

**Galendor**  
**Ye Dude from Yonder Forest**  
**(Book I of The Galendor Trilogy)**

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## **Dedication**

To Jesus for giving me purpose, my wife Joy for the will to keep climbing, my three best friends, Jay, Michael and Eric through whom my sense of imagination developed and to every soul I've encountered for good or bad as you've made me who I am today.



## **Chapter One: Not Your Normal Peddler's Convention**

Galendor padded across the creaky floor, hungry for a bowl of Tasty Poofs while Mr. Stove fired up to take off the chill. In doing so, a cozy orange and yellow glow danced a jig around the small stone cottage. The pots and pans awoke in preparation for the morning chores, while the spoons and utensils grabbed another fifteen winks.

Trying to conjure enough spit to wet his dry throat, Galendor worked his cheeks every which way. “Bummer, dude!”

Sir Wicket lay in his wicker basket and took a deep wakening breath of the chilled Yonder Forest air. His accent sounded as thick as his morning cotton-mouth. “Sakes alive mate, it’s too early for wailing and gnashing of teeth.”

“Well, upon opening the cabinet, I’m wounded by the bitter sting of denial.” He stared droop-eyed at dust and a bit of fuzz on the shelf. “Our cupboards clearly lack the ingredients necessary to sustain life.”

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“And your suggested remedy?” Wick yawned.

Neither claimed much responsibility; they slept when sleepy and ate when hungry, so Wicket didn’t expect much of a plan.

“I seem to recall something about a peddler’s convention going on in Hither. I say we go. You’ll earn some cash, I’ll set up on a corner to showcase my slick musical styling, and we’ll purchase proper provisions to pad our pantry.” Galendor aspired to be a great bard, *if* he could just convince people to accept him. He had a unique way of playing the lyre, and often used odd words in an effort to sound smarter; he called them his five-dollar words.

Wicket’s ears sprang to attention. “*Really?* Town? I’m there!” Going to Hither or Yon always meant an opportunity to earn cash playing street games (with the odds stacked in his favor). He brushed his teeth, *threw on his red cape, concealed his sword, grabbed his bag o’ tricks* and zipped out the door.

\* \* \* \*

Yonder Forest breathed energy and exhaled life. Colors beamed more brilliantly than in other forests, and nary a nook or cranny existed without something peeking or scurrying from it.

Undaunted by nature’s beauty, Wicket hopped up and down in the front yard, impatiently wagging his tail. “Gaaarr! Hurry it up, slug! I could’ve shed an entire winter coat by now!”

Galendor shouted, “Look dude, don’t get yer pawsies in a wad! Is town going anywhere anytime soon?” He finished donning his gloves and boots, saying, “Don’t lemme

forget, we're stopping by the lobothian village to see if Garoetoth's family needs anything."

With his attention elsewhere, Sir Wicket almost missed a royal messenger toad pulling his family with a rickshaw. "Oh, hey! G'day there mates," Wick shouted neighborly, "how goes it?"

The toad paused. "Tings be gowin' bettah once we git deep in da foress *wurp!* Strange tings brewin' at Castle Yorh, we done upt and quit our jobs to git 'way *wurp!*" He nodded, then continued deeper into the wood.

Galendor stepped from the house to a ration of Wick's ranting. "Well it is about time! Jiminy Piminy, you're slower than a schoolgirl primping for prom. You never shave that perpetual five o'clock shadow, so I *know* you weren't spending time on your face."

"Well, my crabby canine cohort, unlike narfs, humans have to wear clothes." Galendor saw the now distant rickshaw. "Hey, what was the deal with that fine caravan?"

"I don't know. I wasn't listening for a whole sentence in reply to my greeting. He said something about getting away from the castle. I guess he's taking the family camping."

After a manly pose to greet the world and survey all the land to be graced by their presence, the two moved along.

\* \* \* \*

En route to the lobothian village, Wicket examined his friend. "What's with the all-green getup as of late? You're like a walking stalk of celery with a cape."

"I theorized that, if I can craft one specific style to

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perfection, it would become my ‘thing.’ People will see me coming and instantly say, ‘Hey, that’s Ye Dude from Yonder Forest!’”

“Lovely,” Wick sighed.

“There to, I’ve heard maidens mention that I’m ‘ruggedly handsome,’ but doesn’t that just mean I’m not cute enough? I don’t know, if the green doesn’t draw ’em in, my mondo, sacred, secret stud dude sunglasses are sure to make women swoon.”

“Whatever. I’ve lived with you for years, and I don’t think I’ll ever understand human behavior.”

\* \* \* \*

The stop at the lobothian village was just long enough to get a shopping list from the blacksmith, Garoeth and his wife Dara. These wolf-beings were so misunderstood by humans, they hardly ever left the forest. Galendor and Wicket would quite often make shopping runs for them.

\* \* \* \*

Nearing the town of Hither, a scene at the city gates set them on edge. “Good grief dude, methinks strange things are afoot,” Galendor said.

Crowds of men gathered together to comb their hair and adjust their clothing. Big, burly, brutish men brushed their teeth and sprayed perfumes in their armpits; a most unsettling sight to say the least!

Sir Wicket’s pitch sounded higher than normal. “Why are they doing that? Are they possessed? Let’s hope it’s not contagious.”

Galendor assessed the situation. “What with all of this hygiene and extra traffic, I’m surmising the goings-on are more than just a peddlers’ convention.”

Hither, the larger of the twin towns of Hither and Yon, held the status of cultural hub in this part of Yorh. If a banquet, royal announcement or carnival needed to happen, it did so in Hither.

Sir Wicket walked to the preening horde. “G’day there friends! What’s all the hubbub about? Or, do you blokes do this all the time?”

