

Love's Knight

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*This is a story of how love can conquer all, even in the face of the darkness of hate.
This is the story of the one called Love's Knight.....*

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1 - Prologue - The Tale of the Two Goddesses

Love's Knight

Prologue - The Tale of The Two Goddesses

At the dawn of time, our world was created.

But not of what the common person would think. Not of earth.

Two goddesses roamed the universe, searching the place to create the ideal world, a paradise unrivalled by any other.

One of them found a place, and with her wisdom and grace, formed the land, the seas and the sky. She was determined that we, her people, would live here in harmony. She also created us, and all the beings that would live together with us.

Her younger sister, the second goddess, became jealous with the control that she was taking over the creation, and deliberately interfered with it. The planet became uninhabitable in many areas, and our species and all the rest became contaminated with her jealousy, her desire, and her anger.

The older goddess had created our world with love, and so we have come to know her as the Goddess of Love. Her spiteful sister, who infected it with the seed of hatred, has become known as the Goddess of Hate.

The Goddess of Love attempted to reason with her beloved sister, trying to realise why she had committed this awful act. However, it soon became clear that the Goddess of Hate was unlike her sister. She possessed a desire, to be ruler of all existence, to do with it as she pleased.....a desire that had corrupted her with evil.

The two goddesses eventually came to blows, battling each other over the very planet they'd created. Being equally strong, neither of them could win.

The Goddess of Love knew that her sister's mere presence was spreading dark emotions across her beloved world. If she could not destroy her sister, she would seal her away where she could cause no more harm.

She chose several women, those of the purest hearts, and granted them holy powers, and they became wanderers of the heavens. They would become known as `angels'. Later, they would protect her people, but right now, their purpose was to defeat her sister.

In the last battle, the Goddess of Love and the angels charged the Goddess of Hate. The angels struck the evil goddess with their holy might and held her in place. The Goddess of Love attacked her sister with the full power of her love, sealing her sister inside a barrier of the greatest emotion.

The Goddess of Hate was finally stopped. However, the world was not at peace. Hate still

slithered among people like a stealthy snake. Wars began to break out, and people began to turn to a bad way of life.

The Goddess of Love was severely weakened by her attack on her sister, and could not react fully against the ever encroaching hate. It seemed that her evil sister was still having a negative effect on the world, even when sealed.

She decided to bind herself with the world, to prevent Hate from fully taking it over. She knew that she was not the one who could stop Hate's victory.

It was then that she had a vision. She saw a young man, clad in armour, holding a sword.....a divine sword, with angel wings. His heart was beating with a love she had never even felt before, a love greater than her own.

A true and eternal love.....

She saw him take the sword and plunge it into the hate filled heart of her sister. The world was rid of hatred, forever.....

She decreed this to the angels. ``I must become the last barrier against the foul stench of Hate.....I charge you to protect this world as long as you can. Do not worry, for eventually, he will come.....a champion of love.....and I will call him, Love's Knight....."

The pure hearted goddess then bound herself to our world, halting the plans of her sister.

For now.....

2 - Birth of An Everlasting Love

Chapter 1 - Birth of an Everlasting Love

"It's a pretty clear night, don't you think?" said the older of the two soldiers to his companion. "More like spooky....." replied the younger and less experienced of the two gate guards. "You can see the moon clearly; it's like some kind of omen."

"Heh heh....." laughed the old soldier. "All that stuff is poppycock. You need to wise up, my young friend."

The two soldiers were the gate guards for possibly the most important place in the kingdom.

Campbell Castle, the home of the royal family of the Kingdom of Galatea.

The great castle stood proudly in the moonlight. The castle had been built by the first ruler of Galatea, King Johans Astaroth the 1st. Designed to be a home for the present ruler of the kingdom and a fortress against enemy assaults, almost nothing had changed about the place since it was built, except for its name.

Originally known as Astaroth Castle, a tradition came about in which the castle would bear the family name of its present ruler. So, as King Gideon Campbell presided over the kingdom, so the castle was renamed Campbell Castle.

The two soldiers were part of a special branch of the Galatean army, the Royal Guard. They were basically assigned to protect the King and his family from any kind of attack. So far, their jobs had been easy. There had been no trouble in Galatea for many years, so no-one had made an attempt on the King's life.

"So, what do you think about her Highness?" inquired the young guard of his superior.

"They say she has a heart of gold, a pure heart." replied the old soldier, smiling. "You don't see too many women like her these days..."

"Have you ever met her?" asked the young soldier again, clearly interested.

"Once. She hardly ever comes out of the castle. Somebody told me that she longs for her true love or something, and that she can't ever be truly happy without him. Some kid she met when she was a little girl, apparently." The old soldier certainly had a knack for remembering things. His younger comrade began to cry. "That's....so.....sad!"

He received a slap on the head from his friend. "Oh, quit blubbing! It annoys me...." He then began to patrol the gate again, marching up and down its length.

The younger soldier frowned. "Sheesh...you don't know your own strength, old man!" he yelled, nursing a bruise from where the old soldier hit him. He too, began to patrol the gate.

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Behind a bush close to the gate, a group of shadows were watching the two guards.

"Poor, stupid fools. Royal Guard? Pah.....more like a bunch of weaklings made to look important." The speaker turned to the rest of the figures.

"We get in, and we get out. Understand? I know that we can hold our own against these Royal Guard idiots, but Maximillian is no pushover. And if they call the Knights....." The mention of the word struck fear into the hearts of every man there. They didn't have a chance against them.....
"Understood, sir!" A tall figure gave the leader a salute.
"I'll handle this....." The leader turned back around to face the gate patrol. He paused for a few seconds, feeling the soft breeze of the night air blow against his face.

Then, he struck.

It was the younger guard who saw the attacker. "Enemies!!!!!!" he shouted nervously. He made to draw his weapon.....

.....but was too late. The attacker stabbed straight through him at blinding speed. His extremely long, thin blade had no trouble penetrating the unfortunate soldier's standard issue armour.
"Uh...ughhh....." The young guard froze with shock as he realised what was happening.
The attackers' leader drew his now bloody sword from the young soldier, who collapsed to the ground, bleeding his life out.

"Why you....! YAAAAAHHHH!!!!!" The older soldier, seeing his comrade's fate, had drawn his longsword and rushed at the leader.

With terrifying precision, the leader sliced at the guard's weapon, and the sheer force of the hit caused it to be knocked out of his hand. Seconds later, a second slice ripped through the old man's armour and knocking him to the ground.

"How...in the....?" gasped the surprised guard, before his attacker ended his life, stabbing him through the heart.

The tall man, the group's second in command, searched the bodies. On the old soldier, he found an ornate key. No doubt that this was the all important key for the castle gate.

"Let's move!" ordered the leader quietly, unlocking the large gold plated gate. He took care to open it silently, so as not to alert the guards' attention.

The hooded leader, with a black cape covering his whole body, took a quick look around. This was only the beginning, and if they screwed up, they would have a whole castle full of guards to deal with.....and possibly them.....

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"I'm coming through to see her Highness." The imposing, gold armoured figure saluted the two Royal Guards outside the large double golden doors. They saluted back, and allowed him to enter.

Maximillian Westring was the commander of the Royal Guard, and one of the best damn soldiers in the Galatean army. As a matter of fact, he was the best damn soldier inside Campbell Castle, and he knew the place like the back of his hand.

A veteran of several conflicts, Maximillian was an expert with the sword. He'd never believed in magic, dismissing it as 'supernatural nonsense', and believed the way of the sword to be the only true way of combat. At 56, he was getting a little old for this job, but his skills were as sharp as his weapon, and those under his command were in need of his experience.

He was also one of the few people allowed to do what he was doing now.....

He stepped the chambers of her Highness, covered in royal red carpet, with red curtains and a

**large decorated window looking out across the kingdom.
Standing at that window was her Highness.....**

Princess Michelle Campbell of the Kingdom of Galatea, and the heir to her father's throne.

"Your Highness, excuse me." spoke Maximillian respectfully.

Upon hearing his voice, Michelle turned around. She was dressed in a long flowing pink dress, with white cummerbunds on the sleeves. Her long, flowing brown hair ran down past her shoulders, and her emerald green eyes looked back at Maximillian. Her face was her typical expression of royalty, but it was simply a mask. A mask that she did not bother to hide. A mask of sadness.....

**"Yes?" she replied, in her regal tone. It was rare that she could speak in her normal voice....
"I report no problems around the castle. Also, I will be standing guard tonight." stated Maxmillian with military precision.**

Michelle smiled slightly. Maximillian had been a good friend to her and her father all her life, and knowing he was on guard made her feel safer, even though she didn't think she needed protecting. "Thank you, Maximillian..."

"Your Highness." Maximillian saluted her and left the room, leaving the Princess of Galatea to turn back to her previous thoughts.

She sighed, and stared out of the window again. She was sad, and had been so ever since that day.....when she'd met.....him.....

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"Come on, move it you scallywags!!!! Call yourselves Knights of the Crown??? You aren't fit to lick my boots! Come on, stand to ATTEN-SHUN!!!!"

The snarling commander hurled orders at the bunch of soldiers in the courtyard. They were all drilled harder, faster and more often than the rest of the Galatean military, and for good reason. They weren't soldiers, and they certainly weren't the ordinary military.

They were knights.....and part of the most elite fighting force of the Galatean military.

The Knights of the Crown.....

They were the greatest fighters in Galatea, assigned to respond quickly to threats and eliminate them with by any means necessary. No-one had taken on the Knights of the Crown and lived. This had earned them respect among the people of Galatea, and fear from those who ended up in their path.

The knights, mostly young, were being marched around the courtyard of their base, the Silver Arrow fortress. It was a short ride north from Campbell Castle, so they were ready to respond instantly if anyone threatened the castle.

The unit lined up in perfect formation, all of them facing the same direction and not moving a muscle. They all wore different kinds and colours of armour.....they were allowed to customise their weaponry and armour, unlike the regular military, which allowed them to maximise their

strengths. It was one of the reasons they were so deadly in combat.

The middle aged commander barking orders at them was Henson Rudy, who was in fact the second in command of the Knights. He surveyed the knights with his aged but keen hazel eyes. "Being a knight is all about pushing yourself beyond your limits!" he shouted. "Being a knight is about upholding justice! Being a knight is about chivalry!" He paused. "But most important of all, being a knight means being able to kick the enemy's @\$% TEN times harder than those regulars! Do you understand?!"

"Yes, sir!!" shouted the entire unit in unison.

"You must give nothing less than 110% in battle! You must fight with all your might even if you are the last man or woman standing!" He paused again, eyeing the troops. Suddenly, he pointed his finger at one of them. "You! Show me how to give 110%! You will fight me, right now!"

The knight he'd pointed to was a young rookie, who had yet to become a fully fledged Knight of the Crown. He stepped forward, hiding his nervousness. He didn't like the idea of fighting the commander, but he was a knight, or nearly was anyway. He wasn't going to back down.

"Yes sir!" he replied at full volume.

Rudy drew his sword, a longsword with a longer blade than a standard one, and went into a combat stance.

The young cadet drew his sword from his back. It was a zweihander, or two handed sword. It was fairly lengthy, and had nothing special about it. It was simply a standard silver steel blade with a golden hilt. He held it in his combat stance, which was with the sword to his right, slightly lower than his shoulder.

"Have at you!!!" declared Rudy, charging at the cadet. He brought his weapon up, ready to cut downwards in a vertical slash.

It was met by the cadet's zweihander, who retaliated with a horizontal stroke. Rudy almost failed to block it, and only just managed to keep his balance.

Before the older knight could react, the youngster pulled a surprise move. He'd crouched low during his attack, and delivered two spin slashes to Rudy's legs. Rudy's armour prevented any injury, but ordinarily this would have badly wounded his legs.

The aged commander jumped back and brought his sword crashing down. He thought the young cadet wouldn't have time bring his sword up to block an overhead strike.

He was wrong. The cadet was more nimble than he'd given him credit for. The longsword clashed off of the zweihander again, and the cadet got to his feet. He then took his weapon behind him and swung it forward over his shoulder with immense force. The impact knocked Rudy's longsword free of his hand, and the cadet pointed his zweihander straight at his face for a moment, before sheathing his weapon.

The rest of the unit, completely shocked, broke into applause. Not one of them had beaten Rudy in a training duel before.

The defeated commander rose to his feet, recovering his long sword, and brushed his greying hair out of his face. Sweat was dripping down his face. He hadn't had such a workout for a while, let alone been defeated.

"That....." he declared, "is how to give 110% in battle." He looked at the victor, and looked him up and down. He hadn't thought much of this one before.....

"Commander Leinard will be impressed....." He paused to catch his breath. "What is your name, cadet?"

The cadet answered. "Christopher James Appleyard, sir!"

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The intruders slipped quietly into the castle through an open window, evading discovery by the guards at the main entrance. One by one, they all made their way inside the castle. Now, they were hidden inside the main lobby, right next to the grand staircase leading up towards the chambers.

They'd all made their way in.....except for the leader. He stood outside the window, speaking to his second in command.

"Geryon.....remember, we're not here to pick a fight with the Royal Guard. Get the Princess, and get out. I must take my leave now....."

"Yes, sir. For power and glory!" He saluted his superior, who then vanished into the night, back towards the main gate.

"Alright, everyone." whispered the tall imposing figure of Geryon. He was well built, and carried a large axe, which no weaker man could possibly carry. His black hair was tied up in plaits, so that it didn't get in his face. "All but three of us shall remain here. I, and you two," he pointed at two of the group, "shall ascend the staircase and make our way to the Princess' chambers as planned. I will take custody of her Highness, and we shall return here. If we move with haste, we'll be able to get this done before the Guard can full react. Let's go."

Geryon and his two comrades stealthily moved across the lobby, using the great marble pillars and shadows to mask their presence. There were guards patrolling around the lobby, but only three at most. It was a matter of finding their pattern and exploiting the weak point of it. Geryon watched and waited....

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Maximillian headed down the grand staircase, stretching his arms and letting out a slight yawn. He was very tired, and wearing the armour didn't help much, either. He decided that it would be best if he got some sleep for now. A tired soldier was not a good soldier.

As he walked down the staircase, his eyes wandered to the great window staring straight outside, towards the gate. His keen eyes saw that there were no guards patrolling outside. An ordinary soldier would have ignored this, but Maximillian came built with a sixth sense, one that had been made from seeing and experiencing danger in the wars he'd fought. This sense was telling him that something was wrong.

Quick as a flash, his eyes darted down to the lobby. All seemed to be quiet, but the wise commander scanned every single marble pillar. They were great places to mask one's presence.

As he reached the last pillar, he wondered if he was just getting too old.....

Then, all of a sudden, he caught a flash of light. A reflection.....

.....from a sword.

He instantly drew his sword. "Enemies in the castle!" he shouted, rallying every soldier in the

castle. **"TO ARMS!!!!!!"**

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Geryon could hardly believe it when he saw Maximillian on the staircase. He had cursed his luck that very moment, knowing that the old dog was a cut above the rest of the Royal Guard. However, he was even more shocked that he'd discovered them.

"shoot!" he cursed, as the alarm was sounded. He looked at his two companions, but as he was about to speak, he noticed what had given them away. The man next to him had worn his sword too wide on his back, and the edge of the sword had shone in the light from the stained glass window behind them.

He growled at the man. "You idiot!" Without a second's thought, Geryon drew his axe and drove it into the unfortunate intruder's back. The other looked at him fearfully.

Geryon shouted out to the rest of the infiltrators. "Charge!!!! We'll take the Princess by force if we have to!!!!!"

The entire group suddenly charged forward out of their hiding place, and rushed towards the staircase. Geryon and his remaining companion did the same.

Maximillian readied himself. "You filthy dogs....." he muttered under his breath in disgust.

From the other end of the castle, a large group of soldiers came running, all of them dressed in light blue armour. They ran as fast as they could, ready to join the fight.

Geryon and his group stopped as they reached the staircase. Several more Royal Guards were descending it, and they noticed the large group charging them from the main corridor.

Geryon brought his axe to bear. A bloodbath was better than all this sneaking around.....

Moments later, the Royal Guards engaged the intruders. The bottom of the staircase became a battlefield. Some of the Royal Guards jumped from the staircase into the fray as well, though most of them stayed on the staircase to block their passage.

Maximillian gritted his teeth. How the hell had this rag tag bunch gained entry to the castle? He turned to a nearby soldier, who had golden shoulder plates like his. "I will protect the Princess. If the situation gets out of control, summon the Knights of the Crown."

The soldier, who was a Lieutenant named Ash, nodded. "As you command, sir!"

Maximillian raced up the staircase, towards the Michelle's chambers. He would not let them get to her, even if it cost him his life.....

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The Royal Guards outnumbered the intruders, but their unwanted guests had much better skill with the sword than they did. The Guards were getting cut to pieces, especially by Geryon, who was simply too strong for them to handle.

He leaped behind an unsuspecting Guard, before smashing the life out of him with a deadly blow from his axe. Two more tried to take him from behind, but he swung his axe horizontally, decapitating both soldiers.

The rest of the group was fighting hard, with a crazy bloodlust in them. Most of them were unencumbered with armour, and were running rings around the slower Royal Guards. It was turning into a total bloodbath.

Ash managed to fight off one man, but another caught him off guard and pushed him over the staircase. He landed on the floor, but quickly got to his feet.

"These guys..." he breathed, "are too strong....who the hell are they? I've got to call the Knights of the Crown!" He raced out of the main entrance with all haste, and headed for the Silver Arrow fortress.

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The unit was still drilling in the courtyard when the alert came.

"Knights of the Crown, scramble!!!!" shouted Rudy, who had just received word from Ash.

"Campbell Castle is under attack!"

Every man and woman in the unit immediately scrambled, grabbing their gear and getting astride their horses in under two minutes. The whole twenty strong unit quickly galloped off towards Campbell Castle at maximum speed.

The sleek horses of the unit streaked across the moonlit countryside, and the castle grew ever closer on the horizon

Five minutes later, the unit came to a halt outside the castle. They dismounted their horses, readied their weapons, and raced to the defence of the castle.

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Michelle was shocked to see Maximillian burst into her chambers. "What is going on???" she asked worriedly.

"The castle is under attack, from forces as yet unknown." replied Maximillian quickly. "Stay inside the chambers, my lady. I have this protected, and the Knights of the Crown are on their way. It's just fortunate that your father isn't here as well....."

Maximillian left, and Michelle was left shocked.

"The...the castle is under attack.....?" she thought out loud, fear beginning to shake her voice.

"But....why????"

She reached under her regal bed, and dragged and old red box out from under it. She opened it to reveal a sword. The metal was strangely white, apart from the middle, which was purple from the blade to hilt. The hilt itself was bright gold.

Michelle took the sword out and looked at it.

"This is why....." she said sorrowfully.

A few minutes later, she heard noises outside of her window. Clutching the sword, she looked outside, and hope filled her heart.

"The Knights of the Crown.....they made it in time!"

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The fighting was beginning to spread through the castle as the bloody battle broke off from the

staircase. The Royal Guard were trying in vain to hold back the determined intruders, but they were simply no match for their skill.

Geryon felled another unfortunate soul. "Ha ha.....this is too easy! These fools can't call themselves soldiers!"

He looked around at his battling comrades! "Show no mercy!!!!" he cried, raising his axe in the air.

His moment of glory was suddenly cut off, as the great wooden door that was the main entrance burst open.

Standing in the entrance were the twenty souls that no-one wanted to cross....

"The Knights of the Crown!!!!" growled Geryon in anguish. "Damn it!"

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He stood ahead of the elite unit, surveying the lobby. The bodies of fallen Royal Guards and their blood littered the once clean marble floor.

He flicked his golden locks back, and drew his long blade.

Tristan Leinard, commander of the Knights of the Crown, shouted, "CHARGE!!!!"

The twenty knights under his command rushed forward with frightening speed, and joined the fray.

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Geryon panicked as the knights charged, but not as much as his men. They struggled to defend against the highly trained unit, and before long some of them were laying on the floor, dead or badly wounded.

The knights fought with intense speed and strength, and rarely did any of them even receive a hit. One by one, the intruders were defeated or killed.

However, against the odds, a big group of Geryon's men managed to breach the blockade on the staircase, and rushed for the next floor of the castle.

"Damn it!" cursed Leinard, watching the event unfold. "They're going for the Princess!!!" He barked orders at the top of his voice.

"All units, remain here! I will go to the Princess's aid!" With that, he dashed up the staircase in pursuit of the would be kidnappers.

"Always going off on his own....he's pretty reckless for a commander." thought Wedge Gordon out loud. The blue haired young knight was always very critical of the commander. He was dead serious about being a knight, following orders to the letter, and delivering his own unique skills to the battlefield, as he was a talented fencer.

"He's an awesome knight though.....so dashing....." Crystal Lightbourne, a close friend of his, almost swooned just talking about her handsome commander. She was often more worried

about her appearance, and was constantly brushing her blonde locks. However, her girly persona hid a focused and excellent fighter.

"Aren't you guys forgetting we're in the middle of a battle?" chimed in a person they were both good friends of. In fact, the three of them were childhood friends.

"Chris, behind you!!!" screamed Crystal in terror.

The young cadet swung his zweihander upwards and blocked the blow from the vagabond behind him. He then smashed the man over the head with the hilt, knocking him out.

Hardly breaking a sweat, Chris faced his two buddies again. "You guys, somebody needs to make sure the Princess is OK, and not just Leinard."

"Chris!" yelled Wedge anxiously. "Our orders are to stay here and secure the castle!!!"

"These guys are after the Princess!" replied Chris angrily. "This is no time for that idiot to play hero, he needs backup!"

Crystal sighed. Both she and Wedge knew two things about Chris. First, he and Leinard were not the best of friends. The commander seemed to look down his nose at the gifted cadet, and Chris took serious umbrage at that.

Second, Chris would always do the right thing, even if it meant defying orders. Trying to stop him doing so was like trying to take a bone from a dog.

The 19 year old cadet rushed off towards the melee around the staircase, while Wedge and Crystal sighed with worry.

"Doing the right thing might get you killed someday, buddy....." thought Wedge to himself.

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On the second floor, Maximillian dispatched one of the kidnapers with a vicious but precise blow to the stomach. The now dead attacker slumped to the floor.

The aged commander was sweating like a pig. "How in the world did they fight off my entire unit?!" he cursed, breathing deeply. He'd managed to evade being wounded, unlike the two chamber guards next to him. One of them lay dead down the other end of the circular corridor.

"Sir.....don't worry." gasped the other, holding his side. "The Knights...of the Crown are tearing them apart....."

"I know.....but the enemy's tactics are flawed." replied Maximillian matter-of-factly. "They couldn't possibly have escaped this castle without being detected.....unless....."

His eyes widened. ".....it's just a distraction!!!!"

"ARGGHHH!!!!!" came a scream to his right.

The wounded guard had been run through by a long thin blade. His body dropped to the floor, and Maximillian came face to face with his killer.

"Who the hell are you?!" he shouted. "Halt!"

The hooded and caped leader of the intruders had returned. Maximillian couldn't see his face, but he realised what was going on.

"So....that rabble was just to distract us, while you snuck in and took her Highness...." he spoke calmly. "Only you didn't count on me." He readied his trusty weapon, staring at the mysterious

man before him.

