

The Chronicles of Aralyth: Book 1- Quest For Unity

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Follow Levi and his friend Kaz as they Quest to find the Ravens that were rumoured to have died long ago.

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1 - Levi

The Chronicles of Aralyth

Book 1

Quest For Unity

Chapter 1: Levi

The sweet sound of the serenading nightingale echoed smoothly through the air, across fields and brooks, through small forest glades and open areas. All was peaceful along the ridge of Gahla, where the borders of Amberwood connected to Gahla's all the way along a small foothill that stretched as far as the eye could see. A couple crows, about the size of a grown man's arm in wingspan, cawed in a nearby aspen, as the dusk started lifting, foggy night shifting to bright day.

The sun began to rise to the east, towards Winterkrieg, where the weather was almost always like the Arctic. The blizzards never ceased, and nearly no one had ever gone into Winterkrieg and returned to tell the tale. All but one.

The boy who was seated upon the ridge of Gahla was staring off into the closest forest of Amberwood, thinking of his father, Gabriel, whom had been the very man to cross the Winterkrieg wastelands and return in nearly perfect condition. Not so long ago, in fact, only four months previous to the now, Levi's father had been taken to the king for questioning. Levi had no idea why this had to be done- it was only a couple days after his father had returned from his long journey. When Levi bombarded the Cahlana guards whom came to arrest his father with questions, they simply replied, "The King deems it suspicious that Gabriel Galebringer returned from the thousand-mile trek through the Winterkrieg and back again with nary an injury, and no hunger nor thirst."

That was the most he ever found out. Several months later, he finally came to realize that though the guards told him his father would probably be sent back home- he never returned. Levi never doubted the sheer obviousness of it. The King had his father executed. Odd thing was, a couple days after he came to understand this, the last Raven was killed. It was even more worrying because it was Levi's fourteenth birthday, and his father was taken away a mere few days earlier.

Connections were fearfully made by some of the bewildered people in Hendor, a town situated in Gahla, though most disregarded it in fear for their own lives. The King was known to punish small offenses to the crown nowadays, and it was an abrupt change in his once kind and benevolent rule.

The blonde haired boy sat upon the grassy ledge, still thinking, still brooding. But it was not of his father, nor his mother, whom had long since been killed by a supposed offense to the crown punishment, no, he was brooding over the Raven. The only news that had reached his hear from across Gahla was that the Raven had been larger than a fully grown man, and a female. He pondered upon the Raven he had pictured in his mind. And all the years previous, his father told stories quite knowledgeably of the Ravens and their Stryders. He seemed to know quite a lot for a trader, considering he never had time to pay attention to anything but his work and the occasional storytime with Levi, his son.

Blinking his one blue and one brown eye, Levi stood, turning around to face the north, where far ahead, he saw the small village of Hendor, his home, and backing it up hundreds of leagues away, The Raven

Mountains. Of course, as the name implies, the Ravens once inhabited the area. Until King Hael moved his citadel over from far West, by the sea, to the foothills of the Raven Mountains. The moment the citadel was settled in the foothills, less stories were told of men who had seen Ravens as they ventured into the peaks. Now, the Raven Mountains were forbidden. On penalty of death, should anyone dare break the new addition to the law. Pulling the hood of a night black cloak he had pinned around his neck over his head, Levi strolled calmly into the dawn, not taking his eyes off of those Mountains the whole time.

The black hood slid off of Levi's head as he entered Hendor, the cause being a couple of Cahlana guards pulling it off. They sneered at the fourteen year-old, checking him up and down for any sign of suspicion, and then shoved him into the midst of the village's early-risers, who were hustling about. He sighed in frustration, completely ready to spin around and lay a punch to one of the guards' faces, but he refused. He wasn't afraid of breaking the law, no, he was afraid to let the guards get to him so easily. He had to build a barrier of strength up so he wouldn't anger so fast. He could tolerate them for now.

