

FANTASY...MYSTERY...ACTION AND ADVENTURE

WORLDS OF THE

CRYSTALMOON

THE EYE OF LUVELLES



PHILLIP E. JONES



Richard Hatch (Apollo – Battlestar Galactica)
Actor, Writer, Director and Producer

From the day I was introduced to the “Worlds of the Crystal Moon” was enthralled. When you’ve been in the business as long as I have, doesn’t take long to recognize real talent and a writer gifted with that rare ability to create a compelling world that not only entertains, but profoundly touches the heart, mind and soul. The Worlds of The Crystal Moon is such a story. I implore you to enter and explore this powerful and magical story which will stir and inspire you and your loved ones imagination for generations to come.

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The language of the Elves acquired on the web from English to Elvish translators.

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The author has dedicated this book to his two sons: Christopher and Chase Jones

This novel is a work of fiction. Names, characters, events, incidents and places are the product of the author’s imagination. Any resemblance to actual persons, people or events is purely coincidental. This story is not based on any religious beliefs.

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Phillip Jones
"Big Dog"

Let the
adventure
continue...



Phillip E. Jones (Big Dog)
Author of the Worlds of the Crystal Moon



CHAPTER 1

Soul to Soul

Fellow Soul ...

... I'm pleased to see that you've decided to join me for the second of many stories. When last we visited the Worlds of the Crystal Moon, you were left with some unanswered questions. As we move forward, I offer these words of warning. This story is not for the fainthearted. It requires a mind with an ardent wit—one with the ability to follow the manipulations of the gods and those involved in the events that inspired the telling of this tale.

Even I have found the revelations, which were proclaimed as fact, to be disturbing. I struggle with the command to deliver these supposed truths—for pieces of this story do not sit well within the depths of my being.

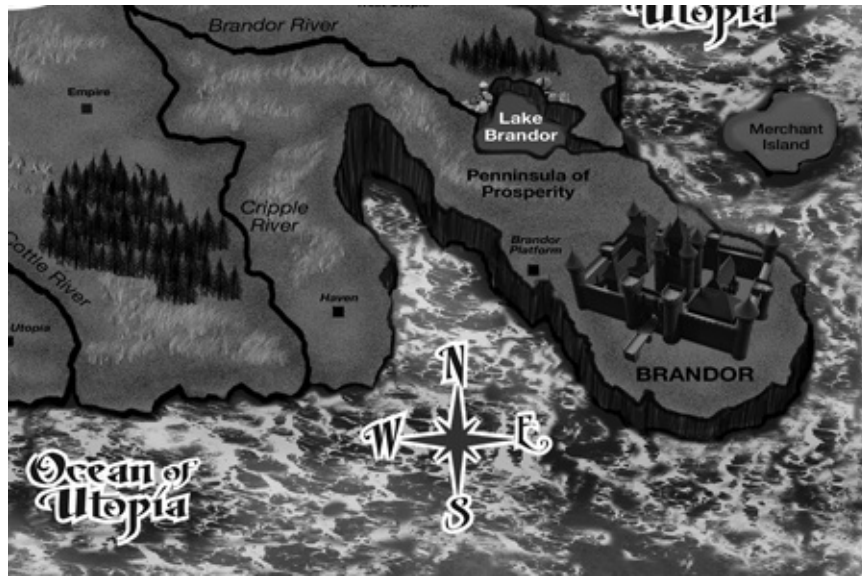
I beg you. Give me your undivided attention, for I hope to find peace while sharing this story with you.

*Your friend, and fellow soul inside the Book of Immortality,
Phillip E. Jones*

Southern Grayham

The City of Brandor

Just After Dawn



AS THE QUEEN ENTERED the throne room, the king sheathed his blessed blade and then extended hand to each of his guards to help them off the cold, castle floor. Once they had been dismissed from training, Sam moved to look out the stone-framed window to catch his breath.

The cobblestone streets leading away from the castle were quiet. The smell of greggled hash and eggs could be savored as the aroma escaped the kitchen window below and made its way to the king's nose.

Hearing the footsteps of his queen, Sam smiled as he turned from the window to give Shalee a good morning kiss. "Hello, beautiful," he said, reaching out to brush the queen's cheek.

Before Shalee could respond, a familiar voice called out. "My King! My Queen!" Michael entered the throne room as the last of the guards limped past him on their way out. The general's walk was filled with purpose as he moved across the room to take a knee at the base of the steps leading up to the thrones.

Michael was strong, a bold man who held the position of General Absolute in Brandor's army. He wore his best chain armor, and a black cape with gold trim was draped across his back. The Crest of Brandor sat inside a golden shield that had been embroidered at the center of the cape—the scales of justice.

"Speak, Michael," Sam commanded as he walked away from the window to ascend the steps to the throne. The king was large, or at least he was considered large for a human, but small in stature compared to the barbarians of the north. Sam's brown hair and brown eyes complemented a handsome face that rested atop a powerful and well-defined frame.

"The news I bring is good, My King. The army's advance on Bloodvain is promising. The barbarians are surrendering as news of Senchae's demise spreads across their kingdom. There are those who have chosen to fight, but their numbers are scattered. They're disorganized, with no real leadership, and they have proven to be no match for our legions. It's only a matter of moments before all of Southern Grayham lives in service to your crown, Sire."

Sam motioned for a servant to bring him a mug of ale. "Have the two missing pieces of the Crystal Moon been found?"

