

Revelation (Prologue)

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The winds of time are changing. Ratheos, a young ranger sworn to secrecy, ventures into the heart of the country of Lamar. Darkness has been looming in the skies and it seems as if the world will soon be plunged into war.

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The flames in the fire pit crackled and hissed, casting a warm orange hue on the faces gathered. The blackness of night pressed in around the people, pressing them closer to one another. Children raced about, chasing one another, laughing. Women brought bowls of freshly baked bread and wild fruits to the others. Tonight the festival was in full swing. Despite the dark night, merry laughter permeated the group.

Tonight was a night of storytelling. It was a time of remembering the past and celebrating the future. Festivals like these were always well liked by the children. It was a time of fun and laughter.

The clinking sound of thick beads and jewelry echoed beyond the campfire's light. A hush fell over those gathered and all heads turned to look. Shuffling toward them, an old woman in heavy robes smiled. Strings of beads and tribal jewelry adorned her, jingling together as she walked. A gentle smile spread across her wrinkled old face.

"Amah! Amah!" The younger children swarmed around her. One of the youngest took her hand.

"How good it is to see you all," Amah said, her voice raspy and tired.

"This way Amah." The children led her to her place by the fire.

In the light of the campfire, her gray hair glistened as if it were made of silver. Her white eyes reflected the flames. Feeling the log with her thin, wrinkled hand, Amah lowered herself to her seat. Murmurs of excitement stirred among the little ones. Sitting at her feet, gathered close to her exotic old form, the children gazed up at her.

"Are you going to tell us a story tonight, Amah?" a little girl asked.

Pulling her shawl around her shoulders, Amah hunched closer to the fire's warmth.

"Yes, child," she said. "Tonight is a night for storytelling."

"Amah?" One of the youngest girls tugged at the old woman's sleeve. Lifting the girl, she set her on her lap. The little girl played with the thick wooden beads that hung about Amah's neck. "What story is it?"

"Oh, it's a wonderful story of adventure. A tale of courage, war, betrayal, and love." She smiled. Whispers of excitement rose among her young listeners. "I heard this one when I was your age. It's a story that has been passed down for thousands of years—one that we should never forget."

The children watched her with wonder. Amah sat up straighter, readying herself to tell the tale.

"It all began in the Elder Days. Long long ago, when men began to settle the lands, the first king wandered the vast plains. He traveled through every region, seeing all that he could. Thammeldir, the

first king of men, ventured the wilderness alone. But one night, when the moon had risen high, he chanced upon a woman. Deep in the northern woods, on the mountain pass road, a woman met him. It was as if she had sprung to life from the trees themselves. She was fair, with hair as dark as night and evergreen eyes that mirrored the forest from which she had come. She wore a dress made of fine cloth, and a circlet of silver adorned her brow. Entranced by her beauty, he begged her to come with him. To his dismay, she refused. She could not leave the forest. She spoke words of mystery, telling Thammeldir that she had seen in her dreams the greatness awaiting in his future. To guide him on the path set before him by fate, she bestowed on him a gift—a seed. It was like a crystal teardrop, a priceless gem of purity and light. But with it, came her warning.

“ ‘Be careful, Thammeldir, king of men,’ she said. ‘This seed has the boundless potential to bring fortune and happiness to the peoples of these lands. But beware, not all have kind hearts and seek the happiness of those around them. For one may come to take this treasure.’

“By morning, she was gone—like smoke on the wind. But Thammeldir took the seed and treasured it. In the lands south of the Femor Mountains he planted it; and from that seed sprouted an enormous tree—taller than any in the land. The trunk was pure white and its leaves shone like silver. But in the dead of night its beauty was greatest, shining like starlight under the full moon. And around this magnificent tree the city of Rethal was built, growing larger and more prosperous with the years.

“But it was not to last.

“As it is with all things, where there is good, there is also evil. The lands to the east fell into shadow and flame consumed them, leaving behind the charred black trees of the forest that once had been. The ends of the mountains danced with the fire of the wasteland that became known as the Flamelands. Horrible, nightmarish creatures emerged from the darkness. With this new darkness, the hearts of men who lived on the edges of the desolate plains soon fell into shadow. Evil consumed them and changed their likeness. Jealous of the prosperity their neighbors possessed; they wanted the lands for themselves. Only the kingdoms stood in their way. They formed together an army. Weapons were forged in the fires of the Flamelands, their malice and hatred burned deeply into their blades. They came with numbers too great to count and pillaged the outer villages of the kingdom of men. Both the northern realm and the southern, divided by the mountains of Femor, suffered.

“The two great lands struggled to survive, Spiridon to the north, Melthenon the south. They knew that separately they would fall to the blades of hatred. Invasion from the east was the first step to their doom. One by one, cities fell to the armies of the Flamelands. It seemed that soon the rest of their kingdoms would also meet the same fate. With each battle, more and more lives were lost. Consumed in the Hell-fires of war, there seemed little hope of overpowering the dark armies spawned from the hatred of warped hearts. Even men from the kingdoms of Spiridon and Melthenon were seduced by this dark shadow, and soon joined forces against their own flesh and blood.

“Pushed back to the fortress of Kûndrad, nestled in the northern edges of the Femor Mountains, the slim light of hope was fading. But in their moment of dire need, the remote kingdom of Lamar came to their aid. The young, newlywed prince of Lamar’s capital city, Elanor drove his army into the heart of battle. Together the kingdoms fought valiantly. It was as if the prayers of the peoples brought to life a new kind of bravery and strength. But the war was not without its losses. The prince of Lamar died by the sword of the enemy and Melthenon’s king also fell to the blades of hate.

“In the midst of the grief following the last of the war, a shadowy figure seized the throne of Melthenon. Taking the kingdom for himself, this dark man subjected the people to his will. This man, called Fethnane, meaning 'of the darkness,' sent assassins after the young prince—the rightful heir to Melthenon’s throne. Desperate not to have his rule challenged, he sentenced the true heir to exile. Soon after, the dark king received word that the prince had been killed. But it was a lie—he had escaped into the wilderness.

“A quiet came upon the land. But in the stillness, an unseen evil grew once more. This time, it came from the capital city itself—Rethal. The darkness grew and consumed the city. Ties were cut from the north, and there in the kingdom of Melthenon the darkness waited. For another thousand years, it bided its time, deep within the walls of the castle. The light of the tree faded and went out altogether. It no longer shone brightly, so long as the dark shadow hung over the land. And in the later years, word came to the people of the dark king’s new heir—yet the ruler had no wife. Surely an adopted heir would not suffice. But it did. There were two—a young boy and his sister, fair skinned and kind. The true heir to the throne lay in hiding, awaiting the day that the bloodline of old might be restored.

“And it is here, dear children, that our story begins....”