Stepping into his warm house, Levi turned and shut the wooden door, locking it tightly and looking out the window to the left, closing the thin yellow drapes for some privacy. Taking off his cloak, Levi sat upon his bed and sighed once again. *I'm gonna find a Raven.* He thought, a sudden wave of excitement swelling through him. No matter how stupid it sounded, he wanted to go out and do it. Breaking the law was fun, finding a Raven would also bring him glory, and his name to honour again. Levi could then say his surname with as much happiness as he could say he found a Raven. He couldn't wait to start off. But, as everyone knows, you need a friend to help you along&

2 - A Questing Comrade

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Chapter 2: A Questing Comrade

The brisk morning air of springtime flowed into the small village house, waking the blonde fourteen year old who slept upon a makeshift mattress. His right eye, the blue one, opened first, glaring at the bedside window he had, wishing he could chance a bit more sleep. But he suddenly remembered his idea the day previous, and smiled. Yesterday he was unable to leave for he had to go purchase supplies, and to do so had to use what leftover money he had. He had also cared for his only horse, a large draft, a dark dapple-gray, with a darker mane and tail, and the feathers of his hooves were black. A beautiful animal, but a lot to care for. Levi threw off his warm blankets and rolled off the bed to his feet, rubbing his brown and blue eyes. He pulled on some black pants and a red vest overtop his white shirt.

Sighing tiredly, he walked out into the main hall of his small house, the dining room, and instead of going to make some oatmeal to eat, he passed by. Halting at his front door, he pulled the black cloak off of a coat hook and tied the notch around his neck, keeping the hood off for now. He walked over to the desk to the right and picked up the things he knew he'd need for the journey. A haversack of food, and a map he'd made. It wasn't the best, but would help him along. He also picked up a pair of goggles. They were thick and the eyes were not separated from each other. He pushed that into the haversack- he'd need it for the wintry Mountains and part of Winterkrieg he'd be passing through.

He remembered with a snap the cat he had owned for four years that still resided here. She was a beautiful young tabby, a gray with smooth, swirling black stripes all over her body. He couldn't just leave her here, and she would go nowhere if he didn't go with her, so he'd have to take her. It was another stupid idea, but what else would he do? So, calling almost regretfully her name, he waited for the she-cat to arrive. Niko!

His companion came from atop the dresser and landed on his shoulder- she was small for her age, and weighed a small amount. He pet her head and then walked out the door, looking back one last time, and then heading to the stables as soon as he shut the door.

He let out a high summoning whistle as he neared the stables, and a dapple-gray draft horse stuck his head out from the stall, munching happily on some hay. Hey, Jester. We're going to be heading out soon, eat up.

The horse let out a snort of what seemed like 'Already?' and then pulled himself back into the stall, continuing his meal, while Niko hopped off of Levi's shoulder and into the stall, to nuzzle Jester in greeting. Levi smiled, shaking his head, and turned away, walking over to the stable wall where Jester's large saddle and reins were hanging. As he reached up for the tack, a hand grabbed his wrist and pulled it down playfully, and a familiar voice sounded in his ear, 'Where ya goin', Levi?' The voice was that of an older boy, a fifteen year old.

Levi turned his smile towards the voice to see a taller boy, with dark brown locks that covered his eyes and frayed out at the sides, much like his own. Underneath the locks of brown, when one could see his eyes, they were dark green. Kaz, hey. Levi responded, not answering the question previously asked.

Kaz furrowed his brow, still smiling, and pressed Levi, "Come on, where're ya going? You can tell me, you know I keep secrets."

Levi gave in and confessed, "I- I was gonna go to the& but stopped himself. Kaz suddenly became serious and lowered his head, so he could hear Levi whisper, "Raven Mountains." Kaz leapt back, almost laughing out loud. "Are you serious?! You can't be, no way! Like *you* could get there on your own!"

But suddenly, Kaz stopped, and grinned. Levi shook his head, knowing exactly what Kaz was going to suggest. "No Kaz, I'm going alone. Definitely not- But Kaz had already decided for himself, "If you leave without me, I'll just follow you. You know I'm an excellent tracker, I'm a hunter. I'd follow you through thick and thin, no matter what. I'm going." Levi was about to protest, but Kaz raised a hand, cutting him off again, "Sorry, Levi. As your elder, I say I should go, just for protection. I don't have anything better to do anyways, my parents are just as gone as yours, remember." The blonde boy frowned and replied almost sullenly, "What of your employer, eh?"

Kaz just smiled mischievously and retorted "I've wanted to get out of his job for years. I'll be glad to leave." Levi warned him threateningly, "You know we'll be going against the law- no, breaking it- if we even attempt to cross part of the Winterkrieg, and if we make it to Cahлана, the King's gonna have us killed. And the Raven Mountains- there's nothing worse than that."