One of the heavier, uglier men spoke up in a gravelly voice, “The Princess of Yorh is here today and called for all who could attend. Rumors say she’s on the hunt for a suitor!”

“Aye then, friend...thanks.” Sir Wicket motioned a sort of wave-salute then returned to his friend’s side. “Wow, Galendor! The princess, the head Sheila, the ultimate luscious babe in charge! Look at the crowds she’s brought. Think of the money in there!” Dollar signs rolled in Wicket’s eyes.

“Forget the money! Just think, if the princess heard me play and fell madly in love with my musical musings and manly manner, I’d be set!” Galendor had a dream bubble where all of his ideas resided. In that perfect place, everything always went according to plan.

“Let’s not get your hopes up tooooo high, Galendor. There are hundreds of other guys here thinking the exact same thing. What are the odds of us getting to see her?”

“C”mon Wicket, where’s your focus? We’re a couple of upwardly mobile dudes; one, a bard with righteous sunglasses and a spiffy hat, the other, a sword wielding, wisecracking, bluish dog-looking fellow. The both of whom

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sport rather excellent capes. We're *in!*" And with that, they entered the city gates.

\* \* \* \*

Hither surged with excitement as beings of every kind walked, scurried, scampered and scooted. Vibrantly colored tapestries and streamers draped buildings welcoming people, or inviting them into their shops. A huge banner hailed, "Welcome to Hither, Princess Jessica."

Several local bands were setting up near the town square's fountain. Rocker drawn carriages, ranging from wooden boxes to silk and velvet canopies, rolled by in search of parking. (Rockers' hooves grew long, curved gliders like a rocking chair, each foot having its own glider—not attached in the middle.)

The drone of people talking resembled ocean waves, as the noise undulated from softer to louder. Sounds of rocker gliders clapping and rolling along the stone streets added rhythm to the pulse of voices.

Sir Wicket mainly noticed the call of the dozens of peddlers selling their wares to the scads of people. He scanned excitedly with a paw shading his eyes from the morning sun. "What shall we do first: grocery shop, buy Garoetoth's stuff, or go charm the stew out of the princess?"

Galendor knew Wick's *real* question was, 'can I go win money off of some rich slob?'

"I suppose we could split and leave each to his own for a while. We'll meet back here in a couple of hours." Galendor secretly felt antsy being in crowds alone.

Before they parted, trumpets pealed, and a crier belted, "Hear Ye, Hear Ye! Her royal highness, Princess

Jessica of the Land of Yorh, now wishes to address the public! All citizens are requested to gather in the town's square!"

In an instant, the entire township of Hither dropped what they were doing and headed for the square. Jesters, elves, dwarves, ogres, farmers, and middle-aged men of all classes and creeds huddled around a small wooden platform in the center of the street to hear if the rumors were true about the princess taking a suitor. Sir Wicket and Galendor stood in the back.

Trumpets sounded again. "Princess Jessica!"

The crowd grew utterly quiet as all manner of men gasped at the beauty of the princess. She spoke, and the legion of spectators leaned forward to catch every word, "Good people of the Land of Yorh, thank you for your time..."

\* \* \* \*

Galendor rustled around. "Wicket, let me get on your shoulders. I can't see her!"

"What? *No*, you can't get on my shoulders!" Wick protested.

"Just zip it and lift me up dude. I want to see her!" Galendor grabbed Wick's right shoulder and placed a knee on the left one to get a foothold and balance.

Wick irritably fought back. "*No!* No stinking way are you getting up there! You're too heavy!"

Galendor paid no attention to Wick's protests; he just continued climbing.

"*Man!*" Wicket whined as he balanced Galendor upon his shoulders.

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Once steady, Galendor lost all hope of concentration. “Dude...she’s the most awe-inspiring portrait of unfathomable beauty as ever I’ve beheld.” His heart raced.

\* \* \* \*

The princess wore a rather simple cornflower blue gown with ribbons encircling her waist. Her flowing auburn hair draped her shoulders, complimenting the tiny features of her face. She had a very concerned look about her as her watery eyes sparkled in the noontime sun.

Jessica continued, “I fear a great evil has befallen our castle, and, as a result, my father has come unto a great sickness. The light has gone from his eyes, and he no longer laughs. Your once caring and noble king has lost the will to govern. If nothing is done, I fear for the safety of our kingdom. Please help us. If there is any man who can entertain my father and lift him from this curse...I will, in return, marry that man, and make him heir to the throne.” In saying that, her countenance fell, and she began to cry.

\* \* \* \*

The crowd, taking no notice of her obvious grief, all cheered and rushed off, eager to practice whatever skill they could muster. Barbarians and mimes alike, sang, yodeled, juggled, and tap-danced away, each one confident they could win Jessica’s hand.

Sir Wicket shook under Galendor’s weight. Galendor, transfixed by the princess’ innocent beauty, dreamt of running to her and consoling her with wit and song. He dreamt of drying her tears and giving her assurance

that everything would be all right. He would be suave and debonair and charm her with his smooth demeanor. These dreams all fell to the wayside as he fell off Wicket onto his backside.

“Galendor...buddy, lose some weight!” Wicket said, stooped over and shaking.

“Dude...Wicket...did you *see* her? She was most awesome. She was...she was...*wow*,” Galendor waxed nonsensically.

“Snap out of it, mate. Princess or not, she’s just a girl, and *no*, I didn’t see her. How could I with two bazillion pounds of oaf on my shoulders!? Besides, she’s gone.” Sir Wicket tried to pull Galendor back to reality.

“What? No! She can’t be gone! I haven’t wowed her with my overtly masculine charm! I didn’t sing her a song! I didn’t do anything!”