"No. We continue to search. It's as if Seth's lair is a neverending maze. The serpent had r

knowledge that George hid the crystals there.” A smile appeared on Michael’s face. “There is other news.”

“I’m listening.”

“In an effort to show his willingness to cooperate, Seth led the army to a shaft filled with coin.”

Sam’s brow furrowed. “Why would a pit of snakes have a shaft filled with coin? Does their species have a use for it?”

Michael grinned. “I’ve never thought about that.” The general scratched his head to organize his thoughts and then continued. “Seth’s race has always sold their poison and various forms of plants that grow in the marsh to Merchant Island. Much of this vegetation has healing properties. It is transported by the Merchant Angels and eventually makes its way to the Priestess of Harvestom. The serpents do this because the taxes from this exchange are split between the kingdoms throughout all of Grayham and this keeps us ‘two-legs’ from crossing the serpents’ borders.”

The general chuckled. “It never dawned on me that they may not need coin. But since the coin has been thrown into a shaft for all these seasons, it appears selling their goods is solely for the purpose of being left alone. Seth told Aparis, the legion leader of the Ninth Mark, his kind has been throwing their profits in this pit for more than 6,000 seasons.”

“6,000?” Shalee exclaimed in awe. “That sounds like forever.”

Michael nodded. “Indeed, My Queen.” The general redirected his gaze back onto the king. “I’ve ordered most of the spoils to be brought to Brandor, but I fear our vaults don’t have the means to hold it. I have also commanded that a wagon full of coin be sent to each city, town, and village throughout the kingdom. I hope this is acceptable, Sire.”

Pushing his hands through his hair, Sam chuckled. “There’s that much?”

Michael just smiled.

Sam took a deep breath and then slowly exhaled over an extended series of moments. “Too much coin is what I consider a pleasant problem to have. I’ll order new vaults constructed. How many do you think we’ll need?”

Again, Michael smiled. “I would say another 25, but you may want to make them twice as large.”

Sam placed his free hand on the back of his throne. “Holy garesh! That pit must be pretty damn deep.” He took another drink of ale. “If this is the case, our kingdom will never lack for anything. We’ll be able to enhance not only Brandor, but the rest of the kingdom as well.”

The king motioned for Michael to stand as he moved to look out the window. Sam sighed as he watched the everyday man walk across the meticulously placed stones of the streets. “Their pain will soon be over. Their loved ones will return, and their lives will be able to move forward in peace.”

Though Sam’s back was to him, Michael nodded. “Your subjects love you, My King ... even those who have suffered loss because of the war.”

Sam enjoyed a deep breath of Grayham’s crisp, clean air as a gentle breeze found its way through the window and onto his face. “Finally ... some good news.” He turned and motioned for Michael to join him at the window. “The coin will be a blessing.”

Sam pointed toward the street and continued to address his general. “I was worried there would be further bloodshed before the barbarians surrendered. The families of our men will be happy to know it’s only a matter of Peaks before their loved ones return.” He reached up and squeezed the back of Michael’s neck. “It sounds like there’s enough coin to reward each soldier for their service.”

“There is enough to reward them again and again for more than a hundred lives lived, My King.”

Sam shook his head. “Wow! It’s hard to envision that much. I look forward to seeing the mound myself.”

“But what about George?” Shalee interrupted, wanting answers of her own.

~~As always, the queen was stunning, her fashion impeccable. Her soft-blue gown accented her natural glow, courtesy of her pregnancy. She stood from her throne and pushed her blonde hair behind her ears. After taking Precious into her hand, she tapped the butt end of the staff on the floor and looked at the general through a pair of radiant, blue eyes.~~

“The coin sounds great, General, but for heaven’s sake, do you know where George is? Do anyone know where Kepler is? How about Kepler’s brothers for that matter? They’re enemies to our way of life and to this kingdom. We need to find them so we can stop them from hurting anyone else. This war was their creation in the first place.”

Michael’s mood changed as his report of the kingdom’s newfound fortune was overshadowed by George and Kepler’s disappearance. “My Queen, I have assigned 500 men to hunt Kepler and his brothers. I have also assigned another 200 to search for George. It won’t be long before their flesh meets the chains of our dungeon.”

Shalee moved next to Sam and took hold of his arm. “Michael, I want the kingdom to be at peace before the baby is born.” She touched her belly. “I don’t want any child of mine being born into a world with that much hate existing in it. Two hundred men won’t be enough to fight against George’s power.”

“I understand. I’ll double their numbers.”

“No,” Shalee demanded. “You will triple them.”

Michael turned to Sam. “Are those your orders, Sire?”

Sam nodded. “They are.” The king motioned for the servants and the remaining guards to clear the room. Once they were alone, he continued. “Michael, let’s talk as friends for a moment.”

“What’s on your mind, Sam?”

“You know that I’ve commanded the members of the Senate to come to Brandor. I want to discuss how I should proceed before giving further orders. I’ve called the Senate to Brandor because we need the members of our government to travel to the Barbarian Kingdom and spread word that we wish to live in peace with them. Each selected senator will need to take a number of offerings with them for each of the barbarian nobles. Their royal families are to remain esteemed.”

Michael’s face showed his disdain. “You want us to treat those heathens as royalty? Sam, this is outrageous. Senchae would not have done the same for our nobles.”

