

FROM LONDONER TO LORD

11. Arrival in Tiranat

Their small caravan had been traveling southwards since the morning on the road to Tiranat. They had remained unscathed from any bandits or mercenaries so far, despite their fears of being attacked. The road to Tiranat had taken them closer to the Arakin mountain range, with dense forests surrounding the road as they traveled. The late autumn months meant most of the trees were bare now, revealing their towering forms against the fading light of the setting sun, their colorful leaves now carpeting the forest floor. In a few places where the forest had thinned, they could glimpse the towering mountains to the left, their peaks dusted with snow.

Around noon, soon after they had started their journey again after a short rest for a meal, Kivamus shuddered as a low, guttural growl echoed through the dense forest, silencing the birdsong. His eyes darted to the side of the dirt road, his heart pounding with a sudden fear. Through the thick curtain of trees, he could see them not too far away from their forest route - hulking beasts the size of small bears, yet possessing the unmistakable grace and pack mentality of wolves. Their fur, a mixture of brown and gray, rippled over powerful muscles as they looped through the forest. For a heart-stopping moment, the travelers held their breath, fearful of the beasts noticing them.

Minutes stretched into an eternity, and then finally, as abruptly as they had appeared, the great beasts veered off into the tangled depths of the forest.

The travelers sagged in relief, a shared sigh whispering through them. They were harrowed, yes, but for now, they were safe. Gorsazo told him later that they were called adzees. Similar in their habits to the wolves found more commonly through the forests of Reslinor, adzees were a rare sight. They were the apex predators of the forests, and usually, it took a small group of knights dispatched from a nearby town to kill even a single adzee, if it was seen near a farm or a village.

At some point in the afternoon, Kivamus saw the vast silhouette of a flying creature soaring towards the Arakin mountains. It looked enormous even from a distance, making him worry before he realized that it probably couldn't see the wagons moving in the forest from such a great height. He was told that it was a Bakkore, a huge bird-like beast, that lived and hunted near mountains or tall hills. They seldom came close to human habitations, but farmers in remote farms had often reported them stealing their goats or sheep and flying away with their catch.

Kivamus forced in a deep breath, trying to quell the unease that gnawed at him. This world was nothing like the Earth he left behind. Here, danger lurked not just in the shadows of men, but in the very creatures that roamed the wilds. Monstrous beasts roamed freely, creatures that would send shivers down the spine of even the bravest soul back on Earth. Survival in this harsh

medieval world was already a challenge, but the presence of these monstrous predators added a terrifying new layer of difficulty. He swallowed hard, the weight of his new reality pressing down on him. It would be far harder to stay alive here, but that wouldn't deter him. He would have to learn to adapt, to understand the dangers that stalked these lands if he was going to survive here. And he will survive.

Although the weather had been mild during the daytime, a noticeable chill had settled as evening approached. Kivamus tightened the cloak Feroy had generously offered him, grateful for the extra warmth. The air grew colder with each passing mile, its chill seeping through his clothes. Tiranat, nestled closer to the Arakin mountains, promised a winter far harsher than what he was accustomed to in his life on Earth.

As they crossed the treeline and exited the forest, the pitiful village called Tiranat came into view, giving Kivamus the first glance of what was going to be his new home from now on. The huge trees of the forest surrounded the village, wrapping it from all four sides. The Arakin Mountains, their peaks still ablaze with the fading sunlight, dominated the eastern horizon. Their snowy crowns, usually stark white, were now awash in a golden light. Smaller hills, some gentle and verdant, others steeper and more rugged, stretched from the east of the village towards the majestic range.

He looked at the Tiranat village itself. It was a heartbreaking sight, with no wall to protect it from the dangers of the surrounding forests. The few wispy rays of

the setting sun that still managed to break through the dense forests illuminated a scene of profound poverty. Most of the dwellings were little more than one-room huts built with a desperate mix of mud and whatever scraps of wood the villagers could scrounge in the hopes of keeping out the biting wind. Their thatched roofs, uneven and patchy with missing straw, offered little protection from the elements. Smoke, thin and wispy, curled from a few misshapen chimneys fashioned out of crooked sticks. The air itself held a faint tang of woodsmoke and manure, a rustic fragrance that spoke of a life lived close to the earth, scraping by on its meager bounty.