“Don’t sell yourself short, bro. You fell on your bum...right in front of her,” Wicket reassured with a smile.

“Rats!” Galendor cried.

“C’mon man, we still need to grocery shop and get Garoeth his stuff, and I’m almost too pooped to pop.”

Galendor hunched over and stared at the dirt for a time, nursing his bruised ego. Taking a deep, remorseful breath, he dusted himself off. “Yes, I suppose you’re right.”

\* \* \* \*

Wicket ran off to start gaming while Galendor pressed toward the fountain to check out the bands. Three groups had set up and took turns to see who could draw the most people. Galendor toyed with the idea of jumping in and showing off, but needed time to build up the nerves.

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“You seem quite pensive, young fella,” came an old crackled voice with an accent as heavy as Sir Wicket’s, yet with much different intonation.

Galendor saw the short man cloaked in a deep brown robe four or five sizes too big for him. The only distinguishable feature on the hooded figure was the presence of a long, gray beard and mustache protruding from the dark hole where a face should have been.

“Just feeling out the local talent. They’re pretty good don’t ya think?” remarked Galendor.

“Phooey! There’s no heart here. They have the music and rhythm, yet they lack spirit. There is no depth, no character, and no charisma! No, they’re not good...in fact, they stink!” The small figure stomped his foot in a fit of emotion.

“Whoa, old dude! I wouldn’t go that far. I mean, yeah, they all sound the same, but that’s what the people want to hear,” Galendor said with a smile, quite shocked at the fire in the little stranger’s voice.

“They *want* to hear it because that’s all there *is* to hear. No one wishes to hear something different because they don’t know *what* different is. Change in style is what we’re discussing.”

“Yeah, but if you do things differently, it’s just so hard to get people interested in what you have to offer.” Galendor took the subject personally.

The man then pointed his voice right at Galendor. “*You’re* never going to save the kingdom if *you* repeat what everyone else does!”

“Save the kingdom!? What are you on about, Mr. Mystery Cloak Man? Who said anything about save...?” Galendor turned to face his debater, but only a blank area

remained. “Where did you go? Were we finished with our discussion?”

While Galendor spouted off, a small boy stopped at his side. “Hey mister, who are you talking to?”

“That little cloaked dude who was just standing here. Didn’t you see him?” Galendor replied.

The child ran off rather worried. “Mommy, Mommy, there’s a stranger danger man over there!”

“Aw for cryin’ out loud!” Galendor, now completely confused, left the conversation behind and sat on a bench, mustering courage.

\* \* \* \*

Galendor’s confidence actually decreased as he listened to the well-organized bands. Defeated, he set out to find Sir Wicket. “Wicket? Yo, Wick! Where are you?” Within seconds, Wicket came running out of an alley, with cash and various items bulging from his game case.

“Get into any trouble?” Galendor intuitively knew the answer.

“Oh, I started to with an ogre who didn’t appreciate my card tricks. Luckily for him, you called.”

“Did you procure any capital? It will be most difficult to do further shopping without it.”

“Did I ever! We’ll be able to get the lobothians their stuff and still be rolling in loot. *Woo hoo!*” Wick jumped and clicked his heels, just to be silly.

“In that case, why don’t we score goodies for Garoeth’s kids? I’ll get Gretchen her surprise and you can find something for Ladeus.”

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\* \* \* \*

After an hour, the two met up in the same spot. Galendor had a full sack of goodness, while Wicket held several patterns of cloth for Dara and a strange toy for Ladeus.

“What *is* that thing?” pondered Galendor.

“It’s some crazy new-fangled toy. Here, check it out. It’s a rocker and carriage, right?” Wicket started twisting it. “Now...it becomes...(*flip*)...(*twist*)...a fully poseable knight with a sword and buckler.”

Galendor, taken with utter joy, spat out, “Utmost-neato-transformographic-righteous-budliness!” Both he and Wicket stared wide-eyed with juvenile grins. “All I got was this crumby music box.” Galendor felt outdone by the super groovy toy, and rightfully so.

“That’s all right, mate. Girls like that sort of thing,” Wick consoled.

Galendor poked his nose into his shopping bag. “I scored the essentials from Ye Olde Food Shoppe: Alchemist Pepper, Cheese Corn Crunchies, Tasty Poofs, some lettuce, and, in the advent of an apocalypse, I got some potted meat food product.”

“*Ew!* Potted meat food product? That’s just nasty.” Wick shriveled his muzzle.

“Well, it’s either that or cannibalism if something ever went down.” Galendor laughed.

\* \* \* \*

With everything done, the duo decided to depart. Most of the crowds had gone, leaving only a few peddlers

and a lot of trash. It had been a good day overall.

Toward the fringes of town, they noticed a small huddled figure crouched in a dark, dirty alley. “Alms, kind sir,” he uttered in a weak, trembling voice. “A bit of kindness is all I ask.”

Sadness flooded Galendor. He’d never seen a beggar, nor been in a situation where he had more than someone else. “Hey, Wick, how much do we have left over?”

“Oh, man, we have a killing! I mean I was hot toda...hey, what are you thinking?” Wicket cringed at giving away loot.

“Just hand it over dude.” Galendor reached out his palm.

“Everything?” Wicket whined.

“*Aaahhhttt!*” Galendor interjected, “Just fork it over, and some cloth too.”

“All right, all right, here, take it. I can always make more on the next trip.” Wicket shrugged and closed his eyes so he couldn’t see himself giving away his prizes.

Galendor laid the items in front of the figure. “Here you are. Use it well, and God speed.” He also gave up the groceries, except for the potted meat food product, which he wouldn’t wish on his worst enemy.

“Thank you, sir. The goodness you put in others’ lives will come back into your own.” With that being said, a gnarled hand slowly grabbed the groceries and held them close.

