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*"You call me a dreamer, but I'm
simply a believer in a world where
anything is possible."*

- Solomon Woytovvich

This book is a work of fiction. All characters and events portrayed in this book are either products of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously.

PIERCING THE VEIL

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I would like to dedicate this book to my mother.
I wouldn't have been able to reach the goals and dreams I have today
without the ten years of her life she spent homeschooling me.
Love you mom, thanks for giving me a great start at life.

Tears of Omega

Book One

Piercing the Veil

*Our story begins on the
eighty-seventh day
of the
one-hundred and twenty-second year
of the
Seventh Age*

In the village of Daunt...

Chapter One

Origin

The day began as any other, though this day was the last day remembered of an age, for this day humankind would strive too far. Kindness had failed and anger was released upon the world. The Last Age of Humanity drew to a close, after fifty ages of the sins that they had committed: conquest, war, murder, hate, greed, and defiance to a creator god. The oldest were judged first, as they were responsible for failing to correct their children's attitudes and offences. The sky darkened, a great stage was being set in motion. Fire burst from the sky, barreling down towards the city streets. Children ran towards their parents, screaming in terror when men and women burst into flame. None were judged innocent.

The ground tore open, ripped open; the earth screamed in pain. Cities were reduced to rubble as the world gave up its life. Fire issued forth from the depths and oceans gave way to dust. Even the sky retreated, as the cold empire of open space conquered the last breath of life. In the breath of one day the world had been reduced to a dark ball of ash, cursed for humanity's sins. The coldness of space embraced the dead world, and carried it off to the depths of the universe.

“Was this a mistake?” Mr. Yad looked around at the students in his classroom. “Could no atonement have been made for mankind? Zeph what do you think?” Zeph jerked up in his seat. He looked around with a blurry-eyed expression on his face. He tried to regain his composure and searched his mind for a suitable answer.

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“If you are going to sleep in my class Zeph, I would suggest coming back when the suns set.”

Mr. Yad was a nice old man. Zeph had to admit that Mr. Yad gave him a lot of leeway. Yad had been teaching since he was a little older than Zeph, but now he seemed somewhat absentminded and frail. The old teacher would not likely continue at the school for much longer. “I’m sorry Mr. Yad; I’ll try not to let it happen again.”

Mr. Yad grunted and said, “Well, next time you may find a sphere of water floating above your head. Now, since you are with us once again, why don’t you continue where I left off?” Zeph frantically scanned the pages of his textbook.

“Pssst! Page 65, second paragraph.” Zeph silently thanked his life long friend, Marcus, who sat right behind him. He began to read:

And so the world was abandoned and adrift in space for seven millennia. At the end of the seventh millennia, the god Omega found the world. Remembering the world, as it had been the only world to be struck down by its own god, he looked upon the lifeless ball and was filled with sorrow. Omega wondered if this world would always be remembered for its sins. He held the forgotten world in his hands, and made the choice.

Mr. Yad motioned for Zeph to pause. “What is it Marcus?”

“Well don’t you ever think that it’s degrading to say that we are the second try of a screwed up world?” Mr. Yad removed his glasses and looked up.

“Everyone has the option to change, to become better, Marcus. Choice is what separates us from the Last Life of our world. We have no name to call what our world used to be, but we do know that our world was named Arkhay.”

“Yeah I know, which means ‘a beginning’. That doesn’t mean that we won’t screw up like the last time.” Marcus stated.

“Their existence only lasted for fifty Ages. We have already been through seven since this world was remade, and we have grown so very fast. Perhaps we will fall once again. Our world was blessed with gifts from god; you yourself have the ability of Fire, one of seven gifts that were used to remake this world. We must not abandon them as some have. We must not look towards our own creativity to bring us to the future, but to hold onto the things that make us. There is a place for everything, and everyone has a unique ability. It is the elements given to us that will save us, not the technology we build.”

Origin

“Everyone always says technology will bring us down, but I think tha...” Marcus trailed off as Mr. Yad motioned that he would speak no more of this in class today. He then turned to the rest of the class.

“Although this class today is only review, I expect you all to listen. You are all here for a reason; you were born with abilities that allow you to do amazing things.” He noticed that at least half the class shot a glance in Zeph’s direction. “Some of you will take longer to discover your full potential than others. This doesn’t mean that you cannot do amazing things. I believe that some of you will become something that I could never even hope to reach.” He shot a look at Zeph. “This world needs you, keep it safe.”

Just then the chime rang out, and the students began to pack up their things. “This is all for today, please re-read the chapters on: Origin, Fallen, and study the chapter about your specific ability; I will have an extra page on the final for each of you on your own ability. Have a good day.”

Both Zeph and Marcus stood up, “Well that was fun, don’t you just love being the class reader?” Zeph looked up at Marcus as he stretched.

“I actually don’t mind doing it, Mr. Yad is pretty cool, plus he’s been helping me with my research,” replied Zeph as he finished packing his books into the brown sack which sat on his desk.

“So how is the research going anyway?” Marcus asked, as he also finished gathering his belongings and threw a similar brown sack over his shoulder. Both boys walked to the front of the class; Zeph turned towards Marcus.

“It’s not bad, when you’re born with the rarest element, not a whole lot can be told to you about it. I guess it would be different if someone on this side of Appagon had been born with it within the last half Age.” Mr. Yad lifted his eyes from his paper work to observe the two boys standing in front of his desk. They seemed to not take notice that he had stopped to watch them. He chuckled and returned to the papers on his desk.

Marcus began to walk towards the door, “Well we do live on a fairly small continent, I’m sure there are more books somewhere else in the world. Anyway, let’s go.”

Zeph stopped just short of the door, “You go on ahead; I want to talk to Mr. Yad a bit.” Marcus turned back, “Alrighty, you go talk with Yad; I’ll meet you at your place later.”

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Marcus was just about to leave when Zeph remembered something. “Oh, could you find Iggy and just make sure he’s heading home, you know how mischievous of a little brother he is.” A grin came over Marcus’ face and he laughed.

“No more than me or you. Ya, that’s ok, I’ll go find him. See you at your place later.”

With that Marcus left, and silence seemed to fill the school room. The book bag in Zeph’s right hand just brushed across the floor. He looked down at his boots, they were worn. His pants were not the best for wear either; the dark brown had faded to a beige-white in many places. The navy shirt he wore was undoubtedly his best decision that morning. It was well kept. The sleeves were extra long, long enough to cover his hands when they were at his sides. That was the way he liked it.

He turned to face one of the windows in the classroom. Gentle rays of light past through the window into the now almost empty room. A section of hair hung in front of his left eye blocking the light from view. Lifting his hand he brushed away the white strands. The color of his hair had begun to change from light-brown to white when he was a toddler. His father had always said with a smile, ‘It’s a sign of wisdom. He will be destined for great things’.

He had been in school for eleven years now, only a handful of people other than Marcus, Breeze, and Mr. Yad knew he was eighteen. He was to start attending school at age five with all the other kids, but his parents felt that because of his abilities he should wait.

What abilities!! He thought in disgust. Eleven years now, and he was still no closer to understanding what he was. The name Omega held no meaning for him, other than a symbol on his forehead. He walked over to Mr. Yad’s desk.

The old teacher continued to mark the papers on his desk. Without looking up he said, “I had a feeling you would be staying after class.” A grin came across his face as he lifted his head to look at the young man. “So what can I do for you Zeph?”

“You said that on the final there would be a page on each of our abilities, but I...” his voice trailed off. A wave of discouragement washed over his face, he stepped back and sat at one of the desks. Mr. Yad got up from his desk and pulled a chair up next to Zeph. The teacher’s kind eyes seemed to almost sparkle as he ran his hand down his white beard.

Origin

“You want to know how you are supposed to study something you know nothing about. I know how hard it must be for you sometimes, not knowing who you really are.” The words seemed to impart truth as Mr. Yad looked at Zeph’s face.

Zeph pulled the sleeves of his shirt down, which he often did when he was frustrated or distraught. “I don’t want this,” he whispered out into the room.

Mr. Yad was known for having a very soft welcoming face, yet somehow his face became even softer upon hearing Zeph’s words. He moved closer and put his arm around the boy. “We don’t get to choose what gift God gives us. But you should feel proud to share the same name as God. Omega was the last gift given to us; it was given after he remade this world. The scrolls say he named the last element after himself, because he gave up part of himself to remake this world. You have part of the God Omega in you, a part of him that is greater than any of the other six elements.”

Zeph listened with his head hung low, then he looked up, “I just want to know what it means to have the Omega ability.” He stood up from the desk and walked around the room. “I’ve grown up with Marcus since before we started school here, I watched his Fire get stronger with every year, and I watched him discover new ways to use it. I have nothing to show for myself.” The frustration was evident in his voice and on his face.

“Yes, that Marcus,” said Mr. Yad with a bit of annoyance, “but that aside, I may have something for you.” He got up and walked over to his bookshelf, searched for a moment, and then removed a large book. From where Zeph was sitting the book looked familiar. “That’s just our history book,” Zeph said looking puzzled.

Mr. Yad placed the book on his teaching desk and took the appropriate seat behind it. “Oh, is it now?” he said with a somewhat mysterious look on his face. Turning the book to face Zeph, he motioned for the boy to take a seat in front of the desk. Zeph grabbed the closest chair and pulled it up to Mr. Yad’s desk.

“No wait, it does look similar to ours, but this is about twice as thick and looks much older. Why is that?” he asked with a curious look on his face.

Mr. Yad flipped open the book. “You see, there was a time when these sorts of books were written only by Mages. It was thought that only once you reached that level of mystical ability were you wise enough to pass the knowledge on to the next generation. Along with the previous knowledge from the past edition, the mage was to add any of their own

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knowledge to the new edition.” He paused for a moment to let his words sink in.

“How old is it?” was the first thought that came in Zeph’s mind.

“It is believed to be three generations old. So it could have been written as long as five hundred years ago, the middle of the Sixth Age,” Mr. Yad explained. “The difference between this book and the books you students currently use is that your books are mere copies. Your edition was made when I was a young man in school; it includes the world history but much less elemental history by comparison.”

He began to flip through the book as he continued, “The local mystical council felt that it wasn’t needed, since this book was not used until a student’s last year of school, and by that point the student would already know a great deal about their abilities. So it was remade with only the sections on world history.”

As he finished speaking he handed the book to Zeph. Zeph began flipping through it, trying to find the sections on mystical history. “Now hold up here, I want you to take this home, read up on it, and get back to me. And, before you even get into the mystical sections, I want you to finish reading the world history section we started today. That part is still the same in this old edition. You’ll need to know it for the final.”

The two of them stood from their seats. Zeph placed the book in his bag next to his normal History book. “Thanks a lot Mr. Yad, you’re a great teacher”

“And you’re an excellent student, funny how those things come hand in hand.” The old man said with a smile. “What about Marcus?” Zeph asked with a grin.

“I must admit that he is a good student, besides his outbursts in class. But you should be off, I’ll see you tomorrow lad, say hello to your mother for me.” They exchanged handshakes and Zeph headed off.

* * *

Iggy sat in his seat and listened intently to his teacher. Even though he did enjoy Mr. Edge’s teaching he was looking forward to studying under Mr. Yad next year when he would graduate to Upper-class. Today’s topic was of particular interest to Iggy though. They had been studying Talents over the last month. He learned that Talents were mental abilities that any person could learn. Of course some Talents were easier for certain people to learn than others.

Origin

Mr. Edge addressed the class, “All right everyone, now I want to see some practical use for what we’ve been talking about today. I see most of you have tried to master some sort of projection field talent. I do hope some of you will try some other talents.”

When the class had first heard about Projection Fields many of the students jumped at the opportunity to learn more about them. Fields were the process of projecting ones’ own mental concentration onto an object or person. Since Iggy had Light Abilities he was familiar with the concept. Whenever he healed someone he was using the same principle as Projection Fields. Of all the fields he had learned about, including Destructive and Illumination, he found Protection most interesting.

A Protection field created a wall of protection around the person you were concentrating on. Iggy felt that it was his best option for his first field to try and learn. Just then a hand tapped Iggy from behind. It was Pierce.

“Hey can you help me out Iggy?” Pierce asked.

Since it was open class time Iggy didn’t see a problem with it. “What’s up Pierce?” Pierce was two years younger than Iggy. He was somewhat of a shy kid and really only hung out with Iggy.

“I’ve tried a handful of different Talents but I can’t seem to make any of them work,” Pierce answered with a disappointed look on his face. Iggy thought about it for a moment.

“Alright, here’s what I want you to do. I want you to concentrate on my mind, ok. Just picture that you’re me, close your eyes.” Pierce did as he was told. Iggy waited a moment. ‘Can you hear me Pierce?’ Iggy thought in his mind.

“Of course I can” Pierce answered.

Iggy smiled, but he was careful to hide his thoughts for the moment. He continued, ‘Good, now why do you think nothing is working for you?’

“I guess because I’m concentrating too hard. I keep trying to focus my mind so hard that I think it’s not working.”

‘I want you to keep concentrating on me, but now I want you to open your eyes,’ Iggy thought.

Pierce opened his eyes. “What?” he asked puzzled.

‘Can you hear me?’ Iggy thought.

Pierce’s eyes widened as he heard Iggy’s voice but did not see his

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lips move. Iggy smiled and patted Pierce on the shoulder.

“See you’ve got a lot more potential than you think. I bet you’re the only student in the class that has learned some of the Telepathic Talent.”

Pierce smiled. It was nice to see, most of the time he just had a blank expression on his face.

‘Well done Pierce!’

Pierce looked around. That hadn’t sounded like Iggy in his mind this time. Confused he searched the faces of his classmates, but it seemed that no one was looking at him. Disappointment began to wash over him then he looked up to the front of the classroom. Mr. Edge was looking directly at him with a smile on his face.

‘That’s quite an accomplishment lad, you should be very proud of yourself. Learn to control it and always use it wisely and you will go far in life,’ Mr. Edge thought.

Iggy wasn’t sure who Pierce was connecting with, but he saw the biggest grin ever appear on Pierce’s face, and he knew the boy had found a part of himself today.

Iggy now turned his attention back to his task at hand. He had been playing around with the protection field for a while now and he wanted to try something new. Raising his hand he asked, “Mr. Edge could I have a candle?”

Mr. Edge brought one over. Rather than lighting it with a match he asked one of the nearby students with Fire abilities to do it for him. The candle was now lit. Mr. Edge walked back to his desk and watched Iggy. He was interested in what Iggy would do with the lit candle.

Iggy placed his hands on either side of the candle and began to concentrate. If you looked closely you could see the protection field begin to form around the candle. ‘Now for the test,’ Iggy thought. He poked the flame on top of the candle. The flame squished like a soap bubble. Iggy felt no heat from the flame. It had worked.

Mr. Edge walked over to Iggy’s desk. He was puzzled as he looked down at the flame. Reaching down he touched it in the same manner Iggy had.

“This shouldn’t be possible, or at least I’ve never heard of it. What kind of field were you trying to create?” he asked Iggy.

“It’s just a protection field, sir. I know its use is meant for people, but I thought why not try it on something that’s an object but still is technically alive,” Iggy replied.

Origin

“That’s brilliant; I’ll have to record this in the school archives.”

Just then the chime rang out in the school. Iggy began to gather his things together. He hoped that Zeph and Marcus would come and get him today.

Marcus headed down the hall from the classroom. The school consisted of three main rooms, plus a small assembly hall for when all students needed to be addressed. Of course, a student body address didn’t happen very often. Marcus headed to the next room down the hall, which he knew Iggy would be coming out of any moment, if not already. The room he had just come from was for students in their last two years of schooling, the next was the four years of middle school, and the last was for those attending any of their first five years. All in all the three rooms covered the eleven years of school that any one student would go through.

Stopping at the doorway of Iggy’s classroom, Marcus peered in. The students seemed to be in the middle of packing up their belongings, just as he and Zeph had done moments before. Just then Iggy came flying through the door nearly knocking Marcus off his feet.

“Whoa there little man, where you going in such a hurry?” Marcus asked as he regained his balance.

“Hey, sorry Marcus, I was on my way to find my brother. I have something new to show him about my powers,” Iggy replied as he stopped and stood with Marcus.