“Exactly. That’s why it’s important for our actions to show otherwise. I want all barbarians to know that we respect their people. I want to meet their nobles to determine who amongst them would be the best choices to offer positions as new members of the Senate. I plan to select 11 to replace those lost during the quake, and I’ll give each their own seat on the Court of Brandor. It’s more important now than ever to ensure the barbarian people are represented within a unified Southern Grayham.”

Michael stood in silence. Shalee could see the irritation on his face. “What’s got you boggled, Michael? Speak your mind.”

“I don’t like the thought of barbarians polluting our Senate. The senators will have much to say about this. Your ideas won’t be welcomed.”

The king rubbed the scruff on his chin. “‘Pollute’ is a harsh word for people we don’t understand. Let me ask you something, Michael. If you were barbarian, and you hated the people of the south, not to mention the fact that you were taught to hate them since childhood, wouldn’t you loathe Brandor further if you were left without a voice when it came to the day-to-day functions of a government that had been crammed down your throat? Think about it. How would you feel?”

After spending a while pondering his king's opinion, Michael responded. "Your logic makes sense. I suppose the alternative would be a lawless nation. I would rather deal with a barbarian in the Senate than on the battlefield."

The king grinned. "Considering the politics of the Senate, they can be just as ruthless as barbarian warriors."

Michael nodded. "Agreed. But it will take many moments for my mind to adjust. It will take many more moments for the men of the army to understand, but they trust your judgment. From the moment you became king, you have shown them your strength. The Senate, however, won't accept the change."

"Don't worry about the Senate," Shalee responded. "When Sam reminds them that it was the gods' decision for us to come into this world to create a peaceful empire, they'll see things our way."

Michael shook his head. "No ... they won't, Shalee. You're wrong."

The queen frowned. "No, you're wrong, Michael. They'll have no choice but to comply. We're still at war, and until Sam declares otherwise, he can do as he pleases. The senators will just have to deal with it."

Michael patted Sam on the shoulder. "I hope you handle this matter with far greater tact than our queen has just suggested."

Sam laughed and then pulled Shalee close. "Our queen is spirited, is she not? I'm sure I'll figure something out before I address the Senate."

Michael sighed. "I often forget you have such powerful friends backing your positions. Not many men converse with the gods as you do." The general bowed to his queen. "I don't think I'll ever understand how the mind of a woman from your old Earth works. I often find myself perplexed by your candor."

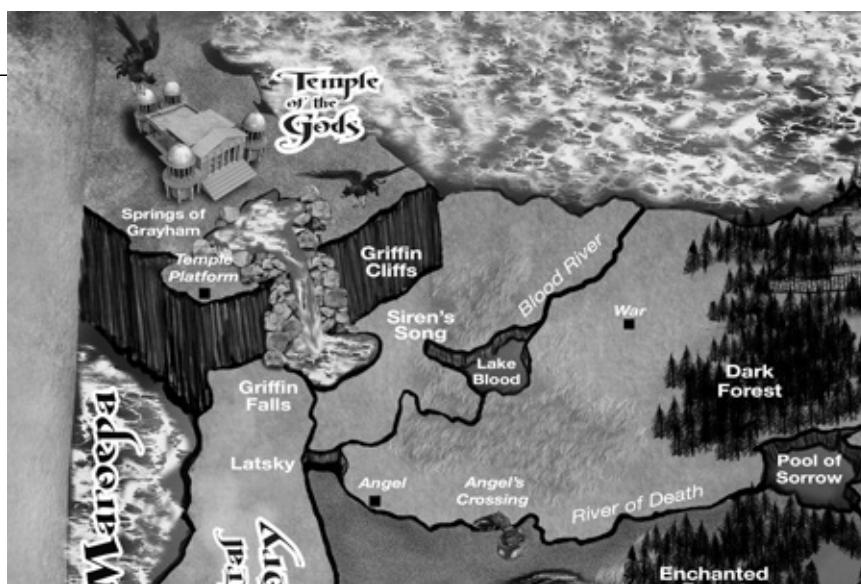
Shalee moved to Michael and gave the general a hug and then followed the embrace with a quick wink. "There's no forgiveness necessary. Women are pretty much the same here as they were there. And as all good women should, we keep you guessing as to whether or not you'll ever figure us out."

Michael gave a half-hearted smile. Since he did not know how to respond, he changed the direction of the conversation. "As for me, My King, you have my full support. I believe your proposal will find favor in the hearts of the barbarians once they understand your intent is to provide them with a voice."

"Let's hope you're right, General." Sam moved up the steps and took a seat on his throne. "Please check to ensure that all senators have received word to make their way to Brandor. I want all the voices representing each mark to be present when I address the Senate. Oh! And let me know when you find George and Kepler. I also want to know when the new roof for the Senate hall is complete."

Michael bowed. "Yes, My King."

3 Peaks Later Griffin Falls



With Late Bailem approaching, Sam and Shalee were sitting at a small, wooden table near the edge of the griffin's platform that overlooked Southern Grayham. The meal before them was cooked here and the royal chef was filling their mugs with wine.

Sam watched a smile appear on his queen's face as their meal was uncovered. "I'm glad you liked it. Your ability to teleport has its uses. I gave the men the scroll I asked you for so they could teleport ahead and prepare this for us."

"This is delightful. What made you decide to do this?"

The king unfolded his napkin and placed it on his lap. "We haven't had many moments for ourselves since we returned to Brandor. I want you to understand how much I love you." Sam motioned for Shalee to look at the area surrounding them. "I couldn't think of any place more romantic."

