



ATLANTIS

BEARER
OF
FRUIT

DAVID SPEIGHT

ΑΤΛΑΝΤΙΣ
BEARER OF FRUIT

By
David Speight

Atlantis: Bearer of Fruit

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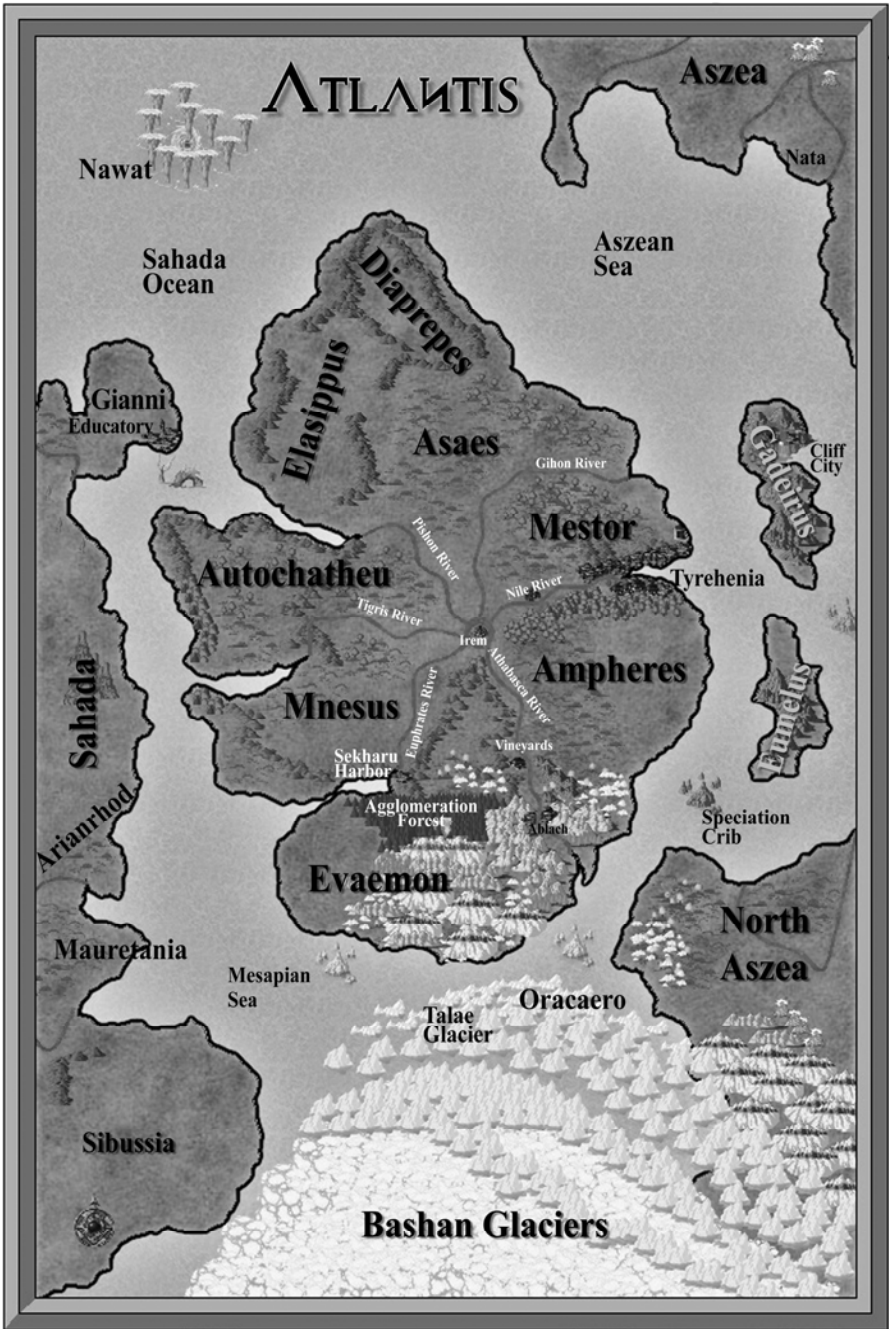
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ΑΤΛΑΝΤΙΣ
BEARER OF FRUIT



P R E F A C E

ABOUT THIS STORY

Shortly after college, I penned a two part screenplay on the subject of Atlantis. It was the beginning of this adventure. Actual writing was set aside for the next eleven years while I experienced life which I could draw upon in further developing the story and its characters. Over time the story expanded into a collection of novels, each in two parts; this is the first in that series.

Nearly every religion of the world has a “flood” story and this one is full of symbolic characters that represent many. This science-fiction-fantasy will take you on a journey filled with excitement and mysticism that is rich in historical references of Atlantis from Biblical to Grecian accounts. A review of the account in *Genesis* chapters six through nine may help unlock some of the mysteries that are set up in this story and fulfilled in their sequels. Ambiguous persons described in *Genesis 6:2,4* as *Sons of God*, *giants*, or *Nephilim* have been molded into another world that takes place on Earth’s second moon. They are a people that have been

P R E F A C E

charged with keeping peace on Earth until the King's return, but lose their grip over time. Another subplot, where King Yaswhen has gone on a journey to prepare a better place and promises to return, hints at religious stories about a coming Messiah.

This tale transplants an *End Of Days* plot into a time period thousands of years earlier. It beefs up the ancient society with modern technology like a flying delta-transporter. While this may seem absurd, there is research to support these and other tangibles may have existed during this time period.

The purpose of this narrative is not to reinvent the story of Noah, Gilgamesh, or other religious flood figures; but to provide an entertaining story with thought enlightening values.

But this is mostly a chronicle about, Aedon, a forgotten prince who is faced with the choice of following the ancient teachings in the King's scrolls, or dabbling in their forbidden enchantments with his friend who desires to use them for his own selfish gain. Throughout the series the characters experience situations about friendships, trust, faith, believing, and keeping oaths. I hope that you will enjoy your visit back in time to Atlantis. Now turn the page and begin your journey.

