetalina raised her palm. “Please calm this talk,” she said heavily. “The Brookside Band has always valued unity, and I’ll not have disdain for the skills of others tearing us apart.”

My cheeks reddened at having stayed silent while my companions came to my rescue, and I cursed both the general timidity that kept me from defending my honor and the crippling attacks of the Onslaught that plagued me in times of distress.

“Well said, Quetalina,” Phaeton Birch announced, gesturing at the sun rising higher in the sky. “The Xanthorians will be here soon, so let’s not have them arrive with our camp in disarray!”

At his call, we began putting away the breakfast dishes, closing our discussion, and with it, this introduction to my Brookside Band companions—whom I hope, dear reader, you’ll do your best to keep track of throughout this tale! For unbeknownst to me, I would soon be leaving them for a grand adventure of my own.



The Brookside Band’s campsite was small by any standard, and as we set about taking down tent poles and packing equipment into rucksacks, I once again beheld the beautiful Granitarian countryside before us. We’d made camp the previous night in an expanse of open field within the Bulafar forest on the crest of a low hill, which offered a breathtaking view of nearby Mt. Quinimack. Below the clearing, the glistening waters of Mirror Lake provided a pleasantly peaceful place for reflection, along with the rare but not-unheard-of chance of glimpsing a wandering moose come to drink. The beauty of our tranquil spot, however, came at a price: the clearing was the site of an abandoned and haunted outpost owned by a Xanthorian ancestor of Captain Dormaxian’s, now boarded up and gathering dust. The outpost, the legends said, harbored a terrible curse, and Lord Mylos the Xanthorian leader had declared that any adventurer foolhardy enough to enter and wake the spirits within would be punished with banishment. Thankfully, the Fair Empress Helena had cast a protection spell to bind the spirits within the crumbling outpost walls, rendering our party safe from harm—at least at this point in my tale.

Though nothing would have pleased me more than to spend a quiet two days at the outpost clearing trading yarns and basking in the Natural serenity with my companions, during the open discussion of a Council meeting, the Brookside Band had agreed that we should join Lord Mylos and the Xanthorian forces for the mysterious adventure ahead. As I struggled to unearth a particularly stubborn stake securing the tent I'd shared with Brantly and Pennyfarthing, Brantly himself approached with an excited spring in his step. "So," he began, "what did you think of our little debate?"

"You made some valid points," I said, more confident now that we were alone. "But I stand by my conviction that storytellers are valuable in bringing insights to the people and safeguarding our culture."

"But the value they bring is all relative," Brantly said with indifference. "Anyway, it's lucky Quetalina jumped in to save you when she did."

The tent stake continued resisting my attempts to extract it. "Yes, quite," I said, pretending to agree, for I knew from experience that once Brantly had made up his mind there would be no dissuading him, and any attempt to assert my own opinion would only result in his denying it.

Though that put an end to our conversation, Brantly made no move to help me with the tent and instead set about gathering his own belongings. However, he was soon interrupted when Nanaya approached with her sword in hand and young Pennyfarthing tagging along behind her.

"Would you care for some sparring before the Xanthorians arrive?" she asked Brantly. "We'll likely be needing the practice."

"An excellent idea," Brantly said, dropping his bag. "Glimrick, you and Pennyfarthing can finish packing up by yourselves, right?"

It had been a trying morning, and the tent stake remained steadfast in the hard earth. Upon hearing Brantly's words, I felt the first tremors of the Onslaught, that cursed affliction that threatened to overwhelm my senses. However, I bravely fought it back with a smile and said, "Of course. Go have your fun while I clean up here."

Nanaya's face brightened as Brantly unsheathed his sword, a medium-length blade of dwarf-forged steel with a beautifully adorned hilt and pommel that matched Nanaya's. He wore it on a tight scabbard behind his back despite the difficulty this created in unsheathing it.

"So be it," he cried. "Let's duel!"