"Well, aren't you a peach? This was a lovely idea. You've outdone yourself."

Shalee stood from her chair and moved to her king as she held his eyes with her gaze. She leaned over. The passion she felt could be seen as she prepared to thank him. The men standing guard at the edges of the platform turned their backs, but the royal chef smiled and moved to a better position from which to enjoy the romance that filled their moments.

The queen's lips were soft and tasted like melon, her tongue accenting the mood. Sam melted. He forgot everything around him as she gently bit his bottom lip. When Shalee moved back, she once again held his eyes with hers until she settled into her seat.

The chef could not contain his excitement. "Well done, My Queen!" he shouted. "Bravo! It's nice to know my king and his stunning bride share a love so divine."

Shalee blushed.

Sam gave the chef a look. "Thomas, don't you have something better to do with your moments?"

"My apologies, Sire. I shall fetch more wine."

As Sam watched Thomas move to the far side of the platform, he marveled at the gigantic doors of the temple in the distance. They sat beyond the pools that bubbled to the surface across the plateau. He could remember how he felt the first moment he saw their massive hinges. Each door was massive and arched toward each other at the top. He remembered thinking how heavy they must be. At almost two meters thick, he had imagined the sound they would make if one of them was to slam into the wall.

Shalee lifted her mug from the table and sauntered to the railing overlooking the falls that were fed by the springs. The water fell more than 7,000 feet to the land below. The view across the steppe was breathtaking. Many beautiful flowers as well as other vegetation she had grown accustomed

seeing since their arrival on Grayham, bloomed around the pools. The scene was glorious and set the mood for an evening of romance with her regal husband.

After dinner, Sam had his men clear the table and teleport back to Brandor. Once they were gone, Sam moved to the edge of the platform and rang a large bell. "I have a surprise for you. I know you don't remember our first ride with Soresym since you were asleep. You remember ... the Peak you threw your fit?"

"I remember my mood fit the moment," Shalee defended. "However, I do regret missing the experience of that first flight."

"Well ... now you'll have the chance to make up for it."

Shalee smiled and pushed up against him. "Just take a look at you, Sam Goodrich. Who would have ever guessed that you had a romantic bone inside that body of yours?"

Sam remembered Shalee's exact words when she found out that they would need to ride the griffin to get to Brandor. The queen had scolded Mosley, *"If you think I'm gonna ride some giant whatever is, you got another think coming. I'm not about to get on some creepy, flying thing. I don't know how to ride stuff like that. Do they bite? Goodness-gracious, I bet they bite. Oh my gosh, do they smell?"*

Mosley had become sick of Shalee's ranting. The night terror wolf breathed on her face, and his body slumped over onto the platform. He said, *"She will be asleep for a while. I'm sure she'll be far more pleasant after she's had the moments to adjust. Are all the women from your Earth like her?"*

Sam had responded by saying, *"Only the ones worth keeping. I have to admit, I find her attractive. I like her sassiness. She'll grow on you, Mosley. She's just stressed right now, that's all. But I am glad you knocked her out."* The king remembered smiling. The last thing he had said to try to convince the wolf was, *"Just trust me on this, Mosley, you'll grow to like her. I'm sure of it."*

"I hope you're right. I find her annoying ... like a tick on my tail."

He grinned at the pleasant feeling of the memory and pulled Shalee close. He was kissing her when Soresym crested the ledge of the cliff. The king reacted. He grabbed the railing surrounding the platform as the massive wings of the griffin stirred the evening air. As Soresym's majestic form lowered to the landing area, Shalee could not contain her excitement. She ran to the griffin and stroked his feather-covered neck.

"Well, aren't you a sight for sore eyes. It's good to see you, Soresym. I think of you often."

"And, I you, young one."



The Griffin Lord, Soresym

“Thank you for this, Soresym,” Sam said as he approached the griffin. “I cannot express how much I appreciate you.”

“You’re welcome, King of Brandor.” The griffin lowered to the platform. “Please, climb up.”

Sam lifted Shalee onto the griffin’s back and then jumped up to take a seat. He tied his queen with the heavy leather straps that were attached to the padded saddle, and then he pulled her to him. The beast walked to the edge of the platform with his head held high and wings spread. Shalee lifted her arms into the air and screamed as the griffin folded his wings and jumped from the ledge.

Soresym kept his wings tight to his body as the ground approached. He waited until the last possible moment before the griffin allowed the wind to funnel beneath his feathers. The coolness of the mist shrouding Siren’s Song was refreshing as they swooped out over the terrain.

Shalee shouted, “Oh, my Lord in Heaven, Sam! This is the best date ever!”

Sam reached around Shalee’s waist and gently squeezed. He admired the countryside as it passed swiftly beneath them. After a while, he leaned in and put his mouth to the queen’s ear. “I’ll always love you.”

Turning to taste his lips, Shalee responded, “I love you, too, ya big lug.”

Meanwhile, Western Luvelles
The Lands of Kerkinn



The Dark Chancellor's Tower-palace



The Dark Chancellor, Marcus ID

The Dark Chancellor stormed into the highest level of his tower-palace. Marcus Id threw his black cape, marked with the Order's symbol, and watched it fly across the room. Despite the chancellor's desire for the cloak to hit the wall, the cloth refused to be abused. The cape adjusted its course and peacefully hung itself on a hook near the door.