D A V I D S P E I G H T

PART ONE

PAPYRUS ONE

BLOOMERS

Aedon was a prince of Atlantis who no one recognized. Long Ago, the highest Prince Lord of the continent doubted his mother's claim that Prince Gilgamoeh was his father. Hoping the situation would be forgotten with time, he sent the boy far away, thousands of stadia across the Sahada Ocean to a private *educatory*. Aedon promised himself that once he finished his studies, he would return to Atlantis, find his father and prove that he was a worthy son and prince. He had never met the man before, but he had seen many paintings, sculptures and even a three-dimensional *transglaust* once.

He had one more workshop to finalize, so he tightened the frayed rope around his toga and shuffled into the rotunda where a dozen shinny tables glinted at him.

He was early.

Cautiously he sat down at the nearest table and found himself next to a well dressed comrade who gave his ragged toga a disapproving look-over. Mitchum, as a rule, usually arrived late, making a grand entrance. Aedon was suspicious of his premature arrival and investigated.

“I don’t suppose you know about what the assignment will be today?”

“Botanicals”

“Yes, plants, of course,” he echoed, nervously rubbing his sandals together. “Maybe a focus on *Hethnobotony*?”

Mitchum turned with a condescending glare, “*Hethnobotony* is the rumor and I’ll deduce that everyone will be cozying up to Areshia hoping to partner with her on the assignment.”

“Certainly would be an advantage, though I can persist on my own. I’ve studied plenty and ought have a perfect *Registration*.”

“Aren’t you a tad young to be planning your *Registration of Youth* already?”

“Actually my ninety-first birthday was just last moon-cycle.”

“Hard to tell one’s real age any more now that we’re living to be past nine-hundred,” Mitchum groaned. “I don’t recall what your focus was in ...”

“My concentration has been Intercontinental Associations with a sideline of Navigational Sciences.”

“Then you speak other languages. Which was your emphasis?”

“Asterian.”

“So you want to be an Ambassador but you’re probably going to end up a sea captain,” Mitchum chuckled.

“I hope not, I’m a bit afraid of the water. Maybe a pilot of commerce though,” Aedon responded. “What caste are you in?”

“Sartorial Fabrication.”

“Oh, *mercantiling* ...”

Pulling a piece of lint from his toga and then brushing its fabric to smooth any wrinkles, Mitchum scoffed, “At *Registration*, next week, I trust that you will adorn a garment which is more appropriate than that same old-discolored toga you always wear? ... You are going to the *Day of Apaturia* celebration?”

“Certainly most, I’ll be meeting my father there, for the first time,” Aedon boasted, proudly sitting up taller than a peacock.

“And who is your father? In case I’m supposed to be impressed.”

“I’d rather not say,” Aedon hesitated, “Though he is a prince.”

“Then tell me, my prince, how come I’ve never seen you on tier eleven in our section of the library?”

“There are more than fifty-hundred decedents of Lord Antioch. Can one possibly remember all the names?” Aedon reasoned, ducking the question.

“I remember faces, every one.” Mitchum said, adjusting his armband. “Who is your companion — for the *Eve of Apaturia Dance*?”

Aedon stumbled, “I — I haven’t asked anyone — yet.”

“You’re early for final laboratory but late in assigning a companion for *Apaturia*. Am I supposed to believe you’re a prince or a jester?”

At the very back of the room Aedon caught a glimpse of a tall-skinny fellow with long-brown hair sitting in a windowsill. At second glance, he noticed the dark-brown eyes, so dark that they were almost black. He recognized the feature, it had to be Faeraud. They used to be friends and playmates up until about forty-second grade. The two hadn’t crossed paths in years and Aedon felt too awkward to reintroduce himself. Besides, he thought, with more

than a million students at the educatory, he certainly wouldn't be remembered after all this time.

He couldn't help himself as he kept glancing back at Faeraud who was just beginning to chew on a twig. It dangled from the left corner of his mouth, most likely broken off from one of the *tabaccum* plants located across the way next to the library. They were now in full bloom with their pink flowers and its nicotine gave him some kind of a distracting high. A breeze rippled through his hair from outside the window. Further outside it began to tip the plank of an old broken teeter-totter. Its breath disturbed the seesaw like ghosts playing. It drew Aedon's attention into the past where the slat had been the center of attention decades earlier — when they were about the age of a seedling. Faint images of the memory moved over its plank.

He remembered how Faeraud would play: he would slide back off of the seat and Aedon would be forced to do the same or else the teeter-totter ride would slow. As one sat further back, the totter would teeter higher above and lower below. Faeraud would push, riveting the seesaw up and down and then suddenly jump off of his side. The other end would come crashing down, landing Aedon on his behind with a sore scream echoed by Faeraud's laughter. Then he would want to play again and if Aedon refused he would call him names and say that he was going to be left all alone.

Mitchum interrupted the elapsed memory with another question, "Which Etruscan are you related from?"

"None. I'm in the direct bloodline of Prince Lord Methouslan," he sharply responded, getting up and heading toward the rear of the room.

"Prince Lord Methouslan ..." Mitchum mouthed, with silent words, in a disrespectful mimic.

Faeraud beckoned Aedon over with an acknowledging nod of his twig like it was a magic wand he was waving.

“I wondered when you were coming over here,” he said with a low raspy voice, chewing the stick from the side of his mouth without missing a beat.

“You were?”

“Unless you enjoy keeping a distance while continually staring and admiring ...”

“I was — I was just looking at the teeter-totter. The one outside,” Aedon sputtered, nervously sitting down at the table that was closest. He had always thought that Faeraud, a prince of Atlantis, was a very mysterious person. His unpredictable outbursts switched on and off like an illumination-bulb. His demeanor was shy, yet forward; his physic was muscular, yet thin; most people hated him but Aedon was fascinated (infatuated is probably a better description) with everything about him.

“You’ve decided to come back — here with me — after how many sun-cycles? It can get lonely when you’re all alone.”

