

## **Thoren's Night**

By Shane Hill

The small and graceful elf, along with her human companion, enters into a trance. But did she see him? From his distant position, Thoren is convinced that Skylana looked his way just before they went to wherever it is that elves go when they travel in their minds. He tried to keep far enough away that even Ryder with his expert skills would not be able to detect Thoren's presence. Howe'er, it may not have been far enough. Ryder is not quick to allow just anyone to watch over them. But because of the recent actions, Thoren is compelled to not only watch over his own band of travelers but over all those involved. Paragons can take care of themselves, but their allies and apprentices are not as capable. The dangers are stronger now than ever before. It is the threat of the Draco Disciples and their leader that keep Thoren's nights absent of sleep.

Once convinced that Skylana and Ryder are well, he rises in the August night and looks to the sky. Even with one eye he sees the echoes of those past. Perseus and Andromeda together in the stars. Suddenly, a flash of light streaks across the deep blue night. Then another. After seeing a third streak of fire, Thoren knows that the Paragons are also restless this evening. It appears that Ignis and Aria are up to something. Thoren drinks something foul from his flask. If he is to have any prayer of rest he knows it is found quickly from this bottle. He starts to walk back to Bristol.

Passing the public square house he hears the libations and music coming from inside. Thoren chuckles to himself as he hears Dan the Bard entertaining Percival's guests with another of his tunes. "Fools. How I envy their ignorance to what is really happening," he mumbles to himself. He then raises his vessel and makes a toast, "MAY YOU ALL ENJOY YOUR VISIT WITH THE QUEEN! AND MAY SHE BLESS YOU WITH HER BEAUTY AND STRENGTH!" After finishing his toast with a drink, he wipes his beard as he quietly punctuates his sentiments, "you'll need it."

"Thoren wears a mask. Thoren shows his joy. But Thoren is sad" came a cackling voice from the shadows of the pub. Thoren knows who it is and doesn't turn.

"Evening, Maddy. Don't you have some fireflies to be chasing or something?" Thoren asks.

"Maddy knows how Thoren feels. Maddy feels both happy and sad. And happy. And sad. And happy. And sad. Happy, sad, happy, sad...." she sings.

"Enough Maddy! Your love of chaos will earn you a front row seat in what is to come. Enjoy it while it lasts" growled Thoren as he walks away.

"Poor Thoren...." whispers Maddy as she smells a rose and walks away into the Pub.

Walking toward his camp, Thoren bumps into a familiar fellow that he doesn't want to deal with at the moment. Thoren shakes his head and acknowledges Jasper Trustworthy. Prepared for one of his usual remarks about his exploits and who really runs the underbelly of Bristol, Thoren was shocked when Jasper extended a hand.

“Thoren.”

“Jasper.”

“Thoren, you and I ‘ave ‘ad our differences. And frankly they ‘ave been fun. ‘ave they not?” Jasper grinned his Cheshire smile and continued. “Well, as you know, nothing ‘appens here in Bristol without mine ears catching wind of it. As much, I wanted to wish you luck. Yours is not a path that I wish upon any of mine enemies. Even if it IS you. Good journey, old friend. Let us brag of our spoils where e’er it is that cousins like you and I end up.”

Thoren saw in his eye that Jasper meant what he said. To be honest, Thoren would trade places with the fox-like rogue if he could. Howe’er he knew it not to be his destiny. As he walked up on the camp, he looked around and saw Canis on the top of the wagon. Peering down to the others gathered ‘round the fire. No doubt, in preparation of hearing one of Talia’s legends. The young ones eagerly waited to hear of her travels and stories hoping it would put their minds at ease for but a moment. As the wind begins to pick up and blow in the inevitable change that late summer winds tend to do, Thoren takes another drink and whispers to himself, “Make it a good one Talia, they need it.”

Knowing that he can’t let them see this side of him, Thoren then shackles his heart and sternly walks into camp....