

# Callister Draabyn

Written by David Roomes

As the Third Wind sailed into the port of Drakkel, Captain Callister Draabyn leaned on the railing and slowly puffed on a long ornate pipe. The perfumed burgundy smoke danced lazily around him on the sea breeze. Although the morning had been cool, the summer sun was quickly warming the ship's deck and Callister unbuttoned his long coat and let it hang loose and open.

Harker Kaedin, his first officer, stood next to him, dressed in a finely tailored four piece suit cut in the Kalimuran style. The clean cut young man peered through wire rim spectacles at the notebooks and papers clutched in his arms, pausing a moment to smooth out a wrinkle from his lapel.

Callister tapped the ashes from his pipe and broke the silence.

"We've been away too long. It's good to see Asylum again".

"Drakkel, sir" Harker quickly corrected.

Callister locked a scolding eye on his first officer. "Right. ... Drakkel. Very well. ... who wants us here?"

Harker quickly shuffled through some papers. "Guild Barrolyn has filed a warrant against you, the Harbor Tax Collection Office has a lien against the ship and the Bishop Malfidius of the Church of Imarus has issued a papal writ of arrest.

"The Bishop? Really? What charges?"

"Interrupting temple services, corruption of a nun, public urination and attempting to contact the eighth plane of-"

"Nonsense!" protested Callister, dismissing the notion with a wave, "It's not like we *summoned* anything!"

"Yes sir," replied Harker, with an air of well practiced patience, "those summoning spells are *so* finicky about details".

"...obviously wasn't a virgin," muttered Callister under his breath. "Is that why we left in such a hurry?"

"Among other things, sir, yes".

Callister paused and thought back to their last visit, a smile on his face.

"You know I was once knighted in a temple of Imarel", said Callister.

"Imarus, sir," corrected Harker.

“That’s the one.”

“Cap’n!”. Callister and Harker both turned at the shout.

A bald and barrel chested man walked up the deck with a look of concern. Tackett, the boatswain, stopped when he reached the two men and wiped the sweat from his bald head.

“Thought you might want to know,” he said pointing across the water, “that assistant dock master there is flagging us in to pier seventeen”.

Following his finger, the two officers could make out a young, uniformed man on the distant dock waving a pair of brightly colored flags.

“No, Mr. Tackett. That won’t do at all,” Callister scolded, “Take us into pier nine. That’s our lucky pier”.

“Aye, cap’n!,” said the boatswain as he turned and headed off barking orders at the crew. “Helm, make for pier nine! Snap to and bring in the sail! Make ready to dock!”

As the crew sprang to work, Callister gazed at the harbor before them. Coming into port after a long voyage was always one of his favorite times. As the Third Wind entered the mouth of the harbor, it passed between the twin lighthouses of Porthus. Sea gulls sprang up from the rocks to chase the ship, crying at the crew for scraps of food.

Callister looked at the ships lined up along the docks of the great city ahead. He pointed out several to Harker. He recognized the tall white sails of the Oaken Lilly, the stout belly of the Blind Raven and the bright green sails of the Eighth Sister.

“And look there Harker... the Last in Line. Old Bryerson’s ship. Why it’s been a spell since I’ve had a good chinwag with him. Make a note – we must find time to hoist a pint with him.”

“I believe you still owe him three thousand, four hundred gold lords from that rather ill-fatted game of raljath.”

Callister nodded. “You know, I’m sure he’s busy this time of year. Maybe we’ll catch him next time”.

“Of course, sir”.

“Cap’n, look there,” called the helmsman, “there’s a crowd forming on the dock”. Callister could indeed see at least a dozen people ahead, standing on pier seventeen, waving to them.

“Seems news of the Third Wind is already here” said another crewman, as he pulled in the foresail.

“So it is”, murmured Harker.

As it became clear that the Third Wind was not slowing down for pier seventeen, the dock master, a portly young man with a mop of blonde hair, lowered his two flags and yelled for the Third Wind to stop.

“Ho there! You... you can’t do that... you see this flag. It means STOP!”