The height difference was unmistakable between the two of them. Iggy was a good foot shorter than Marcus. Even though he was fourteen, he looked like he was closer to ten years old.

“Powers, eh?” Marcus asked with a somewhat sarcastic tone in his voice. Iggy glared up at him. At this Marcus let out a chuckle. “Alright, well your bro is hanging back with Yad. He did, however, ask me to grab you and head back to your house. So what do you say we head over there?” Iggy nodded, and they headed for the large archway leading out of the school.

The suns were still high in the sky when they left the school. Dust flew up from the ground as he and Iggy ran down the path from the school. Marcus had always enjoyed hanging out with Zeph’s little brother. It was always so easy to get away with more when Zeph wasn’t around, and Iggy was just as mischievous as Marcus had been when he was fourteen.

Iggy ran alongside, keeping up with Marcus. Although he wasn’t as fit as the young brown man, he could still match him in speed. His eyes darted over as they ran through town; Marcus always seemed to have a smile on his face. This in turn made him smile too. He had always looked

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up to Marcus just as he did to Zeph. There were two years between him and Marcus, and four between him and his brother. This had always made him thankful that they would include him in their adventures.

Just then they ran past the shopkeeper section of town, and began to move towards the houses. Zeph's house was one of the last houses in town, all the way on the north side. This did cause a bit of travel on a daily basis, to go from the north end of town all the way to the school at the south end of town.

The two continued on until they passed the last several houses, including Marcus' house. Zeph's house was only a little farther down the road. Usually it would take the boys five minutes to run from home to school or fifteen if they walked.

They ran up the pathway leading to the house. Both boys stopped and sat on the front steps to catch their breath. The sweat had beaded on Marcus' brown skin, and in turn on Iggy's pale skin. They both looked over at each other and let out a laugh.

* * *

Somehow the air felt better; the suns shone brighter today. Zeph was a very happy young man. He paused for a moment at the top of the hill, and looked out on his village. It looked good and happy.

The small town of Daunt, it began its day like any other day. People awoke and went to work, children ran to school, mothers tended to the young. Life was simple. The sea breeze filled the town that morning, as the gentle sea washed against the shore. Life in Daunt was simple, yes; however this was not the life for most. Perhaps the smallest village on the continent, Daunt is known for its Temple. Zeph turned to look at the Temple. Although it was across the village, it was also on a hill like the school. The town was pleasant, and from this perspective it looked as though it was wrapped in a soft green blanket of hills.

Like much larger towns, Daunt had a Temple; which brought many people to their village during certain times of the year. It was very uncommon for a town of less than a thousand people to have its own temple. The rolling hills to the north of the village were always a pleasant view, always fresh and green, with a tree on every hilltop. On many evenings you can see many people sit under each tree: lovers, children, and parents, as the suns set. It was said that this is the best place in the world to watch the suns set.

Origin

The blue sun, giving a brilliant purple hue to the sky, is the first to set and soon after the orange sun sets. Of course that all depends on which solar cycle you are in. Zeph was told that he had seen a Solar-Alignment Sunset before, but since the last one was almost eighteen years ago, just after he was born, he was looking forward to the event again. There was just less than four more months to go now.

This event brought people from all over Arkhay to Daunt. The colors of this sunset were said to only exist here at this place at the edge of the Eastern shore. When the orange sun stands in front of the blue exactly at sunset, it is said that a flare of energy is released upon the world as the suns cross each other's thresholds. To sit at this place was heaven, with the village below you, and the ocean beyond, one could easily lose oneself here forever.

West of the village were open fields, a very large forest, and in the distance the Appagon Mountains could be seen. The white peaks dotting them could be seen from even here. Zeph had always wanted to go and see them, to reach the top and see the world on every side of him. Someday he would do it, him and Marcus.

Marcus! He pulled out his pocket watch, it was almost seven. It actually wasn't that late. School had only gotten out an hour ago. Still he knew his mother would be mad if she was left alone with Marcus too long. His stories and jokes could become very long at times. It felt odd sometimes starting school at noon and getting off at six. Then again it felt odd at the high point of the Cronus Solar-Cycle when school would start at six in the morning and end at noon. However, since it took eighteen years for both suns cycles to take place, you did have those few years in the middle of each cycle where things almost seemed like they were the way they were supposed to be.

Zeph looked up at Cronus, their great blue sun. A slight outline could be seen of Pythus, their orange sun, just a slight orangeness on the edge of Cronus. Yes, it would be only a few more months till alignment.

He had always wondered if the alignment had something to do with him. Well not him exactly, but on the day he was born the last Solar-Alignment happened. Somehow it seemed like a really odd coincidence, but his mother had always said they weren't connected. She used to say, "Think of all the other babies that were born that day." He used to say right back, "Ya, well how many of them were born with this damn mark on their forehead."

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Once again he was jolted out of his thought. Home! Marcus! Mom! He ran down the path into town. As he hurried through town not looking where he was going he found himself flying through the air. Landing with a thud, thoughts of pain went through his head as he picked himself up. Turning he found his reason for falling, and rushed over to pick up Breeze.

“You ok Breeze?” he asked with a worried look on his face. He and Breeze met in his grade six years ago when her and her father moved to town. Gus was a lot of fun, if not a little eccentric. Having an inventor for a father seemed so cool.

There was a time when he had owned a shop in town, until the local Mystical Council asked him to close down. It seemed that he was “crossing over” as they called it. He had started to go beyond practical inventions, and straight into technological advancement.

Zeph never really cared about that sort of thing, if something makes your life easier, why is that such a bad thing? The pocket watch he carried had been a gift from Gus when he had started his Upper Class years at school. ‘A man should be able to take time with him’ Gus had told him that day.

Now Gus and Breeze lived just out of town where Gus could still work on his inventions away from the town’s people. It’s not as though people didn’t like him, it’s just that people did what the Council said was best.

Breeze stood up quickly and brushed the dirt off her clothes. “I’m just fine, no thanks to you!” she said with a somewhat angry look on her face. “Why the heck don’t you watch where you’re going?”

A look of embarrassment came over Zeph’s face. “Sorry, I was running to get home; Marcus has been there for over an hour, and...”

“Oh, well that’s a different story,” she interrupted, “I feel sorry for your mom, just her, Marcus, and Iggy.”

He reached down and picked up his book bag which had also gone flying when he did. “Um ya, that’s why I’m in a hurry.”

“Well ok, say, do you and Marcus want to stop by later, I know Daddy would like to see you boys.” She began to blush slightly, and turned her face away. “You haven’t been over for weeks. Why is that?”

Zeph smiled as he saw her blush. They had always seemed to have this chemistry between them, but neither had made a move for the other. “I’ve been doing some research, and it’s sort of been taking up all my time. I’ll get into it later, ok, but I need to go.” With that Zeph was off. He knew Breeze would understand, or he would be getting the yelling of his life.

Origin

Either way he wanted to deal with it later.

He rounded the corner and ran up the slope to his house. No screaming or crashing of furniture could be heard; that was always a good sign. Bursting into the front door, he was shocked to find that everything seemed normal. He looked to his right into the living room; nothing seemed out of place, the cat was sleeping softly on the far couch. Dropping his book bag he headed straight to the kitchen. There he found his mother working over a large pot on the stove. Upon entering his mother looked up, “Hello dear, how was school today?”

Uh, it was pretty good, say where’s Iggy?” he said with a slightly puzzled look on his face at the lack of confusion in the house.

His mother continued to stir the large pot on the stove. “Oh, he and Marcus have been upstairs since he got home from school.”

Zeph’s eyes seemed to bug out of his head for a split second. “And the house is still in one piece? Are you sure it was your youngest son, and my best friend?”

His mother turned around, hands on her hips, with a very serious look. “Be funny if you will.”

“Oh, it has nothing to do with funny; those two are like matches and oil.” As hard as he tried he couldn’t keep his grin inside as he spoke.

Her hands still on her hips his mother said, “And where were you if Marcus was the one that brought Iggy home.”

“I stayed after school to ask Mr. Yad a few things about next week’s final.”

“Oh, what kind of things?” his mother stopped what she was doing, and sat down on the stool. This made Zeph kind of nervous.

“Just stuff, mom, it doesn’t matter.” He felt as though he was shrinking inside his already large blue shirt.

His mother caught the expression on his face. “It’s about your abilities isn’t it?” He nodded slowly, “I just need to know mom.” She stood up from the stool and walked over to her son. “I know dear,” she replied.

“You do? Normally you are against this,” he said with an odd look on his face.

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Somehow it was always a mother's disposition to disagree with her children, so his mother's statement did seem rather odd. "Yes, but I also didn't think you would go this long without some sign of your abilities coming through. If they aren't going to find you, then you should seek them out." She turned and picked up some vegetables by the basket.

He watched as she held her hands over the carrots. After several back and forth motions the carrots had grown to almost three times their length. "There. See, even that," he said pointing at the carrot in her hands.

"What?" she asked puzzled, "this carrot?"

Walking into the kitchen he took one of the carrots from her. "One of the littlest things Earth ability can do, and its right there. You most likely learned that when you were younger than Iggy. I just want to do something!" The same frustration that had filled his voice at school was now evident in his voice.

A silence filled the room for several minutes. The sound of the pot boiling, and a slight breeze coming in through the window filled the room. Zeph looked at the ground, he felt as though he went too far. He didn't mean to get mad at his mom over his own frustrations.

She walked over and lifted his chin. "Yes, you are right, I did learn how to use parts of my Earth ability at a young age. However, being able to use this ability, any ability, is not the most important thing in the world." She gave him a hug; he felt as though he needed it. "Now I want you to go upstairs and see what those two are doing. It has been far too quiet in this house since they got home." He nodded, forced a smile, and walked out of the kitchen. Just then he remembered the book Mr. Yad had given him; he walked over to his book bag. He grabbed the book out of it, and walked back into the kitchen.

Excitedly he pulled the large book from his bag. "Hey take a look at this book Mr. Yad gave me," he said as he handed it to his mom.

She studied the book. "This looks very similar to the history book you are using in class. What's so special about this version?" she asked.

"This was written back in the Ages when Mages recorded history and knowledge." He explained. "Mr. Yad said this could be as old as five hundred years. The books we use at school were copied by scribes within the last hundred years, and much of the information was either shortened or removed all together."

Origin

“So what do you hope to find in this book?” she asked as she flipped through it.

“Well I haven’t had time to read through it yet, but I’m pretty sure it will have some information on people gifted with the Omega ability!” He answered with excitement in his voice. She looked over at him and smiled. Handing the book back to him she turned back to the meal cooking on the stove.

Zeph now had smile on his face. He always found that was his mom’s best quality. Maybe the ability to make others smile was even considered mystical to some. Ever since he was a kid she had always been there for him. Even after Iggy was born, she was still the best mom ever.

His father had disappeared when he was eight, and she still remained strong. It was said that the voyage that took his father was the only one to have been “lost” in the last hundred years. It made sense for his father to be a fisherman, having been born with the Water ability. Zeph remembered when he was in the bathtub as a child; his father would bend the water and make shapes for him to play with. He remembered how good his father was at controlling water.

This is why he never really believed that his father was lost. He would never let the sea take him, even if he had to walk on the water all the way back to Appagon from Sire. His father used to tell him stories about Sire, the continent across the Eastern Sea. When his ship would reach the shores, they would dock at the port city of Thai. He used to say it was a wondrous place, and at night the city would light up with lights that did not need oil. He said it was like a dream.

Zeph grabbed the rail of the staircase, he missed those days. His mother glanced from the kitchen, and saw him standing there. Somehow she knew what he was thinking. He grabbed his book bag and walked upstairs. Stopping at the top of the stairs, a puzzled look came across his face. His mom was right it was far too quiet. Walking slowly he proceeded left down the hall towards Iggy’s room. Pressing his ear to the door, he could hear muffled talking coming from the other side. Now the decision came as to whether he should knock or simply enter.

Thinking it through for a moment, he burst into the room. Marcus jumped out of his seat, as the small fire ball in his hand went flying. Zeph dove for the floor as did Iggy. He shot a glance over at his little brother. Iggy had on odd look on his face, similar to a puppy when it knows it’s in trouble with its master.

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The ball began bouncing around the room. Zeph's eyes followed its every move, then he slowly stood up. The ball didn't seem to be igniting anything in the room. Marcus lay laughing on the bed. Zeph's eyes continued to track the ball; he quickly reached out and grabbed the hot ball out of air. However, it was not hot. Zeph studied the ball for a moment. He looked over at Iggy, "How did you do this?"

Iggy slowly poked his head up from the other side of his bed, Marcus still rolling around giggling. Zeph looked down and slapped Marcus upside the head, "Dude, snap out of it. And you, how did you do this?"

Iggy peered over the side of the bed. "It's a protection field," he replied as he stood up.

Now Zeph didn't know a lot about fire balls or protection fields. "I thought you can't place a protection field on inanimate objects?" he asked.

"Well yeah, normally you can't. You would use some sort of a "lock down" field to protect objects. But a ball of fire isn't really an object. I've wanted to try this for a while. We've been studying Protection in my Light Ability class." Zeph remembered that class in grade nine, or at least the option for it. No surprise that no one taught a class on Omega. The school board allowed him to attend the class on Shadow ability as an alternate.

He held out the glowing ball of fire. The ball looked as though it were incased in glass, and yet he was able to squeeze it in his hand. The fire swirling inside the sphere form gave it a hypnotic quality. Marcus jumped up off the bed, and grabbed it out of Zeph's hand. "Pretty neat stuff huh? Your kid bro has some smarts in that head of his." Zeph's eye shot over to Iggy sitting by the bed. "How long will that last anyway?" he asked turning around. "I don't think very long, my abilities aren't very good", replied Iggy.

Marcus stood there tossing the ball up and down. "Oh here it goes!" exclaimed Marcus. Both Zeph and Iggy looked over. Marcus tossed the ball once more, the ball floated up into the air. With a small burst of light the glass like covering on the ball disappeared. Marcus outstretched his hand, and the flame flew into his hand. "You know my mom did always tell me not to play with fire as a kid," Marcus said with a chuckle as the flame seemed to be drawn into the skin of his palm. "Anyways we were going to head over to Gus' later and show him this, you in?" asked Marcus.

Origin

“Totally! In fact I ran into Breeze earlier, literally actually. She was wondering if we wanted to stop by. I think Gus has something new to show us.” Marcus’ eyes began to glimmer at Zeph’s words. “Slow down bro, I need to do some reading first before we head out, plus mom is almost done supper by the looks of it.”

“What are you reading?” The words seemed to come out of nowhere. Both Zeph and Marcus looked around for a moment, then looked over at Iggy. A look of embarrassment came over his little brother’s face. “What? I was just wondering.”

“I need to finish a section we were working on in class, Iggy.” Zeph replied.

“Can I listen?” questioned Iggy.

“What makes you think I’m going to read it out loud?” Zeph said with a somewhat superior look on his face.

“Oh come on dude, just read the section for him, you have to read it anyways. Plus it’s not like I’ll review it without you around; killing two birds with one stone, my friend,” he said with a glimmer in his eye. He glared at Marcus and watched as Marcus put on his ‘puppy-dog’ face.

“That doesn’t work on me, but ok whatever. Iggy sit there. Marcus cut that out, and sit down.” He couldn’t help but grin. Marcus was the best for that.

Zeph looked around the room, and grabbed a chair. Opening his new book, he began to read:

A world destroyed for its own sins, could it ever become more than it was? He held our forgotten broken world in his hands, and made the choice. And in that moment his heart broke, and he cried. The first tear fell like a blazing comet; it struck with a force to destroy or to remake. It fell into the center of this dead world, and burst; renewing the core of our world. The second, full of life and deadly strength, fell like a mighty stone. It broke and crumbled across the face of the world, covering the core. The third tear, with the power to reveal or conceal, fell like a great cloud. It burst upon the world, and swept the ash away. Now a great tear fell like a rushing flood, it washed our world clean and filled the oceans. This was the forth tear.

For a moment Omega stopped, and questioned whether he should remake this world. This was a world that was destroyed for its own undoing. In its peak of existence it was consumed by sin, and thrived on evil.

