

Out-Take Two

Grehling Cara stood watching as the tall Highlander and the two women who accompanied him boarded his airship and lifted off. With a quick sweep north, they were out of sight and quickly gone. That was one fast vessel, the boy was thinking. One accomplished pilot.

This was the sort of man he wanted to be when he grew up. Capable and steady, a bit reckless sometimes but never heedless. And those pretty girls with him, he wouldn't mind having a few of those follow him around either.

It was well after midnight, the skies clouded and dark and the air thick with the smell of an approaching rain. He had been working at tying off the smaller aircraft and readying the airfield for what he imagined would be a deluge. The skies west were particularly dark, the clouds thickest there and deepest black with wind bursts coming from the same direction. Taken as a while, it left no doubt as to where to look for the approaching weather to bring a change.

Grehling hesitated a moment longer, looking off into the darkness where the Highlander's ship had disappeared. He hoped they would be able to outrun the storm but it was coming up pretty fast. They might have to navigate a rough patch or two to get through it. They might have to ride it

out. Even so, he thought (What was his name?) Paxon was more than capable of managing it.

Putting the matter aside, he turned back to the job of tying down the light aircraft and securing the lines that anchored the maintenance buildings. Twisters sometimes appeared in weather like this, especially here in Wayford. It would be best to assume the worst.

He was barely five minutes into his task when Arcannen appeared. He came striding across the airfield like an avenging wraith, his clothes tattered and soiled and his face dark with rage. Grehling would have run if he thought it would have done him any good. As it was, he did the only thing that seemed reasonable and stood his ground.

Arcannen swept up to him, snatched the front of his tunic and pulled him close. "Where are they?"

Grehling had promised Paxon he would say nothing of seeing them, but he knew instinctively that if he lied to this man he would be caught out. "Flew out awhile ago," he said as calmly as he could manage.

The sorcerer's grip tightened. It felt like a steel band clamped to his clothing. "How many?"

Grehling shook his head. "Himself. A girl, maybe two. I wasn't paying all that much attention. He was there all of a sudden and then gone. All I was just supposed to do was watch his airship."

"And tell him where to find me. You did that, I presume?"

"I did. Like you told me to."

Arcannen released him with a push. "Talked to him, did you?"

"A bit."

"Did he tell you anything about himself? Anything unusual?"

Grehling shook his head. "A little about airships, when he flew in. A few words about the Highlands. You, of course. He asked where he could find you, so I did what you said and told him." He paused. "I asked about his sword. He showed it to me."

Arcannen's eyes glittered. "What did he tell you about it?"

"Said I might have one like it some day."

"Nothing about where he got it? Nothing about how he came to be in possession of such a fine blade?"

"Nothing." Grehling waited a moment as the sorcerer looked off into space, thinking. "I have to get back to work," he said.

Arcannen nodded, and then held up his hand quickly to stay him from going. "You have been a reliable lad in the past. I presume you are being truthful and forthcoming with me here?"

The boy nodded. "I am. No reason not to be."

"No. No reason at all. But nevertheless. If I were to find out later that you lied to me about anything? Or that you held back information that I would find useful? It would go very badly for you. You understand that, don't you?"

Grehling nodded wordlessly.

"Because I hate liars. I hate those who play games with me. I wouldn't like it if I found out this was true of you."

The boy kept his face blank. "Can I go now? There's a storm coming in. I have work to do."

He waited on the man, but no longer than it took for a nod to signal his release and then quickly turned away. He could feel the other's eyes on his back as he moved away. He could feel his skin crawl.