

Zolton's Wrath: Willful Ignorance

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1 Legal

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2 Foreigners in a Foreign Land

"Can you keep a secret?", a half-elf says to the dwarf standing next to him. The half-elf is a slender, brown-blond haired, brown eyed, middle aged man. The dwarf is a pale, burly, auburn haired, green eyed young adult with an almost overflowing coin purse hanging off his belt and both a warhammer and metal shield strapped onto his back. They are both on a wooden, one masted, passenger ship with worn, white sails. It is a warm, humid, late afternoon in the tropical Tardesian Isles island chain. The dwarf turns his head from looking out at the warm and welcoming tropical waters over the ship's railing towards the half-elf and looks a little flustered. He responds with his deep voice, "Oh, well, I suppose so? You are aware that we are complete strangers right laddy?" The half-elf takes a sip out of his tankard, looks out over the ship's railing at the passing tropical islands, and continues, "Wait, are you getting off at Arhuna?" The dwarf responds, "I do

not know where that is, so no I suppose not." The half-elf says, "Good, I need to get some things off of my chest before I get to Arhuna and may not speak of them again until the next time that I leave, which could be months. Do you mind?" The dwarf says, "Well, you have gotten me curious now, so by all means go ahead." The half-elf gives a small smile, takes another sip from his tankard and says, "Ever since the previous God of Peace, Armallilla, was killed, I have lost all respect for the Religion of Peace. They have become a bunch of push overs. They even let the Sharmullil elves conquer my homeland of Arhuna! The new God of Peace, Gorstag, told us Arhunians to avoid a war by surrendering to the Sharmullil elves before we even had a chance to defend ourselves. Now the Sharmullil elves have the perfect place to launch attacks against the humans of Endelhiem. Which is from the docks just down the street from my house! All that his" The half-elf raises his hands and makes quotation marks with his hands as he says, "divine decision" he puts his hands back down and continues, "has accomplished is to enable a larger war between humans and elves and strip my people of both their freedom and pride!" The dwarf says in shock, "The God of Peace died!?" The half-elf looks saddened and says, "Yes... she died several months ago... Where have you been? Living under a rock!?" The dwarf looks insulted and says, "You do know that most Dwarves live under mountains for their entire lives right?" The half-elf says, "Apologies, the few dwarves that I have met were here, up on the surface, not underground. Let's start over shall we?" The dwarf reluctantly nods his head.

The half-elf reaches out his hand for a shake and says, "Hi, I am the famous author and founder of the religion with the fastest growing revenue in the whole world of Lutum called, 'Tautology'. My name is Elrond Fubbard. I am not normally so insensitive, I just haven't been sleeping well recently due to all of the stress associated with my book tour. Luckily, I just finished it, and I'm now headed home to this ship's next stop, the most beautiful tropical island in all the world, Arhuna. Where are you headed?" The dwarf shakes Elrond's hand and then says, "Oh, I don't know. I just took the first ship that I found out of Ammarindar. It is the mountain that I have lived in for my whole life. I have never left my home before. The ocean is quit a bit bigger than I had imagined." The dwarf excitedly says, "I heard that if you're lucky, then you can even see shining jewels in the sky called stars! During something called, 'night'." He continues, "Oh, yes, and they call me Pincus Battlehammer, cleric of Fershul the God of rock. Up until recently, I was supposed to fight in Fershul's army against the armies of the evil gods that have started the most recent Cosmic War of the Gods."

Elrond looks towards Pincus and solemnly responds, "It was probably wise of you to choose to not join the fight. Not many people return from that war, and, from what I have heard, it is far from over." Elrond notices Pincus' large coin pouch and with a sly smile says, "You should come to Arhuna too. You could come to one of my sermons about Zolton. He is soon to be the God of devotion based love. Who knows, maybe you will want to join Tautology?" Pincus uncofortably says, "I do need to find a wife, or at least a girlfriend, but I wasn't planning on joining any new religions." Elrond says, "Well, there is another reason to come to Arhuna. Tonight we are having a new years, winter solstice, festival. We are celebrating going from the year of the dog to the year of the dragon. It is one of the biggest parties of the year, which is saying something since Arhuna is a pirate town, so almost every night is a reckless party." Pincus reaches towards his coin purse to check that it is still there. Elrond continues, "Don't worry, the scoundrels in Arhuna know better than to rob the tourists. If they did that then the locals who cater to tourists would lose their business and the whole town would go under. The pirates focus their robbery on expensive, foreign merchant ships who are forced through the island chain due to tides, currents, and the winds." Pincus looks excited and says with a twinkle in his eyes, "I heard that you surface folk know how to put on a fantastic party. I am in! Do the locals accept gemstones or gold as

currency?" Pincus opens his coin pouch revealing that it is filled to the brim with shining precious minerals. Elrond's eyes light up with excitement as he quickly obscures anyone else on this ship's view of Pincus' wealth with his hands and quietly says, "Yes, that will more than do. You should be careful showing off such wealth. You never know who may value THAT much money more than your life."

