

Harbringers of Change

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100 yrs before Magik?, Thereon is peaceful. The Pearl Islands, in particular. Until the Shades of Darkness, followers of Geddon, arrive. What will Prince Syan and Assistant-captain Reki do?

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Chapter 1 - Lost and Found

2

1 - Lost and Found

Hello again! I'm very, very sorry for not updating recently, but I've not been in a very good mood for writing . . . Self-esteem issues and homework, unfortunately, are almost worse than writer's block. But, oh well. We'll see. I'm determined to get these things done. :) Oh, and this title is just random- I haven't decided on one yet. XD I will try to get to them now.

In any case, to the newcomers, this story occurs in the same world as Magik? – Thereon, one where Half-breeds and other beings are much more common than humans. This is 100 years before Milena and the other Chosen are born, and long before Geddon is freed. It takes place far south- places frequented in Magik? will be hardly mentioned here, and its characters will only be foreshadowed at. Sorry. :(

There will be a lot of violence- in fact, I expect to write my first deathscene in this story. It will be shorter than Magik?, as it's a prequel, but it'll still end up being pretty good-sized. There will be shounen-ai in this, though of a shy and sweeter kind than Advocation and Devotion – I've decided that that one's my slash fic. XD This one'll be somewhat gentler. We'll see.

Anyways, as usual, comments and suggestions are much appreciated. Since this chapter is still undergoing changes (grammar and sentence structure and shtuff), we'll see how it looks later. Oh, well. Enjoy!

(P.S. "Sai" is a nickname based on the sound of syllables, not like it's used in the Dark Tower series. Sorry. XD)

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Harbringers of Change
(Tentative Title)

Chapter 1:
Lost and Found

Awash in the sun of a tropical summer day, the city of Korelai was bustling with activity. Noise swelled and fell as vendors cried out advertisements for their wares, newsboys dashed to and fro, calling out the day's business, and the everyday chatter and drama of Market Street bounced from stone and brick

walls. People walked to and fro, lugging along their purchases or searching for somewhere to make them, while others bargained or simply walked the streets of the Pearl Island's capital city.

Few of them, even the tourists (whose job it was to look around) braved the bright sun to glance at the rooftops. So it was that hardly any noticed Reki Thallum as he padded across the rooftops like a cat, stopping frequently to study the street's occupants with a fascination and anticipation that was nothing like said animal. You wouldn't catch a cat nearly falling over in laughter if something caught its eye.

Reki was solid, tall, and deeply tanned for his ten years, with gangly limbs that promised height and bulk as he grew into them. For now, though, they proved a minor annoyance as he crouched on the roof of an inn. Too much of his body was in contact with the tiles, no matter what position he sat in. Its tar, which at the best of times was rough on his skin, was now almost bubbling in the heat. He'd have to move soon or risk it burning through the seat of his shorts.

But the antics of a juggler below had caught his attention, and he smiled widely and laughed as he watched. He was so lucky that he'd been able to come here so early in the day. His father, after watching him fidget unceasingly for hours, had finally taken pity on him, cut short his lesson, and turned him loose with only a warning that he be back for dinner. Knowing that there'd be plenty to see around midday, he'd gone straight to Market Street as soon as he'd left the door. Of course, his enthusiasm had dulled a little when he realized that his friends were still trapped in lessons or helping parents, but they'd be along eventually.

He brushed shaggy black bangs out of his face, focusing deep violet eyes upon the populace. He scanned the crowds, idly counting those who were Half-breeds like himself. Apart from the normal population of dolphin-like Aquarnuns, he also noticed a number of Feluin, Avia, and Unis. Most seemed to be tourists. He didn't see any of the Daegon clan, like he was. Nor did he really expect to- most Daegons kept to the far and icy north. His own mother, from whom he'd inherited his golden horns and black-scaled wings and tail, had only stayed with his father five years before fleeing the south. Despite her love for his father, nothing could make her remain in their home on Lien'ec, the largest of the Islands. He'd have to ask his father about that sometime- Astaerik wasn't free with certain details about her, but he let some slip every once and a while, especially now that he was older. Maybe he'd ask tonight.