"Oh, you're wrong, Maxmillian....." sneered the leader. "I can take you, old man."

"I'll show you who's an old man!!!!!! Die, you vermin!!!!!" roared the war hardened veteran, rushing at his foe. The two of them locked sword, and began to duel.

For a few minutes, the two warriors attacked and parried, feinted and riposted, and neither seemed to be gaining an advantage. However, Maximillian was tiring, and his opponent was obviously more youthful than he was. He growled and lunged at the hooded young man.

The mystery leader side stepped Maximillian's lunge, and struck back with a lightning quick swing that knocked the old man off balance. A second swing cut into the commander's armour. He grimaced at stepped back, clutching his wounded arm.

"You would be wise to stand aside, old man." spoke the leader coldly. "I am here for the Princess, and I will kill anyone who gets in my way."

"I won't let you touch a hair on her head, you fiend!" Maximillian struck back with all his strength, which actually surprised his younger opponent. Maxmillian managed to scratch the man's arm, making him curse.

"You....." he hissed, feeling the sharp pain. "You're the first worthy opponent I've fought this night. However, you cannot stand against what you loathe and fear."

He stretched his left arm outwards, and energy began charging to his hand. Before Maximillian could evade him, the mystery fighter fired a large fireball at him. He simply had no defence against magic, and was flung into the wall by the force of the spell.

"M...Magic.....curses....." spluttered the wounded commander, struggling to get to his feet. Few people could use magic, and those who could were a force to be reckoned with.

"It's time that you retired, old man!" yelled his attacker, plunging his sword into Maxmillian's chest.

Instantly, Maximillian knew that the cold grip of death was upon him. The sword was withdrawn from his dying body, and he coughed up some blood. The pain was unbearable.....

The leader sneered. "As a parting gift, allow me to show you who killed you...." He removed his hood.

Maximillian gasped. "Y.....You!!!!!!" It was his last gasp, as the life left his body. The best damn soldier in Campbell Castle lay dead.....

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Chris raced up the staircase, evading the battle as much as possible. His only thought was to get the Princess to safety.

However, as he reached the second floor, an axe narrowly missed his head.

"You must be the leader....." he said, looking at him with hateful eyes.

"Not quite." laughed Geryon indignantly. "My boss will probably have the Princess by now! Our infiltration was simply a distraction. He's the one you should have been looking out for!" He pointed his axe at Chris. "Come on then, are you going to avenge your comrades?"

Chris' answer came swiftly. He dashed at Geryon, his zweihander low at his side. With amazing speed he slashed upwards at Geryon, but his blade banged harmlessly off of Geryon's battle axe. He rolled quickly to evade Geryon's vertical counter-attack, which smashed into the floor where he'd just been a second ago.

The brute wildly swung around at Chris, but the young Knight of the Crown was too fast for him.

His axe either met the wall, floor, or Chris' blade.

Geryon was beginning to get annoyed. "When are you going to stop dancing around and FIGHT BACK, kid????!!!" The enraged thug lunged directly at Chris.

Chris dived out of the way at the last second, and the axe smashed into a vase full of flowers that had been on a pedestal nearby.

"Hope they don't send you the bill for that." taunted Chris, grinning slightly.

"Why you little punk!!!!!" roared Geryon. "I'll rip your tongue out and wrap it around your throat!!!!!" His axe crashed down upon Chris' sword, which Chris held defensively in a crouched position.

Sweat dropped down Chris' face. The reason he was being so defensive was that he was trying to find a way of beating Geryon without killing him. He'd never taken someone's life before.

Although he knew killing someone as evil as Geryon would be a good thing, the idea of killing a human being didn't appeal to him.

Despite this, he was a Knight of the Crown.

He jumped up, trying to get around Geryon's back so he could knock him out by hitting him on the head. Unfortunately, the muscle bound thug wasn't as stupid as he looked. He twirled around and his axe smashed into Chris' chest, sending him crashing into the wall.

"Oof!" gasped Chris, the wind knocked out of him.

"Just a kid after all.....a cowardly little kid." laughed Geryon with an evil smirk on his face. He figured this would be over very quickly.....

However, his taunts awoke something inside the young cadet. Nasty memories of his childhood, being bullied by other kids....being called a coward.....being beaten up because of it.....and being alone because of it.....

"Hey, there's that Appleyard kid! Let's get him!"

"Nah, leave him over there. We don't him playing with us..."

"You'll never be nothing, cause you're a sissy little coward!"

"No!" he shouted. "I am NOT a coward!!!!!"

He struck with terrifying accuracy. He sliced his zweihander in two diagonal strokes, the first cutting into Geryon's right arm and the second through his left.

Geryon cried out in pain, taken completely by surprise. He staggered back, blood pouring from the nasty wounds on his arms.

It was nothing compared to what happened next.

Chris pulled his sword back and thrust it forward into Geryon's now exposed chest.

The thug's eyes opened wide in shock. Pain exploded through his body, and he staggered back, falling off of the sword. He crashed to the ground on his back, bleeding to death.

"B-Beaten.....by a.....kid.....?" were his last words.

Chris stood, bringing his now bloodied sword to his side. He was in some sort of shock. He'd just killed someone.....taken the life from a human being.....

However, he didn't feel bad. He felt like he'd done the world a favour. Scum like Geryon deserved to die.

He breathed sharply, cleaning the blood off his trusty zweihander. He'd finally gotten over his

fear of having to kill someone. His first kill was also the second in command of these guys, no less.

Chris had finally taken one more step on the path to knighthood. His mind snapped back to the task at hand, and he rushed with haste to the Princess' chambers.

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Michelle was terrified at the sounds of fighting outside her door. Even more so when the fighting stopped.

She grabbed hold of her sword, and readied herself to fight. If an enemy came through that door, they would discover that Princess Michelle Campbell wasn't going to be taken without a fight!

Sure enough, the door opened.....

Michelle came face to face with the hooded leader of the attackers. She pointed her sword at him. "Whoever you are, don't come any closer!!!" she shouted. She hoped someone would come to help, because from the looks of the man before her, she was out of her league.

"Drop the weapon, Princess." said the leader calmly. "You know you can't defeat me." He began to walk closer. "Come with me, and I'll call my men off."

"Stay back!" yelled Michelle. She wasn't an expert sword fighter by any means, but she was actually a cut above the average Royal Guard. She just didn't practise enough.

"We can do this the easy way, or the hard way." stated the leader coldly. He drew his long blade to emphasise his point.

Michelle stared daggers at this man, who dared to threaten her. "I'd rather die than let you take me!" was her reply. She suddenly ran forward, her sword ready to strike.

The leader didn't move. As Michelle reached him, he slashed outwards. The silver blade slice into her hand, making her scream out in pain and drop her weapon. The white sword clattered to the ground harmlessly.

The leader pointed the silver sword at Michelle, who was shaking with fear and anger and holding her wounded hand.

"Pretty girls aren't meant to play around with swords." he spoke, his tone mocking her.

"You cad!" she shot back, her face twisting into rage.

"You're coming with me, right now." The leader roughly grabbed Michelle's right wrist, and began to drag her out of the chambers.

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Chris saw the chamber doors up ahead. His heart began to beat faster and more urgently as she saw the horrible sight outside.

He saw two of the Royal Guards, and Maximillian. He closed his eyes. "Damn it.....who could have done this?"

"Uhhh....uggghhh....." came a groan to his right. Maximillian was still alive!

"Commander Westring!" acknowledged Chris, kneeling down at his side. "Hang on, sir. I'll get you help!"

"It's.....too late....for me....." croaked the dying old warrior. "The Princess.....she's in danger....go and....help her....."

"Don't talk like that!" rebuked Chris. Then he saw the commander's wound. It was ghastly.....

"He.....struck a.....mortal.....blow....." gasped the old commander. "He was.....like a.....demon.....and.....I know.....who he.....is....."

"Save your strength....." said Chris, but he knew it was in vain.

"It's.....it's.....uhhhhh....." Before Maxmillian could reveal the identity of his attacker, his strength left him.

Chris stood up, and cursed. "Commander Leinard, where ARE you???" If he'd been here, perhaps Maxmillian would still be alive.

Chris then heard a scream through the chamber doors, followed by, "You cad!"

"The Princess!!!" he gasped. Without hesitation, he kicked open the golden doors, and raced inside.

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Hearing the doors fly open, the mystery leader turned around.

Stood in front of the door was Chris, who had his zweihander pointed at him.

"Hmph.....another royal lapdog....." snorted the leader.

Chris stepped forward. "Unhand the princess at once!"

Michelle came out from behind the man. "Please, leave! I don't want anyone else to be hurt....or killed!"

At that moment, Chris and Michelle's eyes met.

Chris was mesmerised by Michelle's beauty. This was in fact the first time he'd laid eyes on her Highness.

It was a similar experience for Michelle. She stared at the young knight before her, having never seen him before.

Chris' blue eyes blinked. Her eyes were like emeralds.....and yet, seemed strangely familiar.....it was as if they already knew each other.

Michelle was equally astounded by Chris' sapphire like eyes. She was sure she'd met him somewhere before.....

Michelle's captor broke their reverie. "Some knight you are, kid....." He laughed a little. "You can't even keep your eyes off a beautiful girl."

Chris flushed red for a moment. "Be quiet!!!! Let the Princess go!"

The leader shook his head. "I can't do that. She's essential to my plans....."

"You have committed treason against the Kingdom of Galatea, and slaughtered some of my friends, as well as many good soldiers in this castle!" yelled Chris, struggling to maintain his professional mask. He was just a cadet....he didn't have time for things like procedure or protocol. "Now unhand Princess Michelle, or you'll have to answer to me!"

"You think you can defeat me?" The leader let out a mocking laugh. "You're not even a knight

yet, and I am stronger than you can possibly imagine."

"How do you know that???" gasped Chris. That was impossible, how could this man know he was just a cadet?!

"I know a lot more than a silly little kid like you." replied the man coldly. His voice took on the threatening tone from before. "Leave now, and I will spare your life. Hmph, might even give you the chance to become a real knight instead of being a kid who plays with a sword like it's a toy." Chris' temper flared, and he readied his sword. "I am not a kid!!! And I'm not just going let you walk away with the Princess!"

Michelle was filled with worry. "He's just in training.....He's going to get himself killed!!!" She didn't even know Chris, but felt more scared for his life than anyone else in the battle, including herself.....

"As you wish." said the leader in acknowledgement. "In that case.....DIE!!!!!"

He let go of Michelle and rushed at Chris, with the speed of a Knight of the Crown, the long silver sword gleaming in the moonlight from the window.

Chris' eyes widened and he brought his two-hander up just in time. The long blade was awfully close to his chest. He smashed away the fearful weapon and counterattacked, aiming for his foe's arm.

The leader was no fool, however. He quickly jerked the sword back, and deflected Chris' blow. He wasn't going to fall victim from something like that from a mere cadet.

Chris gritted his teeth. This guy was going to be no pushover, but he knew a few tricks as well. He was going to show him what a cadet could do!

The two fought all the way across the large chambers, attacking and defending, dodging and rolling. When they fought close to Michelle's bed, their blades ended up ripping its silky quilt to shreds. They left countless slash marks on the walls, but not once did they hit each other.

Michelle could only watch, terrified for Chris' life.

It went on like that for a couple of minutes, until Chris suddenly pulled his own special move. He feinted, pretending he was going to strike downward. This caused his opponent to switch his defence lower.

However, is actual fact, Chris did his own personal move from back in his training with Rudy. He brought his zweihander crashing down with awesome force from behind his shoulder.

The leader was caught off guard by the unfamiliar move, and the sword sliced heavily into his right arm. It didn't cut it off but went a fair way through, and cut upwards along it was well.

"Argggghhh!" he cried, dropping his silver bladed sword. He held his right arm, which was in crippling pain.

Chris pointed his weapon at him once again. "Just a little something I learned while playing around with my sword as a toy." he declared, smiling.

Michelle gasped. "Wow....that was neat....." she thought happily.

The wounded kidnapper looked at Chris, and through his voice it was easy to tell he was in pain.

"Not bad....for a cadet.....I didn't see that one coming....."

Chris stared at him indignantly. "You forgot the first rule of combat. Never underestimate your enemy."

The leader smirked under his hood. "So did you."

Suddenly, he stretched his left arm outwards, charging up energy for a magic spell.

Michelle looked in horror. "Look out!!!! Magic!!!!!"

Chris couldn't react fast enough. The leader once again let loose a fireball, and it smacked straight into Chris, flinging him across the chamber.

The cadet groaned, and got to his feet.....

.....but the leader was already charging him. Chris was surprised at his speed, and couldn't get his sword up quickly enough.

The leader slashed horizontally, and his blade struck Chris' zweihander with devastating force, smashing the sword in two.

Chris then froze in shock as the lengthy silver blade thrust straight into his stomach.

Michelle could only watch, horrified, as Chris was run through by her captor. "No!!!!" she screamed.

Underneath his hood, the victorious leader gave a triumphant smile, before pulling his bloody weapon free of Chris.

Chris stepped back awkwardly, looking down at his wound. The sword had pierced vital areas, and the bleeding wouldn't stop.

His strength failing him, Chris collapsed backwards to the floor, his armour clanking loudly as he hit the floor.

The entire 19 years of his life flashed before his life. Being a little baby, happy days spent with his family and friends, joining the Galatean military and then the Knights of the Crown, and the events that had transpired that night.

His biggest memory however, was the one day when he was about 12 years old. He met a girl while playing in the forest one day, and he remembered the promise he'd made her.

Now he would never get to keep his promise.....

His life fading fast, he turned his head to look across at Michelle. the Princess was in shock, and tears were beginning to fall down her sweet face.

He spoke two final words with his last breath. "I'm.....sorry....."

As white light appeared in his eyes, Chris' last thoughts were not of himself, or his friends, or the person who had ended his life.

They were of the beautiful princess that he'd failed to protect.....

Seconds later, Chris Appleyard was dead.

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Michelle was beyond despair. The gallant cadet who'd tried his best to protect her lay dead, killed before her eyes. She knew that many others had already died, but Chris' death seemed different. She hadn't even known him, yet she felt like she'd just lost someone very dear to her.

"How.....how could you....." she angrily spoke through her tears.

"Anyone who crosses swords with me will pay the price." replied Chris' killer in his icy cold tone.

"That fool didn't know when to walk away, though he was a most impressive opponent, for a cadet."

Michelle could only stand there, almost numb. "I-I won't let you get away with th-this....." she said defiantly, her voice shaking.

the leader grabbed her wrist again forcefully, and she struggled to break free. He then slapped her hard across the face. The princess winced in pain, and held her cheek.

"Silence, you spoiled brat!" growled Michelle's captor, getting increasingly annoyed by her. "Or I'll make you suffer a fate worse than death! We go now!"

He turned and blasted the window into pieces with a well aimed fireball showering the chamber

with shards of glass.

He then jumped out of the window with Michelle in tow. As they jumped, the princess looked back at the fallen body of Chris, tears pouring down her face.....

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White.....

A white light.....

A white light moving at great speed.....

It felt like he was going through a tunnel at extremely high speed. He was being catapulted through goodness knows where.

Was this the way....to Heaven.....?

Suddenly, the tunnel exploded into complete light, He stopped moving, and time seemed to stop completely.

Slowly, Chris opened his eyes. He squinted as extremely bright light shot its way into them, but soon became use to the brightness.

And brightness was all there was. He looked around him. White light. There was nothing but white light all around him in every direction.

He looked down. It looked like he was floating in mid-air. He moved his right leg forward gingerly, and it floated upwards. Panicking, he quickly moved it back down.

Where in the goddess's name was he?

"Is this.....Heaven.....?" he wondered.

"Not quite." came an echoing reply. Chris jumped.

"Who....who's there?" he called out nervously.

His answer came right in front of him. A few metres away from him, a figure began to come into view. It was a womanly figure, and she appeared to for out of the light surrounding Chris, as if she was made of it. She was quite tall from what Chris could tell.

Then, several brilliant lights shot out of her back, brighter than what was around the two. She reared her head back as the lights continued to shine, then they formed into shapes. Looking closer, Chris cou goddess....." gasped Chris, looking at her in wonder.

"You're very perceptive, aren't you?" spoke the heavenly woman, her strange pink eyes blinking at him. "I would have expected nothing less."

Chris could only stare in wonder at her. "Who.....who are you.....?"

"I am the one who brings the light of hope." she replied, her voice sounding so gentle and loving. "I am the one who drives back the foul stench of evil. I am the one who fills my treasured world with love."

Her equally gentle eyes met Chris's. "I am the Goddess of Love."

Chris' mind went reeling from this revelation. "The.....legendary Goddess.....of Love.....?" he replied in amazement. He of course knew of the Tale of The Two Goddesses passed down through the ages, but no-one had ever laid eyes upon the divine creators of their world.

"Yes." replied the Goddess, smiling. "I've been waiting for you for a long time, Chris."

"Waiting....for me?" said a puzzled Chris. "But.....I'm dead now.....aren't I?"

"Yes.....but do not worry." said the Goddess reassuringly. "You are here for a reason."

She cast her hand through the light, and it parted, turning black. It then showed two armies fighting, in some distant place in the world.

Chris watched this with interest, but also worry. "Why is this war being fought? Those people are getting killed!"

"It appears to be the wishes of power hungry warlords." answered the Goddess of Love, who suddenly looked very serious. "However, this is in the fact the machinations of my sister, the Goddess of Hate." Her face fell at the mention of that name.

"The Goddess of Hate?" said a perplexed Chris. "But the legend says that you and your angels sealed her away..."

"We did, yes." nodded the immortal. "However.....her influence did not stop. By her will, hate has continued to spread through my world, corrupting the wills and minds of good people. It is all in an attempt to destroy everything I created...and another step towards her goal of domination of all existence...."

"That's terrible!" exclaimed Chris. "But where do I, and the attack and the castle fit into all of this?"

The Goddess calmly looked at Chris, and the view switched to that of a massive circular object. "The leader of the attack has had his body and soul taken by my sister. Through her will, he has kidnapped Princess Michelle in order to break the Seal of Avalon."

"The Seal of Avalon? What is that?" Chris tilted his head, looking at her thoughtfully.

The Goddess showed him an ancient looking castle. "My angels created a holy fortress, which was named Avalon. It was filled with traps and guardians, designed to prevent anyone from breaking the seal contained at the top." stated the Goddess, the memory of the place fresh in her mind as if it had been yesterday. "Many people, those driven by hate, believe that the Seal of Avalon

contains unlimited power. Many have tried and failed to reach the seal."

She continued, her tone becoming more serious. "The Princess' kidnapper will be heading to Avalon. His intention is to break the Seal and gain unlimited power for himself. His taking of the Princess is no accident, young Chris. She is the only person who can break the Seal."

"Princess Michelle?" Chris shook his head. "But what could she have to do with the Seal of Avalon?"

"That is not important, Chris." said the Goddess swiftly. "What is important is what is behind the Seal. The Princess' captor is being fed an illusion. Opening the Seal will not bring him unlimited power.....it will bring death and chaos to the world...and all that exists."

"That doesn't sound good!" gasped Chris. "What is behind the Seal?"

"The Seal must NEVER be broken, Chris....." spoke the Goddess sternly, closing her eyes.

The tear in the light changed to show a figure emerging from the Seal, now broken. Chris could only see her silhouette, and from what he could see the figure looked very similar to the Goddess of Love. However, the wings were not white. They were black.....

Then, her face appeared. It was like the Goddess of Love's face, but this woman was staring with

hatred in her eyes, and an evil smile across her face.

".....for behind it, lies my sister, the Goddess of Hate....." she finished, opening her eyes.

Chris was shocked. He could only imagine what an evil goddess was capable of.....

"If she is freed, everything will know hatred." spoke the Goddess, her eyes blinking with sorrow. "This world, and perhaps every other, will be consumed by the darkness she has created. Finally, she will attempt to absorb all existence into her will, and will mold the universe as she sees fit. It will become a hellish paradise....."

She faced Chris. "But there is still hope.....you." she smiled.

"Me....?" Chris' mind was completely reeling from all the things he had been told.

"Yes. I have waited such a long time for the one who shall be this world's champion and hero." She looked him up and down. "I can feel it even now, the love that you have....."

"My....love.....? I don't understand, Goddess....." Chris was very bamboozled. What was she trying to say? "I'm dead! I failed in my task...."

"You did not fight your way to those chambers simply because of duty, Chris." interrupted the immortal. "You went up there because you cared about the Princess. You care about her more than you realise."

Before Chris could speak, she said, "You love her, don't you?"

Chris flushed red. "I don't even know her....."

"Your heart tells a different story, young one. Why do you think you fought so hard to save her?"

He thought back. What the Goddess was saying was true. Ever since he'd heard of the Princess, he'd done his best to join the Knights of the Crown. He'd thought it was because he wanted to protect the kingdom, but in fact, he just wanted to be close to her Highness. He was just drawn to her, for a reason he didn't know. Yet, when he'd seen her face for the first time, he'd felt like he'd know her all his life. When he'd died, his last thoughts had been of her.

Yet, he'd never approached her before, as he'd been too scared that she would reject him...because she was a princess, and she was a knight. Also....he'd never even gotten to know her.

"The love you have for her may be unknown, but it's shining, Chris." continued the Goddess. "It shines even brighter than what lies in my heart.....for what you have for her is a pure, everlasting love. No other love like yours exists....."

"A pure, everlasting love.....? For Michelle.....?" Chris instinctively touched his chest where his heart was. It was pounding rather fast.

"You don't truly realise it yet." smiled his divine companion. "In time, you will realise how much she means to you. It is your love for her that will be your strength. Never forget that, Chris."

"My love for her is my strength?" Chris frowned, becoming a little frustrated at the Goddess' vagueness. "What do you mean?"

"This is what I mean." Suddenly, pink coloured particles began to circle around her, growing in intensity. They made her glow with a brilliant pink light.

She then thrust her hands out in Chris' direction, closing her eyes. Then, a beam shot out from her hands and struck Chris.

"Whaaa.....?" gasped Chris, as the beam hit him...right where his heart was. He closed his eyes and felt a surge of something flow through his body, and even his mind.....

The pink particles suddenly formed around him and began to swim around him like they did the Goddess.

All Chris could think was, "What's happening to me.....?"

The particles spun around him for a few moments, then surged into his heart, and a brilliant flash of pink coloured light exploded from there.

A few moments later, the bewildered teenager opened his eyes. He checked himself over, but everything seemed the same.

The Goddess was looking at him, smiling brightly.

"What...what did you do to me....?" spoke Chris, scared by what had just happened.

"I have awakened your true potential and skill, young Chris. I've lent you my power."

"What??? Power? What are you talking about???" yelled Chris, panicking.

"You are the only hope for my world, Chris." replied the Goddess softly. "You must find my sister's pawn, and prevent him from releasing her. Do not worry. Your love for Michelle will guide you to where you need to go, and will enable you to fight off those tainted by my sister. Please, Chris.....please help me...." she pleaded with him. "If you refuse, then I will send you on your way to the peace of the afterlife....I do not wish to force you to do this....."