It was in this moment a great dark tear fell upon the world. It fled to every corner, and covered the world in Shadow. He looked down on our now darkened world, and cried a sixth tear. A tear of pure Light, it shone like a thousand suns. The rays of light broke from the tear, and spread across our world, to balance the Shadow. As he

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looked down on this new world, he cried a seventh tear, full of himself, so that this world may have Hope to become not what it was before. Now only the few would have the power to change the existence of all. It fell to the world and was scattered to only a few places. It created seven great beacons of light to guard our world; beacons for only the few to find.

“And I might as well stop there,” said Zeph closing the book, “since that’s the end of the first chapter in the Origin section.”

“Ok seriously I need to start listening in class more, I don’t even remember what you just read the first time we did it.” Marcus said with a somewhat dazed look on his face.

“Why are there some blank pages at the end of that chapter?” Iggy asked. Zeph raised an eyebrow and opened his book again. Glancing at the pages Iggy had notice he had no response for his brother. “Hmmm, well I guess it could be because this version was hand written.” Zeph suggested. Just then a voice echoed up the stairs, “Boys, come for dinner.”

“I guess we should go for dinner.” said Iggy.

“You two go, I’ll be there in a sec.” replied Zeph as he motioned for them to go ahead. He walked down the hall to his room. Man, did he ever need to do some cleaning in here he thought, as he tried to find the path to his bed. He opened his book to where he had left off, and looked at the blank pages. At the end of every chapter it seemed there were several blank pages. The normal textbooks weren’t like that. He tried to focus on the page, but nothing appeared. Maybe he was just having a long day, but he could have sworn he had seen writing illuminating off the page before. He finally dropped the book on his bed and headed down stairs.

His book lay open on his bed to the page where he had ended. *‘It fell to the world and was scattered to only a few places. It created seven great beacons of light to guard our world; beacons for only the few to find.’*

The blank pages began to glow and words appeared on the pages. *‘The few, the chosen, one will come from every Age. The one chosen in the Seventh Age will bring forth the destiny of this world. This will be the last chosen, and the last chance of hope for the world.’* The words stopped and three glowing symbols appeared on top of the text causing the words to vanish. The symbols grew brighter, light shone in the room and then the pages were blank once again.

For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through endurance and the encouragement of the Word we might have Hope. For it was from the Tears that we have found new salvation.

- The Book of Ja' Hor

Chapter Two

Nights of Shadow, Days of Fire

The afternoon grew into evening, the suns set, and the dim glow of the oil lamps in the village lit the dusty roads. A faint glow was still shining on the horizon, and a peace fell over Daunt. People were up on the hills north of town, as was the normal pastime among many of the townsfolk. With the solar alignment only a few months away, life seemed to have a normal quality to it.

Zeph stared out the living room window at the evening sky. He remembered the last alignment; it was the Pythus-Solar Alignment. He had been nine, and he remembered his mother telling him all about it. She had explained that even though he couldn't see it, their orange sun, Pythus, was exactly behind their large blue sun Cronus. She said that the alignment meant the start of the Pythus half of the Solar Cycle, when Pythus would start to follow Cronus, adding several extra hours to the end of the day once the middle of the cycle was reached. Now, almost nine years later, the suns nearly aligned with Pythus centering itself in front of Cronus.

Zeph wasn't really looking forward to the earlier mornings for the next four and a half years. Of course the greatest point would be in four and a half years from now when Pythus reached its low point in its revolution, and it would begin its trip once again to the far side of Cronus.

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But for the next year or so, he would have to get used to seeing, what appeared to be, only one sun. It just seemed odd somehow, only one sun.

He continued to gaze out the window and his eyes began to drift towards the sky. The moons were nice tonight. He had always loved to lie out on his favorite hill as a child and watch the moons. In children's stories the moons were portrayed as the guardians of Arkhay, the great guards Pia and Cia. Pia, the slightly larger moon, hung low in the sky above Zeph's head, almost as if it were reaching out to him. He turned to lie on his back, and looked up at it. The surface of the moon was rough and covered in many deep craters. The smaller moon, Cia, was out of sight as he scanned the sky for it. Zeph knew it would be visible in the next few days. Cia belonged to Pia, something for the great moon to rule. It is said that Cia was once an asteroid threatening to destroy Arkhay, but that gravity of Pia grabbed it from the sky and made it its own.

Something soft and fuzzy brushed lightly against Zeph's ear slightly startling him. He looked over to see Teak. Scooping her up in his arms, he cuddled her. The day he got her had been one of the best of his life. He had waited for years for her, due to her rare breed. Most people love to get kittens, but all too soon they grew into cats. Unlike others though, Teak's breed belonged to the Beasts of Light. They remained in a kitten-like state for most of their lives. Teak was perfect. She was gray with a few black stripes and eyes that glowed pale green in the dark. You could always find her, even when she was trying to hide.

Marcus walked to the edge of the living room archway and watched Zeph and Teak for a few minutes. The room was dark, and the dim glow from the lamps in the kitchen cast a distorted shadow across the room. He walked into the room and sat down in the large chair next to the couch Zeph was laying on.

"So are you ready to head out? I finally convinced your mom to let Iggy come with us." Zeph looked over at Marcus.

"What are we doing here bro?"

"Uh, well...we are going over to see Gus," Marcus replied searching Zeph's face in the dark, trying to see if his response was what was expected.

"That's not what I mean. I mean what 'we' are doing here? In Daunt, in Appagon, on Arkhay. I just wish I knew," his voice trailed off as he turned his eyes away from Marcus and moved them back to the sky lit window.

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“I know a lot’s been going on with you lately Zeph, and I don’t hope to understand it. But I’ve been friends with you since we were kids, back when we didn’t think about the mystical, or elements, or abilities. Back when it was just you and me, and that really big sandbox on the edge of town.”

Zeph smiled, “Thanks man, I needed that.” He put Teak softly on the couch as he got up. “So I guess we should get going since it’s almost nine. Let’s grab Iggy, and give my mom the heads up.” The two of them walked out of the living room and into the kitchen. “Alright brat, let’s get going,” Zeph announced as he entered the room. Iggy jumped off of his chair and headed towards Zeph.

“So how long do you boys plan to be out tonight?” his mom asked. “Don’t forget you have to be up early for school tomorrow morning.”

“Don’t worry Mom we won’t be too long, just popping in for a quick hello and to show Gus a few things,” Zeph replied as he tied up his boots. He stood up, looked at Marcus, looked at Iggy, shook his head and smiled. The three of them left the house and headed down the path towards the Main Road in town.

The night was oddly fresh for this time of year. The three of them chatted as they walked down Main Road. The glimmer of candle light danced across their path as light flowed out from the windows of the houses they passed. On every corner a large oil lamp stood adding its own light to the night.

Just then Zeph stopped, “Wait a sec, why exactly are we seeing Gus? I don’t think you ever explained that to me yet.”

“Well both Iggy and I want to show Gus this awesome fire ball thingy. I know Gus will have some sweet ideas of how to make it even better. And I think you’re coming cause you tragically ran Breeze over after school, and she will kill you if you don’t come,” Marcus replied with a somewhat cocky look on his face.

“Uh huh,” Zeph said with a raised eyebrow, “Well alrighty, I guess I’ll accept that answer. I suppose we should continue.”

They began walking again. They reached the bottom of the hill from Zeph’s house, and turned on to the Main Road of Daunt and headed south. Marcus and Iggy talked back and forth, while Zeph walked several paces ahead. Zeph looked in the windows of the shops and houses they passed along the way. Everything seemed to be just as it should be. Zeph’s heart felt heavy as he walked down the road, many thoughts filling his mind.

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Iggy slowly came up behind him and placed a hand on his big brother's shoulder. "Are you ok Zeph?" Zeph stopped and hung his head. Marcus motioned to Iggy,

"He's just got a lot on his plate little man; he'll be ok. He just needs some time to work things out."

All three turned to continue down the road but stopped abruptly in their tracks. At the same time they all seemed to spot a man walking down the road towards them. Each shot a glance at each other, this man was clearly a stranger to Daunt. Also he was walking from the south end of town, and the only roads leading into Daunt were on the north end.

As the man drew closer none of them knew how they should react, just that it should be different than how they were reacting at that moment. The man was large, at least a foot taller than any of them. He had goggles over his eyes, and a long black trench coat flowed down to his large boots. The armored vest was evident underneath his coat; several large buckles ran down the front. The end of two curved blades could be seen at the bottom of the coat.

The boys shifted their path towards the right side of the road, making their way towards the turnoff that would take them out of town. The stranger also matched their direction and pace.

By this point it was clear that the man was walking towards the three boys, but for what purpose none of them knew. Zeph scanned the man's face, trying to find something familiar about it. The light from the street lamp fell across the man's face, and Zeph froze. A slightly glowing Shadow symbol was on the man's forehead. Zeph now recognized the man's attire; this man was a Shadow Mage.

"We have to go!!" Zeph whispered urgently in Marcus' ear as he turned away.

The man stopped. All three of them quickly turned their heads.

"Fire Guardian, Light Emitter, I have no questions for you!!" the man's booming voice seemed to carry to every corner of Daunt. "I only wish to speak with the Chosen One." Marcus and Iggy immediately looked at Zeph. His face had faded to a shade of white neither of them thought possible on the human body.

"Who... are you?" the words came out broken and twisted from Zeph's lips.

"My name is Xa'an, I belong to the Seeing Order of the Shadow Mages. Please come closer young sir, my intention is not to harm you. If that was the case all three of you would be dead already."

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The three boys all took a step forward. Xa'an raised his hand. "I wish to speak only to the Chosen One." Zeph looked at Iggy then Marcus.

"These two are my protectors, they travel with me at all times," Zeph had no idea where that came from. Xa'an looked at Marcus then Iggy,

"A life friend and a brother, place your faith in them well and they will become true protectors of you." His words startled them; they had no idea that the stranger could read their thoughts. "Come now, I must speak with you."

They followed him slightly farther down the road towards the Rolling Hills Inn. "Who the heck is this guy Zeph?" Marcus asked with anxiousness in his voice. "I've never seen him before in my life," Zeph said looking over cautiously.

"Yea and what's with that name?" Iggy piped up. Both boys shot a glare at Iggy.

"If my name confuses you, young master Iggy, you may call me Xa." Eye's wide, the three of them swung their heads once again towards Xa'an.

The night seemed to grow darker. Zeph looked up and he saw the moon light extinguished by the coming storm. The lights from the inn were ahead, the dim lit windows of the first floor softening the darkness. Zeph's gaze drifted to the other floors, all of which were dark, except for one window on the second floor.

They reached the door of the inn.

"Ok, just too clear this up, does it matter if we whisper or just think something, will you still hear it?" Marcus asked as he looked Xa'an up and down. Xa'an leaned in close. Marcus could see his own reflection on the goggles across the man's face.

"You think quite loudly Master Marcus. I am surprised that these two cannot hear your every thought." Zeph snickered,

"Most of the time we can." And with that the four of them entered the inn.

The inn was quiet. No other patrons seemed to be in the lounge. They walked upstairs. Zeph looked around the second floor realizing he had never been on the second floor of the inn. He had lived his whole life in Daunt, which gave him no reason to stay at the town inn.

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They walked down the hall and stopped at room number '207'. Xa'an motioned the three boys into the room. The room had a small oil lamp burning on the table in the middle of the room. The boys walked over to the table and took a seat. Xa'an locked the door and walked over to claim the remaining seat. The light stood still on the table now, the flame an unmoving pillar of light as it burned. Xa'an turned his head eyeing each of the boys and then stopped on Iggy.

"You have a question for me young sir?" A flush of embarrassment came to Iggy's face,

"I was just wondering if I could see your eyes." Both Zeph and Marcus looked oddly at each other, then at Iggy, then back at Xa'an. A grin came across Xa'an's face as he reached for his goggles.

"You are quite a bright young boy Iggy," he removed his goggles to reveal brightly glowing orange eyes, "you knew that if I am truly a Seeier that my eyes would glow."

"It is not unlike the blue glow that a *Seeier of the Light Mages* would have," Iggy replied while studying the man's eyes. Xa'an replaced the goggles on his face, and turned towards Zeph.

A clap of thunder rumbled in the distance. The gentle pitter patter of the rain fell gently against the window. A half hour had past since they had left Zeph's house. The events of the evening were nothing like any of the boys could ever have imagined. Xa'an scanned Zeph's face.

"You have many questions Chosen One; I can see it clearly on your face." Zeph looked up,

"My first would be why do you keep calling me 'chosen one'?" Xa'an raised his hands and leaned back,

"Perhaps I should start from the beginning. I journeyed here from an island called Tarn, which lies south across the sea. Tarn is but a mere island compared to Appagon, however your 'continent' is also not what it seems. I belong to the Shadow Order, I am a Shadow Mage blessed with the gift of Seeing. The Order has been in existence since the Second Age. So you can see that we have been around for quite some time."

He paused seeing Marcus' raised eyebrow.

"I have a quick question. If you're a Mage, why are you armed so heavily?" Xa'an raised his right arm behind his head and pulled one of his blades out from the sheath concealed within his trench coat, and placed it on the table. The blade had many engravings on it, along with some mystical symbols Marcus had never seen before.

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“I chose my own path, as you will some day, Marcus. I was once a deadly assassin, but now I am a protector. This blade alone has spilled more blood than you could ever comprehend. Please pick it up.” Marcus did as he was told; the blade was very light, and seemed to fit his hand perfectly. “Now I want you to hit me.” Marcus’ eyes widened at the request. But there was no hesitation, he lifted the sword and brought it down with a clash upon Xa’an’s shoulder.

Marcus opened his eyes feeling slightly disorientated. He now lay sprawled on the floor, although he wasn’t sure how he had gotten there. He grabbed the blade off the floor and stood up.

“What happened?” he asked while holding his head.

“The force of your blow was brought back upon you,” Xa’an explained. “All my weapons have been enchanted; they will only do as commanded while in my hands. Zeph take the blade.” Zeph did so. “Run your hand across the edge of the blade.” As he did he found that the blade was dull, no sharpness at all.

“How can you fight with a blade like this?” he asked with a perplexed look on his face. Xa’an took the sword back. Removing a silver coin from his pocket, he balanced it on its edge in the middle of the table. Centering the blade over the coin, he gently let it come down. Each half of the coin rolled across the table. The boys’ eyes grew wide and their jaws dropped. Xa’an handed half to Marcus and the other to Iggy.

“Remember young protectors that things are never what they appear to be.” The boys placed the coin pieces into their pockets.

Once again a clap of thunder rumbled loudly, closer this time than before. The rain was still steadily falling on the window. The lamp remained motionless on the table. Xa’an replaced the sword back into its sheath.

“This is not why I have come. I have come because of you Zeph, you are the Chosen One.” Zeph waved his hands in a frustrated motion as if to say, ‘which means?’ “At the Order we are keepers of ancient texts and scrolls. Our oldest collection dates back to the Second Age. In these scrolls they speak of Chosen Ones, one from every Age. You have seen something like this haven’t you Zeph?” Zeph looked around,

“I don’t really know what I saw; my text book seemed to be doing some strange things earlier.”

Marcus looked oddly at him, “What are you talking about?”

“I see things, words, but they aren’t actually there.” Zeph replied.

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“In many of the old texts written within the last several hundred years there have been a handful of accounts where individuals have seen words or messages within the pages.” Xa’an explained.

Xa’an stood up from his chair, and removed his bag from around his body. He placed it on the table. “I have brought something for you, but first, I must explain more to you. The Order has been studying the accounts of the ‘chosen ones’ since we first found the texts.

Around the beginning of the Sixth Age the Shadow Order brought forth a girl. She was a very fast learner, rising through the Magical ranks faster than anyone had ever seen. She reached the rank of Master even before she was finished her schooling.” The boys were impressed at this and each nodded with amazement. “But then something happened,” he began to explain.

“The Order found a scroll, a scroll that no one on the council could open. As you may or may not know, scrolls can be mystically locked to specific people or ability types. After several years of research we discovered that the scroll was somehow connected to the Chosen Ones. With several years left in her schooling and already at the rank of Master, the girl asked if she could see the scroll. The Order granted her request only once. The scroll reacted to her, and was immediately confiscated and placed in the Sacred Archives for safe keeping. The leaders of the Order were afraid that if she was able to open the scroll, that her lust for power would become greater than they could control.”

