



Chapter Eleven

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Wake up, sleepy face.”

A familiar face greeted Sam from the doorway of his and Gus’s bedroom in the cabin.

Sam rubbed his eyes and squinted as the morning sun poured through the window. There in the doorway was Sayvon, her brown hair in a long thick braid as always.

“Good morning,” Sam yawned heavily. “And it’s sleepy *head*,” he told her.

“Oh, sorry,” she blushed, her warm rose skin glowing in the golden light. “I’ve been practicing, but still don’t have all of them down.”

Sam jumped out of bed and gave her a giant bear hug. He hadn’t seen her since last festival, but in his letters to Talister through the year, he had included a note or two to Sayvon.

Thankfully, before leaving Lior last year, he had a chance to tell her about his mother being raised with Sayvon’s father. Now that there were no more awkward feelings between them, Sam could actually

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look at her as his family. Maybe not a blood relation, but it was enough for him.

Sayvon hugged him back. “I missed you, Samuel!” she laughed. “I can’t believe Mentorship is here already.”

He tossed on a shirt. “Yeah, I know,” he said, checking his breath to see if it was good enough for going to breakfast without brushing. “Are you ready?”

“Yes,” she said sadly. “I love my parents, but I’m kinda ready to make my own way, you know?”

Sam did know. Except for he never really had parents that cared like others did. But still he wanted to experience the world.

“Let’s go. Breakfast is waiting.” She grabbed his hand.

The other three were already downstairs, with Talister and his wife, Julena, just sitting down to stacks of pancakes and birch syrup.

Emma looked at Sayvon and Sam a bit strange as they came down the stairs hand in hand, but quickly caught herself. They were family.

Sitting down to breakfast with the Talisters gave Sam, Lillia, Emma, and Gus a little bit of normalcy. They had missed the family atmosphere the families in the cabin circle provided, and it felt good to be with others they knew, even without their parents.

The four teens had spent the entire festival week going to the feast, acrobatic shows, and Light illusionist acts by themselves. Although they had enjoyed themselves, having eaten way more than they should and staying up far too late telling stories next to the fire, they still missed the familiar faces they had come to know in the circle.

Talister apologized profusely for having to leave them alone, but from his tone, Sam could tell that it could not have been avoided.

“You know, you four should come with us to Telok someday,” Julena told them. “Rolling hills, a lake you can see down fifty meters clearly.”

“I like the Maripoth Forest,” Sayvon added. “Huge ancient trees that seem to speak to you as you walk through them.”

Talister sipped his coffee as the rest of them finished off the last of the pancakes. “Yes. Truly remarkable they are. It is said that the



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Watchers from long ago will tell you the secrets of Lior.”

“Really?” Emma asked.

He nodded. “They have spoken to me a time or two when I was in a very dark place.”

Gus was skeptical, but careful not to offend Talister. “I certainly do not fault those who visit the forest for those reasons, but there are quite a few in the scientific world that would agree that the voices are there simply because they want them to be.”

Talister laughed and patted him on the back. “Always the pragmatist, Gus my friend! I suppose one day you will have to find out for yourself.”

They picked up the dishes and said goodbye to the Calphers, who promised to retrieve them long before the start of the Kolar game and sendoff of the student candidates to Mentorship.

They had no idea what to expect. They only knew that they were allowed a large backpack with whatever belongings they could fit inside. According to Talister, trying to pack too many things would only get in the way, as Mentees were trained to make do with only the basic necessities.

Sam packed slowly, trying to make sure he wouldn't leave any essentials behind. Toothbrush, journal, shirts, pants and undergarments, his coffee mug, shoes, and a few other odds and ends he could think of. The last thing he took from the closet was the new training robe he had purchased at Osan's shop the day prior. Each of the Mentees were required to have one, and Emma thought it best to check on uncle Osan anyway.

Mr. Sterling had also suggested a small knife to take with them, not just for protection, but for general use as well. “Before you get to the school, you will be going through the Themane region, and Cembra City is a wonderful place to do some last-minute shopping for anything you may have forgotten,” he told them. “It is the closest place to the school, which isn't really close to much of anything.”