Dotted amongst the mud huts were a few sturdier structures - a small number of wooden houses offering a touch of relative comfort in the desperate poverty of the village. Even these structures, however, were warped and weathered, their windows patched with ragged pieces of cloth and the wood chipped in places. A communal well, its mossy rim worn smooth by generations of hands, stood next to the road as the village's lifeline amidst the gloom.

As the line of wagons came closer to the huts, a few of the villagers who had started to gather nearby, gazed at the caravan with eyes mixed with hope and desperation.

All of a sudden, Hudan stood up on his saddle and declared in a booming voice, "Hear ye, hear ye! Your new liege, the Baron of Tiranat has arrived! Make way for Lord Kivamus Ralokaar!"

Soon, Feroy, Pydas, and the other wagon drivers joined him in yelling as well, and more and more villagers started to come out of their houses to look at the passing caravan. A few of the villagers had a hopeful look on their faces on hearing about Kivamus and started to clap hesitantly.

It was an otherworldly experience for Kivamus, being praised and cheered for, just because he had somehow found himself as the son of a Duke. Being entitled and getting privileges just because of noble birth went against everything Kivamus stood for in his life on Earth. Yet, for now, this was his life and he had to adjust to it, whether he liked it or not.

Nevertheless, it was impossible not to notice that the majority of villagers still had a subdued silence, punctuated by a few scattered claps or nervous cheers. Some of them did seem to have a curiosity about their new baron, yet it was full of apprehension.

The wagons kept moving and slowly passed the small crowd of villagers through the muddy road, their clothes patched and faded, mirroring the dullness in their eyes. In front of a stinking pile of garbage, a girl who looked to be barely ten years old was clutching a smaller boy to her side, her eyes full of weariness which had no place on any child's face.

As they moved further through the alleys, charred remains of some houses came into view, standing between other undamaged huts and wooden houses. Homeless families huddled in doorways of what remained of their homes, their faces etched with hopelessness.

"What happened here?" Kivamus breathed.

Gorsazo, who was sitting on the other side of the wagon, was also looking at the burnt houses. "I can't say, my lord. But Tiranat is not an easy place to live for anyone, that is certain."

On the muddy paths that wound between the dwellings, villagers moved with weary steps to look at the passing caravan, their faces etched with worry lines deeper than any a simple life should carve. Children, their clothes hanging loose on their thin frames, played sluggishly with sticks and stones, their laughter dull and infrequent.

Kivamus saw the exhaustion in their eyes, the way their shoulders slumped under the burden of their lives. He swallowed hard, as the full weight of Tiranat's despair settled upon him. He'd seen hardship before, but the sheer depth of despair in their eyes was a new kind of pain. It wasn't just fear in the villagers' eyes, but a resigned acceptance of a life lived perpetually on the brink. The air itself seemed to carry the weight of their despair, a thick fog of hopelessness that permeated every corner of Tiranat.

As it became darker, the tall trees of the forest surrounding Tiranat loomed like a silent threat in the fading light of dusk. Tiranat was a village on the precipice, a testament to the harsh realities of a life lived on the fringes of civilization, where every sunrise brought a renewed battle for survival. But amidst all the despair, Kivamus saw something else in the eyes of a few villagers - a spark of hope, faint and fragile, but present nonetheless. As their eyes met, a silent plea passed between them. A plea for change, for a leader who wouldn't simply squeeze them dry but offer a lifeline.

Kivamus took a deep breath to calm his mind. The truth remained that he hadn't chosen to be here, on this planet, or in this village. Yet, he was here now and that was not going to change anytime soon. He could crumble and give up on everything after being uprooted from his happy life in London through no fault of his own. Or, he could use his knowledge to do something good for these people.

A surge of resolve ran through Kivamus. He wouldn't be just another medieval lord, another burden on their backs. These people, broken but not defeated, deserved better. He would be their shield, their champion, a beacon of hope in this suffocating darkness. He would fight for them and this dying village. He squared his shoulders, a newfound determination etching itself onto his face. Tiranat was his home now, and he wouldn't let it crumble. He would help them rebuild, not just their homes, but their lives.

These villagers were his subjects, his people now, and they depended on him. The weight of responsibility pressed down on him, but it wasn't a burden. It was a purpose, a chance to make a real difference in the lives of these desperate people. The journey ahead would be difficult and full of challenges, but that yearning look in the eyes of those villagers had fueled a fire of determination within him. He wouldn't let them down.