Callister waved and smiled as they sailed by. “It is a very pretty flag”.

The crowd of onlookers that had been gathering quickly pushed past the young dock master and chased after the Third Wind. Others on the docks watched the crowd run by and some joined in the chase.

By the time the crowd caught up to the ship at pier nine, the mooring lines were being thrown to waiting dockhands who hauled the boat in with the chants of “hey, ho, haul!”. The creak of wood sounded as the weight of the Third Wind settled against the pier bumpers. As the mooring lines were tied down, the loading ramp was extended and dropped to the dock with a hollow wooden thump.

Callister looked down at the mingling crowd. Young sailors, whores, fishermen, shipwrights, cargo hands and guards were gawking up at the newly arrived ship. A group of young boys perched themselves on crates and began feeding the seagulls. A trio of sailors of a neighboring ship wandered over for a look. The cargo handlers strapped on gloves and began clearing the dock for the cargo that was to be unloaded.

The portly young dock master pushed through the crowd, ran up the loading ramp and stumbled onto the deck. Spotting Callister, he quickly straightened his uniform and brushed the blonde curls out of his eyes.

“Assistant dock master Hanoven, at your service, sir. But I’m afraid you cannot dock here. You were instructed to moor at pier seventeen.”

“The ship,” Callister whispered conspiratorially and put his arm around the young man, “she doesn’t like pier seventeen. We had a bad experience there once. Pier nine, lucky pier, much better”.

“But captain, pier nine is reserved for ships of House Quaigen”.

“Are there any in port?”

“Not at the moment...”

“Then it’s settled! Pier nine. We’ve got cargo to unload”.

“But sir-”

“Did I happen to mention among the cargo we have a bottle of Gaithian brandy that no one here claims?”

Callister smoothly pulled out a long slender bottle of burgundy liquid and a green and gold label. “Bottled in 2523, very good year. Very valuable. Perhaps you could take charge of unloading this precious drop for us and keep it safe while you sort out this ugly pier business...”

Hanoven paused and looked between Callister’s smile and the bottle.

“I’d be happy to sir,” he said, plucking the bottle from Callister’s hands. “Pier nine is yours. Have a nice day.”

As Hanoven departed, Callister turned back to the crowd on the dock and smiled...

“I intend to.”

“Sir?”

Callister turned to find Colin Harris, his second officer, standing with hands clasped. He wore an expression of worried agitation which Callister knew too well.

“Let me guess”, said Callister, “as head of security, you’re going to encourage me to lay low and out of sight for my own safety?”

“Correct, sir. Given the haste of our exit last time and the number of warrants for your arrest, perhaps it would be best if you and a few of the officers make a discreet departure to the other side of the harbor whilst I deal with any irate authorities”.

“I agree, sir” said Harker, stepping closer. “Perhaps we should try discretion for a change.”

Callister pursed his lips and gave the suggestion serious thought.

“Sounds cowardly. I’ve got a better idea!”

With that, Callister leapt up on the side railing of the ship and waved to the assembled crowd on the dock below. “Ahoy, my good people!”

The crowd erupted in cheers.

“The Third Wind has arrived at Asylum-“ began Callister.

“Drakkel, sir” the crew said in unison.

“-aye, Drakkel..” shouted Callister to the crowd “after far too long of an absence.”

“Perhaps it would be best,” Harker whispered, “not to mention your name, sir.”

Callister shooed him away as the crowd cheered and whistled.

Callister continued... “I, Callister Draabyn,” (Harker winced) “am happy to bring the Third Wind home. Long was our journey to distant Aggradar. Many a tale do I and the crew bring back with us. Our hold is laden with treasures and trinkets plucked from distant lands. Rare and wondrous be these baubles... allow me to share with you.”

The crowd cheered again at this.

“Have any of you seen a Cirilite fire ruby?” Callister held up a small, sparkling yellow jewel. The crowd cooed at the bright gem.