The juggler, meanwhile, had gathered quite an audience after switching from normal wooden balls to torches. So many people were crowding around him that even Reki, who'd picked this perch specifically for its great view, could hardly see him. *Ah, just when it was getting good!* With a sigh, he rose to his feet and walked carelessly along the edge. There'd been rumors of a troupe of human performers- a rarity in these mostly Elf and Half-breed populated Islands- in an alcove a few streets over. He'd go over and see if they were worth watching. His friends wouldn't want to waste coins on them otherwise.

First, he'd have to go a house or so over to look for a way down- jumping was out of the question, as his father had yelled at him last time for doing that. But he really had to get down- although he was planning on eating the azre in his pocket soon, it might spoil if he stayed up here much longer. Backing up a few steps, he leapt. No human could have made the jump, which was over five feet wide. *But*, Reki thought with a smug grin as he landed safely on the other side, *I'm not a human. I'm a Half-breed! I'd like to see one of those human performers do that!*

Not that he had anything against humans. His own Da was one, after all. But it didn't take long, especially if you lived with one, to realize how impaired they were in strength and senses. Father was better than most, though, and Reki didn't really mind. It was kind of fun, being able to notice things that even his scholar of a father couldn't. Like pointing out when one of the students who came to him for help was lying, or if the fish they were going to have for dinner had gone bad. It was almost like a game.

Reki stopped once more and walked to the edge of the house, looking over into the street parallel to the one he'd watched before. After taking a bite from the azre he wiped blue juice from his lips as he studied a wagon clattering on the cobblestones. Bright signs, large drawings . . . yup, it was an apothecary. He could tell by smell if not by sight- the musty, bitter scent of herbs reached him even on the rooftop. He'd seen it heading toward the palace a few hours ago as he'd run out of his house; they'd apparently finished their business, as they were heading back this way now.

There was something oddly intriguing about this group. Although he could tell by their faces that they were foreigners, they were wearing sleeveless tunics of light fabric- a rarity for northerners, who most often arrived with clothes much too heavy or dark for this climate. Someone had apparently warned them beforehand. That wasn't the only odd thing. Although the scent of herbs covered everything, there was a strange, reeking undersmell- almost like blood. He shivered slightly, but knew that it was only normal that that smell lingered around the cart. After all, apothecaries often served as doctors for those who couldn't afford surgeons or barbers.

But try as he might to ignore it, there was still something that made him uneasy about these people. It might have been the fact that the men looked around with sharper alertness than usual, or that the woman looked nearly as wary. One startled him by catching his eye (something no one had done all day) and giving him a measuring look. Surprised, he waved back, trying to look as cheerful as possible. Well, it only made sense that they'd be nervous in the city; as foreigners, they were targets for the bandits lurking in the backstreets, so he should be nice. But the woman just looked away and rapped the horse with the reins to get it moving faster.

Insulted, he stuck out his tongue at them as they passed and turned his back on the street, resisting the urge to throw the azre pit after them. Knowing that his father would give him a talking-to if he got in trouble with strangers, he dropped it into his pocket to throw away later. Wiping the sticky syrup from his fingers onto his shorts, he walked slowly along the edge, looking for a good way down.

Ah. **There** was a good one. Against the side of the building he was standing on, a bunch of boxes and barrels were piled up, providing almost a staircase down to the street. As he got ready to jump down onto the first, he paused. Something below had caught his eye. Squinting a little, he saw that someone was huddled in the space between two barrels. This wasn't strange- he'd seen enough beggars hide in such places to be used to it- but what **was** odd was the size and garb of this one. The stranger was tiny and almost certainly a small child, as it was far too thin to be a Dwarf or Gnome. And added to that, it was covered completely in an expanse of grey cloth. Even the **locals** rarely wore full-body clothing during the afternoon.

This was just too interesting to pass up. Without a sound, Reki jumped lightly from box to barrel until he was kneeling on one directly above the stranger. Its head was leaned back and touching the wall, so Reki thought he'd been seen.

“Yo!” he said loudly, leaning down. Before he could open his mouth to ask something, the person shrieked and buried his head in his knees, drawing them up to his chest until he resembled nothing more than a little ball of cloth.

Reki winced. Well, he’d been wrong- the little boy (for he could tell that’s what it was now) hadn’t noticed him. In fact, he’d been sleeping, and he’d just come along and scared the living daylights out of him. “I’m sorry, I didn’t mean ta scare ya.” He said, rubbing his neck sheepishly. “. . . but these streets aren’t exactly safe. Ya might get mugged or somethin’ if ya sleep here.”

