

# Fortunes of a Feather

By EndlessAsgard

Submitted: October 4, 2005

Updated: October 4, 2005

Provided by Fanart Central.

<http://www.fanart-central.net/stories/user/EndlessAsgard/21209/Fortunes-of-Feather>

<b>Chapter 1 - Visions of Red</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Chapter 2 - A World Apart</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Chapter 3 - Song of Angels</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>Chapter 4 - Silent Hearts</b>	<b>27</b>

# 1 - Visions of Red

## Chapter 1 Visions of Red

A still and bitter winter was coming to a close. It was a cold morning and the dew had become frost and made the green grasses white. A tall girl shivered as the trees rustled around her with wisps of cold air. She still had a ways to go before she arrived at the steps of her destination.

The streets seemed empty and yet alive. There was no one about but her and the waving trees along the street. In the distance down the way were the figures of two people. When she saw them, though she was cold, she felt warm in her heart. A smile came to her face as they called out to her: "Hitomi!"

Hitomi ran to catch up to her friends. The bitter cold nipped at her long legs but it did not slow her. She caught up and hugged them with the cold to encourage them. "Yukari! Amano!" She said happily. And she was happy. Despite the separation of an entire world, she was happy. Happy because the love that she had, like her wishes, were stronger than any distance or any length of time.

The three old friends climbed the steps of Tokyo University to start their new semester with each other, for years had passed since that fateful day, that day of Dragons and Destiny. Hitomi's thoughts wondered as Yukari, Amano and she walked to their dorms. Her thoughts dwelled on the past. Hitomi had come back to a world that she loved but she had also left one that she had an equal love for. The smell of the fields. His smell.

There was a breeze and Hitomi looked up from the ground toward the sky. The moon was dim above; seeming to fade into the light blue of the early morning sky. There was a smell of grass on the air despite the frost and it took her back. 'I miss him. I hope he's happy' she said softly to herself.

Suddenly an enthusiastic and nosy Yukari threw her arm over Hitomi's shoulder. "You miss who?" she said loudly.

Hitomi's pale skin flushed red with an almost contented smile. "Oh, no one." She said softly. She looked at her friends and decided not to think about it for a while. "Let's go." She said.

The three trotted off into the morning talking about the future and reminiscing about the past. Yukari giggled about her and Amano and about things they did over the winter break. They talked all the way to the dorms and the two girls said goodbye to Amano as they all went to settle into their rooms again.

Hitomi and Yukari's dorm room was on the third floor of a sorority house. As they unpacked and settled in they talked more about old and almost forgotten memories. Subjects like old friends and old crushes. This brought up a question in Yukari's mind which she had meant to ask Hitomi for a long while now. It was one that had troubled Yukari now and then for the last couple of years in fact. "Hitomi." she started, calling Hitomi's attention from putting her clothes in a chiffonnier by the window.

There was a pause as Hitomi looked to her best friend with an expression of query. "Yes?" she said in her soft snowy voice.

"Hitomi I've been meaning to ask you about something." Yukari continued.

"What about?" Hitomi said.

"About you." She said trailing down into a quiet voice. Yukari was afraid to ask as she thought Hitomi might take it the wrong way. "You and Amano."

"Me and Amano?" Hitomi said with surprise. "Yukari, you know you don't have to worry about that! Maybe once I thought that I loved him but- well he's with you and there is nothing I could do to change that." Hitomi smile at her friend to alleviate the rather uncomfortable and embarrassed look on her face.

"No! Hitomi I'm sorry! That's not what I meant at all! I trust that you would never do anything like that. What I meant was something else. I wanted to ask you why- why I haven't seen you with anyone else." Yukari explained. "I mean I've never seen you with any men and you haven't confided anything in me for a long time." She trailed off.

"Oh." Hitomi was taken aback. It wasn't really something she had noticed but it was true. She hadn't been with anyone or thought about anyone else since. Yukari was looking with intent and caring eyes at Hitomi, but Hitomi didn't know what else to say. "Oh." She repeated.

"I'm sorry." Yukari said again. There was an uncomfortable silence.

After a moment Hitomi broke the silence. "It's not that I don't want anyone." Hitomi said looking out the window. "I suppose I'm just waiting." The skies outside were patched with clouds. Hitomi thought to herself 'But waiting for what? Can I really want to go back after all this time? Sometimes I feel sad, and I wonder: is it because we are so far apart? Or maybe I'm sensing that he is sad, or upset or both. I miss him.'

"Hitomi?" she suddenly realized that Yukari was kneeling next to her with her hand on her shoulder. "What is wrong? You seem distant again. Like you were off in another world."

Hitomi's eyes shot to Yukari's. "What do you mean 'in another world'?" Hitomi looked almost scared, panic-stricken even, for that moment.

"In another world? I don't know, it's just a figure of speech. I mean you look like something's on your mind. Something important." she said.

Hitomi didn't know why but her eyes started to tear up. She thought to herself that by all means she should be happy, and she was most of the time. But there were other times like this one when she just felt sad and feeling happiness or joy seemed an impossibility or a distant memory. She felt cold all over. All over except where Yukari's hand was. Without another word the two friends embraced each other and sat in each other's arms on the floor for a long time.

Later that day they and the other students started up their routines again going to classes or cutting

them. Hitomi saw familiar faces and new ones and went from class to class but she couldn't shake the sad feeling. Lunch came and she thought maybe she should eat something but she wasn't hungry and she hadn't felt the symptoms of anemia for a while.

Hitomi finished her last class of the day and started on home to her dorm room. The day was waning and the moon was getting brighter in the sky. It was near full and as Hitomi stared at it she couldn't help but wonder what Gaea would look like in the sky with the moon. Before she realized she was at the step of her dorm so she went up to her room.

It was just her in the room; Yukari was out somewhere with Amano. She sat down on the window seat and tried to do the homework she hadn't finished between classes. It was not much use however for she couldn't prevent her mind from wondering. She looked from the window to her notepad and found herself imagining a feather appearing before her like so long ago. It would be white and soft, though she would not be able to touch it.

She looked out the window again and her hand went to her chest looking for her pendent, something she hadn't done in a very long time. Thoughts started racing through her head, ones that she wished wouldn't, wants and desires. She looked at her top chiffonier drawer. She knew what was in it. She had vowed never to use them again but she had kept them anyway. She didn't know why but she kept them. For what seemed like hours she fought the desire but in the end she stood, opened the drawer and from it drew the deck of cards.

Hitomi sat at the window with the deck in front of her for what seemed like an equally long amount of time too afraid to touch them. More thought raced through her head. Mostly about all the people that suffered and died because of her and her readings. "Valgus, all the men at Allen's castle, Duke Freid and Vorris, Naria and Eriya, all the people at Malerna's wedding. All because of me."

After long she stood again and took the cards in her hand with the intent to put them back in the drawer. But she was stopped by something. A sound, but so quiet that she thought it might have just been her imagination. Her first thought was that it was just the breeze outside but it came again. This time she could tell that it was a voice but she couldn't tell what it had said or where it was coming from. It came again louder this time. Someone was calling her name.

Hitomi walked to the short foyer at the door. "Is someone there?" She said in a very quiet voice. So quiet that anyone outside would not have heard it. Somehow she knew that there was no one outside the door.

It came again. 'Hitomi!' Though seemingly far away and almost ghostlike she now recognized the voice and it terrified her.

"Di- Dilandau! N- no. You're dead." Hitomi suddenly felt a weight in her hand. She turned from the door and faced a mirror on the wall above a small wooden table with pictures of Yukari's and her families. She stared at herself holding the cards.

Though she didn't want to and would give anything to have never done it, she drew a card from the top of the deck and placed it on the table. It was the Devil card. Hitomi stiffened and her hand shook as she drew the next card. When she placed it on the table and saw it she was somewhat relieved but still frightened at what it could mean. It was the Lovers card.

She drew the third card and placed it face down above the others. She had almost no desire to know what the card was and yet at the same time she of course she did. The preceding cards were enough of an indication for her. She placed a finger on each card facing up. "The Devil and the Lovers. A great evil will come between two that deeply love one another." Hitomi said half in trance.

Hitomi looked at the unturned card. She couldn't stop from trembling now. She reached for the card and rested her hand on its edge. The image of a woman with white wings came into her mind and the memory of what she had said: 'You brought those unhappy futures into being.'

She felt the deck of cards slip out of her grasp. "No!" she yelled in fear and rage. She tore her hand away from the card and then threw her arms across the table sweeping everything onto the floor. "I won't let it happen!"

Hitomi looked at the broken glass of the picture frames on the floor. And then she saw it and cupped her hand over her mouth to keep from screaming. The card. It was still lying face down on the table. In a low and shaky voice she uttered: "I don't want to go back."

Suddenly Hitomi heard someone outside the door. It opened and Yukari stood in the doorway staring at Hitomi and the cards and the broken glass. "Hitomi!?" She said concerned. Hitomi looked at her friend for a moment and then ran past her out the door. "Hitomi!" Yukari only felt the tips of her fingers reach Hitomi for a short moment before she was gone.

Yukari stepped inside the room. She looked again at the broken glass and the cards on the ground and then she noticed the card on the table. She picked it up and looked at it. "The Tower?"

Hitomi ran down the stairs and out of the dorm. Without any knowledge of where she was going she ran simply to run. To somehow run away from her own thoughts. She had no intent to stop any time soon but it seemed to her that fate intervened and she tripped over a root in the ground.