Wicket took a couple of steps back and whispered, “Galendor, let’s get home.”

“Yes, let’s.” Galendor shook his head.

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\* \* \* \*

They made haste for the city gates, very uneasy with what had just transpired. A hooded figure behind a building watched from the shadows. The good deed had not gone unnoticed.

## **Chapter Two: The Commission**

Coming to the Fork in the Road that would take them home, they ‘tined’ left toward the forest. Traffic laws mandated a large fork be constructed at branching roads with the destinations clearly marked on the tines.

Yonder Forest stood smack-dab in the middle of the land of Yorh, but most humans avoided it due to silly superstitions. Stepping into the serenity of the trees, Galendor relaxed and laughed. “Can you believe people think our forest will swallow their souls?”

“It’s just another facet of your people’s behavior I’ll never fathom. You know, I actually heard someone say that those who live in Yonder Forest marvel potted meat food product. I, for one, do not.”

Galendor feigned gagging. “That’s just nasty. I mean, I’ll eat it, but only as a salty diversion from hunger.”

\* \* \* \*

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A bit further in, Wicket broke the silence on the big topic, “What do you think about Princess Jessica’s speech?”

Galendor’s eyes winced behind his dark sunglasses. “The king must have fallen into a super-duper deep state o’ funk for the princess to offer marriage based solely on the grounds of entertainment value. What really gets me is that, just after her speech, some little robed dude was going on about me saving the kingdom and such. I’m currently pondering the thought that the two instances may be linked.”

Wick’s expression deepened. “This does *not* bode well for the fair lady or the kingdom.”

Galendor sighed, “A most egregious situation indeed, my little blue buddy. Let us not forget the beggar. Have you ever known someone to be destitute in Yorh?”

“Not in Yorh, nor my native Narfingham. I believe we did right by him, but did you *have* to give away all our food?”

“I was so overcome by non-joyousness, I figured it’d settle my conscience. We can get more tomorrow. Plus, I’m sure we’ll eat at Garoeth’s.”

Part of Wicket’s friendship entailed goading Galendor to improve. “So, do we head for Castle Yorh and take a crack at winning the hand of the luscious babe in charge?”

Galendor raised his walking stick as if it were a mighty sword. “I would give my right arm just to see the sun glint off her precious hair once more! Alas, I am not good enough. More experienced persons learned in verse and song go before us, and I’m afraid we would waste our time in sojourning to the castle.”

“What? What happened to the ‘upwardly mobile

dudes with excellent capes' who headed through the city gates this morning? Where's *that* Galendor?"

"I guess I just had a reality check today. I'm utmostly not as triumphant as those bands I heard, and I'm never going to be the suave guy who struts to the princess." Galendor's dream bubble had burst.

"I surely do see your point, but *what if* we succeeded!? Oodles and gobs of treasure for me, and you could marry that lovely Sheila...it's a *woo woo* situation!" Wick wiggled his eyebrows up and down.

"I couldn't marry someone because of some deal, no matter how heart-poundingly pretty she is. There's that 'love' thing and stuff," Galendor said.

Wicket tried another angle, "Okay, forget all that. It would be *fun*...yes?"

"You know where the Word says, 'hope deferred maketh the heart sick'? Truth be told, I'm scared to put myself out there too far. What if I get my hopes up, just to get rejected one more time? I'm sooooo tired of losing. Currently, I can still dream of seeing Jessica, once I have the chutzpa to knock her socks off. Let's not ruin that dream just yet."

Wick gave in to apathy. "You're right. Plus, it would stink to walk that far anyway."

"Absolutely!" Galendor felt relief once Wick dropped the subject.

\* \* \* \*

Deeper into the forest, the atmosphere became brazenly strange. Nothing scurried, and the only noises were whispers in the pine needles and the eerie squeak of the trees.

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The air seemed heavy, almost as if it were visible with a yellow tinge. Every rock, leaf, flower, blade of grass, and tree could be seen with the utmost clarity; no distance blurring or fading of colors. The unutterably odd situation caused both to have heaviness in their chests as they tried to breathe.

Galendor peered over his sunglasses for a clearer view. “What unsavoriness is this; the calm before a massive storm?”

“I’m feeling all closed in, like I’m in a container or large box.” Wicket wheezed.

The twosome froze dead in their tracks as the air became too thick for movement. Their vision bent and warped into a spiral, then waved like a ripple in water. Tremendous thunder clapped, followed by a magnificent flash with arching and sparking like colorful fireworks.

*Bbbbbzzzzaaaatttt! Rumble, Rumble.*

The forest returned to its normal state of animals playing, chirping, and chattering, and the air no longer had a yellowish tint. Only one thing seemed out of the ordinary: the short little man now standing in front of them! He wore baggy brown robes, and his hat probably should have been pointed, but couldn’t quite make it. Under this hat flowed long white hair and bushy eyebrows. A pair of thick blue lenses sat above a big round nose shadowing a long white mustache and beard.

“You ever heard tell of a *mugician*, boy?” he asked.

“Uhhh...I’ve heard of a *ma-gician*, does that count?”

“*Mew-jih-shun*...mew...mew like a small cat! A *musical ma-gician!*” he shouted.

“Say what?” mused Galendor.

“I’m a magician of music. Mugician Lord Bill is my title, but you can call me Mugician Lord Bill!”

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“Okay. Mugician Lord B...”

“On second thought, don’t call me at all; it’d take up too much time. You are the one who has been chosen, *nay* I say! *You* are the Chosen One!”

“I’m the chosen wha...”