The little ball uncurled a little and two large, storm cloud-hued eyes peeked up at him, fearful but curious. “Will they really?” he asked in a small voice.

Reki shrugged nonchalantly. “Not while I’m here.” He jumped lightly off the barrel and, with a wide and friendly grin, waved down at the little boy. “Anyways, the name’s Reki. Nice ta meetcha!”

As the kid straightened a little more, Reki studied him. He couldn’t be more than five or six years old, and was pretty thin and delicate-looking for any age. Bright orange-red bangs hung in his eyes, and a pointed ear could be seen where the hood had fallen back slightly. That meant he was an Elf as he didn’t smell like a Half-breed, though most Elves had more normal-hued hair. Apart from the dusty feet anyone got from walking in the street, he was mostly clean as well, and the cloak and laced-up sandals he was wearing were of very fine make. So obviously the boy came from a rich family and hadn’t been missing long. Question was, where was he missing *from*?

To his surprise, the tike’s face brightened up immediately and he was treated to a wide, sweet smile that almost took his breath away. “Nice to meet you, too!” he said brightly. “My name’s Sy . . . uh . . .” For a moment he seemed lost at words, blinking blankly like he’d forgotten it, then regrouped and finished. “Symon! My name’s Symon!”

What was that about? Reki had no idea why he’d felt the need to lie about his name. Even his voice was upper-class, not showing the slightest taint of street slang. He really needed to return this boy soon; he had a feeling that any moment now, ‘Symon’s’ huge, bulky bodyguards (conjured solely by his imagination) were going to pounce on them and beat him into a pulp, just like his Da always warned him was going to happen if he messed with the workers near the dock. (Little did his father know that he was good friends with most of them. So much for fatherly intuition.)

“That’s a nice name.” He said admiringly, sitting beside him. His legs were too long to fold into his chest, something he regretted- Symon looked quite comfortable, sitting there like that. “But, can ya tell me why yer here all alone?” he asked softly.

Symon just buried his face in his knees again and wrapped his arms around them. Silence stretched out for a few moments, and Reki finally accepted that he wasn’t going to get an answer. He sighed, rubbing his neck. “Well, I guess it’s okay if ya don’t tell me, but can ya at least tell me where ya live?”

“I don’t know how to get back.” came a whispered voice from beneath the hood.

Reki couldn’t exactly say he was surprised. He’d had a feeling that was the case. “Well, whaddya say we go ta my house, Symon? My Da knows how to get *anywhere* in this city!” This last was said proudly,

and with good reason. His father, who'd been all over the Islands in search of various books and people, knew this city very well.

"Really? Can he help?" Up came the head again, and Reki found himself briefly caught up in the large grey eyes, almost brimming over with hope.

He shook himself free and nodded vigorously. "Of course he can! Are ya comin'?" He got up and held out his hand. Symon clambered to his feet and took it. As they exited the small alley, the Daegon marveled at how much smaller the hand was than his own. They were soon making their way down the street, weaving through the people Reki had found so interesting a few minutes before. He hardly noticed them now; this time around, he had something new to occupy him now.

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As they continued on, Reki couldn't help but be amused at Symon's reaction to Market Street- the little tike was staring, wide-eyed and open-mouthed, at anything and everything. As with most young boys, he liked feeling superior when he knew much more about something than someone else. This put him in an extremely good mood as they walked along. "Oi, ya act like ye've never seen a city before." He joked, grinning.

Symon blinked up at him. "I haven't. This is the first time I've been Outside." The last word was said with slight emphasis, like one would add to the name of a street or city.

"Oh, really?" That basically cemented Reki's suspicion that Symon's family was rich- well-to-do Elven families hardly ever let their children mingle with commoners. No wonder he'd gotten lost so quickly. "Well, you kinda missed out. Come on, I'll show you something cool!" he said, grinning at the look of expectation on the other's face.

When they came across another street performer, the crowd was too dense for even them to push through. Reki was ready to move on but, unable to spoil the painfully curious look on Symon's face, impulsively grabbed him and lifted him up on his shoulders. This would have been impossible for most other boys his age but Reki had always been strong, even for a Half-breed.

They stood there for a few minutes. Reki could only imagine what was going on from the sounds and occasional delighted comments from Symon, but he didn't really mind. He'd seen most of the local acts already, and would see any new ones in the next few days.