“I won’t be — all alone — for very long now,” Aedon stuttered. He couldn’t remember if their friendship from long ago had ended in a falling-out or if they had just grown apart. While their paths hadn’t crossed in over two decades, Aedon had thought many times about the shenanigans they used to create and the adventures that followed. He was almost all grown-up now and he wondered if Faeraud had matured too — or if his boyish mischievousness might visit again. “I won’t be alone much longer ...”

“I see. So, who is it, who is your companion for the *Apaturia Dance*?”

“You already heard me say, I’m certain.”

“Then, if you could go with anyone, anyone in the whole *educatory*, that you wanted, who would be that lucky person?” Faeraud asked. “Who would you chose?”

A scrimmage of noise briefly turned their attention as other *educatory-mates* settled into seats near Mitchum. A girl with long-black hair, wearing a boy’s toga, caught his attention as she plopped a leather satchel on the floor. She would have been teased

more about looking like a lad except for the fact that she could beat up most of the other youths; so, they usually opted not to say anything that might rile her up.

“Areshia,” he blurted out, answering him with the name of the girl who had just walked in. He was as surprised as Faeraud at his answer. Did her presence command his tongue or was he secretly in awe of her, he wondered.

“Areshia? Isn’t she a boy?” Faeraud huffed. “If you’re interested in going with a guy, you should’ve asked me. Then neither of us would have to go alone.”

“Beneath her rough façade I’m certain a beautiful girl flourishes,” said Aedon. He felt a new attraction like never before. A lump swelled up in his throat, his skin became clammy, and his face felt like a fresh morning splash.

“She’s practically engaged to Yapet, did you know?”

“Yapet, my half-brother?” Aedon exclaimed, acting surprised, even though he knew the facts. He questioned if his desire toward her was because of his brother’s involvement, or if he was really turning a genuine fondness toward her. She had always been quiet and kept to herself. Maybe it was the loner aspect that attracted him to her. Like her, he had spent most of his life also alone and ridiculed by others.

“What kind of points do you need on this assignment — to lock in your *Registration*?” Faeraud asked.

“I’ve an almost flawless record and I need a perfect mark on this so very much ... I’ve just *gotta* get an absolute score so I can present an unspoiled record to my father.”

“This is one ending-exam that I am going to take top place — I’ll guarantee it on my princely armband,” Faeraud boasted, “I’ve made arrangements to assure it.”

Aedon was concerned about his own marking and sighed, “If only it could be something we’ve practiced before.”

“Not sure why ... but there is something about your — simplicity — that I like. I’m *gonna* include you, just this once, into

my secluded chase. ... But only if you promise not to abandon me this time.”

“Is final exam the proper time for a lark? I don’t like to make promises. Even worse, if I don’t pass —”

Auseten stepped in with his usual slurred speech, “If *ya dan’t* pass? We *yall* need *ta* pass *old petrified-bridge* Yenocho’s exam today.”

The sloppily dressed prince from Aszea plopped his pudgy rear-end on the seat across from Aedon. By the size of his belly, his dirty blond hair, and his mannerisms, you would have never guessed him to be a prince. He pulled out a glass-frog from his satchel and held it toward the window while examining it. A glint of sunlight speared off its corner piercing the other boys’ eyes.

“Interesting creature,” Faeraud remarked. “An ice-fossil from the glaciers?”

“Not at all,” Auseten said, bringing the piece closer for Faeraud to inspect. He was always trying to hang-out and be best buddies with tall-tan prince. In fact, he would tell you that Faeraud was his best friend, if you asked.

Moving his eyes to and fro, as if each person in the room were a pawn in a game, Faeraud examined the crystallized frog, “You did this? How? It still looks alive.”

“It was alive ... I think it might still be living, just in a timeless captured state,” Auseten explained, snatching the frog back. “I AM a Mechanical Alchemist.”

“Well, not officially yet,” Aedon reminded. “Not until *Registration Scrolls* are bestowed next week.”

“Wait, how did you do this?” Faeraud asked again.

“Shhh. I’d be expelled, most probably, if they found out. It’s a formula that our alchemy class came up with to capsule flowers and plants. I muddled it a tad to work on animals.”

“So this amphibian really was alive,” Faeraud asked, perking with interest. “I wonder if it would work on humans?”

Auseten quickly tucked it back in his satchel hoping that Aedon hadn’t overheard too much. “Humans? You’d kill a dozen

perfecting it ... and the cost of materials would empty the vaults of the *Isolation*. Best to forget about this experiment before some purist labels us all *Say and Tellers*.”

“What about this laboratory? Have you discovered the exam’s setup for today?” Faeraud asked, getting back to the purpose before them.

“I hesitate to be *sayin’* with strangers so close by,” Ausethen cautiously answered, nodding toward Aedon.

“Perhaps Aedon could be a princely asset for our team,” Faeraud suggested, jumping off the sill to join in around the table with the other two. “You can keep quiet ... about things that are secret and of a highly-secure nature, correct?”

“Maybe, I suppose, if it’s proper and ...” Aedon stuttered, wondering what he was getting into.

“Can we really trust him?” Ausethen asked, feeling a little threatened that someone else was now coming in on their operation.

“Aedon is an honorable asset — he’s even studied Asterian,” Faeraud said, placing an arm on the new prince’s shoulder.

“Asterian — most difficult language,” Ausethen remarked, changing his tone, “*S’pose* it’s alright, so long as someone don’t get in the way and ruin stuff.”

“We already have a formulated plan. What’s one more person added to the mix, especially one who needs a tally on the exam like some of us do,” Faeraud said.

“We’re not hedging toward a kind of cheating are we?”

“Not at all. I paid a good number of talents for my information and that makes it fair. Not like we’re getting it for free.” Ausethen insisted.

“But I didn’t give a part, so for me it’ll be like ...”

“Maybe he can contribute for his share, and say the words in ...” Ausethen suggested, stopping short with a hush from Faeraud, before their entire idea was spelled out.

“Then it’s agreed, we are all on the same team,” Faeraud confirmed, extending his fingers as a gesture of promise.