"I don't know what is going on here....." said Chris, frowning, "but I do know that I want the Princess to be safe.....and your sister to stay behind a locked door. I'll do as you ask." He nodded in acknowledgment.

"Thank you." said the Goddess happily. "I have every faith in you."

She paused. "But whatever happens, never let anger or fear cloud your mind. To do so would mean certain victory for my sister...."

"I won't." replied Chris, smiling.

"Then godspeed to you." said the immortal. "Love's Knight....."

"Love's Knight.....?" said Chris, looking at her, perplexed.

Suddenly, he was being hurtled back down the tunnel of light, away from the Goddess, away from death.....and back to life.....

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Chris bolted upright, breathing in a panic. Once he regained his composure, he saw that he was back in the Princess' chamber.

It was like he hadn't even been gone. Everything was as it had been when he'd left this mortal

coil. He noticed one difference, however....the large window was smashed, and the cold night wind was blowing in.

He stood up, and felt his stomach. There was no wound, and his silver armour and blue underclothes were untouched.

He felt like he'd just woken from a dream, and scratched his head.

A glint of metal on the floor caught his attention. On the floor lay the two broken pieces of his zweihander. He picked them up, and looked at them, giving a big sigh. "How am I supposed to save Michelle if I haven't even got a sword....?"

His thoughts turned to the Princess. He wondered where she was now, if she was safe. It was all his fault that she was in her current predicament! If only he'd seen that fireball coming, he might have been able to best that villain....

"Curse you, Chris!!!!" He punched the air in frustration.

He sat for a few moments in silence, thinking about the events that had passed. "Heh.....you wouldn't want to marry me now....." he laughed a little, sarcastically. His mind had drifted back to his sweetest memory....

It was a lovely day in Cherryglade Forest. The sun was shining, and the colour of nature could be seen everywhere. The forest never looked better, and it was very peaceful here.

Chris had just finishing chopping the tree. He may have been just 12, but he seemed pretty gifted with handling tools such as an axe. He put the last of the wood into the leather bag he held, and began to walk home.

"Hellppppp!!!!!" cried a voice, not too far away from him. It sounded like a girl...

The young boy stopped and looked around frantically, searching for the source of the voice.

"Hey!!!!" he shouted.

Suddenly, out from the bushes burst a figure. Chris could see that it was a girl, who was dressed in a light pink dress. Her shoulder length brown hair was bouncing up and down as she ran, and her eyes were fixed in a look of pure terror.

Behind her, a black four legged beast was pursuing her. Chris instantly recognised the creature as a wolf. It was extremely odd that a wolf was running around in daylight. The girl had probably disturbed it from its sleep.

The girl spied Chris and screamed all the louder. "HELP ME!!!!!!!!!" Suddenly, she fell flat on her face, tripping over her dress.

The wolf, licking its lips at the chance of a meal, leaped at her.

"AAHHHHHH!!!!!!!!!" screamed the girl, closing her eyes.

The wolf suddenly yelped as a hefty object struck it in the side of its face.

Chris had jumped in front of the fallen girl, and had smashed his axe into the beast's face. He stared at it, scared a little himself, but more worried for the safety of the young girl.

The wolf snarled, and ran off, not wishing to risk another blow like that. Chris breathed a sigh of relief and put his axe away. He turned to the young maiden.

"Are you OK?" he asked, helping her up.

She got to her feet and looked at him. "Yeah, thank you!" she said politely, but she was still a bit scared. "That monster was gonna eat me...."

"Don't worry!" smiled Chris enthusiastically. "I'll protect you from any monsters!"

The girl giggled. "Thank you. You're really brave!"

The young Chris blushed. "Thanks..." he said, shuffling his feet nervously. He looked at the girl.....she was really pretty. She looked back at him, smiling.

"Hey, do you wanna play?" asked Chris of the girl. "We should play Hide and Seek!"

"You...want to play with me...?" spoke the girl shyly. "No-one's ever wanted to play with me before.....alright!" She giggled happily.

The two kids spent a good long while playing the game. Chris knew more about woodcraft than the girl, so he had no trouble finding her and keeping hidden from her.

"Got you!" shouted Chris, tackling the girl from behind. They rolled around in the soft grass, laughing. Eventually they came to a stop.

Chris looked down at the girl. "You're beautiful...." he said, his face going red.

The pretty young maiden flushed red and giggled. She sat up and so did Chris. The young boy blushed and plucked a pretty flower from the grass nearby. "This is for you, 'cause you're as pretty as a flower." He shuffled his feet nervously again. This was really the first time he'd been this way around a girl, and he already had another friend who was a girl, Crystal.

"Thank you....." The girl took the flower and tucked it into her hair. She looked at Chris with loving eyes. "You're my knight.....my knight in shining armour."

Chris smiled. "Yeah, and you're my princess!" He looked back into her eyes. They were soooo pretty.....

"Hey, when we grown up....." It was the girl's turn to shuffle nervously. ".....will you marry me....?"

Chris blushed, but held the girl's hand. "Yeah, I wanna marry you!"

The maiden smiled. "Promise?"

Chris nodded. "Promise!"

The two then planted a small kiss on each other's lips. Both of them blushed even redder than they already were.

The girl then got up. "Oh no! My mommy will be worried about me! I have to go!" She ran off along the beaten path through the woods.

"Bye!!!!!" shouted Chris after her.

"Bye bye!!!!!" shouted back the girl, as she vanished into the distance.....

He never saw the girl ever again. She never came back to the woods. He'd used to wait there for her everyday after chopping wood.

But she'd never come.....

"I'll never keep that promise now...." murmured Chris, looking at the ground in sadness.

"Look into your memories, Chris. Love exists not just in the present and future, but in the past as well.....let your memories push you forward"

"Huh???" Chris stood up and looked around. A voice had just echoed somewhere, as if it was talking to him.

The two pieces of his sword suddenly began to shake.

"What the....my sword?!" Chris held the pieces away from him, afraid they were going to explode. They shot out of his hands and floated in mid-air in front of him. Then, Chris almost jumped as his chest began to glow where his heart was. A pink beam, like the one the Goddess shot at him shot out from there and struck his broken sword. Light began to emanate from the weapon, and Chris had to shield his eyes.

A brilliant purple light shot out from the zweihander, and repaired the damage, fusing both pieces back together. However, that wasn't all it did.

It began to change the sword. It became sharper and slightly longer. The hilt became a brilliant golden colour unlike the duller tone from before, and the wrist guard became triangular. A blue chevron like shape formed and linked the hilt to the blade. The blade itself changed from silver to a brilliant white, as if it was holy.

The light then began to cut small markings into the blade, like a laser. The markings weren't very visible to the naked eye, even though it looked like the light cut deep into the reborn blade. A thin yellow line of gold was formed, running from the tip of the blue area to the tip of the blade. Finally, two gold coloured supports grew out of the side. On these supports, two beams of light shot out, just like with the Goddess. Two feathery white angel wings formed on the supports, and immediately swept back.

As quickly as it had come, the light faded, and Chris was able to see again. He gazed in awe at his new weapon. It was truly a sword fit for a knight. He wasn't sure what the angel wings were supposed to mean, however. Perhaps they had something to do with the Goddess? He took the sword out of the air, and there was some kind of reaction as he gripped it with both his hands. Once again, that now familiar purple light shot out from the hilt, and enveloped both wielder and weapon.

out loud.

He began to think of Michelle. Her sweet face, her kind heart, and her beautiful voice.....the brief memories he had of her.

"Memories are what made this sword." smiled the cadet. "Memories of Michelle...."

He held the divine sword up in the air. "Sword, I name you, Michelle Memoria!"

He heard fighting outside the door. He'd completely forgotten about the battle. He guessed that his comrades had finally gotten to the chambers.

How was he going to explain what had happened? Would they even believe him? He didn't have time.....his heart was telling him to immediately go after Michelle and her captor, and the Goddess had told him to follow his heart....

Without another thought, he leaped out of the broken window, jumping across to the battlements, and then down several window ledges, before landing in front of the main gate.

"I'll save you.....I promise...." he spoke, before rushing off through the gate, into the night.....

3 - Grand Memoria!

Chapter 2 - Grand Memoria!

Despite having been a Knight of the Crown for a few years now, Chris didn't really know much of the layout of the Galatean Kingdom. His knowledge of the local geography was Campbell Castle, the Silver Arrow fortress, a couple of small towns in between, and his home town of Cherryglade. What that meant was, finding his way to Avalon was going to be difficult. Also, he had no hope of catching up with Michelle's kidnapper, as he had gotten a good headstart. Plus, he knew where he was going.

"What I wouldn't do for a map...." declared Chris half out loud, half to himself as he followed the road from the castle. He knew that this particular road would bring him to the town of Smith's Guild, where he hoped he could get some information, or at least a map.

Day was beginning to break, and the sun began to poke its way through the white fluffy clouds as Chris continued on his journey.

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"Looks like there was one hell of a struggle here, Crystal...." Wedge shook his head, appalled by the corridor to Michelle's chambers, which now stank of death.

"I can't believe the Princess was kidnapped...." gasped Crystal in disbelief. "And Chris....what happened to him.....? You don't think he's.....?" She shivered, not wanting to think of her childhood friend as dead.

"They haven't found his body." replied Wedge, optimistically. "He can't be dead....maybe he went after whoever took her Highness?"

Crystal grimaced as she stood in a puddle of blood. "Both him and Commander Leinard, maybe? They haven't found him either. He's been missing since we all saw him last in the battle...."

They were interrupted by Rudy, who came up the staircase flanked by two of their comrades.

"Knights of the Crown, I congratulate you on your efforts. All but at least one of these vermin were killed. Unfortunately, the Princess has been taken into the night by these fiends! Also, we lost two of our number, and two are unaccounted for, Commander Leinard and Cadet Appleyard."

He paused, thinking of the dead for one moment. "I sadly report the death of many of the Royal Guard, including Commander Maxmillian Westring, one of the most respected men in the Galatean army. However, we will not falter because of this tragedy, ladies and gentlemen!" His voice became a rallying cry, booming through the castle. "We will find and deliver swift justice to those who have dared to draw the blood of our friends and snatch our beloved Princess from us! Knights of the Crown, you will mobilise immediately and search every last inch of this kingdom for those responsible!"

"Yes sir!!!" came a resounding shout from all the Knights. Every man and woman began rushing out of the castle, and mounting their horses. They then rode off into the early morning, their mission clear.

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Morning had well and truly broken as Chris finally reached Smith's Guild. The town was so called because it had originally been a blacksmith settlement, producing weapons especially for the Galatean military. A town had grown up around the business, and it had soon become the number one rest stop for anyone journeying to Campbell Castle and beyond. However, the blacksmiths were still the most important aspect of the town.

Chris walked into the town, past the wooden sign saying 'Welcome to Smith's Guild'. It wasn't the neatest of places, seeming as most of the buildings had a stack of junk sitting outside them. These buildings were the blacksmiths, but they had no use for Chris, who was holding a weapon for greater than any of them could forge.

He looked through the window at one the working 'smiths. He was hammering away at a red hot piece of metal. No doubt that like any good blacksmith, he was attempting to make the perfect sword.

"It takes more than a hammer and metal to make the greatest weapon." thought Chris, thinking of his own sword.

Smith's Guild was quite a busy place. Once or twice, Chris nearly bumped into people, as the streets were quite full of bustling citizens. There were shoppers, people selling things, and of course trade caravans.

Chris hated towns and cities. They were so noisy, and often full of questionable people. He preferred it back home in Cherryglade, which was a small village....it was so peaceful there. Ignoring a town crier shouting the news, Chris found his way to an inn, 'The Hammer & The Anvil.'

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The horse was very tired, but its rider had been merciless, riding it almost to the point of exhaustion. However, the white coloured steed was on the verge of collapse, and even someone with an evil mind was smart enough to know when to allow rest.

The kidnapper of Michelle hopped off of the panting horse for a moment, stretching his arms and legs. Still sitting on the horse was Michelle herself. Her hands were bound, so that she could not escape. A couple of bruises lay upon her face. Her constant taunting of him had forced him to try and shut her up.

"Ahhh.....you may as well give up any hope of rescue, your Highness." he spoke, smirking evilly.

"We have a good start on those oh so brave Knights," he snickered, looking at her, "and only I know where Avalon lies. Nobody will ever find us once we reach it."

Michelle glared at him, her eyes narrowed. "If you found out how to get there, someone else will!"

"Perhaps.....but by then it will be too late." The hooded man looked up at the sky. The clouds were totally white and the sky was a refreshing clear blue. If he had his way, they would look very different indeed.

He mounted the horse again. "Face it, Princess. No-one is coming to rescue you. Yaah!" He whipped the horse with its reins again, and the poor animal began to gallop to their destination once more.

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The Hammer & Anvil was a fairly traditional town inn. All kinds of people were hanging around in here, mostly labourers and tradesmen looking for a good deal. Chris got a few looks, probably because he was the only person in the inn dressed in armour. However, there was no-one being rowdy in here, and Chris judged that this might be one of those pleasant pubs.

His judgement was changed when three rowdy looking muscles barged in. They looked tough, and began to act like they owned the place, shoving several people out of the seats at the bar.

"There's always one...." Chris chose to ignore them and went up to the bar.

The bartender, a moustachioed man wearing a white apron and a smart green striped shirt, addressed him. "What'll it be, young 'un?"

"I'm not after a drink." replied Chris, getting straight to the point. "I'm looking for information.....about the ancient Avalon fortress."

"Information, eh?" mused the bartender, rubbing his moustache thoughtfully. "Well, there's not much known about this Avalon place you speak of. However, I know someone who might know about it. Of course....it's gonna cost you." He gestured at Chris as if expecting some money.

"I'm afraid I don't have anything I can give you." Chris said, wondering where his pouch of gold had gotten to. He must have lost it during the battle.....

"That's too bad." replied the bartender. "However....there is something else you can do for me." He gestured to the three toughs sitting at the bar.

"Those three are the Smithy Trio." he explained, muttering in disgust. "They're the local troublemakers of this town, involved in all sorts of illegal stuff. Anyone who's tried to deal with them ends up paying a heavy price.....and they come in here regularly, hassling my customers and acting like they own the place."

"So what do you want me to do about it?" asked Chris, listening intently above the voices in the inn.

"I want them out of my inn. Permanently." replied the bartender, keeping one eye on the trio.

"You're wearing knight armour, and you look like you can handle yourself in a fight. If you get rid of them, I'll give you the information you want." The bartender walked away from Chris, going back to his job.

The young cadet sighed. "Why does everyone assume I'm a fully fledged knight?" he thought, a little annoyed. He didn't have time for this.....Michelle was in danger!

He looked at the Smithy Trio. The one in the middle, the biggest of them all, was obviously the leader. He wore a metal helmet with horns, and looked like he could take plenty of punishment. The two with him weren't quite as well built as he was, but they didn't look like pushovers, either. He was about to wonder how he could approach them, when someone tapped him on the shoulder. He looked to his left and came face to face with the Trio's leader. It looked like they'd decided to approach him first.

"Well, well, well." spoke the ruffian, smiling. "Look what we have here. A little kid who thinks he's a knight!" He and his buddies started laughing loudly.

Chris sat there, and ignored them. However, he smelled trouble, and his right hand was ready to draw Michelle Memoria at any moment.

"I think you should go home to your mommy and daddy." grinned the thug. "You see, we decide who comes into this bar, and we don't want you here." He poked Chris in the side as he said that.

"That's right, we don't want you here, pretty boy!" hissed one of his friends in an insidious voice.

"I see." replied Chris calmly, turning to look at them. "Too bad. I was hoping we could be

friends."

"You trying to be funny with me, knight boy?" said the Trio leader, his voice becoming a bit more aggressive. "What Rodimus Grappler wants, Rodimus Grappler gets. And right now, I want you out of my sight, punk-@\$\$."

Chris stared indignantly at Grappler. "Sorry, but I don't feel much like moving. And if you know what's good for you, you'll back off right now."

The whole inn went silent. Somebody had just dared to stand up to the Smithy Trio!

"Nobody talks to me that way, boy." growled Grappler, smashing his fist onto the bar inches from Chris' own hand. "I think we'll have to teach this little kid a few manners, eh boys?"

His two lackeys nodded eagerly. "Oh yeah, boss!"

Chris sighed, and stood up. "I think it'll be teaching you the lesson, Grappler."

"Hehehehe.....he's a regular joker, isn't he, boys?" smiled Grappler menacingly. "Get 'im!"

The two underlings of the Trio rushed at Chris, brandishing hefty clubs. The people in the bar backed away from the fight and waited to see yet another poor soul get beaten black and blue by the thugs.

Suddenly, there was the sounds of a sword being drawn, and slicing through the air. The clubs of the thugs were smashed in half.

Before they could recover, Chris punched one of them in the jaw and bashed Michelle Memoria's hilt off of the other one's head. They were both flung back across the room, crashing onto one of the tables.

Grappler, the customers and the bartender looked shell-shocked. That was the first time anyone had KO'd a Trio member!

Grappler, enraged, drew his own weapon, a black spiked mace. He swung it about his head a few times, demonstrating what he was going to do Chris' face. "You little rat! Get ready to meet Mr. Ball and Chain!!!! Yaaaaaah!!!!!!!"

He swung the mace wildly at Chris, but the agile teenager ducked as the ball sped towards his head. It crashed into the wall behind him, which was made of stone, leaving a big crack.

Grappler pulled the mace from the wall and swung at Chris again. Seconds before it whammed into his chest, Chris jumped away, leaving the mace to hit yet another wall, close to the front door of the inn.

"Now it's my turn to boogie!" shouted Chris, rushing at Grappler. He made to slash his sword down, but his target wasn't the overgrown bully. Instead, it was the chain linking the mace ball to the hilt. Chris' weapon sliced down into it and easily broke it, where any other sword would have just clashed off of it.

Fragments of the chain shot across the inn. The bartender and customers ducked for cover as the pieces of metal hit the floor and the walls. One of them landed in the mouth of one of Grappler's minions.

"H-how the....?" gasped the disarmed thug. "You'll pay for that, you little runt! That was my BEST mace!!!!!! RAAAAARRRRHHHHH!!!!!!!"

He rushed Chris, his right fist ready to smash into the teen's face. However, Chris saw the attack coming, and grabbed Grappler's ready arm, and spun the surprised ruffian towards the door.

"Have a nice trip!" grinned Chris, letting go.

Grappler went flying into the inn's wooden door, which flew open on impact. The muscle bound tough went flying out into the street.

Chris turned around and looked at the two remaining members of the Smithy Trio. There was a sudden look of worry on their faces.

Seconds later, the two toughs went flying out of the door, both having received a big kick up the backside from Chris. The first landed on top of Grappler, and the second landed on top of both his buddies, knocking the wind out of Grappler.

Chris looked at them. "You're barred!" He then closed the door, rubbed his hands together to clean any dirt off his gauntlets, and sat back down as if nothing had happened. The customers and the bartender looked at him, astonished. One of them came up to him. "Thanks, friend. Those guys have been messing us about for a long time." Chris simply replied, "It was nothing." He spied the bartender coming towards him, and smiled. "I think I'll have that information now, friend." The amazed bartender finished washing a glass. "You've more than earned it, young 'un. Have one on the house as well."

To the cheers of all the people at the inn, Chris drank up.

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Outside a small tent, somewhere else in the kingdom, a meeting was taking place between two men.

"You know what to do. Find and kill any Knights of the Crown. I believe you are more than capable of this task." spoke the first man.

"I understand, my lord." The second man nodded. He was dressed in light brown armour, and wore a long red cape over his back. He sported a slight beard, which was as black as his hair. "No-one must track me to Avalon. I will attain what I wish for." Michelle's mystery captor walked away from the meeting, stopping a moment. "Do not fail me, Scorban."

Scorban, one of the most prominent mercenaries in all of Galatea, nodded in acknowledgment. "Anyone who tracks you is as good as dead." His employer left the area, walking around the back of a small tree nearby. Moments later he rode off, with Michelle in tow, towards the north. Scorban, on the other hand, began to walk along the way he had come from.

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The sun beat down upon the young knight as he trekked along on the main roads through Galatea, the Tradesman's Road. This great road stretched from the North to the South of the country, and was so named because it was a favourite of trading people everywhere, as it linked to many towns and cities.

The Hammer & Anvil's bartender had told Chris that he needed to seek a respected magician, Albert Cornelius. The man was a recluse, not wanting any contact with the outside world, and so his place of living was somewhere far from prying eyes. The helpful bartender had happened to be an old friend of the magician, and knew where he lived. However, he didn't know if the old man still lived there, or if he was even alive. If Cornelius was still alive and kicking, he would be found deep inside the Forest of Fairies.

Chris was still wondering about that place as he walked the long and winding road North.

Supposedly, fairies lived in the forest and would not allow just anyone to enter. It sounded like a good place for the old magician to live out a life of solitude.

He came up to an old sign that lay on the right side of the road. Chris moved out of the way to let a trade caravan rumble past into the distance, then read the old sign. It read:

Forest of Fairies

DO NOT ENTER

"I guess the fairies want their privacy." mused Chris to himself. He didn't exactly believe in fairies, as he'd never seen one in his life, but he kept an open mind.

Chris walked off the Tradesman's Road, venturing towards a place that few humans had ever been to.....

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A few minutes later, the Road was far in the distance. Chris really had left civilisation behind, for the moment. Up ahead, he could see massive, pure green trees. He'd never seen such wonderfully healthy trees before. There was definitely something special about the Forest of Fairies.

There were just a few kilometres to go, so Chris got up from a small bench he'd taken a quick rest on, and started off towards the unnaturally green wood.

He made it about ten steps, when he felt a prickling down the back of his neck and spine....like a sixth sense.

He rolled to the left, and an arrow missed him by inches, slamming into the tall tree trunk to his right.

As Chris came out of the roll, Michelle Memoria was already in his hands. He stood up and faced the shooter.

"Not bad.....just what I'd expect from a Knight of the Crown." spoke the figure who had just walked out from behind another tree, that had been back the way Chris had come. He wore brown armour which wasn't full armour like Chris', meaning he was more vulnerable to attack. The plus side of this was that he was more agile, and could avoid attacks more easily.

A red cape blew behind him in the gentle breeze, and his short black hair blew slightly in the same direction. In his hands, he held a black crossbow, which was pointed at Chris' heart.

However, he now put the crossbow on his back, as the arrows would be useless against Chris' armour. Instead, he drew a curious looking weapon from the black scabbard on his right hip, a two handed sword with triangular points along the blade. It was a seven branch blade, designed to rip through armour.....and skin.

"I think you'd better drop that." suggested Chris, going into his combat stance. He knew this man wouldn't do anything of the sort.

"Scorban doesn't yield to anyone. Especially when he's getting paid." replied Scorban, eyeing his target with terrifying patience. "What my employer failed to tell me is that I'd be fighting weak little kids."

"So, he sent you after any Knight of the Crown?" asked Chris, not taking his eyes off the mercenary. He knew that people like him were very slippery and sneaky. If he had just a momentary lapse in concentration, it could be the last mistake he ever made.

"Sharp, as well." nodded Scorban, genuinely impressed with Chris' abilities. "It's a shame I have

to kill you, kid. I like you. In fact, you remind me of me when I was your age."