When he noticed Symon losing interest, he set him back on his feet and they started off again. This time they actually managed to get a block or so before coming across a collection of food vendors. Symon, with a grumbling stomach, tugged on his hand imploringly and asked what they were selling.

Reki noticed the gaudy sign and grinned. "Spiced meats and vegetables, fruits, candies, cakes stuff like that, Sai. But I don't think I'm carryin' any bits with me. We can't get nothin'." But right then a rumbling in his own stomach reminded him that he was a growing boy that hadn't eaten anything but an azre since breakfast. He scanned the stalls until he recognized someone, then grinned. "But I might

be able to get somethin' anyway. Come on, Symon!"

The man in the stall looked up as they approached. "Oi, Reki! Ain't seen ya in ages! How are ya, boyo?" he boomed cheerfully. Rord Oaktree was a northerner; a man that looked like he'd sampled more of his goods than sold them, he was a kind and fair man to do business with. Twin white streaks in his hair and small ears made it pretty obvious that he was a Broak, a badger Half-breed. His hands, like the rest of him, were huge, almost big enough to completely cover Reki's face when stretched out flat.

"I'm good! Da let me out early, too. Good ta see ya back in town." Reki replied, smiling. He should've come and checked up on Rord a while ago- he did business between the Islands and was often gone, but that didn't keep him from being good company when he was here. "Say, since I helped ya unload yer ship last time ya was here, can me and Symon here have somethin'? Y'know, just to keep us 'til we get home."

Rord leaned over the counter and peered at the younger boy, who met his gaze with wide, wondering eyes. "Who's this little fella? I didn't even notice him." He chuckled and turned around to a barrel just behind him. "Of course I'll give ya somethin'. The boy-Symon, ya said?- looks half starved." With a wink that made Symon's eyes go even bigger, if that was possible, he handed over the objects he'd been fishing for. "Yer in luck, boyos- I unloaded this shipment myself."

With delight, Reki recognized the little things for what they were- pickles! As there was little farming room on the Islands for side crops like cucumbers or the herbs needed to pickle them, pickles were a moderately rare and tasty treat. "Thanks, Rord!" Reki handed down one to Symon, shaking some of the briny vinegar from his hands. "Eat up, Sai. Yer in for a treat!"

Symon stared at it for a few moments, brow furrowed in puzzlement. Dubiously, he raised it to his mouth and took a bite. As soon as he started chewing, he froze.

Reki, who was already halfway through his, couldn't see what the problem was. "What's the matter, Symon?" he asked, chewing his crunchy mouthful happily. "Don't ya like it?"

Unexpectedly, his little face wrinkled up after he swallowed what he'd taken. "It's **so sour!**" he exclaimed, but didn't look too unhappy at the realization. "And it smells funny!"

Rord guffawed and slapped his huge hand down on the counter, making them jump. "What, ye've never had a pickle before, little man? Where d'ya live, the palace?"

Symon shook his head violently and took another bite of his pickle. It wasn't long before both were completely gone.

"Thanks a lot, Rord! I'd stay ta talk, but I gotta get Symon to my Da, so we can get him home." Reki said, taking a step back rather reluctantly. He hadn't seen the vendor in a while and wished they could stay longer, but the smaller hand in his own reminded him of his business. "I'll come see ya later, though, if I can." And they really would have to get a move on- all the sights and smells of this place was going to make him want to stay if they didn't go soon.

"Alright then, I'll take ya at yer word." Rord replied, nodding. "Make sure ya get him home

straightaway- I can think of many a rogue who'd jump ya both for that cloak of his. Be careful, boyo." He leaned down with a wide grin for Symon. "And you be careful, too! Take care of this guy." He waved his hand at Reki. "He's useless." He didn't so much as twitch when the other Half-breed smacked his head for teasing.

He was rewarded by a giggle and shy smile. "Thank you, Mister Rord." Symon said. This spawned another bout of laughter from the man, who patted his head and waved them good-bye as they headed once again toward Reki's home.

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A while later, Reki decided to ask Symon again about why he'd been in the city. The boy was young and naïve, but not stupid- he, like Reki had at that age, must have already been told about going out on his own. He *should* know better. "So, Sai . . ." He paused, hoping his friend had warmed up enough to him to answer. "Can ya tell me why ya were in the city, alone? No worries; ya can trust me, y'know."