“It’s not all together locked in yet, *ya*’ know,” Auseten interrupted. “The teams *’ll* be randomly sorted. What if we’re split up?”

“I don’t think I can be involved in this scheme,” Aedon confessed.

The rhythmic beating of a short *looking-glass* against his quill-like toga told the class to quiet down. Master Instructioneer Yenocha, rarely used the glass (except to see things up closely), and when he did, you felt like he was looking into your most private thoughts. Another instrument, a *looking-scope*, was tied loosely to his belt with a yellow-colored cord (he used this to see things that were far away). Faeraud swiped the *looking-scope* and hid it under his toga without the Instructioneer noticing. Yenocha announced, “The assignment before us today is about how positive and negative energy polarize life on the planet. Each vessel contains a small seedling. The goal this hour is to present a prayerful flow of energy to help the seedlings flourish.”

“Whew,” Aedon let out a sigh of relief. The experiment would be a cinch, almost a waste of time. He had done this twice before in basic instruction. He could put anxiety to rest now as he bragged in a whisper to the other boys, “I could pass this one even if I were a blind fruit bat. Don’t think I’ll be needing your assistance after all.”

“Get closer,” Faeraud snapped, yanking the other boys’ togas toward him, “So he’ll group us together.”

“Please group into teams of three as designated by your seating colors,” said Yenocha, pacing by. “Notice how the soil has been saturated and covered with water to act as a reflecting pool. This will aid in transmitting your energy.”

A smirk muscled across the corner of Faeraud’s mouth, realizing they *would* all be on the same team. Then he pulled out the glass he had just swiped and showed it to Aedon. “You did say you were eager to be in on our same team ... else I might have to tell the Instructioneer about who swiped his *looking-glass* and that might keep you from getting the mark you wish for?”

Aedon grumbled.

“Last I remember you abandoned me ... when I was trying to help you. Did your passive methods yield what you were seeking?” asked Faeraud. “I suspect that even now, twenty, forty sun-cycles later you still wait and hope. ... I like you, Aedon. I have always put your best interests before even my own. That advice you received long ago — about patiently waiting — did it bring results or was it a mask for someone else’s ambition?”

A laboratory experiment began to mechanically elevate up from within the center of the front station, then it leveled with the tabletop. At another counter near them, a healthy plant appeared for its selected group of students. Its greens flourished in front of Areshia, like the thick long hair that covered her face. Her pupils gleamed with joy as if she were just handed a passing mark.

“I hate hedge-plants, hedge-seeds, hedge-any-things,” Faeraud grumbled.

“How bizarre. Why is that?” Aedon remarked.

“You’ve seen how thick the Agglomeration is? It started out with a simple flowery hedge-bush. Once those thickets start growing, they get bigger and stronger until it’s impossible to go through them.”

Next, the boys’ plant appeared. It was a stringy brownish seedling, barely a *spithame* (about nine inches) tall, peeking out of a triangular shaped pot before them. The vessel, packed with soil, had a *daktylos* (about half an inch) of water topping it off. They grumbled at the scrawny stick that could barely be described as a living cell.

“Remember not to touch the plants for very long,” Yenocho warned. “They are poisonous.”

“What? What is this? Hardly a twig,” Aedon began to protest. Then he turned to Faeraud, “We’re on the same team, right?”

Faeraud leaned forward, “I always keep my promises.”

“Maybe the percentage — the grading will be on the median,” Aedon worried out-loud. “A — A thriving plant would

give little advantage over a scrawny one if ... Do you think our tally will be based on how far we strive from the balanced median?"

Faeraud interrupted, "Slow down Aedon, you're always talking faster than a unicorn gallops. Relax."

Then Yenocho announced, "Marks will be given based on the largest plant when the last drop of liquid falls."

"One glass? ... Only one hourglass?" Aedon complained. "We couldn't make this stem sprout even a bud in twice that time."

Yenocho walked by, and though he never looked directly at the boys, they could feel him laughing, as if he had finally had his revenge on three students he never liked.

Faeraud whispered over to Auseten, "Do you think he knew?"

Aedon began mumbling, "How am I going to present a perfect record to my father now?"

Faeraud sighed a long huff, "We could sure use one of those magical trees that grow in the gardens of Mount Evaemon?"

"They don't teach about those mountains here anyway," Aedon said.

"Such an unverified legend would never be entertained in this fine educatory," Faeraud grumbled. "Don't you ever wonder how a tropical garden could survive on top of such an icy mountain?"

"Like you said, unverified legends ..."

"Wouldn't be forbidden if they were just fables," Faeraud interrupted.

"Most people believe it's a peak of land that contains some kind of toxic intolerance," Auseten added. "Who would want to risk such an adventure?"

In a low-raspy whisper, while staring at his reflection in the water around their plant, Faeraud beckoned, "We're all on the same side, together we can succeed without divide. Blow energy into the plant's water-tide, grow it strong, healthy and alive."

Faeraud blew on the water that floated around the plant trying to produce a bond of energy. Auseten helped too but the plant only seemed to wither more.

“I should’ve took to studying Asterian. Then I could really make the hostile thing grow,” Faeraud remarked, with a glint in his eye toward Aedon, hoping to spark an engagement of cooperation.

“If you could speak Asterian, you could cast enchantments that would blast Yenocha into the polar garden’s ring of fire,” Auseten snidely remarked.

“Aedon, you can speak Asterian, can you interpret too?” Faeraud asked, perking his interest.

“A little ... some ... I studied a while back.”

“You were the prophets’ favorite, if my memory recalls,” Auseten interjected, remembering. “Aren’t you that pseudo-prince chap, the one who could talk fluently with Ahteana a few sun-cycles back?”

“Awesome waters!” Faeraud remarked. “Then you can repeat the rhyme I just recited, in Asterian?”

“Maybe, maybe not,” Aedon retorted, suspiciously lowering his voice. “Wouldn’t that be kind of like chanting a forbidden poem?”

“Please ...” both Faeraud and Auseten scoffed at the same time.