The cold blades of grass hurt Hitomi's skin when she hit the ground and the night air was very cold. She picked herself up and looked around. She was in a long courtyard just outside the campus. She shivered as all she had on was her school uniform. She sat beneath the tree the root belonged to and hugged her thighs. The field around her glistened with frost in the moonlight.

Hitomi looked up to see the moon through the branches of the tree. She tucked her head between her knees and felt her tears fall to the grass. 'I don't want it to begin again. I don't want to see it anymore.' She heard herself say.

Suddenly something told her to open her eyes. Before her a spot on the ground seemed to glow a gentle white. Hitomi knelt and looked closely at it. For a moment she thought she could make out a white feather but before she could focus on it, it disappeared. This saddened Hitomi even more as she felt that it took away any hope of seeing him again. She put her face in her hands and began crying again.

But a moment later she felt a slight wind and heard the branches of the tree sway. She felt something light land in her lap. When she opened her eyes they fell upon a white feather resting on her thighs. She

smiled and several images flashed through her mind. Images of the one she loved. Then she heard another sound. It came from several feet ahead of her.

She looked up and she saw the tall dark figure of a boy. The light of the moon glinted off of his eyes and a red stone hanging from his neck. He walked to Hitomi and stood smiling down at her with gentle eyes. Hitomi jumped from the ground into his arms. "Van!"

Van held her close and whispered to her: "Hitomi. I missed you. And I'm sorry, I was starting to forget." Hitomi looked at Van's face and their hands met at their sides. Hitomi became lost in his eyes and finally felt joy.

Suddenly there was a fast sound of a blade through the air. Hitomi was filled with horror as Van suddenly leaned back and then fell forward into Hitomi's arms. She fell to her knees supporting Van in her arms. She could feel his blood running from the wound across his back. "Van!" she yelled to no avail.

Hitomi heard the sound of a sword being sheathed and she looked up. A perverse and sadistic laugh came from a dark figure walking toward Hitomi and Van. It was a man. A man in red armor. Dilandau. He stood over Hitomi and Van. Hitomi could say nothing. Dilandau reached down toward Hitomi and she reared back still hanging onto Van's body. Dilandau's hand went to Van's neck and he ripped the pendant from it.

The pendant hung from Dilandau's hand swinging back and forth. "The stone will bring you to me, and then you will die. You can't escape that fate." Dilandau's voice seemed ghostlike just as it was before. With the pendant still in his hand he drew his sword and raised it above. The light of the moon shone off of the stone and the blade. Hitomi closed her eyes as she heard his bloodthirsty cry and the blade swinging down.

Hitomi awoke suddenly with a frightened yell. She laid where she was and didn't move as she was disoriented and still frightened. As she focused her eyes she realized that she was looking at the ceiling in her dorm. She sat up in her bed and wiped the sweat from her face. She gripped the white sheet and fell back to the bed and looked at the ceiling again. "I suppose I was dreaming. I'm glad that's all it was." She said to herself quietly. "But where did it begin?"

She glanced over to the window and saw that it was morning again. But she couldn't see the sun, it was covered by clouds. She then heard the door open and someone walk in. She quickly sat up and saw Yukari rush over to her. "Are you feeling alright? You really had us worried yesterday!" Yukari exclaimed as she sat down and took Hitomi's hand.

"I'm fine." Hitomi said with a reliving tone but then her expression changed. "Wait, why were you worried?"

"I was worried because you ran out on me last night and when Amano and I found you, you were passed out lying face down in a field. We tried to wake you up but you just wouldn't. Amano carried you here." Yukari said frantically.

"You found me lying on the ground?" Hitomi said perplexed. 'That's it. That's when it started. It didn't really happen.' She thought. She then realized something else: 'If it started when I fell outside than the

reading was real. What does it mean? A great evil will come between two that deeply love one another.'

Yukari saw that Hitomi was drifting off again. She turned her head to the side still concerned. "Are you sure you're okay? You look a little pale." Yukari said as she leaned over Hitomi and put her hand on her forehead. Hitomi pulled Yukari's hand off her head and held it. "Don't worry, everything's fine." Hitomi smiled at her friend even though she still felt uneasy.

After a few more times of making sure her best friend was alright, Yukari went off to the bathroom and left Hitomi to get dressed. Hitomi got out of bed to get dressed. She noted that she was in her nightgown and not the school uniform she had been wearing that night. 'Sometimes I wonder about that girl' Hitomi joked to herself as she paced a few steps to her chiffonnier. She reached for the handle of the top drawer but stopped as she glanced at the deck of tarot cards on top of the chiffonnier. 'Yukari must have picked them up for me.' She thought. She put her hand on the top of the deck. She thought for a moment about taking the card but instead picked up the whole deck and put it back in the drawer.

"Never again." The girl from the mystic moon said.

## 2 - A World Apart

### Chapter 2

#### A World Apart

As the wind blew across the lands in it was caught a white feather. The wind carried it across green fields, dark forests and white mountains. In its path it saw many things and peoples. Houses and castles, villages and kingdoms. It saw the joy of peoples and the sadness. Its journey was of gentle flight never touching the ground or the tree tops.

At last it came to a glistening city on the water. It went over that city on the winds and saw its people. They were busy, hurrying about the streets despite the setting sun. It came upon a pass in the mountains narrow and steep. As the feather moved the walls fell back and the canyon opened up into a vast valley. There it danced with the winds over the green fields far and wide.

The Shadow of the mountain had already covered the fields and the ground was plain without shadow or glint. Not for miles around were there anyone but two in the field. A tall man with long golden hair watched as a girl knelt in the soft grass with the butterflies. The man walked to her with grace as if there were no troubles in the world. He knelt next to the girl and looked at her thin face. He ran his fingers down the right side of her face with care and love. "Oh my dear sister." He said sullenly.

"Brother?" the girl questioned looking up into his deep blue eyes. There was a gentle breeze and the girl saw something dashing about in the currents. The breeze subsided and all was calm and the white feather drifted from the skies to the girl's hands. "A feather." the girl said.

The man looked at the quill intently as if a memory of a dark past had suddenly risen in his mind. The girl spoke again cradling the feather in her hands. "I've seen feathers like this one before." The man looked at his sister. A feeling of dread and darkness echoed in his mind. "It is the first thing I remember besides you my broth-." She stopped as she felt the man's hands clasp around hers.

"Sister, let's go home." He said with a smile as they stood hand in hand.

As they left the field the feather was left behind, alone in the grass. The man glanced back as if to make sure it stayed where it was.

Night had come to Palace, the capital city of the kingdom of Asturia. The darkness was deep but the light of the orb of the Guardian Sea Dragon gave a dim blue light to the city. The light traveled across the harbor to the castle in the mountain cliffs. It poured into a hall through its tall windows being only obstructed by the many clothed wall hangings. Though the orb was not the only source of light, a crackling fire cast dark shadows of several figures onto the walls.

At a large desk sat King Aston. Next to him was his chief advisor, Lord Miden and behind him were Aston's other advisors. Before them were Allen Schezar and his second, Gaddes. The king looked on



Allen with a skeptic gaze as his advisors spoke among themselves snidely while once in a while giving Allen and Gaddes a quick look of disrespect and loathing. Finally after much frustration Allen interrupted the advisors banter gruffly. "My lord."

The echo of his voice ceased the advisors conversation. King Aston briefly gave Miden and amused look and then turned his attention to Allen. "Allen Schezar, you are worked up over nothing. Zaiboch is wounded and leaderless. They are of no concern to me."

Allen stood from his chare. "But my lord, there is irrefutable evidence that Zaiboch is-"

"What evidence, Allan Schezar? The reports of a few minor informants? Whether or not it is true, the treaty still stands." The king interrupted in an almost lighthearted tone.

Allen's gaze became hard and grave. "Since when does Zaiboch honor its treaties?" Silence filled the room. Allan, followed by Gaddes, stood and left the room without dismissal.

Allen, still with a stone stare, stormed down the long torch lit hall outside the conference room. Gaddes looked on his commander as he followed at a distance. Allen had changed over the years. He did not wear his Knight of Caeli uniform but instead a similar suit of black with an extra short-sword on his right hip.

Gaddes called out to his respected commander. "You can't keep doin' things like this. King Aston is not only going to not allow the mission but he may begin questioning your loyalty!"

Allen stopped short and stood with his back to Gaddes. Gaddes kept at a distance as Allen's temper had shortened as well. "And if he does where then will your loyalties lie?" Allen asked coldly.

Gaddes scratched his head with a bent smile. "You're the boss." He stated.

Allen turned to his loyal subordinate. "There was no question." He said though his expression did not change.

"Gaddes is right!" A soft voice came from an approaching woman. Allen and Gaddes turned to the voice.

"Princess Malerna." Allen said with none of the magic that came with that name in the past.

"He is right in that your public disrespect for father is unbecoming." Malerna said as she faced Allen.

"Unbecoming of what?" Allen said harshly. Gaddes took a long step back and leaned on the wall to leave the two some space.

"Of a Knight of Caeli?" Allen continued.

Malerna's expression went from upset with someone she cared about to regretful. "You cannot refer to yourself in that manor anymore. Not since it was stripped from your title." Though Malerna had become better at hiding her emotions this was the one person from whom she was as transparent as a pane of glass. Malerna wished to cry, but she did not let herself. Allen looked at her

almost as he would have long ago. But after a very short moment he turned from her and walked away.

Once again Malerna felt abandoned and alone as she had so many times. Suddenly she was startled by Gaddes's voice as she had forgotten he was there.

"Ya can't blame him can ya princess? Not only did he suffer a grave dishonor by losing his title and his duds, but King Aston still won't listen to him." Gaddes defended Allen.

