

Trip to Dar Goranth

Fieran Laesornysh rocked from his toes to his heels, his hands clasped behind his back in as polished a posture as he could manage.

Did formal ceremonies have to be so boring? He was twenty-eight years old in half-elf years—nine or ten if he were a human. Why did he have to actually be here? He'd rather have sneaked off to explore. But his mama or dacha was bound to notice if he tried to leave. His dacha had a grip on his shoulder, as if to prevent that temptation.

Next to his dacha, Merrik was shifting from foot to foot, though his dacha didn't seem to feel the need to keep a grip on him to prevent sneaking.

The windswept, rocky island stretched before them with a curving bay at their back and a set of cliffs ahead of them. A few stone buildings jutted from the otherwise bare shore while a few pockmarks in the cliff face designated the beginnings of a tunnel network.

Two stone wharves jutted into the harbor. One held Kostaria's latest steel-clad warship, it's sides painted a brilliant white. Escarland's flag ship—a black-painted steel warship—was tied to the other side of the jetty. Both ships looked nearly identical to the clusters of wooden ships tied to the other dock, except that they were large and steel-sided.

Three steel flagpoles—one burnished and two flashing new—rose before the cliffs. Beneath those flagpoles, Fieran's uncles King Rharreth, King Weylind, and King Averett, along with all their various clerks, envoys, diplomats, head generals, and more gathered around a table with the pages of the new treaty spread before them.

A clerk was reading out the treaty and everyone was making speeches. Something about shared harbor and naval domination of the northern waters and blah, blah, blah fancy speech.

Fieran wasn't even sure why his parents and siblings even had to be there. Sure, his parents were the symbol of the Alliance or whatever. But it was just so boring, standing there to one side with the various other Escarlish dignitaries who had made the trip to Drogenvroh Island to witness the founding of Dar Goranth.

As Fieran glanced around again, his gaze caught on his cousin Rhohen, standing next to his mother and brother in the cluster of Kostarian dignitaries. Rhohen had his arms crossed, a scowl on his face.

Fieran was probably scowling in boredom as well, but there was something about Rhohen's glower that rankled.

As if feeling the weight of Fieran's gaze, Rhohen turned, his look deepening further.

That did it. Fieran crossed his own arms and stuck out his tongue. He was probably far too old to be sticking his tongue out anymore, but whatever. Rhohen was far too pouty.

Rhohen glared right back.

Fieran went cross-eyed and screwed up his face into even more of a funny face.

Rhohen rolled his eyes, slouching even more.

Fieran's mama reached over and tapped Fieran's head, giving him a firm shake of her head in a *no*.

Bother. He'd been caught.

Fieran sighed and faced forward again.

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As soon as the formal treaty was over, Fieran wiggled out of his dacha's grip, even as his dacha called after him, "Do not go far, sason."

“We won’t!” Fieran grabbed Merrik’s arm and dragged him away from his dacha. “Let’s explore.”

Merrik stumbled for a moment before he gathered his feet under him. “Where are we going?”

“I don’t know. Somewhere that doesn’t have stuffy people.” Fieran headed off between the buildings, away from all the dignitaries and diplomats and everyone that expected him to stand tall and still like a proper prince of both Escarland and Tarenhiel.

Together, he and Merrik wandered between the buildings. A pair of troll guards didn’t let them into the cliff tunnels, nor were they allowed onto the Kostarian ship.

As they meandered back through the buildings once again, Fieran rounded a corner and nearly ran into a black-haired, gray-skinned figure.

Rhohen.

“Watch where you’re going.” Rhohen glared as he stumbled back a step.

“You watch where you’re going.” Fieran crossed his arms and glared right back. Now Rhohen was blocking their path between the buildings. “Move out of our way.”

“No, you move. This is a Kostarian island, and I’m the prince here.” Rhohen shifted so that he stood even more in the middle of the road.

“We can go around.” Merrik tugged at Fieran’s arm.