The boys took in every word as Xa’an continued, “Shortly after this she claimed to see things: messages coming to her in the night, words appearing out of shadows. She also saw messages in books and on parchment that no one else could see.”

Zeph breathed in deep. Marcus and Iggy looked over at him. Xa’an motioned for the boys to hold their questions for the moment as he continued.

“The Order didn’t know what to make of this. She demanded entrance into the Sacred Archives, where forbidden and unknown scrolls are kept. The council would not permit that request to someone as foolish as her,” he paused, as though his heart was heavy. The boys looked cautiously at each other. Xa’an continued “She unleashed herself upon us; she fought her way in, killing anyone who stood in her way.

She brought herself before the Order claiming to be a ‘Chosen One’. The Order tried to explain to her that it wasn’t possible, seeing as the time of the Shadow Chosen One had happened the Age before. The odd thing was she agreed with the council, but still claimed to be right as well.

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No one understood what she meant, or what the scroll did to her. But she did take the scroll with her, just like this one,” he said reaching into his bag. He pulled out a metal scroll case engraved with ancient markings. “This scroll has never been opened due to the fact that none in the Order know how to do so. The scroll we once had was identical to this in every way and it also had never been opened.”

Xa’an reached across and handed the scroll to Zeph. He took it and looked it over. He recognized some of the markings, but many of them seemed foreign to him. Xa’an sat back and studied him as he turned the scroll over again and again. Zeph turned the scroll horizontally, and stopped at what he decided was the top.

He looked up at Xa’an “May I try something?” he asked. Xa’an gestured to go ahead. Holding the scroll out horizontally, he looked at each of the ends. It seemed odd that neither end had any engravings.

Just as he was thinking this, a symbol began to appear on the end he was looking at. He immediately looked at the other end, and the same symbol was there as well.

“What is it Zeph? What do you see?” Xa’an leaned in towards him.

“I see the Omega symbol on each end of the scroll.” Marcus and Iggy could see the ends of the scrolls from their point of view.

“I don’t see anything,” they said in unison.

“Do you see anything else?” Xa’an inquired. Zeph held the scroll, fingertips holding the ends on either side. He pulled the ends closer until his palms touched the ends.

His arms stiffened, his gaze focused on the scroll. He clinched his jaw trying desperately to speak. Xa’an burst up from his seat and motioned for the boys to move. Zeph’s arms began to shake as he lowered his head, the veins on his chest and arms began to glow a pale blue.

His body was thrown back in the chair and the Omega symbol on his forehead burst with light. Marcus reached out to try and knock the scroll from Zeph’s hand, but a force hit him sending him flying across the room where he laid unconscious in the corner. Pain was evident in Zeph’s face and his teeth were still clinched tightly. He desperately wanted to scream but he was unable to utter a noise. Xa’an stood near the door of the room, weapons drawn.

Iggy was kneeling on the floor with his arms outstretched trying with all this might to place a protection field around his big brother. Zeph’s head shot back as his body arched, arms outstretched still holding the scroll. Tears began to flow down Zeph’s face as his body began to lift off the

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chair. The Omega symbol now burst from his hands. He seemed as though he was fighting it, his fingers trembling.

Iggy looked frantically at Xa'an and screamed, "I don't know what to do!"

Just then Zeph began to scream; it was a sound that Xa'an had never heard before. It was as though God himself was screaming from the depths of him. Zeph's arms shook violently, as he let loose another blood curdling scream as he let go of the scroll. He fell to the floor, the chair breaking underneath him. Zeph lay on his back gasping for air. Xa'an replaced his weapons and extended his hand towards Zeph. He tried to stagger to his feet but could not find the strength. Iggy sat against the wall crying. Zeph turned towards his little brother.

Through the tears streaming down Iggy's face he whimpered, "I'm sorry I couldn't save you big brother."

Zeph turned to see Marcus unconscious in the corner by the window.

"Please go help him," he whispered to Xa'an. The Shadow Mage walked over and picked up the boy, placing him on one of the beds in the room.

A flash of lightning filled the room and a loud clap of thunder followed. The rain poured down the window. Zeph lay on the floor next to Iggy, while Xa'an sat watching over Marcus.

"Is he ok?" Zeph asked while staring at the ceiling.

"He appears to have obtained no permanent injuries from the blast," Xa'an said while looking down at Marcus. Zeph looked at his hands which now had burnt palms. The same symbol, the Omega, which had appeared on his forehead at his Christening now appeared on the top of each of his hands.

He tried to roll over, his body ached. Iggy sat motionless in the corner, eyes wide. Zeph held his hands out towards him,

"Do you think you could do anything about these burns?"

Iggy slowly crawled towards him; he took Zeph's hands in his and began to concentrate. The burns began to heal, and within a moment Zeph's hands were healed. Zeph rubbed his hands.

"Thanks little bro, that's a great trick, sure wish I had that." Iggy smiled a little bit then stood up. He helped Zeph up and onto the nearby bed. "Can you do anything for Marcus?" Zeph asked, noticing his friend was still lying on the bed unconscious. Iggy looked over.

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“Yea, maybe.” Iggy walked over to Marcus, placed one hand on his head, and took one of his hands. Zeph lay on the bed holding his head. Xa’an stood up, leaving Iggy to tend to Marcus. He walked over to Zeph and pulled up a chair.

“How are you feeling young sir?” Zeph glanced over, wondering if he looked as bad as he felt. Xa’an smiled, “Not quite, but pretty close.” Remembering Xa’an’s abilities to read his thoughts, Zeph smiled.

“Can you tell me what happened?” Zeph asked.

Xa’an’s eyes widened behind his goggles, “I was able to read you for just a moment as you gripped the scroll, but after that I dared not read you while you were in such a state. I was unsure what was going on.”

Zeph held his head; it felt as though the ocean had been pumped into his brain.

“I remember something, something I heard.” His eyes darted back and forth as he searched his mind. “A voice from inside the scroll, it said something to me. It said ‘The journey of The Last begins within. Seek the Six and stop the Sin.’”

Xa’an stood up and walked slowly around the room. “So you are the last then.”

Zeph looked up, “What?! You know what that means?” he asked angrily.

“Master Desiree, the girl I spoke of earlier, claimed the scroll spoke to her and was calling her to be ‘chosen.’ It said ‘Learn Within to Find the Last.’” Xa’an explained.

“I don’t understand what that means,” Zeph said.

“What if the scroll was some sort of mythical storage device, used by the Chosen Ones to pass their essence on from Age to Age? This would explain the knowledge Desiree obtained after opening the Shadow scroll.”

Zeph looked over at him and pondered it for a moment. “But why was she the only one able to open it out of your whole Order?” Zeph asked.

“Perhaps to ensure the knowledge would only go to someone worthy, they would have to have obtained the rank of Master.” Xa’an suggested, “For a brief period of time, when she was in the Order, she was the only Master.”

Zeph lay on the bed taking it all in. He looked over at Marcus; he

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still lay unconscious on the bed across from him. Xa'an stood up and walked over to the table then turned and faced Zeph. "I can only conclude that whatever this 'journey' you spoke of is you have to find the other six scrolls to be able to take it. I would suggest that you seek out what happened to Desiree first."

"Why her first?" Zeph asked with a puzzled look.

"It's my guess that unlike the other scrolls, wherever they may be on Arkhay, the Shadow scroll will not be in a temple or sacred place. Unless it was once again found after Desiree died."

Zeph walked over to the table and picked up the scroll. The metal was warm. "The scroll tried to use me to unlock itself but I wasn't ready." He looked down at his hands. "What do you make of these marks?" he asked Xa'an.

"All I know about those is that Desiree also received them after her encounter with the scroll."

Marcus began to stir on the bed.

"I think he's coming around," Iggy said. Xa'an and Zeph walked over to the bed. So many thoughts were going through Zeph's mind if felt as if his head had been hit with a forging hammer of information. The feeling in his head would only get worse he was afraid. He knew as the days went on that his thoughts would retreat back to the scroll with every spare moment. Kneeling down beside the bed he took hold of Marcus and helped him sit up.

"Dang! That scroll sure has some kick to it. How long was I out?" Marcus asked holding his head in both hands. Everyone looked at each other, then at Zeph.

"About an hour," Zeph replied.

"Well what happened, cause I can totally tell something happened while I was off in dream land."

The three of them carried Marcus over to the table, where Zeph recounted the events of the evening. He showed Marcus the tops of his hands where he now had the Omega symbol. Marcus sat there trying to process everything. After a short while he finally spoke up.

"This is all a little heavy for me guys. I know we've been best friends forever Zeph, but this is all a little crazy to believe." Zeph felt the disappointment flood his stomach, but he really couldn't blame him.

Xa'an stood up from the top, the boys followed suit.

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“I must be going young sirs. Please follow me to the shore.” With that the four of them left the room and proceeded downstairs. The innkeeper gave Xa’an an evil eye as he walked up to the desk.

“My pardons for the noise, I hope we have not disturbed your other guests,” Xa’an said as he reached into his waist bag.

The innkeeper grunted, “What guests? You folks are my only customers this week. I have no real need for the place except during Alignments, and the semi-annual festivals.” Xa’an placed three gold kessas on the counter. The innkeeper’s eyes widened. “The room did only cost ya one silver kessa for the night.”

“Then consider it a gift from the Order of Shadow Mages, may you always welcome us in your inn.” He smiled and nodded his head towards Xa’an.

The night air had cooled with the passing storm. Mud squished around their boots as the four of them continued southward through town. The sky had cleared giving the night some light from the moons. They continued on down the road past the last buildings and stood on the top of the slope. A gentle breeze from the ocean brushed across their faces as the four of them stood and breathed in.

Xa’an turned slightly towards Zeph and extended his hand, Zeph shook it. He then reached into his robes and extended the Omega Scroll to Zeph. Some hesitation fell over Zeph, he was unsure if he should take it.

“I understand why you don’t wish to have this. Not a day ago you were struggling with finding your place in this world, and now you fear that place is too much for you to fill.” Zeph fought to control the tears that wanted so badly to break from his eyes. The pain began to swell inside as he knelt to the ground. Iggy and Marcus watched, but they knew it was not their place to speak. Xa’an placed his hand on Zeph’s shoulder.

“To release feeling, whether it be from despair or gladness, is what truly binds this world together. Even the great god Omega cried when he made this world Zeph. Do not be afraid, you will find your place. Once you are ready for your journey, I will return to you. But take this scroll, for you are the only one who truly deserves to carry it through life’s journey.”

Slowly he reached up and took the scroll from Xa’an. He watched as Xa’an walked down the slope towards the shore. Even in the night, the light of the moons showed a small boat of some kind just out past the shore. The other two boys knelt beside Zeph as Xa’an disappeared into the night.

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Marcus turned Zeph to face him. "I'm sorry bro, I didn't know how hard things had been for you lately." He nodded his thanks to Marcus then he turned his attention to his lap. The scroll now lay in his hands. How was he going to even start explaining everything to his mother?

* * *

The fury of the night had died. Water pooled in the road creating a field of mirrors for the night sky. A gentle breeze brushed through the trees disturbing the silence of the night. The severity of the earlier storm had inflicted damage to the town that would make for a rude awakening the next morning. But that would have to wait. The orange glow of the fire reflected softly on the glass window. If you were to stand outside this house on this particular night, you might see a silhouette of a girl dancing across this window pane.

Breeze sat on the bench beneath the window with her hands held together inside the large flowing blanket she had wrapped around herself. The night sky filled her eyes as she continually scanned the road leading up to her and her father's house. The fire popped grabbing her attention for a moment. She turned to look at it. The fire had been large hours ago when she had expected the boys, now only hot coals remained.

She looked around the room, the soft light danced across the paintings lining the walls of the den. Her eyes moved slowly until they fell on the image of her mother. What would you do mother, she asked herself. When her mother had become sick many years ago, an artist in the town had offered to paint the family, as a gift to ease her suffering. Her father did not want him or Breeze to be painted alongside her. He said he wanted to cherish her like this. But now as the years had passed she wished that the painting had included everyone. She had no image in her mind of her and her mother, perhaps this would have been the only one.

Gus walked to the archway of the den and stopped. Even in the faint light of the dying fire he knew his daughter was staring at his passed wife's face. He hung his head for a moment then stepped into the room. Breeze turned and looked at her father as he walked over.

"What are you still doing up sweetie?"

Her eyes turned back towards the night sky.

"The boys didn't come tonight. I hope nothing happened to them." Gus pushed his daughter forward and sat behind her so she could lean on him.

"With a storm like that tonight I don't think anyone left their houses. I'm sure you'll see them at school tomorrow." She fell farther back

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into her father. "I know you care about them a lot dear, a great deal more about one in particular I think." She sat up with a start and faced him. He grinned, "Oh so you've found out I'm not just a crazy inventor, and that perhaps I do watch my daughter's love interests."

"Daddy, Zeph and I are just friends."

Gus tilted his head and gave her that soft grin, "Somehow I don't think you would have waited into the night if it was simply Marcus and Iggy coming over." She opened her mouth to reply then closed it. Her father was right of course but she would not draw him into a conversation that would allow him to win.

Both of them stood up. Gus walked over to the fire and lit a small oil lamp that sat on the mantle. He then put out the fire and walked over to Breeze as she waited by the archway. He handed her the lamp. She looked up at him.

"Will you be able to find your room ok without it?"

"I'll do fine sweetheart. You get some sleep now; worry about future loves on a later night. I'm going to work on my glass project a little longer," he said as he kissed her goodnight. With that he walked down to the main hall of the house and off towards his lab, which also held his bedroom.

Breeze turned and walked up the stairs to the loft. Every stair creaked along the way, but the second from the bottom was always the loudest. She walked over to her bed and sat on the edge. Staring at the candle somehow gave her peace. The flame flowing back and forth was somehow hypnotic. She crawled under the covers and blew it out. Tomorrow would be another day and hopefully she would find out what had happened to the boys in the morning.

Gus stood just under the loft waiting for his daughter to go to sleep. He heard her bed creak and knew she had finally crawled into it for the night. Ever since his wife died he had kept close watch over his daughter. When Breeze was born it had been the happiest day of his life. He had become even prouder when he had found out she was also blessed with the ability of Wind, just as he had. After the death of his beloved wife, the thought of anything happening to Breeze filled him with grief.

He stepped down the stairs from the main hall of the house and entered his lab. His sleeping arrangements were similar to his daughter's, with a sleeping area hanging above a section of the lab.

Running his hands through his rather messed old gray hair, he sat down at one of his work stations. He picked up a small stack of his notes.

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Titled on the top of the first page were the words ‘Glass Project’. He had been working for some time now on creating a type of unbreakable glass. After months of experimenting with different types of sands and temperatures he had finally made a breakthrough.

Parts of the coast near Daunt had a somewhat odd sparkle to the sand. Gus had created several different sifting machines to separate the sand, and, in doing so discovered the ‘sparkly’ part of the sand was actually a form of crystal. This crystal could easily be crushed or ground into powder, but when heated to a molten temperature and allowed to cool, it became indestructible to both physical force and temperature.

He stood from his seat and walked over to the machine in the corner of the room. He was going to make practical use of his discover by allowing this machine to heat the crystal and once hot enough, spray a thin, thread-like, stream of it out the bottom. Now all he had to do was create some molds of different objects to cover with the glass. Windows would be the easiest to make, having already made a standard window sized flat mold several weeks earlier.

The night was getting late though, and he knew that he should also get some sleep. Climbing the ladder in the corner, he retreated to his own loft. He also hoped that the boys would be coming over in the morning, showing them his new inventions gave him such pride. The house grew quiet as both father and daughter fell asleep. The gentle light from the moons fell softly across the house. Tomorrow would be another day, and each new day also brings something new.

* * *

“Hey sleepyhead, are you going to wake up anytime soon?” The words filled Breeze’s ears so softly. She turned her head to see Zeph’s face looking down at her. Was this a dream? It had to be. She had never had such a pleasant dream before though. Zeph’s hand reached down and brushed her face, it felt so warm and gentle. Her eyes opened wider as she realized that this wasn’t a dream. She sat up with a start.

Zeph jumped up, startled by Breeze’s sudden movement.