"My father can be stubborn but that is how it has always been. And sometimes I do worry about Allen's loyalties." Malerna said regretting the truth of it. Gaddes went to Malerna and gave her a sure look.

"I wouldn't worry about his loyalties. His first loyalty is to the people he loves." He gave her an odd look as he paused. "But he still loves Asturia. He always has. He just doesn't love it's ruler."

"I know." Malerna said. "But what I don't know is what Allen is so concerned about. Once again father has kept me in the dark." She looked at Gaddes intently.

He reared back a bit. "Oh no, not this time, Princess. I don't think I'm really the person to tell you that." He said knowing that she would force the issue anyway.

"Gaddes!" Malerna stated stubbornly. She balled up her fists and took a step toward him.

"Okay, okay! But not here." He said looking down the hall in either direction.

"Of course not." She said quietly.

"Look, Allan has called a meeting on the Crusade for tonight. You can talk to him then. I'm sure he'll let you in the loop. I think." Gaddes said. Malerna noticed that he was getting nervous in regard to their conversation.

"Very well." She said in a low tone. "I shall take my leave of you, soldier of Asturia." She finished in a voice a little louder than normal in case anyone was around. She curtsied and Gaddes half bowed his head before he dashed off.

Allen stood at the bow of his airship just ahead of the wheel. He gazed out the front window at the city lights below. He saw the image of his sister's thin face in the reflection. Her pale blue eyes, her now long light hair. He closed his eyes and in his mind he pictured her face and the thin light line down her right cheek. Allen tried to put it out of his mind as he leaned on his forearm on the window and looked to the city again. His focus went from the city to a reflection in the pane of glass. In the light of the doorway leading to the lower decks stood Riden.

"Heya, captain." He said as Allen turned and looked at him across the room. "Ah, sorry fora disterben you, but everyone is assembled. We're ready for ya anytime now." Riden kept his voice low as the room was completely silent when he came in.

"Very well." Allen said.

The two walked to the lower deck and went into one of the side rooms. The room was brightly lit as

compared to the dark bridge Allen and Riden had come from. Not that he didn't trust Riden, Allen counted his men. Teo, Katz and Pyle were in a corner sitting around a crate drinking and playing cards. Riden walked over to the other corner and sat down with Oruto who was sharpening his daggers. Allen's eyes then came to Kio, as big as ever and Gaddes who were standing together facing away from Allen behind a long table that was in the middle of the room. They seemed to be blocking something from Allen's view.

Allen approached the table suspiciously and laid one hand on it starring straight at the two big men. "Gaddes?" He questioned.

Gaddes sighed as he and Kio turned and parted revealing the person they had been hiding.

"Princess!" Allen said in a low voice. He looked at Gaddes but he was looking another direction. "What are you doing here? The hour is late. It is not a time to be socializing."

Malerna gave Allen a cold stare. "But it is a fine time for secret meetings?" Allen said nothing. "I hear that you have been making plans. And I would like to hear about them." Malerna said glancing at Riden.

Allen turned his head and gave Riden a hard stare. Riden tensed up. "I- I didn't tell her, boss, she just sorta put it together."

Allen looked back to Malerna. "Put it together?"

Kio pulled a chair out from under the table and Malerna sat down. "It was not very difficult. You have been stockpiling weapons onboard the Crusade and it would be very difficult to miss the four guymelefs and melef carrier sitting on this pad behind us. So just what are you planning to do?"

Allen crossed his arms and turned away from the princess. "It is plain to see that you will not give this up." He turned halfway around and looked at her from the corner of his eye. "In which case you should hear it from the beginning."

Everyone packed around the table and sat down. Allen and Malerna sat in the center of each side. Gaddes stood at the head of the table fumbling with some maps. He found the one he was looking for and set it in on the table. Then using a long dagger as a pointer he addressed the group. "Alright. Is everyone here? Does anyone need to go to the bathroom before we start?" The men laughed quietly but Allen and Malerna sat in stillness starring at one another. Gaddes continued. "Is everyone sober?" He looked at Pyle at the other end of the table as he hiccuped. "Close enough." Gaddes said.

"Several months ago the new Asturian spies in Zaiboch started reporting. We learned that though Emperor Dornkirk is dead the chaos of anarchy hasn't swept over the empire as we had expected after the war. Instead others have taken command over the people. More specifically, General Adelphis chiefly, one other remaining general of the four, who wasn't killed in the war, and equally importantly and perhaps even more of a threat, the sorcerers." Everyone in the room had already known this information but Malerna did not.

"Further reports said what we had been fearing since the end of the war. Zaiboch is starting to rebuild its forces. They are mass producing not only Alseides units but also Oreades units. Those are the big ones

that if I remember correctly only a certain white dragon could defeat. That report came only two months ago. After which King Aston ordered most of the spies back for fear of discovery. Until this point we were being told the spies' reports. But then for some reason they decided to stop talking to us. Gee, I wonder why." Gaddes stopped briefly and looked at Malerna.

"Anyway, we managed to pull a few strings and got three of the remaining seven to talk to us through various channels. The next report said that they were starting to deploy small melef carriers bound for various locations across this continent. Afterwards King Aston ordered all informants to pull out for good. Unfortunately only five made it back. So we don't know if they know that we know what they are doing."

Everyone looked at one another trying to make sense out of the last part.

"After that we decided to look for the troops that were deployed but unfortunately the trail went cold and all we were able to hear was some talk of queer events that sounded like trouble. Then the really concerning stuff started happening. People were talking about melef battles with 'invisible devils'. After that there was no question. Zaiboch forces had reached our shores. We then got reports of melef battles to both the north and south of Asturia, in these locations." Gaddes pointed to spots on the map with the dagger. "Some battles were even as far as the Shtall Mountains." He stabbed the dagger into the table on the mountain range.

"But we cannot be sure that those far off battles were Zaiboch battles." Allen chimed in. "Basram has been picking fights with several of it's neighbors in that area."

"Am I the only one that noticed a pattern to the location of the battles?" Malerna asked.

"You're right." Said Gaddes. "the battles seem to be around us, none of them actually occurring on Asturian soil, and they are leading in a south- eastern direction."

Malerna gasped. "You- you don't think- that they are headed for Fanelia do you?"

"It is a possibility that we cannot dismiss, yes." Allen said. He stood and looked on his men and the beautiful princess before him. "That is why I shall speak with King Aston first thing tomorrow. There can be no more delays. It is my hope that he will finally understand that. Once I have his consent we deploy. Our mission will be to find these Zaiboch forces and deal with them if necessary."

"That is if you can convince him to give you consent. So far he has completely ignored you. What makes you think he will allow us to go?" Gaddes asked.

"He will simply to get rid of Allen." Malerna said. "It would be just like him."

"The princess is right. And that is what I have counted on." Allen said. "Now then. I am counting on all of you to make readiness. I want the Crusade prepped and the melefs loaded by mid-day tomorrow."

Malerna stood and faced Allen. "I'm coming."

"No. You are not." Allen said as if expecting it from Malerna.

"Allen I am! Even if I have to ask father. You can't stop me." She said.

"I'm afraid she's got ya there, commander." Gaddes said.

Allen turned to leave the room. "Very well, ask your father. Though I doubt very much that he will see any gain in sending you with me." Allen said. He stood for a moment waiting for a response but none came from Malerna. "Dismissed." He said as he walked out of the room.

The group dispersed and everyone went home or to a tavern as they did not know how long they would be gone if they left at all. All except Gaddes. Malerna pulled him aside to speak with him once again.

"You will come with me when I ask my father." She said to him as they walked to Malerna's chariot just off the pad and away a few blocks as Malerna enjoyed walking the streets of Palace when she could.

As the two walked through the streets Malerna looked at the moons in the sky. "Tell me something, Gaddes." She said. Gaddes looked at her in the blue light of the sea-dragon orb no longer wondering when she was going to ask him something about Allen. "Why does Allen treat me the way he does? Why does he not face me when he speaks to me?" She continued.

"Well princess, there is no simple answer to that. But if you want to know why he seems like he's always in a bad mood lately, then it's probably because of his sister." Gaddes said.

"His sister? What do you mean." Malerna questioned.

"Well ya see, it's like this: Celina, he tells me has been acting strangely and has been having nightmares. It's really bothering him because he can't do nothing about it." Gaddes said. "That and that time not too long ago when Celina got lost by herself in the forest west of the mountains where Allen takes her from time to time."

"Oh. I see. How awful." Malerna said in an even tone. Gaddes looked at Malerna with a critical eye. He knew that she was disappointed that the reason didn't somehow concern her. It was the selfish little princess routine showing though again. But that was just how things were.

"Princess please tell me. Why are you coming?" He asked.

"I will tell father that I am going in case the Crusade runs into any trouble with any other country's people such as Basram. They will think twice about starting a fight or doing anything of that sort if I am aboard." Malerna said. Gaddes rolled his eyes at her logic and evasion of the question.

"Princess, what is the real reason you are coming?" Gaddes asked as they reached the chariot. One of the chauffeurs stepped down and opened the door for the princess.

"Thank you for escorting me to my chariot, Gaddes soldier of Austria." She said as she put her hand out for Gaddes to kiss. Knowing she wasn't going to give him a straight answer, Gaddes paid his respects to the princess and she departed leaving him to the night. He watched the chariot disappear down the street as it turned a corner toward the castle.

"She still loves him huh?" He said to himself as he started on the way home.

In the soft flicker of firelight Celina sat with only her thoughts to accompany her. She felt warm in the light of the fire and the blanket wrapped tightly around her long body in the house of Schezar. Despite the warmth, the tears running down her cheek seemed cold. "Where are you brother? I don't want to be alone." She whispered from time to time as she looked out the open shutter at the moons in the sky.