There was another silence, and Reki once again gave up on ever getting an answer. He was surprised when Symon began speaking, looking down at the ground. "I couldn't find my mommy today." He said softly. "No one would tell me where she was, and there were all these people around, so . . . And they were really scary, too." He broke off in typical child fashion and looking up to see if Reki understood. When he nodded, Symon's gaze returned to the ground and he continued. "So I thought she came her to buy stuff for Daddy, like she did a while ago. But I *still* couldn't find her, and I got scared again and hid. And then you came." He paused again. "I'm really glad you came."

Touched, Reki squeezed the other's hand comfortingly. "Me too, Sai. Me too." He fell to thinking about this new information, and it troubled him. A lot of things had been going on in the city today- though he hadn't said anything to anyone, he'd heard people riding down the next street over when they'd stopped at Rord's stall. Worried that they might get careless and accidentally hurt Symon, he'd avoided all the streets he'd heard them in.

But what if they'd had something to do with Symon's mother? It took thinking about, but it boggled the mind. He shrugged it off and chattered with Symon about the city for the next few blocks.

As they entered a street a short ways from his house, Reki began feeling uneasy. He kept feeling that they were being followed . . . but no one was there when he turned around to look. He tried to tell himself that it was nerves for their safety this close to home, but deep animal instinct made him realize that something was truly wrong. Symon seemed to sense he was worried and got very quiet.

"Come on, Symon, let's take a shortcut!" Reki said with forced cheerfulness, leading him into an alley. Only a few more houses away was his own house, and safety. Even if they were in trouble, Da would take care of it.

They were halfway in before Reki realized that the other end was blocked by a large wagon, which he'd been unable to see before entering. A few grim-faced people were standing in front of it, all holding knives or staves. A cold shiver ran down his back as he heard footsteps behind them. Spinning around,

he clutched Symon close to him.

“Reki?” the boy whimpered, looking around with wide eyes. The Daegon shushed him, narrowing his eyes at the figures in front of him. A bitter, familiar stench reached him from both sides and he recognized, with a sinking heart, the people from the apothecary cart he’d seen earlier.

“What d’ya want?” He tried to growl this out, but his voice betrayed him by cracking into a squeak. “We haven’t any money.”

“We don’t want money.” A lean, dark man said smoothly as he stepped from the shadows. Judging by the way the others gathered around him, he was their leader. “Give us the boy, and we’ll let you live.” His tone and smile were pleasant enough, but neither reached his eyes, which remained cold. Murderer’s eyes. Reki had seen a pair like them once, in the face of a man condemned to death after killing his wife and children. He’d had nightmares about it for weeks.

Somehow, he had no doubt that this man would have no qualms about doing the same to his own family. If he gave Symon over to them, the best the child could hope for was that he’d be held for ransom- and not killed outright. And he knew for a fact that they’d kill *him* where he stood, just for being a witness. He couldn’t let them harm Symon. “Whaddya talkin’ about? This is my cousin, Symon! He’s from a real poor family, so yer not gonna get much by taking him.” He bluffed, spiked tail twitching in agitation.

“The boy’s name is Syan Reigallus, Crown Prince of the Pearl Islands.” All pretense of warmth was gone from the man’s voice now, and his eyes were like chips of ice. “Give him to us, boy.” He commanded.

Reki felt his charge stiffen. He himself was shocked. Crown Prince? There was no way little Symon was a prince! He was from a wealthy family- he’d guessed that at least- but royalty? No way!

But a few facts dropped like acid into the stone wall of his disbelief and burned it away. He did recognize the name Syan . . . and the boy’s age fit. He only remembered the Prince’s birthday because he’d been born one year after his own Ma had left them. And it *was* said that the Prince had bright red hair. And, yet . . .

He had to know. “Sai? Is that true?” he whispered. A pause, and then the smallest of nods confirmed the man’s words.

“Enough talk, Caiyn!” came a roar from behind them. Before Reki could react, a giant mountain of a man snatched Syan from his protection and, with a backhanded blow, sent him sprawling into the wall. “Let’s kill the brat now and have done with it!”

