

Two (Phil) Preparation for Arrival

Rathcar sat motionless in the night. A dozen candles flickered with flame casting moving shadows to the tall prairie grass that surrounded the little clearing. The elf sat amid the candles on the heels of feet folded beneath him. His arms were outstretched in meditation. His head slightly bowed. Lips quietly recited ancient verse. The silken clothing he wore, a *kium*, shimmered in the starlight, its pattern mimicking the sky above. A gentle breeze rustled the high grass. This did not disturb the elf. He sat in a ring of power; it had taken three days to prepare once he had finally found the proper location. The stars needed to be in a rather specific alignment.

The spot was easy to find as it turned out. The local mage, a balding man with skinny legs and large girth, had told the elf that he knew of the place. Rathcar was careful to disguise his appearance as a human wizard's apprentice looking to rendezvous with his master, so the mage spoke freely and without trepidation. He had personally witnessed three successive lightning strikes to the spot. With a little experimentation, he had learned to use the place to intensify his spells. Rathcar insisted that was the very spot he was to meet with his master and that the mage had to tell him where it was lest the apprentice feel the scorn of his master. The mage confided to this young whelp the location. As Rathcar thanked the man, he erased the man's memory of their conversation. No need to have inquisitive amateurs around.

Rathcar had begun preparations as soon as he arrived. A single *tuhne* tree shaded the spot. A small wood thicket nearby provided adequate shelter for a campsite. Once he had fed and watered the horses, cared for the tack, and brushed them, he had a bite of *elan* (elven unleavened loaves) and water. Refreshed, he started about the very delicate task of preparing the ring. First, he removed all dead grass, leaves and twigs. The area was rich with life, so it took nearly a quarter of the day to complete the task. Next, the elf removed a small vial from the folds of his white leather vest. Its fine top came off easily in the delicate fingers of the elf. One of those slender fingers covered the top of the vial and inverted it. Returning it upright, he let the drop of blue fluid run off the side of his finger. It fell to the ground and landed with a strange hiss. Taking a step, the elf repeated the process. Rathcar did this until the vial was empty, covering the entire ring area. It was after dark when the top was once again put to the vial and it returned to the folds of his vest. Once purified, the ring was marked with a fine powder the color of blood. The elf's fingers looked as though he had been treating wounded by the time he was finished marking the great detail with *kaal*, the sacred crimson powder. The sun was near midday when Rathcar ceremoniously removed the *kaal* from his fingers by rubbing it into his gums, lips, and tongue. He thanked the gods for the lone *tuhne* tree as he drank of some water. Its shade covered the ring for most of the day keeping the hot sun off the back of his neck. The next step was to place the twelve candles in carefully chosen positions. Each white candle was half a length long and as round as an Oberland Crown was. Once placed, the elf lit the candles as he exited the ring.

The ceremonious preparation completed Rathcar fed and watered the horses before tending to his own grooming. He stripped and quickly washed using a water skin, his great white wings unfolded and stretched. The elf then pulled a silken garment from his pack. He gently unfolded the *kium*, the traditional garment of his kind. This particular *kium* was of ceremonious use to Rathcar. He slipped the garment on; the special tailoring met the needs for his wings. As his wings opened and fluttered freely, he felt the power of his ancestry wash over him as he embraced tradition.

He began meditating before he re-entered the ring. His inner self at peace, he naturally walked among the detailed characters and sacred markings drawn with *kaal*. The fluid movements of his *kium* avoided the twelve flames as if it had a mind of its own. Once in the center, Rathcar instinctively sat in his meditative seating. His mind opened. In his mind, he saw a messenger lay a rolled parchment on a doorstep. Arat and Nyrinugathar were behind that door. He re-focused his thought and saw four *Tra'brdyling* brethren riding through the night. Once again, he re-focused. This time the subject was the ring of power in which he sat. The elf was pleased with what he saw abroad. His plan was working out well. He took several deep breaths. His concentration became so great that his breathing all but stopped. Slowly and clearly came forth ancient words of power. Memorized from before birth, the sounds were a part of the elf magician. As verse poured forth, an eerie glow began within the ring. The color started as that of the earth that slowly gave way to the color of plants which then blended into the fire of the sun and the blue of the sky.

So Rathcar sat. The spell would take a day to complete. He would be exhausted when it is completed. But it was worth it. When it was done, Arat would be at his side.