Pincus asks, "What else is there to do around these parts except party?" Elrond responds, "The new god of Peace, Gorstag lives right over there." He points to a tropical island with a large, dormant volcano off the port side of the boat. Elrond continues, "He came to visit us in Arhuna once. He had about ten white skinned, human, body guards with him on his visit. All of them were, of course, golden dragons who had used their inherent magical powers to shapeshift into their human form as to not scare the locals. You see, if the God of Peace defends themselves from an attack, then they are not being peaceful. This inherently weakens them, thus the God of Peace does not usually fight; even in self defense. To solve this problem, the good gods assigned the noblest and most powerful of all creatures to be the body guards of the God of Peace many thousands of years ago, the golden dragons. When grown, they are about 30 feet tall, have shining golden scales, can breath fire so hot that it can melt the side of a mountain, and they have the unique magical power to enter people's dreams to help guide them down the path of goodness or discover an enemy's plans and act appropriately to defend themselves. Even the golden dragons are not perfect; they come to Arhuna to drink a lot." Elrond chuckles, "Well, if knowing how to let off some steam is a sin, then call me a sinner!" Elrond takes another sip out of his tankard. Pincus plainly says, "All the dragons that I have seen are thieves. Every few months we catch one trying to steal the wealth of Ammarindar. It takes an entire dwarven army just to repel one. I am a little surprised to hear that some dragons have chosen the path of good." Elrond smiles and says, "There are plenty of good dragons out there. If you want a chance to meet them on different terms than you are used to, then I would suggest that you check out the nicest tavern in Arhuna. It has been recently renamed to, 'The Dragon's Mouth'. The golden dragons go there to drink and gossip. This allows the locals of Arhuna to know more about the affairs of the gods than most other towns. If you're lucky, then you may even get to meet Gorsteg." Pincus goes wide eyed and says while shocked, "Me meeting a Gggod!? I have only every dreamed of such a thing, but they are so busy tending to their religions, and now they are even busier due to the Cosmic War of the Gods." Elrond says, embarrassed, "Come to mention Gorstag, please do not tell anyone in Arhuna about me complaining about the region of Peace or the Sharmullil elves who conquered Arhuna. I could get in trouble if anyone found out what I had said." Pincus warmly responds, "Your secret is safe with me." Some flying fish jump out of the water and glide next to the ship. Pincus turns towards them in awe and loses focus on the conversation.

On the other side of the ship there is an almost four foot tall, blond haired, blue eyed, gnome wearing a thin gold chain around his neck. He is looking out at a few clouds in the sky. He is wearing a lenticular printing of a hand with its thumb rubbing up against its middle finger which is the accepted, international, "pay up" symbol on his shirt. A human woman with deep brown skin, long brown hair, and brown eyes, wearing colorful silk in her early twenties walks up the stairs leading from below deck. She approaches the gnome and says with a seductive smile, "Hi, I'm Zanna. I couldn't help but notice your beautiful hair while eating lunch below deck earlier today." The gnome blushes, and respond "Oh, hi, I'm Eldon. You're quite attractive yourself. Where are you headed?" Zanna responds, "I'm going to the new years festival in Arhuna. I'm a traveling bard and plan on spending the next few weeks there busking outside of the local taverns for a living. I come from the distant land of Mernillow and figured that learning about the musical customs of foreigners could help inspire my, work in progress, masterpiece composition. What

about you?" Eldon responds, "I have always wanted to visit, Mernillow, but the long journey has thus far dissuaded me. It is quite fortuitous that I'm going to Arhuna also. I'm a lobbyist working under Talligor, God of Taxes. I was sent on a work trip to lobby the local Arhunian government, now controlled by the Sharmullil elves, to lower their exploding inflation, set up guilds to limit competition among wealthy business owners, and start using unnecessary parking tickets to collect government revenue. I have an appointment with the governor tomorrow." Zanna slowly says, "That's an interesting job that you have there... Do you enjoy your work?" Eldon continues, "I like my job. I usually act as a lawyer defending wealthy banks in bankruptcy court in the city of Escallant. The court's main office has a huge fountain" Zanna interjects, "Isn't it quite dry in Escallant?", Eldon nods with a smile and continues, "The office also has gold laced tapestries, and even a doorman in a nice suit who opens the door for those who work in the office but not anyone there to declare bankruptcy. I am, unfortunately, missing my brother's funeral for this work trip, but this is an assignment that I was asked to go on from the God of Taxes himself, so there was no way that I could refuse."

Pincus runs from the other side of the ship to continue watching the flying fish that have just swam under the boat to this side of the ship which is where Eldon and Zanna are currently speaking. Pincus inadvertently puts himself between Eldon and Zanna. Eldon angrily says, "Get away fool! We are having a moment here!" Pincus looks at Eldon and blushes with embarrassment. With a tone of regret in his voice Pincus says, "Sorry, I was just trying to see the flying fish." He moves towards the front of the ship thus putting Zanna between himself and Eldon. Zanna says to Pincus with a smile, "It's alright, it was an accident. Plus, you were not interrupting anything important." Pincus looks at Zanna and asks, "How do these fish fly?" With a smirk Eldon says, "The fish fly by excreting a magical elixir into the water that raises them up into the air. If you jump in and drink the water that the fish were just in, then you might be able to fly too." Pincus excitedly smiles and says, "Oh boy that would be great!" His facial expression changes to a look of concern and he says, "But I cannot swim." Eldon smirks and says, "Don't worry you'll be flying shortly. Go on and jump in." Zanna looks appalled and quickly says, "That's not true, the fish use their fins to catch the wind to fly. There is no magic involved. Do not jump into the water dwarf." She turns towards Eldon and angrily says, "What is wrong with you?!" Eldon responds, "Lighten up, I am just having a bit of fun. People like HIM are hopelessly lost and there is nothing that we can do for them. People like US should take the opportunity to use them to get a laugh in when we get the chance. Anyways, how about I buy you a drink tonight in Arhuna?" Zanna dismissively says, "You're not my type." She turns away from Eldon who looks insulted. Eldon says, "I don't need you. I could find a better lay with a five silver coin Tardesian hooker!" Eldon storms off to below deck.