"There's one big difference between you and me, Scorban." rebuked Chris, gripping his weapon tighter. "I'm good, and you're evil."

"I'll rephrase that." Scorban blinked, his muscles ready to spring into action. "You allow yourself to be limited by things such as honour and chivalry. I am not constrained by such things, and as such my power is greater than that of yours.....as I shall now demonstrate!"

He flung his left wrist up, shooting a circular object from a device inside his sleeve. The silver bladed circle was a chakram, a projectile weapon.

Chris blocked the chakram a split second before it sliced into his face, but the projectile had been meant to distract him. Scorban rushed him, attempting to drive his sword up through Chris' main weak point, the exposed armourless area around his thighs.

The seven branch blade came perilously close to accomplishing this, but it clashed against the white blade of Michelle Memoria. Chris jumped back and thrust outwards at Scorban, but the mercenary had done this before. He pressed his sword upwards against his chest and Michelle Memoria met cold steel.

The young knight and the older sword-for-hire continually locked swords, neither being able to find a weakness or the strength to break through the other's defence. Both of them started to tire, but kept up the fight. Chris wanted to continue after Michelle, and this guy was holding him up. Scorban was simply earning his pay.

Finally, something had to give way. As the two clashed swords together yet again, Scorban suddenly managed to drag his weapon up into Chris' right arm. A normal blade would have crashed off of his arm plates, but the seven branches slid in between them, slicing into his arm. "Agghhh!!!" Chris winced, the branches cutting a deep, raw wound. He moved back quickly, his right arm going slightly numb from the pain. He gritted his teeth, still looking defiantly at his attacker.

"As you can see, armour won't always protect you, kid." spoke Scorban as if he was speaking from experience. "You put up quite a fight, but now it's time I collected on my reward!" He ran towards Chris, his blade poised for the kill.

Chris' endurance was beginning to waver, and his arm was killing him to boot. He wasn't experienced enough to fight this guy, and though he could continue to fight, Scorban would eventually wear him down until he could fight no more. With his wounded arm, Chris' attacks and defence would become much less efficient.

"I can't give up now!!!" he thought angrily to himself, cursing himself for even considering defeat. "Michelle's counting on me....."

The wounded knight's thoughts turned to the Princess. He wondered where she was, if she was alright.....if that mystery man did anything to her, he'd.....

"No!" Chris yelled at his oncoming attacker. "I refuse to give up!!!"

He slashed to his right, blocking Scorban's incoming strike which renewed force. He then struck back hard, and so suddenly that Scorban didn't block him fully. The edge of Chris' divine weapon ripped through Scorban's right shoulder.

The battle-hardened mercenary bit his lip and stepped back in pain, grabbing his shoulder.

"D-damn it!" he growled. He could have sworn that it had hurt more than a sword normally should....

Chris faced his enemy with new determination. "I will save the Princess, no matter what stands in my way!"

Chris' mind drifted to thoughts of Michelle yet again. She was so sweet, and so beautiful.....he wasn't going to let any harm come to her. The memory of her panicked face echoed in his mind.....

This surge of the few memories he had of her seemed to trigger something inside him. He began to feel something inside his heart, as if he felt loved.....

Some kind of reaction began to happen between him and Michelle Memoria. Pink energy began to lance through the hilt and into the blade. The shallow markings that were carved into the divine blade began to glow with the same energy. The angel wings on the side had unfolded, showing off their majestic beauty.

Out of the air, seemingly from all around him, particles of the pink energy were slowly being drawn into the tip of the sword. At first they were slow, but then they left trails of pink in the air as they flew into the tip faster, and a great light began to form on the sword tip.

Chris gasped, looking at the weapon. "What's happening???"

He then looked at Scorban, and sudden thought entered his head.

Chris raised Michelle Memoria and pointed it dead on at Scorban. The blade was resonating with energy now, and the light collecting on the sword tip was growing bigger and brighter every second.

The sword began to shake slightly, but Chris held it firmly and steady. The light was now so bright that it was even blocking out the sun's rays and the colours of the surroundings.

"What the hell is this???" shouted Scorban.

Chris' mind seemed to 'lock on' to Scorban. What he was feeling was amazing.....it was almost as if he was linked with Michelle Memoria.

Then, two words entered his mind, and Chris yelled them as loud as he could.

"GRAND MEMORIA!!!!!!"

The massive buildup of energy on the tip of Michelle Memoria suddenly 'fired'. Chris shuddered from the recoil of the blast, but remained steady, keeping the sword pointed.

The charge of energy rushed towards Scorban at incredible speed, forming a point. It was a massive energy projectile, powered by the love and memories that Chris had for Michelle.

"AAAARGGGHHHHH!!!!!!!" yelled Scorban in terror.

The Grand Memoria hit Scorban with an unearthly force, in a huge explosion of energy and light. It was so powerful that the earth seemed to shake slightly from the blast.

The evil mercenary was blasted away a few feet before landing on the ground with a loud thud. He didn't move.

Chris was breathing heavily, still pointing the sword as before. He was shocked at how much power he'd just discharged, and he held Michelle Memoria up to take a look at it. The sword was back to its former self, before Chris had used Grand Memoria. It was still white, the angel wings were swept back again and the carvings were no longer filled with energy....it was as if it had never fired a Grand Memoria at all.

Chris walked carefully over to his fallen foe, keeping Michelle Memoria ready in case Scorban was just playing dead. However, as he came up to the mercenary, he knew his blow had been a fatal one.

Scorban's armour was smashed, and he was splattered with blood. However, that was just from the armour cutting into him as it was broken apart....the Grand Memoria hadn't caused any wounds. It was the sheer force of the Grand Memoria that had killed him.

Chris looked at himself and his sword in wonder. "This must be what the Goddess was talking about.....when I did that, I felt the love I had for her.....is this what she meant by 'Love's Knight'? Just how powerful am I....?"

He sheathed the divine sword on his back, and turned around, back towards the forest. As he began to walk, so many thoughts filled the young teen's mind. He'd only just discovered that he could even use the Grand Memoria. How many more powers lay dormant within him, waiting to be unlocked?

Whatever the answer, Chris knew that whatever power he had was linked to his feelings for Michelle. Maybe the more determined he was to save her, the more powerful he would become....

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Michelle's kidnapper was tired. He'd stopped riding for a moment to allow the horse to have a drink of water, and so he too could rest. Also, the Princess was beginning to grate on his nerves terribly. Still, he wouldn't have killed her even if he could have. She would have been easy to kill, however.

Or would she....considering what she really was.....?

He looked across the plucky young girl. "It's hard to believe that SHE is....." he thought bitterly to himself. "Still, she does have a pure heart.....and she is beautiful.....hah, perhaps once this world becomes my own, I'll make her my bride!"

Michelle was sitting by the river, next to her horse. Her hands were still bound, but right now she didn't care about her predicament. She was thinking of the young knight who had died back at the castle.

Ever since his death, she hadn't been able to stop thinking of him.

She looked down into the water, looking at her reflection. She hated herself for being what she was.....

"If I wasn't half.....then none of this would have happened, and he might still be alive!" she thought, closing her eyes in her anger.

However, she knew that she was just being silly.....none of this was her fault, and

besides....being what she was was supposed to be something of honour, not of shame.

She began to think of the knight again. She hadn't even gotten his name.....but she smiled a little to herself.

"He reminds me of you....."

"Bye bye!!!!" she shouted back, watching the young boy disappear into the distance.

Michelle ran all the way along the forest path, until she saw a familiar figure.

"Daddy!!!" she shouted happily, running to him.

King Gideon Campbell knelt down, and father and daughter embraced warmly.

"Michelle, my little princess!" he laughed, kissing her cheek. "Where have you been? You were gone quite a while."

"I was chased by a big bad wolf." she replied, hugging her father tightly, then she let go, looking at him. She giggled remembering the boy she'd met. "But my hero rescued me!"

"Your hero?" grinned Gideon, picking his daughter up. "And who was that?"

"A boy.....oh no, I didn't ask him his name!" Her face fell. "We promised each other that we'd get married when we become grown ups!"

"Hehe....my little pumpkin's in love!" laughed Gideon, remembering his days as a kid. The king wasn't exactly as young as he used to be, but did his best to get around the kingdom. This trip out to Cherryglade was one such outing. However, sadness filled his heart. Michelle's discovery of love had made him think of the love he'd had.....and that was cruelly taken away from him.....

The young princess noticed her father was crying. "Daddy, are you crying...?"

Gideon wiped his tears away quickly. "No...no, I'm fine, little Missy...."

The 10 year old was slightly more perceptive than that. "You miss Mommy, don't you....?"

The king was slightly taken aback by Michelle's question. "Yes....I miss your Mommy very much.....but I know that she's watching over us, and I know that she loves both you and me."

He stopped walking for a moment, and put Michelle down. He knelt down and looked at her.

"Michelle, let me tell you something. Love is the most wonderful thing in the whole universe.

However, even greater than that is true love."

"True...love?" said Michelle quizzically. She tilted her head, listening to her father.

Gideon nodded. "Yes.....you'll know it when you feel it, poppet. And when you do, never let the one you love go....."

"I won't, Daddy." smiled Michelle, holding his hand. The two royals began to walk home together.

Gideon's heart was gladdened by the fact that his daughter was becoming such a lovely girl.....but at the same time, he wished her mother could have been alive.

"Jasmine....." he whispered under his breath.

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Michelle sighed. "I wonder if haven't already let my true love go, Daddy....."

Her captor suddenly grabbed her roughly. "It's time to go." he said coldly, mounting her on the horse.

As they galloped away yet again, Michelle wondered if she'd ever see that boy again.....

4 - Dancing With The Fairies

Chapter 3 - Dancing with the Fairies

"So.....this is the Forest of Fairies....."

Chris was stood outside the entrance to that very place, the Forest of Fairies. It simply looked like a massive wall of trees, and the entrance was dark. He felt like if he walked inside, he'd be swallowed up.

The unnatural green of the trees was more noticeable now that he was right up close to the forest. They seemed to be full of life compared to any normal tree or greenery he'd ever seen. Then there was the tale of the fairies. A fairy was a tiny spirit of nature, and all fairies were female. They were said to be made of magic, and that they gave life to whatever they touched. Those who got their hands on their power could be blessed with eternal life, in theory. Chris wasn't expecting trouble, but this forest was hidden for a reason. He'd only found it in the first place thanks to the Hammer & Anvil bartender, and his own keen eyesight. He doubted that the fairies would give a warm welcome to an intruder, even if he was on a mission of good. "Time to go dancing with the fairies....." he quipped to himself, walking into their domain. The thick leafy entrance seemed to swallow him up as he entered it.....

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"Stop your whining, you pipsqueaks!"

The incessant wailing and sniffing of those damn creatures was getting to Geoffrey Eridanus, ESQ. He was as sick as the next man of roaming the blasted forest, but the prize would be well worth it.

Eridanus was a very pompous nobleman, always used to getting his own way. His round face would suggest he was a jolly man, but in fact he was a rather nasty character.

He looked at his captured prize through intrigued brown eyes. His equally brown hair was tied in a posh style ponytail. Draped around his portly frame was his large and favourite red cloak. He looked every inch a posh man....which he was.

He'd inherited his fortune from his late father, who unfortunately had no idea how greedy his son would become. Eridanus had squandered his vast assets on every pleasure and item that he desired, until there was almost nothing left. He lived a life of decadence and disregard for people lower than himself.

However, despite having all his treasure possessions, Eridanus craved something more valuable than these things. Something that no man had the secret to.

The key to eternal life.

He'd become obsessed with the notion, researching it diligently, and paying others to do the same when he got bored. For years, all he found were obscure clues and dead ends, and it

seemed that eternal life was a mere dream.

Then, he found out about the mythical fairies, the sowers of life itself.

He searched high and low for the sacred Forest of Fairies. He learned that they'd chosen to live there in order to guard their life giving powers from people like him. He'd scoffed at this, saying "They're just fairies, what can they possibly do to me? The secret of eternal life should be mine, as I am the one man who truly deserves it!"

One day, he finally located the sacred forest, and took a bold step inside. He met with a few difficulties...it seemed that the fairies had created an illusion to keep trespassers away. However, Eridanus' greed was indeed a powerful force. "I'll tear this blasted forest apart tree by tree if I have to!!!"

He'd begun to destroy the great trees, cutting a path through the forest....but each time he did, more trees seemed to appear. He knew it was the clever illusion trap, and at first was exasperated.

Then he came up with a devious plan. "I'll lure one of those simple creatures out here, then I will trap her and the gift of everlasting life shall be mine!"

He laid his trap, planting a tree just outside the forest. It took a few days, but his prey finally took the bait.

A lone fairy, tiny and fragile, flew out of the forest. Seeing the lone tree struggling to survive, she began to spray fairy dust onto it. It was this fairy dust that gave the gift of life, and enough of it would grant it for eternity.

Eridanus then sprung his trap. He had invented a special fairy catching weapon, an Aerobolt. It was like a crossbow, only as the bolt reached its target it would fire out a dense net, which trapped the fairy inside and prevented her from escaping. Eridanus could then retrieve his target at his leisure.

The poor fairy was taken by surprise by Eridanus and the weapon, and was soon in his hands. He tied her up to the same tree that he'd begun to grow.

Unluckily for him, he discovered that one fairy alone could not generate enough fairy dust to give eternal life. However, the lone fairy's dust was enough to make him feel ten years younger.

So, Eridanus had used the fairy to break through the illusion trap, and pursued the other fairies, catching them one by one.

It had taken him a long time, but now he was but one fairy away from realising his greatest desire.

"Soon....very soon.....I shall live forever!" he declared, laughing loudly. His mad laughter could be heard halfway through the dense forest.

"You have no right to do this!!!" shouted one of the fairies. The tiny being shone with a beautiful light, as all fairies did. Nearly fifty of these lights, all different colours, were glowing around the now fully grown tree, which glowed an extremely unnatural green, due to the effect of having

forty - nine fairies strapped around it.

"Silence!" roared Eridanus, and he pressed the switch on a box that was tied to the middle of three. It was a device he'd made himself after learning about the fairies. They would not willingly produce any fairy dust for him, so he had to force them. The device had exactly fifty wires encircling the tree and strapped into each poor fairy. At the press of the switch, the wires forcefully extracted fairy dust from them.

That's what it was doing now. Every single fairy on the tree cried out in pain and the machine forced their precious dust out of them.

Eridanus smiled with glee. "Soon.....very soon.....now I must find the last fairy....."

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The flora and fauna of the forest all watched Chris' slow progress through the deep undergrowth. It was a very confusing place, and there was no clear path through the natural haven.

Chris was impressed. "This place is even more peaceful than Cherryglade Forest!" he exclaimed. Everywhere he walked he could see beautiful flowers growing everywhere, pretty uncommon for a forest. At some points, the treetops completely blocked out the sun, and he wondered how so many of these plants flourished here.

The animals that were watching him scurried away whenever he turned around to look. "I guess they don't trust me, and judging by what I've heard, I don't blame them." he thought sadly.

It was only a few minutes later that Chris began to notice something odd. He saw something familiar, and stopped walking. "I could have sworn I've seen that rose before....." he said, looking at the ruby red flower.

He shook it off and continued walking. To his surprise, he saw the rose again, in the same place and looking exactly the same as it did.

"OK.....something funny's going on here." The puzzled knight looked around him, and his eyes caught a thin beam of light poking through the undergrowth back down the way he'd came. He walked towards it, and stepped out into the light.

"What the....?" he gasped in surprise.

He was right back outside the forest, where he'd started!

Confused, Chris stepped back inside the undergrowth. He was being sent back to the beginning of the forest no matter how far he walked! Up ahead of him was the same rose, yet again.

It was then that he realised what was going on. "This must be how the fairies stop people getting deeper into the forest.....an illusion." He sighed, and sat down next to the rose. "I was right....they do see me as an intruder."

"I don't want to disturb the fairies, but I have to find Cornelius." He rested his back against the tree behind him. "If only I could make them see I'm not an enemy...."

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"Yes, I believe I saw some guy riding north of here on a white horse. Come to think of it, I remember the young lady with him didn't look best pleased about being there." The old tradesman scratched his head.

"Thanks for your help, sir. You've been very helpful." Wedge smiled at the old man.

"So....her Highness has really been taken by evil-doers?" asked the man. "I hope you find her safe and well."

"Don't worry, we'll make sure she's safe." Wedge let the tradesman go about his business, and walked over to Crystal, who was brushing her hair with a red comb.

"I've got something!" Wedge informed her excitedly. "I think Michelle's been taken north, most likely along the Tradesman's Road!"

"Yeah, but they could have turned off anywhere along there, Wedge." sighed Crystal dejectedly.

"Whoever took her isn't stupid."

"It's better than nothing, Crystal. Don't lose hope!" said Wedge, rallying his friend. "Heh, Chris may even be on his tail as we speak!"

"Or he may be dead....you saw what happened to Commander Westring....." Crystal looked down sadly. She hoped that both Chris and Michelle were safe, but the odds of that were unlikely.

"Don't think like that!" exclaimed Wedge. "Chris isn't one to go down so easily, you know that! Come on, we'd better report this to Commander Rudy!"

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Chris had tried several methods of getting past the illusion trap. He'd tried touching the rose, thinking it was some kind of switch. He'd tried doubling back after going past the rose, and walking away from the forest entrance while keeping it view, so he wouldn't be tricked. However, it was all in vain. Chris was still stuck at the entrance to the domain of the fairies.

"Damn it!" He kicked at the ground in frustration. He'd never find Cornelius now, or Avalon. Michelle was as good as.....

He began to cry, tears rolling down his warm cheeks. He buried his face in his hands and cried softly to himself.

His sadness was broken by a sudden cry of "Help!!!! Somebody HELP!!!!!"

He got to his feet, looking around frantically. He couldn't see anyone, but the voice was close by. He rushed past the rose once more, searching for the damsel in distress....the voice had been female.

Suddenly, something bumped into his chest. "Oof!" he groaned, and looked at what had hit him. "Watch where you're going, buddy!" came an annoyed voice. Chris couldn't believe what he was seeing.

In front of him, frowning at him for bumping into her, was an extremely tiny pink haired girl flying in mid-air with small fluttering wings. She was staring daggers at him through pretty eyes. She emitted a glowing pink light which shone on Chris' armour.

"A.....A fairy?!" gasped Chris. "You do exist????"

"Of course, buster!" answered the fairy sarcastically. "Who else could have made this forest as great as it is? Not that you or any other human who comes here appreciates it!" She glared at

him furiously.

"H-Hey!" frowned Chris, looking angrily at the tiny girl. "I'm not here t cause any trouble for you fairies, and I actually like what you've done with the place!" His annoyance at the fairy faded fast, and his face fell. "I'm trying to find someone, so I can save someone dear to me..."

"Oh..." The fairy's face fell, and she zipped up close to the knight's face. "I'm sorry.....us fairies just naturally think everyone who tries to get in is out to get our fairy dust...." She began to cry, wiping tears from her pretty face.

"Hey....what's wrong.....?" asked Chris. He wished he could hug the fairy, but his being a giant human wasn't helpful. "Were you the one calling for help?"

"Yes...." sniffled the fairy, looking at Chris with frightened eyes. "Someone came....and tricked us. He's kidnapped all my friends, and tied them to a tree, and he's hurting them! He's trying to get all our fairy dust....."

"That's terrible....." Chris shook his head. "Why would anyone want your fairy dust?"

"Our fairy dust has life giving properties...." answered the fairy, fighting back her tears. "We can give full life to any living thing, it's why this forest is so pure and alive. However...." Her voice turned sad. "...when your kind find out about this, many came after us to steal our fairy dust. You see, if enough fairies generate dust at the same time, it can give eternal life to whatever is touched by it. We abandoned the rest of the world and took refuge in this forest, so that mankind could not take from us anymore." She paused, her face full of worry. "This man, who's kidnapped my friends.....he's after that same thing. He needs one more fairy, and he'll have enough fairy dust to give himself immortality!"

"You're all another victim of hate...." sighed Chris, gently touching the fairy's cheek with his finger. "Those humans are driven by their greed for everlasting life. But we're not all like that." The young fairy smiled. "You seem really nice, Mr....."

"Appleyard, Christopher Appleyard." replied Chris, smiling. "Just call me Chris, though. I'm a Knight of the Crown....well a cadet..."

"I'm Ariel!" replied the fairy, giggling. Her face then turned serious again. "You're a knight.....will you please help me and my friends? Please....?" She put her hands together, begging him. Chris smiled. "You didn't even need to ask. Of course I'll help you!"

"Thank you!!! Thank you!!!" shouted Ariel, spinning around in the air excitedly. "Come on, let's go! I'll stop our illusion trap so you can get through. We'd better hurry though!"

She snapped her fingers and the path before them changed. the rose and the tree behind it vanished, and before them, a distinct green path snaked deeper into the magical forest. Ariel zipped off along the opened path, and Chris ran after her.

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Geoffrey Eridanus slowly stalked through the thick foliage. The smell of the flowers around him detested him. He'd never been one for sweet smelling plants, and so he took great pleasure in stomping on them.

"Once I achieve immortality, I'll have the bloody place chopped down! The fairies shall be added to my personal collection, mwahahaha!" He showed a toothy grin as he continued searching for the last elusive fairy.

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Chris was almost out of breath as he finally caught up with his new fairy friend. She was certainly fast for a tiny girl....

Ariel was stopped, looking in horror at something. "Ohhh.....it's terrible...." she said quietly.

They were behind a thick bush, and Chris and Ariel were looking through a thick gap. Chris frowned as he saw a tall tree glowing with many small lights. The tree itself was a brighter green than all the rest, and wires were wrapped around it, each one leading into the lights.

Upon closer examination, Chris could see that the 'lights' were in fact fairies!

"That fiend...." he said under his breath, his fist shaking in fury. "How can someone do this?!"

"Like you said, he must be driven by his greed.....and anyone driven by greed will do anything." replied Ariel, looking in desperation at her friends.

"I don't see him around.....he must be looking for you." observed Chris, poking his head through the bush slightly. "Now's our chance! I'll free your friends while you keep a lookout. If he comes back, I'll deal with him." The teen gave Ariel a knowing wink.

"You got it, Chris!" Ariel winked back, and the two of them walked through the bush into the clearing.

The fairies, still in pain from the extractor, were shocked to see that another human had entered their forest. However, once they saw that Ariel was flying around free, they sensed that he wasn't a threat to them.

Chris looked all around the tree, and winced as he saw the poor fairies in pain. He had to shut off that infernal machine! "Don't worry, I'm here to save you!" he said fairly loudly, so that all the fairies could hear him.

He walked around the tree until he saw the device, a large black box. Masses of wires came out of it, and Chris wondered how such a device had been made.

"I see the switch....this should do it...." His gauntleted hand reached out for the switch.

"AAAAHHHH!!!! Hellllpppp!!!!!" screamed a familiar tiny voice. Chris whirled around to see Ariel getting wrapped in a net! She dropped to the ground, completely entangled. The determined young fairy tried to force her way out of the net, but it was no use. She was stuck fast.