Syan’s shriek of shock sent chills down Reki’s back as he scrambled, reeling, to his feet. The man wrenched back Syan’s hood and three intricate braids, each down to the boy’s shoulder blades, sprung out when the fabric ripped. *If I didn’t know already, I would now.* Reki thought as his head spun, fighting to clear his mind. *Only royalty are allowed braids like that.*

A fresh whimper from the little Prince brought him to his senses and he watched in horror as the

assailant bared Syan's throat, ready to slit it with the knife in his other hand. "Syan!" Reki screamed, dodging grabbing arms to dart forward and wrenching his friend from the other's grasp. The guy cursed and Reki saw him swing something from the corner of his eye.

Agonizing pain ripped into the right side of his face as he finally stumbled to a stop with Syan in his arms. Blinking brought fresh pain as something dripped into that eye and made it sting horribly. He realized that he'd been slashed across his right eye and cheek. Even though the eye still seemed functional, the blood didn't let him see through it.

Desperately he looked for a way out, but there was none. There were enemies on all sides and now that he could see the leader clearly, he noticed a tattoo on his arm that mirrored everyone else's- a blood-red eye surrounded by a swirl of black. He recognized it immediately, and that knowledge made him shudder. It was a sigil from a dark fairytale, a symbol of every child's worst nightmare. To bear it these people had to be the Shades of Darkness- followers of Geddon, the Dark Prince responsible for the genocide of thousands of humans and Half-breeds eons and eons in the past before today's world, Thereon, was even born.

Caiyn caught him looking and smiled coldly. "Nice, isn't it? Admire it, for it will be the last thing you ever see." Faster than human eyes could follow, he drew his sword and lashed out at them.

However, he'd made two mistakes: One, Reki wasn't human; and Two, this time he wasn't taken by surprise. "Syan, run if ya see a break and **stay down!**" Reki ordered quickly. Violet flame enveloped his body, leaving a small dragon with glittering black scales in its places. The sword sliced off those same scales without even leaving a scratch. With a wordless snarl of rage, Reki threw himself at his foe.

He got in a few good hits, raking Caiyn's torso badly with claw and talon before the man recovered and stabbed downwards. Searing pain ripped through Reki's wing, but luckily that was all it hit- only the leathery membrane between the bones of the wing was pierced. Swinging his sinuous neck around, Reki snapped at his hand. His foe let go of it with a curse to nurse his bleeding hand, leaving the Daegon to flap his wing until it fell out. His foot came down hard on the blade, bending and cracking the steel.

His thoughts were mostly Dragon now, and he would've gone for the man's throat if a cry from Syan hadn't stopped him in his tracks. He whipped around to see the boy in the clutches of yet another goon. With a roar of rage, Reki barreled toward them, gouging the cobblestones with his claws. A snap of his jaws, a scream from the victim, and Syan was same again. He curled his body around the Prince, snapping and breathing purple sparks at anyone who came near. Nobody wanted to lose a finger (or worse) to the needlelike teeth, so they stayed away for the most part.

Then, the woman he'd noticed much earlier in the day crept up on his from his blind side. Before he could react fully, she'd fired something at him from a small tube in her hand. It didn't hurt much- just a pinprick lodged in-between two scales in his neck- but it was irritating. He sent her flying with a buffet from his wings, but the damage had been done.

Slowly, the little pinprick took effect. His movements slowed, fatigue pressing onto his body like a lead jacket. Syan cried out to him in encouragement and alarm as he weakened, but it steadily grew worse. Finally he collapsed and couldn't even raise his head from the ground. His wings, raised before in

protection of the little Prince, folded limply against his back.

The leader stared down at him with a triumphant smile on his face. "Needlefish poison. It paralyzes the body almost instantly. But really, you didn't actually think that these were all we had for weapons? Or did you, filthy little Half-breed?" he asked, gesturing with his knife. With a quick move, he slashed again across the softer scales around Reki's eye, making the cuts into an X on his cheek.

Reki growled in pain, but couldn't even budge as Caiyn knelt down. A twisted glint of pleasure entered his eye as their gazes met and he continued speaking. "You can rest assured that I didn't kill Queen Lucimaara with this little trinket. No, she died, but slowly and in great pain as a Queen should. Take comfort in knowing that your death will be much quicker."

Reki's magic ran out, and a pale lavender mist rolled off his body to leave him in his demi form once more. His fists clenched angrily as he realized that he couldn't even lift himself onto his elbows. "M-monster." He gasped, glaring murderously up at the man. If he could, he would've spit in his face. Caiyn just laughed and drew back his arm to strike the fatal blow.

