

Chapter Seven - Toolin - Part One

As they approached Toolin, the sandy hills and rocks gave way to a flat terrain of dry shrubs and reed-like weeds. Smoke drifted from a few of the pointed adobe roofs that rose over the shorter, flat buildings. On the left side of town, James could see a flat platform of rock that housed several larger buildings overlooking the main street.

They followed the wide, gravelly road, called Noldon's Path. It curved into the town and became lost in the dense centre.

James had briefly visited Toolin twice before. Once on an errand with Tam—shortly after starting work at Rimas Complete—and when he was sent to buy some supplies from the town's blacksmith. He had to plead with Tam to let him go to Toolin for the errand. The foreman resisted strongly but eventually allowed James to go, with another colleague.

Now that James thought about it, he realised that Tam was protecting him, and must have been worried about sending him out of Tyken Town. But Tam must have known that he couldn't keep him locked in town for too long, even if that was what he was tasked to do.

Evan stopped and turned to them. "Before we venture into town, allow me to look over your injuries once again."

"Let me have a go at my shoulder myself," Sam said. "Now that I'm a bit more rested too. Why don't you tend to James's shoulder?"

James paused, watching Evan uncomfortably. "Ah, yeah, sure," James said. "If you don't mind."

While Sam placed a hand on his bad shoulder, Evan stepped to James. He laid a small hand on James's torn shoulder, and closed his eyes.

After several seconds, James felt a cold, tingling sensation pulse over his shoulder. The coldness increased, causing James to grow uncomfortable, before he realised that his arm had gone numb. No, not quite numb, but, the pain had gone. Evan removed his hand, revealing a green glow that lingered briefly on James's shoulder.

Sam had some difficulty healing the long gashes down his neck and shoulder, and so Evan helped him also. James wondered if Sam's wounds were so severe that they were beyond healing with magic, or that he was so exhausted that he couldn't use his magic so much. The image of Sam's being surrounded by those beasts still chilled James. He hated himself for just standing there, frozen like a helpless child.

Evan finished with running a finger over the cut on his own forehead, turning it into a faint, crusted scar.

James tested his shoulder as they continued walking, and found that it moved remarkably better, despite the long scars remaining.

"We look a mess," James said. And he was right. Sam's shirt was almost entirely stained with dried blood, and both he and James had long rips in their shirts, over scarred wounds. Not to mention the sweat patches. Evan had fared better than them, although his tunic and trousers were covered with dirt and dust, like most of their clothes.

"It's a good thing they have clothes stalls here," Sam said, and added, "Luckily there's enough rough and random folk around these parts that us three won't draw that much attention, anyway."

From the southern edge of town where they approached, a market place lined the street. The various stalls were much smaller and simpler than the more elaborate stands in the Sab Sina Market of Tyken Town, but James appreciated the simpler styles of the old town. Perhaps he had spent too long in a big city.

Strings of pointed blue flags were hung between the inactive lamps that hovered over the stalls. A few people around the market swept up the rubbish and colourful rubble. James then remembered the Festival of Serne Solstice yesterday, and the fireworks and parades around Tyken Town. They must have celebrated here in Toolin last night also.

Among the crowd, a tall, dark-skinned man in dull armour caught his eye. Over the burly man's broad back was slung a large wooden hammer, which looked far too cumbersome to James. Grinding gears and whining servers drew James's attention away from the large man, to a dusty brown mech ambling through the market stalls. Its bulky, rounded head contrasted with its thin and gangly torso and limbs, giving it a look of a ball on a stick. Dull tones came from the speakers on the sides of its head, offering assistance to anyone.

A tall figure was distinct over the crowd. A ten-foot lanky mech with a domed glass head. As it drew closer, James saw there was a small figure inside the dome; a little alien sitting in what looked like a cockpit, driving the tall mech. James liked to think he had seen a lot of different types of beings, in his time in the bustling city of Tyken Town, but was always surprised to see something new.

Sam led them to a clothes stand. He picked out a simple white shirt and James found a dark grey shirt with three buttons down the collar, which was similar to what he had been wearing. They both removed their tattered old shirts and pulled on the new ones, their bare chests and fresh scars drawing some curious looks from the stall owner and several nearby people. Sam handed the merchant a few extra coins from his pouch to discard their old clothes.

"Let me know if you see anything that interests you," Sam said to them as they passed through the market. He turned to Evan. "I doubt that the gods saw fit to give you our local currency before they sent you here."

"They did not," Evan said flatly, making James wonder if he saw the humour in Sam's words.

Evan stepped away from them and wandered through the stalls, looking around curiously.

Sam looked over the wares of a weapons stall. The larger broadswords hung on the sides of the wooden display towers, with smaller swords and knives laid out on shelves in the middle. None looked nearly as extravagant as Evan's decorated sword.

"What do you think, James? Time for a sword?" Sam asked.

"I've never thought of having a sword before," James said. "But I've been feeling the need for one more and more lately. For some reason."

"Aye," Sam said. He made eye contact with the stall owner, a rotund Bahkschim whose scaled skin glistened in the sun as he approached. The tall reptilian alien's rounded face maintained an indifferent, somewhat grumpy expression when he grunted at them.

"How much for the Tridonite?" Sam asked, pointing to one of the hanging blades.

The Bahm sniffed. "One-hundred fifty joul's." His gravelly voice barely pronounced any of the words correctly.

"For a Silver Set?" Sam asked, raising his eyebrows. "One-hundred and fifty can get me a Crystal Set in Tyken Town."

The merchant looked Sam over, and eventually nodded, his thick lips still down turned. "I have Crystal." He stepped inside the stall, and brought down a sword that was hanging out of sight, on the back side of the wooden boards.

Sam took the sword and examined it. He then pointed the blade to the ground and held the handle to James.

"A Tridonite Crystal Sword. Should serve you well until we can find something better." Sam ignored the loud sniff from the merchant, which rippled like a snarl.

James gripped the cloth-wrapped handle, keeping the blade pointed down, not wanting to raise it and possibly make a fool of himself or hurt someone. The silver-blue blade caught the sunlight, the handle reaching his upper thigh when the point touched the ground.

Sam brought out his pouch and withdrew a dusty gold coin, followed by a handful of thick red coins. He dropped them into the Bahm's meaty palm. James thought he counted more than a hundred and fifty joul's, but couldn't be sure how many of the red coins Sam had dropped.

"And a sheath," Sam said to the merchant, pointing to a low shelf. The Bahm nodded with a disinterested wave of his hand.

Sam helped James attach the brown belt, which held a long holder for his sword. The thin material wasn't quite as protective as the thick scabbards that Sam and Evan wore, but it would keep James's sword in place on his hip.

"We don't want to buy any guns?" James asked, despite not seeing any firearms on display.
"Just to be extra safe?"