Marcus grunted his disappointment. His brown eyes were cold. Tension filled his lanky limbs beneath the confines of his golden shirt. His long, brownish-black hair fell across his elven features. He shouted at the top of his lungs, "My brother's self-righteous attitude is becoming tiresome!"

After a moment of silence, Marcus realized he was yelling at an empty room. He grunted again and then lit his pipe. "Gage, get in here before I have you skinned!"

Another few moments passed before a dark-brown badger, covered in a short, fitted, red robe, entered the room, walking erect. He ignored the chancellor's threat and tapped his tiny, wooden cane on the cold stones of the tower-palace floor. "Would you stop shouting? Just relax. Stick to the plan. Your tirade will accomplish nothing."

"Careful, goswig, I'm not in the mood."

"You're always in a mood. You created me for confrontation. It's my obligation to tell you when you're being absurd. If memory serves me right, and it always does, you created me to speak our mind when you have these idiotic fits. You know you're acting rash, or I wouldn't feel the need to bring it to your attention."

Marcus slammed his bony hand on the stone table that rested at the center of the room. The table was large and its stone surface held many chiseled markings that represented the ways of dark magic. "Then you know what I'm thinking!" Marcus barked as the smoke from his pipe drifted past the angle of his eyes.

Gage's furry face cringed. He hurried across the floor—a task hard for a badger to do while walking on hind legs—and jumped up onto the table. The badger pounded the butt of his cane against the stone.

"It's too early to kill your brothers ... either of them, no matter how strong your desire. You don't have the power."

"Bah! Gregory is no match. I could kill him with little trouble. I should destroy his precious city of glass while I'm at it. Why someone would want to live in a glass palace is beyond me. His goodness binds my bowels."

Gage growled, then looked up at the archway spanning the center of the room. "Would you stop shouting? We both know it isn't Gregory you fear. You cower to the Head Master."

Marcus snapped his head around and stormed toward the window. He took a long, deep breath and looked down at the roof of the Order's temple that surrounded his tower. Taking a moment to admire the gloom of the city he had named after himself, he responded. "I cower to no one ... not even Brayson. I could defeat him."

Gage gave Marcus a look.

Seeing the badger's expression, Marcus turned and glared at the cloud-covered sky. "So what if I'm afraid of Brayson? I don't need you pointing it out. Besides, my power has grown. Perhaps it's the right moment to challenge him."

The badger growled as he sat on the surface of the table and started to trace the etched markings with his claws. "You must wait. If you're wrong about your ability to defeat Brayson, you'll perish—and for what? Because you have no patience. The Head Master will take on a new Mystic Learner soon. You must wait for this to happen."

"It has been more than 20 seasons. How can you be so sure? Brayson doesn't seem to be in a hurry"

I need that spell. Without it, I can't open the chest to get the key."



Marcus thought back to a confrontation he had with Brayson's last Mystic Learner. Hettolyn, young halfling, was making his way to Brayson's shrine after receiving the secret spell from the Head Master. The shrine, located on the southern end of the Head Master's Island, served one of the most important purposes on Luvelles.

Marcus had stopped Hettolyn just prior to his arrival. The shrine housed a locked chest, and the spell Hettolyn had memorized was the only magic that would open it. The key unlocking the way to the Source was inside.

"Where do you think you're going, boy?" the Dark Chancellor asked after appearing in front of Hettolyn.

"You startled me, sir! Who are you?"

"Who doesn't matter. You and I have something to discuss."

"I see," the young halfling responded. "Then if it doesn't matter who you are, I suppose it doesn't matter what I'm doing or where I'm going."

Marcus laughed. "You're right. It doesn't. It's what you have that matters. And what you have you're going to give to me."

Marcus remembered the fear in Hettolyn's eyes as he lifted his hand and bound the halfling with his magic.

"Please, let me go! I have nothing of value. I have nothing other than the clothes on my back."

"How could you not know who I am, boy?"

"I don't know your face. You must have the wrong man. You must be waiting for someone else."

"What's your name, boy?"

"I'm called Hettolyn, from Equality."

"Equality is a city full of weak minds. Are you also weak, Hettolyn? Do you think your mind is strong enough to resist my advance?"

"I believe I'm strong." The Mystic Learner struggled to break free of Marcus' magic. "Why do you bind me?"

"How about we find out how strong you are? On this Peak, you're going to recite the spell my brother gave you to unlock his precious chest, or you'll perish if I don't lay my hands on the key."

"I have no idea what you're speaking about. I have a family. Please! They need me."

"Don't lie to me! I know you seek the key resting inside your master's chest. You seek your chance to speak with the Source. You wish to look into the Eye of Magic. We both know I have the right man."

"I swear it. I don't know anything."

"Hmpf! We shall see." Marcus lifted his hands.

The halfling had proven to be unforthcoming. Hettolyn gave his life to protect Brayson's secret spell, and the Dark Chancellor destroyed the evidence.



Marcus took a drag from his pipe and then shook his head. "Brayson's spell is the gateway to my desires. With the power of the Ancient Mystics I could rule Luvelles."

Gage showed his sharp teeth, picked up his cane and once again tapped it against the table. H

tone was firm as he snarled. “The key is worth the wait. I know controlling this world means everything to you, but only the Source can give access to the power you seek. We both know that without it, you’ll be unable to destroy Brayson.”

“I already know this, goswig!”

“Then why speak of it?”

