

JOURNEY *to* HOKKA DU

By LEW ANDERSON

THE LORIAN STONES TRILOGY

Book One: *Tombs of Dross*

Book Two: *Battles Grim*

Book Three: *Pillars and Power*

THE LORIAN CHRONICLES

Horse Boy

Journey to Hokka Du

Misty Gray

Yodin the Rescuer

For Us...



THE LORIAN CHRONICLES II

JOURNEY *to* HOKKA DU

LEW ANDERSON



TREESTONE BOOKS

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*To Ole
A man after God's own heart
You inspired me to start this one*

*And to Scott Mandell
For inspiring me to finish it*

And in loving memory of my brother Paul



Northern Loria



Fieldstone



Brittlemick



Blackwall



Kurhh

to High Kru



PRONUNCIATION GUIDE

Alle-Encer	(AL-lee EN-sir)
Ariel	(AR-ee-el)
Armadon	(AR-ma-don)
Baruuk	(ba-RUKE)
Dorian	(DOOR-ee-an)
Dulac	(dew-LACK)
Eryn	(AIR-ren)
Garlock	(GAR-lock)
Golyak	(GOAL-yak)
Grimalkyn	(GRIM-ol-kin)
Hokka Du	(HOK-a-DOO)
Jei-sar	(je-SAR)
Kee-el	(KEE-el)
Kharlome	(car-LOME)
Mersha	(MER-sha)
Mirrah	(MEER-rah)
Nar-gool	(NAR-gool)
Nevelin	(NEV-e-lin)
Nusa	(NEW-sa)
Perin Bol	(PEAR-in BOWL)
Pernippen	(per-NIP-en)
Pharen	(FAIR-en)
Quimby	(KWIM-bee)
Rolio	(ROW-lee-oh)
Sasson	(SA-son)
Seoni	(sea-OH-nce)
Seraph	(SAIR-if)
Shalom	(sha-LOHM)
Sha-ná	(sha-NA)
Tabria	(ta-BREE-ah)
Tercel	(TER-sel)
Tesoro	(te-SOR-ro)
Vulgonhar	(VUL-gun-HAR)
Zeljin	(ZEL-jin)

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PREFACE

“The Christian life, then, is a battle, so sharp and full of danger that effort can nowhere be relaxed without loss.”

—Huldrych Zwingli

“The story of your life is the story of the long and brutal assault on your heart by the one who knows what you can be and fears it.”

—John Eldredge

PROLOGUE

Deep in the twisting caverns that snake beneath the mountains of Hokka, that lie beyond the sand and ice fields of Hokka Du, a bitter voice, tight and breathy, echoed through the sooty light and drifting shadows.

“Bring me them... alive.” The voice seemed to quiver through the dimness, a froth of hatred in its wake.

“And the brother?” a husky voice replied.

The wheeze tightened to a throaty hiss. “Feed him... to the nar-gool!”

1 A DISTANT WAIL

Zac tossed the smooth wooden dice, all three cubes swirling around themselves as they tumbled in the alabaster bowl. Two came up as horsemen, the other as a foot soldier.

“I haven’t any horsemen left,” he whined, shaking his head at the chess-like board where only a dozen pieces remained.

“Then move a soldier,” Breezy said, looking on from a cozy cushion. Blue-eyed Seoni sat across from Zac, her fair lips sporting a triumphant grin.

They sat together on the floor of the Karmalyn court. A gentle draft of warm dry air played through the tall narrow windows just behind. The western sun angling through, warmed the plush horl-skin rug beneath them. It was a fine fall day in Northern Loria, the late afternoon affording some well-deserved free time to relax before dinner.

“A whole troop couldn’t save me now,” Zac replied, studying the checkered board in hopes of finding some escape from his imminent demise.

Like chess, but with three dice limiting the options of which piece to move, the game was played with fourteen carved figures, each having specific range of movement and effectual power.

And like chess, capturing the shalom was the ultimate goal, which for Seoni seemed only a few moves away.

Zac slid one of his four remaining foot soldiers forward one square. Seoni then tossed the wooden dice, eagerly watching as they tumbled to the bottom of the bowl.

Suppressing a gleeful cry, she gave a sudden clap, as the dice revealed the three pieces from which she could choose—a horseman, a Lorian, and a Brone. She glanced up at Zac, her bright eyes flickering with delight.