With a blush on her face, Zanna says to Pincus, "I'm sorry about him. I usually have better taste in men. Are you alright, you look pale?" Pincus slowly looks up towards Zanna and quietly says, "I am not sure. I almost jumped to my death... Apparently, I do not know how to survive on the surface." Zanna gently smiles and says, "Well the first step to survival in a foreign land is to make friends." She reaches out her hand as she says, "Hi, I'm Zanna." Pincus slowly reaches out his hand to shake hers. "Hi, I'm Pincus, cleric of Fershal, God of Rock. This is my first time on the surface, and I'm headed to a new years festival with pirates in Arhuna tonight. How do I survive?"

The dark skinned female ship captain yells to the passengers, "Attention, next stop is Arhuna. We will be docking in fifteen minutes. Gather your things now if you're getting off." Zanna looks from the ship captain towards Pincus and kindly says, "I can teach you a thing or two about surviving in a foreign land. I am going to the same festival as you are to busk and learn about the local music. Why don't we go to the festival together as new friends?" Pincus joyfully says, "I

look forward to it!" Zanna says, "Let me go gather my things and I will meet you here on deck in fifteen minutes to off board the boat." The mostly upper class, tourist passengers go below deck to gather their things as do Zanna and Pincus.

The sun begins to set forming a deep orange across the sky. The ship puts down its sails and slowly drifts next to a floating wooden dock to moor. Pincus comes up from below deck and waits where he met Zanna several minutes earlier. He now also has a sack on his back with his possessions. Pincus looks out over the docks of Arhuna and sees many thatched roof, wooden buildings. Several have smoke coming from their chimneys. The buildings seem old and worn down. On the sides of the wet streets, there are clusters of fireflies circling the lit lanterns. There are tropical plants scattered along the nearby beach, which is just to the right of the docks. There are faint sounds of festive music being played from a nearby tavern and also off in the distance near the center of the town. The streets are packed with joyous people of many different humanoid races, but mostly humans and elves. The streets have rich, poor, likely criminals, pious priests and same sex couples holding hands all harmoniously coexisting together. Wagons carrying what appears to be barrels of ale, decorations, and food are busy heading from the docks towards the town center. There are at least ten pacification officers by the docks wearing leather armor. Some have short swords on their sides while others have bows and arrows on their backs. All of the pacification officers are humans local to the Tardesian Isles with a light brown skin, eyes, and hair. There is a large painting on a building near the docks of a beautiful blonde, white skinned, buff, teenage, male, human model with outstretched, white, shimmering angelic wings protruding from his back. He is looking seductively over his shoulder back at the viewer of the art. He has no shirt on, and his pants are a long, tan, tight, linen along the leggings and are bright red at the butt region.

Zanna comes up from below deck and then approaches Pincus. She says, "There you are. Let's go stand in line to get off the boat." Zanna now has a lyre instrument next to a sack filled with her things strapped to her back. They walk over to a small line of passengers formed near the wooden plank exit ramp of the ship. There is a very young, human, girl in line to get off of the boat in front of Zanna and Pincus. She starts to cry and says, "But I don't wanna get off. I wanna see flying fish!" The ship captain, who happens to be standing nearby, bends down to the girl's height and with a smile says to the little girl, "Don't worry, this isn't the end. It's just the beginning of your next adventure." The little girl looks confused and her mother says, "Yes honey, we will see many more interesting things here on vacation. You can see the flying fish again when we take the boat home in a few days." Zanna notices that there is a school of little fish swimming in circles at the base of the boat with red along their backs and they are emitting bright blue light from their sides. Zanna pokes Pincus and points to the fish. Pincus loudly says, "Oh boy, these are the prettiest fish that I have ever seen!" The little girl looks over the edge of the boat with a smile, and her mother says, "See honey, there is not nothing to worry about. If you keep an open mind, then you will be more than satisfied by what Arhuna has to offer you."