“Because all this waiting while my brother basks in his glory is killing me! Brayson is pompous and wants to rip that arrogant smile from his face and feed it to the krape lords. It’s absurd how he remains neutral in all things. How could someone avoid choosing a side? At least Gregory’s vexatious mind has chosen to wallow in tenderheartedness.”

Gage shook his head. “Your impatience solves nothing.”

Marcus relit his pipe. After a long drag, he held the smoke inside his lungs and then exhaled over an expanded series of moments.

The badger lowered his cane to the table and crossed his arms. “Your brother will eventually choose a Mystic Learner. Be patient, Marcus.”

The chancellor chuckled as he rolled his hands around one another. “Yes ... and Brayson will give this fool the spell. I’ll force this doomed spirit to speak the words. Once I have them, I can get past Brayson’s magic.”

“You’re right,” Gage responded, “but you might want to maintain your composure when the moment presents itself. You should wait until the student recites the spell before you kill him.”

“Again, I know this. Your babbling is testing my patience, goswig.” Marcus took another drag from his pipe.

“Your mind’s affliction will subside. Just think about it. Once you’ve spoken with the Source, you’ll be all powerful ... without rival. It’s worth the wait, so be patient.” The goswig swallowed at the thought of his words and shook his furry head in disgust, careful not to allow Marcus to see his disapproval.

The badger would have continued to dwell on his dislike for Marcus’ repulsive ways, but he became distracted after capturing another thought from Marcus’ mind. The thought was ridiculous and it forced the badger to laugh.

“What’s so funny?” Marcus sneered.

After collecting his composure, Gage responded. “I find it humorous that you call your brother pompous when you were just thinking you’re the only brother vain enough to name a city after himself. You cast stones in the wrong direction.”

“Careful, goswig.”

Gage shrugged. “Don’t be so unbalanced. You thought it.”

Marcus gave the goswig a look of warning and pointed a bony finger in the badger’s direction.

“Calm down!” Gage watched as Marcus stormed out of the room. The badger sighed and the thought, *My duties as your goswig are becoming taxing. There’s too much hate in your heart. It makes my head hurt.*

The Village of Floren Kebble’s Kettle



George Nailer rushed into his room, his blue eyes full of anxiety. The day had come to leave Kebble's inn. "Athena! Are you ready?" Shutting the door, the mage scanned the empty room. "Where are you? We need to hurry. This is the Peak I've been waiting for."

"I'm moving as fast as I can," Athena responded from behind the washroom door. "I'll be ready a moment. You do want me to look my best, don't you?"

"Of course, I do."

"Besides, you don't want to look over-anxious. You said so yourself."

Athena's light-blue eyes carried a sense of joy. Her belly was beginning to show the life the couple had created on Grayham. She could only smile as she brushed her long, blonde hair with an ivory-handled brush while gazing in the mirror.

"I know what I said," George huffed. "But that doesn't change the fact that I want to get going. We've been stuck inside this damn inn for far too long. It's about time that piece of gash sent for us."

Athena poked her head out the door. "George Nailer, you watch that mouth of yours! You know I hate it when you speak so foul. And there you go again using that word 'time.' You know there's no such thing."

"Whatever," George whispered, careful not to allow Athena to hear. "Yes, dear. I'm sure I meant to say, I'm glad the moment has arrived for the Head Master to send for us. We're supposed to meet with him to find out where the family's new homes are."

Athena looked back into the mirror. She knew it was hard for her husband to change his habits after a life filled with nasty language and abuse. Taking a deep breath, she continued to brush her hair. "I know you're right. I agree. I'm also glad the moment has come, but the family has enjoyed our stay here. Kebble has been more than pleasant. I thank Mosley that you had the coin to keep us sheltered for so long. I can't imagine what my family would have done if you didn't have the means."

"Mosley had nothing to do with it," George argued. He shifted from one foot to another, knowing that his wealth had come at Amar's expense, and Lasidious had been the one to convince the Head Master to give him the dead mage's riches.

"Coin isn't an issue," George continued. "I've told you that more than once. You need to stop worrying. I'm ready to move on and get settled. This inn has been an okay place to crash, but I think we need to have our own space. I want to get past this pit stop."

Athena looked out from behind the door. "What's a 'pit stop?' And I'm sure we haven't crashed

into anything. Some of the things you say are odd. There are moments when I have trouble understanding you. ~~The people from your Earth must have been strange.~~” She laid down her brush. “Mother said you confused her the other Peak. She said you spoke of how much you missed your cats and metal beasts called planes. I’ve been meaning to ask you about them.”

Rolling his eyes, George sat on the edge of the bed and threw himself back with a flop. “Baby, you’re killing me! Don’t worry about it. Just hurry up so we can get out of here. I’m sure you look stunning.”

“I’ll hurry, but it doesn’t mean I won’t make you answer my questions later.”

“Later is better.” George stood, moved into the washroom and pulled Athena to him. “I love you.” He smiled. “Now hurry up.”

Athena grinned and then lowered her head against his chest, her favorite spot. “I love you, too. I’ll be ready in a moment. I want to look beautiful for you.”

As Athena and George left the inn, they said goodbye to Kebble. As always, the short, plump elf lifted his pipe into the air and bid them farewell. “Come back in one piece,” he joked, his rosy cheeks and his graying, smoke-stained mustache complementing his jovial smile.