“About as forbidden as the fabled trees in the glacier,” Auseten snapped.

“But my father is opposed to people who try to use them — who are not Asterian.”

“Your father? *Gillgy*? The father you’ve never met and who’s never been there for you?” Faeraud huffed.

“You have a special talent, I say, and one should use such a gift,” Auseten insisted, gesturing toward the scrawny twig. It seemed so small with the three boys towering over it. Its trunk trembled causing a leaf to fall off.

“We all know the ancient laws don’t apply today. Go ahead, Aedon. It will be our secret. No one else will ever know. How would they find out?” Faeraud encouraged.

“I suppose maybe it would be permissible to try. Especially after the ridiculously-rigged failure we were dealt.”

“Yenocha knows that Faeraud and I always sit in the back. He obviously planned this — for all of us to fail,” Auseten growled, anger boiling within.

“He has to do it, else he won’t have perfect markings to present to his father. He’ll do it, he’s my *Smart-owl*,” Faeraud said.

He looked around hoping no one was watching. Under the table next to them, Yapet dropped something which knocked one of the ornaments off of Areshia’s sandal, then he attempted to reattach it. The commotion gave Aedon the brief opportunity that he needed to quickly speak Faeraud’s poem in Asterian:

*“Lecumo hun vuyune ahuro elue
hun khut cluluevuteun seckueo,
Kuo vuyune lecut elue
craump evethen navueo;
Ahvlueuw ahonorgyun entu
khut huleuno vutch kecklueo,
Swauw et craweuluelue,
toulueth ahund ahuluevo.”*

“I could’ve chanted that,” Auseten remarked.

“Not in a hundred *Apaturias*,” said Faeraud. “It’s a tonal language. Chant or sing just one note off ... and you’ve offended them.”

“Who’s around to offend?” Auseten huffed.

“THEM,” Faeraud snapped, looking toward the ceiling. “They don’t just talk to their own kind, their language speaks to the energy of the universe.”

Then, Aedon placed his arms around theirs. The circle of bodies seemed to triangulate some sort of invisible energy. The little

plant began to move and grow all on its own. The twigs transformed into healthy stems, then into pointed green leaves, and then into an even deeper, darker green. But that wasn't enough for Faeraud.

“Fetch us a query of *orichalcum*! From the cupboard,” he called out.

Aedon was reluctant to participate any further in his scheme. He longed for Faeraud's approval and was eager to be included, but stealing supplies was gnawing at his conscience. What kind of a concoction was Faeraud trying to create with such a powerful mineral as the *orichalcum*? Aedon's hesitation drew another prompt.

“Afraidy-Aedy?” Ausethe name-called.

“I hate it when you guys dither.” Faeraud grumbled. “You're worse than a flying horse afraid to step off the edge of a cliff. Do you want to lose the energy we have going?”

“Maybe not, but taking supplies ...” Aedon whined, lingering.

“Isn't this *our* last lab — and *our* supplies?” Faeraud reminded him. “Let's finish off this withered photosynthesis with a bang of magic. *Smart-owl*, brush up against Mitchum's project and distract Yenocho while Ausethe grabs the *orichalcum*. It's the least you can do now, after spoiling the energy.”

Reluctantly he turned and crossed over to the other side of the room to fetch a pitcher. Then he tripped, splashing water on Mitchum's colorful toga and causing the brief distraction on queue. As Aedon yielded his pardons and returned, Faeraud and Ausethe shaved a few particles from the crystal rock into the water-drenched soil.

“Recite the enchantment again,” Faeraud whispered.

Within seconds of Aedon finishing the words, seeds began to pop off of the mother stem and baby shoots suddenly began to sprout up. Moments later the entire planter had been overtaken with a forest of younglings who were now crowding their container beyond its means. Faeraud stepped back, breaking the

ring-of-energy, and the flowers ceased to grow. A devilish smile wiped across his face.

The entire room of students abandoned their own projects and rushed over to the potted forest where Faeraud took center stage. He grumbled under his breath before picking up a water vessel. Just as he was about to drench the plants he stopped and mixed in a compound of orichalcum dust. With a yawn and a rhyme, he sung, “These greens are wasting away in a manner. Let us return them to a life of growth and glamour. Excessive nutrients which will bring them back, faster, stronger and greater with the energy they lack.”

Faeraud poured the new mixture over the bulbs. Liquid bubbled up like hydrogen peroxide turning the twigs into branches that reached out toward them. They shot up out of the small planter, their roots cracking the base as each one turned into a mighty brown tree a *bema* (meter/yard) in height, twice as tall as they were before. The stalks sprouted blackish leaves and then yellow flowers, each with a reddish buttercup blooming in the center.

No one had ever seen anything like this before. Areshia was mesmerized by the small garden as if the blooming-bulbs had cast a spell over her. Snapping off a flower, sniffing it closely in his face, and then almost handing it to her, Faeraud continued, “It is shameful that some would spread lies about such beauty being poisonous. I tell you, we live on a planet where the fit will survive and those who follow myths or wait around for some miraculous love-potion will wilt away as their mistaken ideals vaporize.”

As Areshia reached out for the flower, Faeraud deliberately yanked it away. Aedon felt badly that she had been shunned, so he plucked another one of the flourishing stems and presented it to her. She looked up, and though she rarely smiled, her eyes couldn't help it as they looked into Aedon's bright blue ones. A low grumble from Yapet, behind her, brought her back to a social consciousness which insisted that she refuse. She balked, “And cheat, like you?”

Before the plant could exchange hands Faeraud stepped in and snatched the stem away. He placed his arm around Aedon and walked him in the opposite direction. “You really shouldn’t be associating with servants,” Faeraud counseled. “You do know that her father is employed ... she wears a yellow band.”

“Then how is that she attends this fine educatory?”

“She also wears expensive *globeakys* on her sandals. I’m not impressed. Her father is *well* employed — but *employed* none the less,” Faeraud snobbishly stated. “Stick with me, we’re the *top-crest* of the royalty here, direct lineage that you don’t want to muddle, do you?”