The brown haired boy shook his head to the side absent-mindedly, making his brown locks to move from his green eyes for a moment. He seemed to take this into consideration, and then he just shrugged his shoulders and replied, "Yeah I know. I'm older than you, I've broken a few rules. Let's get going. I've actually already got Stag all tacked up. I was going to go hunting. Guess I don't need to."

Levi smiled, and nodded. "Alright, alright, let me get Jester's tack on."

The two teenagers led their two draft horses out on the streets, the wet mud roads and lanes squelching grossly. Both had their black cloaks on, with hoods pulled over, to keep warm from the cool, misty air. Stag, Kaz's draft horse was a deep black, with white feathers on his hooves and black eyes. The horse nickered softly to his friend, Jester, who snorted back. Both their heads were held at ease. Upon Jester's saddle sat the proud tabby she-cat Niko. She rocked with the movement of her horse friend, and lazily kept only one yellow eye open.

The two teenagers turned out to the village entrance and exit, which, if you continued forwards, would lead you to Amberwood, to the left Winterkrieg and to the right, the sea, and walked by Cahлана Guards. Levi sighed in great agitation when the two guards yelled out, "Hey, where'd ya think yer goin' without a report, eh? Get back here!" The two stopped, halting their horses. Niko hissed crossly at the guard that came to check the packs of the two boys on Jester's saddle. After the guard finished checking the packs, he checked Levi, the other guard checking Kaz. Sneering once again in Levi's face, he murmured, "Where are yew eadin' to, Galebringer's son?" Narrowing his eyes, Levi shot back tartly, "Only out hunting. I'm getting Kaz to train me for apprenticeship."

The lie seemed suspicious to the guard for some reason, but he let it pass and grunted, walking away with the other guard. The two boys exchanged nervous glances and then led their horses on.

As the late afternoon turned to evening, the sun a bit lower than midway in the sky, the two of them finally looked back over their shoulders. Jester and Stag were mounted, then, after the teenagers saw the town was a mere black splotch. Niko was nestled in the crook of the back of the saddle on Jester's back, right behind Levi. He pet her for a moment, before loosening Jester's reins and looking to Kaz.

The two nodded, and urged their horses on. They galloped off, heading straight for the corner of Winterkrieg, and Cahlana. But most of all, the Raven Mountains.

3 - Winterkrieg

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Chapter 3: Winterkrieg

The blistering winds picked up the powdered snow upon the ground and whipped it around, creating a blizzard from the leftovers of the real one. Snow flew about in a frenzy, and the cold bit at any warmth like a snake to its prey. Four figures plodded on, and a smaller figure was huddled against another for warmth. The blonde haired boy had his goggles on, so he could see clearly, though there wasn't much else to see but white. Wrapped in the hem of his cloak upon his lap was the freezing tabby cat Niko. Her heart was slow, and she had seemingly passed into hibernation. Jester, the horse he sat upon, was trotting tiredly, forcing strongly through the gale.

Alongside the three of them were two others, a brown haired boy with his black cloak hood pulled up, and a black bandana to veil his nose and lower face from the wind. He sat upon a black draft horse named Stag, and the five of them were continuing on reluctantly. Levi coughed from the cold, and suddenly urged his horse on, nudging him gently. Jester picked up the pace to a canter, and startled, Stag and Kaz followed suit. The dapple-gray draft horse that led the way was starting to gallop, nervousness of the weather pushing him on. A spurt in his run caused him to trip, and the large horse crashed chest-first into the ground, skidding along his front before toppling fully over, and ending his riders into the ground as well.

Levi rolled into the snow in shock, tumbling, holding onto his cat and trying not to crush her. As he skidded on his back to a halt, the she-cat stood and took a step, before crumpling to the ground, freezing. The blonde boy was dazed, after hitting a rock on the back of his head at some point, and though he tried to remain conscious, his eyesight slowly darkened, and then there was no more.

A warm scent lifted into the air, and Levi breathed it in appreciatively. It was familiar, and had history with him. He first opened his left eye, for he lay upon his right side, and grunted in pain as the back of his head ached and pained. He moved his arm up and touched his head- a thin band was tied around his forehead, patching up the injury. He furrowed his brow, wincing, and then sitting up. The familiar smell he had breathed in earlier, that his head had been laying upon, was his horse's neck. The dapple-gray was laying upon the ground, black eye watching the boy in some sort of love. It was obvious he was attached to the boy, for he remained with Levi though his rider was knocked out. The horse nickered softly to him, and Levi slowly moved his hand kindly along his horse's neck. As he looked around, he saw Stag, the black draft horse, standing and munching on some unburied greens. Between himself and Jester was the little body of Niko, who seemed more comfortable and warm now, though she slept fitfully. Her breath was husky, as though she had a cold.