“No?” continued Callister, “how about a Chaddi mummification glyph?” He tossed the gem to a crewman and hoisted a carved stone for the crowd to see. “Not easy to acquire, believe me!”

The crowd murmured appreciatively as Callister handed off the stone.

“But both pale next to this...,” he said, rifling through a sack and pulling something out.

“Hapraxi!” he said holding up a deck of large ivory plaques. “A new card game, very fast paced, lots of betting. I’ll be hosting a game later tonight”.

“Oh!” he spun back excitedly, almost losing his balance, “just wait til I introduce to you magrakian board wrestling! It’s fantastic!” Callister tossed the ivory plaques to a crewman and began miming awkwardly with stiffened arms. “They bind your arms rigid and you bludgeon your opponent with spiked boards”. Callister began miming a fight with some unseen foe on the railing.

“But never challenge the reigning champion...” laughed a deckhand.

“Cap’n learned that one the hard way” called another, drawing a warm laugh from the crowd.

“Alright,” replied Callister, “new Ship Law. Only I may tell the board wrestling story. Right? Harker?”.

“Ship Law number seventy four,” Harker said, as his quill scribbled furiously across the page, “only the Captain may tell the... got it!”

As a pallet was being unloaded, Callister leaned over and grabbed a small wire cage and held it up for the crowd to see. Inside was a strange looking crab that seemed to be wearing a glittering shell of blue and silver crystal that glinted brightly in the sun.

“Here now...” said Callister, flourishing the cage, “a saridian razor crab... make a fine pet!”

From within the cage, the crab screeched loudly and rattled its scales threateningly. Several of the sailors on deck took a step away from Callister. The crowd gaped at the marvelous creature.

“Quiet” Callister scolded the crab with a wagging finger “or it’s the pot for you”. He addressed the crowd. “Don’t worry, it’s rattle is worse than its bite”.

A crystalline pincer reached through cage bars and snapped at Callister.

“Bah!” He dropped the cage in alarm, yanked out his sword and lunged at the crab. Two of crew restrained him. Calming himself, he shrugged off his crewmen as Tackett picked up the cage and carried it down the loading ramp.

“T’would make a fine bisque, I’m sure” yelled Callister after the cage. “Oh, speaking of bisque, bring me that there...”

A crewman handed up a sealed clay pot in front of Callister.

“Aha! One of my personal favorites...” he said, grabbing a wooden bowl. “A drink of the Magrakians”. He scooped up a bowlful of gelatinous goo.

“A rare and wonderful concoction... with a heady aroma... something they call” he paused for dramatic effect, drawing the crowd in, “baklath!” A murmur of awe rippled through the crowd.

“Made from fermented fish guts.” With that, he took a deep drink from the bowl as a collective gasp of shock and revulsion erupted from the crowd.

Draining the bowl, Callister wiped his moustache off and smacked his lips dramatically.

“No, no, it’s quite tasty. Really. After the first gag, it goes down smooth as mare’s milk. Just a matter of...” he thumped on his chest to aid something going down, “training the palate. Trust me, you’ll love it.”

Callister handed the baklath jar back to his crew.

“Now then,” he began, but stopped abruptly. The crowd’s attention was drawn to someone pushing through from the back. Callister could make out a tall hat coming through the sea of onlookers. Slowly the crowd parted as the newcomer walked slowly forward. He was a tall, very thin, distinguished looking elderly gentleman in a fine black suit which matched his tall hat. He wore a black and white cloak that trailed behind him. The tapping of a gnarled oak walking stick sounded with every other footstep.

Behind him came a hulking brute wearing a chest plate, iron helm and a bristling array of weapons. A bull’s head symbol adorned the walking stick and the guard’s armor.

The tall man stopped at the bottom of the loading ramp. His face was set in a rigid mask of displeasure and mild annoyance. The man slowly looked up to the railing and fixed his unflinching gaze on Callister. He took a moment to look Callister up and down.

“Captain Draabyn?” the man said in a deep, slow voice.

“Well, that depends on,” Callister began but then noticed a crewman standing next to him, nodding vigorously with a smile. Callister thumped him on the head with the bowl.