Sam joined the others in the living room about an hour before the games were to begin. It was an odd excitement that they all had for

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what was to come in the next months. Paired with the anticipation of the Mentorship training was also the worry of what was happening in White Pine with their folks.

Emma had learned to deal with it day by day, but Sam could tell she was worried. She knew her parents would do all they could to get word to them that they were safe, so when days continued to pass with no word, her resolve began to diminish.

They had visited the Protector's Office twice that week, but no one offered them any information, not that they had any to give.

Furthermore, Boggle had not been heard from since they saw him at his workshop and left the Stars with him. He promised to give them updates, but even he let them down.

If it weren't for Talister and the others in the circle, they would have been truly alone.

When Sayvon, Talister, and Julena arrived at the cabin, they locked up and walked together toward the stadium. Sam's pack was lighter than he thought, and he was thankful he had left much of it in the cabin.

Gus seemed to be struggling a bit with his, and judging from the looks of it, he had added a few more books than he normally carried.

Books, Sam thought. That was one thing he had forgotten. Hopefully he could find one or two in Cembra City.

As they waded their way through the throngs of people entering the stadium, Sam caught a glimpse of Tarmin, the Son of Light that helped save them last year from Arazel in the forest. He nodded and smiled gently at Sam, then turned and disappeared through the crowd.

"Through this way, Mentees!" a large man with a short grey beard hollered, pointing behind him to a set of half-moon double wooden doors leading behind the stadium. "All Mentees going to Helel Malach this way!"

Talister led them to the doors, then gathered them around him. "This is where we must leave you, I am afraid," he told them, a tear forming in his eye. "I remember the day when I entered Mentorship,



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and now ... so much time has passed.” Julena clung to his arm, tears welling up in her eyes as well.

“I will leave you with the same prayer that my father left me with.” He grabbed his daughter’s hand and motioned for the others to take each other’s hands as well.

“May the Creator give you peace, and guide you toward truth, sheltering you with his Light, so that you may see through the Darkness.”

They bowed their heads as he prayed, and Sam felt the warm Light creep into his body. He let it come, and soon his own hands radiated with the same warm feeling as the others allowed the Light to surge through their hands and around the circle.

Sam opened his eyes for only a moment, and was greeted by Emma’s eyes opposite him, her entire body glowing softly in the waning sunlight of the day.

The others glowed as well, and for several minutes the Light moved through them, pulsing as though it were alive within them. Finally, Talister let his daughter’s hands drop and the Light ebbed from them like a wave flowing back out to sea.

“You are never far from the Light, young people,” he said softly, then opened his arms for an embrace from all of them. “Now, it’s time you leave us old people to get some rest before we keel over.”

They laughed and said their goodbyes to the Calphers, tears still rolling down many of their cheeks. The last of the Mentees were making their way through the doors, so the five teens picked up their packs and followed the stragglers into the dark hallway.

The only light came from the wall of stained-glass windows beside them, which now cast only the occasional red, blue, or green ray on the Mentees as they passed.

Their steps echoed through the hallway as they made their way to another set of wooden double doors in front of them, where Mentees were filing through into what looked like a large room built under the stadium.

“This way!” Another shorter man with curly dark hair and glasses

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shouted and pointed at the last of the students walking down the hallway. “Hurry up then!”

The room was large indeed, and just as dark. Torches lined the walls and gave off a cave-like appearance, but the only other source of light Sam could see was the glowing stone on the staff of the man who stood on a small stage in front of them.

“Good evening, Mentees,” thundered the voice of a tall, thin, hooded man in a white robe. Sam immediately recognized him as the one who led the ceremony last year with the Sons of Light.

“I am Mentor Aron of the School of the Shining One!” He smiled largely, the light from his staff illuminating his face in blue Lazuli Light. “I would like to welcome you all here this evening, and I am sure you are all anticipating greatly your journey to the Helel Malach!”