“There you go, *Blah, blah, blah*, wasting time when there’s no time to waste! Now shut yer yap and listen! The king has fallen under no ordinary doldrums, *nooo!* ’Tis an enigmatic sickness the likes of which I’ve not seen. You must journey to find three others like yourself. Focus on the finding of the three. Only then will you be able to seek out Phorsyard the Keeper and eventually put on a concert for the king, but, again, your sole goal is three souls. I shall guide you on occasion, but, for now, away with you! Go! Fly away! Be gone!”

“All right, all right, *all right!* We were just heading that way,” Galendor whined as the little man began pushing him.

“Off with me then!” And with that, Mugician Lord Bill vanished.

*Poof!*

Galendor had his hands in his pockets, staring at the now empty area. Wicket stood speechless with his paws on his hips. Galendor rolled forward onto his toes then rolled back to his flat-footed, slouched position.

Wicket’s muzzle pursed. “*Mmm-hhhmmm.*”

“Yep. I’m not gonna lie, I’m a little freaked out right here,” Galendor confided.

“Let’s just get to the lobothian village. I think we need some normalcy,” Wick said as he picked up his gaming bag and the supplies he’d dropped.

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\* \* \* \*

The charm and intricate details of the loboethian town never ceased to amaze. Galendor thought that if outsiders could just see the water features and exquisite gardens accentuating the surrealistic architecture of the houses, they might see the loboethians for who they really were.

Windows, glowing warmly, invited visitors to the cobblestone and shingled houses as chimneys puffed wisps of smoke in the still air. Aromas of lunches caused Galendor's tummy to rumble: smoked meats, bread baking, and wood burning. Both Galendor and Sir Wicket stood, sniffed and drooled. These were some of the simple pleasures of life.

Loboethian children scattered and played in the afternoon sun. Boys chased girls, others ran from girls. A few played with rocks and sticks while girls dressed dolls. When Sir Wicket and Galendor arrived, all of the children stopped what they were doing and flocked to them shouting, "Yaaayyy!"

Galendor warned, "Crumb snatchers dead ahead dude!"

"I think there are some rug rats mixed in as well." Wicket set down his armload and darted about; tackling a few kids grouped together.

"Play us a song, Ye Bard of Yonder Forest!" Scads of kids huddled among Galendor's legs.

"Okay, okay, just give me some space, ya knot heads!" He laughed as he reached for his lyre. Galendor played the instrument in a direct and fast style that the children enjoyed. The song sounded whimsical and the children smiled.

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‘Ye do not taketh from the pond of fish.’  
‘Ye hath not given to the...pond of fi-ish!’

‘Ye do not taketh from the pond of fish.’  
‘Lest ye be wet ah...’

After his lyrics, he played something he called a riff. The children roared with laughter and applause. “Play us another, pleeeease?”

“I would, but we’re here to see Garoeth, and then we need to get home.” Galendor made a funny face as he raised his shoulders and hands in defeat.

“*Aww!*” The children sulked, but quickly returned to their games.

\* \* \* \*

The lobothian smithy worked miracles with ore. A metal didn’t exist that he couldn’t wield with splendor. His wolf-like head atop his 6’7” dark gray human body definitely made him seem like a creature from a childhood nightmare. His soft blue eyes and gentle nature proved more than enough to reassure his status as a pretty decent chap.

Billows of smoke rolled upwards from Garoeth’s shop, and the rhythmic, almost musical clang of his hammer upon anvil rang through the streets. Galendor joked, “Hey man, is this what they mean by Heavy Metal?”

“Galendor! My old friend!” The clanging stopped. “How art thou and Sir Wicket this fine afternoon?” Garoeth’s speech sounded proper, like royalty.

“I cannot complain on this utmostly jubilacious day

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that has been set before us, dude.” Galendor shook hands, though the giant’s muscled grip eclipsed his meager offering.

“Splendid! Let us converse and break bread; we have plenty.” Garoeth had a contagious energy about him.

Galendor smiled. “Yes! Let us sup and make merry!”

\* \* \* \*

Garoeth’s family garden grew flowers from a magic peddler. Little yellow ones sang in beauty shop harmony while blue and red tube-like flowers played a tune. The plants uprooted themselves and danced as if they were having a party. A swaybacked rooftop gave the house a whimsical appeal, while an intricately detailed iron and oak door secured it in a fashion most becoming a blacksmith.

Dara kept the inside immaculate. As beautiful and refined a lady as one could meet, she would pass for any fine woman at a human court—if not for her canine facial features.

As Sir Wicket and Galendor entered, a heavenly aroma grabbed their noses and carried them into the room.

Garoeth’s two children, Gretchen and Ladeus attacked. “Uncle Galendor! Sir Wicket! *Yay!*”

Wicket quickly whipped around with a mid-air twist, effectively turning the tables on Ladeus. “Thought you could get one over on the old Knight of Narfingham, didn’t ya?”

“Sir Wicket, do you think I could ever be as fast as you?” the boy asked.

“Well, if you eat your veggies, obey your parents, and do your homework...*naw*, you’ll never be as fast as me.” Wick laughed, shaking his head.

Dara smiled at him and took her supplies off his hands.

“Uncle Galendor,” Gretchen beamed with a smile, “do you like my new dress? Mother crafted it for me on my birthday. She says it makes me look mature. What do you think?”

With one hand on his heart, the other toward space, Galendor declared, “You are the epitome of radiance and aesthetic bliss.”

She giggled and ran into the next room, surely blushing, though it was hidden by her furry face. It was all too apparent that she had a crush on Galendor, which he considered flattering.

“All right everyone, soup’s on! Kids, get washed up! You too, Garoetoth, you’re absolutely filthy.” Dara placed her hands on her hips. “Galendor, Sir Wicket, welcome! You know where the sinks are.” She sure could organize.

