

## The Story of Baltor (How Magical Conscription Isn't So Bad)

Did you ever have one of those days where something is nagging at the back of your neck, like an itch you can't scratch? I've been in some bug infested places and know about itching but this was different. I'd been waiting in Lorendan City for days, trying to enlist in the Black Leopards. It appears, however, that competent fighters from backwater hamlets don't have the kind of spit and polish that citified militia are seeking. "Baltor Egilsen of Greyford?" called the recruiter after I had been waiting outside the barracks for hours. Looking me over, he said "don't think we can use you. You don't have the kind of background we need."

Background? He meant knowing which fork to use at a court dinner, or how to properly bow to a noble. Guarding caravans on the Wall Road to protect them from bandits and barbarians for years apparently didn't cut the mustard. Surprisingly, his dismissal of my qualifications didn't seem to bother me and that's when that feeling started at the back of my neck. Having nothing better to do, I coped a squat outside a local tavern and grabbed a beer. While drinking a poor excuse for an ale and pondering my next move, an urchin wandered by selling the local rag sheet. "LORENDAN HERALD!, LORENDAN HERALD FOR SALE HERE!," he bellowed. I threw the kid a copper and grabbed the paper he offered.

Reading through the crop reports and royal engagement announcements (Yes, I can read very well thank you. Probably better than you), I came across a small story about a group called the Rainbow Company. As I read an account of their exploits (obviously fiction), the name of Einar Ragnarson seemed to burn a hole in my brain. Why do I know this name? Does he owe me money? For whatever reason, I couldn't get this name out of my head. Calling over the bar wench, I asked if she knew anything about this Einar? "Been in here a time or two with his buddies," she said. "Good tipper and not too handsy. In fact, I think he is meeting with some high muckety wizardly type across town. Something to do with a threat to Lorendan, or so the rumors say."

Now that squirrely feeling is going off like a warhorse is trying to bash in my skull. So, I head off to the royal sector where the high and mighty of Lorendan hang out. I ask around and am told that if he is meeting with the gentry that he would be at the Temple of Odin. No sooner do I get to the Temple gate when it opens and out steps a man in green armor. Looking up at the man (not something I do very often), the swirling in my head subsides. As he gazes down at me, it seems to me like he knows me. "Took you long enough," he says. "Just to let you know, that funny feeling you've been experiencing is a summons from a Deck of Many Things. The universe thinks that I need you and you need me. If you think the universe has made a mistake, then I'll understand. If you want to live dangerously, probably die young but get filthy rich and maybe save the world then let's hit the nearest tavern." The big man holds out his arm, "I'm Einar" he says. Grabbing his arm, I respond. "I'm Baltor, I think this might be the beginning of a beautiful friendship."