Cheers rang up from the hundreds of Mentees before Mentor Aron.

“Now, let me offer my sincerest gratitude for your willingness to serve the Descendants of Lior in Mentorship, and to warn you ...” he paused for a moment as ripples of talk flitted through the crowd. “You have all been given a great gift. One by the Creator almighty himself.”

Mentor Aron’s staff began to glow brighter, until it illuminated the entire room so brightly that Sam and the others could not stand to look at it.

“Do not use this gift lightly,” he said as the light began to retreat back into the staff. “For it is given with purpose, as you here have been called with purpose. The Light you hold within you is sacred, and only to be used for good, not evil. To dispel the Darkness, and to fight those who attempt to snuff out its life.”

He paused as another hooded person whispered something in his ear. Nodding, he looked at the crowd of Mentees once again. “Remember, the gift that is within you is not yours to control. It is a part of you, as the Creator is a part of you. It will always be there, just as the Creator will be!”

More cheers came from the crowd. This time, Sam and the other four cheered.



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Suddenly, the staff and Mentor Aron disappeared, and the only sounds came from the stadium above them as the ceremony and Kolar game commenced.

The Mentees waited in the darkened room throughout the ceremony and the entirety of both Kolar games, during which several of them became agitated with the ordeal. Why would they bring them here so early just to make them wait in the room? Some grumbled, but others stayed silent and listened to the roar of the crowd above them. Occasionally a bit of dust would unloose itself from the ceiling and make its way down to a Mentee's head when the cheering got exceptionally loud.

Gus, Sayvon, Sam, Lillia, and Emma stood still, waiting for the end of the games. Not only did they know that all of Mentorship training was essentially a test, but also that it was of a sacred order. Before they left, Miss Karpatch had warned them of that very thing.

Others did the same, having been warned by someone as well, no doubt. Quickly it became clear in the crowd who would likely have trouble while being mentored and who would not.

"Remember what she told us," Emma said quietly. "Mentorship is not about serving us, but learning to become the servant."

"It's true," Sayvon agreed. "It's going to be tough for all of us to learn that."

Sam nodded. He admitted that this was going to take some work, having been raised with a maid for quite some time. He was used to being waited on by Estella whether he wanted it or not.

Occasionally he would catch himself expecting things to be a certain way or would lash out just the slightest when something was not done for him on time.

But he also remembered the day he saw Estella scrubbing his socks by hand until they were gleaming white once more. He had gotten used to walking around the floor in his sock feet and often into the garage or patio, and his socks would get plenty dirty by the end of the day. He had always thought that the washing machine would take care of it, but

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now he knew the truth. Someone had to scrub his socks clean because he was too lazy to put on his slippers.

But Lior—and the Creator—had changed him in ways he could have never imagined. Those things he used to desire he did no longer, like becoming famous or rich, or taking revenge on those who abandoned him. His friends and family here meant more to him than anything he could have asked for or demanded. Perhaps servanthood wouldn't be so bad.

The cheers above raised to a fever pitch, then died suddenly as the voice of the Chancellor could be heard loudly through the stadium.

Suddenly, Sayvon spotted a friend of hers crying in the middle of the crowd. “Hey guys, I’m going to stay with Yadris,” she said loudly to the others over the cheering.

Sam watched her go, a bit saddened that he wouldn't get to spend the trip getting to know his only cousin. At least they would be together at Mentorship.

“Before we send our very own Mentees on their journey to training, I would like to offer a word of caution to all here this evening.” The Chancellor's voice thundered above them. “The Protector's Office of Lior has alerted me that an increased number of Metim have been spotted in some of the more remote locations, and while we are indeed safe under our warrior's protection, caution must be taken while traveling back to your regions.”

The Chancellor paused, and slight murmurings could be heard from the crowd above.

“Please take care to travel in the daytime and avoid remote paths or roads that could be potentially hazardous.”

Suddenly, below the murmuring crowd, two large metal doors opened before the students waiting in the darkened room.