“I am Lord Damni”, the tall man began, speaking in a slow and commanding way, “Chronicler and Master of Coffers for Guild Balloryn. Some time ago you were contracted for the timely transport of a cargo owned by Guild Balloryn for delivery to the Kingdom of Anquar. We received word last year that the cargo was never delivered. We have received neither fair compensation from you nor the faintest whisper of an explanation”.

Callister whipped about to face Harker who immediately started flipping through the pages of a leather tome. Stopping on a page, Harker’s eyes quickly scanned the words.

“That would be the cargo that we lost at Borakar some two years ago”.

“You mean the cargo that was – “

Harker looked up and met Callister’s gaze. “Yes sir”

Callister turned back to Lord Damni and smiled warmly with well practiced charm. “That was *years* ago, my friend”.

“And yet, in all that time”, replied Lord Damni, “we have never been properly compensated for our loss. Where is the cargo?”

Callister climbed off the railing and began walking down the ramp.

“A storm forced us onto Borakar and...” Callister paused and shrugged, “well, we found out where all those tales about Borakar come from”.

“Where is the cargo?”

“I’m afraid the cargo is decidedly irretrievable”.

“Do elaborate”.

“It was... um... eaten.”

“40 head of samasar steer were eaten!?!”

Callister smiled weakly.

“By what?” pressed Lord Damni.

Callister waved away the question dismissively and began to walk away. “You wouldn’t believe me if I told you”

“Just a moment” said Lord Damni, chasing after Callister.

“Now, look here friend,” said Callister, turning to confront the noble, “You try steering a top heavy cog with a nervous cargo through a summer squall. Not as easy as it sounds. You’re lucky we managed to escape with our lives. Now your guild’s business is husbandry. Balloryn’s pride is its beef, yes?”

“What of it?”

“Well, on our voyages in Aggradar, we just happen to pick up a pair of beasties that you might be interested in. Harker. What are they called again?”

Harker stepped forward, rustling through his notes again. “Aukarian raugs, sir”.

“Raugs, yeah,” continued Callister. “Now I will admit, these beasts are ugly, foul smelling and ill-tempered... not unlike yourself. But they do also happen to have the sweetest milk and tenderest beef you’ve ever tasted. Just ask the crew. We left Aggradar with four of the beasts.” Several of the crew on the ship hollered in agreement.

“And what we have on board,” continued Callister, “is a bull and a pregnant heifer. Think of it, mate, you could raise a herd with these two, start a whole new bloodline of beefstock. You’d be the only guild selling this succulent beef from the other side of the world. Now how’s that for fair compensation, eh? So, that square us?”

Lord Damni folded his hands and carefully considered the proposal.

“It is a start, and I will take the offer to the headmaster at Guild Balloryn, but I am still under orders to take you to the Council of Guilds to resolve this matter.”

“Not if *I* have anything to say about it!” came an unpleasant nasally voice. Callister and Lord Damni turned and found themselves confronted by a short, plump and balding man whose round face was screwed up in a determined and angry glare. He was dressed in a short grey cloak and was clutching a large leather bound book. Behind him stood four armored guards with tunics bearing the Drakkellian city crest.

The man extended a hand and Callister hesitantly took it. The little man pumped his hand in a firm handshake.

“Farsil Arkus, Tax Collector from the local office”.

“The city tax office? Wait... I thought we were all paid up with the City High Tax Office.”

“No, I’m with the Second Division Harbor Tax Office”.

Callister turned to Harker with an exasperated look.

“The city of Drakkel has a multitude of tax bureaus, sir,” explained Harker. “And they are not always in cooperation with each other.”

Callister rolled his eyes and turned back to the tax collector, recomposing a smile.

“So, Mr. Arkus, did I fail to pay one of your paltry little taxes?”

“Not one, thirty nine. “

Callister’s smile collapsed.