Just then into the room came a beautiful woman with earrings of gold. She walked over to the armchair in which Celina was sitting. "My dear, it is late what are you doing out of bed?" She said in a soft and caring tone.

"Aunt Eries." Celina said. "Forgive me I could not sleep. I dream of frightening and unpleasant things. Though they seem so real I feel as if maybe they are not dreams at all, but memories from long ago."

"It is alright my dear. Your dreams can't hurt you. Nor your memories. Come now and I shall put you to bed." Princess Eries said as she held out her hand to the girl. She took the bundled girl down a dark hall and to her bed. Over the years the princess had grown quite fond of Celina, caring for her often when Allen was away. She had also developed a further liking of Allen. They could now be considered close friends. As she walked back from the room, in the way to the common room where the two had come from, silhouetted in the firelight was Allen. Once to him he bowed to the princess and invited her to sit and drink.

"I am aware of your plans to leave tomorrow." Said Eries.

"Oh? Do they concern you?" Allen said in an even tone.

"I am confident that you are capable of taking care of yourself. My concern lies with Celina. She seems to be becoming more and more attached to you rather than less and less. Quite abnormal for a girl of marriageable age such as your sister." She explained.

"She has been a marriageable age for some years now. It is not only that she doesn't want to let me go but she chooses not to take a suitor. And I am inclined to agree. The men who have approached me about her I did not care for. Particularly Midens's second son Cliden." He said.

"Regardless, I am concerned about her because she is even more distant than ever. The only time I see her face light up is when she sees you, Allen. And my concern is furthered by her tellings of her dreams." She said looking into the fire from one of the arm chairs they were sitting in.

"Yes her dreams. Did she tell you of them?" Allen asked.

"No. Only that nightmares had been keeping her from sleep." Eries responded. "What is it that she dreams of?"

"I have almost not the heart to say aloud for she describes it like a memory as she says she feels that that is what they could be if not dreams."

"Yes, she told me of that." Eries said.

"She said she dreamt sometimes of fiery battles and blood-soaked ground and sometimes of a single

person. She said it was a woman with long white hair and white skin. She also said something about this woman which is quite confusing since it sounds as if she is speaking of a human woman. She says that the woman's ears are pointed. She also said she heard a song and that the woman might have been singing it."

Princess Aries thought for a time mystified. "Those are very specific images." She finally said for lack of anything relevant to add.

"Yes. And none of the things she has described to me seem likely to have been influenced by anything before she was taken, like Austria, our mother, father, or even me. They may be influenced by or be memories of when she was taken. I think that is likely." Allen paused a long while looking worried. "But what if it was." Allen trailed off becoming quiet and pensive.

"What? What if it was what, Allen?" Eries asked with concern leaning forward in her chair.

".what if it was a memory not from Celina, but from Dilandau." The air went silent. Memories of a day long since passed formed in both their minds. The day at the gravestone. It was that day for Allen at least that he started believing that nightmares could come true.

"Anyway, I shall put your mind at ease by telling you this: I have decided to take Celina with me." Allen finished.

"I see." Said Eries. "Good."

Eries set her wine glass on the table between the chairs and stood abruptly ending their conversation. Allen stood as well.

"The hour is late. I must turn in soon." Eries said. Allen escorted her to the door and her guards. "I shall see you off tomorrow. I believe my father will allow your trip. He has seemed eager as of late to rid himself of you." She said coldly but about her father and not Allen.

"Good night princess. I thank you for looking in on my sister." Allen bided Eries goodbye.

The sun shone down onto the Austrian water and they glinted brightly seeming to smile back at the life-giving sun. Clouds patched the sky here and there and though the sun was shining the clouds threatened rain. The crew of the Crusade bustled about busily making last minute preparations for the mission. Pyle, Oruto and Teo were taking weapon inventories, and checking supplies like food stuffs, Gaddes and Katz were securing the melef carrier to the bottom of the Crusade. The carrier held four heavy class offensive Austrian guymelefs who's pilots were Gaddes, Katz, Teo, and Oruto. All of whom had become pilots at Allen's request some years ago.

Left on the bridge of the Crusade were Riden and Kio. Their responsibility was to the Crusade. They were doing tasks such as calibrating pressurized steam pipes and checking the levastones for cracks or fissures. They were ahead of schedule and done with most of the work, but Allen was late, which wasn't like him. Kio fumbled with the wheel and looked at Riden. "Heya, don'tcha worry pal. The boss is fine. I'm sure he has pressn' matters he's attendin." Riden said trying to cheer up his friend.

"Yah, your probably right. But he's been gone a long time since I saw him this morning before he went to see King Aston. I'm just worried that he didn't get approval." Kio said deeply.

"Wella. ya know he wouldn't wait around to tell us we wasn't goin nowhere so I don't think that's just it." Riden sad as he wrinkled his brow and scratched his chin. He glanced outside to look at his city. "But that doesn't change how hard it is ta leave home. It's even harder ta leave my wife." Riden said.

"Oh yah. How is that little fire cracker doing?" Kio asked with a grin.

"She hasn't cheated on me in a whi. Hey! There he is!" Riden shouted as he ran from the com pipes he was absently shining to the window with Kio in tow.

The two men peered down at their commander below who was just standing on the edge of the pad looking at the city. "Hey, what's he doin?" Riden asked rhetorically.

"I duno." Kio said as they looked at their commander's back.

Allen stood with his arms crossed with his weight shifted to one side. After a few minuets of starring at the city he shifted his weight and looked up at the sun to check the time. He heard a carriage and held up his black gloved hand to shield his sun from the eyes. Though after a moment he no longer had need of it as a wisp of clouds cast its shadow on the entire pad. As Allen looked from the cloud to the carriage his heart went from impatience to joy as three beautiful woman stepped from it. He walked to them.

"Princesses, Celina. Good morning." Allen said.

"Good morning Allen." Malerna said pleasantly surprised at Allen's good mood.

"I apologize, we are late and have delayed your departure." Eries said.

"Quite alright. There can be no departure without my sister and the princess." Allen said. Malerna frowned at Allen's priorities but he did not notice. Malerna and Celina stepped to Allen's side as they prepared to part ways with their beloved Eries.

"I was pleased to hear that you received father's approval. I bid you farewell Allen Schezar knight of Asturia. I shall see you upon your return. May it be swift." Eries said as she looked into Allen's blue eyes. Allen looked into Aries's eyes. He felt himself lost for a moment but then took the princess's small hand in his own an kneeled before her.

"I bid you farewell Eries Aria Aston. Allen Schezar will now leave you." Allen said. He kissed Eries's hand and stood.

"Goodbye sister!" Malerna called as the three walked to the Crusade.

"I shall miss you dearly!" Celina called as well.

Eries stood by her coach and watched as the Crusade lifted off and started on its journey. "Return safely, Allen."



## 3 - Song of Angels

### Chapter 3

#### Song of Angels

Deep in the depths of the Wondering Earth a wind from the distant surface world blew sharply between the many dark stones. The wind went from the mouth of the deep chasm and in and out of the spaces between levitating rock. As it traveled downwards it shifted over and around the black stones ominously still and silent. It reached a depth to where the light of the sun or the moons would only be a fragmented haze obstructed by the aimless and lost wondering stones.

Here it found things not native to this deep part of the world. Though they were indeed levastones, they were dressed in unnatural shaped metals and were not silent like the others. As the wind passed these stones it not only took with it the low hum of the foreign stones but also a sweeter vibration of sound that it enjoyed more than the hum. It was a sweet sound, like a smooth white wine sliding across the tongue. Though it was also sad, like the tears of a lost love falling down into the darkness below.

On the bridge of the lead flagship of these dark Zaiboch stones that lye deep in the dark with the lonely stones of wondering stood men clad in gray armor. The sweet sound that the wind on their hull so enjoyed echoed though out the ship. All the men were stead at their posts entranced by the sound for it was both beautiful and dark, joyous and saddening.

Win dain a lotica

En vai tu ri

Ai lo ta

Fin dein a lolucan

En dragu a sei lain

Bafa-ru les shutai am

En riga-lint

Win chent a lotica

En vai turi

Si lo ta

Fin dein a loluca  
Si natigura neuver  
Floreria for chesti

Se entina

In the center of the bridge filled with darkness and sullen sound stood Veolae Europa, the captain of the Sequior and commander of this Zaiboch armada lying in wait amid the wondering stones. He was tall and strong with an inquisitive and caring face. He stood in complete stillness as he gazed forward expressionless gripping the sword at his side tightly. Though his face gave no allusion, his heart sank with the song. Though a mighty warrior and a strong willed man, the song's melody defeated him and he was prepared to surrender to it and she who sang this song of angels.

La la la la la la la

La la la la la

Fontina Blu Cent

De Cravi esca letisimo

La la la la la la la

La la la la la

De quantian

La Finder eve

Win dain a lotica

En vai tu ri

Ai lo ta

Fin dein a lolucan

Endragu a sei lain

Vi fa-ru les shutai am

En riga-lint

As the sad song ended the cold air seemed as silent as death. Veolae directed his attention to one of his

subordinates, Lethathan, who had been standing beside his commander waiting with all others on the ship for the air to fall silent again. Lethathan said to him: "Sir. There is still no word."

Veolae closed his eyes in silent prayer and bowed his head. "Very well. Thank you Lethathan. I give you the bridge." He said with a hand on Lethathan's shoulder.