"At last....the final addition to my collection!" declared a high and mighty voice. Behind Ariel was Eridanus. "Ah, it seems I have a visitor! Where are my manners? I am Geoffrey Eridanus, ESQ." he spoke with impeccable courtesy. "Who might you be, young sir? I take it you're interested in the secret of these delightful little creatures as well?" He laughed with an annoying guffaw, and straightened his monocle. "I must thank you for delivering the last of these annoying little brats to me, they have been oh so difficult to get a hold of."

"You make me sick, Eridanus..." Chris glared at the greed filled 'noble'. "I've got no interest in the secret of eternal life, and neither should you! It's not something that mankind is meant to know!"

Eridanus's tone changed very suddenly. "I won't be lectured on ethics by a young upstart like you! You're all the same, you military types!" He thought Chris was a member of the Galatean army. "Well, I'll have you know this! I, Geoffrey Eridanus ESQ, am one of the greatest men this world shall ever know! I DESERVE eternal life!"

He held up Ariel, still stuck in the net. "As soon as I hook this little wench up to the extractor, I shall have what I desire!"

"Some of us don't agree with what you want!" Chris drew Michelle Memoria. "You're one of the

most selfish people I've ever met, and I'll be damned if I let you bring suffering to these fairies any longer!"

Eridanus drew his own weapon, a crossbow similar to his Aerobolt. However, this was loaded with arrows that glowed with a strange light. "I call this the Aurabolt!" he grinned, holding it proudly, then aiming it at Chris. "The arrows have been augmented by the fairies' magical dust. I've thoroughly tested them, and they're more than capable of punching through that armour of yours! Unless you want me to prove it, I suggest you back off, you whippersnapper!"

The posh villain stepped towards the tree, ready to hook Ariel up to the whirring extractor. The other fairies could only watch helplessly.

"Then you leave me no choice!" Chris pointed Michelle Memoria straight Eridanus.

"GRAND MEMORIA!!!!!"

The burst of energy flew at the crazed noble, but he was sharper than he looked. He managed to jump away from the attack, but barely. It tore his top hat from his head, and vaporized it. The Grand Memoria smacked straight into a tree, causing it to crash down. It dragged other trees with it, each one tearing up the ground as their roots were pulled out. The fallen trees began to grow dark, losing their healthy green colour.

"Don't DO THAT!!!!" screamed Ariel. "You'll destroy the forest!!!"

"My best hat!!!!" wailed Eridanus, his voice filled with rage. "YOU'LL PAY FOR THAT, YOU DEVIL!!!!" He took aim with his Aurabolt and let loose one of the powerful arrows. It rushed towards Chris, glowing with the magic of the fairies.

"Woah!!!" Chris angled his body so that the arrow flew underneath his shoulder, and it stuck in a tree just behind him. However, he'd only JUST dodged it.

"Not so clever without your fancy big bangs, are we my little friend????" laughed the diabolical Eridanus mockingly. He was slowly moving towards the tree while keeping his weapon pointed at Chris. "Take.....this!!!!!"

He fired shot after shot at Chris, who struggled to dodge the quick arrows. He was forced to roll and dive all over as the arrows whizzed past him. A less agile person would have become a pin-cushion.

"Grrrr...." growled Chris, frustrated. He couldn't get close enough to use his sword, because the second he rushed Eridanus, he would be shot to bits by the Aurabolt. All the time Eridanus was moving close to the tree and if he got there, he'd hook Ariel to the extractor and receive eternal life, and he couldn't let that happen!

He couldn't use Grand Memoria as he would likely destroy a lot of the precious forest. It was the fairies' home, he had no right to tear it apart like that!

Suddenly, Chris had one idea. It was risky, but it was his only chance. He'd kill two birds with one stone!

"You've think you've got all your bases covered, Eridanus." he called out to the entrepreneur, "but you forgot one thing. Machines can be broken!!!! Fairies, look out!!!!"

He took aim at the extractor. He hoped that by the Goddess he didn't hit any of the fairies.

Chris scratched his head, embarrassed. "Hah....it was no big deal. I can't just let injustice like that happen."

"Thanks to you, we can once again live in peace!" Ariel came up to his face and smiled. "We have to reward you somehow, but I fear there is nothing we can give you." She and the rest of the fairies looked crestfallen.

Chris laughed a little. "I don't want a reward, but I would like to ask you a question. Do you know of an Albert Cornelius? It's urgent that I find him, and I was told he resided in this place."

"Cornelius?" smiled Ariel. "He's really nice, like you! He lives in a house that is hidden even deeper within our forest. In return for keeping this place secret we agreed to let him live here. He's such a great person!"

She pointed off to the east. "Keep following the path east. Look for the bell on the side of a big tree. When you ring it, Cornelius' house will appear. He hasn't had any visitors besides us for a long time however....but I'm sure he'll be happy to help you! By the way, you could do with this!" Ariel suddenly began to fly around Chris, showering him with golden fairy dust. Instantly, Chris felt revitalised, as if he'd just had a great night's sleep. Also, his earlier wound from fighting Scorban was healed fully.

"Thank you very much!" smiled Chris, looking at all of the fairies. "I promise I'll never reveal this place to anyone."

"Thank you, Chris." Ariel bowed slightly. "We wish you luck on your journey as well. I hope you find that person dear to you. I can tell she means a lot to you.....we all can. We can feel the love in your heart.....we've never felt such a great love from a human before."

"Yeah.....she means a lot to me....." Chris nodded, and hitched up his armour. "Goodbye, and thanks for the help!"

"Thank you again for everything, Sir Knight!" grinned Ariel. "Everyone, let's give Chris a fairy goodbye!"

The fairies all rushed towards Chris, who was shocked at first. Every single one of them planted a kiss somewhere on Chris' face, and Ariel kissed his nose. The young knight blushed a deep red. "Uhhh....ummmm.....thanks!" he said, shyly.

The fairies all giggled, and made a new formation in the air, spelling out a message:

BYE BYE, CHRIS!

They all waved at their saviour, who waved back as he ventured on through the forest, alone.

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"So, the Princess has really been kidnapped? Oh woe for us all!"

"Who would commit such a monstrous act? Perhaps the Halcyon Imperium?"

"I hear the army is blocking all main roads through the kingdom! I don't think the kidnapper will get very far!"

The towns of Galatea were buzzing with the news of the Campbell Castle incident. Some people were even in a panic, fearing invasion.

Roads through the kingdom were now blockaded by the army, who were on the lookout for

Michelle and her captor.

Little did they realise, he'd already slipped past them.....

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Chris was to walk for another half an hour before he finally happened upon the place that Ariel told him about.

There was a thick wall of foliage in front of him, and it seemed impassable. However, a thorough search of the bushes revealed a tiny brass bell.

"The bell tolls....." thought Chris out loud as he tapped the instrument.

It rang much louder than he expected, and the piercing sound forced him to cover his ears. Fairies were small, but they were big when it came to action!

When Chris uncovered his ringing ears, he saw that the wall of leaves had vanished, leaving an opening which opened out into a beautiful clearing. There were a vast amount of flowers here, and a small pond, in which frogs were playing about. Insects flew around the flowers and trees, and there was even a couple of birds watching the young knight enter. Unlike before, they did not shy away from Chris. It seemed that like the fairies, they trusted him now.

Ahead of all this natural beauty was a wooden house. It was rather splendid for a house only made of wood, and looked rather like a miniature mansion.

"Nature didn't make this house...." said Chris knowingly. He knew magic when he saw it.

He walked up the front door, which was coloured red, yet still wooden like the rest of the house. Brushing his hair out of his face, he knocked on the door.

The door opened, and Chris came face to face with a fairly old man. He wore tiny spectacles on his blue, narrowed eyes, and a lengthy white beard hung down from his jaw, twinned with a white moustache. He was dressed in a dark blue cloak with red highlights, and he looked at his visitor with inquisitive eyes. Chris had no doubt in his mind that this was Albert Cornelius.

"Well hello there! This is quite a surprise!" beamed the magician, looking Chris up and down. "I haven't had a visitor in 20 years, aside from those delightful fairies."

"Hello, sir." said Chris politely. "Are you Albert Cornelius?"

"Indeed I am, young man." smiled the wise old wizard. "And you are Christopher James Appleyard, of the Knights of the Crown, serving the Kingdom of Galatea."

Chris was taken aback. "How did you.....?"

"I'm a magician, my friend. Mind reading is one of the many abilities I've perfected in my solitude. Please, come in!" He gestured with his hands for the young knight to enter, and Chris did so.

The inside of the wooden house couldn't be more different from the outside. It was like a mansion! A lush, blue carpet adorned the entire floor, and the walls were filled with wonderful, varied paintings. On the shelves around the room were many pots and containers, obviously for storing magical items.

"Wow....." said an impressed Chris. "You did all this with magic?"

"Yes." replied the wizard, chuckling a little. "A magician's got to have his creature comforts, you know!" He sat down in an old rocking chair, which was next to a wide black fireplace. The ancient chair creaked as the old man began to rock gently in it.

"You're not here to ask about me, though." he said suddenly. "You wish to know where Avalon

is."

Chris wasn't surprised now, knowing that Cornelius had read his mind already. "Yes....I was told that you were the only one who knows where it can be found. I must get there.....the fate of the world may rest upon it....."

"....And the life of the one you love." finished Cornelius, nodding. "My friend, few have ever found the ancient fortress of the angels, and those who did never returned."

He stood up, and waved his hand in the air. A shimmering circle appeared in front of Chris, and showed him something.....a large castle, ruined but still standing firm. Several towers jutted out from it, including a central one that dwarfed the rest. The castle looked white, but was decaying and parts of it had turned brownish, having been weathered away by time.

Chris had seen this place before, during his conversation with the Goddess of Love. "That's Avalon...."

"Yes. It is a mere shadow of its former self now, as the angels left it long ago. Without the angels there, it has fallen victim to the hands of time. Yet its still stands as the only barrier between existence, and the Goddess of Hate." Cornelius waved his hand again, and something else appeared.

Lines began to draw in the air, seemingly random. They twisted and curved and seemed to mean nothing. Small and large dots also began to pop up at random places in the air. It all seemed to be pointless at first...

Then, Chris began to recognise the shapes, and the locations of the dots.

"It's a map.....a map of the world....." he thought out loud, amazed.

"Avalon is not an easy place to find, young Chris." spoke Cornelius as the map finished drawing. "There is only one path to reach it, and it will take you across most of the kingdom."

A large red dot appeared on the map, somewhere around the southeast of Galatea. Chris noticed something peculiar about it.

"Isn't that...the centre point of the world...?" he asked.

"Hmmm....very perceptive!" grinned Cornelius, 'zooming' the map out. It now represented the entire planet, as if they were looking at it from space. The red dot that showed Avalon was right in the centre of the planet.

"It will be a dangerous journey for you, of that I am sure." said Cornelius. "However, you have the heart, the courage and the skills to see it through. However....you must make haste, my young friend."

He zoomed the map in this time, and it centred on a point close to a large lake in Galatea, which Chris knew as Lake Angelis. The map then turned into a view of the lake itself. They could see what was happening there at that moment!

A white horse was galloping next to the lake, so close that they could see the reflection of it, and its two riders in the lake. Chris gasped as he recognised the riders.

The first was his opponent back at the castle, the one who had killed him.....and the second was Michelle, tied up!

"Michelle!" he yelled, as if trying to speak to her through the 'map'.

"You know what will happen if they reach Avalon first." said Cornelius, but he smiled as if he knew something. "However, even if they do, all is not lost. She may be the key to the Seal, but she will not open it willingly."

Chris looked at the wizard, puzzled. "What do you mean, she's the key to the Seal?"

"The Princess is the only one who can open the Seal. However, her captor will have to force her to do so, meaning you have more time than you believe." answered the wise magician.

"However, now is not the time for questions, my young friend."

He waved his hands once more, and the view of Lake Angelis became the map again. It then vanished in a puff of smoke, and reappeared in mid air as a parchment. Cornelius plucked it from the air and gave it to Chris.

The knight unfurled the old paper, and saw that it was the very same map they'd been looking at. He also noticed three dots, all of them glowing on the paper! One of them was the red dot which symbolised Avalon, another was blue, and a third was pink.

"You won't find a map like this anywhere else." grinned Cornelius, pointing at the three dots.

"The red dot is the location of Avalon. the blue dot is your present location. The pink dot is the location of the Princess."

"Amazing..... now I won't get lost, and I'll know how much time I have left...." Chris saw that the Michelle dot was moving gradually near Lake Angelis.

"You'd best get moving, Chris. If you hurry, you may be able to catch up to them. Do not lose heart if you don't, however. All is not lost unless the Seal is opened." said Cornelius.

"Thanks.....I'll do my best." Chris rolled the map up and shook Cornelius' hand. "Thank you for your help."

"Anytime, my friend." smiled Cornelius. "Glad to be of service!" He watched as Chris headed for the door, and then said one more thing. "And.....before you go, I know about your meeting with the Goddess...."

"You do?!" Chris gasped, wondering how Cornelius could have gotten that from his mind. "In that case.....can you tell me what 'Love's Knight' means?"

"The Love's Knight.....even I know little about this legend." Cornelius rubbed his beard thoughtfully. "The Tale of the Two Goddesses mentions that before she bonded herself with the world, the Goddess of Love said that one day, a champion of love would come, and he would be called 'Love's Knight'. A knight imbued with the power of true love, able to wield incredible power and destroy the dark emotion of hate."

"I see.....it's just.....she called me that before I left her realm...." Chris paused, letting this information sink in. "I must go.....thank you, again." Chris left the house, leaving the old wizard along once again.

Cornelius stared out of the window, watching Chris leave his little place. "He's still unaware of his destiny.....and I fear he may not be able to take the pain he will suffer.....but he is indeed the one....."

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Darkness.

Blackness.

Emptiness.

Three of the traits of Hate.

It was rather fitting the person currently surrounded by them. She lay dormant, only her deep subconscious knowing what transpired in the outside world. A world she had not known for over a thousand years now.

She wanted to rend that world, destroy the precious life that her sister had created. She wanted to recreate it as per her own desire, into a living Hell.

"No....the world is not enough for me.....everything that lives shall soon bow before their new master....."

The void still binded her, as strong as it had since was placed there. She remembered the great battle, being struck into submission by those cursed angels.....and then blasted into the void by the one thing she hated the most.....

Her sister.

Her body lay still in the void of the Seal, unable to break free because of the holy barrier forced upon her. However, her precious power, the sweet aroma of Hate, had not been stemmed by the Seal. She had continued to force it upon the world, despite her sister becoming a barrier against it. She was all that stood between her and domination.

Only, she had found a truly weak minded fool. One who craved power and glory. He believed that by opening the Seal, he would gain it. However, he would make an excellent champion of hate.

"Soon.....soon I will be free.....and then, dear sister.....I'll send you, this world, and this universe to a new dimension of pain and suffering!"

Biding her time behind the Seal of Avalon, the Goddess of Hate continued to manipulate her pawn.....

5 - Chasing Downstream

Chapter 4 - Chasing Downstream

After leaving Albert Cornelius' secluded home, Chris continued to walk through the magical Forest of Fairies. It wasn't until about twenty minutes later that he finally emerged from the realm of the fairies.

Chris pushed aside a thick bush of hanging branches, and daylight welcomed him once again. He could see far into the distance from this rather high up position. To the north he could see a vast mountain range, with snowy peaks rising high up into the blue sky, beyond the floating clouds. Further down and to the northeast, the great city known simply as Galatea Capital rose up, surrounded by a great grassy plain. It was a shining symbol of peace for the kingdom.

"It's about time I got back out in the open...." mused the knight, turning back to face the forest. "It sure is larger than it looks...."

He took the magic map that Cornelius had given him, and looked at his and Michelle's dots. Michelle was still somewhere around Lake Angelis, which was about 5 miles northeast from Chris' position.

"I'll never catch up if I'm on foot...." Chris rubbed his chin, trying to think. "At this rate, they'll be at Avalon before I get anywhere close...."

"Wait a minute!" he exclaimed. He glanced again at the map. "Every lake must have a river!" On the map, a long and curvy blue line led from Lake Angelis towards the mountain range in the north. The map labelled it as Burgeld River, and Chris was only a kilometre or so from it.

"That's it!" he grinned. "I can use the river to get to the lake in double quick time!"

With no time to waste, Chris ran towards the part of the river closest to him. He spied a shallow valley in the distance; that had to be it!

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"Worthless animal...." Michelle's captor was looking at his white coloured steed, which had dropped dead of exhaustion. He'd pushed it too far, but he didn't care.

"We'll be walking the rest of the way, Princess." he spoke quickly.

Michelle was looking at the dead horse, and she felt sorry for the poor animal. "How could you do that...?" she spoke angrily. "You ran that poor horse into the ground. Don't you care about anyone or anything?!"

"Shut...UP!" Michelle's kidnapper grabbed her roughly by her wrist, and started pulling her along with him.

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"So this is Burgeld River."

Chris was looking down at the fast flowing river, which cut through the high area of land he was currently at. The Burgeld River had been discovered by an explorer named Burgeld, and was very peculiar. It always flowed at a fast speed, despite the weather. Of course, even this river would freeze over in the winter. At any other time, however, it was the fastest river in the world, and the most dangerous. Wading in the river was suicide, and even on a boat safety could not be guaranteed.

The river was also what had created Lake Angelis, and as such was the fastest way to get there. "I don't like the looks of this.....I hate water...." Chris sighed as he headed down to the river bank. The current looked furious, and even his armour wouldn't prevent him from being swept away. The young knight saw some thick trees next to him. If he was going to get down the river, he needed a boat, and he knew what the next best thing was.

"GRAND MEMORIA!!!!!!"

One of the trees came crashing down, and the earth seemed to shake it as it smashed into the ground. Chris wasted no time, and cut at the trees, getting rid of the leaves and cutting the tree down to size, leaving just a small but thick log.

A couple more Grand Memorias and yet more cutting later, and Chris had the four logs he needed. "I sure hope those trees grow back fast." he thought, hoping he hadn't damaged the environment too much.

He created six long and sturdy beams of wood with deft cuts of his sword. He then attached the beams to the four logs, connecting them all together by hammering in some wooden pegs that he'd also made. Finally, he made a long pole, for steering his craft in the water.

Chris stood back and admired his work. He never thought his days of woodcutting as a kid would amount to anything, but they had helped him greatly here.

Chris' own personal river raft was now ready to disembark!

He pushed the raft down to the river bank, and slid it slightly into the river. The water lapped at the bow of the craft, wanting to push it down the huge river.

He pushed the steering pole against the grassy bank, and the raft was pushed into the water. The current began to take the craft along with it, and soon Chris was heading downstream.

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The wooden rowing boat sailed down the river, its occupants scanning the surroundings for any unsuspecting river travellers.

These men were not nice and friendly people out for a little day trip. They were the River Pirates. The River Pirates were simply that; a group of men who robbed anyone who travelled down 'their' rivers. They had no qualms about killing anyone either, and they were led only by their greed and desire for riches.

Their leader, a grizzled old seadog going by the moniker of Skullbeard, was the most fearsome of

the bunch. He wore a black bandanna with a skull and crossbones design on it, and a black tunic with golden edges as well as matching black trousers. Obviously, he'd stolen this uniform from some unfortunate soul. Skullbeard didn't care much for his victims, however. His aged green eyes kept watch for victims, while his men rowed his small but mighty boat through the treacherous waters.

The old pirate was slightly off his rocker, which meant he could be as much of a danger to those around him as well as any poor souls who crossed his path. He had delusions that he was a grand pirate on the open seas.

"The tides ride with us, me hearties!" he declared with glee. His men simply ignored him, grumbled a little and continued to row, but they didn't consider mutiny. The last man who'd tried that had had his body rearranged by Skullbeard's cutlass.

The boat sped on, leaving a trail of waves down the river. Eventually, they rounded a steep corner, past a low embankment with overhanging bushes. Skullbeard suddenly sighted a potential victim.

"To the east, lads!" he bellowed, squinting to try and make out his quarry. "There be a man of armour before us! He'll have plenty of worth on him, I'm sure!" He stroked his white beard, thinking. It didn't take long for the maddened old man to reach a decision.

"Make haste, lads! Let's waylay this iron clad landlubber!"

The River Pirates' boat began to move faster through the medium deep water, closing in on their target.

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Chris was no expert at seamanship, but he'd been taught the basics in Knights of the Crown training. He'd never actually thought he'd end up making use of that training.

At least it was a pleasant ride. His ramshackle raft was holding up well, and the ride was rather smooth. The sheer speed of the river alarmed him somewhat, but he felt sure he could navigate through any hazards he could come across.

He sighed a little and sat down. The hard wood underneath him wasn't very comfortable, but it was better than nothing. He took out the map and checked his location.

There was about a mile left to go to Lake Angelis. Michelle was still somewhere close by, and hadn't moved very far from when Chris last checked the map. "They're moving a lot slower now.....they must be on foot!" deduced the river-bound knight.

This was good news! Chris knew that Michelle and her captor couldn't move as fast on foot, as the kidnapper would have to wait for Michelle to keep up. Chris however had no such problem, and could move much faster. In a couple of hours, he would finally reach them!

"Hang on, Michelle....." He said, looking at Michelle's pink dot. "I'm nearly there!"

Suddenly, he heard shouts from behind him. He got to his feet, steadying himself on the raft, and looked into the distance.

Behind him was a small wooden boat, with several rough looking types on board. At the front of the craft was an aged and demented looking man. Chris could only guess that these guys were not looking for a nice friendly chat.

The shouting was being done by Skullbeard. As the boat came close to Chris' raft, the knight was

finally able to hear the old man's threats.

"Ahoy there, landlubber! This river be the domain of the River Pirates, and ye must pay a toll! Hand over all yer goods and yer vessel, and we might let ye crawl back to whatever place ye came from!"

Chris eyed the pirates. "I am a Knight of the Crown, in service of the Kingdom of Galatea! I hereby order you to drop your weapons at once!"

The pirates laughed, and Skullbeard laughed the hardest. "Har har! A Knight of the Crown, ye say? Ye be just a young cabin boy!"

Chris ignored the mocking laughter of the river bandits. "I'm on an important mission, and I don't have time to play around with a bunch of washed up seaman."

The group stopped laughing, and Skullbeard looked at Chris with his best menacing face. "Ye dare make a mockery of I, the great Skullbeard?!" he growled, pointing his cutlass at Chris. "I'll keelhaul ye, you little swine!"

The boat began to move to the right of Chris' raft. Chris did his best to speed his ship up, but the boat was better designed for the water; its sleek bow swept through the water like it wasn't even there, while the simple straight front of the raft met more resistance from the river.

Soon enough, the pirates were right alongside the knight's raft. They glared at him and drew their weapons. Some held knives and swords, while two of them had crossbows.

"When I'm done with ye, there won't be a hair on yer head left, sunshine!" Skullbeard grinned evilly. "FIRE A BROADSIDE!!!!!"

"Aye aye, Captain!!!!" shouted the two crossbowmen. They let loose their arrows, which shot towards Chris.

Chris quickly ducked and covered his head, making sure his arms were angled towards the incoming missiles. The arrows bounced off his arm plates, and dropped onto the deck of his raft.

"Curses!" hissed Skullbeard, witnessing the failure of the attack. "Can't you poltroons hit anything?!"