“Whoa there, you trying to freak me out?” he said holding his chest. She looked around trying to grasp hold of her conscious mind. “Good morning to you too,” Zeph said as he regained his composure. “You know most people speak when they first get up.” She looked around for a moment, then looked at him.

“What time is it?” she asked.

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“Oh it’s about three in the afternoon, so about lunchtime,” He said pulling out his pocket watch.

“Wow, I guess I’m really late for school huh?” she asked while climbing out of bed and walking over to the mirror.

“Well you would be if there was any school today.”

“What do you mean? Why is there no school?” she asked while brushing her hair.

“Well it seems during the storm last night a rather large tree fell on the school. They’ll be fixing it all day.”

She walked over to him and gave him a hug. “It’s good to know you’re alright. You had me very worried last night. I guess no one left their houses last night.”

“Uh, actually you should get dressed; I have a lot to tell you about last night if Marcus and Iggy haven’t already started telling Gus.” She shot him an odd look, which in turn he shot a sarcastic one back. Pushing him away she grinned and told him she would be down in a minute.

Zeph chuckled as he walked down the stairs. Stopping at the mid-level he walked into the den where he found Marcus, Iggy, and Gus all sitting. They all turned their heads and looked at him, which in turn made Zeph look behind himself.

“Ok, where’s this guy that we’re all giving the weird looks to?” He asked in the most serious tone he could muster. Turning his head back he saw that nobody was smiling, “Ok tough crowd this morning I see.”

Marcus jumped up from the couch, “You can’t just ignore what happened last night.” Zeph found himself one of the large chairs opposite Marcus and sat down.

“I’m not trying to. It’s just a lot to take in. You expect me to handle something that I have no idea where to start?” Gus raised his hand which caused Zeph and Marcus’ bantering to stop momentarily.

“Alright the two of you, I would really love to get in on this too, so why don’t you fill me in on what happened last night.” Just then Breeze entered the den and took a seat on the smaller couch next to her father. “And now that we’re all here,” Gus continued, “This would be a perfect time to fill us in.”

Zeph stood in the middle of the room like a professor would stand before an anticipating class of students. He explained how they had met Xa’an in the middle of town. He started explaining the events of the hotel slowly, not wanting to dump too much information on them at once. As

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soon as he began to mention the scroll though, everyone began to lean forward. A look of excitement came across Gus' face as he began to tell what happened when he held the scroll. This in turn caused a look of horror on Breeze's face.

Zeph paused for a moment and rubbed the tops of his hands. Everyone's gaze slowly shifted down the length of his body stopping at Zeph's hands. Both Gus and Breeze immediately noticed the Omega symbol on the tops of his hands.

"Did the scroll do that?" Gus asked as he walked over to Zeph. He held out the tops of his hands for everyone to see.

"I'm not really sure what this means," Zeph said with a note of concernment in his voice "but it's just like the mark we get on our foreheads after Christening." Gus sat back down as Zeph continued to recall the events of the night.

After Xa'an had departed they returned back to Zeph's house. His mother had already gone to bed. It wasn't uncommon for him to spend the night at Breeze's house, so when he arrived home he found it odd to find his mother sleeping. Then he remembered that she had expected him to go to Breeze's, and knew nothing of what had transpired.

Iggy headed up to his room and Zeph and Marcus settled in the living room for the night, since Zeph's room was a little too messy for two boys to sleep in. They awoke in the morning to a Council messenger knocking on the door. He had come to inform them that the school would be closed for the day.

After rousing Iggy they decided to head to Breeze's place. Zeph spent a good deal of the morning trying to hide the marks on his hands from his mother. Of course they made up a convenient story for where they had been, which did have some truth to it. They said they had been caught in the storm and stayed at the inn until it past. After some morning chores, the three boys left the house.

"I guess this brings us back to the present, doesn't it?" Zeph asked as he sat down next to Marcus. Everyone else in the room exchanged glances for a moment, and then Gus motioned for everyone to stand up.

"Well boy, you sure don't do anything the normal way do ya?" He asked looking down at Zeph. A wave of embarrassment washed over Zeph's face. "I don't mean to embarrass you Zeph, but you're a very unique lad."

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Gus stood, and with him everyone else in the room. They walked down the stairs into the main hall of the house. The tall ceilings complemented the stained wood walls of the house. The house had always felt like a place where one would go for a vacation, not a place for normal living. Light bathed the room from the skylights above. There were four in the main hall, and two in the other rooms. It was a very large house, you would expect many events or parties to be thrown here, but that was not the case. Most of the house consisted of Gus' lab towards the back, and the main hall in the front.

Zeph looked around the room. It was large and it gave off a very gentle, yet somehow exciting atmosphere. He remembered the first time he had entered the house after it was built. Entering the main hall he stopped and gazed up at the ceilings. No building in Daunt has ceilings this high. The ceilings reached up at least the length of four grown men.

Everyone was now in the main hall. Marcus was the first to speak up,

“We did have something to show you Gus,” he said motioning to Iggy and himself. Gus turned towards the boys,

“Well let's have it then.”

Marcus stepped forward and Iggy walked to the opposite side.

“Now this is going to involve some fire, just to let you know.” Gus raised an eyebrow but he was an inventor after all. He motioned for the boys to continue. With that, a grin spread across Marcus' face. Placing both hands in front of him, he began to form a small ball of fire in his hands. He allowed the ball to grow until it was about the size of a man's fist. Then he motioned his hands forward and the ball drifted out to the middle of the group. Iggy now followed suit and placed his hands out in a similar manner. He concentrated very hard and within moments the small fireball took on a perfect spherical shape.

Everyone was staring at the ball now. Iggy walked over and grabbed it out of the air. Such a symbol of power in the hand of the small boy could have been frightening if they did not know him. Astonished Gus walked over. Iggy held the ball out for him to see. Taking it in his hand, Gus was surprised that he felt no heat.

“This is fabulous boys!” he exclaimed. “You must explain to me how this works.”

“Well first I create a fire ball,” said Marcus.

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“Then I create a protection field around it,” Iggy said jumping in.

Gus studied the ball for several minutes. Then he asked the question the boys knew was coming sooner or later.

“How long will it last?” Now, neither of the boys really knew what to say. They had only tried it once before and even then it had only lasted a few minutes.

“Well, uh, that’s a good question. I think most of that is up to Iggy. Being that he’s the one that creates the field,” Marcus said looking over at Iggy.

“Just to be clear, it’s not a ‘lock-down’ field. We tried that, which we at first thought seemed to make sense, but the fire just ate through it. After a while Marcus and I figured it was a lost cause. Then one day I tried a ‘protection’ field. I had just recently learned in class about creating a field to protect living matter. For some reason it worked, the field held, not for long mind you. I think that it all depends on my concentration, because this field is lasting much longer than my previous attempts.” Iggy finally stopped talking. A slightly stunned look was on everyone’s face, no one could remember the last time, if ever, Iggy had talked so much.

Gus walked over to Iggy, pulled up his pants and said,

“Alright boys, I think it’s time I showed you a little something; and, with what you just showed me here, we may have a great invention about to happen.” Whenever Gus got an idea he pulled up his pants, sort of like a warning for those that knew him well.

He led everyone into his lab. There in the corner was his new machine.

“There in the corner is my new machine,” he exclaimed. Gus sometimes had a bad knack for stating the obvious. Everyone chuckled a little as they approached the machine. Gus picked up a nearby flat mold, the kind he would use to make a window. Placing the mold underneath the nozzle part of the machine, he motioned for Marcus to join him.

“I have a few questions for you. First, can you help heat this machine up to the temperature I need? Second, how long can you keep a fire ball floating in exactly the same spot?” Gus asked as he started up a pressure boiler on the side of the machine.

Marcus looked at the machine; he quickly found where he would have to focus his mental flame ability. He then turned to Gus,

“Well I’ve never really tried to keep a ball motionless, but I’ll give it a try.”

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Everyone else took a step back as Marcus and Gus went to work. Marcus began to heat up the pressure boiler, which, in turn pushed large blasts of heat into the main chamber where the crystal powered was. Gus looked at the gauge on the side of the chamber and motioned to Marcus that the temperature was where it needed to be. Iggy walked over. To those watching, this could have been some freak experiment concocted by three crazed inventors. In truth, that wasn't so far off.

"You boys ready to go?" Gus yelled over the rushing sound of the pressure in the machine. The boys nodded. Gus pointed over to the wall where several pairs of goggles hung. The boys knew what to do. Putting their goggles on, they took their positions next to the machine. Marcus began to form the ball in his hands, as Iggy began to concentrate. The ball floated underneath the nozzle. A momentary flash across the surface told Gus that Iggy had placed the field around the ball. Gus pulled the handle and a thin spray of molten glass began to coat the surface. He motioned to Marcus to spin the ball. The surface was starting to glow much brighter than the ball itself as the molten glass covered the whole ball.

After several minutes of coating Gus released the handle, stopping the flow of glass. Gus pulled the depressurization handle down hard. A loud boom was heard from just above the house as the pressure was vented. Everyone began moving their jaws in an attempt to regain their hearing. Looking over at the machine, the illuminated ball still floated in the same spot.

"Um, Gus?" Iggy asked with great nervousness in his voice. "Exactly how long does this take to harden?" Gus looked over at the young boy and saw how much of a struggle he was having. Outstretching his hand, Gus sent a blast of wind towards the ball. It wrapped itself around the ball and began to cool it. Just then Iggy's field gave out. The surface of the ball began to get brighter. Gus looked over at Marcus.

"Let it go Marcus, it won't cool like this." Marcus did as he was told and the fire bent its way out from the molten glass. The glass fell into the mold and spread out.

"Well if anyone needs a window, I'll have one for you later today." Gus said with a smile, looking down at the molten glass.

Zeph was the first to walk over to them. The room had become quite hot during the experiment, at least double what it had been before. Sweat ran down his face. He could feel it dripping off his chin and clinging to his clothes. Breeze stood beside him in a similar state. They looked at each other and smiled for a moment. Turning his attention back towards Gus he asked,

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“So, what went wrong?”

“I should have seen this before we started. I didn’t take into account the cooling process when I ran through the experiment in my head. It’s not Iggy’s fault, I could not expect him to maintain a new Talent for hours, at least not until he’s mastered it a bit more.”

Zeph face twitched at hearing the term ‘Talent’ from Gus. It was the term his father used to say whenever Zeph failed an attempt at his Ability. He would say, ‘Just because you don’t know what your main abilities are, doesn’t mean you don’t have Talents.’ Most people associated a handful of abilities with an individual’s Ability. For example, if you were born with the Fire Ability, at your very basic nature you could create and control fire. However, since no one really knows how far any one person’s abilities stretch, those outside the norm are referred to as Talents.

Gus, along with the two boys, walked over to Zeph and Breeze. Everyone had a brief chuckle at the sweatiness of everyone else. Gus walked towards the kitchen and returned shortly with a handful of towels. As everyone whipped themselves off Gus spoke up,

“Well I do think that this experiment has great potential. We just need to work out a few kinks.”

Zeph looked up, “Just so I’m clear, what are we attempting to make with this?” Gus looked at Marcus, and in turn Marcus turned to face Zeph. Holding out his hand Marcus made a small fire ball.

“Take a good look at this bro. This is at least five times brighter than a candle or oil lamp. What if we could place this in a glass ball where it would never dim and never burn out?”

“You want to market this?” Zeph asked raising an eyebrow.

“This could be one of the greatest inventions of our generation.”

“But it doesn’t work yet.” Zeph pointed out.

“It will though. With your help I’m sure we could do it.”

Zeph sighed. What could he do? He held out his hands, and his eyes caught the symbols on them. Then again, a lot of strange things had happened in the last day, maybe Marcus was right.

The large clock chimed out signaling that it was six o’clock. Zeph stood up and waved Iggy to do the same.

“Well this was a fun, crazy afternoon but we should be getting home. Are you coming with us Marcus, or are you going to stick around here?”

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Marcus looked up, “I think I’m going to try brain-storming with Gus and Breeze.” Breeze shot Marcus an odd look. “Ok fine then, just with Gus.”

* * *

Zeph and Iggy left the house as the day was drawing to a close. It seemed strange that only a day earlier Zeph’s world had seemed so normal and now, it was being thrown in every direction. Somehow though, he wasn’t worried like he had been last night. The one worry that did remain in his mind was his mother. She still knew nothing of what had happened in the last day, and so much had happened. He hoped that things would slow down. There was no way he could get used to days being like this.

The two of them began their walk back to town. Zeph glanced down at his little brother. He was growing up, and it felt odd to Zeph. Iggy’s size made him seem so much young than he was. In just two more years, Iggy would be graduating just like Zeph. Maybe as early as one year the way he was going. He was impressed at the brilliance of his little brother.

Zeph stopped as they stepped onto the main road in town. Iggy kept walking for a moment then turned around.

“What is it?” he asked.

“Before we go home lets go see Siah,” Zeph replied as he began to jog down towards the docks.

Siah was the Trade Master in Daunt; he ran the docks and the Trade Post in town along with the local pub. He had his hands in a good number of money making businesses in Daunt. Zeph knew the group of them would have to talk to him once they worked out the issues with the glass fire balls.

They bounded down the slope towards the docks. Siah was down at the end of one of the piers helping some merchants. It wasn’t uncommon for ships to dock at Daunt. However, most merchants would sail to one of the larger towns on Appagon. Even Zeph’s father worked mostly in fishing, aside from his trips to Sire. Thai was the only city on Sire that his father had ever been to but he was sure that there were many more coastal cities on Sire.

Siah noticed the boys heading down the pier towards him. He was a big man, a very big man at that. In his youth he was an awkwardly tall boy, standing at almost seven feet tall. But after many years of working as a fisherman and merchant he had transformed into a bulk of a man. Zeph’s father had been best friends with Siah. They had gone on many voyages

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together. Oddly enough though, he had not accompanied Zeph's father on the voyage in which he was lost.

"What can I do for you boys?" he asked with a smile as Zeph and Iggy approached.

"I have a couple of questions for you," Zeph answered.

"Go for it, lad."

"If we had an object to sell, let's just say for now we're selling oil lamps. What kind of demand is there among the merchants for that sort of thing right now?"

Siah gave Zeph a bit of an odd look then glanced over at Iggy. Iggy just smiled and shook his head. Turning back to Zeph he replied,

"Well lamps are something that everyone needs. Daunt however, is not known for supplying them, so sales are not normal for them."

Zeph thought to himself for a moment. Should he or shouldn't he let Siah in on their little invention? Failed invention, he reminded himself. He decided to only mention some small details.

"Well let's say someone could make a lamp that never ran out. How would sales do then?" Zeph asked in response to Siah's statement. Again Siah gave Zeph an odd look. The captain of the merchant ship had been listening in and walked over to the boys.

"Now I don't know what you boys are concocting over here, but if someone could make a lamp that never ran out... well I tell ya, I would give you boys two silver kessa for each one you could sell me."

Both Zeph and Iggy's eyes lit up upon hearing the captain's words. Zeph had just found his place in their whole scheme. He would be in charge of marketing.

"How long are you going to be in Daunt, good captain?" Zeph asked.

"Oh I would say a day or two. Why, you have a proposition for me?"

"Not yet, but give me 'a day or two,'" Zeph said with a smile.

With that he grabbed Iggy and ran back towards town. Siah raised his hands and shouted something about leaving him in the dark. The boys laughed as they ran through town. They stopped for a moment and looked up towards the school. All the damage seemed to be repaired. It looked like tomorrow would be another day of school.

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It didn't take long for them to arrive home. Zeph stopped Iggy as they were about to enter the house. He reminded him that mom still didn't know about anything, from the scroll to the experiment. Like any mother, they were never really sure how she would react to any given situation, but Zeph had a feeling that this was one of those things that should remain a secret for as long as possible.

They entered the house and found their mother working in the kitchen, as she did pretty much every day. Over the years of using her Earth ability, she developed a love for cooking. It was her past time; when she wasn't cooking for herself and the boys, she was cooking for others.

"Hello boys. How'd the afternoon go over at Gus?" she asked, entering the front hall. They looked at each other for a moment.

