

Lhak'leeri

Amkhuleeri—Floating lanterns; lit as a memorial to those that died during the year, to ferry their souls to the stars.

The Wailing

“lhakhu lhak”—“revel in the revelry”

“Probably Enthi and Mharye, from the Songs of Wanderers.”

“That’d be the Kardarnl translation then,” Ridley said with a sigh. “Whoever handled it racked the job proper; made ‘em spirits instead a’ birds.”

“Weakness and Madness, which, a’ course, isn’t really accurate neither. Enthi is more like “vulnerability,” or “unguardedness.” And mharye doesn’t mean madness so much as... I dunno, literally it translates as “spiral,” but its gotta have direction, right? Up and down, not just in or out.”

A procession of boats, ranging from massive barges to light schooners to a veritable fleet of skiffs, dories, rowboats, and even a handful of rafts, decorated the shimmering waters of Ghant—shimmering, because each of those vessels was host to at least one lantern, with the larger ships carrying dozens that hung from the prow, the boom, the gunwale, and any other serviceable structure that wasn’t in the way of the sailors onboard. The lights flickered in a variety of colors, some from gels, some from powered metals and chemicals added to the oil, sold in large amounts by shops and peddlers for this one night. For safety’s sake, red, blue, and white were relegated to their seafaring positions on the port, starboard, and bow respectively; the celebratory lamps were widely amber and green, but occasionally he spotted one flickering with purple or pink.

She started slightly, though, as the night was pierced by the rich toll of a bell. It rung again, louder this time, then again, and again, as voices rose from the crowd in cheers. The bell would belong to one of the barges on the river, attended by this year’s lucky child—lucky by way of their parents’ connections, probably, rather than the lottery’s odds—playing the part of bright-eyed Moxha, troublesome child turned hero from the Songs of Wanderers.

In the oldest story of the Lhakhik people, before they’d even been known as Lhakhik, their ancestors had been driven from their home by disaster upon disaster that broke their lands apart, leaving them to roam the seas in search of a new place to live. There were many epic poems and tales from that voyage, but in the final song, Moxha finally redeemed himself from all their pranks and foolishness by staying on watch for three days and three nights straight, while everyone else, even Lord Captain Anzuha, had all but given up; by lantern light alone, they spotted land, and weak

for lack of food and water, had rung the bell and screamed at the top of their lungs to turn the fleet East. The moment that they came to the shores, and the wanderers felt solid earth under their feet, a madness of joy overcame them, and by morning, had given the near-dead people their new name: the Revelers. The Lhakhik.

Tonight, one well-fed and watered kid who neither needed redemption nor knew the first thing about earning it would be perched in a crow's nest, watched closely by the sailor who'd drawn the short straw for babysitting duty, and would continue pulling the bell's chord with a vigor that would destroy the shoulder ligaments of any self-respecting adult. The other ships on the Ghant, large and small, took up the ringing cacophony; the whooping and hollering began coalescing into distinct T'Lhak, discordant at first before shouting settled into a steady, united rhythm: "Landfall! Rejoice! Landfall! Rejoice!"

At last, an even deeper bell, the bell of Ehlíath's clocktower, struck the eleventh hour. Still, the silence of the crowd carried, extending through ten of the ponderous chimes.

Then, as the final bell sounded, a single, crystalline, female voice nearby began to sing.

"Weep, my heart, for the ghosts in the sea
The ghosts in the air, and the ghosts inside me
Weep, my spirit, for what we have lost
For all who've known love, and known loving's cost
Salhu, salha salha sal.
Salhu, salha salha sal.

Laugh, my heart, with the air of the dead
Laugh with their voices, now, laugh in their stead
Revel in what we are for where they tread
May our laughter echo and drown out their dread
Lhakhu, lhaka lhaka lhak.
Lhaku, lhakha lhaka lhak."

Mourn and revel. Revel and mourn.

A steady stream of amkhuleeri rose through the fluttering snowflakes, ascending lethargically toward the clouds. Not all came from the river—far too many for that. Some were released from the silhouettes of crooked rooftops, from the depths of distant streets. Some, he reckoned, were from the farmlands, where Ehlíath wasn't all stone and smoke and grey. No more than a handful from Scrappertown, by his guess. Those that shown blueish-white instead of yellow-orange would come from the Murks, a tradition of solidarity among factory workers and process folk.