He left the bridge down a hall and through to the center of the ship. He stepped into a circular room adorned with crimson silk sheets and velvet pillows. The room was bathed in the light trickling down from the hidden sky above through a dome skylight of glass and gold etchings. Still at the door Veolae looked to the center of the room and his weary gaze fell on the girl from whom the song had come. She stood facing him her pail blue eyes seeming to glisten in the dim light. She held out her hand beckoning him to her.

When he was upon her he took her hand in his own and looked on her. Her white skin. Her long wavy hair. Her pointed ears. "My laity, Sora." He said gently.

"Lord Veolae." She said in a voice like silk.

Veolae felt his concentration waver as he peered into Sora's eyes. After a moment he remembered his duties. "Two of our squadrons have reported the Basram troops west of Fanelia are in retreat from the Fanelian forces. However the other three squadrons have failed to report for the second day. One of these squadrons was made up of Oreades units. They could not have been destroyed by the Basrams." He said.

Sora lowered her hands to the sides of her long flowing dress and a slight smile came to her light lavender lips. "We are in the den of the dragon." She said in an admirable tone. Veolae knew of whom she spoke. He had once seen him fight in the last battle for Freid. He had lost many of his men to the white dragon of Fanelia, and now even more it seemed. "Do not fear. The dragon is far from us." Sora said.

Veolae could hide nothing from Sora least his fears and hatred. She could see through him, as she could see through almost all. Sora's gifts both intrigued and frightened Veolae. As did her origins. He knew only that she was from the capitol of Zaiboch and she was a servant of the sorcerers. "I have recalled the remaining troops. What are your wishes my laity?" he said.

Sora closed her eyes and slowly raised her chin to the air. Veolae watched in awe and apprehension as he saw her body tremble and then her eyes opened wide. "What we seek approaches from the west, crossing the Shtall Mountains." Her voice was flat and eerie without the her usual sweetness for, as Veolae knew, it was not her but the sorcerers speaking through her with the power of what remained of the Destiny Prognostication Engine which was at their command.

Sora stood tense still looking upward, trembling. After a moment her stare diminished with her eyes closing her into darkness. She fell limp into Veolae's arms and he knelt to the ground. "Sora!" He exclaimed. Though this was the method used often by the sorcerers to send commands to him, it still scared him to death each time. Sora sat kneeling before him supported by his arms. With a fatigued effort she looked up upon him. "We must find her before the dragon." She said softly. She, as the conscious world faded away into darkness fell into Veolae's arms.

Elsewhere in the dark of that night blue flame roared across a field in a valley of the wide Shtall Mountain range. Above and away in the sky the Crusade approached. On the bridge there was confusion and haste as Riden peered through the periscope at the field. "Fire! I see blue fire! Kio adjust course to 184!" Riden shouted. "Pile, go get Gaddes and the da boss!" But there was no need as Allen and Gaddes entered the bridge followed by Malerna and Celina.

"Riden, can you see melef wreckage?" Gaddes asked hastily as he rushed over to Riden.

"Hold on." Riden said as he refocused the lenses and zoomed in. "Wreckage! Geze tons of it! It looks like dare are at least nine or ten melegs! All torn to shreds!" By now most of the crew had gathered in the cockpit and were looking out the windows at the small flicker of the flames in the distance. Malerna held Celina as she cried, as she had done each time they had come upon a sight like this.

Allen looked to Malerna. "Take her below." He said. He returned his focus to Riden. "Who's melegs are they?" He asked.

"Ah, I, I duno. We're still to far. But" Riden said.

"But we can assume two things about this battle: that it was very recent and that it involved Zaiboch." Allen said. "Their guymelegs burn blue. There is no mistaking that at least some of the wreckage is Zaiboch. Gaddes, Katz, Teo, Oruto, get to your melegs. We don't know what is waiting for us down there. I'll lead you in Scherazade. Riden, approach carefully at quarter speed. Take us in."

The men dispersed throughout the ship to their various stations. Gaddes, Katz, Teo and Oruto boarded the melef carrier through the hatches on the underside of the Crusade's hull where the carrier was anchored and awaited Allen's orders at its com pipes. It was a low altitude drop carrier; the guymelef would fall from the air through the trap-door floor of the carrier. The melegs themselves were big and bulky, a dark gray like Scherazade; upgraded versions of those in the battle at Allen's castle. They were larger and more capable to stand up to Alseides units for which they were designed and built to fight after the war.

Allen waited at the com pipes in the rear of the Crusade before boarding Scherazade.. Even though Scherazade was one of the official guymelef of the Knights of Kalee, he still retained it as a favor from the princesses.

Through the pipes Riden spoke to Allen. "We're getten close. I can see the wreckage clearly now. But it doesn't make no sense!"

"What is it that you see, Riden?" Allen said through the pipes. "There are a total of twelve guymelegs-" Riden paused. "All Zaiboch."

There was a moment and no one spoke. Gaddes, Katz, Teo and Oruto stood at the carrier's com pipes waiting for Allen's commands. After a minuet they came. "Everyone back on the crusade. Riden, get some distance between us and the melegs. We don't want to have a flying fortress on top of us. Best speed." Allen said.

"Wait!" Everyone heard Malerna yell.

"What is it princess?" Kio said glancing at her from the wheel as she stared out the window at the battlefield which they were nearly upon.

"Malerna!" Allen said. "I thought I told you to go below."

"You told me to take Celina below. Not stay there." Malerna said obstinately. "There is something moving down there! I think it's a person!" Malerna continued seeming to speak to anyone but Allen.

"Rieden?" Allen inquired.

"Just a sec..." he said as he scanned the battlefield searching for movement other than the flames whispering through the air. "I got im'! It's a Zaibach soldier! He's alone, Captain."

"Gaddes, Katz, Teo, Oruto, Pyle join me in the drop pad." Allen called into the pipes with some reluctance. "Were going down."

The six men gathered into the pad and it was lowered to the ground on the edge of the battlefield. The fires had gone down but there was a soft blue light cast from many directions. Allen commanded the group to stay alert in case it was an ambush. They approached the person from the rear and saw that he was in fact as they had predicted, a Zaiboch pilot dressed in blue and black. They proceeded cautiously with a nervous eye in every direction.

The pilot was sitting on the remains of his melef and they could hear him breathing or struggling to breath. One of his hands was in his lap clutching his sword and the other was hanging limp to his side draining blood onto the cold metal of his Alseides unit.

Gaddes was the one to sneak up behind him. He was cautious; as an animal is most dangerous when it is injured and separated from it's pack. Gaddes, silent as a fox was upon the pilot unnoticed. The man's breathing made Gaddes more nervous as he crept closer. In and out, as if the air around him was reluctant to give him breath. But he was also mumbling something that Gaddes couldn't make out. He was very close now and he could now see that the pilot was much smaller than he had thought.

As the group watched and waited from behind an Oreades unit lying on its side, Gaddes acted. He jumped toward the man and twisted his arm around his back and grabbed his neck lifting his seemingly light body off the ground. In the same motion the pilot screeched in pain as he dropped his sword and was thrust down onto the ground next to the melef with his face hitting the sharp bladed grass. With the back of his sword, Gaddes struck the pilot on the back of the head sending him into darkness.

The pilot lay limp facing down into the grass. With his foot Gaddes rolled him over and the group came and looked upon his face. It was a boy. His face was thin and his shoulders narrow. "Geeze." Gaddes said in some regret. "He's just a kid. No older than fourteen."

"Yes." Said Allen. "And all his comrades are dead, and he can tell us who killed them. Lets get him to the Crusade. "

With the new prisoner loaded the Crusade moved away from the field and into a mountain pass into

supposed safety. It was the third week of their mission and they had already come across four new battlefields since passage into the Shtall mountains by way of the Asturian town of Marsoon. All of the attacks appeared to be by Zaiboch guymelefs. But the battlefield they were now leaving in the distance was the first where they found any Zaiboch wreckage let alone a survivor be he Zaiboch or Asturian as some they had not up until now found anyone alive.

In a dark room within the Crusade the prisoner sat bound to a chair still in darkness. His head hung limp from his shoulders. The back of a hand came across his cheek with a painful smack. "Wake up!" Allen commanded as he prepared to strike the boy again. Gaddes with Kio stood by the wall watching their boss and his cruelty. Gaddes gave Kio a look and Kio walked over to Allen.

Allen raised his arm across his chest to hit the boy again but was stopped by Kio's large hand. "Come on commander. Leave the kid alone. He's lost a lot of blood and probably won't wake up for a while." Kio said in an uneasy tone.

Allen gave the big man a cold look. "Very well. When he does wake up I want a thorough interrogation. Use any force necessary. I want to know who did this and why the Zaibach are here." Allen said his voice dark like midnight waters. He dropped his eyes from Kio and made for the door.

Once again he was stopped. Gaddes, with his hand on Allen's shoulder said regrettable words. "It's pretty low to hit a defenseless kid. It's something that the Zaiboch would do."

"He is our enemy and he has information I want." Allen said coldly as he left the room.

In the hall outside the room he was met by the gaze of Malerna; cold and critical of Allen. He had not let her examine the boy upon his arrival even though she had insisted. Standing in opposition she wished to speak her mind to him; to tell him of his unbecoming behavior, but it seemed the silence between them that had been typical of them for so long conveyed the same message. She looked away from his face as she walked past him into the dark room and Allen did not hesitate to leave to his cabin. His thoughts now dwelled only on his sister. Once in his cabin he was dismayed as he had expected to see her but she was not in her bed. Though concerned he knew where she was. He left his cabin wrapping himself in a blue cloak to combat the cold winter air and made for the melef hanger at the rear of the Crusade. He approached the port, aft look-out terrace and as he had expected there his sister was standing. As it had been each time they came across one of the battlefields whether it be one they had already charted or one a new, each time in the after words in this place she would be, crying for the lost lives of the men on those battlefields.