In his usual disapproving tone Yenocha made his way over and questioned, “Of all worthiness, what do we have here?”

“Only our project, Master,” Aedon answered.

“I must investigate this. Could an impermissible mineral or a prohibited ritual been employed to obtain these results so quickly?” he suggested, examining the sprouting container.

“A ritual, like your daily glass of prune juice,” Faeraud retorted.

“Were poems used here in any way?” Yenocha asked, opening his right eye wider in a manner that demanded the truth.

“We may have rhymed something as a peaceful gesture. Poetry is beautiful. Is it not a required course of study here?” said Faeraud.

“There are verses that you read, love sonnets, and musical limericks, but no justification would allow you to cross over and travel to a land of *piskie prose*, *magical odes*, or *forbidden-enchanted ones*. ... Are there reasons for this excessiveness?”

“We can be less excessive and take away the energy,” Faeraud agreed, moving his hand down and away from the thriving miniature jungle. The buds began to droop with the motion of his hand. He thrust his hand forward toward the soil. His eyes became large with excitement as he used his aura-of-energy to suck the water molecules themselves from the soil. The precipitation dripped from his steaming hand as the plants quickly

dried up and withered away before everyone's eyes. Then he mockingly said, "Looks as if they were hung-out-to-dry."

The term *hung-out-to-dry* referred to what was done to the worst of criminals. The person's arms would be tied together and hooked over the top of a steep-pointed pyramid. They would be left there without water or food until their body had dried up and withered away. It brought shame on a community that had to erect such a monument, and because of that stigma, the practice had become scarce. Villagers were reluctant to advertise that such a case existed in their neighborhood.

Before Faeraud could make any understandable point with his demonstration, Yenocha chimed in, "This foolishness doth experiment in extreme conditions and not the balanced norm of the universe."

"Precisely my point," Faeraud added, "We were trying to be normally not."

"I insist that you return a steady prescribed amount of water and ration your *energy* — proportionately to the plants — so they may regain a balance with your laboratory assignment and harmony with a passing mark."

The teacher's seemingly self-righteous countenance struck a chord with Faeraud, because he boldly answered him back like no one had ever done before, "Master instructioneer, huh? What new insight did you deliver our way? You talk as though none of us had done this lab prior to today. We've all done it *spithames* of times before. A refreshing angle was all we tried to explore."

"And you expect some kind of — refreshing grade, because of this?" Yenocha scorned, snorting as he walked away.

Aedon screamed at Faeraud, "Look where you've taken us. We're certain to get a failing mark. What kind of a record can I present to my father now? Worst yet, what if we have to come back here again next sun-cycle."

"Listen, it's the final term. They don't want to see our messy heads-of-hair in their lecture next year because of one lousy lab experiment," Faeraud reasoned.

Reaching the front of the room, Yenocha turned back, raising his voice, “Your poems — your erroneous lessons — your misuse of energy — it is like that of the *Uprooter* the prophets have warned of. Normally I would escalate such an inappropriate matter to the *Committee of Conduct*, but since we are blessed with the presence of a much wiser Asterians, visiting our institution today, I think I shall refer this matter to Ahteana.”

“Ahteana? I would rather eat sea-mud,” Faeraud warned in a whisper.

“But she adores me, and I her,” Aedon remarked, glimmering with puzzle. “I only trust we have not behaved too foolishly and embarrass ourselves.”

Yenocha stepped closer and ordered, “You shall expedite your persons, the three of you, to the library — within the hourglass.”

PAPYRUS TWO

LIBRARY TOWER

You're ruining my life. No one in this place has been my friend or hardly cut me a break — ever!" Aedon complained.

"And this is somehow my fault?" asked Faeraud.

"The one and only thing I had going for me, was a perfect score card to present to my father at the *Registration of Youth*, and now, it seems as if you've helped me blow that too."

"Bring the rapids down a notch, I haven't exactly been King Merman either."

"How will I ever get him to accept me now?" Aedon ranted, shuffling his sandals across the stony bridge which led toward the library. It's architecture couldn't decide if it were a gothic cathedral or a government building. A tall tower grew from its top where a large flame burned above, making it look like a gorilla laying on its side holding a torch.

"I just hope Ahteana can fix this. How else will anyone in the royal family ever resign to acknowledge me?" Aedon worried,

barely noticing the gigantic pillars that supported the upper-floor extensions of the library in front of them.

Faeraud stopped Aedon in the middle of the span, “Maybe you’re trying to swim after the wrong dolphin. After the *Registration*, I’ll be a full-prince myself and I’ll support your way back into the prince-hood. I’m going to do everything I can for you.”

“How could you possibly make people approve of me, except by enchanting more forbidden poems?”

“Your father, Gilgamoeh, is my brother. Maybe no one else in the continent believes that you are a true son of his, but I do. ... Stick with me because I’ve got your back.”

Aedon sighed, calming down, “I’ll talk with Ahteana, she likes me; perhaps she’ll see, if I explain.”

They continued on, through the tall archways that led inside, passing a sculpture of an Asterian with wings spread out. It leaned forward and its cold stare made them feel like it was going to swoop down over them.

“I could never tell if this thing was a male or female. What do you think Aedon?” Faeraud asked.

“There’s one on each continent. Given as symbols of peace after the *Territorial Quarrels*,” said Aedon, remembering the history lesson.

“It’s so lifelike, as if someone could be hiding inside it,” Faeraud remarked.

“Asterians don’t have wings though,” Aedon objected.

“But some of them can fly.”

“In their light,” Aedon remarked, passing through the archway into the main corridor of the building. He inspected the various triangle-shaped slabs of marble that transported people up and down to access the various levels. “Which section do we go to?”

“You two must be the princes who were caught cheating?” a prudish thin faun asked, walking up to them with a stack of scrolls in his arms.

“This is the librarian, the pedant next to our section on tier eleven,” Faeraud snarled, pointing to the faun’s yellow armband with a brown stripe. “Did you come down from your tower to escort us up?”