Sam and the others shielded their eyes from the piercing lights from the stadium, but soon the form of the Chancellor could be seen standing in the mid-center of the field, his arms held out in front of him.

“Descendants! Liorians of Themane, Nais, Thalo, and Telok, let us



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welcome together our newest Mentees, chosen by the Creator, of the year four thousand four hundred and fifteen!”

The crowd above them could be heard standing and clapping loudly, waiting for the students to emerge from their cavern below.

Instantly Mentor Aron was in front of them and beckoned the Mentees out onto the Kolar field.

They followed him onto the soft grass, stopping directly in front of the Chancellor, who still had his arms raised toward them. Then he motioned for them to turn and face the crowd.

The stadium erupted in cheers and clapping, as the Mentees stood gazing on the huge crowd before them.

For several minutes, the clapping and cheering continued, until finally the Chancellor and Mentor Aron had to send up flames of Lazuli into the air to quiet them down.

The Chancellor prayed a blessing over the group of hooded youths in front of him, his voice genuine and sincere as he recited the ancient words.

Sam had not gotten to see this part last year, for this was about the time they were sneaking away to ride the Lightway to the Old City.

The Chancellor finished, and the crowd resumed its cheers. Then, from somewhere in the dark expanse of the sea behind the field, the deep echo of a horn sounded four short blasts in the night air.

Mentor Aron and the Chancellor motioned for the group to continue behind them toward the back of the Kolar field, where a small door opened in the wall leading out of the back of the stadium.

Single file, the snaking line of robed youths exited from the stadium facing the sea. Sam watched them file into the opening, their silhouettes against the moonlight disappearing against the horizon.

As they drew closer, Sam turned and glanced at the crowd once more, the cheering throng becoming a blur against the bright lights of the stadium.

I almost didn't get to go to Mentoring, he thought suddenly. He was the unknown stranger of Lior, attached somehow to an ancient Dark legend, and many in Lior still believed it, even after the Council told

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them it wasn't so. Even still, they cheered. Maybe not at him personally, but at least they weren't talking behind his back or outright yelling at him.

Emma snatched the sleeve of his robe and pulled him toward the dark opening where Gus and Lillia were already entering, and then she scolded him to keep up with her or they could risk getting separated.

There were only a few others behind them, but none were paying much attention to Sam or Emma as they too were journeying to parts unknown and showed the same apprehension.

Through the doorway the walkway ended suddenly, curving downward toward a thin stairway carved into the side of a cliff. The only light was the moon above. Upon their descent downward, they realized that one wrong move could pitch them over a hundred-meter drop to the sea below.

Still holding his sleeve, Emma gathered her courage and started down the stone steps, dragging Sam behind her. He reached out to the wall on his left, keeping his hands on the cold stone for support as they continued downward toward the black sea.

The stairs seemed to go on forever, and with each step, the noise of the waves crashing against the rock grew louder.

Soon, however, the stairs turned inward and entered the rock face, blocking out nearly all light except for the flame of a small torch attached to the wall.

They continued their descent, following the line in front of them until the sounds of shouts could be heard echoing off the stairway walls. The line slowed, then stopped, then inched along for several minutes. Emma let go of his robe and clasped his hand, her skin cold and clammy.

The men ordering students around the dimly lit space could finally be seen as Sam and Emma stepped off the last step into the cool cavern. Gus and Lillia waited for them, clutching their large packs and watching the mass of students being directed toward one of four large wooden ships before them. Sam looked around for the sight of Sayvon, but decided she must have already boarded.



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The interior of the cavern was enormous, and nearly as tall as it was wide. Each of the ships stood nearly five stories tall with their masts, and nearly as long as they were high. They were sleek in design, yet Sam could tell the ships were several hundred years old as they floated heavily on the water inside the cave.

A shorter raffish man wearing a thick woolen sweater and sporting a long beard directed them to the ship on the far side of the docks. They clomped past the first three ships to the fourth vessel, where another man nearly as short as the first whistled to them and pointed to the plank spanning the dock to the ship's deck.