'Why sister' Allen thought 'why must you be so sensitive and caring. I should not have taken you with me. It was selfish.' Allen went to his sister to once again console her but when close, he did not see or hear any sign of her sadness. Instead she looked as if she was holding something in her hands. He unwrapped the cloak from himself and draped it upon the girl's thin shoulders. "Celina," Allen addressed her. She turned to her brother and though she was not crying she had a look of sadness on her face and to Allen's eyes the ever darkening scar of Dilandau was present. Unconsciously Allen's hand met Celina's cheek covering the mark from view. By this some of the sadness left from her face.

As if remembering the materiality in her hands she looked down upon them. "Brother." She said raising her hands to him. Allen's eyes grew wide as he stared at his sister's hands. In them once again was a

long white feather that seemed to glow in the dimness of the night. "It came to me on the winds again." She said. "It came to me because it knew I was sad." She cradled it in her hands close to her chest and looked at it with teary eyes. "I think it is trying to tell me something but..." She paused in thought and looked up at Allen. "Is he alright?" Allen did not answer for he feared who it was she was asking about. "The boy. The boy from the blue flames."

Allen stepped back from his sister. Since the war and his experiences with two people he trusted nothing supernatural. His sister's question frightened him as she had no knowledge of the prisoner. Or so he had thought. Before he could ask her how it was she knew there was a breeze and from Celina's hands the feather escaped and blew far from the two. Celina went to Allen and in each other's arms forgetting all their woes they watched the feather until it was just a speck of white in the distant skies of the mountain canyon.

Allen wanted Celina to come with him to take some rest but she wished to stay and look at the stars and the moons a while longer. This he permitted so long as she was not long to it and later got some rest. Somewhat reluctantly he set on back to his cabin to wait for her. Celina laid on her back and wrapped warmly in her brother's care gazed queerly into the night sky wondering when the feather would come to her again and what it would have to tell her. She drew the heavy blue fabric of cloak up over her chest and nestled in it and the thought of her brother's caring arms brought a smile to her face.

Allen walked into his cabin with a mind to sleep and recover his strength from the long days behind him but he would not rest until his sister was with him. He knew that most likely in a short while he would leave to the hanger and carry his sweet sleeping sister back to her bed. When through the doorway he was, quickly he was drawn back into reality by the sight of Malerna sitting in a chair in the dim candle light of the room. Being in a state almost that of levity from being with his sister he would have smiled at the sight of the princess if it were not for her cold hapless stare. With this he suddenly returned to his former mood. "Princess," He said without joy or a smile.

She sat still staring. Again an unsaid message was conveyed between them. After a short while Allen became weary of her gaze and walked to a window at the side of the room. With frustration and some anger Malerna spoke. "How can you be so insensitive?"

Allen made no indication of acknowledgment with his back to Malerna. She continued. "That boy, who is just a child at that, barely survived his ordeal. And then on top of that and aside from Gaddes' brutality you beat him so that he may wake to more torture!" Malerna scolded with anger and disbelief as to Allen's appalling treatment of the boy.

Again speaking to her with his back turned he said in a quiet and menacing tone: "As long as he is alive. As long as he is alive and able to speak."

"How can you be so cold!" Malerna cried jumping up from her seat. She looked at him. It was apparent to all and especially Malerna that Allen had changed. And changed for the worse rather than the better as many things over the past few years had seemed to. Though there was one person whom his treatment of had not changed: his sister, Celina. Upon this thought the shadowy parts of Allen's mind began to come into focus for Malerna even though she in the past had resisted the thoughts. "It's not..." She paused. She knew it was something she had to say whatever the outcome. "It's not about that soldier at all is it? Or about this mission. You just wanted to take your sister and leave. Take her and run

away."

"It is not something that you can understand!" Allen shouted as he turned to Malerna. "That boy in there is our enemy and he will pay dearly for his crimes and the crimes of those who came before him!"

Malerna was truly taken aback. She was also afraid, not for herself but for Allen. The dark pieces began to come together and Malerna felt her hand upon her chest and the stare of Allen, appearing before her a dark and distant figure before the window to the moonlit sky. "I see now." She said.

In the dark interrogation room were the shadowy figures of the prisoner, Riden, and Kio. The door opened and light poured in from the hall outside. As it shut and their eyes adjusted the two men greeted their Captain Gaddes solemnly. "How is our prisoner doing?" Gaddes asked.

"Well." Riden said. "The princess came in and patched him up a bit about an hour ago. A few minutes later he woke up! Sort of. We haven't even been able to get a name out of him but he's been mumbling about something for the last hour! I think there might be something wrong with his head."

"It was the battle" Kio said.

"Yah," continued Gaddes. "A kid that young can't deal with that kind of carnage. He's probably traumatized." Gaddes walked cautiously to the prisoner. He was going to try and get something out of the boy however unlikely because Allen had ordered it. He stood in front of the boy and leaned in on him. The boy's head was still hanging down though his face was now cleaned and cared for by Malerna but still bruised from Allen's malice.

"What is your name, soldier?" Gaddes commanded. The boy didn't move except for his unceasing trembling. Gaddes took hold of the boy's jaw and drew his head up so that they were looking at one another. "Who did this?" He simply said. The boy opened his mouth but was still silent as if afraid to speak. "Out with it!" Gaddes snapped.

"A shadow... dark. white..." the boy babbled. His eyes were wide seeming to stare past Gaddes into nothingness. "screaming, from everywhere... it was so dark, I couldn't... couldn't see it... couldn't see it anywhere."

Riden and Kio exchanged nervous glances. "I remember people in Marsoon saying something about a shadow in the west. But I figured they were talking about the Zaiboch." Riden said to Kio with apprehension. "Shhhhh!" Kio hissed.

Gaddes concentrated on the prisoner. "What? You couldn't see what?" He asked gruffly.

"The dragon." The boy said.

Once again silence filled the room as memories echoed and candles flickered. Gaddes continued the interrogative questions. "Why are you here? What is the objective of your mission?"

The boy seemed more wakeful now and somewhat cooperative though still in somewhat of a trance. "To... to find something."



"Would that something be the Guymelef which was able to take out two Alseides and one Oreades squadron alone?" Gaddes asked.

"No. Something else." The boy said.

"What than?" Gaddes continued.

"The..." He said as Gaddes leaned in to listen. "The airship, Crusade."

Still wrapped in Allen's cloak Celina gazed blissfully out into the sky. There was a slight breeze and it chilled her white face. On the wind was a strange sound. It seemed far away like a echo to Celina but it began to grow and become softer and lighter. It was the sound of a sweet melody and it became clear and beautiful. Suddenly she realized that the wind was no longer blowing and the sound had stopped. Everything seemed eerily still and silent.

Celina sat up and looked around as she had a feeling of being watched quite suddenly after the wind and the music had stopped. She looked at the area behind the ship and saw a most peculiar thing: the air seemed to be rippling like water just disturbed by a thrown stone.

Riden ran down the corridor of the crusade seemingly in a panic.

Malerna stood staring at Allen. "What do you see princess?" Allen asked her. The door of the cabin burst open as Riden bounded in.

"Captain!" Riden yelled.

Allen looked at the little man. "What is it Riden?"

"The Zaiboch swine! They're here for us!" Riden exclaimed.

"What!?" Allen said.

"We just found out! The Zaiboch carriers were sent here to find the Crusade! That's what the kid said!" Riden explained.

Suddenly Gaddes' voice came across the pipes. "Zaiboch Guymelefs approaching from aft!"

"Man your station!" Allen shouted into the com pipes in his cabin before making for the hanger. As he ran he herd Gaddes' voice once again.

"Incoming!" He said as the whole ship shook from a rain of fire projectiles. "Damn! Their aiming straight for our levastones! I'll try and shake them!"

Balance was almost lost as the Crusade with Gaddes at the helm tilted and pitched as it swerved to avoid fire. Allen reached the hanger now followed by Kio as well as Riden. They could see the melefs pursuing them at a distance. This confuse them however as they should have already have overtaken them as both Alseides and Oreades units were much faster than the carrier laden Crusade.

Upon the hanger deck before the great Scherazade Allen looked for his sister. "Celina!" He shouted. Then he saw her, standing where he had left her starring out at their pursuers still wrapped in Allen's cloak. In response to his call, Celina turned her head towards him. And behind her the air blurred and the form of a great guymelef appeared. Allen felt his heart stop as its stealth cloak was thrown back revealing a monstrous Oreades unit.

With a great gust of air the guymelef was gone. Celina no longer was in sight. Morning light was just forming and light grew in the sky. Kio and Riden were saddened as they held Allen back as his yells for his sister echoed across the canyon and then everything was silent.

## 4 - Silent Hearts

### Chapter 4

#### Silent Hearts

Came the dawn and the valley was again still and silent. The smell of dying embers of fire was light in the morning air. Along the base of a rock face amid the trees, giants of metal sat silent and cold. Among them a great white giant seemed to loom over the others shining a dull red glow from its heart. Before each giant were the dying embers some still slightly aflame and some cold black ash. To each fire there was a man bundled against the cold of the waxing morn.

The snow capped mountains rising high above gave a calming blue shadow to the valley below. The glow of the morning roused the men before their great machines. They stirred and stretched in the cold air of the morning. It was still hazy and surreal like the state between sleep and wakefulness. It was so for all but one. He sat atop a high rock ledge on the face of the mountain overlooking the campsite. Around his shoulders was a cape of dark blue and silver cloth with complex and beautiful flowing embroidering fit for royalty. Bundled in equally ornate blankets was his loyal and beloved companion. She clung to him and her long ears twitched as she slumbered, safe in his lap.