Eldon is standing near the front of the line. He whistles towards the ship captain and says, "Murithi, come over here." The ship captain walks to Eldon and with a forced smile says, "How may I be of service?" Eldon says, "Here take this tip, you have earned it for your hospitality towards me on this journey." He hands her a silver coin. The captain continues her forced smile and says, "Thank you for your patronage." She then walks down the plank that has been placed between the boat and the dock for off boarding and begins to talk to a pacification officer waiting on the docks. Captain Murithi says to the pacification officer, "We are ready to off board if you are." The pacification officer waves forward the first group of tourists to off board the boat and says, "There is a one silver coin tourist tax for each adult. It is required to gain entrance into Arhuna during the festival." The first family to exit pays the tax and then walks into Arhuna. Eldon is up

next. He walks down the wooden ramp and points to his shirt with the holy symbol of the God of Taxes on it. The pacification officer says, "Oh, I am sorry sir, I did not mean to ask a tax of you. You may pass without paying." Eldon smirks and begins walking into town. As he leaves, he looks back at the ship captain, raises his right, outstretched hand into the air, and says, "Live long, and may you profit from many tax loopholes." Captain Murithi forces a smile and waves at him as he walks away. He walks up some steps to a main street and then to a group of people gathered to his right. When Eldon is out of earshot the ship captain mutters to the pacification officer on the dock next to her, "I hate tax lobbyists.". Most of the boat, including the dock pacification officer, laugh at Eldon as he walks away. He turns to look back at the boat and everyone suddenly stops laughing except Pincus. Pincus looks around at everyone near him who is silent and starts staring at him with uncomfortable looks on their faces. Pincus blushes and slowly stops laughing. Zanna and Pincus both off board the boat and pay the tourist tax.

Zanna looks towards Pincus and says, "I'm hungry. Would you like to get some food?" Pincus is looking around and notices that a large crowd has formed not too far away down the street to the right. Pincus hears someone yelling from where the crowd is, "Free tacos! Free tacos with a sermon about the new God of Peace, Gorstag! Come here for free tacos!" Pincus snaps back into the conversation with Zanna and says, "I could eat. What are tacos?" Zanna excitedly says, "They are supposedly a delicious local food that I have never tried. Do you know where we can get some?" Pincus points towards the taco stand off to the right. They both hurry through the crowded streets and see some children taking hallowed out, painted, bird eggs that are filled with confetti and breaking them over each other's heads and laughing. They notice that quite a few people in the streets near them have some confetti on their heads.

Upon arriving at the taco stand, Zanna and Pincus notice at least fifteen people all grouped up at its open fire grill. There is a half-orc woman with a light green undertone of her skin and small tusks protruding from her mouth. She is a little over six feet tall and is strong. She looks at Pincus and Zanna and says, "What would you like: vegetarian, fish, or chicken tacos?" Zanna says, "Vegetarian please. How many may I have?" Pincus quickly says, "Three chicken tacos please." The half-orc cook smiles and says, "Three is usually what we give, but if you wanted more, then that is alright with us." Zanna smiles and says, "Three please." Zanna looks around to try to see who else is with the half-orc cook, but does not notice anyone else. The half-orc yells out, "Father Dover, where are you Father Dover! This crowd wants you to give your sermon now!" She looks a little concerned, but goes back to cooking. After about thirty seconds she looks around again and yells, "Ben, where are you!? These nice people would like a sermon!" The cook looks towards the crowd around her and says, "I am sorry, Father Dover is supposed to be giving a sermon about Gorstag right now while I cook, but he seems to have run off somewhere." Eldon, who is also in the crowd impatiently says, "Where is my food woman? I have better things to do." The half-orc cook looks towards Eldon and says, "I do not wish to give you under cooked food, so you will have to be patient. It should only be a little bit longer until you get to meet Father Dover and hear his sermon about the new God of Peace little boy." Eldon looks insulted and opens his mouth to speak up to remind her that he is a gnome, which is a shorter race, but not a human child. Just then, a local human man with light brown skin and brown eyes wearing a black and white priests outfit with an embroidering of two doves being released into the air runs up and say to the cook, "Sorry Sister Dotsk. I was giving some tourists directions to the town center, but I am back to give the sermon about Gorstag now." The half-orc cook looks towards Eldon. While gesturing towards the male priest, and with a welcoming smile, she says, "This is Father Ben Dover little boy."

The crowd gasps and looks stunned. Eldon becomes furious and angrily yells, "It would seem that the only peace that your god is interested in is the one attached to the lower back of a little

boy! Keep your tacos wench!" He storms off down the street back towards the boat and loudly mutters to himself, "And I thought that Talligor, the God of Taxes, was evil." He walks towards a building with a sign that depicts a strawberry cut down its middle with text beneath it that reads, "The Moist Strawberry: Liquor in the front, poker in the rear". There are young women outside wearing a heavy layer of makeup greeting the male guests as they enter.