They followed the remaining students of the line over the thin plank to the ship's bow, dropping their laden packs with the others on the sprawling deck.

Some were already being directed into the expansive cabin of the boat, while some stayed on the deck to watch the remaining luggage being loaded and the last-minute checks by the crew before the caravan would shove off.

"Rigging secure!" one of the small men yelled as he circled the hull from the docks.

"Aye," a hefty man in a green robe said gruffly from a balcony behind them. In front of the man was the ship's helm.

"Full to the gunwales, Captain!" another of the crew yelled from the belly of the ship.

The captain nodded to the first officer beside him, and immediately he began yelling commands to the crew on the deck below, who immediately sprang into action, tightening ropes, securing various cargo items, and checking the ship from bow to stern once more before pulling up anchor.

"Here we go!" Gus ran to the side of the ship, gesturing for the others to follow.

Emma, still holding Sam's sweaty hand, now let go and hurried to where Gus stood at the ship's side, but waved animatedly for him to join her.

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Lillia shrugged and shoved Sam toward the others playfully. “Here we go, wonderboy,” she smiled.

Suddenly, a burst of blue Lazuli Light shot downward from the bow of the ship into the seawater below, and the great vessel began to back out slowly from the cavern’s entrance.

The churning surf of the Yarey sprayed a salty mist over the deck of the ship as it emerged from the safety of the cavern into the moonless night.

The three other ships backed out from their ports inside the cliff as well, the Lazuli from their bows flooding the angry waves below them.

“Lazuli powered.” Sam was fascinated. “Do they even use the sails?”

Gus scowled. “I’m not sure. I have never been on one of these ships before,” he admitted.

“It’s pretty amazing,” Emma said as the four ships turned away from the cliffs and began moving toward the dark expanse in front of them.

Behind them was the city in all of its illuminated beauty, with the familiar spires rising high into the night sky. The crowd from the stadium would either be headed home or to the festival streets once again to get a nightcap or catch the last of the acrobats from Themane Street.

The four stood on the ship’s deck for nearly an hour as the vessels formed a line and powered out into the night, but when a heavy fog sank around them, they decided to make their way inside the cabin where most of the others had already gone.

Just as they were about to open the dark sea-weathered doors to the cabin, however, a scurry of movement behind them and a series of shouts made them turn back around to see what was happening.

“Clear the jacks!” the officer at the helm yelled out as two short men pulled the pins from the main sail. “Hoist the main!” the first officer continued. “Get the seawater out of your trousers, men! We’ve got us a breeze!”



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The men rushed around the deck once again, until all at once three enormous sails billowed out willingly into the beckoning wind. Each of the sails took on the shape of the Irin, a Watcher's wing.

"We are at full sail, Captain!" one of the deck mates called up as the ship caught the steady wind and lurched forward.

The Lazuli Light behind the ships blinked out one by one as each deployed their sails in favor of the natural propulsion the air currents provided.

Steadying themselves, Sam, Emma, Lillia, and Gus followed a few other students who had remained on deck to the cabins below to await the two-day journey to the port closest to Cembra City, then on to Mentorship.

"I just don't see how we have to get stuck with that Dark-sucker and his friends." The voice could be heard loudly as the four found an empty set of chairs in the cabin's interior.

Immediately Sam picked out the voice in the crowd of other faces. An average sized boy with brown hair and tan skin glared at Sam as he picked through the other clusters of chairs and tables.

Two other thin blond boys and a thicker dark-haired girl laughed loudly at his rude comment. The group was sitting around a large central fireplace in the middle of the room, feet propped up on chairs so others couldn't sit in them.

There seemed to be enough other places to sit, however, and no one seemed to mind giving them plenty of space.

"That's Yorin Moge, one of the High Council's grandsons," Lillia whispered to Sam before turning and giving them a dirty look only she could produce.

"Biggest jerk in Lior, by far," Emma agreed. "It's said he has actually convinced his grandfather to replace one of the guards simply because they wouldn't let him in a restricted area of the city."