“Mom,” questioned Ladeus, “why’d you say, ‘soup’s on?’ I thought we were having chicken and toast and stuff...I hate soup!”

“We *are* having chicken and such. ‘Soup’s on’ is just an expression saying it’s time to eat,” Dara explained.

“*Ooohh, IIII* ssseeee!” Ladeus walked off into the next room, displaying his newly acquired tidbit of youthful information. “*Gretchen*, hurry up! Soup’s on, and *no*, we’re not having soup, it’s just an expression!”

\* \* \* \*

Wicket and Galendor sat contentedly at the large wooden table when Gretchen and Ladeus scampered in.

“Hey mom, watch this!” Ladeus shouted as he

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scratched behind Sir Wick's ear, causing his leg to bounce.

"A little to the left there, mate," Wicket instructed.

Gretchen approached with a pale pink bow. "Galendor, will you put this in my hair?"

"Um...sure I will. Come here." Galendor, not being one for dainty things, hadn't the foggiest idea of how to put a bow in someone's hair.

"That's enough, children. Leave our guests alone. It's time to eat." Dara turned her head to holler at Garoethoth, still washing up, "Hurry dear, it's on the table!" She had prepared a large bird, along with eggs and lightly browned toast, juice, and some fruit.

Garoethoth came in, stood at the back of his chair, and closed his eyes. "Great is our thanks as we owe much to thee. Bless our house, friends, and food...*amen.*"

Grace being said, the feasting commenced. The food tasted so wonderful, Galendor had a tough time taking a break from scarfing. "Man, oh man, this meal...it's *d-e-licious!*"

"Hey Daddy, the next time someone goes to town for us, can I get some new chemicals and herbs for my science kit?" Ladeus asked before turning to Sir Wicket. "I'm going to be an alchemist someday."

"Father, may I get some lip colorant and eye shading too?" Gretchen wanted so badly to grow up and be like her mother.

Garoethoth spoke firmly but kindly, "We shall not burden our friends, children. Ladeus, thou canst wait until the date of your birth, and Gretchen, thou art not of the age for beautification."

"Rats!" Ladeus said, kicking the air.

"Yes, Father." Gretchen nodded.

\* \* \* \*

When the only noises were chewing, slurping and clinking of metal utensils on ceramic plates, Galendor let the music box play. Gretchen's eyes beamed. "Is that for me?"

"For you, my sweet." He offered the trinket with a polite bow.

"I love this," she whispered and held it to her heart.

Ladeus searched the two with sad, pitiful eyes. Wicket converted his toy from a wagon to a knight while making a strange noise like clearing his throat down a musical scale.

"*Oh yeah, that's mine!*" Wick had no time before Ladeus nabbed it and ran to the other room.

Dara glared at her guests, who desperately fought to avoid eye contact with her. Galendor slid back from the table to give his newly filled potbelly some stretching room. "Dara, that had to be one of the utmost taste-o-licious feasts as ever there was!"

"Too right!" Wicket added, toweling his muzzle.

Dara placed her elbows on the table and rested her chin in her hands with a smile.

Galendor stared at his plate and couldn't conjure an excuse to leave the table. Dara sipped her coffee. "Wow, it's not like you to sit this long after a meal. Something weighing heavy on your heart?" she asked.

"Must be that female intuition one hears so much about," Galendor answered, "but, yes, my noggin's all aflutter." He proceeded to detail the day's events; from the princess to Mugician Lord Bill's kingdom-saving challenge and the vagabond. "I've always thought Yorh a place of

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harmony, but methinks there are dark shadows looming. What's your opinion?"

Dara and Garoethoth looked at each other the way parents do before dropping heavy knowledge on their kids. Dara answered, "Sweetie, nothing is ever perfect. Just because you've not seen much darkness doesn't mean it's not always been there. Do you think all is right in the world when our people can't safely go to town or let our kids play with humans?"

"Of course I don't feel that's right! So, are you saying that all is not coming to an end and take today's revelations with a grain of salt?"

Garoethoth added, "Doest thou trust the words of this Mugician Lord? Art thou convicted to champion our fair lady's plight?"

"Bill seems a bit loopy, and I would *loove* to see Jessica again, but methinks I'll squat and watch for a few." Galendor breathed a small sigh of relief.

"Whatever you decide, do keep us informed," Dara said. Galendor and Wick started to clean the table, but Dara wouldn't have it. "*Aht!* I want to sit and enjoy my coffee. You're excused from the table. And, thank you for getting my supplies."

Garoethoth walked them to the door and waved goodbye. "Fare thee well, 'til our paths cross once more...dudes!" With that, he smiled and closed the door.

## **Chapter Three: A Reluctant Start**

Home finally, Ye Olde Mister Stove crackled away, glowing with warm, comforting light. “Rough day out there, yes?” He spoke in a low and cheery golden voice.

“I wouldn’t even know where to begin, Stove,” Wicket said, taking off his cape and collapsing in his basket.

“Well then, let me cook up some comfort food. What did you get at the store, Galendor?”

“Here, cook this,” Galendor said bluntly as he heaved a brick of red substance onto the stovetop.

“Ahhh, potted meat food product...you guys *do* realize this stuff smells bad, right?” Stove asked.

Galendor nodded, “Try eating it, dude.”

“No thanks! Luckily, my enchantment doesn’t cause me to have to eat.”

“Well, luckily, we don’t need to eat now, either. We just feasted at Garoetoth’s table.” Galendor did a back-flop onto his bed.

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Wicket had squinted eyes and a furrowed brow since entering the house. “Let’s piece this out. What do you think Bill meant by three others like you? Who in the name of sense is ‘Phorsyard the Keeper’, and if the king is sick, shouldn’t someone be searching for a Chosen Doctor? The whole thing sounds absurd to me.” Wick peered over the side of his basket.