Sister Dotsk hands some tacos to a shocked Zanna. As Zanna reaches out her hands to get a taco, Pincus notices that there is a tan line in the shape of a ring on her empty, wedding finger. Zanna accepts the tacos and almost leaves, but she sees that Pincus does not have his tacos yet, so she stands there and begins to eat her tacos. Father Dover looks confused by what happened and says, "Well, not everyone has what it takes to piously following the path of peace and forgiveness. Anyways, I am Father Dover, and I was transferred to Arhuna a few weeks ago from Lheerindell, God of Forgiveness', church. The new God of peace, Gorstag, and Lheerindell have quickly become friends, so the two churches are closer now than ever before. Gorstag took over as the new God of Peace after Armallilla was killed about six months ago. He is her son with King Luth Mostana being his father. He is the first mortal to ascend to Godhood in over a millennia! Gorstag brought peace to his own lands after years of internal struggles and wars waged by his father. Gorstag has been a god ever since the good gods voted that he should be the new God of Peace and told their followers in all of the realms and inhabited planets to worship him. That was almost four months ago now. He has been doing his best to negotiate an end to the Cosmic War among other smaller wars. Some ignorant people blame him for the growing chaos throughout Lutum, but he is a symptom of it, not the cause! Gorstag has not caused the growing number of disappearances, crop failures, plagues, civil unrest, nor the Cosmic War between the Gods. These problems started before Gorstag was ever even a god. Supporting him is our best hope of ending these troubled times and getting back to a world of peace and joy for as many people as possible. We have sermons every night at the temple of Peace here in Arhuna. Please join us, and don't forget to bring friends and family. Thanks for listening. Do you have any questions?" Sister Dotsk hands Pincus his tacos. Zanna grabs Pincus' hand and drags him down the street back in the direction of the boat. As they are leaving they hear someone at the taco stand ask, "How was Armallilla, the previous God of Peace, killed?"

Zanna says, "I heard some lovely music coming from down this street when we got off of the ship. Let's go there and check it out? I need to learn as much about the local music as I can if I am going to accomplish my dream of producing a master piece composition!" Pincus says, "Sure, will I get to hear you play a song tonight?" Zanna says, "Maybe, if we can find the right place for me to perform." They head two blocks down the street back towards the boat. As they approach the source of the music, they discover that the music is coming from a tavern with a sign above the door that has a mermaid playing a harp with text underneath that says, "The Mermaid's Tail".

Zanna and Pincus notice several young adults protesting outside of the tavern. A few people in the crowd of about ten are holding signs that are difficult to read now that the sun is almost fully down. There is a tall, exceptionally attractive, blonde, blue eyed, white skinned, buff, young man standing on a wooden box just outside of the tavern's door. He is wearing an unbuttoned shirt with long, tight, tan pants that are bright red at the butt area. Zanna recognizes him as the male model on the advertisement that she saw when coming into Arhuna. He yells to the small crowd, "Mermaids are more than just their tail!" The crowd responds with a chant, "Mermaids are more than just their tail!". Zanna and Pincus stop for a moment and watch the crowd. A woman in the crowd yells, "I love you Chadly Johnson!". The attractive man on the box leading the crowd smiles and winks at her. She puts her hand on her head and pretends to almost faint. She then giggles. Chadly continues, "Until the owners of this establishment acknowledge the historical struggles of

merwomen and change the tavern's name, we will not eat nor drink here!" The small crowd cheers.

Zanna turns to Pincus and says, "I really wanted to hear the local music, but are we not supporting the struggles of mer-females for going into the tavern?" A local, young man nearby participating in the protest turns towards Zanna and politely says, "Its mer-women. Not all women are females." Zanna forces a smile and nods slowly while saying, "Oh, you learn something new everyday. Thank you." Pincus says over the crowd's chanting, "These people are not very bright. I am sure that it is alright for us to enter." A few protesters turn and glare at Pincus, and Zanna blushes with embarrassment.

A gnome woman with brown hair and pale skin walks out of the tavern and yells, "Enough, enough!" The crowd quiets down. The gnome woman addresses the crowd, "Ok, I talked with my husband and we agreed to change the tavern's name to, "The Mermaid's Talent". Can you please stop keeping away customers on our busiest night of the year for some pointless cause?" Chadly, looks to the crowd and raise his hands into the air. Chadly triumphantly says, "Yes, we, CAAAN!" The crowd cheers. Chadly yells out, "Everybody, let's get some beer and food at, "The Mermaid's Talent!" The gnome woman rolls her eyes and then holds the door open for them. The crowd, some nearby tourists, Zanna and Pincus all enter the tavern.

The tavern is lighted with lanterns on each each table and an old iron cast chandelier with lit candles on it. There is a roaring fire on the right side of the tavern opposite of the bar. There are some cheap paintings of landscapes on the walls. The tavern smells of the ocean and smoked meats. The tavern is about half full with all sorts of people. There are some families, many drunk tourists, and a few small groups of locals getting dinner and drinks together. There is a band comprised of one female singer and three instrumentalists playing on mandolins in the back. The music is upbeat and has drawn a small group of young adult locals to dance in front of the band. Their music is hard to hear over the occasional bouts of laughter from the different groups. A smaller gnome girl, perhaps fourteen, approaches the first group to enter which is Chadly's group. She says, "Hi, I'm Orla, and I'll be serving you tonight. You may take any open seats." Chadly starts to look around for a table big enough for his roughly ten compatriots. Orla smiles and says, "Let me move these two empty tables together for your group." She does so and Chadly's group all sit down to the left of the entrance fairly close to the bar. Orla approaches Zanna and Pincus and says, "I have a nice quiet table in the back if you two would like a little more privacy?" Pincus blushes and Zanna says, "We are just friends. May we be close to the music? Maybe over there at those open stools at the bar?" Zanna gestures to the far side of the bar. Orla nods and guides them to their seats.