“I’m a librarian not a detention-sitter. I have much more important things to tend to, such as preserving these newly-discovered, ancient-scrolls — and locking them away from delinquents like you,” the librarian taunted, turning around and stomping off.

Faeraud motioned for Aedon to follow and soon all three of them were near the center of the lobby. From there you could look up and see the eleven floors above, each with a railing carved from honeycomb. The honey inside each cell had been crystallized giving it an eloquent golden glow which was topped off with a rail of ivory.

The faun stepped onto a marble platform and was whisked up toward the ceiling. Aedon and Faeraud, both thin boys and light enough, stepped onto the same *trivelator* and followed. When they arrived on the eleventh floor, Aedon turned to shadow Faeraud toward the princes’ section but the librarian stopped them, “Your investigation is being held ...”

“Meeting, you mean meeting,” Aedon interrupted, tugging at Faeraud to change direction.

“Your INVESTIGATION is being conducted in the Interrogation Chamber,” the faun sneered, pointing them the opposite way, down the corridor.

Meekly approaching the archway, the CLICK-CLACK of the master instructioneer’s shoes cautioned them to wait outside. Yenocho was warning Ahteana that he suspected Faeraud was paying one of the assistant instructioneers to arrange favorable test results, “Perhaps that would explain why *Fake-rude’s* lethargic studies somehow always came away with the top marks.”

“Your unwavering ways from the ancient days are appreciated; however, do I detect an old-man who has become bitter?” Ahteana chuckled, smiling with some concern.

Faeraud whispered to Aedon, “Rumor has it that his dirty beard is infested with micro rats.”

“Where are the other collaborators?” Yenocha demanded, seeing that Aedon had been pushed into the doorway.

“They are coming, on their way now, shortly to be here. I thought it would be wise for me to come first. I — I am not sure exactly why our ending-exam is in question. I’ll grant, alright, that some of the — comments — that our team did make, were perhaps not in line — maybe, maybe not — as we were anxious and therefore careless because of our anxiety for the *Registration of Youth*,” Aedon explained, flailing his arms in explanatory gestures.

“Do slow down boy. How is one to make sense of this nonsense?” Yenocha snapped, holding up his looking-glass. “I just don’t see —”

“*Voerdu!* Aedon, please do enter and sit, over here with me,” a sharp, yet soft, female voice said as an illumination-bulb faded up to full-brightness. Her dark-bronze skin and long white hair made her look as frighteningly scary as the ancient teachings she was master over. Her personality was about as warm as an iceberg.

“Ahteana. ... *Evetchcruft tunur u’d lecumo ketz wezeun, ahund ahvog ah huruzeto epur iyr yomreun,*” Aedon greeted, speaking in her own language.

“Words can be very powerful. Tell me Aedon, what did you recite in the rotunda earlier today?”

“It was ... entirely my fault. When I saw the scrawny plant that we were dealt, the other boys began chanting poems; their chants were in Atlantean not Asterian. Then, as if it were almost instinctive, something came over me, and suddenly I found myself repeating their same poems, except in the magical language. It was then that the experiment burst out of control. The other boys had nothing to do with it at all. The responsibility and punishment is all mine,” Aedon confessed, bending down on a knee with respect.

Yenocha stomped forward, “I am more concerned about the disrespect of the other boys — especially *Fake-rude.*”

“This appears to be nothing more than an honest mistake to me,” Ahteana reasoned, tapping Aedon on the head and indicating for him to sit next to her.

“But your Holiness,” Yenocho pleaded.

“I think that the three of you each, shall be required to do some additional clepsydras of study in this library today,” Ahteana decided, half smiling. “Think of this as an assignment — additional training time — to be used to research the consequences that are possible when my native tongue is not used in a respectable fashion.”

“Had I doled-out the punishment, you would’ve been required to read *The Pillars* — all sixty-six scrolls — from left corner to right,” Yenocho grumbled, unhappy that they’d been let off easy.

Back in the corridor Faeraud abruptly turned and walked the other way.

“Are you upset or something? Was it something I said? Didn’t I do well in there?” Aedon begged, pondering the prince’s sudden mood-swing.

Faeraud stopped for a moment, “Now I suspect you think that since you did me some kind of a courtesy, by taking all the responsibility back there, that now, I owe you a return favor.”

“Lead the way to the study area, paranoid one. I didn’t act out of concern for any favors.”

Aedon gazed over the honeycomb railing which overlooked the lobby from the eleventh floor before settling into a woven, willow-vine chair. He had never been on this level before and the sounds from the vestibule below echoed like hard whispers that lingered forever. A loud ostrich, giving a tour on one of the tiers below, interrupted the monotonous ambience for a minute.

“Most of these writings were contributed by the scholars of Atlantis,” she said. “There are volumes of knowledge waiting for your discovery, except, of course, those kept in the *Library Tower*; which are not for sharing.”

“They keep more than just scrolls locked away in that tower,” Aedon grumbled.

“Then, you haven’t forgotten,” Faeraud snarled, slightly annoyed. “You think anyone other than an Etruscan would be allowed to inspect those documents — locked away — in the restricted tower?”

“Someone has to be allowed in, else how would they get the scrolls there in the first place?”

“See that palm-bark desk — over there — beyond the railing across from us?”

Aedon nodded.

“The snooty librarian we followed up here, he sits there and guards the entrance. Without the proper *globeaky* no one can get in,” Faeraud told him, realizing an opportunity of interest. “You’re curious, I sense you are eager for an adventure, you want to go in the tower don’t you?”

“I didn’t before, besides we’re not allowed.”

Pressing ivory levers on the edge of the table, which resembled piano keys, Aedon requested a writing. A round hole in the center of the table opened up and the papyrus popped up. Faeraud snatched the dowel and positioned it in the reader for Aedon who commanded, “Roll one-four-zero-four.”

“I *betcha* I could get us in there. *Betcha* anything that one of the three parts of the *Rataka* resides in there,” Faeraud enthusiastically surmised.

“The *Rataka*?” Aedon inquired, looking up from his scroll. “We have copies right here.”