Syan, now on his knees at Reki's side, had gone utterly still. Reki could see him from the corner of his eye, and was dismayed by the fact that he was still there. "Syan! Run!" he breathed, pleading.

"Mommy . . ." the boy whispered, slowly raising his head and fixing a vacant gaze on the lead murderer. Rage filled the grey orbs in a sparkling rush as he stared. "You killed my mommy, and now you want to kill Reki." He said coldly.

The man paused, head cocked, staring at the little Prince. The smile had slipped from his face for a moment, but came right back on. "Yes, I did, and am. Don't worry, you'll join them soon." A ripple of dark laughter spread through the group, which had gathered around the fallen children like a pack of hyenas around a kill.

Syan slowly rose to his feet. "Sai! I **told** you, run!" Reki implored feverishly, struggling to move. The boy didn't answer, and Caiyn made to strike once more, this time for the Prince.

Syan's head snapped up, and all hell broke loose. It was as if he suddenly became the center of a tiny hurricane- the people nearest to him were blown hard into the walls, sliding senseless to the floor. Some weren't so lucky and were thrown into the cart, smashing it into a painful bed of splinters, broken glass, and noxious chemicals. The leader himself ended up on the ground near the front of the alley, pinned to the ground by his own dagger.

Strangely, this havoc seemed to have the exact opposite effect on Reki. A small measure of strength returned to him, and he was finally able to lift himself up into a sitting position. He stared at Syan in shock-he'd heard of the Royal blood having strange powers, but this was just insane! The air around the Prince was sparkling and crackling with gold sparks, smelling strongly of ozone. Reki's hair almost stood on end. But the most frightening thing was the effect on the boy's eyes, which had gone from a peaceful stormy grey to merciless, metallic silver.

"Sai?" he murmured, face livid under its tan.

His head turned to him and those eyes met his. For one terrifying moment, there was no recognition in them at all. Then, abruptly, the charge faded from the air and his eyes became his own, large, innocent, and startled.

“Reki?” he whispered, starting. The Daegon nodded, his mouth twitching into a smile. Syan’s almost made an answering one, but that faded entirely when his eyes rolled to the back of his head and he suddenly collapsed.

“Syan!” Reki caught him, frightened at the sudden limpness in the body he held. He cried out his name, nearly in tears. A noise immediately caught his attention, and his head whipped around. To his despair, even **more** men were entering the alley, while others were standing outside with horses. In the noise of battle, he hadn’t even heard them arrive.

Gritting his teeth, the Daegon gathered his strength for a final time, ready to fight or run. He knew he wouldn’t get far either way, but he wasn’t going to give up now. The lethargic feeling was already returning to his limbs with frightening swiftness, but he tried to fight it, clutching Syan tighter.

The leader, this time a woman, stepped up and spoke soothingly. “Don’t worry; we’re not here to fight. We’re here to help. We’re the Palace Guard.” Reki finally saw the image on her uniform’s shirt- not Geddon’s Mark, but the crest of the House of Reigallus, a dolphin and merman curled around a crossed arrow and sword. A pearl (a real one, in her case) shimmered in the center of it all.

He went limp with relief, the little strength he was able to muster draining back out of him. The woman smiled kindly, motioning people to move in closer. One man lifted Syan away from him- he protested faintly, but stopped when he saw how gentle they were. Another man came and gathered him up in his arms. Reki struggled weakly when his wounded wing was jarred; his bearer noticed and shifted him to a much more comfortable position. “Relax, kiddo.” he rumbled, ruffling his hair gently. “You did your kingdom a real service today.”

“My Da-” he began, but then noticed a neighbor rushing over to his home and knocking frantically on the door. His father would find out soon enough.

The soldier saw this as well and chuckled softly. “You’ve got quite some neighbors there, bud. If one hadn’t come and found us, it might’ve turned out worse. Get some rest- we’ve got a ride back to the Palace to make.”

At any normal time, Reki would’ve been excited beyond belief to realize that he was actually going to the Palace, of all places. But at the moment, all he could feel was relief that Syan was safe and he’d see his Da soon. Unable to stay awake any longer, Reki let his head fall back against the nice man’s shoulder with a soft thump. By the time it hit, he was too far asleep to even feel the pain from the cuts on his face.