No matter how many times they played, she always seemed to win. Isaac would not touch the game, though he loved chess.

“Chess or chance,” he had said. “Not both.”

“But that’s life,” Zac countered. “Gotta flow with the roll.”

Unlike chess, the checkered board was played from the corners, filling two rows with four squares up each side. In the back corner stood the shalom, flanked on each side by a Lorian warrior with the queen directly in front.

Seoni moved her remaining Brone one square. Although limited in movement, a Brone piece could take out any piece touching its square.

Zac groaned, watching his last Lorian warrior, which could move like a rook in chess, be ceremoniously swiped off the board. Seoni smiled, chuckling as she set the piece beside its fallen comrades.

“You win... again,” Zac said with a sigh.

“Ain’t over till it’s over,” Breezy said, encouraging him to keep trying.

“But I’ve nothing left.”

“Fight with what you have,” Breezy proclaimed, swinging her arm upward. Then looking into the distance, she deepened her voice. “Fight till the last warrior falls, till all have stood their ground, even if unto utter defeat.”

Zac and Seoni chuckled at her antics. Then with another sigh, Zac rolled the three wooden dice, hoping to see a Brone or a scout, his only remaining pieces of any real power.

A DISTANT WAIL

Before the dice had finished their circling tumble, the distant wail of a signal horn drifted through the Karmalyn windows.

All three sat upright, eyes on each other as the dice tumbled to rest in unnoticed silence.

“Wa-hoooo,” came the call once more, its hollow hum waffling on the afternoon breeze. Two long blasts given just seconds apart—the *eyes-up* alarm—a call to take warning. Something was amiss.

For the past three months, the land had seen relative calm, save for a few roving bands of disruptive parlords. Their numbers never grew to more than three or four per gang, due to their combative nature. Troublesome; yes. Causing bloodshed at times; of course. But so far, nothing to warrant the sounding of a tower trumpet.

“What is it?” Zac asked, rising to peer out the narrow window, the purple-red scarf of Perce about his waist. He knew that until a runner came, no one in the Karmalyn would have any idea why the alarm had sounded.

Angst held each girl in somber silence, their eyes on Zac.

Momentarily wearied with leadership duties, Isaac had gone for a walk with Eryn, their footsteps in sync as they climbed a set of stone stairs leading to a favorite turret where they could look out over the twin cities and the southern valley beyond.

They too, met each other’s gaze as the horn’s simple song wavered over the walled city.

“Northwest tower!” Isaac said, his blood tingling. The months of relative peace had not been without challenges, some of which had left him deeply concerned. The disappearance of Tiffy still pained his heart, stirring up angry doubts to which Eryn, Zac, or Breezy would reassure him that Ariel knows her every move and watches them as well.

Yes, Sasson was gone and the parlords disbanded. But the reborn kingdom of Northern Loria was quite fragile in many

respects. Any advancing force could still attack, driving the Pharens and Kurhhs into the walled city, only to be held under dreadful siege, something for which they were not prepared.

Drifting rumors spoke of vengeful nations, the Wurloom in particular, seeking justice for their trampled troops, but so far the scouts had not reported any signs of gathering movements.

A fear for the God of the Lorians had settled over kingdoms both friendly and unfriendly to Loria. The evil which had emanated from Skone Lor no longer soaked the land with vile hatred and distrust, but men were still men, some yielding to envy and greed, others to the lust of power and control.

“What is it?” Eryn asked, her eyes searching the northern towers. “I see no signal flags.”

Isaac narrowed his gaze, wishing he had Zac’s eagle eye. He scanned Lake Noord and its cliffs beyond. “Don’t see anything.”

Eryn took his hand, squeezing it tight, her grip strong and warm. Both teens still suffered from nights of dark dreams, of triggered moments that flared into sweaty palms and panicked heartbeats, of startling sounds that caused a knife or sword to be swiftly drawn. The months of relative peace had not yet calmed the young nerves, which had endured so much trauma, even tasting of death itself.

“Could be nothing,” Isaac said, returning her squeeze. “May be nothing at all.”

After searching the north and west horizons one last time, they descended the winding stairs at a dizzying pace.