Pennyfarthing carefully circled the pair as they began their match. “I’ll help you, Glimrick,” he said in a low voice. “Just show me what to do.”

Though my heart warmed that Pennyfarthing alone had agreed to help, I had no words with which to instruct him, and knew not how to explain the dismantling of a canvas tent whose mechanics I myself barely understood. As the clearing filled with the sounds of Brantly and Nanaya’s battle, I silently held firm against the Onslaught’s sway and pointed to the tent stake opposite the one that plagued me, hoping Pennyfarthing could remove it without aid. This was the best I could do, for I was in no way skilled in instructing those less experienced than I—my own brotherlaw included.

As I expected, Pennyfarthing soon grew tired in his attempt to help and joined the others watching Brantly and Nanaya’s clashing of swords. By then it had become clear that Nanaya was the more skilled opponent, and she’d only just achieved her third tap when we were startled by the sound of approaching footsteps, for Captain Dormaxian of the Xanthorian Order had arrived!

The Xanthorian captain was flanked on either side by two guardsmen clad in jerkins of bright green and orange over ornate chain mail. All three of their breastplates bore the crest of the jagged-eyed dragon of the Xanthorian Order, an elaborate though ominous insignia whose pointed gaze seemed to pierce my very soul. The guards’ regalia stood out as more fanciful and costly than the simpler garb worn by our ragtag band, though it paled in comparison to that of Captain Dormaxian, who wore a battle helmet and velvet cape that no doubt would have trailed grandly behind him had there been more than a slight breeze that morning. He studied our group with amused curiosity, and his tight, muscular arms, despite their relative gauntness, looked as if they could wreak some damage in a tavern brawl. Though this was my first time seeing Captain Dormaxian in the flesh, I’d heard whisperings that he possessed both a rough tongue and a penchant for anger when the tides of an adventure turned against him.

One of the guardsmen blew a small horn as Captain Dormaxian raised his hands. “Adventurers of the Brookside Band,” he announced. “Today begins an adventure like none other!”

Nanaya set down her blade as the others snapped to attention. Pennyfarthing’s mouth hung open as he gazed upon Dormaxian’s form, and even Quetalina, who herself had boldly led our adventures in months past, seemed to shrink in stature at the captain’s words.

“We’ve gathered here on this beautiful summer’s day by the outpost built by my grandfather’s father to commence a momentous occasion,” Dormaxian continued. “Today, the Xanthorian Order welcomes you eight apprentice adventurers into its alliance, and though you may be inexperienced, Lord Mylos has sensed your potential and believes that together we can soar to new heights within the High Realm.”

The Xanthorian captain paused as if expecting applause, setting in motion an awkward moment before Squim Sanderschmidt and a few others clapped their hands.

“As a culmination of our two-day adventure,” Dormaxian went on, “on the morrow, all of you will have the chance to enter the fabled Tournament of the Solstice, a festive competition of swords and spells that will determine the superior combatants of the High Realm.”

“We look forward to the chance to enter!” Brantly cried.

“And we thank you for including magic users in the tournament,” Phaeton Birch broke in.

I felt my face redden, for surely my bardic talents would be of little value in such a tournament.

“However,” Dormaxian added, “we still have today’s adventure ahead of us, and Lord Mylos needs each and every one of you to play a role in a conflict that will test the very limits of the High Realm. For if all goes as planned, before the sun sets, our combined forces will challenge the most dangerous enemy we’ve ever faced: the darkhearted Rogue of Bulafar!”

I felt a twitter of excitement at the captain’s words, for though the name meant nothing to me, I was sure the pursuit of this Rogue of Bulafar would provide rich material for storytelling.

“Some of you may have heard tales of this haughty Rogue,” Dormaxian said, pacing the narrow path. “A Rogue who despises the High Realm, who’s openly mocked and derided the Adventurer’s Code, and who long ago attacked Lord Mylos and myself in the cowardly Ambush at Lake Massesserret!”