On Pincus' right there is an elf man with the typical multi-colored irises, slender bodies, and pointed ears of all elves wearing a white puka shell necklace. Next to him is a human, male in his late twenties, with white skin, brown hair, and brown eyes. Orla asks, "Can I get you two started with something to drink?" Zanna says, "Just water for me please." Pincus excited says, "This is a party, with pirates! I would like the strongest ale that your people have to offer!" Orla says, "That would be the called, "Tardesian Tap"". Orla leaves to go prepare the drinks. The elf next to Pincus says, "That's the spirit! So many tourist come to Arhuna for its tropical beauty, but if you ask me, what defines Arhuna is our culture of freedom and drinks for everyone." The man sitting next to the elf loudly interjects, "These people will not be oppressed!" The locals in the tavern go, "Here here!". The gnome woman tavern owner yells to the tavern, "Enough of that or we will get shut down! Do you want the Sharmullil elves to hear you!?" The elf lightly smacks the man sicking next to him over the back of his head and says, "Can you stop being an idiot for just one minute? Your stupidity has almost got me in serious trouble at least three times in the few weeks that I have known you." The elf turns towards Pincus and says, "Do not mind him, he thinks that

the Sharmullil elves who now rule Arhuna are bad guys just because they do not look like him. Arhuna is still quite a nice place for you and your lovely friend. Are you two here for the new years festival?" Pincus says, "Yes, I came from the mountain of Ammarindar to experience more from life and forget about my problems." The elf says, "I left my homeland and came to Arhuna too. That was over one hundred years ago though. I wanted to do more in my life than just to disappoint my family. Most of the non-locals here are escaping something. Except Geth here." The elf gestures to his human friend. He then chuckles and continues, "He is an apprentice monk who was sent to Arhuna to sell his monastery's beer. Then he lost his coin purse and couldn't afford passage back to his monastery. He is stuck here until he can get the funds to both travel back home and pay back the monks who foolishly trusted him with their goods." Geth sighs and slowly says, "Laucian is my friend. Laucian is mean sometimes."

Orla arrives with drinks for Zanna and Pincus along with refills of beer for Laucian and Geth. She sees the lyre on Zanna's back and says, "Is that an instrument of some kind?" Zanna nervously says, "Yes, it is my lyre." Orla says, "My mom and dad run this place. They are looking for more musicians to play in the tavern later tonight. Would you like to audition?" Zanna looks at the ground and blushes while saying with an embarrassed tone, "I am probably not good enough." Pincus says, "Nonsense, this is a part of your dream. You need to put yourself out there and audition. I am sure that your music will be inspiring to listen to." Laucian says, "I would like to hear you perform too." Geth says, "Yah." Orla lets out a little laugh while saying, "You already have more fans than our current band. What do you say?" Zanna says, "Ok, let me get some dinner first, then I will play a song."

The tavern is starting to get full now that the protest outside has stopped. About thirty feet away Chadly and his friends are drinking heavily and opening up fortune cookies from a large bowl of them that they ordered. A young man at the table tells his friend, "Do your fortune followed by "under the covers"." The young man opens his fortune cookie and starts reading the words on the paper inside of the cookie, "Your biggest obstacle is you... Under the covers." Everyone at the table laughs. A girl in the group turns to her female friend and say, "You're up next." Her friend takes a sip from her beer and says, "Expect only the best and that is what you will receive... Under the covers." The group erupts into laughter again. Another girl in the group opens her fortune cookie and reads out loud, "To be content with little is true happiness... Under the covers." A friend sitting next to her says, "To bad that wasn't true for your last boyfriend." The group laughs and continues drinking.

A homeless, middle aged, local human woman walks into the tavern. At the entrance to the tavern, the woman's eyes roll into the back of her head and she loudly addresses the entire tavern, "From tranquil love shall wicked cosmic forces be conceived!" The tavern quiets down and many patrons look at her in shock and fear. She loudly continues, "Peace will end, and the reign of destruction will spring forth! The stars will fall, and the sun will arise from the depths of the earth! Only fools shall dare to stand against such undeniable wrath! Our salvation lies with teaching the lonely teenage boy how to love himself!" Chadly yells, "Under the covers!". The entire tavern erupts into laughter. The homeless woman's eyes roll back to normal and she stands there looking confused. A gold scaled, large, dragon born man who was sweeping the tavern in the corner approaches the homeless woman and starts gently jabbing at her with his broom's brush. He says, "Go on now. Get, get!" She stumbles out of the tavern back onto the street. The band begins to play music again.