Entering the square beneath the Karmalyn, they intercepted the runner, who being rather winded, was greatly relieved to relay his message without ascending the long stairway to the royal hall.

“Northwest tower,” he huffed. “Smoke columns beyond the hills.”

“I saw nothing,” Isaac said.

The runner drew hard breaths. “No, ‘twas a fifth done passed. Then a column to the west. Only a moment... but like a

signal. Then again in betwixt... at northwest. Single white column... Captain Larro waited... a long fifth... then gave command to signal." The runner awaited Isaac's acknowledgment, then went on. "Captain thinks Wurloom may have gathered behind the hills of Noord."

Isaac shook his head, blood pumping too hard, too fast. "No," he said, glancing at Eryn. "Scouts would have seen. Been watching those lands closely."

Sometimes scouts would spend several weeks watching and listening, posing as beggars or balladeers, roaming the borderlands up and down before reporting in. They had signal towers set at visible distances to relay any urgent message. All had been quiet until now.

Zac, Seoni, and Breezy came running up while the messenger stood awaiting fresh orders. Isaac filled them in, keeping his voice low, as a crowd had quickly gathered in the open square beneath the Karmalyn.

"We would have seen them," Zac said, referring to a ride he and Seoni had taken only yesterday on the back of Kee-el. "We flew around the lake. Went beyond the hills. Nothing but shepherds. Brittlewick and Blackwall, both quiet as usual."

"Could be nothing," Isaac said with a nod. "Could be nothing at all." His spirit grew uneasy, regardless the effort his mind kept making. "Is Kee-el still around?" he asked.

Zac wagged his head. Each boy knew the giant raptor came and went according to a higher command. He may come within the hour or within a week, or maybe never again, although weekly seemed to be the recent norm.

Isaac looked about at the gathering crowd, many already peppering them with anxious questions. "To Mirrah's," he said, dark angst rising.

2 IT STILL ROAMS

The knew the sages and Karmalyn council would be asking questions soon. Dulac and Dorian were away in Bellock, finalizing treaties with the two Brone kingdoms. Garlock had remained in Yorne and would be gone for at least another week or two.

Walking briskly, Isaac led the way up to Dulac and Mirrah's new home, which sat just a few stories above them in the Pharen side of the Karmalyn tower. A large, open dwelling with a semi-circular hearth, it provided an excellent meeting place for both kingdom business and warm-hearted family gatherings. A balcony to the south overlooked the southern fields, while a balcony to the west overlooked the square below.

They peered up to see Sherrabella leaning over the balcony rail. Isaac gave her a nod and she dashed back into the home.

As adopted daughter and self-appointed house servant, Bella grew in both self-esteem and studious knowledge, eager to learn under Mirrah's steady tutelage.

Their home was also Eryn's place of residence, since being newly betokened, Pharen law forbade her to live independently as she had in Kharlome.

And for the teens, it was their unofficial home. Although they were expected to sleep in the royal bedrooms and occupy the

royal chambers, they were most often to be found at Dulac and Mirrah's, sleeping on makeshift beds strewn about the fireplace, Nusa occasionally joining them, only to hog the most desirable spot nearest the fire.

Helmstay, commander of the armed forces, would also know to meet them there. Limited in size, the semi-circular living room proved an ideal location for only the select members to attend. More could be accomplished in far less time sitting around that fireplace than in the great hall of the Karmalyn with so many diverse opinions and agendas.

Both Mirrah and Bella met them at the door, each wearing a look of deep concern. Mirrah's tall, slender frame loomed above the teens, her long auburn hair bound into its customary braid, its tail hanging to her calves. Bella stood attentive, her brindled blond and yellow hair also woven into a fine braid. Her cute nose was dotted with freckles that had only recently appeared.

"What is it?" Mirrah asked, seeing the runner beaded with sweat.

Isaac filled them in, asking if Helmstay were somewhere near.

"I have already summoned him," she said. "Rolio and Nevelin as well."

"Thank you, Mirrah." A few pounds of tension lifted from the boy's shoulders.

Bella brought the runner a mug of drink, which he eagerly drained. Seoni went to the rounded fireplace and sat upon the hearth, her keen eyes staring into the pulsing coals. For two weeks now she had been awakened by disturbing dreams, images of creatures lurking in the shadows, gargled voices rising from the dark recesses.