I stood enraptured with awe, for this indeed seemed a promising backdrop for an adventure! Beside me, Brantly nodded in recognition at the captain’s words, and I reminded myself to ask him about this mysterious Ambush later.

“Does this ’ere Rogue have a name?” Squim Sanderschmidt asked.

Captain Dormaxian waved away the metalworker's question. "That information will come in time. For now, suffice it to say that this Rogue is a dangerous enemy, so we have much preparing to do."

From across the half circle, Desirae Shining Star shot me a glance that seemed to ask what mystery was being laid out before us. In response, I could only nod.

"In any event," Dormaxian continued. "Lord Mylos himself will explain each of your roles when we reach the newly completed Bulafar Helm."

My eyes widened at this. The Bulafar Helm was the fabled grand fortress of the Xanthorian Order, a massive structure said to stretch over a thousand paces and tower above the tallest trees of the forest. Though I yearned to behold this mighty stronghold, I felt a stir of unease at having to interact with Lord Mylos after so many years, and recalled the Unpleasantness that had dogged our very first adventuring group (an incident that will be recounted in Chapter 5, dear reader, if I might humbly ask for your patience!).

Here, Quetalina spoke. "I assure you, Captain Dormaxian, that you have our group's complete cooperation."

"I thank you for your loyalty," Dormaxian answered, "though there's some business we must attend to first. Lord Mylos has bestowed a member of your band with a special mission, one upon which the success of this entire adventure rests."

These words ignited my curiosity, for who among our meager Brookside Band could be tasked with ensuring the entire adventure's success?

One of the guards handed Dormaxian a long envelope, its flap sealed with the insignia of the Xanthorian Order. "Lord Mylos has entrusted one intrepid adventurer with delivering this letter to the Rogue in Bulafar Village," the captain said. "The task requires extreme caution, for the Rogue harnesses the Evil power known as the Twisting to manipulate the weak-minded."

While this reference to the vile Twisting (which I also promise to explain in due time!) initially took my breath away, it was soon forgotten when Captain Dormaxian pointed a finger at me. "You, Glimrick the bard, have been chosen to deliver Lord Mylos's letter."

The others turned to me with looks of amazement, and the Onslaught nearly came upon me as my body trembled in a shake and my breathing

emerged in quick, labored gasps. It became a struggle to utter even the simplest of words, and it was some time before I could finally murmur, “Me?”

“Yes, you,” Dormaxian replied with little patience.

I was fortunate that Quetalina attempted to come to my rescue, for she knew my struggles with the Onslaught made me a poor candidate for a task as simple as delivering a letter. “If I may be so bold,” she began, “Bard Therrinbottom is sometimes oft to—ah, shall we say, seek solace during moments of great excitement, which it seems such a mission may provoke.”

I lowered my head in shame at Quetalina’s description. Though my companions all knew of the Onslaught’s effects, it still pained me to hear them spoken of aloud.

“Furthermore,” Quetalina continued, “the bard has no carriage in which to journey to Bulafar Village. It will take the better part of a half day to tread there on foot.”

“Lord Mylos has already considered that,” the taller of the two guardsmen answered. “Bard Therrinbottom will be guided by a driver who can assist him on his quest.” He aimed his finger squarely at Brantly. “Brantly Vander-swoggin, do you possess a carriage of sound magical contrivance that can make the journey to Bulafar?”

“Yes, m’lord,” Brantly said. “It’s secured off the main road with the others.”

“Very well,” Dormaxian declared. “Then you shall venture forth immediately. Lord Mylos has drawn up a map that will lead you to the Rogue’s family estate. Come closer and receive the letter!”

“My dear captain, I believe there’s been some mistake,” I began. “I am but a humble teller of tales from the far-off village of Darby, and I know nothing of Bulafar Village or its people. This Rogue of whom you speak is a mystery to me, and I see no reason why a heartier adventurer wouldn’t be better suited for this task.”