He pulled the blanket off of himself and draped it upon both his horse's neck and the cat, to keep them warm. Levi stood, tottering for a moment, and groaned. He wondered where Kaz was. Probably off hunting. He thought.

Looking around for his haversack that had been on his saddle, he spotted it and quickly ran over and grabbed it. Heaving it back to the blanket he had slept upon, he set it down and seated himself, searching through the contents. There were about a week's worth of small rationed meals in here, along with the goggles that Kaz probably took off of Levi's face, and the gauze. They wouldn't do Jester any good, they were just for cut wounds. He didn't know the extent of Jester's damage, but all he could remember clearly was Jester had fallen forwards and hit the ground chest-first. He suddenly heard a crunching of snow from behind and he spun around, to see a figure in a hooded black cloak walk up with two jackrabbits in his one hand. Raising them by their ears, he pulled back his hood and said calmly, "I got us some breakfast." Before Levi could ask Kaz about the horse's food, he hefted up a small bag of grass he had ravaged from underneath the snow. "Don't worry about it."

As Kaz came and sat beside Levi, the blonde boy swallowed nervously and asked the fifteen-year-old, "Kaz? How is Jester?" There was no response for sometime, as Kaz was tossing grass to Stag and laying down one jackrabbit in front of Niko, who gladly accepted the large morsel. As soon as he was done, he looked down at the dapple-gray horse who lay there, so innocently, and murmured quietly, "Levi, he may have broken his chest bones. I didn't even know it could happen, but it did. He can no longer stand, let alone run. The shock continued pulsing through Levi as Kaz hesitantly added, "He's dying peacefully- he probably can't feel any pain. He shattered his nervous system in the process. He'll be gone soon." Levi just coughed, trying to say something but choking on the words.

Kaz sorrowfully got up and walked away, mounting Stag, his black horse, and cantering away into the calm winter, allowing Levi some time with his poor horse. All Levi could do was talk to the six-year-old draft horse, conversing with him of the times they had run out and explored, how Levi was the first to befriend him as a colt, to tame him and make him listen only to him. As the last hour passed by, Levi saw Jester's black eye getting lazier and lazier, and his gasping becoming slow, relaxed breaths. Instead of his legs twitching from the broken nervous system, he lay quite still, peaceful. Niko, the tabby, suddenly seemed to realize what was going on and mewed a farewell to her friend, laying upon his round belly and purring, tucking herself into his thick fur. The horse finally let go of life, passing into the world of beyond, and leaving Levi and Niko to sit along and atop his body. Levi allowed a single tear to slip gently down his cheek, but wiped it away quickly and smiled. He could only remember the good things, and that was that. One thing that tugged at his heart was the fact that he could not possibly bury his proud stallion here, in the frozen lands, but could not possibly carry him or drag him out. His body would be left to the cruel winds. But maybe that would make him happy- running free on the wind. Levi was concerned with Niko now, her warmth still barely remaining, despite her easy movement, and he wrapped her in his cloak, picking up the haversack and walking away. He left the blankets upon Jester, and his saddle beside him. The reins he hung over his other shoulder, because they were lighter and needed more to ride anything than a saddle. He walked on, following the deep grooves of hoof marks in the snow that led the way to Kaz and Stag's destination.

4 - Kaz's Discovery

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Chapter 4: Kaz's Discovery

As Levi trekked through the shallow snow, he raised his head, goggles shining in the dim sunlight that broke faintly through the clouds above. Looking forwards again, he spotted two black shapes up ahead, and began running, holding Niko in the crook of his arm, and the reins over his shoulder. As he made it closer to the two figures, he saw Kaz was staring up quietly into a single evergreen, holding Stag at a halt.

Levi wondered what he was doing, and as he arrived at Kaz's side, Kaz didn't even blink. He still stared in awe at the tree. Levi laughed a bit and nudged Kaz, who didn't respond, "Okay, Kaz, what are you doing now?"