"It was fun," They said in unison. She raised an eyebrow. They smiled and retreated upstairs. The room was dark, and the heavy curtains still hung in front of the window from the day before. The only light came from the hallway and several cracks around the edge of the curtains. Iggy walked over and opened the curtains letting in the evening light. In another hour the suns would set.

Even though there was three distinct points to the suns alignments, the town only rotated its time system at the peak of each alignment. During the time in the alignments when the suns were overlapping, days were pretty normal. In four and a half years the suns would be their farthest apart. Sunset would be the same but since Pythus would be rising before Cronus, it would make the sunrise happen several hours earlier. Of course four and a half years earlier Pythus was following Cronus, which made sunset happen several hours earlier. It was discovered long ago that Cronus always stayed where it was, and it was in fact, Pythus that revolved around Cronus.

Screwy system, Zeph thought. Why not simply adjust the time system leading up to each alignment so that class started at say, eight and ended at three? Well, once the next alignment hit he would be done school and wouldn't have to worry about class starting at six in the morning.

His room was a mess but that was nothing new. Zeph looked around his room. The only real free space left was on his bed. Sitting down on his bed he picked up the open history book, which he had dropped there the previous evening. Holding the book in one hand he let himself fall back on his bed. A look of disbelief and confusion came over his face as he was shocked to see three symbols burnt into his ceiling.

"What the heck is this?!" Zeph blurted out with disbelief.

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“Language boy!” his mother shouted up from the kitchen. Zeph quickly clasped both hands over his mouth. Unless he wanted it full of soap he had to watch his mouth around his mother.

The two boys stood with their heads cranked back looking at the ceiling. Zeph tried to walk around while still fixing his eyes on the ceiling. He soon found this impossible after tripping over his many belongings on the floor.

Iggy was the first to say something about the ceiling,

“You think mom will notice?” Zeph stopped for a moment. That thought had yet to enter his mind.

“Oh crap!!” Zeph blurted out.

“Don’t make me come up there boy!” his mother shouted up the stairs. Again Zeph clasped both hands over his mouth.

“Ya, maybe you just shouldn’t talk for a bit.” Iggy suggested.

Zeph placed a hand on his chest and tried to calm himself down. This day was very quickly turning into a possible nightmare. He looked back at the three symbols on his ceiling. Whispering this time, he leaned over to Iggy,

“How do you think those got there?”

“Your guess is as good as mine. They look burnt,” Iggy replied as he jumped up onto Zeph’s bed. Even though he was short he was still able to reach out and touch the marks. Nothing felt odd; the marks seemed to just be a discoloration.

“You don’t think Marcus, you, and I had anything to do with this do you?” The question seemed a little strange but Zeph was willing to listen.

“What makes you think that Iggy?”

“Well if you haven’t noticed, the three symbols are the Fire, Light, and Omega symbols.”

Zeph looked up at the symbols and walked around the room. Once again he fell, tripping over the clutter on his floor. Falling against the side of his mattress, the history book bounced off the bed, falling in front of his face on the floor. The cover lay open. The first several blank pages were the only thing exposed.

“Whoa, this is crazy,” Zeph whispered as he touched the page.

“What is it?” Iggy asked jumping off the bed.

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“Don’t you see it?”

Iggy looked down at the page Zeph was touching but saw nothing.

“Well let’s just roll with this for a moment. What do you see Zeph?”

“It’s the Omega symbol. It looks like it’s floating just off the page,” He replied running his hand over the page. “When I run my hand on the page my hand blocks the light, but it looks like I should be able to run my hand underneath it.”

Zeph closed the book and looked down at the front. It had a thick, leather cover. The title was stamped into the leather along with a variety of symbols Zeph had never seen.

“What do you think these symbols mean?” Zeph asked his little brother as he scanned the cover. Iggy leaned over,

“Your guess is as good as mine. We haven’t covered any sections on Symbology or Glyphs.”

“Ya we haven’t either, it’s one of the last things we learn. I think we start it next week once we finish this unit,” Zeph said.

“I know this is the last thought in your head, but maybe we should tell mom about everything that’s been going on.” The words filled Zeph’s ears and he shot his little brother a crazy look.

“Are you insane?! Mom would kill me!” Zeph gasped out.

“I actually think she could handle this. Plus she’s going to find out sooner or later. Don’t you think she can handle it better now rather than later, when it’s more complicated?”

Something in Iggy’s words rang out the truth. He was right of course, that was his thing. Pointing out the obvious was what he was best at. Zeph picked up the history book Mr. Yad had given him. Unlocking the small chest that sat on his desk, Zeph removed the Omega scroll. He took a deep breath and looked at his little brother. Iggy assured him that things would be ok and they walked downstairs together.

The next several hours were some of the longest that either of the boys could remember. Zeph took his mother into the den and began to recount the events of the last twenty-four hours. He began to realize more and more as he spoke that the last day had been the most monumental day of his life. He watched the expressions on his mothers face change to cover a wide array of emotions as the story unfolded.

Nights of Shadow, Days of Fire

Hours later Zeph finally stopped talking. The room was quiet. Iggy stood by the fireplace tending to the dying fire. The Omega scroll rested in their mother's hands. She reached across and handed it back to Zeph. Tears began to form in her eyes. Zeph immediately stood up and walked over to her.

"What's wrong?" he asked sitting down next to her.

"You're just like your father," She replied. "He was reckless and always strived for so much more in life."

"Oh I can assure you mom that I did not strive for this. I have no idea what I'm doing." After several minutes of regaining her composure she stood up. Waving both her boys towards her she gave them a hug.

"You're growing up too fast, both of you. I just don't know how to take it."

Zeph sighed, "We're not going anywhere mom. Things will be ok, you'll see."

She looked at him very sternly and said, "No Zeph, things won't be ok. Not on the path you're going down. If you truly are destined for greatness, only danger can lie ahead."

He had never heard his mother speak that way to him in his whole life. Not knowing how to take her words he simply sat down. She said her goodnights to the boys and walked over to her room. Iggy sat down next to his brother.

"So, what happens now?" Iggy asked.

Zeph looked over at him. He had no idea what to do now. Come to think of it, telling their mom had been all Iggy's idea. If anything he should be the one deciding what should happen next.

"Well hopefully when I get a chance to talk to Marcus tomorrow he'll tell me that they figured out some way to perfect the glass balls," Zeph replied with a look of confidence on his face.

"So till tomorrow then?" Iggy asked.

"Till tomorrow little brother," Zeph replied.

With that the boys went off to their separate rooms. Tomorrow would be another day.

Day 2

Like a light shining in the darkest place until the day dawns, so we are called into the Light so that we may bring it into the darkness for the entire world to see. No one is chosen by mere prophecy, it is the Will of Omega

- The Book of Ja' Hor

Chapter Three

Encasing the Flame

Light shone through the windows of the classroom. Soon the desks would be full of students ready to learn, although a few of them were sure to fool around or sleep. It was really just a matter of which students you were referring to. The damage from the night before was almost unnoticeable. When all the townsfolk pulled together, almost anything was possible in a short amount of time. One of the town's oldest trees had fallen on the school. This was devastating not only for the school, but also for the tree. Several people in town with Earth abilities had spent a good portion of the day bringing the tree back to health.

Mr. Yad looked up from his desk to see Zeph standing in the doorway. Both of them took out their pocket watches in unison. A grin formed on the old teacher's face. He glanced over his glasses at Zeph. In turn, Zeph also smiled and shrugged his shoulders as if to say 'what can you do.' You see, Zeph was not known for his punctuality, something that Mr. Yad had tried for several years to instill in him.

He walked over to his teacher, pulled a nearby chair towards the desk, and sat down. Even though it had been two days since he had been in this classroom, Zeph's appearance seemed not to have changed. Most of Zeph's clothes were the same style and color. Not many people could afford a full scale wardrobe.

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Zeph's white hair hung in front of his face. He hadn't had it cut in some time and it was at an awkward length where it wasn't quite long enough to hang, so it stuck up in patches. Zeph turned his face towards the window. The midday suns poured through it. The suns caught the blueness of his eyes causing them to give the appearance of glowing. Zeph never really liked his white hair, but he loved his eyes. They were a brilliant blue in the middle and faded out to a well defined black rim at the edges. The black rim on the blue stood out so much from the whites of his eyes.

Mr. Yad removed his glasses and leaned back in his chair. He was wearing his brown suit today. Although the jacket was hanging on the back of the chair, he still wore the vest. His long white beard accompanied his attire perfectly.

Zeph looked down at his own attire. He was wearing one of his long sleeved navy shirts and faded beige pants, just as he had the last day he was in class. In fact the only real difference anyone could make was the Omega symbol on the top of his hands. Of course he kept his hands inside his sleeves.

He placed a hand upon his chest. Why did his heart feel so heavy? Could it be that everything was finally catching up with him? He didn't want to think about it. So many other thoughts filled his head. A limitless number of questions waited at the edge of his mouth. Of the two of them, Mr. Yad was the first to speak up.

"Well Zeph, I do believe that this is the first time you have ever arrived an hour before class. What's the occasion?" asked Mr. Yad, with a gentle grin on his face.

"You know, I think you would be the only one to actually believe the last day of my life, the first time you heard it," Zeph said with a sigh.

Mr. Yad raised an eyebrow, "What's been going on lad?"

Once again he told his story. He felt as though he should simply write it down and hand it out to people to save time. However, he did not include the experiment at Gus' house. He only recalled what was relevant to the scroll and the history book Mr. Yad had given him.

Zeph finished his account of the events of the last few days by placing the Omega scroll on the desk, which in turn also revealed the marks on his hands. Mr. Yad took it in his hands. A twinkle filled the old man's eyes, like a child's eyes when they gaze upon fireworks for the first time.

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“Never in my life have I seen such a scroll as this,” Mr. Yad said in awe. “It seems to have no latch or lock on it, yet it remains closed. You are still unable to open it, I assume Zeph?” The question came as a slight puzzle to Zeph. He realized that since the night everything had happened with the scroll, he had yet to examine it again. Perhaps he was still afraid of it. Or perhaps he was afraid of himself, and what the scroll might do to him.

“No I haven’t been able to yet. Based on what happened before, I think that I might be able to open it. From what Xa’an told me of what happened with Master Desiree and the Shadow scroll, she seemed to have had some sort of reaction to it as well, before she was able to open it.” Upon hearing his own words, the idea of opening the scroll didn’t seem so scary anymore.

Mr. Yad handed the scroll back. Zeph placed it in his bag and pulled out the history book he had received from Mr. Yad. The old teacher seemed insulted by Zeph’s gesture. “Oh no, Mr. Yad I’m not returning it back to you. I just have a few questions about it.”

“Good, because it was a gift for you, and I don’t take back gifts,” Mr. Yad said with a chuckle.

“Actually I was wondering, in all the time that you owned the book, did you ever see anything strange?”

“Well most books don’t really come with strange things attached. What sorts of things do you mean?”

Zeph flipped open to cover of the book. The blank page in the front was still illuminating the Omega symbol. “Well, for starters, do you see anything on this page?”

Mr. Yad was a wise old man. He would soon reach one hundred years old, or so the students joked. Scanning the page for several minutes he turned the book back to Zeph. “Well I don’t know what to say to you lad, I’m afraid I don’t see anything. But from the look of your face I know that you do.”

Zeph nodded, “It’s the Omega symbol. I see it illuminated on the page. I guess no one else can see it though.” He sighed taking the book back. Just then an idea came to him. “Mr. Yad, is there any way someone could write a message or symbols so no one but themselves would be able to read it?”

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The teacher thought about it for a moment. “Well yes there is. But not so much in the way you’re talking. Glyphs can be created so that only certain individuals can see them. For example, you could mark your house to let people know that someone with Omega ability lived there. All you would have to do is write the Omega symbol on your door with some of The Tears of God. Anyone with the talent to read Glyphs would see the illuminated symbol on the door.”

The Tears of God, how could anyone get enough of that to use it for writing purposes? The Temple had only one vial of it, and it was no larger than a wine sack. It had been used for the Christening ceremonies in Daunt for generations. Only a few drops were needed on a baby’s head.

“So let me get this straight. The Tears of God can be used in Glyph writing?” The confusion Zeph felt was evident on his face.

“I can understand your confusion. The only thing I can really tell you is that you will be interested in our next unit, *Symbology & Glyphs*. Daunt has had very little interaction with people that use symbols or glyphs. That’s one reason why I don’t teach it until the end of the last year of school.”

Just then some more students began to file into the room. Both teacher and student once again pulled out their pocket watches. It was already time for class. Zeph replaced the chair he was sitting on and found his normal seat. Wow! He thought. There was so much he didn’t know. Why did it seem like all the questions were coming at once?

Marcus came walking through the door. His new shirt was unmistakable. It was bright orange, and made in the same fashion as the one Zeph was wearing. Their mothers enjoyed sewing together. The black pants he wore enhanced the overall brightness of the shirt. Somehow, the fire orange shirt with black pants just seemed to add to Marcus’ personality.

Marcus was your typical Alpha male. His highly energetic personality combined with his dashing good looks made him stand out, especially with the girls at school. It was his eyes that caught most people’s attention. Because of his brown complexion you would expect dark brown eyes, but this wasn’t the case with Marcus. Zeph figured it had something to do with his ability. Whatever the reason was, Marcus had bright amber eyes.

Taking his seat behind Zeph, the boys clasped hands. “So, new shirt I see,” Zeph said with a smile.

“Heck ya, I love this shirt!” Marcus exclaimed. Zeph just rolled his eyes.

“Anyways, so how did the brain-storming go yesterday after I left Gus?” questioned Zeph.

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“Well it could have gone better. We have two options at this point; we either have to figure out a way for Iggy to maintain his field longer, or a faster way to cool the balls down.”

Zeph pondered the options for a moment. Just then Breeze entered the classroom and walked to her seat. Since class hadn't started yet, the boys turned in their seats to face her. She looked good today. Of course, in Zeph's mind she looked good every day.

Slap! For a moment Zeph was unsure where the hand had come from. He reached up and rubbed the back of his head. Then he glared over at Marcus. “You can daydream later man, but at the moment let's chat.”

The three of them began to chat about the glass balls and how they could solve the problem. Zeph suggested trying wind instead of water. The idea had already occurred to Gus and Breeze. Gus was working on a way to funnel a large amount of wind into a jet system that could cool the balls. Since both he and his daughter had the Wind ability, creating the wind wouldn't be a problem.

Zeph began thinking about the merchant captain. Was now the right time to tell the others about it or not? They did only have two more days until the captain left. Maybe telling them would be a good way to motivate their progress.

“Hey guys I have something to tell you,” Zeph said, interrupting the open dialogue. “I don't really know if this will help our motivation or not, but I have a buyer for the balls if we can perfect them. He says he'll give me two silver kessas for each ball, and he says he'll buy as many as we can give him.”

Both Breeze and Marcus' jaws dropped. They looked at each other, then at Zeph. “When did this come up?” asked Marcus.

“Yesterday after Iggy and I left, we stopped by the docks. I ended up talking to a merchant captain. We have to hurry though. He's only here for two more days.”

Marcus was about to open his mouth again when Mr. Yad rang the bell. The classroom bell was hooked to a cord which was also connected to the classroom door. When Mr. Yad pulled the cord from his desk, it rang the bell and closed the door at the same time.

Mr. Yad stood up from his desk and walked to the front of the class. Every seat was filled today. The layout of the room consisted of six rows which had eight seats in each. The two rows against the window side of the room only had seven seats. Two seats had been removed from the

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back of each of those rows to accommodate the large bookshelves in the corner.

Zeph looked around. He sat in the middle of the row closest to the windows. Marcus sat one seat behind him, and Breeze sat one row over and one seat behind Marcus. In the class of forty-six students they were lucky to still be sitting near each other. Their class was one of the largest in years. A handful of families with children in their Middle-class years had moved to Daunt in the last number of years. In turn, this caused Mr. Yad's class to fill up once they graduated to the Upper-class level.

This was only half the class. Since Upper-class was two years long, second year and first year classes were intermixed throughout the day and overall week.

Mr. Yad looked out over the class. Many of the students had lived in Daunt for their whole lives. Even though they hadn't entered his class until this third segment of their education, Mr. Yad felt a connection to each and every one of his students.