For two weeks she had sought Ariel's guidance, pleading for meaning to the dreams, but nothing had yet come. Now she sensed the unwelcome answers were drifting in, riding a northwest wind.

Breezy and Bella hugged in greeting, the two still quite inseparable, especially since Tiffy's disappearance, after which

Bella had wept for days, eating and drinking nothing, sprinkling her head and hair with ash. For a full week, she refused even water, until Mirrah finally made her drink, lest she too pass from their world into the next.

"May be nothing," Isaac told Mirrah, "but we'll have to go see."

Mirrah stiffened, holding her breath. She then nodded, pressing her lips tight. "Yes," she said with obvious strain, "we must... go see."

Isaac watched his brother mount the sleek gray horse, its mane and tail a rich black. He and Eryn each rode tan horses with markings of reddish-brown.

The plan had been for Isaac and Eryn to go with a squad of twelve, but Seoni had insisted she too ride with them, which meant Zac now would ride as well.

Isaac had protested sternly, but Zac seemed overly stubborn on the matter, refusing to listen even to Mirrah's counsel.

"There's nothing out there," he said. "It's just a ride."

Helmstay had urged them to take heed, but he too considered it merely a precautionary check.

Passing beneath the northeast gate, called Winter Gate, a sudden sadness breathed over Isaac, his brow furrowing. Whatever lay beyond the hills drew more than just concern. He felt something—something evil was at work.

You're just stressed, he told himself. *Been a lot of adjustment... steep learning curve*. He deeply wished Dulac and Dorian were back. Tark had been gone for over a month, visiting his homeland in the Marsing Valley.

The clippity-clop of hooves on cobblestones echoed off the gate's towers, the guards nodding respectfully to the outgoing party. The huge iron gates remained open from sunrise to sunset, allowing the farmers, merchants, travelers, and sometimes riffraff to conduct their daily business. But all passed

beneath the watchful eyes of the guards in their towers, an air of suspicion still lingering within the city's guardsmen.

The peace they presently enjoyed rested delicately on the fledgling kingdom with its limited defenses and still-developing government. Nor was the threat solely external. While most had enthusiastically embraced the rule of the Lorian teens, some had watched with hidden spite as their positions of power were given to another or dissolved completely.

Passing through into the sunlight, Isaac breathed a heavy sigh. It was a fine clear day with scattered clouds, warm, yet breezy. The party crossed the wooden bridge that spanned the canal, each eye searching the horizon for any more signs of smoke. Their horses then clomped over the drawbridge onto the dusty road.

Seoni too had felt the sadness drift past her heart, her eyes going to the young teen boy riding beside her. She and Zac had grown close. His uncanny ability to know her thoughts from gestures and the drawings on her stone, brought joys she had not felt in a very long time. He was so patient and kind as she sometimes tried to speak, but only when they were alone. To finally communicate deeply with someone had rekindled her hope, especially after so much loss.

Ariel, she prayed, please ride with us. Who have we, but you.

Their journey would take them north along Lake Noord to then turn west toward the hills. Both Isaac and Eryn had moorcelite crystals, enabling them to see details at incredible distances.

Rounding the lake, they paused to study the hills, each declaring all looked normal. Men fishing in boats and onshore. Women coming and going through a pass in the cliffs, some carrying water, some laundry, some baskets of fish.

The three small villages behind the western hills were a mix of less privileged peoples, the access to the lake being not the most suitable. But they were good people, loyal to Loria and the young shaloms.

After a good hour's ride, they entered the first village, Brittlewick. Its dirt streets were lined with shops and stalls selling a wide variety of goods and services. The villagers, dressed in either work clothes or fine cloth, milled about, haggling and bickering, laughing and dining, eating things roasted on sticks as if at some state fair back home.

Though ravaged during the recent war, the villagers had rebuilt a good portion of their homes and shops, inspired by the hope of a new era under new leadership.

The captain of the squad, Lokin Vaas, a trusted friend of Dulac, dismounted to ask the village blacksmith if he had experienced any unusual fires that morning.

"Nai," the burly man replied, "but a pair of them parlords come through." He shook his head, his square face reddened from his work. "Not the sorts we like seeing abouts here, if ya gist me gettings."