Sam turned and looked at the bully once more, which only drew more laughs and jeers from the group.

Now that he had dealt with Bush back home, and Arazel here in Lior, the idea that someone could be bullying him didn't seem that big

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of a deal. For the most part, they seemed harmless anyway.

“Just ignore them,” Emma said just loud enough for the jeering group to hear, which only made them laugh all the more.

“I plan to,” Sam flopped into a comfortable leather chair that faced the fire, which was happily dancing on the large pile of wood inside the iron gating.

The others sat with him, pointing their chairs toward the fire, which seemed to be the only source of heat in the whole of the ship’s interior.

Sam glanced around the modest cabin, noticing the bunks around the room for the first time. Some students were already in them, making good use of the rest time on the way to Mentorship.

From what Sam could tell, the ship had everything they needed for the two-day trip. Lavatories just off to the right of the stairway up to the main deck, beds with bunk rolls already furnished, and a small kitchen that looked as though it could fit two cooks as long as they weren’t too portly.

He sunk down in the chair, barely noticing the stares from around the cabin. By now, everyone had heard the rumors about his encounter with the Dark Lord Arazel, and Sam’s connection with the Prophecy of Darkness.

Eventually they would ignore it, just like every other rumor out there. It would just take time.

Emma leaned over in the chair and put her head on his shoulder, her hair draping over his chest.

Instantly, the chills returned, as they had done so many times before when she had gotten close to him.

Emma was his rock, and the best friend he had ever had. She knew him better than anyone he had ever known in his lifetime, family included. She always had his back, regardless of the situation. For that, he was truly grateful.

At some point he must have drifted off, because when he lifted up his head from the chair, a line had formed near the kitchen and a wonderful smell was drifting past his nose.



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“Late snack. Anyone interested?” Gus slipped his shoes on and stood.

Lillia stretched, apparently having napped with the rest of them as well. “I’m in.”

Emma lifted her head up suddenly. “Are those cheese tibbs I smell?”

“I do believe so,” Gus smiled. “It’s been awhile since I’ve had those!”

Lillia rolled her eyes and sunk back down in her chair. “Cheese filled sour bread gives me heartburn this late at night.”

Sam hopped off the chair and joined the others in line. Smelling the baking bread and melting cheese made his stomach growl.

“First they sour the bread for nearly a week, then use barrel-aged cheese and cook it in with the dough,” Gus narrated as they moved through the line. Sam was sure Gus smacked his lips nearly a dozen times as he recounted the entire recipe.

Two short but hefty women plopped a heaping basket of what looked like hush puppies on his plate, then motioned for Sam to take one of the steel cups at the end of the window full of greenish liquid.

“What is it?” Sam asked as he sipped the sweet substance back at their spot amongst the chairs.

“Green tea and falshorn fruit.” Emma’s eyes lit up as she tasted it. “One of my favorites!”

Sam slipped one of the cheese tibbs into his mouth, allowing the melted cheese to ooze onto his tongue. The bread was sweet—but savory at the same time. It was delicious.

Slinking back into the chair, Sam then noticed the middle-aged bearded man sleeping in one of the bunks in the corner of the room.

“Whoshat?” he asked, mouth full of warm cheesy bread.

Gus turned from his own basket and pushed his glasses up on his nose. “Mentor Sauravin,” he said quietly, as if his voice would suddenly wake the man. “One of the most powerful Mentors, many Descendants say.”

Emma peered at the man, whose black braided beard was tucked

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neatly behind his chin. “Daddy says he’s a bit unconventional in the way he does things.”

“A rebel. I like that.” Lillia smiled and nodded.

Gus slipped two more tibbs in his mouth. “I heardth—one thime he kill’th a Dark Lord by himthelf.”

His eyes were wide, but it was tough to take him seriously with his mouth full of bread. It was too much for Emma, who burst out laughing so hard she ended up spilling her tea all over her pants.

Lillia rolled her eyes. “Think you could fit another four thousand—.” She was instantly cut short by a large explosion that rocked the ship angrily to one side.