As his men awoke the man on the rock gave no sign of movement. Only every once in a while did he stroke the burgundy hair of his companion as she stirred. Some of the men were old and some young, some with long white beards and some scrapped their faces in the morning air. Quietly they went about their business of the morn: kindling kindly fires for breakfast and rousing those who still slept.

As they quietly worked with only a word hear and there they waited for the word of their King who so benevolently watched over them. One man more than the others looked to him. A tall and broad older man in worn but fine clothes, one of the men with a long white beard he was. His name was Cassola, First Brigadier General under his king. Even from a distance he could see the weariness in his king's eyes. Cassola had known his young king well over the last few years and had seen his many troubles. They were troubles that he thought none so young should have to carry but it was his destiny as a king.

The still air of the valley was heavy but fragrant with waning winter smells. The young king ran his fingers through his companion's hair as she woke and looked up at him lovingly. She lay her head on his chest and purred a soft purr of contentment and relief. He smiled down at her and she thought that all was well for them and soon they would be through the tall wooden gates of their homeland to dwell and rule in their blue-roofed home. But the king knew that all was not well and he had doubts of his return being as swift as his companion hopped. He thought of the furies he had faced in the recent months. And most of all the devils he had just faced. But he was hopeful despite his ill feelings.

The king looked to the sky and saw the sight of the coming sun; great rays of light poured over the ridges of the peaks of the mountain the men dwelt under. They filled the sky and it was as if the heavens had opened up and would now give their majestic light to the world endowing it with its peace and its love.

In the air on the breeze the feather flew. The king, still looking to the sky, saw it and followed its path. After a time it sailed to the camp and the king held out his hand to it with a warm smile. It came close to him but then flowed away back up into the sky. His face fell with dismay and confusion as the feather seemed reluctant as if it wished to keep its tidings from him. It sailed into the sky, higher and higher as if it didn't intend to return but in fact to leave this world and all its sadness behind to the heavens above.

'No...' the king whispered as a shadow fell over his face. His companion gripped his cape and felt that the joy of the past moment had suddenly slipped away. The king in his mind felt a dark tidings from the feather. Gently he bayed his companion give him span and she reluctantly took herself from him. He stood casting off his cape to the cold rock under his feet. There was an echo across the canyon of the dull clatter of his blade on his side. He untied the brown tasseled thread of his dark crimson garment also embroidered a handsomely green with ornate kingly designs. From under his attire and from around his neck he drew a small red stone.

With his arm outstretched the gem dangled from his hand by it's golden chain. On the ground below the rock and past the white giant that sat before its master the men peered up in silence. Some mystified and some fearful. True of all but Cassola; he stood stead awaiting his king without fear or wonder. Some of the younger of the men began to speak very softly and cautiously to one another. Word that had been said before about the king. Words of rumor, words of fear. Of their king's power. Of their king's bane.

With the glare of his eyes, Cassola silenced the men for his king to carry on in peace, if peaceful it could be called.

The king stood for a time without movement, his eyes closed, barring the conscious world. The stone hung still. In his mind the land around him was full with light. It brought to the land warmth. It brought to the land life. The green of the trees and the grass never seemed brighter and the blue of the rivers' waters never deeper. The creatures about were nourished by the land nourished by the sun and there was harmony. But a shadow came. It covered the lands; the greens withered, the waters darkened, the animals fled and the harmony was broken.

The faces of many people whom he once knew well went through the king's mind. He recognized the feelings that each brought to him. But he also felt the state of each person in this time. Like the dark land they were cheerless and some even choleric. Among the faces many there was one who seemed to elude his sight. The face of a girl. A girl whom he still held dear.

In the enigmatical void where his mind preserved the things unseen the image of the stone surfaced, still and silent. Quietly and to himself the king spoke in question: "Where?" The stone in his mind grew dim and small as if receding away from him into the unseen. Then there were sound in that distance. Cries of terror or pain. All around him dark hazy forms began to appear. The cries came from them but still sounded as if coming from afar. The forms all around crept closer and they felt cold to the king. He could barely make out the faces on each. Not even could he seclude each form from the other as their haze did not diminish but it covered all of them together like a blanket.

In the darkness they overtook him and he struggled against many hands all around him. The cries grew louder now, not only screams of pain and anguish but now of madness. Many hands the king felt upon his body. He was forced to his knees by the weight of that many. He struggled to no avail but would not

give up. The cries and screams filled his heart and mind.

There seemed no hope but then the cries subsided and then ceased. He now felt nothing upon his body. About him the forms were not; they had left him and he felt no ground below him and no sky above but simply nothingness. Suddenly a white light filled his mind. Blinding it was at first but after a moment he could see that it emanated from a pillar of light stretching high above and far below. In it was a shadowed form. He went to it not by his feet but by whatever means used in this place. He was to the pillar of light and he moved into it.

He saw before him a sight he had wished for, for what seemed Forever and Ever. It was not only what he saw though be it the most beautiful sight imaginable in the King's mind, no, but what he felt. A joy and a peace in his heart the likes of which have not words. It was happiness. The sort that only a joining of two easily swayed human hearts can bring. It was her. His one. His love. His no other.

And she looked at him just as he looked at her. But then the light began to dim. The joy on their faces turned to dread. Dread of once again being torn away from one another. The king wished to go to his love and hold her but he could not move from his place. He reached to her in the dimming light and she reached back for him. There was no sound though both wished to yell out the other's name. Away she started to move back and away into the darkness. It felt to the king as if there was some force taking them from one another and he cried out in anguish and anger.

On the rock in the morning light the king suddenly opened his eyes and as he did he saw the stone swing. To the east it swung and that is the way he peered. He saw the light of the sun on the lands. The cheer of it all seemed to mock the king and anger took him.

At least a day's journey away by any means whether it be by melef or airship the Crusade rested upon the ground without flight. The fight of that morn had been brief. With crema-claws, Scherazade had been damaged beyond their capability to repair before an enraged Allen could set foot in its control chamber. The fire of the Zaiboch melefs had forced the Crusade down. After that the Zaiboch withdrew and disappeared. It was several hours since the attack and no one had spoken since. They simply made repairs in silence and did not even look up. It would be not until the night that basic repairs would be complete and the Crusade would be air-worthy again. That is without distraction.

Outside the ship sitting atop the melef carrier, Katz, Oruto, Teo, and Gaddes stood guard in their guymelef all around the ship. Every once in a while there was heard the soft whir of gears and the thump of one of their heavy feet upon the earth as they shifted their positions in if not anxiety then boredom. The minuets dragged by like hours and there was no relief to their toil.

On the bridge Riden, Kio and Pyle were the only ones that talked. To one another and very softly though they spoke only of the repairs. Kio and Pyle did most of the labor whist Riden monitored the valves and needles of the pressure gages or on occasion looked nervously through the periscope. Also on the bridge was Malerna standing in a patch of sunlight at the forward windows. Because sitting atop the tall and wide melef carrier the Crusade was, Malerna could look out and see over top of most trees just barely. She thought to herself that if anyone wanted to find them it would be no trouble at all.

But as she looked out over the trees, their tops painted gold by the rising sun, she didn't think on their position for long. She found her mind wondering back to her confrontation with Allen earlier that night. She thought of what she had almost and was about to say. It wasn't that Allen wanted to get away. Away

from his hardships, his disagreements and his dishonor at the hands of his peers. Not only that anyway. Malerna thought that perhaps his troubles went deeper. That his wounds of the war had not yet been healed. As they hadn't been for so many. Yet she thought; that though Allen's behavior had been on a very gradual down-slate since the war, his acts in recent months had been particularly rash. His blatant disregard for her father's authority and his violent temper had been noticeably flaring.

Malerna thought to herself: 'why? why were you so suddenly so stricken with remorse? It is understandable now but why before? Has it been your sister that has brought you so much grief? But when you are with her you soul is as calm as the waters of our crystal blue bay. Is your love for her so strong that it brings you sadness? But what of our love? A love of which I am sure still burns within your heart as I am so painfully aware it does in mine. What of it? What of our love.' Suddenly the princess felt the tears sliding down upon her smooth porcelain skin. Silently and for the first time in so long a time as her memory didn't serve her, she wept for Allen.

She did so but not openly. She stood peering out the window letting the time precious slip by without notice. She passively heard the door to the bridge slide open and then closed but she paid it no mind with the thought of it being Kio or Pyle simply returning from running a repair errand. A few moments passed. As she stood with her head bowed concealing her tears she felt a presence behind her. She felt a pair of hands grasp her shoulders. She gasped as she was startled and turned around to find Allen. For a fraction of a second she feared him but then she saw his face.

It was calm and pleasant; a look that he had not given to her for some time. Somehow weariness and strife had left him it seemed as he looked into her eyes. She looked deep into his. He spoke: "Princess" as he took her hand. But in his eyes and his voice she could feel that he was in devastation. Her eyes did not grow any less sad at his gaze and she felt his hand on hers trembling. It was then in Allen's care so long since felt by Malerna that she realized how weary she was. She felt that sleep was about to overtake her and for the first time in so long she in all trust fell into sleep in Allen's arms.

His smile as she now slept faded and he picked her up to carry her to her cabin. As he left the bridge he gave Riden and Kio orders as Pyle was elsewhere: "Go below and make sure of the carrier's anchoring." He said.

