

Night had fallen.

It was dark on the road and darker still among the trees. Aeron trudged down the road, his pack slung across his back, his sword at his hip. He was tired and he needed a place to rest. After a little consideration, he walked over to the side of the road and placed his pack on a rock. Unbuckling his sword belt, he placed it next to the rock and knelt beside it on the grass. He drew out a map and spread it out, then pulled out his flint and a small stick. As the flint caught, the stick flared to life, and he used its glowing flame to peruse the map; there were five miles still to the nearest rest-house.

Sighing, Aeron blew out the flame, rolled up the map and replaced it in his pack. Sighing again, he sat down on the grass. He looked at the sky strewn with stars, the moon a sliver in the blackness. It was the night of the new moon tomorrow. There was no wind and the leaves hardly stirred. It was the very picture of peace.

After reflecting on his options, Aeron decided to keep walking. On a busy road like this, there was a possibility of meeting someone else.

Picking up his sword belt and strapping it around his waist, Aeron slung up the pack and resumed trudging down the road. The silence of the night unnerved him a little, so he started whistling *The Wife Who Was a Goat*.

After fifteen minutes, Aeron finally spied a light down the road. As he approached, he realized that the light was a campfire set up on the side of the road. As he got nearer, the blackness began to assume shapes: five tents, two wagons, a few horses and, most importantly, about ten people sitting around the campfire.

Aeron pulled out his stick and flint again and brought the stick to life. The shapes around the campfire stirred. Aeron stopped and waited with a friendly smile as one of the shapes detached itself from the gathering and came towards him, carrying a flaming stick of its own.

The shape was a stocky, well-built man, and Aeron sighed with relief when he saw that the man was wearing the grey robes of the Travelling Hospitaliers. In the light of the flame, Aeron saw that he had a long scar running from his right temple to his cheekbone.

"Greetings, traveller," the man called out. "*Trisfar alar et aum.*"

Hospitalier custom required any man seeking shelter to be greeted in this manner: "*Trisfar alar et aum,*" "May we offer you relief from the weary road."

Aeron smiled.

"*Falar serum truant,*" he replied, in customary reply to a Hospitalier. "The relief is gladly accepted."

The man smiled.

"We are heading towards the Yorn Mountains," he said.