Levi glared at his friend mockingly and then followed his friend's stare up into the tree. Then he saw it. A black egg spotted with gray and ivory white. It was huge. It would probably take both hands for Levi to lift it, as it was the size of his head. He whispered uncertainly, "Go get it, Kaz. We gotta get it. Kaz needed no further ushering. Almost absent-mindedly he let go of Stag's reins, walking up to the tree and lifting himself onto the first limb. It was six feet into the air, and the egg was nearly at the top of the tree. Grunting with the effort, Kaz heaved himself two branches up, nearly half way there. The whole time Levi stared at the large egg, memories of his father's stories echoing back to him. *Some say the Ravens and their Stryders all perished decades ago. But,* his father had said, *I believe there are just a couple more out there.* Weird thing was, as he said it, he had a look in his eye. Levi couldn't describe it, but he remembered how interested he was after that. To know about his father's trek through Winterkrieg the most. But he was taken away. And only a couple days afterwards, the last Raven was said to have died. It was all connecting now, but Levi couldn't believe it, not now, anyways, and he pushed the thoughts away roughly. Suddenly, he came back to reality when he heard Kaz shout excitedly, "I've got it!" Levi watched as Kaz struggled down from branch to branch, carrying the load, and landed on the ground. Kaz immediately sat down underneath the tree, and Levi ran and joined him.

What is it?

Almost without thought Kaz responded as though he knew all along, "A Raven egg." Levi burst out in laughter, nudging his friend playfully, "Yeah right! We heard they were all dead!" Kaz retorted swiftly, this time with a fierce glare that wasn't joking at all, "You wanted to go find a Raven in the Mountains, didn't you? Well, I've found one in Winterkrieg, so there isn't much difference. Just closer. Believe me, this *has* to be one. What else could be this big?" Levi for once had no answer to the question. Levi gave in and spoke, "Okay, so, say this *is* a Raven, and, and, um& It's Raven and it *hatches*, and then it's big and hungry, and we've never seen a Raven and don't know what it likes, and& Kaz just smiled, gazing kindly at the egg as though it had feeling, and responded dreamily, "I can hear it. Levi, can't you hear what it's saying? It's almost as if it knows how to speak already." Levi furrowed his brow and shook his head, worried, "No, Kaz I don't. Are you alright?"

But then a voice spoke out into his mind, deep baritones, as though the creature inside was already fully

grown. *Friend of the Raven Stryder Kaz, greetings. I have long awaited to be found.*

Levi cried out in shock and wonder, and then both boys leapt back (Kaz hitting his head off a branch) as the egg gave a loud crack. Stag, the black horse, whinnied in interest, and Niko just purred in boredom. In front of the four of them, the egg was breaking. Hatching. The egg was actually hatching. And first, out came a smooth, perfectly preened wing, and it swung out, six feet long even though the egg it hatched from could barely hold a raveled up two foot wing. Another preened black wing broke through the other side, casting away pieces of the black and white shell. On the last feathers of each wing were splotches of gray and ivory, as though someone splashed along the feathers with paint. At last, a great head shoved its way out, a large, powerful beak opening to breathe in the cold air. His beak was dark gray, his body ivory black, and his legs gray. He flapped his great wings for a couple moments to stretch them out, and then looked to each boy with gratefulness. Black eyes held pride and dignity in them, though also care. I am free of the tiny egg at last. Please, what are the names of my two rescuers? the two teenagers were still disbelieving, and instead of Kaz, who was the cause of the egg's hatching, Levi spoke first, stuttering, W-we re& We re Kaz and Levi. I-I m Levi. And that's Niko- and the horse is Stag. The great Raven nodded, clacking his beak in acceptance, and then turned his beady black eyes to Kaz. I feel your aura of power. It was you who opened my egg. And because you were the first to touch my egg, it is you who shall ride me. You are my Stryder.

Both boys just stared at the seven foot tall Raven in more wonder. There was no explanation for their questions. Kaz simply blurted out, R-ride you? How can I ride a Raven? I-I ve never seen one before. I ve only heard of them in legends!

The black bird chuckled, and then clacked his beak in thought. After a while, he asked curiously, Well, Stryder Kaz, are you going to give me a name? The brown haired boy just swallowed and looked to Levi, who shook his head, shrugging. Err& Any ideas, Raven? the black bird just replied nonchalantly, The Raven cannot give itself a name, Kaz. As my Stryder, it is your duty. Kaz just sighed and murmured under his breath, I guess I should have used some foresight& The bird, however, cocked his head at the only word he heard- foresight. Foresight? A well chosen name, for me, seeing as I am the wisest of Ravens. Levi and Kaz just looked at each other, and then Kaz added, Yeah, sure, Foresight. Foresight, my& My Raven.