As the couple exited, Kepler was napping on the front porch. The demon stood and stretched, his massive form that spanned the width of the porch as his muscles rippled beneath his black coat. The top of the cat’s back was as tall as George, and his weight bent the wooden planks where his paws rested.

“Where are we off to?” the demon questioned as he yawned. As the weight of his paws cleared the porch, the life’s source that ran through the building replenished the area where it had been displaced.

George marveled as the color returned to the planks. *I’ll never get used to that. I still can’t believe the buildings are alive,* he thought.

After leading Athena down the steps, the mage placed his hand on the demon’s neck. “The Head Master has sent for us. We’re supposed to meet him at his school at the center of the village.”

“Finally. I hope he has a task worthy of my prowess. If I’d spent another moment lying on the porch, I would’ve lost my mind.”

George nodded. “I agree, big guy. Lying on a porch is totally taxing,” he poked.



Now, fellow soul ... just a quick reminder—the village of Floren had been the family’s home for 115 Peaks of Bailem by the moment the Head Master called for George. After their arrival at Luvelles, George and Kepler maintained a low profile. This was necessary to stay out of the spotlight since the Collective had no idea they had fled to Luvelles—except Lasidious and Celestria.

After George killed the witches that Celestria stayed with during her pregnancy, there was no reason to use his magic. George retrieved Lasidious’ newborn son from the witches’ home and had been playing the role of uncle ever since.

Athena’s sister, Susanne, did a wonderful job adapting to motherhood, despite the fact she had never given birth. A vision had been implanted in Susanne’s mind. With her whole heart, she believed she was the child’s mother.

The rest of Athena’s family had also been given the same vision to create the same belief. There was no doubt in anyone’s mind that Susanne was the child’s mother. The facade worked.

George gave Lasidious and Celestria’s son the name Garrin. The god-child’s birth broke the most sacred rule within the Book of Immortality—a rule created by the gods to avoid a power struggle.

between those who formed the Collective. The rule forbade two gods from having a child, and Gabriel, the Book of Immortality, was in charge of enforcing this rule.

Lasidious, staying true to form and doing what the Mischievous One did best, found a way to break this rule with his lover, Celestria. The conception and birth of their son had been planned for more than 11,000 seasons, and special precautions had been taken to keep the Book of Immortality from knowing the child existed.

The Collective believed that a being born of two gods could quite possibly possess the ability to seize control of the Book. Gabriel would no longer be able to protect the gods from one another. Instead, the Book would be forced to serve. Chaos would be the result. Now that the child was born, a plan that remained in the execution of their plan was that George needed to hide Garrin's existence from the Collective until the baby was old enough to command his power.

The theft of the Crystal Moon was brilliant. Hiding its pieces provided the perfect distraction. These diversions had kept the gods busy and led the beings of Southern Grayham into the largest war that world had ever seen.

Lasidious created a pact with George—a promise to retrieve his daughter's soul from the Book of Immortality and allow her to live again. The Mischievous One used this promise to motivate George. Though Lasidious had shown him the way to attain substantial magic, this level of power had been achieved by many on Luvelles. Further attention to George's growth was necessary to accomplish the Mischievous One's goals.

The village of Floren was an area of highly concentrated magic, and the air smelled of it. The strongest of all who commanded the arts—both white and dark—came to Floren to begin their training. But true to the nature of these conflicted paths, they parted ways once their training was complete.

The Head Master's school was only for those with exceptional skill—beings who possessed power like George stole from Amar. Few were allowed to attend Brayson's school, and fewer still were allowed to train under the Head Master's supervision.

While learning advanced magic, it was common for a student to become injured. As a result, Floren had a collection of some of the finest healers on all the worlds.

Healers who trained under the High Priestess on Harvestom were often recruited to come to Luvelles to serve the Head Master's school. Many of the High Priestess' students perfected their craft while saving the lives of over zealous pupils of magic. The best-of-the-best healers were often employed by the Head Master himself to stay on as staff of the school's vestry. Many never returned to their homeworlds.



It was not long before George stood with Athena and Kepler at the base of the Head Master's school. The building was invisible to the naked eye. If it had not been for the note delivered by Keble's Kettle with specific directions and detailed instructions, George would not have known that they had arrived.

Words to a spell had been scribed on the parchment. They were written in the elven language, and without Keble's help, George would not have been able to pronounce them to reveal the entrance. The mage spoke with a forceful tongue. "*Aaw' meenle nuava calan ar' ta hewsta e' ale'queneel,*" which meant—*May thy paths be green and the breeze at thy backs.*

Athena squealed when the door appeared.

The mage reached out to open it. “Hmpf, just another freaky thing. I wish I could say that I’m surprised, but not much surprises me any longer.” George motioned for Athena to enter. “After you, my dear.” Once she was inside, he looked at Kepler. “Get your furry ass in there.”

Kepler growled, “There are Peaks when you look like a morsel.”

“I’m just kidding, buddy. Don’t get your hairy panties in a bunch. Besides, I taste like garesh.”

The demon sauntered in without responding.

“Sheesh! Tough crowd,” George snickered.

Once the door shut, the entrance vanished to the outside world. The inside of the school was capacious. A circular staircase stretched upward for what seemed to be forever. Bookcases full of endless knowledge lined every wall and stretched upward just as far. The furniture was made of dark heavy stone. Symbols had been chiseled into their surfaces and were filled with gold. Each symbol had a unique meaning, representing the paths of white and dark magic. The floor throughout the tower changed color. The green glow faded and was replaced with a bright yellow. It was as if a source of light had been placed beneath to shine through.