"Did they harm anyone?" Lokin asked. "Steal anything?"

"Nai..." The blacksmith cocked his head. "'Twas a bit quee. Them just passing through. Me wife says they up to bad behoovings. She's an eye for such. Be up-right quee."

Isaac and Eryn listened with interest. Parlords passing through without fighting or stealing, was indeed strange. Like bad guys in a Western leaving the bar without a fight or confrontation, it just didn't fit.

"Thank you," Lokin said. "Anything else unusual?"

"Nai. Was that a horn we heard? Is there a boil in the pot?"

"Not sure. If you see or hear anything, send word."

"Ai up, Capt'n." He looked to the teens. "Keep 'em safe. Evil might seem a nappin' but it still roams. Still... roams."

Lokin Vaas nodded, thanking the man. "What do you make of it?" he asked the teens.

"Could be nothing," Isaac said. Then he sighed. "Or... could be... something bad."

3 CASTING PEARLS

They continued south, passing through Brittlewick and the small village of Myss to then stop in Blackwall. They inquired of another blacksmith as to whether his fires had gotten out of control, or if he had seen anything unusual.

Like the other, he mentioned the two parlords that had ridden through, neither stopping nor stealing.

“Both on horseback,” the blacksmith said. “Dark steeds. One a huge beast, as black as the nether glooms.” While the first smithy was broad and husky, this man was thin, lean, and wiry. “No words. Rode straight through. A tilch bit wally, is it not?”

The captain nodded. “Didn’t stop to talk or drink?”

“Noi.”

“Not even eye your swords or knives?”

“Noi, thank the Maker.”

The party stopped at a stall selling fruit and drinks, their numbers overwhelming the young boy and girl minding the store. The boy called for their parents who came running from where they had been gaming at a small table.

While the horses drank from a trough, the teens enjoyed the refreshments, inviting the soldiers to join in but none did.

Seoni smiled at the young girl whose eyes shone blue like her own. She pulled out her thin white slab of stone—smooth and translucent like the pillars. Sketching a column of smoke rising above the hills, she held it for the girl to see.

For a moment, the girl looked perplexed at Seoni, but then understood, for many had lost their tongues during the cruel reign of Sasson. She pointed south, her blond head nodding.

Seoni wiped the slate clean and wrote, *Do you know why?* But the girl could not read, so she had Zac come over. When he read the question aloud, the girl only shrugged. He tried inquiring more, but she had become so shy in his presence, they got nothing else.

After the encounter, Seoni pointed to Zac's neck with a questioning look. Seeing her, he put a hand to his chest, shock rising on his young face.

"My trune!" he said with alarm. "I left my trune!" It, like the scarf of Perce, was almost always on his person. "How did that—?" His face paled, looking as if his world had fallen from beneath him. Seoni watched with equal alarm.

"I have to go back!"

Seoni shook her head, angst darkening her face.

"Mount up!" Captain Vaas called. "On to Blackwall."

"You're not going back," Isaac said sternly to Zac's near childlike insistence. "You're still Loria's shalom whether it's on your neck or not."

"I have to go back," Zac said indignantly.

"Zac, we'll be home in a loc or two. It'll be there. We've more pressing issues here."

Though glum, Zac finally consented. "How did I forget my trune?" he muttered, tying the scarf of Perce firmly about his waist.

Moving south through Blackwall, they were about to turn left, which would bring them around the south side of the lake back to the fortress city, when a loud ruckus came from the right.

A crowd had gathered in a ring, corralling what appeared to be a fight. As the party rode up, they could see from their high perch that two parlords were pulling at a young man as if he were the rope in some tug-of-war.

He wailed as one pulled from the ankles, the other from the wrists. They laughed, oblivious to the crowd watching in silence.

“What goes here?” shouted Lokin Vaas, his voice clear and sharp. Three soldiers had crossbows aimed. Two others had their wisp bows drawn. The rest drew blades. Though twelve strong and mostly experienced fighters, they all knew the parlords could take them if luck were looking the other way.

Both parlords glanced up, their smiles causal and cruel. “Just granting his wish,” one said, his greasy hair a deep red. The short wide horn on his weathered forehead was a reddish-black, while a long scar slashed through his left eye from forehead to mouth, leaving the socket a dark hole. He looked to be at least seven feet tall and like most parlords, lean and muscular. Both Zac and Seoni drew back, the sight more than disturbing.