“It certainly does indeed! Furthermore, I believe I will continue lying here, maximizing my relaxation efforts, thus demonstrating my distaste for a quest. In fact, I believe if we forget the whole thing, it shall go away. Ability to pop out of thin air or not, let Baggy Robes McGee find some other Chosen Dude, as I’m not up to it.” Galendor crossed his arms behind his head.

“Would someone like to tell me what you’re going on about? What quest? What short guy? Who’s the Chosen One, and for what?” Ye Olde Mister Stove didn’t like being left in the dark.

Galendor updated Stove, adding, “Frankly, I think that Lord Bill dude is full of bologna which, as you know, is one step short of potted meat food product, and that’s not a very good thing to be full of.” Galendor placed his hat over his face to further relax.

Stove reassured, “Sounds like an opportunity to get out and do something good, Galendor.”

“Traipsing around the kingdom doesn’t sound very advantageous to me,” Galendor refuted.

Mr. Stove started to make a counterpoint, but a knocking at the front door interrupted him.

Wicket sprung from his basket. “I’ll get that!” He leaned on one foot with his ear to the door and sang, “Whooo iiiis iiiit?”

“Toad-o-gram for mister ‘Ye Dude’ in care of Yonder Forest *wurp*.”

Wicket opened the door to see a large toad on a small bicycle. The toad stretched out his arm. “That’ll be half a silver please.”

“Half a silver? *Half* a silver!” Wick barked. “Flaming bags of cow cookies! The postal service is just getting too expensive these days!” Wicket fumed to and from the money cup on his nightstand and paid the toad in disgust.

The messenger forked the letter over with a small, “*wurp*,” and pedaled away.

Sir Wicket handed the letter to Galendor. Enclosed were some strange drawings of a contraption unlike anything he had ever seen. Wicket sometimes enjoyed figuring out puzzles, so Galendor passed them along. “Can you make heads or tails of this, Wick?”

Sir Wicket scrutinized the papers. “Near as I can figure, these are schematics for a sound amplification device.”

“Radical!” Galendor chuckled. “How’d ya come up with that brilliant deduction?”

Wicket pointed to some large bold print. “It says right here, ‘*sound, amplification device.*’ You see?” While Galendor sat dumbfounded at the marvel of science, Wicket double-checked the envelope. “There’s something else in there, what does it say?”

Galendor dug around and produced the short note. “The letter enclosed reads as follows: ‘Stop lollygagging with your stove, get out of the house, and start your quest! Keep these drawings until you find the one who can use them. P.S. I wouldn’t eat the potted meat food product if I were you. Starving would be much better!’”

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This message visibly spooked Galendor. He stared at the letter. “Wicket, this is a most jarring occurrence. Clarvoyant or kook, in my considered opinion, we shall not be getting much rest tonight.”

Wicket stood ready. “Well, what’ll we do? He’s not leaving us alone.”

Galendor stretched out on his bed with the sinking feeling of dread. After staring at the ceiling and playing through multiple scenarios in his mind, he sat up. “I’ll tell you what we’ll do. We’re going to give this thing our best shot. Then, when my best proves not enough—as always—we will be rid of this persistent, vertically challenged foofenheimer! And if, by some miracle, we do succeed at whatever this quest is, then I shall ask Princess Jessica to hold hands and eat funnel cakes! Pack all of our stuff while I go to the shed and get Lil’ Red.” Galendor marched straight out the door.

“Too right!” Wicket shouted as he threw stuff from every nook and cranny of the house into a pile.

Stove flared, stoked by the new rush of energy in the room. “That’s the spirit! I’ll keep the home fires burning until your return.”

\* \* \* \*

The evening sun cast calming orange rays through the thick trees as dew sparkled on the flowers and blades of grass. The smoke from Ye Olde Mister Stove rose slowly and hovered. The night would be calm.

As Galendor reached the rickety old shingled shed, he couldn’t help but feel a little excited. Throwing laziness aside, calling on Lil’ Red meant a long, potentially

*W. Eric Myers*

overwhelming journey might be in store. What if this whole deal wasn't a farce? If it did pan out, he could see the princess again. "*Woo hoo!*" Galendor shouted.

\* \* \* \*

Digging through the shed revealed that it hadn't been dug through in quite some time. A small, dusty tarp in the corner covered something obviously wonderful.

"Hey Lil' Red! C'mon out, little fella," Galendor whispered.

"*Squeak squeak!*" A fiery cherry-red wagon came swooshing out.

"Whoa! Slow down there, hot rod! We've got a long task ahead of us, so don't go pooping yourself out too fast! Are you up to it?"

"Squeaky squeak!"

Galendor squatted and brushed spider webs and dirt off of the excited little vehicle. "Well, alrighty then, my bodaciously righteous Lil' Red Wagon, let's pack up and move out!"

"*Squeak.*"

\* \* \* \*

Wicket finished locking the house as Galendor and Lil' Red came around the corner. "Are you sure we're all ready, Wick?"

The narf stood at the base of a pile o' stuff. "Ready as we're ever gonna be. Do we have a plan?"

"Lord Bill said to find three others like me. I figure he wasn't speaking of utmostly cool gents, but rather,

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musically inclined. My guess is for us to head south, deeper into the Yonder Forest. There were people from every corner of the map in town today, and yet this Bill guy picked on us. So, keeping to these enchanted woods might yield a more desirable candidate.”

“And you’ve surmised all this in these few minutes? Lovely, just lovely.” Wick crinkled his muzzle in reaction to Galendor’s logic. After painstakingly throwing everything into Lil’ Red, the two, plus wagon, trekked south and west into the setting sun.