He cleared his throat and began to address the class, "Good to see everyone here today. I trust you enjoyed your day off yesterday. I hope you also took the time to read over the chapters on Origin, Fallen, and Abilities like I asked you to." Groans echoed from student to student. Mr. Yad shook his head and continued. "I thought not, but I always try to give you the benefit of the doubt. Being that we covered most of the Origin section in review at the beginning of the week we are going to proceed with the Fallen section review."

Mr. Yad picked up a piece of chalk and began to write on the board. When he turned around the words 'The Uriel and their connection to Mankind' was written on the board. "Let's start this easy. Who are The Uriel?" he asked the class. A girl on the far side of the class raised her hand.

"They're the first humans Omega made," She replied.

"Not bad, can I hear a more descriptive answer?" Mr. Yad asked.

Marcus raised his hand, "The first humans created and only recorded beings to Ascend without dying."

"Good, thank you Marcus." 'Wow! The boy knows something', Mr. Yad thought.

"As you should know by now The Uriel are the first humans Omega created. He created them with complete knowledge of their abilities. Which in turn allowed them to become powerful enough to rid themselves of physical bodies; existing only as the power of their minds and Abilities.

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We refer to this state as Ascended.” Mr. Yad stopped speaking and wrote some more on the board.

“Fallen” He said pointing at the word on the board. “Why are The Uriel most commonly referred to as the ‘Fallen?’”

Skye, who sat in the front row, raised his hand. “Because Omega did not intend for them to ascend with the knowledge he gave them.”

“Correct! Now we don’t know how old they were when they Ascended, or how long they lived on the world. We do know however, that once Ascended they no longer aged,” he paused for a moment.

Continuing, he wrote several more lines on the board. ‘How many and Where?’ was the next line on the board. “To the best of our historical knowledge we know that there were at least five humans that made up The Uriel. Although, referring to them as humans may be a little impractical. Can anyone tell me how they were divided?”

Breeze was the first to raise her hand. Mr. Yad nodded in her direction. “There were three men and two women. Many historians suspect that there were more than the five history records.”

“Well done Breeze,” Mr. Yad congratulated. “Although we don’t know everything about them, we do know the names of three of them. Everyone take out a piece of paper and a lead piece from your desks.”

After several minutes of rummaging, everyone had one piece of paper and a small piece of lead. Mr. Yad then asked for each student to write their own name at the top.

“Write down the three known names and what they mean. I’ll give you an extra five percent for each name towards the ‘Fallen’ section on the upcoming final exam,” Mr. Yad said sitting back behind his desk.

Zeph thought about it for a short while. He could only remember one of the known Uriel. His father had told him about the stories of Iyr when he was little. Iyr’s name meant ‘watcher and guardian’. After the first people ascended, Omega gave them names based on the lives they had lived while on Arkhay. It was in fact the next creation of mankind that had called them The Uriel. The name meant ‘Flame of God.’

Minutes had past and he was still unable to remember the other two names. He wrote down Iyr’s name and meaning. Zeph looked around the room. It seemed most people were done or had given up. By the expressions on several students’ faces, that was the case.

“Time’s up class,” Mr. Yad announced. “If you would, please pass your sheets forward to the first student in your row.” Mr. Yad walked over

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to the front of the rows and collected the sheets. “Alright class, since the next period will also be review, I’m going to let you break for lunch a little early today. Remember, even though today’s third period is a first-year student’s class, I still expect all you second-year students to return for the last period of the day.”

With that Mr. Yad sent the students off. It was nice to have a whole extra period of free time. There would, of course, be students that would study, but most would go off and have fun.

A normal school day consisted of four periods. Each period was an hour long, with a twenty minute break between first and second, and third and fourth period. Lunch was also an hour. Classes were held six out of the seven days in a week. You didn’t go to all four periods every day though. Both the first and second year Upper-class students still attend the same number of classes in each week.

Zeph, Marcus, and Breeze walked out into the afternoon light. They had three hours to do whatever they wanted. Zeph looked over at Breeze. She was wearing her dark green ensemble today. Being a typical girl, she had a fashion sense. She was wearing a top that buckled up the front and had short sleeves, a matching skirt that was just above her knees, and a pair of leather knee-high boots that her father had gotten her several years ago. Her long black hair flew in the breeze.

“However much fun it is to see Zeph drool all over you Breeze, don’t you guys think we should go do something?” Marcus asked, breaking Zeph’s train of thoughts. This caused both Breeze and Zeph to blush.

“Well what do you propose we do Marcus?” Zeph asked in a sarcastic manner.

“We do have almost three hours to kill, why don’t we go to my place and see what my dad has done so far today,” Breeze suggested.

“Sounds good, I’m in. What about you Zeph?”

Like he really had a choice? Zeph agreed, and they headed towards town. They walked down the dusty road through town chatting along the way. Zeph glanced up at one of the street lamps. It would be amazing if they could make their glass balls large enough to be used as street lamps. He thought for sure the town Elders would buy them; after all it would be an unlimited light source.

They began to walk up the path leading out of town towards Gus’ house. Even from here they could see smoke rising in the distance. Gus must have the machine running again. Perhaps he’d figured out a way around the cooling problem? Rounding the bend just before the house it

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was clear that Gus had powered up the machine. Large amounts of white and grey smoke were rising out of the large smoke stack at the back of the house. Breeze also noticed something that hadn't been there before.

"Hey, look on the roof! There's another stack on top of the lab. Dad must have created another venting system," she observed.

Entering the house, the temperature had climbed to a staggering temperature just like the day before.

The three of them entered Gus' lab. Gus was working on some sort of smaller machine near the pressure chamber. Breeze called out her father's name, grabbing his attention. He tried to reply, but the noise from the pressure chamber made it impossible. They walked out into the main room of the house.

"Good to see you kids," He yelled, "I may have solved our little temperature problem. I was just about to test it out, come follow me." He motioned for them to follow him back into the lab.

Gus placed a metal mold underneath the nozzle of the machine. The mold resembled a large wooden bowl Zeph saw at most meals. Gus took hold of the machine's controls and began to coat the inside of the bowl with a thin layer of the molten glass. After several coats, he stopped and turned off the machine. A loud bang followed as he vested the excess pressure.

Removing large metal tongs off the wall, he picked up the bowl and walked several meters over to the new machine. He asked Zeph to open the door on the front. Gus then placed the bowl on the rack inside and closed the door. The so-called machine looked like a converted wood stove, which it most likely was. It was big, black, round, and it had a pipe running out of the top. It also had two pipes running straight out on either side of the door on the front. They were about the size of your palm around, but shrank to the size of your finger once they connected to the pot section of the machine.

"So, care to explain dad?" Breeze asked.

"Glad you asked," He said with a grin, "You see both you and I are going to power this machine. It really isn't a machine at all. Here's what you do." He motioned for her to stand in front of one of the pipes pointing out from the machine, as he took the opposing spot.

Breeze could feel the heat flowing up from the pipe. The glass bowl inside was still in a molten state. Gus instructed her to close her hands over the end of the pipe and send a blast of wind down the pipe. On the count of three both father and daughter sent a blast into the pipes. Loud

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noises began to fill the machine as the pressure built. They continued for several more minutes until Breeze motioned that she couldn't go on.

Exhausted she began to slump over. Zeph quickly ran over to steady her. Gus opened the cover on the door. The bowl no longer glowed. This however, did not mean that its surface had cooled. Gus picked up the metal mold using protective gloves he had made. He quickly set the mold down as he felt, through the gloves, that it was still very hot.

The west side of Gus' lab had large doors. Opening them Gus revealed a blacksmith section of the lab just outside the house. For some reason Zeph couldn't remember Gus having a blacksmith section of the lab. Turning the mold upside down Gus gave it several heavy hits with one of his metalwork hammers. Upon hearing the glass separate he placed the mold aside and picked up the glass bowl. There was a large metal basin of water outside which he proceeded to drop the bowl into.

Smoke and steam mixed together clouding the house. One could easily think it would rain any minute with the amount of cloud cover they had created from the machines. Steam sprang up from the basin as the glass submerged. After a minute or so Gus reached into the water. It felt rather warm. He knew that only a moment earlier, the water would have felt ice cold from sitting in the shade all day.

Zeph, Breeze, and Marcus all looked over as Gus pulled his hand out of the water revealing a perfectly smooth glass bowl. They were sure their shouting and yelling could be heard back in town.

"YES!!" Marcus exclaimed.

"Right on!" Zeph burst out.

"Oh that's nothing, look at this," Gus said placing the bowl on the metalwork table. Raising a large sledgehammer up, he brought it down on the bowl. Everyone except Gus had raised their arms in front of their faces expecting to have glass fly everywhere. They opened their eyes and looked over at the bowl. Not even a scratch was on the surface.

"This is the most amazing thing I have ever seen!" Marcus exclaimed. "When you said it was unbreakable I figured you meant dropping it on the ground. But when you said unbreakable you really meant it."

"Have you ever thought about making a line of dinner wear, Dad?" Breeze asked in a joking manner as she walked over to her father. Gus stopped for a moment and pondered it. "I'm only joking," she said shoving him.

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“What’s to joke about? People need plates and bowls that aren’t made out of some cheap tin or wood. But first things first, we need to complete at least one lamp ball before I start any other projects.”

Zeph walked over and picked up the bowl. It was truly amazing. The glass felt so smooth. Which, he had to admit, was because of Gus’ craftsmanship of the metal mold. He carried the bowl into the main room of the house where everyone was sitting. Breeze was exhausted. She wasn’t used to using her abilities at that magnitude. Gus on the other hand made it a point of practicing his Wind techniques several times a day, every day.

Gus and Marcus began walking around the house, opening up any of the windows that could be opened. Zeph sat next to Breeze on one of the couches. Both were covered in sweat. She looked as though she had just run a marathon. Her long black hair was sticking to her face, shoulders, and back. She looked over at him and smiled.

“This is all a little crazy, isn’t it?” she asked, leaning over. He wasn’t really sure how to respond. Everything was a little crazy lately. If only things could just go back to the way they were. He looked down. In his hands he held the newly made glass bowl. It was a symbol of everything new, and he realized no matter how much he wanted to, he couldn’t go back.

Gus and Marcus returned to the main room. Rather than sitting around talking about the experiment Gus suggested that they just take the afternoon to relax. Everyone agreed. Zeph couldn’t remember the last time they had all just hung out with each other.

As the hours passed the house cooled, and so did the feelings in Zeph’s heart. He felt his anxieties fade away as he talked with the others. Though his anticipations did remain for the knowledge that awaited him, he felt content to wait. The end of the week could not come soon enough. He yearned to learn more about symbols and glyphs. For the first time in his life he felt as though he was connecting to himself.

The large wooden clock in the corner of the room let out one resounding ring. The clock was an engineering masterpiece. Gus had spent a large portion of his life trying to learn how to craft machinery. His clock was perhaps his finest work. Although he had made many more complex machines in his time, none of them could stand up to the clock’s beauty. Gus had spend a great deal of time and money ordering the many components and brass needed for the internal parts and housing.

Everyone’s attention was directed towards the hands on the clock. It was four-thirty. The next class would start in a half an hour. The three teenagers stood up and began to collect their belongings. Gus walked them to the door. He stood in the doorway and watched them begin to walk away

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from the house. They were good kids he thought to himself. Better than good, they were truly amazing kids.

Gus closed the door and walked back to his lab. It was time to clean up. Grabbing a broom he began to sweep the floor. Dirt easily built up on the floor of the lab. He swept everything into the open section of the lab. It was better than sweeping it under a rug he thought. Carefully he swept around the pressure machine. Even though it was not on it was still hot. He had to keep a small flame burning inside the base of the machine. There was no way he would let all the molten crystal go to waste by something as careless as letting it cool and harden. Besides, oil was much easier to obtain than the lengthy process he went through of sifting the crystal from the sand.

The place looked much better now, all nice and clean. Looking around he felt a little out of place. There was nothing he could really experiment with. Their latest experiment had been a success; all he had to do now was wait for Iggy and see if the ball would also be a success. Gus was fairly sure the kids would be back this way in several hours. After all, things had been perfect with the glass earlier. Who wouldn't want to try a crack at it again?

Leaving the house he walked up a path leading the opposite direction from the main path to the house. Several minute later he reached the top of the hill behind his house. This was his training area. A large circle measuring nearly fifteen feet across was indicated by an arrangement of small logs. The ground had been covered with a thick layer of soft sand. Stepping into the circle Gus removed his shirt, boots, and socks. He was in excellent physical condition for a man of almost sixty, and it showed. The sand felt warm from the day as he sat in the middle of the circle.

Gus arranged several small stones on the ground around himself. He never used to train in this manner but he was trying to expand his ability and several of his talents. When he was a child, one morning at breakfast he sneezed and caused everything on the table to end up on the kitchen wall. Gus couldn't remember for sure, but on that day he told himself he would always strive to control his abilities.

Placing his arms out in front of him, he closed his eyes. He had placed ten stones in an evenly spaced circle around himself. Slowly he moved his hands behind his back until they touched. Concentrating he began to slowly extend his arms forward again. The stones began to lift off the sand as his hands passed over them. As his hand passed over each stone, it would rise softly up to the level of his hand and then float back down once his hand moved away.

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Gus opened his eyes. Even though his eyes had remained closed, he was still aware of what he had done. The Talent of Levitation was more common amongst people born with Wind abilities than anyone else. However, it was not commonly researched or practiced. Many of those with Wind abilities would simply use the wind to blast themselves or objects into the air. Levitation was different however. It required a highly concentrated mind.

Gus picked up two stones and placed them in the center of his palms. This was a conditioning exercise that he found most difficult, but necessary in his mental practices. Opening his left palm he used his ability to make the stone float. The stone spun slightly as wind from Gus' hand made it rise several inches. Gus opened his right palm. He tried to let his body continue with the stone in his left hand as he began to concentrate on the stone in his right hand. The stone began to rise. He felt his mental restraint begin to fail him as he fought to keep each stone in the air, using different parts of his concentration.

An hour had now past since the trio of youth had gone back to school. Gus still sat in the circle. He had failed his particular conditioning test once again. Perhaps his mind was not strong enough to be used in two different, yet very similar ways at once.

Picking up the stones he placed them back in the leather bag at his waist. Stopping for a moment he took one of the stones back out. Looking towards the direction of town he threw the stone as hard as he could. He didn't even use his wind abilities to propel the stone farther. The stone went sailing into the air. Gus reached his hand out and concentrated on the stone. A moment later the stone came rushing back into his hand. A smile came across his face as he looked down at the stone. Even if he couldn't master using both his abilities and talents at the same time, at least his Levitation talent had grown stronger.

Gus returned to the house and immediately went to the bathroom to clean up. The house did not have the luxury of water fixtures controlled by the pressure of a reservoir like Daunt. Gus pumped the handle next to the sink, and the water came splashing out. The water drops ran off his face, mixing with the dirt and oil that was draining down the sink. He ran his hands through his grey hair. He didn't feel old, but he was sure starting to look the part. Perhaps at some point he would dye his hair.

Gus walked out into the main room of his house. Strolling over to the kitchen he proceeded to make himself a sandwich. He hadn't realized how hungry he was until now. The house clock rang out with six chimes. The group would be getting out of school shortly, and most likely be making their way back here.

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Taking his food he sat down in the den. The picture of his departed wife gazed down at him from the wall. He missed her. Breeze was the near perfect image of her, which could be why he loved his daughter so much. Soon she would be gone too. He didn't know for sure of course, but he suspected that in a few months when she graduated she would leave. Why shouldn't she? The world was a wondrous place. A place that Gus had spent a great deal of his life searching out, and he knew he had only scratched the surface.

He finished his food and proceeded back to the lab. If the gang were coming soon he would have to start the machine up again. Gus started up the machine and added more water and wood to it. He closed the venting hatch and watched as the pressure valve began to rise. Then he simply took a seat and waited.

* * *

The three of them entered the class just in the nick of time. Mr. Yad scolded them as he closed the classroom door. They took their seats. Marcus seemed to be the only one not out of breath. Then again, he was in excellent shape.