“There’s been no mistake, bard,” the second guard growled. “Lord Mylos specifically ordered you to deliver the letter. Perhaps you hold some special relationship with this Rogue that you haven’t told us about?”

I felt an urgent need to answer in the negative before remembering that I still didn’t know who this mysterious Rogue was. “Does the Rogue of Bulafar go by some other name?” I asked meekly.

Instead of answering, Captain Dormaxian beckoned me forward, and I drew closer with short, reluctant steps. In his eyes blazed a fiery look of annoyance, and I sensed his bitterness that such a simple task was causing me such difficulty. When I reached within three paces of him he gestured me still nearer, and it was only then that I glimpsed the angry, upturned curl of his lip and the stray unshaven hairs beneath his flared nostrils.

“Lord Mylos asked for you *personally*,” he whispered through clenched teeth, “and it’s *very* important that you and Brantly deliver this letter to the Rogue so we can start our adventure.”

I recalled Lord Mylos as I’d last seen him during the Unpleasantness nearly seven years before, howling with anger as he insisted to our Paths of Light party that he’d spoken the Truth. The memory, however, only made the tremors of the Onslaught loom more strongly.

“Now, you might recognize the Rogue’s Mundane name on the envelope,” Dormaxian said ever so slowly, “though Lord Mylos insists that you call him by his adventuring name.” He held the envelope so I could read the handwritten letters on its face. “So tell me—are you familiar with the Rogue of Bulafar, otherwise known as Carcrash Parker?”

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At seeing the words on the envelope, a bright, ominous Shimmer—that harbinger of an oft-feared Paradox!—enshrouded my vision, seeming to distort the very images of the High Realm. The Shimmer rose up to nearly blind me, but it vanished when I grasped the meaning of the words on the envelope—for of course, they were merely Epluriban place names spelled out in the marking system of the King’s Messengers, and not some splintering of the Mundane into the High Realm!

“I do know Carcrash Parker,” I admitted. “He was my adventuring companion in a campaign that journeyed from the Dragon’s Head in Kaynan with Lord Mylos, though I’ve not spoken to him in some years.”

My words seemed to thrust the group into confusion: Nanaya turned to whisper to Phaeton Birch, Pennyfarthing wrung his hands with worry, and I averted my eyes from the shock on Desirae Shining Star's face as she stared at me open-mouthed.

"Of course," I added, "I have no memory of Carcrash mocking the Adventurer's Code or launching an ambush like the one you've spoken of, so perhaps you have him confused with someone else?"

Dormaxian's face grew dark. "Memories can be deceiving, Bard Therrinbottom. Carcrash Parker is not to be trusted, for he knows many tricks and owes loyalty to no one. He will attempt to sway you to his side using the Twisting, but remember: he is an enemy of the Xanthorian Order, and now an enemy of the Brookside Band."

I again felt the others' eyes upon me as I stumbled for what to say, though it was then that Desirae Shining Star's voice rose out from the crowd:

"Even if this mission involves great danger," she called out, "Bard Therrinbottom will still have to voice an Oath of Consent to any weapons the Rogue would use against him. Isn't that right?"

Captain Dormaxian nodded. "That is correct."

Though a bolder adventurer than I would have felt a rush of courage at hearing a companion's support, Desirae Shining Star's assurance did nothing to quell the Onslaught trembling within me, for it was more than just battling that I feared. Much of Dormaxian's story had gone against what I'd expected about the adventure ahead, and his mentions of events I'd thought were far behind me had only heightened my foreboding. Still, what was I to have done in front of Desirae Shining Star who'd supported me, as well as the other Brookside Band members I so badly wished to see me as their steadfast companion?

Though I wanted nothing more than to charge into the forest and hide behind a fallen log, I felt the words escape my mouth that would set a momentous adventure into motion. "So be it," I said. "I will hasten to deliver the letter as best I can."