"He....he's wearing armour, Captain!" stammered one of the crossbowmen, fearful of a reprisal. "Excuses, excuses!" roared the irate pirate captain. "Turn him into a pincushion before I turn ye into fish food!!!"

The two scared crossbowmen jumped at the thought and quickly tried to reload their weapons. However, Chris was one step ahead. "Call that a broadside, Skullbeard?" he taunted, grinning and raising Michelle Memoria. "THIS is a broadside!" He pointed the divine sword at his men huddled at the side of the boat.

"GRAND MEMORIA!!!!!"

The powerful pink light sent a bright reflection across the blue rushing water as it streaked across the river. It blasted into the pirates, knocking all but two of them and Skullbeard overboard. The thugs yelled in pain as they were flung aside like toys, and there was an accompanying splash for each one that ended up in the drink.

Skullbeard's temper was now flaring at maximum. He totally flipped! "Ram that little whelp!!!!" he ordered loudly. The remaining two of his cohorts immediately steered the boat hard left, making it head quickly towards Chris' craft. Chris tried to steer away from the incoming pirates, but he was one man versus two, and their rowing was stronger than his.

The boat lurched violently into Chris' raft, and both craft shook with the force of the impact.

Chris nearly lost his footing, but managed to keep steady, unlike one of the rowing pirates, who lost his balance and fell on to the raft.

"Kill that scurvy scum, ye pockmarked buffoon!" shouted Skullbeard with fury, waving his arms around.

"Yes Cap'n!" The dislodged pirate got to his feet and faced Chris, wielding a scimitar, a curved blade. He swiped at Chris, grinning nastily.

However, he wasn't much of a swordfighter, unlike the well-trained Chris. The agile knight easily dodged the attack and slashed upwards with Michelle Memoria, striking very close to the hilt. The sword was knocked out of the pirate's hand, and dropped into the unforgiving current of the river.

"Uh-oh....." said the pirate, fearing for his life.

He expected Chris to finish him off, but the knight would only kill people if absolutely necessary.

"My advice, find a better and more friendly career." said Chris, before winding up and punching the bandit square in the face. The thug was knocked off the raft and into the water.

However, he couldn't relax just yet. The second pirate was about to jump onto the raft.

Chris quickly pushed away from the boat with his pole, just as the dim-witted thug jumped.

"Yaaahhhh!!!!!" he shouted as he fell into the river, and was lost from sight.

Skullbeard thumped the deck furiously. "Useless incompetents! I'll deal with ye meself, ye scurvy brat!" The deranged seadog jumped from his boat onto the raft. Moments later, his boat crashed into the river bank, breaking into pieces.

Skullbeard's eyes were firmly locked onto the little whelp that dared to make a mockery of him, and he thrust out dangerously with his silver cutlass. The weapon was designed for quick and precise slashes, and its length allowed for some good defence, too.

Chris narrowly evaded the long tip of the cutlass, and delivered a powerful 360 degree back-swing which crashed into the delicate weapon. It was easily knocked away by the thicker and stronger Michelle Memoria.

However, Skullbeard was no amateur. He swept his weapon back upwards, and it sliced up Chris' right leg and blocked the next blow from the knight. Luckily for Chris, his leg armour prevented the cutlass from inflicting a nasty wound.

"I be tired of playing games, lad!" hissed the old pirate, swishing the cutlass around wildly. The lightweight weapon was so quick that Chris could barely get an attack in.

Suddenly, Skullbeard locked his cutlass with Chris' divine greatsword. The two fighters pushed against each other furiously, each trying to break the lock. However, though Chris had youthfulness on his side, Skullbeard was a much more muscular man, and slowly began to push Chris towards the edge of the raft.

"'Tis the end for you, me hearty!" laughed Skullbeard, grimacing a bit under the strain of pushing Chris. "Take a good look at yer grave!"

Chris looked down, and saw he was on the very edge of the raft, about to fall into the frighteningly fast river. He struggled against the mighty muscles of Skullbeard, and knew he had to do something fast.

"Sorry, but it's not my time to die yet!" he retorted.

Suddenly, Chris broke the lock. He quickly slid his sword free of Skullbeard's cutlass, ducking down as quick as a flash. Before the senile old pirate could react, Chris pushed him.

"Yaarrggghh!!!" The old seadog fell backwards onto the raft, dropping his cutlass. He struggled to get to his feet, his old age slowing him down.

Chris stood, ready to run the old man through, but that wasn't his plan.

"You're a pretty poor excuse for a pirate. You can't even beat a kid like me!" he taunted, laughing a little.

His words had just the reaction he wanted. "I'll crucify ye, scoundrel!!!!!"

The now enraged Skullbeard ran straight at Chris, hoping to tackle him and knock the living daylights out of him.

The youthful knight was ready for him, however. He expertly jumped out of the way as Skullbeard charged.

The leader of the River Pirates' eyes widened in surprise, as he missed Chris and fell straight off the raft into the river. "Aaargggghhh!!!!!"

Chris watched as he left Skullbeard behind. The old pirate floundered in the river, trying to reach land. It looked like he couldn't swim!

"Bon voyage!" grinned Chris, waving as his raft left the defeated pirate behind.

His ears then picked up a sound. It sounded like a massive torrent of water pouring down something.

Ahead of him, the river abruptly ended, and went over a steep cliff. Chris' heart stopped as he saw a.....

"Waterfall!!!!!" he gasped.

Chris' raft was hurtling on towards the waterfall at full speed. There were no rocks for him to jump to, and no way he could fight back against a current this powerful.

"Damn! What am I going to do?????" he thought out loud. The cliff loomed ahead of him, the sound of the rushing water growing louder.....

Then he remembered something from his childhood. Something that someone close to him had once told him.

"If in doubt, take a leap of faith. Sometimes it's all you can do.....always remember that...."

Chris smiled, the memory of a voice he hadn't heard for a long time coming back to him.

"Thanks, Father....."

The raft reached the edge of the sheer drop, and Chris closed his eyes. As the raft began to disappear under his feet, he took his leap of faith.

The knight jumped from the craft, and down into the dangerous waters below.

Chris gasped as he realised two things. First, he was diving into a massive lake...it had to be Lake Angelis!

Second, he remembered he was afraid of heights, and went into slight shock upon seeing how far he was falling.

Suddenly there was a sound of metal, like a sword being drawn. A white object then fell past him into the plunge pool below. Chris cursed himself when he realised his armour sheath was empty!

"Damn it! Michelle Memoria!!!"

He stared down at the waterfall's plunge pool. The current was fast and furious, and was coming towards him very fast. There was no sign of his lost sword.

The young knight took a deep breath and closed his eyes. Seconds later, he plunged deep into the base of the waterfall.....

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Underneath a rock outcrop, Michelle and her captor rested. Even the twisted warrior was in need of a rest. He was annoyed at himself for showing such weakness, and had a bad feeling that they were being followed.

He looked back down the shallow rocky cliff they'd climbed. The splendour of Lake Angelis still showed, even a mile away, and even though he cared not for such things, he had to admit it would be a nice place to live.

"I think I'll have my castle built here once I take power." he said out loud towards Michelle. "What do you think, your Highness?" He gave her a dirty look.

"If you ever built a castle there, I'd make sure it got turned into ruins...." she replied, with poison in her voice.

"Ha!" snorted her kidnapper, who still hadn't revealed his identity to her. "The only castle in ruins will be yours. No-one will be able to stand against me, and besides, you wouldn't. You're going to be my bride, after all!"

Michelle felt and looked sick. "I'd rather die than be the wife of such a wretched man as you!" The black hooded man didn't take the comment nicely. He leaned over and roughly grabbed Michelle by her jaw. "You won't have a choice, my DEAR...," he pulled her head sharply as he said 'Dear', hurting her neck, "...Princess! And I'd watch your tongue if I were you, because trust me, if death is what you wish for, I can give you a very slow and painful one!"

He let go of her roughly, and stood up. The frightened but defiant Princess glared at him, nursing her aching jaw and neck.

"We move now, Princess!" he spoke, taking her wrist in the same rough manner he always did, and pulling her along with him, further up the cliff.

She could do nothing but comply, and her hope was beginning to fade fast.....even though she felt an odd flutter in her heart. By some strange instinct, she looked back towards the lake, as if she realised someone was following them.

"If anyone is there.....please, save me....."

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6 - Into the Depths Of Danger

Chapter 5 - Into the Depths of Danger

He slowly opened his eyes, the light pouring in slowly.

"Ughhhh.....where am I....?" groaned Chris, slowly getting to his feet. Looking below him, he saw that he'd been lying on sand.

Looking up, he saw a massive body of water, and he was on the coastline of it.

"Lake Angelis, huh?" he thought out loud.

The huge lake was about 2 miles wide, and quite deep. Half of it was surrounded by cliffs, and Chris could see the waterfall he'd jumped from among them.

"I must have been washed ashore....and the impact on the water must have knocked me out...." He rubbed his head, checking for any injuries. He didn't find any, but knew he was lucky to be alive. Had he been swept underwater, he would have drowned.

As the knight tried to think what to do next, a voice greeted him. "Hey there, sonny!"

Behind him was an elderly man, carrying a red fishing rod and a bagful of fish. He looked around 60 years old, and greeted Chris with a warm friendly smile. He wore green fishing gear and a pair of boots in a light shade. He had a full head of grey hair, despite his age.

"Uhh...hello." replied Chris politely, though a little confused as to how this man hadn't found him before.

"I ain't seen you around these parts before, lad!" grinned the old fisherman. "I'm Giles Caffrey, fisherman extraordinaire, and the best bloody fisherman in Galatea!"

"Uhhh.....I'm -" Chris started to introduce himself, but was interrupted.

Giles started to go into a long and winding speech about his fishing exploits how he'd lived at the lake since he was a boy and about his quest to catch the Great Octopus.

Chris just stood there dumbfounded and unimpressed as the fisherman carried on talking, which started to become gibberish.

"- and so, the Great Octopus escaped my clutches yet again! I'll get him next time though, oh boy I will! Maybe I need a bigger net....or some juicier bait? I wonder how much bait like that would cost...?"

"Ahem...." Chris coughed, trying to get Giles' attention.

"Hmmm...that'll set me back quite a bit. Do octopi even like those things....?"

"AHM...." Chris coughed louder. This old man was getting on his nerves. He didn't want to hear about fish!

"Some help might be good, but then I wouldn't get the glory...after all I am the greatest fisherman -"

"HEY!!!" yelled Chris, exasperated.

Giles jumped a little. "Waah! Hold your horses, boy....no need to get tetchy with me! I was just talking to you, that's all!"

"Hmph....well...." Chris shook his head. "I'm Chris Appleyard, a Knight of the Crown. I need some help.....I jumped off of the waterfall up there," he pointed at it, "and I lost my sword on the way down. I think it's gone to the bottom of the lake."

Giles laughed. "Goodness! You jumped off the waterfall?! And you lived? You must have the luck of the Goddess!"

Chris smiled, knowing how ironic that was, because he DID have the luck of the Goddess....

"I'm on a mission to rescue Princess Michelle, and I can't continue without that sword. Can you help me? There's no way I could swim to the bottom of that lake...." Chris looked at the crystal clear waters, and knew he'd need some kind of breathing equipment to get down there. Not even his powers were going to help him here.

"Hmmm.....interesting." said Giles, rubbing his chin thoughtfully. "I may have just the thing. It's not the best thing for this situation, but it should work for you. Follow me!"

The old masterful fisherman and the young Love-empowered knight left the edge of the lake and made their way towards a simple shack further onwards on the same side of the lake.

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"Looks like someone had a big battle here....."

Crystal was looking at the corpse of Scorban, left behind by Chris' first Grand Memoria. She and Wedge now knew that Chris was alive, after being told so by the barkeep of The Hammer & Anvil.

"It's amazing....whatever killed him, it didn't draw blood. It's almost like it was a holy power or something...." said Wedge, intrigued as to what power could have felled the top mercenary in Galatea.

"Whoever did this, it wasn't Commander Leinard. There would be big cuts from his weapon." chimed in Crystal, taking a look around. She saw the path leading to the Forest of Fairies.

"Chris was here.....the question is where is he going? It looks like he went into the Forest of Fairies...."

Wedge shrugged his shoulders. "I don't know, but we've got to assume he's hot on the trail of Michelle and her captor. What I don't get is, why didn't he report in first? Let us know he was OK? It's not like him, Crystal."

Crystal sighed and shook her head. "I don't know, Wedge....but I have a thought. What if this has something to do with the light that was seen from the Princess' chambers?"

"That bright light that people reported seeing? Oh come on...that must have been a spell or something..." Wedge knew the rumours, that it was caused by the Goddess of Love, but he didn't believe it.

"Wedge...something happened in those chambers.....something happened to Chris, I'm sure of it." Crystal looked at her friend desperately. "I'm scared for him.....what if he gets himself hurt...?"

"He took down *Scorban*, Crystal.....somehow, I think Chris can take care of himself!" Wedge grinned. "Come on, we'll have to head to the next city. We can't follow him through the Forest, I know what those fairies are like."

He started to walk away, then looked back at Crystal, who was staring into the sky, worry written across her face.

"Crystal....he'll be OK. You know Chris." he said calmly.

"I hope you're right....." The young female knight slowly followed her friend back onto the Tradesman's Road.

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Chris stood inside the old shack, which looked old and dilapidated on the outside. Inside, it was rather homely, and it was obvious that Giles enjoyed simple pleasures. There were lots of paintings to do with fish, so Chris guessed that the old man calling himself a master fisherman was no exaggeration.

"Ah, here it is!" said Giles, who had been digging through a large pile of junk in the back of the old shack. In his hands he held a small blue coloured bag. "With this, you'll be able to breathe underwater, lad!"

Chris looked unimpressed. "A little bag? THAT'S going to keep me from drowning." It sounded as if this guy was a little senile.....

"This ain't no ordinary paper bag, young 'un!" laughed Giles, walking over to him and handing him the object. Chris felt it in his hands, and was surprised. It felt slippery, like a fish's scales.

"This is made from the skin of a leviathan, the most famous sea monster in the world!" continued the grinning old man. "It absorbs the water and turns it into oxygen, and no water can remain inside! Simply take a deep breath inside the bag while underwater and you can swim as deep as you like!"

"Amazing....I never would have guessed!" Chris raised his eyebrow in interest, and put the bag in his pouch. "Thank you, this'll be a great help! I'll be sure to return it to you once I get my sword back."

Giles shook his head. "No need, lad. I'm too old to be going under the sea, and you look like you need that more than me. Keep it, as a token of our friendship."

Chris bowed graciously. "Thank you, Mr. Caffrey."

Giles laughed. "It's Giles! I hate being formal, heh heh! Listen, I assume you're going out there now. Take care, lad, and watch out for the Great Octopus."

"The Great Octopus?" inquired Chris as he headed for the door. "You mentioned that before."

"Indeed I did." Giles pointed a picture on the wall, of a large purple creature wrapping itself around a boat. It had eight tentacles, and looked particularly. "That thing's a menace to this lake, and the reason why no-one dares to go boating on it anymore. So many people have been dragged to their deaths by that thing, and I've tried so many times to capture it. The bloody thing was just too strong for any equipment I had!"

He sighed, shaking his head. "One bright spark decided to go underwater and try to kill it. He never came back, lad. The point is, don't dill dally down there, or you'll be lunch meat for that abomination as well!"

"Well, if he shows up, he won't find me so easy to digest." quipped the young knight. "I'll be back soon, Giles." With that, Chris left and made his way back to the lakeside.

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"Cough...cough....splutter.....That scurvy brat will pay for making a fool out of me!"

Skullbeard had been swept downstream after Chris had knocked him from the boat. He'd ended up being swept ashore, exactly the same as the knight. Now he was feeling particularly vengeful.

"If I survived without a boat, then that rascal must have made it back to land as well!" he deducted, looking around for any trace of his quarry. "Har har har.....when I find him, I'll feed him to the fishies!"

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The cold air made Chris shiver a little as he looked into the water. He sure couldn't see the bottom of the lake, and wondered just how deep it was. He also had no idea where Michelle Memoria might have ended up, but he would have to allow for the current.

"It must have been swept in the same direction as me, but it'll have sunk and gotten lodged in something." he mused. "I sure hope it didn't sink to the bottom...."

He took the breathing bag, and stepped into the water gingerly. Water was not one of Chris' favourite things, and it was only thanks to Knight of the Crown training that he could swim at all.

He looked down at the deep water. In a few moments, he would be at its mercy, with only a small bag keeping him from losing breath and drowning, and only the Goddess knew what lay beneath the depths of the lake.

He closed his eyes, took a deep breath, and dived under the surface, heading into the depths of Lake Angelis.....

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Skullbeard had been walking the lakeside for a few minutes, and the cold air was beginning to get on his nerves. "Arrrr, I could use a warm blankie right now!" he muttered, rubbing his hands together.

It was just then that he saw a telltale glint of light on something metal. In the distance, a figure was standing in the water, a very familiar figure.

Squinting, Skullbeard saw the young knight! A moment later, he dived under the surface and vanished from view.

"A-harr!" smiled the crazy pirate with glee. "Trying to get yer sea legs again, are we? Ye won't escape from me this time, pockmark!"

Skullbeard reached into his pocket, and pulled out a treasured item. It was the same kind of breathing bag as Chris had, only the pirate had gotten it through less friendly means.

The maddened old fool walked into the water, and fearlessly dived into the lake in pursuit of his enemy.

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First, there was an intense sound of rushing water filling his ears. Then he felt his hair become soaked by the ice cold liquid. He had to fight to keep his mouth closed and prevent the water from rushing into his lungs, drowning him.

Chris slowly opened his eyes, and found himself in a watery paradise. All around him, he could see marine flora and fauna, with dazzling colours and spectacular shapes and sizes. The light from the moon pierced the surface, casting an almost holy glow down into the dark depths.

Chris swam downwards with his arms, taking in the sights. He couldn't hear very much, but supposed there wasn't much to hear underwater. While having no idea where his precious weapon was located, he decided to follow his instincts and headed towards where he knew the edge of the lake intersected with the waterfall.

A school of fish brushed past the intruder into their waters, but paid no attention to him, swimming off into the distance faster than he possibly could. Chris marvelled how these creatures could adapt so easily to this environment, which was unforgiving to him. He was finding the going tough in his plate armour, but if he needed to walk on the bottom of the lake at some point, it would act as the perfect weight.

Suddenly, he started to choke. He needed to breathe! He moved the breathing bag close to his face, and opened it, pushing his mouth inside. For a moment, he couldn't feel any water. Giles had been right! The bag acted as a vacuum of air, and Chris took a large breath, thankfully feeling air fill his lungs before taking the bag away and resuming his underwater exploration.

The young and wet knight swam for about 15 more minutes, and soon got the hang of breathing underwater. He came close to where the cliffs opened out into the waterfall, and it was then that a flash of light caught his eye.

Looking downwards, he saw an object wedged inside a rock that was perched awkwardly on a ledge. It wasn't until he saw the angel wings that he recognised it.

"Michelle Memoria!" he exclaimed to himself. With extra vigour he propelled himself further down towards his trusty sword, the water beginning to increase its resistance against his moving body.

As he closed in on the sword, Chris saw a shadow fall across the rock. At first he thought it was his own, but then saw that it looked like two shadows in one....

He was suddenly grabbed around the neck by two aged but muscular hands. His assailant squeezed tightly on Chris' neck, attempting to choke him to death.

Chris struggled hard against the stranglehold, but began to feel his breath vanishing. As he tried frantically to pull to arms from around his neck, he caught a glimpse of the attacker's upper arm, which had a skull and crossbones tattooed on it.

"Skullbeard!" he thought. It looked like he hadn't quite sunk the idiot yet....

With a sudden surge of strength, Chris pulled the insane pirate's arms free and swung him round in front of him. He looked into the crazy fool's eyes, and saw vengeance burning in them.

Before Skullbeard could try anything else, Chris kicked him in the stomach. The old and bitter brigand went flying into the side of the nearby cliff, and got the wind knocked out of him.

Snarling through his teeth, Skullbeard took a breath and lunged back at Chris. The knight barely managed to dodge due to the powerful weight of his armour in the water, and Skullbeard was able to grab his arm. He swung Chris around and sent him spinning towards the same cliff.

Chris smashed into the ground near the rock which held Michelle Memoria. he looked up groggily, took a breath from the bag and tried to grab his weapon.

Skullbeard was ready for this, however. As if to say, "Oh no ye don't!" the pirate kicked Chris in the face, and the knight crashed back to the floor.

Chris tried to get back to his feet, but Skullbeard then placed a foot on top of him, preventing him from doing so. The weight of Chris' armour was too heavy for him to struggle back against the idiotic pirate.

Skullbeard picked up a hefty looking rock from next to Chris, and held it above his head, ready to smash it down onto Chris' head. The knight gritted his teeth and tried desperately to get up. A blow like that would kill him for sure....

It was then that Chris saw a very large shadow fall across the rocky cliff edge. He wasn't sure what it was, but it looked big.

Suddenly, out of nowhere, Skullbeard was swept aside by a large purple tentacle. The appendage curled around him tightly, almost squeezing him to death.

The now panicked pirate pushed against the iron grip, trying to get away. He looked behind him at what the tentacle belonged to.....

.....and came face to face with the gigantic Great Octopus!

It was purple from head to toe, and was as big as a house. Its two reddened eyes stared hungrily at Skullbeard, while the remaining seven tentacles floated around, keeping the creature from sinking to the lake bottom.

Skullbeard's eyes widened in fear as he saw the creature, and his efforts to escape became more frantic. However, he was too late. The octopus opened its mouth at the very base of its body, and drew its clenched tentacle towards it. The water near the mouth began to be sucked inside.

The petrified old pirate opened his mouth in terror as the tentacle released him and he was sucked into the octopus' mouth. Had he been able to, he would have let out a horrified scream.

Moments later, the octopus closed its mouth, but not before a small trail of blood drifted out.

Chris could only watch this event unfold, and looked away as the octopus ate the pirate. "No-one deserves to die like that..." he thought sadly, even though he was relieved as the Great Octopus had accidentally saved him from Skullbeard's vengeance. The knight stood up, and walked towards the rock holding Michelle Memoria.

He then noticed the octopus eyeing him, and a bad thought entered his mind. "He's still hungry....."

Chris jumped as a tentacle shot towards him, crashing into the spot where he'd just been. He landed a couple of feet away, and cursed himself for not getting to his sword quicker. Without it, he was defenceless against the undersea titan.

The octopus struck again, but Chris jumped yet again, aiming this time to land by his weapon. The creature missed him yet again, and the knight landed on the rock, quickly gripping the hilt of Michelle Memoria.

He pulled hard on it, trying with all his strength to pull the sword from the rock, but it wouldn't budge. "Damn it!" he cursed inwardly.

Suddenly, the Great Octopus struck again, flinging its appendage wide of the knight. At first it looked like it had missed, but in fact, it was curling the tentacle around Chris. It quickly drew tight before he could jump out of the way, and suddenly Chris was held in the iron grip of the Great Octopus.

"Uggh!!!" he groaned, but he knew struggling was useless. Then, he had an idea.....however he would only get one shot....