“You might be the prince here, but you shouldn’t be mean to visitors.” Fieran matched Rhohen’s stance, not budging with Merrik’s tugging. “You should be extra nice.”

“I’m a troll. Trolls aren’t *nice*.” Rhohen dropped his arms to his sides and clenched his fists.

“You’re half-elf, just like me.”

“You take that back!”

“Why? It’s true. It’s hardly an insult when it’s true.” Fieran cocked his head. “Why are you ashamed of being half-elf? My mama says we should never be ashamed for either of our halves.”

“Your mama is a weak *human*.” Rhohen said the last word with a sneer.

“You take that back!” It was Fieran’s turn to clench his fists and spit those words, taking a step toward his cousin.

Merrick was still tugging on his arm. “Fieran, we should leave.”

“Why? It’s true. It’s hardly an insult when it’s true.” Rhohen flung Fieran’s words right back at him, just with even more of a disparaging tone.

“You leave my mama out of this!”

“You leave *my* ma out of this!”

“I’m not the one ashamed of my mama!”

“Well, your father is a dishonorable murderer. Everyone says so.” Rhohen’s scorn nearly sent Fieran over the edge. “He’s a—” Rhohen said naughty word. Fieran didn’t know what it meant, but he knew he wasn’t supposed to say it.

The haze in Fieran’s vision went as red as his hair. “Don’t say that about my dacha!”

Rhohen smirked. “What’re you going to do about it?”

“I’ll fight you.” Fieran raised his fists. “You’re so weak I’ll beat you easy.”

With that Rhohen growled and threw the first punch.

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“Uncle Farrendel! Uncle Farrendel! Dacha!”

At the sound of Merrik's voice, Farrendel turned from where he had been speaking with Rharreth, Julien, Averett, and Weylind. A few steps behind him where he had been lingering in the shadows, Iyrinder also spun, his hand dropping to his sword's hilt.

Merrik skidded to a halt, glancing between Farrendel, Iyrinder, and Rharreth. He pointed back the way he'd come, gasping out between panting breaths, "Fieran and Rhohen are fighting!"

Farrendel suppressed his sigh as he shared a resigned glance with Rharreth. This was hardly the first time they had been called to break up a fight between their sons. "Where?"

"Come on!" Merrik started running toward the clusters of buildings.

Farrendel set off after him with Iyrinder at his heels and Rharreth jogging at his side.

As the three of them rounded a corner in Merrik's wake, they discovered the two boys scrambling on the ground, punching, biting, kicking, and clawing.

Rharreth waded into the fray, reached down, and somehow managed to get a grip on both boys' collars. He yanked them apart and upright in one motion, holding them well away from each other. "That is enough of that."

Rhohen had a bruise on his face that was already blooming around his eye. Fieran had several scratches on his face while both boys' clothes were ripped and dirty.

Fieran stuck out his tongue at Rhohen. "Yes, that's enough."

Rhohen growled and lunged at Fieran, only Rharreth's firm grip preventing him from restarting the fight.

Rharreth brandished Fieran in Farrendel's direction, though his disapproving frown remained fixed on his own son.

Farrendel suppressed another sigh, gripped Fieran's shoulders, and marched his son away from Rhohen and further temptation. "That means you too, Fieran. That is quite enough."

"He called you a naughty word. And said mean stuff about Mama. Well, the words weren't mean, exactly, but it was the way he said them." Fieran still had his fists clenched at his sides, even as Farrendel steered him around the corner of a building so they would have some privacy.

"It does not matter what Rhohen said. You are responsible for your own actions and words regardless of others." Farrendel braced himself for the discussion he needed to have with his son. These fights with Rhohen whenever the two of them were in the same room needed to cease.

Now just to think of an appropriate punishment.

He would have discussed a joint punishment for both boys with Rharreth—such as hauling rocks to clear the roads of the new naval base—but Farrendel feared such a punishment would just result in the two boys fighting once again. He would rather they were not armed with rocks when they did so.

Perhaps cleaning the ship's privy would be suitably disgusting enough to knock some sense into Fieran's skull.