Pincus turns to Zanna with a confused look on his face and asks, "Do you think that was a prophecy about the destruction of the world or just a crazy homeless lady spouting nonsense?" Zanna shrugs. A few wealthy looking elves walk in. The young adult, elf, male leading the group

stands at the door and says arrogantly, "Excuse me, my guests and I would like a table. Now." Orla runs over and says, "Apologies, but there is a ten minute wait for tables currently. If you give me your name, then I would be happy to add you to our list to get a table. You would be behind two other part—" The elf looks insulted and interrupts her, "I do not wait for YOUR people." He walks over to the table with Chadly's group and angrily says, "Scram!". Chadly says, "Check your privilege bro." The elf says, "I never ask twice." Chadly stands up and aggressively approaches the elf. Chadly says, "Be careful. I don't start fights, but I do end them." Orla quickly interjects herself between the two by putting her little hands up and barely holds them back. She looks towards the elf and quickly says, "I will find you a table! I just need to talk with some guests. Give me two minutes." The elf picks her up off the ground and yells in her face, "Do you know who I am?!" She looks scared. She grabs a tankard on the side of the table and hits the elf on the head with it. Orla yells, "Help!" as the elf loses grip of her and she falls onto the ground. Pincus stands up and says, "We have to protect the girl." He starts running towards Orla.

The band begins playing exciting tavern brawl music. One of the elves try to grab Orla, but Chadly lands a punch right before he gets to her knocking them out. A few of the elves draw their swords. Orla turns and starts to scurry along the ground towards the cover of bar. Tavern patrons nearby the elves gasp, get up, and run to the corners of the tavern to get away from the violence. Laucian jumps behind the bar and yells, "I'll guard the booze!". The elves' leader angrily says to Chadly, "You will regret that." An elf in the group lunges forward and takes a jab at Orla with his sword, but Pincus jumps in the way and partially blocks the blow with his shield that he is holding with both hands since he did not have time to properly strap it to his left arm. The sword brushes off the shield and makes a shallow cut on Pincus' right arm near the elbow. Pincus falls to the ground from the force of the blow. The elf that slashed him stands above Pincus and prepares to deliver a devastating attack. Zanna strums her lyre while singing, "Laaah diddy duhm". Thin waves of light that osculate from blue to purple sail out from her mouth into the ears of the elf. He stumbles and then falls down asleep with his sword dropping to the ground next to him. All of the elf's friends, except their leader, become distracted by trying to wake him up. The leader of the elves swings his sword at Chadly who narrowly manages to avoid the attack by ducking and pounding the foot of the elf with his hands. The elf lets out a hauler and jumps up and down on one leg while grabbing his foot in pain. Chadly quickly stands back up, picks up a wooden chair, and jabs at the elf with it. The leader of the elves falls to the ground and his sword leaves his grip. Pincus takes this moment to get up and run to the door. He shouts back, "I will get help!"

One of the elves looks towards their leader and says, "Come on Khalin, let's get out of here!" Khalin angrily responds, "Not until we have taught the locals to respect my superiority!" Chadly says to Khalin as Khalin is still trying to get his sword and stand up, "In our hyper masculine society, men need to express more physical intimacy towards each other or they start acting overly aggressive. Do you need a hug bro?" Khalin looks dumbfounded and yells, "I do not need a hug!" A whistle is blown outside of the tavern. Khalin slashes at Chadly with his sword once, twice, three times. Chadly blocks each of them with the legs of the chair that he is holding. Khalin puts the weight of all of his body into an especially viscous strike which is again parried by Chadly with the chair. Khalin takes a moment to regain his footing. Chadly sticks his foot into a nearby, empty bar stool and thrusts it across the floor. He releases it at Khalin who is tripped by the stool hitting him in the legs. Khalin falls to the ground and loses his sword again. Chadly takes this moment to jab the chair that he is holding into Khalin's forehead knocking Khalin unconscious. The elves with Khalin manage to wake their elf friend who was put to sleep with Zanna's magic and run out of the tavern leaving behind their two, unconscious, elf friends.

Two pacification officers come running into the tavern and command, "Halt!" The band stops

playing music. Chadly puts the chair that he had picked up back at its table. Pincus is standing behind the pacification officers still bleeding. Pincus looks around the tavern while saying, "There was a gnome girl, Orla. Is she ok?" The female tavern owner yells from the floor behind the bar, "She is safe over here with her father and I. May we come out from behind the bar?" One of the pacification officers says, "Yes, it's safe now that we are here. We need to collect testimony from witnesses in order to file charges against the perpetrators." A local, teenage, female human stands up from her table near the fire on the right side of the tavern. She addresses the officers from her table, "Those two unconscious elves attacked Orla and scared my dog Gorlita." she gestures to a young, female, chihuahua who has an uncanny resemblance to the teenage dog owner that is cowering behind the teenager's leg. The teenage girl continues, "They were stopped by Chadly, the dwarf and that exotic woman back there." She gestures towards Zanna. The teenager then blushes and does a quick wave at Chadly while saying, "Hi Chadly." Chadly looks a little confused as to who this girl is, but he still nods at her.

Orla emerges from behind the tavern and hands Pincus a small potion with red viscous liquid inside. She says, "Drink this and it will heal your arm. At least, mostly anyways." Pincus pulls off the top of the small bottle and drinks it all down. His arm heals over just a few seconds. Pincus smiles and says, "Thank you lass. You are quite a fighter. You should try out for the Ammarindar dwarven army sometime." Orla smiles and says, "Thanks, my mom makes me take self-defense classes." Four more pacification officers enter the the tavern. The first one to enter looks more senior than the rest and says, "Wake these two up we need their testimony." A pacification officer turns to Pincus and says, "Is what that girl said true?" Pincus says with a sigh of relief, "What that lass said is correct; Orla, Chadly, the rest of the tavern, and I are the victims in this crime. Thank you for putting your lives on the line every day for the safety of this community." The pacification officer says, "You're welcome, but I am just doing my job sir." He then waves over Chadly and Zanna who both walk to him.