BOOM! Another explosion up on the main deck. This one threw all four of them out of their chairs. A good number of other Mentees were also dazed and scattered about the cabin. Cheese tibbs rolled everywhere.

“What in the name of Light was *that?*!” Gus picked himself off the floor and helped a dazed Lillia to her feet. Sam too, after regaining his balance from the heavily listing ship, helped up Emma.

“Let’s go up and find out!” Lillia hollered, ripping her hand from Gus’s grasp.

The four raced up the cabin steps and landed out on the deck to find a scene of chaos. There were multiple masts ablaze and one side of the ship’s deck had a huge flaming hole in it near the edge.

Three of the short Themane deck mates were frantically trying to put out the fires while simultaneously firing bolts of Light up into the dark sky above them.

Sam looked up and suddenly saw what had just caused the fire to rain down upon them.

Two massive dragons circled high above the group of ships, their iridescent scales glowing green and blue against the blackness of night. A streak of blue and red fire erupted from one of the beast’s mouths as it swooped down upon the ship in front of them, torching its deck fiercely with a spray of deadly flames.

“WE HAVE TO DO SOMETHING!” Lillia yelled at the stunned



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teens. Others had gathered on the deck to watch the scene unfold as well.

Lillia ran out onto the deck with the other men and began tossing bolts up toward the dragons. One of her more powerful bolts struck the side of the dragon closest to the ship, at which point it changed course and began flying toward them once again.

Finally driven out of shock, Emma ran out on the deck to join Lillia, who was valiantly throwing bolts toward the oncoming dragon as quickly as she could. Emma held up her hands and waited for the imminent destruction to befall them, her eyes as red as the flames already consuming the deck.

“WAIT!” Lillia yelled to her. “NOT YET!”

Emma nodded, her eyes fixed on the beast above.

Closer it came, dodging nearly every bolt Lillia and the other men threw up at it.

Then it opened its massive mouth and bellowed a spray of piercing blue flames directly at the two teens.

The deck mates watched helplessly as the flames raced toward them. They scrambled to get to Emma and Lillia before it was too late but were stopped by the raging fires surrounding them on the deck.

Sam was stuck where he was, watching the deadly firebolt descend from the mouth of the ancient beast toward two people he cared about. Gus was no different, paralyzed in place next to Sam.

“NOW!” Lillia screamed at Emma, who was shaking as she held her arms fast.

At first nothing happened, and Lillia looked to Emma in horror, hoping she had not trusted her too quickly.

But then, as if the Creator himself had thrust his own Light into her, an enormous shield burst from Emma’s hands and surrounded nearly the entirety of the ship, stern to hull.

The intensity of the Light was incredible, instantly dousing all of the burning flames on the deck.

Suddenly the shield was surrounded by the firestorm from the dragon’s hail of flames, and Emma went to her knees.

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Sam finally snapped out of his paralysis and ran out to help Emma keep her balance as the torturous heat rained upon them. Lillia was with him, each of them holding her arms up to support against the powerful flames.

Just about the time Sam thought they would all collapse, the deafening roar from the flames ended. The giant shield blinked out, and Emma fainted.

Sam caught her, and he and Gus carried her back toward the cabin. The crowd of students had disappeared, no doubt taking shelter below deck.

Behind them still raged a war against the dragons, with streaks of Light piercing the sky all around each of the ships as Themane men threw as many bolts above as they could.

Sam glanced back to see two bolts of Light seeming to dance among the dragons, each throwing bolts and producing shields as they fought the beasts.

Mentors, Sam thought. *Creator be with them.*

Suddenly the man with a braided black beard opened the door of the cabin and helped them carry Emma down the stairs to one of the chairs.

“If you have it from here, I believe my brothers need me up above,” Mentor Sauravin smiled.

Lillia nodded.

“By the way, you two ladies performed marvelously,” he said, then bolted upstairs and out into the raging night.

On a whim, Sam raced upstairs behind him, only to see a brilliant flash of light as the Mentor transformed into Light and streaked off toward the battle high above.