“For many months prior to your voyage to Aggradar,” continued the tax collector, opening up the book and pointing to a page, “you failed to register with the second division harbor tax office or pay appropriate tariffs on your loads. Furthermore,”

Callister tried to stifle his yawn as the tax collector rambled on about gross negligence, docking fees and the inappropriate use of harbor tax forms in the ship’s head. After a few moments, Callister clapped him on the back.

“Look mate, I think we can help each other out. I propose the following-“

“*Callister Drabbyn!*” The name was boomed out by a baritone voice that shook the air. The voice was immediately followed by a blast of trumpets. Everyone turned at the sudden noise. The crowd parted to let several men advance. At the forefront was a tall black man in brightly colored regal finery, bedecked with jewels and painted face and the neck collar of a slave.

“All bow in the presence of his Holiness, Bishop Malfidius of the Church of Imarus”.

The crier stood aside to let the rest of the small procession advance. Two guards led the way and parted, snapping to attention at either side. They were followed by two gaudily dressed trumpeters with feathered hats, a man in the lettered robes of a scribe and four well muscled slaves carrying a veiled litter. They stopped at the foot of the loading ramp before the crowd and gently set the litter down. The two trumpeters moved quickly to part the curtains.

A large and rotund man climbed out of the litter and stood before the assembled crowd. He was dressed in shimmering white robes embroidered with deep red rubies. He reached in to the litter, pulled out an elaborately decorated headdress and placed it dramatically upon his head. Having apparently secured his symbol of office, the Bishop slowly turned to sweep the crowd with his gaze. As he turned to face them, many in the crowd lowered their eyes, doffed their hats and curtsied to the Bishop.

The Bishop looked at the tax collector and Lord Damni and then finally at Callister Draabyn.

“I understand”, began the Bishop “that other authorities may be interested in conducting business with you, Captain Draabyn, but the concerns of the Church of Imarus take precedence.”

“Now look here-” protested Lord Damni.

“I,” interrupted the Bishop with a withering glare, “serve a higher authority. The church of Imarus, with the full backing of the Papal Council, decree that we, by divine right, have authority over this prisoner.”

“I don’t like the sound of that”, Callister muttered under his breath.



“This is preposterous,” whined the tax collector. “The Church has no jurisdiction on matters of city policy and this clearly falls within the mandate of the tax office”.

“The guilds rule this city,” interjected Lord Damni, “and I come with the full power of Guild Barrolyn. None, save the guild, shall lay claim to this criminal”.

Callister, his crew and the crowd watched as the three officials argued back and forth. Silver coins changed hands as wagers were placed.

“His actions at the Church of Imarus” blared the Bishop, “are inexcusable and the Church will not rest until this man is clapped in irons”.

“I’ve never even been to the church of imurib” protested Callister.

“Imarus!” the bishop barked with exasperation, stabbing a finger in Callister’s direction. “And you were knighted in a Church of Imarus in Rukemia not two years ago!”.

“Oh, right.” Callister said with a smile.

“These documents, signed after the incident,” the Bishop held up a number of papers, “give us the authority to claim him and-”.

“A write of arrest issued by the Papal Council”, interrupted the tax collector, “is only good for one year. If you haven’t paid additional taxes to the city, those papers have expired”.

The Bishop glared at the tax collector, clearly willing him to drop dead on the spot. The tax collector smiled smugly, quite pleased with himself. Callister offered up his hands in mock surrender toward the tax collector.

“Alright, Mr. Arkus, looks like you’ve got me. Clasp me in iron. Or shall I do it for you? Harker, go and fetch those manacles from my bedchamber”.

“Aye sir”. Harker turned to go.

“Stop!” bellowed the tax collector. “As if I would be such a fool as to let you wear your own manacles. Probably enchanted to unlock with a word. I’ll trust to these guards’ manacles. And I have warrants for your officers as well. Guards, arrest these men.”

“I wouldn’t do that if I were you” said a gravelly voice.

All eyes turned to this new challenge. An old man with a white beard was standing at the edge of the crowd. He wore an old worn long coat and scuffed boots. A single grey eye peered out from a tan and wrinkled face. The other eye was covered by an eye patch.