The most senior pacification officer says to Zanna and Chadly, "I'm sergeant Tellickotay, and I will be leading this investigation. Tell me what happened." Chadly says, "That elf", he gestures to Khalin and continues, "came in here and tried to make me leave my table. Orla tried to stop him and then he attacked her. He and his friends, about five others, almost killed her. They kept acting infuriatingly unaware of their privilege, so I beat those two unconscious. In self-defense. The rest ran. They were all wearing fancy cloths. They looked like rich tourists to me. Oh yah, this woman used her instrument to cast a spell to put one of them to sleep." Sergeant Tellickotay looks to Zanna and says, "Miss, what do you think happened here?" Zanna looks a little shocked still and says slowly, "They almost killed Orla... Over nothing... Why are some men so cruel towards women?" She begins to cry. Sergeant Tellickotay slowly puts his arm gently around Zanna who does not shy away from it and he reassuringly says, "The pacification officers are here. You are all safe now. These criminals can't hurt anyone anymore." He turns to the bar and yells, "Can we get this heroine a hot chocolate?" A male gnome behind the bar nods and then goes to a room in the back of the tavern.

Orla turns to the teenage girl with the chihuahua that gave her testimony and says, "Thanks for speaking up Gorla." Gorla walks over while responding, "Anytime, I can't let criminals try to do whatever they want in my favorite tavern can I?" Orla says, "Is your dog Gorlita alright, she looks scarred. Please keep her safe." Gorla responds, "Don't worry, I am a very responsible dog owner. Come on Gorlita, let's go to the festival and watch the knife jugglers." Gorlita lets out a scarred wine. Gorla responds to her dog, "You're right Gorlita; the fire breathers are far more entertaining!" Gorlita's ears shoot up and then she puts her head and ears down in a state of surrender. Gorla looks towards Orla and continues, "Orla, are you free tonight to join us at the festival?" Orla says, "The

tavern is a mess, but I will try to catch up with you when my parents let me." Gorla begins to walk out with a few friends that she had at the table with her and her dog. Gorla says, "Bye Orla." Orla waves goodbye and responds, "Bye guys, and bye Gorlita."

Khalin is finally woken up by an officer. His hands are already bound and he is brought to his feet. He angrily says to the pacification officer holding him, "Untie me mongrel. I am Khalin Nailo prince of Sharmullil and this is MY city." The pacification officer holding him freezes and then slowly turns his head to look at sergeant Tellickotay with an oops expression on his face. Sergeant Tellickotay says while surprised, "Oh no. Untie him right now! I am sorry your majesty. The Arhunians will harshly deal with whoever would dare to attack the prince of Sharmullil in his own city! Who is responsible?" Khalin says, "That brute, dwarf, brown human woman, and gnome girl!" Khalin gestures towards Chadly, Pincus, Zanna and Orla.

The guards round up Chadly, Pincus, Zanna and Orla and tie their hands in rope. The female gnome tavern owner cries to the pacification officers as they grab Orla, "No, not my daughter! Please!" The other elf with Khalin, who was also awoken recently, whispers something in Khalin's ear. Khalin says with a smile, "Due to my immense mercy, the gnome girl may go... If she apologizes to me." The woman tavern owner runs over to Orla and says, "Honey, say that you're sorry to the merciful prince." Orla looks to her mom and then over to Pincus. Pincus smiles and gives her a nod. Orla looks at Khalin's chest and says, "I'm sorry." The guards release Orla. Orla's mother puts her arms around her daughter and then quickly guides her behind the bar.

Sergeant Tellickotay nervously says to Khalin, "As you can see your majesty, these criminals are not locals. The locals would never challenge your family's short, but undisputed rule." Khalin nonchalantly says, "Hang them." He turns and leaves the tavern with his elf friend. Pincus, Zanna and Chadly's jaws drop. Pincus looks to Sergeant Tellickotay and scaredily says, "He attacked a little girl and then we defended her and ourselves. Would I have gotten the guards if we were guilty?" Sergeant Tellickotay responds, "I truly wish that I could help, but the Sharmullil elves have conquered Arhuna. Either you will be executed in the morning or we will." One of the other pacification officers says, "I think that the executioner is out until noon tomorrow. He said that he was volunteering to help rehabilitate ducklings that lost their mothers." Sergeant Tellickotay says, "Oh right, you will be executed tomorrow around noon then. You three are off to jail for the night." Pincus, Zanna, and Chadly are dragged from the tavern, hands bound in rope, as criminals being led to their deaths.

3 Chapter 2

To be continued...

4 Acknowledgments

Inspiration for the story came largely from Critical Role, Dungeons and Dragons, Pirates of the Caribbean, South Park, and the general internet community.

Cover photo: Walkerssk - <https://pixabay.com/photos/beach-sea-panorama-panoramic-1824855/>

5 Fan Art

If anyone wants to post or view fan art, then please do so at <https://www.reddit.com/r/ZoltonsWrath/>