Instead of trying to free himself, he gripped as tight as he could to the hilt of Michelle Memoria, which he had still been holding. He hoped that when the octopus pulled him back, the force would pull Michelle Memoria free of the rock. If it didn't work, however, he was as good as dead.

The hungry octopus began to move its tentacle towards its opening mouth, but the determined young knight held onto his sword as if his life depended on it....which it did. He grimaced in pain as he felt his body began to stretch with the tension, and gritted his teeth.

His adversary pulled with all its strength, eager to sate its rumbling hunger. It had never encountered such a fiercely resistant prey before, but nothing had ever escaped its clutches before.

Chris could feel something begin to move. He looked at Michelle Memoria and saw that it was coming free of the rock!

Suddenly, the sword was ripped free and the octopus began to draw Chris towards its waiting mouth. the knight looked into the eye of the beast, and raised his weapon.

"Sorry, but I don't plan on being fish food!"

He sliced down onto the appendage that held him, and a stream of blood flowed out from the gaping wound. The octopus thrashed around wildly in pain, and its grip on Chris loosened. The freed knight swam quickly up towards the surface, and took a long breath of water from his bag before turning back around to face the agonised creature.

"I can't let this thing kill anyone else!" he declared to himself. He pointed Michelle Memoria down at the octopus, and the weapon made a trail in the water as he did.

"GRAND MEMORIA!!!!!"

The projectile shot through the water like a torpedo, and the recoil pushed Chris back quite fiercely, almost knocking him off balance. Despite being underwater, the Grand Memoria kept the same form as always., but it left a distinct trail as it sped towards its target, almost like an aircraft leaving a trail in the sky.

It crashed into the main body of the octopus, and the creature shook violently. However, it seemed to have little effect, and the titanic predator flung most of its arms at Chris.

"Crud!!!" thought the knight. There was no way he could dodge all those arms, but if he was going down, he would do so fighting!

Chris took aim at one of the arms, let rip yet another Grand Memoria. It smashed into the first attacking tentacle, causing it to burn and recoil back.

Three other tentacles streaked towards him, and Chris knew it would be futile, but he tried to fire another Grand Memoria.

However, he was shocked when it did fire! The second appendage was blasted out of the way.

The knight felt less drained than when he used Grand Memoria normally. The shots he'd fired were slightly weaker than the single shot he was used to, but it meant he could fire multiple shots at a time!

"Let's rock, blubber for brains!" he grinned.

He fired round after round of Grand Memorias, two of them striking the remaining two arms just as they reached Chris, and the rest slamming into the Great Octopus itself. The massive titan reared back in pain, exposing its mouth to Chris.

"That's it....the mouth!" he exclaimed. He breathed one last time, and aimed for the gaping jaws of the beast.

Knowing this would require some awesome firepower, Chris willed all the energy he had into Michelle Memoria. "Gimme a GRAND MEMORIA!!!!"

The lake seemed to shudder as Chris fired the doubly powerful Grand Memoria. The massive concentration of energy zoomed straight into the Great Octopus' mouth, and exploded, tearing the great beast apart. The blast knocked Chris back and sent a circular wall of waves across the surface.

Reeling from the blast, Chris let himself float to the surface. He could see daylight floating in from above him, and let himself head into the light.....

A moment later, the knight surfaced, gasping for air. The air flowed into his lungs, and he breathed a huge sigh of relief.

Suddenly, behind him there was a great splash, and the giant, decimated body of the Great Octopus floated to the surface. It wouldn't be a threat to anyone at the lake anymore.

Chris reached the lakeside, and got back on dry land. He was soaked through and shivering, but otherwise was unhurt.

"Good heavens, lad!!!" shouted the familiar aged voice of Giles. The elderly fisherman came running over with a large blanket, which he wrapped around the soaked knight. He stared incredulously at Chris, and then at the bloated and torn body of the quarry he'd long sought after. "You bloody well killed the thing! H-How did you do it???"

"I just went with the flow." replied Chris, looking across the now calm waters of Lake Angelis.

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About 20 minutes later, Chris and Giles were back in the shack, having a celebratory drink of champagne. Giles had towed the body of the fallen octopus to the lakeside, and from the crowd of people outside, news travelled fast.

"Chris, my lad, you're a hero around here now!" grinned Giles, clanking his glass against Chris's. "You got your fancy sword back as well, I see. Guess not even all the money you'll be getting would buy you a weapon better than that!"

"Money?" said a puzzled Chris, drinking up his champagne. "What are you talking about?"

"You killed the Great Octopus, lad!" laughed Giles out loud. "There was a bounty of 500,000 gold on the accursed thing! You're gonna be rich!"

Chris sighed, and shook his head. "I don't want the money. I have no use for it."

Giles almost spat out his champagne. "You don't want the money? You have no use for it? Don't be silly, lad! No sane person would pass this reward up!"

"I'm giving the money to you, Giles." grinned Chris, winking. "You deserve it."

Giles was visibly shocked. "Lad....come on, it's your money! I can't accept it! You've got to have some kind of reward!"

"You're a good man, and you could do some good for the lake with that money." spoke Chris, getting up. "The only reward I want is knowing that I did some good for this world today."

The wise fisherman smiled, and clapped Chris on the shoulder. "You've got a heart of gold, young 'un. There's not many people like you left in this world..."

"I'm just glad I was able to help." beamed Chris, opening the wooden shack door and letting the cold breeze slip inside. "Take care of yourself, Giles."

"You too, Chris. Maybe we'll meet again." The old man waved goodbye to the young knight with a heart of gold.....

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"It's getting late. We'll have to rest for the night."

Michelle and her kidnapper had stopped under a tree that was nearby an old looking church. The Princess thought it was odd that there was a church all the way out from any sign of civilisation, but was just glad to be able to get some rest. Since her capture she'd been walking almost non-stop halfway across Galatea. She remained silent as her equally fatigued captor addressed her.

He sat down under the tree, and so did she. Within minutes, both of them fell asleep, despite the less than ideal sleeping conditions.

Only Michelle didn't fall asleep. She had been waiting for this moment.

"You can't watch me when you're asleep....." she thought, quietly getting up. She was going to run as far away as possible, back towards Lake Angelis which she could still see in the distance. She didn't know what dangers lay out in the Galatean countryside, but she was prepared to take her chances rather than stay captured.

She stole quietly past the church, entering the small graveyard in front of it. Michelle wasn't stupid, and knew that if she was going to escape she would need to cover her tracks. Going through the graveyard, a different way from which they'd come, was a good way of accomplishing this.

"I'll get back to Lake Angelis, I'll summon the Knights of the Crown....then everything will be OK." she thought to herself as she sneaked past the gravestones, which looked spooky in the darkness.

Suddenly, she heard a low moaning sound. The princess stopped and froze with fear. "W-what was that.....?" she thought, shivering.

She turned around, but saw nothing. Everything was quiet, save for the cold wind blowing everywhere.

"Hah.....must be hearing things....." Michelle resumed her bid for freedom, but barely got a few feet when she heard the moaning again. She jumped in fright, and looked fearfully around her.

There was a scrabbling sound near her, coming from the ground near a gravestone in front of her. Dirt began to fly up from the grave, and a hand reached upwards.

"Ahhhhh!!!!!" screamed Michelle, backing off as the hand was joined by a head. It was a human figure, crawling out of its own grave, and it looked dead. The skin was mostly rotted away, revealing the

skeleton underneath. What remained of the human's face looked at Michelle with its mouth open and its eyes unmoving, the eyeballs twisted in two different directions and looking like they were going to fall out.

Michelle stopped herself from throwing up with disgust, and slowly backed off. However, she heard a pair of moans behind her, and she saw two more of the walking corpses closing in on her.

She'd just come face to face with the undead.

"By the Goddess....." she gasped. "What ARE these things??"

The three zombies closed in on her slowly, their feet dragging along the ground and their moans becoming ever louder. The petrified princess couldn't escape. She was sandwiched between both groups of the undead monsters, and there was nothing she could do.

She didn't know what they would do to her, but knew that she would probably end up like them, walking the earth as a mere shadow of who she was.....

She closed her eyes, and braced herself for whatever horrible fate they would bring. "Death, take me swiftly....." she thought, as the abominations reached their hands out to grab her.....

There was suddenly a bang, and two of the zombies were blasted back, having just been hit by a fireball. The tattered clothes that they wore had caught fire.

Standing a few feet away was Michelle's captor, who had been woken by the moans. "Get away from them! Don't let them bite you!" he shouted, readying another fireball.

Michelle ran quickly in his direction. It was rather ironic.....the person who had kidnapped her was now trying to protect her.

The third zombie fell to the second fireball, but the victory was short lived. The first two zombies got back to their feet, as if they hadn't been hit at all. Moments later, their buddy did the same, and they began marching towards their attacker.

"We must go, now!" shouted Michelle's captor, but he added to his hostage, "And by the way, I didn't save you out of the goodness of my heart. You're no good to me dead."

Michelle simply glared at him. "How can you be so heartless.....?"

He didn't reply, and grabbed her by the arm, pulling her along with him as they made their escape from the undead.

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Deep within the void of the Seal, the Goddess of Hate watched events unfold. She was pleased with the chaos that her emotion was still bringing to the world.

Something was greatly upsetting her, however. She had sensed a great disturbance in her precious chaos, greater than the annoying mortals who refused to bend to their dark desires.

"I smell that foul stench once again.....but never before has it been so prominent." She'd begun to notice it when another pawn of hers killed, a powerful one. Then, she felt the goodness of the fairies beginning to proliferate once more. Now, a creature of the water, touched by her will, was deceased. These events had two things connecting them.

First, this had all taken place on the same route that her most important pawn had taken. Second, she could sense a trail of that cursed emotion, the one that was everything she hated.

Love.

The twisted Goddess knew of only one person that could have done this much damage, and smiled to herself.

"So.....he's come, sister? Heh heh.....let him come to me. I will show both of you how weak your precious Love really is!"

7 - The Church of the Living Dead

Chapter 6 - The Church of the Living Dead

"Huff.....puff....."

Climbing the rocky area of land was no easy task for Chris. Plate armour wasn't the best clothing to be wearing for such a task.

However, he soon reached the top, and took a deep breath.

"Huff.....huff....I must have walked at least 2 or 3 miles....." he thought, looking back the way he came. He was greeted by the breeze of the night air, the sight of Lake Angelis on the horizon. The full moon in the night sky was reflected off the calm waters of the lake.

Chris took out the magical map, and noted that his position wasn't too far away from a mountain, which the map labelled as Mount Aurora. Michelle's location was ON the mountain, and just southeast of the peak was no less than Avalon.

"I'm running out of time...." thought the knight worriedly. However, he'd been walking all day, and he needed to rest. He wouldn't be much use to Michelle if he was fatigued. Also, from the looks of things, Michelle had also stopped to take a rest. Climbing the mountain would not be an easy task.

"I'll have to take a quick rest somewhere....but not out in the open." Chris shivered, realising that it was a pretty cold night. "I'll freeze if I try to sleep out here."

The young knight left the cliff top, walking onwards into a small, patchy forest.

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The coldness she'd known for too long washed through her being. She could still hear the horrible cries of those she had killed, and seeing them become just like her.

She pressed herself against one of the cold stone pillars, desperately wanting release. Not until the monsters she'd created were stopped could she rest in peace.

“Please.....someone help.....set me free.....”

She felt some kind of presence approaching, someone full of strength, and a heart that was beating with powerful emotions, someone who fought for good. Perhaps this person could end her nightmare.....

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An eerie wind greeted Chris as he stepped into a large clearing. The trees here were sparse, and the ground seemed almost dead. There was also a thin mist covering the area. It was not a place anyone wanted to be on a cold night.

"There must be somewhere I can sleep!" exclaimed Chris, who had had no luck in finding shelter. The cold was getting to him, even through his warm underclothes.

It was only then that Chris spied some stones, of all shapes and sizes sticking out of the ground. At first he couldn't make them out because of the mist, but as he got closer, he discovered that they were gravestones.

“A graveyard.....” he said quietly. “And where there's a graveyard, there's a church! I could take shelter in it.”

However, as he started to walk past the gravestones, he noticed something rather peculiar. They appeared to be unmarked. He checked two rows of them, and they were all the same. It was as if nobody was buried in them.

“That's odd.....” mused the knight, frowning in puzzlement. “Gravestones are always marked with the person buried. It seems rather disrespectful to the dead not to mark their graves.”

A saddening thought came to him. If he didn't save Michelle, she would end up in a grave too.....

“Urrgh!” Chris rebuked himself for thinking negatively. “That is not going to happen!”

The lone knight continued through the cemetery, scanning the horizon for the all important church. The mist was hampering his search, and he was also getting a bad feeling from the whole place. There were no sounds of animals, and the wind's spooky moan was starting to unnerve him.

Just then, Chris thought he heard a noise behind him. He whirled around, but there was nothing there.

“OK.....it's just the wind, Chris.....” he told himself, laughing slightly.

The young knight walked on a little further, but he really wanted to leave the place. The graves looked creepy in the mist, dark shapes jutting out from the ground, and he was sure he was starting to hear things.

Then, at last he spied the church, not too far away from him. It was a relatively small church, with white walls and grey roofing. A tall clock tower was its main feature, and it rose into the mist, the top disappearing above the whiteness.

“At last!” sighed Chris in relief, and he started to head for the holy building.

Then he heard another sound, like something scrabbling at dirt.

He quickly looked around him, his senses alert and his right arm ready to draw his weapon.

However, he saw nothing.....not a soul.

“There's nothing here.....nothing at all.” he thought nervously. “I'm just imagining things.....”

Suddenly, he felt something grab hold of his right leg. Gasping, he looked down and saw what appeared to be a human hand clutching it. The hand looked like it had rotted away, and he could see muscle where there should have been skin.

“Ugh!!! Get off me!” he yelled, shaking his leg, but the hand held him in an iron grip. No matter how hard he tried, Chris couldn't get free.

“Think you're so tough, huh?” Chris frowned, and drew Michelle Memoria, slashing the hand off at the wrist. The dismembered limb fell off his leg and stopped moving.

“Phew.....” Chris sighed, looking at the hand. “What WAS that?”

The ground next to the hand suddenly began to rise up. Something was coming out of the ground! The knight stepped back, readying his sword for whatever it was.

The soil fell of the figure that had risen from the earth, which looked blankly at Chris. Its eyes were decayed, like the rest of its body. It was a human body, but the skin was rotted away and dead. It looked like a corpse.....and it was. It had risen out from in front of a large gravestone.

Chris knew of only one creature that looked like this, having been taught about many of the beings that inhabited the world, and looked worried, for this one was very dangerous. "Zombies.....the living dead....." he spoke under his breath.

The zombie uttered a low and deep moan, which made Chris's hair stand on end. It stretched its arms outwards at Chris, and began to lumber forward. There was only one thought inside the brain of the walking corpse.....to eat tasty flesh.

Chris knew this also. From his Knight training, he knew that zombies fed on the flesh and internal organs of humans. They would quite literally eat a human alive.

He also knew that they were incredibly difficult to kill, if not impossible. There was no documented method of killing the creatures. However, a powerful attack would temporarily stun them.

He had to be extremely careful, however. If a zombie managed to bite him, he would slowly die. It was believed to be some kind of poison that naturally existed inside them, and was transferred to anything they bit into. Chris would die, and would become a zombie himself. Obviously, he had no intention of being a meal for a walking corpse, or becoming one himself.

"I think it's time you went back to sleep!" said Chris to the zombie, thrusting forward with his weapon. The divine sword pierced the undead's chest exactly where the heart was located. A normal human would not survive such a hit.

The zombie groaned, and as Chris pulled Michelle Memoria free, it fell to the ground.

Chris watched and waited. "Maybe Michelle Memoria can kill one of these?" he hoped inwardly.

His hopes were dashed a few moments later, as the monster rose slowly back to its feet. It moaned again, continuing its attack on Chris.

"Damn it!" cursed Chris, backing away from the thing. "Looks like swords aren't going to work!"

He stopped moving as he heard more moaning behind him. From the way he'd come and to his sides, more zombies began to rise up from their graves, each wanting a piece of him.

“You invited a few friends, huh?” said Chris to the first zombie, sweat beginning to appear on his forehead. He couldn’t go back the way he came, towards the exit. He had no choice but to head for the church.

Quickly, Chris ran at full speed towards the only refuge against the growing horde of the undead. “I sure hope it isn’t locked.....or I’m worm food.....” he thought, as the moans of his pursuers filled the air.....

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At the very edge of the area around the church, where the tiny wood met greenery, Michelle and her kidnapper could hear the wailing of the zombies that they’d long since left behind.

“A-are they coming for us still???” said Michelle in a fearful voice. She hated appearing scared in front of her enemy, but her experience with the undead had left her deeply frightened of them.

“You don’t know much, do you your Highness?” laughed the black hooded figure. “Those zombies are only staying around that graveyard. Those moans are simply their echoes, and it means they’ve found some silly fool to snack on.” He grinned evilly under his hood. “It’ll be whichever Knight that’s been trailing us ever since we left the castle.”

“What?!” exclaimed the princess, her mouth open in surprise. “Somebody is following us?”

“The Knights of the Crown are all pathetic generically trained knights, but at least one of them will have managed to stay on our tail. He or she is now no longer a problem.” The villain snickered, enjoying the prospect of his pursuer meeting a grisly death. “I’m sure the zombies will eat well tonight.”

Michelle nearly threw up, thinking of the poor soul who was trying to save her. “You.....you’re sick.....” she said, her hand shaking with fury. “And you don’t know that he or she is dead! They’ll get past those monsters, just you wait! When that knight catches up with us, you’ll be sorry!”

“My dear Princess.....how naïve you are.” grinned her captor, stepping closer to her. “None of those fools can take me. The Knights of the Crown is only a great unit because I was in it! Without me, they’re nothing! I deserve more recognition than being shunted behind those wannabes!”

He was right next to her now, his cold breath almost touching her face. “Let me show you the true Knight of the Crown, the one to really be fearful of.....”

With one swift movement, he pulled back his hood, revealing his face.

Michelle gasped, unable to believe what she saw. "I-It's.....YOU!!!! H-How could you.....?"

The hood came back over the villain's face as he gave a triumphant grin. "If your hero or heroine catches up to us, he or she will know the power of a true knight! We move now! Avalon awaits us, Princess!"

Michelle didn't even resist as he grabbed her wrist, her hope fading fast.

"He's too powerful.....they wouldn't have a chance against him.....he killed that knight at the castle..... she thought sadly. As she was dragged onwards yet again, she closed her eyes. The cries of the zombies were still echoing through the night air.

"Whoever you are.....please be alright.....please....."

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Sprinting as fast as his armour would allow him, Chris finally reached the church door. He spun round, and a ghastly sight greeted him. Out of the mist, the shadowy silhouettes of the hungry zombies lumbered forward, each one hell bent on eating him alive.

His hand reached for the door's handle. The door itself was a large iron set of double doors, and looked strong enough to hold off the zombies. Without a second's thought, the knight pulled at the handle.

Nothing happened. Instead, he tried pushing the door in.

Again, nothing happened. The door wouldn't budge.

"Locked?!" gasped Chris, cursing his luck. He turned and saw that the zombie horde was getting closer. He was running out of time, and fast.

"I've got to get this door open!" he thought, but he had to do it carefully. His sword would break the lock, but the doors would be left open allowing the zombies to enter the church. If he used Grand Memoria, the doors would be destroyed.

The windows could be broken, but the zombies could probably climb through them.

"There's nothing I can do....." Chris' hopes fell quickly. It looked like he was going to die in this

place.....

The young knight faced the undead massing near him. In a few moments, they would be all over him, and he'd be nothing more than their midnight snack. The monsters moaned loudly, smelling the sweet taste of human flesh.

Chris looked up to the heavens, his face full of anguish. "Is this how it's meant to end, Goddess?! Do these powers mean absolutely nothing at all?! Is Michelle doomed.....?"

The zombies started climbing the stairs towards the door, their dead eyes looking upon their meal.

Chris stared at the monsters, wondering which one would have the honour of killing him. "I promise you, I won't die easily!" he shouted, raising his weapon and backing against the door.

The zombies walked up to Chris, their arms stretching out to grab him. Chris got ready to fight a hopeless battle.....

There was a noise behind the doomed knight. The huge double doors opened, and an arm grabbed his shoulder, pulling him back and inside the church. As quickly as they'd been opened, the doors slammed shut with a loud clank.

The zombies, denied their meal, started to bang against the door furiously.

Ignoring the sounds of the zombies, Chris noticed the surroundings inside the church. It looked bigger than it did on the outside and the vast hall was full of wooden pews, all stood in two rows in front of the altar, which was made of marble. Stone pillars held up the ceiling, standing tall and proud.

"This place is still intact, as if it was never touched by time or people." Thought Chris, wondering how that was possible. "Surely the zombies must have been in here at some point!"

A footstep brought him out of his thoughts, and he turned to see a woman standing next to him. She was rather pretty, and looked around her late twenties or early thirties. Her hair was lengthy and blonde, and she wore a plain dress, which was black around the chest but purple everywhere else. Through dark green eyes, she looked at him as if sizing him up. Chris could also see the fear in her eyes.

"Thanks for saving me from being a chew toy." he said, smiling at her and trying to put her at ease. "I am Christopher Appleyard of the Knights of the Crown. Who are you?"

"It was no problem, Sir Knight." replied the woman, stepping closer to him. "I could not leave another to be ripped apart by those monsters. My name is Amy Laverne, and I am but a prisoner within these walls."

Chris rubbed the back of his hair uncomfortably. "Ummm.....it's just Chris, I hate titles. How long have you been trapped here?"

"About.....two weeks." answered Amy, flicking some hair out of her eyes. Suddenly, her voice became shaky and scared. "I.....I was walking around this place.....and then those things outside attacked.....barely managed to make in here.....and I've been trapped ever since. I-I can hear them at night, w-when they moan.....w-when th-they kill.....I saw them eat s-someone alive....." The frightened lady began to cry, shivering and sobbing uncontrollably.

"There, there....." Chris gently cuddled Amy, letting her cry on his shoulder. "I'll get you out of here, I promise."

"There's.....there's no way out....." sniffled Amy, letting the knight go. "They rise up when I open either the front or back doors....."

"These things.....they can't be invincible, can they?" said a frowning Chris, remembering how a sword stab hadn't fazed one. "I know a little of zombies, but how can a dead corpse be immune to any attack?"

"Search me....." Amy shook her head, sighing hopelessly. "However, at least that magic of yours can take them down for a moment. What was that you did, anyway? I've never seen anything like it!"

"It's not magic, exactly....." said Chris, avoiding her gaze for a moment. "I'm not really sure what it is myself, but I have that power. That's another story, though. All you need to know is that I'm trying to save the Princess of Galatea." He didn't really want to tell anyone about his meeting with the Goddess, and the powers he'd received.

"I didn't know about that.....but, now that you mention it, I saw two people in the graveyard a couple of hours before you came." said Amy, touching her chin thoughtfully. "One of them looked really beautiful, like a princess. She was about to get eaten by the zombies, but this guy in a black cape blasted them with fireballs and took her to safety."

"That was them....." Chris was disturbed to hear that Michelle was still in his foe's hands, but relieved that she'd been saved from the zombies, even if it was by his enemy. "She's anything but safe right now."