\* \* \* \*

Nightfall didn’t come too quickly; it came about the same time it always did—right when the sky got dark. The chirping of birds changed to the fiddle of crickets, and happy sounds of playing animals turned to the eerie sounds of owls and things that go *gurrp* in the night. With capes flowing behind them and the constant rattling of Lil’ Red Wagon, the trio moved steadily through the ever-cooling air.

After a few hours, Galendor stopped the caravan. “Let’s camp here for the night. This huge crag of rocks blocks our southerly passage, and these tall spruce and pine trees create a nice shelter all around.” He gathered and piled wood while Sir Wicket unloaded blankets and laid them on a nice flat area.

Galendor fiddled in his pockets. “I’m trying to find some matches. Do you have any?”

“I’m a narf. Where am I gonna store matches?” Wicket said sarcastically.

“How am I going to light a fire without matches?”

Wicket jeered, “Why don’t you go rub two sticks together!”

“How about I rub my two fists together on your face, jerky!” Galendor snapped.

The long, tiring day and the whole situation in general had taken its toll on the both of them. Before the argument escalated, Lil’ Red rolled to the rocks, squeaked, and banged his backside against them. Each time he did, a small flash occurred.

“Squeak squeaky.”

“Not now, Wagon! Can’t you see I’m fixin’ to whelp this mutt?”

“Fat chance flabby man!” Wick danced around like a boxer, fists ready.

“*Squeak!*”

Lil’ Red rammed the rocks until the banging and the subsequent flashes broke Wicket’s concentration. “Hey, Galendor...sparks.” Wick put his guard down and pointed.

Galendor relaxed his stance. “Well, I’ll be. Get some dry leaves while I gather twigs.”

All hostilities were forgotten as the two gathered kindling. After light-headedness from blowing, and a sore, dented backside of Wagon, a nice little fire blazed. The new light caused their shadows to jump on the rocks and trees.

“A sad thing it is to blemish the memory of our fine lobothian meal so many hours ago, but keeping our energy up will be most important. Break out the potted meat food product, Wick, and let us partake of the nutrients therein.”

“I guess when you’re hungry, anything sounds good.” Wicket took out the package of food product and continued, “What is your plan for food when this runs out?”

Galendor answered, “Well, along the way I’m sure

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we can find plants and berries. People around here may be generous enough to feed us, plus I'm sure there will be towns down this way. My main concern is how to find three people crazy or stupid enough to follow us. I plan to go to sleep and face it anew tomorrow."

Wicket yawned and stretched his arms and legs. "I'm all for that."

After finishing their meal of salty processed meat scraps, they brushed their teeth and lay down to sleep. The ground definitely wasn't Galendor's bed, nor Sir Wicket's basket, but it felt great all the same to stretch out and relax. The day had held more activity than a whole week.

\* \* \* \*

Galendor drifted off into peaceful slumber listening to the fire crackle and jump, though it slowly died. A breeze blew through the pine needles, making a rushing noise like a distant waterfall. He slept still, dreaming of wooing Jessica with a fantastic song played on a really cool instrument that his mind must have invented.

Sir Wicket, on the other hand, did not sleep so still. He kicked and kicked his legs as most sleeping dogs do, but he kept throwing his arm as if wielding a sword.

When Wick awoke in a cold sweat, he found Galendor smiling in his sleep and Lil' Red sitting contently. "That's the last time I eat *that* stuff before bed."

Ever the pyromaniac, Sir Wicket noticed the fire needed stoking. "I'll get a nice fire going here," he spoke his inner dialog. "Oooh, there's a big log; I'll put that right on top. Next, I'll build up the outside with these smaller logs in order to contain the heat. Finally, I'll build up the structure

by forking tons of twigs into the area between the small outer logs and the big one in the middle...there, now that's an inferno!" Indeed, it was; the fire reached high into the sky and snapped sharply instead of happily crackling.

Wicket convinced himself there was no greater thing than his fire, disregarding the fact that very bright light at night brings out the mischievous will-o-the-wisps. They glowed bright green or yellow and emitted a high-pitched buzzing sound as they ransacked everything in Lil' Red and stirred up the coals causing dangerous sparks to fly. Groups of wispies gathered together and tried to fly off with blankets, pots, pans, and even Lil' Red!

*"Squeak!"*

"Rats! Wispies...I hate wispies!" Sir Wicket whispered. "Well I'm gonna make me some crispy wispies!"

His fire must have been of the highest caliber, for in no time at all, the whole area was aglow with wispies. Surely their buzzing would wake Galendor, but for the moment, he remained asleep. Wicket took a burning ember and ran all over the camp batting will-o-the-wisps.

After nearly half an hour of buzzing, dodging and zooming, Wicket managed to bat them all back with his expert sticksmanship. Panting and leaning on his trusty weapon, he gaped at Galendor who remained fast asleep.

Wicket yawned loudly as he returned to his blanket, *"Aaahhhggghhh!"*

"Huhh...wha...wuz zaht?" Galendor poked his head up from his sleep.

"Oh, you have got to be *kidding* me!" Sir Wicket frowned at him in disgusted disbelief.

"What was that noise? It sounded like a bear or something." Galendor sleepily surveyed the area.

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“Go back to bed, man. I was just yawning,” Wick jeered.

“You go to bed too, dude. We’ve got a long day ahead of us. And hey...put that fire out a little would ya?” Galendor added, “We don’t need any will-o-the-wisp attacks tonight.”

Wicket agreed hastily, “Yeah, sure thing.” He leaned closer to Lil’ Red. “Not a word, Wagon. Not a word.”

“Squeak.”

The sleepy narf poured water on the fire and tried to salvage what sleep he could from the already long night.

Lil’ Red remained happy that he no longer sat in the shed.