"Kio already checked." Riden said. "They're fine."

Allen's face became fierce. "They check them again! The both of you. NOW!" He commanded loudly.

Kio and Riden looked at each other uneasily. "Ye- yes sir." Riden said and the two men scampered off.

Allen went to Malerna's cabin and placed her into bed. He then went to another room within the Crusade. In the room it was dark and humid. Allen's eyes went to the only thing occupying the room; bound still to the chair. The boy barely conscious looked up at the tall man in black with fear as he approached. All the boy could see was the figure of the tall man and the glint of his blue eyes daunting and ominous behind his hanging locks.

The boy watched as Allen tightened his black glove to his hand with a deep leathery squeak in the silent and dark room. Allen lowered his hand to the boy's face and ran the back of it across a bruise. The boy turned his head in evasion but Allen then grasped the boy by the hair with a jerk. The boy breathed scarcely as Allen pulled his head back and looked down at him. The boy then heard the sound of a

blade being unsheathed and felt the lifeless cold of metal pressed against his neck. Though all he could see was Allen's hateful gaze.

The next few moments felt like all of time for the boy, and he saw many things and people in his mind. It stretched on and on like a long coast in the night.

Allen looked down at the boy and animosity and hate consumed his mind. The thought of this simply being a young boy did not occur to him. In his mind he saw a demon in league with those whom had taken from him. "No one is innocent." Allen said deeply as he tightened his grip on the boy pulling his head further back.

There is nothing and in the heart only blackness. The mind is clouded as the heart bleeds and grief is our only companion. Of the malice of men and the benevolence of those above; no condolence or comfort to those in pain and in death. The heart bleeds red and it soaks into the earth. All that live are destined to die. That is the will of our world.

The blade moved swiftly without a sound. Blood splattered across the floor of the dark room black as ink. As Allen released the boy from his grip his head fell limp at his shoulders.

Allen turned to leave the room without sheathing his short sword. As the door opened Riden, Kio and Pyle stood outside. They looked at their commander. His weapon hung in his hand. Blood dripped from it and his splattered gloves. The shock on the three men's faces was bleak. If there were a line uncrossed before, there was no longer.

Allen looked at his men without remorse. Then he uttered: "Justice is done."

The day went on and the air about the men was unchanged. Riden and Kio took the boy from the ship and put him beneath the earth with his sword. Malerna still slept and as the word spread to the men on guard of the act no one knew how she was to be informed. The men could do nothing more than their duties while she slept.

Allen was not idle during the day despite his crime, as it would seem. He took to repairing what he could of Scherazade in the hanger. He put the boy out of his mind and thought of their next course of action. It was obvious that they would give chase when they could but what would be done if they found the Zaiboch? They would almost certainly lose any conflict and there was no guarantee that the Zaiboch fleet-ships had even stayed together. It was these thoughts that went through Allen's mind as he worked but then as he did he glanced to the other side of the hanger to the other melef seat.

It had been long years since he had seen the White Dragon there; it seemed to him that in that time victory was more frequent and times were slightly brighter of mind. Though Allen missed this Dragon as a friend he would be hesitant to extend a friendly hand as his view of him had changed over the years. But still Allen admired his might and thought that indeed his strength would be helpful in these times. But now The Dragon had his own matters and his own people to care for and Allen doubted any aid of his sort.

The day passed without incident of any kind. It seemed that besides the occasional sound of an animal rustling about in the bushes or the call of a bird they were alone in the world. The sun set and night fell.

There were no stars and the moons were dim in the sky shrouded by a curtain cloud. The darkness about that land was thick. The trees swayed about with a low wind. The men were called back to the ship as the repairs were almost complete. All that day there had been almost no speech and what little there was, was hushed and quiet.

Most of the men were on the bridge with Allen once again in a foul mood but he showed it little. Their direction had been decided and they were ready to lift off once the final checks were completed. All were on the bridge but Malerna. She was in her cabin and had been perhaps the most silent of all since her awakening earlier.

There was a low hum as Kio brought the energists online and the ship began to come back to life. Riden looked nervously through the dorsal periscope searching the dark skies for any signs of trouble. For a long while throughout the day he had found nothing and was often encouraged by Kio to cease the pointless endeavor but Riden maintained a 'feeling in his gut' as he put it, of a threat.

All around and throughout the ship there was silence. Only the sound of the wind was there but suddenly as he peered through the periscope Riden's shrill voice pierced the silence like a knife. "Commander! A light! I see a red light!"

"Where?!" Allen asked commandingly.

"Wait! it's gone! but it was in the sky and coming toward us." Riden replied still looking about the skies for other threats.

"It may be on the ground now. Take us up, now!" Allen ordered.

"We still can't." Kio said. "The levastones on the carrier and the Crusade's are still not in synchronous. If their levitation levels are different when we lift off, we could be torn in half!"

"Then we fight." Allen said grimly. He stood for a moment looking into the darkness of the forest and then turned to Gaddes. "You and Katz arm yourselves and get out there. There may be only one but if there are more get back onboard if you can."

Allen's orders were carried out and the two men in their melefs stood with the long bow of the ship above them. The melef were armed with long spears for the stabbing of energests and control chambers. With spears pointed toward the wood the men waited.

With all the yelling and the sound of heavy metal melefs being deployed, Malerna had come to the bridge. As she walked past Allen to peer down at the coming battle she looked away from his gaze for she had since been in the interrogation room where the prisoner was no longer. Though the look on her face was not that of sadness or anger. It simply was with no certain emotion except perhaps that of apathy. She looked out from the windows with her back to Allen thought she could not see the melefs below.

Gaddes and Katz looked into the gloom and dark before them. All was silent again but for the wind. Then the silence was broken by the rhythmic and heavy pounding of melef foot-steps approaching. It was thus far off but a red glow came out of the thicket and Gaddes gripped his spear and opened his eyes wide to perceive more clearly into the trees. His wrist and hand itched for he wished to throw his



spear into this demon's red heart to rid the world of it but he made himself wait for a sure throw. The pounding became louder in the still silence of the night and Gaddes could feel his heart beating. There was a sound not of pounding in the bushes to Gaddes's left and he quickly turned toward it but all he saw was the disappearance of an animal into the bushes that he thought had maybe been scared away by them or the red glow.

Gaddes returned his attention to the forest ahead. And there he saw it. A red orb flickering as its light was occasionally obstructed by a tree. It swayed from side to side as if with the stride of a tall giant. It was then that Gaddes made his decision that he could wait no longer and he hurled his spear into the forest with a heroic yell.

There was silence. No foot steps. No breath. But the glow remained. There was heard the sound of metal being drawn. Then suddenly there was a shrill whistle as if the air was being cut by a swift knife and the spear flew from the trees. With crushing accuracy it struck the energist on the shoulder of Katz's melef and it fell to the ground with a clamorous crash. Before Gaddes could react a giant form rushed from the trees. Gaddes could see only that it was not the form of a Zaiboch guymelef but to the ground it knocked him anyway. His melef on its back, Gaddes reached for the spear of the fallen melef next to him but his melef's arm was shorn off before he could. As he looked back up to search for the melef that had struck him and Katz down with ease he saw nothing but a shadowed form blacker than the dark of the night. Its arms were raised and the red light glinted off of his sword. The sword pointed down in the dark melef's hands and he thrust it down into the earth through the shoulder and energist of Gaddes' melef.

The two men's melefs were crippled. Gaddes heard the scrap of metal as the sword was pulled from his melef. He felt that the next assault would be the long dark blade plunging through his control chamber. Gaddes opened his melef and fled to the carrier where Katz waited for him having fled his melef at first chance. As he skipped off of it the sword came down crushingly and he just narrowly escaped. Several furlongs the dark melef was from the carrier but it started to slowly close that space and its foot steps echoed throughout.

Gaddes and Katz hurried into the carrier bound for the Crusade expecting to be lifting off any second but at the winding stair to the Crusade's hatch they were met by Kio, Riden, Pyle and Allen. "Come with me and do not draw your weapons." Allen commanded. Gaddes obeyed but kept a hand on his sword. He was confused by Allen's demeanor, he seemed almost entertained. He led them down to the carrier doors; still open from the deployment. As they spilled out Allen stood at front, tall before the great melef approaching. Though the approach was slow, Gaddes and all others could tell that it was a hostile approach. However Allen made no further orders. He simply stood watching, waiting.

After only a few seconds the melef stopped only fifteen or twenty feet from the base of the carrier. With many bright sparks he swept his sword's tip across the carrier's front. The sparks briefly illuminated the melef and its form seemed hauntingly familiar. It now stood still in the darkness as if it did not wish to needlessly strike down anyone. It drove the tip of the sword into the ground and stood erect. There was the sharp sound of steam and a short flicker of red light and the control chamber opened down. A figure stood upon it and in his hand he bore a long and wide crossbow and at his side hung a sword, its gold glimmering just perceivably in the dull red light.

There he stood for a time pointing his crossbow down menacingly. The red light pulsed out like the beating of a dying heart and all was dark. There was then a deep voice from atop the melef through the

placid air. "Who are you that attack without provocation? I come in peace in my own lands and this is how I am met?" His voice was commanding and wrathful. Though now deeper the voice was recognized by all.

The clouds moved and the moons side by side in the sky reveled themselves and their light poured over the land. Illuminated now was the melef and it no longer seemed black as the shadows told but a luminous white shining under the moons like a grand God of Battle. Wide were everyone's eyes with awe and astonishment except Allen's. He peered up at the man high above. "I apologize for trespassing on your land. And for meeting you with force. But now that I see who defeats us I am glad for it. Lord Van."