Both parlords wore the vest of mail, their armguards scratched and dented. If ever two men looked like trouble, these two fit the bill.

“Release him at once!” Lokin ordered. “And explain yourselves.”

“Ai,” the other said, his face narrow and pinched, unusual for a parlord. He had dark features, his hair jet black, his horn some six inches long, straight, yet twirled like an antelope. “We only wished to borrow his goat. Grant ourselves some fresh meat. We’d full-up hand it back. Though it be a few scones lighter.”

They dropped the young man, his body falling with a dusty umpf.

“But he refused?” said Lokin Vaas, his muscles tense.

“Ai,” said pinched-face. “Told us to harry someone our own size. So we were just obliging, when you whelps rode up.” He offered a mischievous grin, revealing red-stained teeth.

The young man crab-crawled away, standing only when he reached the ring of gawkers.

“Do you wish to sell your goat?” Lokin asked the young man, who just stood dumb with fear.

“Do you wish to buy the goat?” he then asked the parlords, to which they gave a bored shrug.

All eyes were on the two Sasson warriors, knowing their movements could be so fast, that even a speeding bolt from a crossbow would appear slow.

A tense moment followed, the ring of gawkers widening.

“Could we share a meal with you?” Isaac asked, breaking the tension. Eyebrows lifted, a few gasps rippling through the crowd. “My treat,” he added.

“We want meat,” said the one-eyed parlord, “not some dainty Lorian treats.”

“My meaning is that I will pay,” Isaac said, suppressing a groan. “And we’ll order meat.”

Both parlords eyed him warily, their dark eyes calculating.

“Dine with Isaac the Mighty,” said the pinch-faced parlord, “great Shalom of Northern Loria.” The lean warrior paused to study Zac and Seoni. “And his little brother, the one who rules the skies.” He glanced at his scar-eyed partner. “I will be a tale worth snailing, hai?”

The term *snailing*, Isaac had learned, meant bragging around the fires like fishermen boasting of their grandest catch.

“Well,” Isaac said, “are you hungry or not? I’m sure they have goat.”

Eryn stiffened, her breath stuck. She glared at Isaac with lips tight. Though silent, she fervently chastised him. These two had scandalous trouble *oozing* from their filthy pores.

Captain Vaas had also drawn a sharp breath at the invitation, but he had learned to trust Isaac’s judgment.

So, when the parlords gave a smiling nod, the party moved to an outdoor area with enough seating for them all. Isaac ordered spicy goat.

Both of the troublemakers rode huge war horses, their long tails and manes uncut. Like most parlords, they used no bridle, directing their horse by voice or hand taps. Their leather blanket saddles, however, were equipped with slings and sheaths holding various weapons and supplies.

The soldiers all stood guard, only Captain Vaas joining the meal. The crossbows never lowered, and the wisp bow arrows remained nocked.

Though Isaac tried, nothing could be drawn from the parlords. Where they had been... where they were going... news from abroad. Nothing. They were there to eat, not chat.

They did thank him for the meal though, their appetites as huge as their muscular frames. They drank their ale like horses, yet their table manners were quite refined.

"Must do this again," said the pinch-faced parlord who gave his name as Kroll Vane. "'Twill be my treat, as you say." The other was Gorthl Scour.

As the party and the parlords mounted their horses, preparing to part ways, Kroll Vane spun his huge charger to face Seoni.

"Behold this one, Scour," he said, his horse looming over Seoni. "Be Vallen's child, that noble son of Perce."

Seoni stiffened, her face turning ashen.

"'Twas a brave one," Kroll continued with a crooked smile. "Fought well." He sighed in mocked sympathy. "But... not well enough."

His burst of laughter seemed to loose a breath of evil, its malaise sweeping over the entire squad. An eerie chill passed through the teens.

"You're done here!" Zac ordered, his voice sharp. "Go your way!"

"Nooo," said Kroll Vane slowly. "Not just yet."

"Captain!" a soldier called out, pointing to the south. They all turned. Winding their way up the road, came four parlords, two on powerful horses, two riding huge worgs.