Mr. Yad asked for a volunteer to uncover the oil lamps mounted on the walls. Several students stood from their seats and completed the task. He then asked for Zeph and Marcus shut the curtains, since they were closest to the windows. As the heavy drapes met together sealing off the light from the world, Mr. Yad walked around lighting each individual lamp. The room was now dark. Only the light from no more than half a dozen oil lamps filled the room.

Mr. Yad once again reclaimed his position behind his desk. The room fell silent; it was as if the light was the only thing filling the room. After several minutes of silence, the students began to look around at each other. No one knew what was going on. Several of the students began to whisper questions amongst each other.

“Silence!!” Mr. Yad's voice boomed in the room.

Many of the students grabbed their desks to avoid jumping out of their seats. Zeph felt his heart racing, and he knew Marcus' and Breeze's must be doing the same. Everyone's eyes were fixed forward. The old teacher walked to the front of his desk. In the dim light of the room they could see that he was forming a ball of water in front of himself.

“This class is not about literature or history. Nor is it about power or weakness. All your knowledge will not save you from the fist. All your

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strength will not save you from the battle. What you have learned here in my class is nothing,” he stressed the word ‘nothing’ “compared to the world that will lie before you.”

A brilliant light burst from the ball of water creating an almost blinding shimmering light in the room. Many students raised their hands to shield their eyes. Zeph didn’t though. He gazed straight into the light, as if somehow life would be waiting for him on the other side. Marcus and Breeze did the same, along with several other students. Mr. Yad searched every student’s face and kept a mental note of those that looked.

Lowering his hand the students were shocked to see that it was in fact a pin sized point of light in the center of his palm that had caused the display. It was said that those with Light abilities could create brilliant beams of light from their hands. Since Mr. Yad had only obtained some basic Light abilities though years of practice, the pin sized light was all he could muster. But when he combined it with his Water abilities, it became just as brilliant.

The water floating in the air flowed smoothly back into the palm of their teacher. Returning once again to his desk, Mr. Yad asked Zeph to open the drapes. The bright light from the day was nothing compared to the light the students had just seen.

“Marcus, would you take care of the lamps please?” Mr. Yad asked.

With a raise of his hand the flames jumped from the lamps and into the palm of Marcus’ hand.

“I know that most of you were not expecting anything like this, being that this period is usually not a mystical related class. That was a mere test. Some of you passed and some of you failed. Do not be discouraged or proud of either outcome.” The students looked at each other. The thought of failing something when you had no idea there was a test upset the students.

Mr. Yad now addressed the topic of the period. Just as in the first class of the day, this class was also ending a section and continuing on to the next. Not all of the classes in a day revolved around mystical education, otherwise there would be many adults who had mastered their abilities but were unable to read or write.

Not to be confused with an individual’s mark at the bottom of a letter, written language was called Initial. Even though everyone on Arkhay spoke the same language, there were many different dialects. People from different regions would pronounce words differently, sometimes making the words sound like a completely different language. Symbols and Glyphs

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represented two other forms of written languages. Initial consisted of several dozen letters, so words could be spelled out, rather than having a symbol representing a word or meaning.

“As you may know by now, our next units on both your mystical and social classes are going to be merged. Symbols and Glyphs are both part of written language and greatly connected to the mystical. This also means that I will be expecting twice as much effort from you.” Several groans were heard amongst the students.

“Of course all of you are ready for your Social Final at the end of the week. You will have your Mystical Final in the morning and the Social Final at the end of the day. Most of the final will consist on Trade, Marketing, Literary Representation, and an Essay. You will be able to choose your own topic for the essay. I will be looking for evidence of the literary rules of Initial that we covered in this unit.”

Most of the students were taking notes while Mr. Yad was speaking. He never gave out notes, even if they were requested. Whatever you needed to know, he would mention. It was up to the students to write them down themselves.

Zeph looked over his shoulder at Marcus. He was actually taking notes. Marcus was starting to grow up, somewhat at least. Zeph caught Breeze’s eye as he turned his head back. She gave him a quick wink, and he shot her a smile back.

The class continued on at a smooth pace. Social class covered all of the standard knowledge of life and the physical world. Zeph had always enjoyed the Social classes more than the Mystical classes. It made sense, since he was not able to grasp hold of his abilities. He enjoyed reading and writing. When most kids were out playing around with their abilities, he was writing. He had kept a journal after his father had been lost at sea. Reading it always made him feel better when he doubted his father was still alive. No matter what anyone told him, he refused to believe his father had died.

Zeph looked down at his hands. He hadn’t looked down at the marks for over a day now. Surprise, surprise, they were still there. He wondered if they would ever go away. It wasn’t that weird he thought. Everyone else he knew had a symbol on their forehead. What was the big deal if he had an extra one on each hand?

He finished writing up his notes as the chime rang out. Quickly gathering his books, he walked to the front of the class. Marcus and Breeze followed. Mr. Yad motioned for the three of them to come over to his desk. They stood off in the corner while the other students left. When the last of the students had left the classroom Mr. Yad turned to them.

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“I did not need a test to know that the three of you are destined for great things. But out of all my students, you three never even batted an eye earlier. Not even a flutter of an eyelid. Why do you suppose that is?” he asked.

They looked at each other unsure of how to answer. Zeph was the first to speak.

“I’m searching for more, and even though I didn’t know what you were doing, I knew it was something more.”

“Very true, what about you two?” Mr. Yad asked glancing at Marcus and Breeze.

They were not as quick as Zeph but they ran over their answers in their minds.

“I enjoy exploring new possibilities and new ideas. I was intrigued by what you showed us and I felt compelled to watch,” replied Marcus.

“I guess for me it’s simple. It looked beautiful, and I didn’t want to look away,” Breeze said, jumping in.

“Excellent answers from all of you. Your answers show who you are inside, the kind of person you are, and long to be.”

Just then Iggy walked into the room. Mr. Yad turned his attention towards him. “How are Iggy? Are you paying attention in class?” Mr. Yad asked with a grin.

“Yes, sir,” He answered.

“Are you looking forward to my class next year?”

“I sure am!” he answered enthusiastically.

“I have a strange feeling that you are meant for more than my class. But time will tell for sure.”

Everyone became puzzled at that statement, but before they could ask Mr. Yad shooed them off. The four of them walked out of the school. It had been a good day, of both school and of fun. Of course there was still more fun to come.

“What do you think Mr. Yad meant by what he said to Iggy?” Zeph asked stopping for a moment.

“Yeah, I was going to say something about that too,” Breeze said with a puzzled look on her face.

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They continued to talk about it as they walked down the path to town. Approaching the Rolling Hills Inn, Zeph had an idea. He told everyone to follow him, and he led them into the inn.

A musician was playing in the lounge, but all in all it was just as slow as it had been the other night. Zeph walked up to the counter. The innkeeper walked over, he was a grubby man. He looked as though his clothes hadn't been washed in weeks. Looks aside, he was a nice guy, but he did speak with a slur. Obviously he drank too much while on the job.

"Aren't you the boys that were in here the other night with that Shadow Mage fellow?" asked the innkeeper.

"Yes we are sir," Zeph replied.

"Well you tell that fellow to come back again, I do enjoy his overpaying."

"Oh I will, Mr..." Zeph trailed off. It just occurred to Zeph that this man had been the innkeeper here for several years and he never learned the man's name.

"Oh, I'm no 'Mr.' I ain't no fancy teacher or leader or nothing. People call me Gibbs."

"Well Gibbs, I'm looking for someone. He's a merchant captain on one of the ships in town right now. He told me he's staying here for the duration of his stay."

Gibbs pulled out a clipboard from under the counter. Holding it rather close to his face he squeezed his eyes together. The rest of them exchanged grins amongst each other as they watched the innkeeper read the check-in list.

"What you'd say his name was?" he asked looking at Zeph over the clipboard.

"Uh, I actually don't know it."

"Well when did he check in then?"

"I'm not sure of that either. Within the last few days I think." Zeph was slightly embarrassed with his lack of knowledge of a man that was supposed to be his business partner.

"I believe you're looking for me," said the stranger standing behind them.

They turned around to see the merchant captain that Zeph had talked to the day before. The man wasn't as scruffy as he had looked the day before. Perhaps he had cleaned himself up since landing at the docks.

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The man's hair had been neatly combed back and was tied in a pony-tail. He wore a plain white shirt and a black sailor's coat which was usually reserved for the captain. His massive belt buckle was unmistakable, and his grey pants flowed into his large leather boots. The most noticeable difference was his clean-shaven face.

Zeph looked up at the man's face. The man had a kind look in his eyes. He extended his hand to Zeph. Zeph shook it. He went around the circle shaking all of their hands.

"Where are my manners? I am Captain Victor, Captain of the Merchant ship Nephesh."

"Breathing Creature?" Iggy asked. Everyone shot a glance at Iggy. Victor smiled.

"Well done, not many people know the meaning of my ship's name. The ancient names must not fade away as time passes. It is only by holding onto the past that we can hope to brave the future."

They walked to the lounge area. Victor motioned for the four of them to have a seat. "So a lamp that never burns out? I have to say it sounded pretty farfetched when I heard you speaking with the Trade Master. But I'm not one to pass up an opportunity. Care to explain it more to me?" he asked Zeph.

Without going into specific detail Zeph explained how they planned to trap mystical fire inside impenetrable glass. Victor remained skeptical despite Zeph's words. Zeph then told him about the bowl they had made earlier, and how it truly was unbreakable.

"Well like I told you yesterday Zeph, I'll give you two silver kessa for each one you can supply me with. Now I do have an odd question. If these are flames encased in glass, how exactly are you going to package them? You can't simply hand someone a ball that never turns off."

Zeph hadn't thought of that. He glanced at everyone as if to say 'I'm open to suggestions.' Marcus spoke up, "Well what about those thick little black bags that most shops sell crystals in?"

"We don't have a crystal section in any of the shops in town," Zeph replied.

"No, but I'm pretty sure we have the fabric in the Embroidery Shop."

Everyone gave Marcus a funny look. This in turn made him blush. Since it seemed that Marcus knew his way around the Embroidery Shop,

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Zeph elected him to look into the making of the bags. Victor said he would buy the first shipment without the bags since it was a last minute idea. All the arrangements were made to meet up with Captain Victor again in two days. They also agreed to call the balls Sphere Lamps. It had a nice ring to it.

The four of them left the inn and headed for Gus' house. Almost like clockwork, when they rounded the road up to the house, the pressure vent blew. This meant that the pressure chamber of the machine was at its max and Gus was venting excess steam.

They walked up to the front door just as Gus opened it and stepped outside. He greeted the four of them and handed the glass bowl to Iggy. Iggy, of course, hadn't seen the bowl yet and was marveled by it. He threw it at the ground as hard as he could which made everyone jump, except Gus. The rest of them glared at Iggy. He chuckled to himself as he picked up the perfect, unscratched bowl.

"Well it looks like Iggy is in a great mood to get working," Gus said with a chuckle, "How about the rest of you?"

Everyone nodded their agreement. Today would be a monumental day for them and for Daunt. Gus would be able to open a shop again in town. It would seem odd if the town council refused him a shop a second time. It had hurt Gus' business when the town council has closed his shop. They had still allowed him to trade his inventions at the Trade Post by the docks. If not for that, Gus would have lost everything.

Since it would be loud in the lab, Gus went over the procedure of what they would be doing. Once in the lab Marcus would create the ball. Iggy would then create the protection field. Once this was done Marcus would maneuver the ball under the nozzle of the machine and Gus would apply the glass. Gus also suggested that Marcus make the ball a little smaller than before. The ball they had tried before had been about the size of a man's fist.

Pulling out one of the stones from his bag Gus handed it to Marcus. It was round and about the width of three fingers across and easily fit in the palm of your hand. In his other hand Marcus formed a fire ball of equal size. Gus nodded his approval.

Gus then walked over to Iggy. He told him to use his Focus as much as he could, and the rest of them would try to cool the ball as fast as possible. Focus was the mental energy that an individual uses when concentrating on their Abilities or Talents.

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Breeze was next in line for Gus' pep talk. He told her to do her best and he would do his best to help her. She was much more confident now than she had been earlier.

They entered the house and headed straight to the lab. There would be no wasting time today. Gus and Breeze took their positions by the pressure and cooling machine. Marcus and Iggy stood on both sides of the molding table. Zeph slid open the large door leading outside. Gus gave him a thumbs-up.

Marcus spread his feet and took a solid stance. Placing his hands in front of himself he formed a ball of fire the size Gus had requested. The ball floated forward and stopped between the molding table and the nozzle just above it. There was a quick flash over the ball and the surface became sooth. All eyes looked at Iggy. He had a cocky smile and gave everyone a nod.

It was a rare occasion to see that kind of expression on Iggy's face. Everyone knew he had it in him, they just rarely ever saw it. Iggy was very social with the other students in his class, but became a little shy around older kids.

Gus pulled the lever to release the molten glass. Grabbing the control stick he maneuvered the end of the nozzle back and forth. Marcus began to spin the ball so an even coating of glass would be on the surface. A minute later Gus pulled the release lever back again. He ran over to the wall and grabbed the metal tongs. Breeze opened the front of the cooling machine.

The molten ball of glass hung in the air. Despite the sweat dripping down their foreheads both Marcus and Iggy appeared to be holding up ok. Gus grabbed the ball out of the air with the tongs and placed it into the cooling oven. Zeph took the tongs from Gus as he and Breeze took their positions.

The noise was more than Iggy was expecting as both father and daughter blasted wind into the machine. After several minutes Iggy began to start feeling the drain on his mind. He grabbed Marcus' arm. Marcus looked down then quickly ran over to Gus. Yelling at the top of his lungs, he informed Gus that they had little time left. Gus looked over at Iggy and nodded to Marcus.

Zeph walked over to his little brother. It was obvious that he was struggling to continue. Gus and Breeze stopped and Gus grabbed the ball out of the machine. It was still stable for the moment. It looked fabulous. Perfectly smooth and shining brightly. Everyone knew that if Iggy lost his

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concentration the ball would once again heat up and turn into a pile of useless glass.

Zeph reached out to place his arm around his little brother but stopped as he caught a glance at his hand. The symbol on the top of his hand was glowing. He pulled his hand away from his brother and the illumination faded.

This was not the time or the place for some weird mystical stuff to be happening. Zeph moved his hand back towards Iggy and watched as the symbol began to illuminate again. What did this mean? Zeph had no idea, and he wasn't sure if this was the best time to find out.

Breeze looked over at Zeph and noticed the illumination on his hand. Puzzled, she walked over to him as Gus pulled the pressure release lever. The loud boom caused Iggy to jump. Zeph quickly turned to him and told him to keep going. Iggy nodded, although it was clear he really wanted to give up. Even Marcus, who played with fire all the time, looked a little drained.

Gus ran outside and the rest followed. Plunging the ball into the basin of water he let out a loud HOORAY! Everyone smiled and clapped their hands.

"In a few minutes the ball will permanently cool," Gus said with excitement.

"How exactly will we know when that is?" Iggy asked with a distressed look on his face.

"Yeah, I was wondering that too, cause I'm also starting to feel the kick of over using my Focus," Marcus said exhaling.

"It will be very soon. Don't worry boys, just try to hold out," Gus replied. They all stood by the water basin and waited. Both Marcus and Iggy looked weak but were pushing through it.

All of a sudden both boys grabbed their heads and let out cries in pain. They frantically tried to grab hold of something. Their legs began to buckle as it was clear they were about to pass out. Gus and Breeze's eyes locked on the two boys.

The symbols on Zeph's hands instantly became illuminated. The boys fell to their knees. In what seemed like less than an instant Zeph rushed over. Without thinking he placed his hands on top of each of their heads.

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Light burst from the palms of his hands, showering down on Marcus and Iggy. Time seemed to slow down. Zeph felt as though he were floating. He could feel his whole body, inside and out. Light rushed past his eyes and the world began to grow dark. His head felt heavy as he let it begin to fall backwards.

The ground seemed to roll away and was replaced with the sky above. He felt his hands slip off the heads of the boys. His body arched backwards. The sensation of falling overtook him as his knees became weak. The last thing he remembered was his head connecting with the hard ground behind him, then darkness.

Day 4

*When I dare to be powerful, to use the
strength that I know that is inside me,
it becomes less and less important whether
or not I am afraid to do so.*

- Zeph