Sam watched as the three Mentors fought bravely, but with each attack, the dragons only seemed to grow more irritated and spew more ferocious blasts of fire.

The two other ships behind them had managed to get the fires on the deck under control, thanks to the Mentors who were drawing the attack from the fleet below.



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Then, in one moment, all three Mentors gathered in the air and sent one huge blast of Light, hitting one of the dragons square in the side, which sent it tumbling through the air.

At once, the chaos halted. Both dragons circled the group of three warriors in the air, then broke off and disappeared into the night.

The sounds of battle ceased, and only the soft crash of the waves against the hull of the ship could be heard. All four ships were smoking as their decks recovered from the flames.

The Themane deck mates wandered aimlessly about the deck, scanning the skies above for any trace of the dragons to return. Then three more brilliant flashes appeared near the bow, startling Sam out of his stupor from what had just occurred.

“What in the name of Creation would cause them to attack us like that?” a hooded young Mentor asked harshly, his eyes wide.

“It has not happened for thousands of years,” the eldest Mentor responded. “Is everyone safe?” he said, turning to one of the deck mates.

“Sir, yes, thanks to you. We got the signal flash from the other ships just a moment ago,” the bewildered Themane man answered.

“We have to respond,” the younger Mentor said wildly.

The eldest Mentor held up his hand. “First, we must send word that the dragons have turned—at least some of them. Then we can consider our responses to this action—”

Mentor Sauravin held a finger to his lips and pointed at Sam, who still stood at the door to the cabin. “We should discuss this later,” he said. “Consequently, I believe the information should be given in person, do you agree?”

The other Mentors nodded.

Then Sauravin pointed at the sails above, which were in shambles. “However, a message should be sent to the school that we will be arriving a bit later than usual.”

The eldest Mentor clasped his hands together and then held them open. A small ball of Light formed in his hand. With his other hand

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he scribbled a short message into the Light and then tossed it into the air. Off it streaked into the night toward its recipient.

“Sauravin, would you be so kind to deliver the news to the Chancellor? I think I will pay a visit to Keeper Tanniym and find out what happened.”

Sauravin nodded. “And what happens if the dragons return?”

The elder Mentor gestured toward Sam and the cabin door. “Well, make sure you recruit the young ladies who helped saved the ship. Creator knows we need more like them.”

Then in a blast of Light, two of the Mentors were gone, leaving only the younger one behind. He glanced briefly toward Sam, then disappeared over the railing toward the ship behind them.

Sam slipped back into the cabin and down the steps to where Lillia, Emma, and Gus were sitting. If they weren’t before, the four of them were most certainly the center of attention now.

Emma was awake when he sat down, her eyes dim and tired. “Are you okay?” she asked Sam.

Sam snorted. “I should be asking you that question.”

She smiled. “I’m fine. Just glad it didn’t fail.”

Sam knew she was referring to the shield. “Biggest one I’ve ever seen. Even bigger than the Mentors’,” he told her.

“So what now? Are the dragons against us now too?” Lillia was clearly irritated, directing her question toward Gus, who could only shrug.

“I don’t know. I-I mean, once long ago the dragons fell to the Darkness, but that was during the great war of the Fallen Ones, when the Dark One led the war against the Creator.”

“So we are looking at another war with the Dark One, now that he is awake,” Lillia said shakily.

Gus didn’t respond, only stared off into the corner where Mentor Sauravin had been sleeping. “I suppose that is the responsibility of the Chancellor and PO now.”

Lillia grunted. “Would have been nice to see the PO around—no offense, Emma.”



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Emma nodded wearily but didn't respond. Her body still weak from producing the shield, she needed rest, not an argument.

Soon, the ship lurched forward as the Light propellers substituted for the scorched sails, and the soft crash of waves could once again be heard as the fleet got underway. The gentle swaying motion was enough to put most of the Mentees in the cabin to sleep. They still had a full day and night left in their journey on the Yarey to reach Cembra City, and eventually Mentorship.