“Everything is so beautiful,” Athena marveled as she watched many pairings of fairies carry assorted tomes from one shelf to another. “It looks like they’re reorganizing. Look, George! Look how many it takes to carry that book. I bet there are at least seven of them.”

George was still fascinated with the floor. He bent over to see if the light created warmth, but before he had the chance to touch it, a silver sphere, about twice the size of his fist, appeared and hovered in front of them.

A moment later, the fairies quickly placed the books they were carrying on a nearby shelf and fled from sight.

Kepler snarled, “Why do they flee?”

George shrugged. “Who cares? Look at this thing.” George could not stop marveling at the sphere. “Holy horror movies. I feel like I’ve just walked onto the set of Phantasm.” He reached out to poke the sphere. “Maybe it’ll lead us to the Head Master.”

“Well, don’t just stand there, imbecile, say something to it,” the demon-jaguar growled. “See if it responds.” A moment later, the jaguar added, “I don’t have a good feeling about this ... this ... thing.”

Athena tugged at George’s tunic. “I agree with Kepler. Something isn’t right. Let’s return to the inn. We can come back when someone is here to greet us properly.”

George rolled his eyes and put on a smile. “Babe, don’t worry about it. Everything will be—”

Before he could finish his sentence, small electric shocks erupted from the ball. Kepler roared as the first of these charges hit his nose. George threw up a wall of force to protect them, but the ball moved through the barrier as if it was not there and once again, took the offensive.

Athena was hit. She cried out, begging for George to protect her. The mage lifted his hands. Flashes erupted from his fingertips, pushing the ball back through the barrier, but not before the sphere absorbed the magic and then used the power against him.

The flames cut through the air at a high rate of speed and were aimed at George’s head. The mage managed to get out of the way, but the books sitting on the shelves behind him exploded from the intensity of the energy.

The force knocked the trio across the room. As they landed, the floor turned red while George and the now unconscious Athena slid to a stop.

Kepler was not so fortunate. The jaguar had taken the brunt of the explosion. He stopped sliding only after he hit his head against the edge of a heavy, stone table that sat beneath the spiral staircase. The jaguar’s hellish roar was deafening.

Chills ran down George's spine as he heard the demon's cry. The mage jumped to his feet and shouted to capture the sphere's attention.

Again, the sphere shot its charges, hitting George on the legs. Pissed, George screamed, "Take this you S.O.B!" The mage blasted the ball with hundreds of magical arrows that sent the sphere crashing into a bookcase located at the far side of the chamber. The severity of the collision sent pieces of not only the shelf, but the books flying in every direction.

George threw up another wall of force to keep Athena from being hit again, but his act of heroism left him vulnerable. The edge of a heavy binding caught him on the temple after it toppled off a shelf above his head. Dazed, the mage fell to the floor and struggled to stay alert. A moment later, the silver menace lifted off the floor and resumed its attack.

Kepler growled as he struggled to stand. His head had suffered a nasty gash, and his coat was singed. He could feel the blood saturating his fur as he looked at George. "We can't take much more of this!"

George was unable to respond.

Knowing it was up to him, the giant cat launched into the air. As he came down, the demon hit the sphere with his right paw. A metallic clanking sound pierced the air as the ball bounced across the floor and hit the wall. The now purple light beneath the floor reflected off the sphere's shiny surface as it rolled to a stop.

Kepler followed. Covering the distance, he pounced onto his enemy, putting all of his weight on top of the sphere to hold it down. He turned to shout, "George, get over—"

Suddenly, the demon-cat roared in pain, unable to finish his plea. He pulled his massive paw clean off the ball's surface. Blood poured from the end of three silver spikes that had broken free of the sphere and remained embedded in the pads of his paw. Kepler's roar reverberated throughout the tower with such force that three more tomes fell from various shelves and landed with a thud.

The smack of the books against the floor helped to clear George's mind. As he regained his composure, the floor turned blue. The mage grabbed the nearest bookshelf and used it as a crutch to maintain his balance. As he did, he saw Athena lying motionless behind his wall of force. The mage's anger turned to hatred for his enemy.

Finding the ball, he shouted for Kepler to move clear. The giant cat limped away, leaving a trail of black blood across the floor as it completed its cycle, returning to green.

Before George could take the offensive, the sphere moved to hover just outside the invisible wall that protected Athena. Now awake, she screamed as another electrical charge passed through her pocket of protection and hit her belly. Seeing this, George's emotions took over and fueled his power to a level he had never experienced.

Kepler sensed that George's use of magic was going to be dangerous. The jaguar leapt skyward and used his massive claws to rip into the spiral staircase where he hung suspended.

Looking back over his shoulder, the demon watched as George lifted his hands to release his wickedness. The hatred the mage felt for his enemy after seeing his wife and unborn baby in danger added to his magic's velocity and voracity. A powerful wave of water erupted from George's fingertips, and the gush consumed the lower level of the tower.

The torrential force pushed the ball backward, smashing it against the bookshelves as George placed yet another wall of protection around himself. The orb sunk to the now yellow floor that cast an eerie glow throughout the water as it sloshed about.

The wave had not only stopped the ball, but it also filled the room, chest deep. Beneath the surface the sphere exploded, sending a powerful fountain of water and debris skyward. Kepler was the one

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