“And why not?” sneered the Bishop.

“Because you three aren’t the only ones with an interest in Callister Draabyn”.

“And who else, pray tell, might be” asked Lord Damni.

“Tosadds.”

The name hung in the air like the stroke of a bell as the crowd instantly fell silent. All knew the name of the most feared pirate on the seas. All eyes and ears were focused on the old man.

“I’ve just come from Asylum aboard the Last in Line”, said the old man. “Tosadd’s ship, the Whip and Hammer, was in port there two days ago. Foul mood he was in, foul even for him. I saw him run a man through before he’d even set foot on the dock. He and his crew were in Asylum, sellin’ their plunder for coin and then headed back out. Said they were on their way to Drakkel for the festival. Said he was coming here to settle a score... with the Third Wind. They’ll be here in two days.”

A murmur rippled through the crowd.

“Tosadds killed 50 men last year” said a voice from the crowd.

“Tore a magistrate’s heart out and nailed to his mast, I heard” said another.

“And how is it you are so acquainted with Tosadds?” asked the tax collector.

The old man tapped a finger on his eye patch.

The tax collector swallowed a lump in his throat.

Lord Damni looked at Callister and then back to the old man. “Tosadds has no authority here”.

“You can tell him that,” replied the old man, “when he gets here”.

For several long moments, no one stirred. No one dared to breathe, as if a single utterance might accidentally summon the pirate into their midst.

“Oh, pish posh” said Draabyn, breaking the silence. “I’m yours! Come on. Take me away! You can just explain to Tosadds about how I’m your prisoner when he gets here. He’s a lovely fellow, that Tosadds is. Very reasonable, level headed chap. I’m sure he’ll agree and none of that nasty, ‘tearing the heart’ out business. Which I’m sure is mostly an exaggeration”.

“If Tosadds wants you” said Lord Damni, looking Callister in the eye, “let him have you. When he’s done with you, I’ll arrest whatever’s left”. Lord Damni gave a cold smile and then turned and walked off, his brute following after him.

Callister looked at the tax collector expectantly.

“In the interests of justice, perhaps I shall review your case with the tax bureau. In the mean time, Captain, you are...” he looked about searching for way to save some dignity and finally gave up, “free to enjoy the festival”.

“I shall tell him of your generosity and fair-mindedness when he gets here”.

“No, no, no...” said the tax collector, waving his hands and taking a step back. “That’s really not necessary”

“Oh heavens, no, I wouldn’t hear of it. I’m going to make sure that Tosadds hears your name, *Mr. Arkus*”.

With a squeak of panic, he backed up and then bolted through the crowd. A ripple of laughter followed him.

Draabyn extended his hands in meek supplication toward the Bishop.

“Would the church of Imerob like to take me in, then?” he asked demurely.

“The church of *Imarus*,” said the bishop, emphasizing the name, “has no wish to lower itself to becoming entangled in a dispute which is clearly a mariner affair. When you’re business with Tosadds is finished, perhaps we will revisit our complaint with you. Until that time-”

“-blessings of whatshisface upon me?” Callister said with mock sincerity.

The Bishop sneered and climbed back into litter. As the bishop’s entourage carried his litter away, the crowd began to break up. Some mingled with the crew, others followed the officials, while a few looked to the horizon, as if hoping to catch a glimpse of the Whip and Hammer arriving early.

The old man walked over to Callister, scowling. His scowl quickly split into a wide grin.

“Callister Draabyn”.

“Bryerson. It’s good to see you. How much of that was true? Is Tosadds on his way here?” asked Callister, his expression quickly changing to concern. “Because I really *do* owe him money.”

“I haven’t seen Tosadds in six months. Last I heard, he was pillaging the coast of Padashan”.

“Well, then, at the very least,” said Callister, “I owe you a drink”.

“Before we get to the drinking, mate,” said Bryerson, taking off the eye patch and revealing a perfectly good eye “how’s about that money you owe *me*?”

“Let’s discuss it over a bowl of baklath...”