"Oh.....I see....." Amy went silent for a moment, going deep into thought. She looked Chris up and down again.

Chris could sense that Amy wanted to tell him something. "Amy, is there something you want to tell me?"

"Y-yes....." she answered nervously, walking over towards the altar. Chris followed, noticing something about her as he did. She didn't seem tired or hungry. If she had been here for two weeks, she would be dead from starvation or thirst.....

"Amy, how come you aren't hungry or thirsty?" he asked, looking at her quizzically.

"Ummmm.....there was a store of food in the back of the church." answered the blonde woman rather quickly, blinking at him. "I could get you some if you like. There was a good supply in there, so we'd be OK for a while."

"No thank you." said Chris politely, shaking his head. "I'd rather hear what it is you have to say."

Amy put her hands on the altar. "There are some catacombs under this church. There are only a few zombies down there and also some kind of weird room."

"What do you mean by weird?" asked Chris, scratching his head.

"It had scientific stuff in it, like potions and that sort of thing." spoke Amy, looking up and remembering the room. "It looked like a laboratory."

"A laboratory?" Chris frowned, a bad picture coming into his mind. "It seems a bit strange to put a laboratory under a church.....it could explain the zombies, however."

"Yeah.....but who would create such awful things.....?" Amy closed her eyes, shivering at the thought of the inhuman creatures wanting her flesh. "Anyway, I found something else too.....the first of the zombies."

"The first of them?" Chris said, still frowning. "How do you know that?"

"It was different than the rest. Faster, stronger and smarter....." Amy rubbed her arm gently. "I barely got out of there alive....."

"That was brave of you." smiled Chris, guessing what she was trying to tell him. "You want me to go down there and kill it, don't you?"

"Yes....." replied Amy sheepishly. "If you kill it, all the rest should die. It's controlling all the others. I know this because when I discovered it, the rest of the zombies down there came after me. I think their brains are linked together somehow."

"I see." Chris nodded, but was worried. "The problem is, how do I kill it? I can't even kill a normal zombie, let alone the leader."

"I know you can do it, somehow." said Amy, smiling. "I believe in you.....there's something about you, Chris."

"Heh, maybe....." Chris smiled, because Amy was right. Yet so far, his Love enhanced powers had been unable to kill a single zombie. Maybe his powers could hurt the master zombie, however.

"The entrance to the catacombs is underneath the altar." said Amy, gesturing at the holy object. "We'll have to give it a push."

The two survivors put their hands on the same end of the sacred monument, and pushed as hard as they could. The altar slide to the side slowly but surely. It hit against some kind of stop with a clank. Where the altar had stood there was a flight of small steps leading down.

"I survived getting down here last time.....but whether we'd be able to escape again, I don't know." Amy looked at Chris, with new hope in her eyes. "We'll be better protected with you in front. I'm not being a coward, your powers can hold them off! So.....lead on, Chris!"

The young knight nodded, and led Amy down into the catacombs.....

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As Chris and Amy left the safety of the church and headed down the stairs, the little light that shone from the opening left by the altar faded, and soon they were covered in darkness. Neither the knight or the lady could see in front of them.

Chris tried to continue, but he walked straight into a wall. He stretched his hands out, feeling his way along. His arm had barely stretched when they both met solid rock. They were in a rather narrow tunnel.

"We can't go on like this!" said Chris in Amy's general direction, as he couldn't see her. "We need some light! How did you manage to see down here?"

"I-I had a torch." replied Amy, who also had her arms stretched against the tunnel walls. "I lost it when I was running from the zombies last time I was down here."

"We'll have to turn back." sighed Chris. "We'll be sitting ducks for those creatures if we go ahead like this."

"Wait, Chris.....your sword.....it's glowing....." A dim white light shone onto Amy's face, and it reflected off Chris' armour. She pulled Michelle Memoria from its hilt and handed it to him.

The moment Chris touched the hilt, a brilliant white light enveloped the blade. It was powerful enough for Chris to see ahead of him. In fact he could look in all directions at a limited distance.

The knight was impressed. "It looks cool, it's the perfect weapon for me, it has the Grand Memoria and now it can even act as a torch. What more could a knight want?" He grinned, and took Amy's hand with his left hand while holding his new torch in his right.

Together, the two of them continued through the winding passage, and Chris wondered just how many more abilities he and his divine sword were capable of.....


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It waited patiently, alone in the darkened room.

It hadn't eaten in many years, yet it didn't really matter. Its body needed no sustenance, for it was already deceased.

Yet the mind of the creature hungered. Its one desire was the flesh of humans.....their sweet tasty skin and juicy internal organs.

The first of the zombies knew nothing of the person it once was. All it wanted now was to feed.....and it could sense the juicy morsel heading its way.....

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The tunnel finally ended, and opened up into a vast room. The darkened, empty chamber stretched for further than they could see, and arched pillars held the entire place up.

“The catacombs.....” said Chris, his voice echoing through the cavernous room.

The massive, seemingly never-ending room was made of orange brickwork, and was supported by rows of arched pillars. There were cobwebs on the walls and between the arches, and the bricks look weathered and worn. Chris guessed that the place was several decades old, at least.

“Amy, do you remember where the laboratory was?” asked Chris, who could barely see along the darkened catacombs despite Michelle Memoria's light.

“Yes.....it was actually straight ahead.” answered his companion. “These catacombs aren't as big as you may think. It's just an illusion.”

“Right.....but I can hardly see any further than that pillar just in front of me.” Chris looked at Amy, and motioned for her to come closer. “Stay close, we could get lost very easily.”

The two of them walked further through the aged chamber, their footsteps leaving light echoes. The floor beneath their feet didn't produce much sound.

Chris felt his spine tingle, as if someone was watching them. He was nervous because they hadn't encountered any zombies in the catacombs yet.

"I thought you said there were zombies down here?" he said to Amy, who was busy watching their backs.

"It was like this when I first came down.....then I found the lab, and they all attacked." Amy held onto Chris' hand still, fearful of letting go and losing him in the darkness. "B-but there was an iron door. I forgot to shut it, but if we shut it this time it should keep them out."

The knight nodded, and continued to walk in a straight line. They passed rows after row of arches, and Chris began to wonder if it was never-ending.

Suddenly, he heard a low moan. The knight froze, scanning the surroundings with his keen eyes. "Amy, get ready to run.....it looks like they prepared a welcoming party....."

Just as he said that, the shadow of a zombie fell across the pillar in front of them. Quick as a flash, Chris sliced his weapon to the left, striking an outstretched and rotted arm. The arm was ripped clean from its owner, who didn't even flinch. The light of Chris' sword reflected off the dead eyes of the undead monster, and it moaned louder.

"RUN!!!!!" yelled Chris, tightly holding Amy's arm and running in the direction they'd been going. Their frantic footsteps were soon joined by the eerie shuffling of many dead feet, as the whole pack of zombies in the catacombs began to zero in on the two humans in their domain.

Keeping their light in front of him, Chris ran as fast as he could without making Amy fall, as she seemed to be having trouble keeping up with him.

Just then, light reflected off a surface a few yards in front of him. Straight in front of Chris and Amy was a sturdy iron door. It had to be the one Amy had mentioned.

"I see the door!" cried Chris, stretching his arm out ready to pull it open. They had to be quick in opening it, or they were next on their pursuers' menu!

Suddenly, one zombie jumped out at Amy from the side. It missed, but she screamed and let go of Chris' hand, falling to the ground awkwardly. The ravenous undead heard and saw her fall, and focused their attention on the woman.

Chris screeched to a halt. "AMY!!!!!" he yelled, his horrified voice filling the empty chamber.

Amy looked up to see several pairs of decayed hands reaching for her body. She screamed in terror and squeezed her eyes shut.

Chris quickly took aim at the creatures with his blade. "I hope to the Goddess this doesn't hit Amy....." he breathed, before charging up for his attack. "GRAND MEMORIA!!!!!!!"

The Love powered attack filled the catacombs with a brilliant pink coloured light as it smashed into the group of zombies, blasting them well away from Amy just as they were about to take hold of her.

Chris quickly ran over to the fallen lady and pulled her up. Thankfully, his aim had been true and he'd completely missed her. "Quick, we've got to open that door!"

The two of them ran with haste to the door and began pulling at it. They discovered that the door was rather heavy, but it was coming open quite quickly as there were two people pulling at it.

Just as the metal door came open, the zombies clambered to their feet. Groaning loudly, they began to converge on the door, and Chris and Amy had only just gotten it open. Now they had to close it.

"Ugh.....mmmm....." Chris groaned as he and Amy frantically pulled the door back in. It was closing too slowly.....

A zombie reached the door just before they managed to close it, and it stuck its arm through the gap. It swiped at Chris, trying to take hold of him. The door then crashed shut, ripping the arm from the zombie. The arm dropped to the floor, no longer a threat.

Chris collapsed against the wall, breathing deeply. Amy did the same, yet she didn't seem as scared as she had done before. The zombies banged furiously against the silver iron door, but it held against their might. After a few moments they gave up, knowing that their prey had eluded them.

"Nice work, Amy....." Chris got up from the wall and grinned at the girl. "Are you OK?"

"Yes....." Amy replied, but her tone of voice wasn't convincing. She seemed a little off, like she knew something.

"Amy.....is there something you know?" Chris cocked his head, waiting for an answer.

"No.....why would there be?" replied his companion, shaking her head. "The lab is just through that door." She pointed at an identical iron door just in front of them.

"OK, you stay here." said Chris quickly. It would be too dangerous for her to be in there as well, with a powerful zombie trying to kill them both.

“No, I'm coming with you!” cried Amy suddenly and desperately.

“Are you crazy??” growled Chris, frowning. “That thing will kill you if you step in there! I can't protect you and fight it at the same time!”

“Please!!!” sniffled Amy, beginning to cry. “Don't leave me here, all alone.....it's not like I can get out of here without you.....if I have to die down here, I'd rather die fighting the thing in there.....”

The girl's sadness abated Chris' frustration and anger. “All right.....if that's what you want. I promised you I'd get you out of here, though. I will kill that thing.”

Amy sniffled a little more and smiled. “Thank you, Chris.....”

The young knight smiled slightly and placed his hand on the lab door. “Are you ready?”

Amy nodded silently, her face becoming one of courage rather than fear.

Chris nodded too, and pushed open the door.....

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“So.....it IS a lab.....”

Chris and Amy were greeted by a circular room, which was rather small but large enough to allow freedom of movement for several people. There were desks all around the room, with papers and glass vials and other such laboratory equipment on them. It all looked rather primitive to current standards, but from what Chris could see somebody had been up to something big in here.

It was then that his eyes saw something standing in the middle of the room. It wasn't in the light, so he couldn't see what it was.

“Chris.....that's it.....kill it now!” urged Amy, who looked nervous about something.

“It's not moving.....but now could a good chance to take it down.” said Chris in acknowledgement. He was going to stab it through the heart, hoping that if it was inactive, it would simply die.

He pointed Michelle Memoria at the first zombie, and was about to strike, when the light of the blade illuminated the thing's face.....

Though decayed, Chris could see long blonde hair and green eyes. Patches of pure skin still remained around the rotted face, and Chris saw the curves of breasts and hips. The zombie was a woman and there was no mistaking the face.....

“Amy?!!!!” he gasped, nearly dropping his sword.

He stepped back, but turned around and saw Amy looking at him sorrowfully. “I’m sorry, Chris.....this deception was necessary.....”

Her body began to flicker, and a white aura appeared around her. “Chris, I am the cause of all of this.....I am the first of the zombies.....”

“Finally, I've got the formula! This must be right, everything fits!”

The female scientist took the vial of liquid that she'd created, and held it up in a moment of triumph. All her years of hard work were about to pay off. She'd finally created a potion that would grant eternal life to its drinker.

Amy Laverne smiled, thinking back to when she'd first started working on her project. It hadn't been easy, and she'd needed to hide her secret from those who were less virtuous than she was. Anyone would try to steal the secret of eternal life and use it for evil ends. Amy simply wished to end the suffering of people ravaged by disease, and to lead mankind into a golden age of prosperity.

Now, she had the means to do that. Immortality would no longer be a myth! Amy had decided that she herself would be the first to drink the sweet nectar of eternal life.

Nervously she held the vial up to her lips. “Immortality, here I come!”

In one swift movement, she downed the entire contents of the vial, and put it down.

A few moments passed, and nothing felt different. This she had expected, and there was only one way to test if she was truly immortal or not.

Taking a knife from her desk, she closed her eyes and sliced across her arm. However, there was no

sharp pain and she opened her eyes, astounded.

"I.....I've done it!!!!" she cried. "I'm immortal!!!!!"

Just then, she saw that the cut on her arm was still there, and blood was still trickling out of it. The wound wasn't clotting as it should.

Amy was worried, but was confident that the potion would kick in and heal the cut. She held her arm tightly around the wound.....but she didn't feel anything. Her fingers were touching her skin, but she couldn't feel it.

"Wh-what's happening to me.....?" she gasped, beginning to panic. She frantically looked around the room as if looking for a cure.....but she knew there was none.

She looked at her arm again. The skin was beginning to peel away, as if she was rotting away like a corpse!

Amy screamed, her mind clouded by fear and panic. She dashed around the lab in a state of extreme distress, knowing now that her experiment had gone horribly wrong.

Something began to gnaw away at her mind, a single desire. Amy grimaced and collapsed to her knees, holding her head in her hands. "What.....is.....going.....on???" she spoke, finding it harder to talk.

She then looked at her fresh right arm, untouched by the curse she'd inflicted upon herself. A strange thought occurred to her, one completely horrifying to humans. "My skin.....looks.....so tasty....."

Before she knew what she was doing, Amy sank her teeth into her right arm, tearing at her own flesh. She ripped a huge chunk of it free, swallowing it and leaving her mouth coated in blood.

Her arm began to bleed horribly, as she'd severed an artery with her teeth. The scientist's head was spinning, and realised she was becoming some kind of monster, one that had a craving for human flesh.

"Ugh.....no.....nooooooo.....th.....is.....can't.....be-e....." were her last words, a to death.....

"Amy? Amy where.....What the?!!!"

A colleague of Amy's entered the lab to check on her, only to find his friend lying dead in a puddle of blood in the middle of the floor. He knelt down beside her, noticing she had some kind of horrific bite on her right arm. Her left was somewhat decayed, which was puzzling.

"What in the world happened her?" thought the male scientist out loud. He stood up and examined Amy's desk.

As he did, there was movement behind him. He turned around and gasped. Amy had gotten up, as if she

was alive again!

“Amy?! How the.....?” he gasped.

However, the face that looked back at him was not that of Amy Laverne. The body that was once hers now belonged to something evil, something that desired only one thing.....

Before the scientist realised what was going on, zombie Amy grabbed hold of him and bit deep into his neck. His screams were not heard by anyone.....

“I tried to help this world, but I had no right to mess around with the natural order of life.....” Amy was saddened as the memories of that night came back to haunt her again. “Instead of bringing eternal life, I've brought eternal suffering to the souls of everyone turned into a zombie.....most of all my own.”

“No-one should try to achieve eternal life, Amy.....” said Chris, shocked that someone else would try such a thing. However, Amy wasn't a selfish fool like Geoffrey Eridanus had been. “I know you were trying to change the world for the better, but you can't play the Goddess.”

“I know that now.....the irony is, I and the zombies are all immune to pain and death, since we are already dead.....” She looked at the monster that was once herself. “What you see there is my body, what I was once. You're speaking to my soul.....I've been trapped here, because I cannot move on knowing that those things still plague this world. Only the destruction of my former self and all the other zombies will set me free.” Her eyes pleaded with Chris, as she flickered once more. “This is why I brought you down here.....please, Chris.....set me free!”

Chris sighed, but nodded. “You should have just told me. I know you had a good heart, Amy. Had you been influenced by greed and desire I would have walked away. You've suffered too long.....and so have the people turned into shadows of their former selves by that creature. I promise I will set you free.”

Suddenly, there was a moan. Chris and Amy turned to see the zombie Amy moving. It looked up, straight at Chris. Unlike the other zombies, its eyes were firmly focused on him. They were decayed, like the rest of its body, but they indicated that this zombie was not a typical one.

Zombie Amy stretched its arms out, and began to walk towards Chris, with the slow shuffle now familiar to his ears. It emitted a low female moan in Amy's exact voice.

Chris watched as the creature came closer, and Michelle Memoria was already in his hands. Then, he rushed forward. “Dinner time's over, lady!!!”

The divine blade sliced across zombie Amy's outstretched arms, but it bumped across them as it hit. The

blade didn't cut through Amy's arms at all!

“What the.....?!” gasped Chris. His weapon should have gone clean through! It was as if her bones were made of metal!

`Amy's' right hand gripped Chris tightly around the neck. Chris struggled to get away, but the zombie held him with an iron grip, and pulled him closer to it. The ravenous creature was going to take a bite out of his neck, if he didn't choke to death first.

“Chris!!!!” screamed the real Amy, powerless to help him. She had no fancy powers or weapons to use.

Chris choked, desperately trying to breathe, but his airways were blocked by `Amy's' crushing fingers. He punched and kicked at his foe, but it felt no pain.

The zombie moaned loudly, reaching in to take the fatal bite of the knight's neck.

In an act of desperation, Chris managed to get Michelle Memoria, which was still in his hand, to point at `Amy'. He knew this move would probably hurt him worse than his attacker, but it would get him free.

“Ugh.....acckkkk.....Gr-Grand.....Mem.....or.....ia!!!”

The sound and light from the Grand Memoria resonated through the tiny room, ripping Chris free from `Amy's' grip, but blasting hard against the wall, where he fell onto a desk below. It crashed to the floor in a heap taking the knight with it.

`Amy' was hit into the wall as well, but it didn't faze the zombie in the slightest. With an angry sounding moan, it lumbered back towards Chris.

A dazed Chris got back up, his armour having absorbed most of the blast. He felt a little woozy, however. “My sword can't get through it's skeleton, Grand Memoria didn't even scratch it.” he thought quickly. “Think, Chris, think! There must be something you can do!”

An idea came to him. “The one part of a zombie I haven't tried aiming for yet is the head. Maybe, if I kill its brain, I'll kill its consciousness!”

He ran at `Amy' once more, with his weapon poised to slash downwards onto its head. It would be messy, but it looked like it was the only way to kill the creature.

He dodged to the side to avoid the undead monster's arms, then crashed his sword down on its head. It

banged off it, like it was hitting plate armour.

“Damn.....the skull! I forgot.....” Chris cursed his luck, and there was a sudden scream from Amy. “Chris, look OUT!!!!!”

He was too late to see `Amy's' arm swing into his face, knocking him for six. He smashed into a length table just behind him. It felt like being hit by a sledgehammer, and he winced as he got back to his feet sluggishly.

“It's.....it's too strong!” he yelled, seeing `Amy' lumbering over for another attack. “I can't even hurt it.....”

“CHRIS!!!!!!” Amy's voice was panicked, knowing the knight had no chance now.

The zombie Amy loomed over Chris, groaning as it reached for him. Here was no way Chris could escape from its clutches this time.....

Time seemed to freeze for Chris, as he stared into the dead face of Amy Laverne. “No.....NOOOOO!!!! I haven't come this far to die!!!!” he shouted inside his head.

Suddenly, the particles of Love that he'd seen when he'd been with the Goddess of Love began to swim around him. There was only a few at first, then they began to increase. Suddenly they rushed into his chest, where his heart was located. A brilliant pink light surged outwards from him, becoming bolts of energy lancing around him. They struck the floor and the wall near him, brightening every second. Then, an even brighter light shot out from his chest. Chris was now blinded from everyone's view.

When the light faded, Chris finally came back into view. However, Love particles whizzed around him, and his armour looked slight different. On his breastplate there was a shape of a heart, and the design of his armour looked very different, almost holy.....

Amy looked at him, gasping in amazement. “Chris.....? What in the world.....?”

The transformed knight had no time to be shocked. Through focused eyes, he sighted his enemy.

“I'll send you back to where you came from!” he spoke. He readied his sword, which had the angel wings unfolded, something that only normally happened when he used Grand Memoria.

`Amy' pounced, lunging for Chris with a sickening moan.

Two words entered Chris' thoughts, much like they had the first time he'd used Grand Memoria. He got ready to unleash his attack. A powerful light began to shine out from Michelle Memoria's blade.

“ARC.....RENDER!!!!!!!!!!”

He swung Michelle Memoria to his side, and then over his shoulder, bringing it down upon `Amy's' head. Energy ripped through the blade, leaving a trail of pink in the air and bathing the room in light. The sword tore through the zombie's decayed body, splitting it in half all the way down. The energy from the blade expanded outwards and vaporized what was left of `Amy'.

As soon as Chris had delivered the killing blow, a light flashed out from his chest again, filling the room. It filled the entire room, and as suddenly as it had appeared, it faded away again.

Amy opened her eyes, and saw that Chris was standing there, back to his normal self. Chris himself was a little shocked, having no idea what had just happened to him.

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Elsewhere, all the zombies around the church suddenly exploded into dust, their minds disconnected from their master. The old church was finally free of the undead, and their souls could rest at last.....

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“Chris.....you did it! You did it!!!” Amy ran over and hugged him. However, she passed through him as if he wasn't even there.

“Oh.....I forgot.....” she said, smiling. “Now that my body is dead, I've lost the ability to touch. I really am dead now.....”

Chris looked at her, giving her a reassuring smile. "You can go to the afterlife now. I'm sure they're waiting for you in Heaven."

"I deserve Hell....." said Amy sadly, looking away from him. "I tried to give humans what they should not have, and created a nightmare in the process. I deserve to be punished....."

"No.....you stayed here to try and prevent this nightmare from consuming the whole world." said Chris, comforting her. "If it wasn't for you, who knows what might have happened....."

"Your words are kind, Chris." Amy nodded, and smiled brightly. "Perhaps there is hope for me after all. You taught me that....."

Her body began to fade away, but this time for good. "I'm going now Chris, to my eternal rest. Good luck in your quest.....and thank you.....for setting me free....."

"Farewell, Amy....." Chris waved goodbye to Amy as she finally left the world.....

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Upon stepping outside the church, the picture was very different. The cold mist had vanished, and the moonlight shone down on the church and graveyard. The place was truly a sacred one again.

Yet, Chris was thoughtful. "Looks like I have a new power....." he mused. "Yet, what happened to me down in that lab? I looked different.....I felt so full of power, and something else....."

He looked up towards the full moon, which shined brightly in his eyes. "Goddess.....was that your doing? Or my own.....?"

The knight pulled out his magic map. He noticed that Michelle's dot was on top of Mount Aurora. It seemed that she was still climbing the peak, and Chris could possibly catch up to her before she was dragged into Avalon, and used for whatever nefarious purpose her captor had planned.

"Hang on, Michelle.....I'm coming!" spoke Chris into the night air. He looked into the distance, and he could see the massive peak on the horizon, not very far away from there.

As the determined young knight headed towards the mountain, he looked back at the church and said,

“Rest in peace, Amy.”

Little did he realise, someone was watching him leave, standing next to the old church.

Amy smiled, and replied into the serene night, “I will, Chris.” Then, she vanished, leaving the world behind.....