“I’m talking about the one and only original script.”

“They’ve been long lost. Plus they’re written in boustrophedon text anyway,” Aedon worried.

“Another incarceration when I could be out dining,” Auseten sighed, plopping down into a seat upon his arrival.

“Fine that you show up now that half the detention is over,” Aedon snapped.

“Wait here you two,” Faeraud insisted, getting up, “I have a little errand to attend to down the hall — I’ll be right back.”

“Like we could go anywhere if we wanted ... thanks for gabbing enough to get us confined up here, Aedon,” Auseten huffed.

A few minutes later Feared returned and asked, “Auseten, did you see how they were installing new panels on the orichalcum pyramid earlier today? Remember last time, how the illumination-bulbs kept going on and off while they were working on it?”

“Oh yeah, I recall. That was a few sun-cycles ago. ... I sure do remember,” said Auseten, perking up with interest while recalling the role he had in making the bulbs go dark.

“A study detention like this deserves to have some excitement, I believe,” Faeraud said, giving his head a nod. At his signal, Auseten jumped up and was on his way down the *trivelator* before Aedon could find out what he was up to.

“I think that we may pay a visit to the tower?” said Faeraud, dangling a *globeaky* in front of Aedon’s eyes.

“How did you get the key? Did you steal that?” asked Aedon, inspecting its globe-shape with the three intricate bands that circled it like rings. “What if it’s a fake. Only one in every 47-million *globeakys* is the same and each one of those has 17-trillion combinations ...”

“I didn’t come here to dangle disappointments in front of your eyes. Don’t you trust anyone?” Faeraud huffed.

“Are they *gonna* let us just walk in ... because we have the *globeaky*?”

“I’ve got that covered ... mostly,” Faeraud promised, snapping off a round cap from the end of Aedon’s scroll.

“Hey!” Aedon objected, “You’re *gonna* get us more detention.”

“You coming?” he snapped, starting around the balcony for the door.

“Where did Auseten go anyhow? ... And where did you get the ... how did you get the ...” Aedon continued to ask.

Faeraud hinted about how he had obtained such a prize, “A smidgen of *benzamnestic* may have assured that old Yenocha napped awhile longer than usual.”

“Should we not wait for Auseten to return?”

“He is about to remind everyone about the shortage of orichalcum we have.”

There was a BUZZ and then a HUM and slowly the illumination-bulbs dimmed until the entire library was shelved with darkness.

Faeraud yanked Aedon’s arm leading him to a shinny metallic door — the tower’s entrance. Peeking around the corner, they could see that it was guarded by the librarian who twisted at the wire connecting his illumination-bulb to its transistor base.

“What a foolish seahorse. He thinks the *energy burst* is isolated to his station,” snarled Faeraud.

“Shhhhh ...,” Aedon said.

He looked at Aedon briefly with his mischievous smile and then tossed the scroll-knob down the corridor.

“Who’s there?” the librarian shouted, turning in the direction of the noise.

Faeraud squatted down and crawled past the station to a doorway just beyond, before signaling back. Aedon was sure that the light-colored skirt of his toga would get dirty, but he didn’t want to be left there alone, so he followed. Next, Faeraud pulled out the globe-like key and inserted it into a hole by the door.

The globe’s three rings began to spin around seeking a combination that the door would recognize. The boys crouched low, waiting for something to happen, hoping the clerk would not see Faeraud’s arm extended above, reaching toward the keyhole. The lock bolted awake, opening with a click which echoed down the hall chasing after the faun who had gone into the next room.

Faeraud slowly moved forward creaking the door open and motioning Aedon to follow him. It was even darker inside the small room.

“We’re in,” Faeraud sighed with relief.

Aedon followed him up a narrow spiral staircase that led into the turret. The *energy burst* ended and the illumination-bulbs began to buzz as they faded back-up to full brightness. Slowly the light revealed a spacious, round room. It was made up of nine separate walls hidden by shelves filled with ancient scrolls.

“Is this it, is this the restricted tower?” Aedon asked in a whisper. “We are going to be in so much trouble.”

“Maybe it should be restricted for common people, but I am a prince of Atlantis and you're a prince too, Aedon ... or at least you're always begging that you are. Don't we belong in here?”

Aedon looked up and noticed that there was a large owl sitting at the top of each shelf and even though they appeared to be sleeping he had to ask, “Witness Wise Owls — they'll — they'll wake-up.”

“Chordata, the queen owl, may have accidentally fed them some *benzamnestic*,” Faeraud answered, insinuating that they had been medicated to sleep. Then he scanned the shelves searching for a particular item. He asked, “If you were a valuable scroll where would you choose to hide?”

“I wouldn't choose to be a scroll in the first place,” Aedon answered. “But if I were, maybe, maybe I wouldn't hide at all.”

Faeraud dragged a trunk-case over to one shelf, climbed up on it and headed toward the vaulted ceiling. He felt around on the top shelf the best he could and found nothing there. Carefully he scooted the sleeping *Witness Wise Owl* over to one side. Aedon swallowed a lump in his throat as he thought the owl might wake up. Faeraud started to climb back down when his eye caught site of a hinged door on the top shelf.

“Bet it's hidden in here — this would be a logical place,” he proclaimed.

“There are three original *Rataka Scrolls*. Each contain writings of which have not been entirely made public: one represents fire, one holds water and the other is for air. The fiery torch on top of this library was a clue that I used to figure out that the *Rataka Scroll of Fire* was here,” Faeraud explained.

“This really wasn’t my idea to come in here, was it? You planned this all along like a sea monster scheming below the surface?” Aedon accused.

Faeraud swung open the compartment and started to reach in when a hundred thumb-sized bats jumped out and began to circle.

“Maybe — maybe we should go back to our studies,” Aedon tried to suggest, ducking the bats.

Faeraud reached in again, “It’s empty.”

“Good we can go now.”

“You’ve heard about what the *enchancements* can do. That’s all we’re looking for here, a few magic poems,” Faeraud revealed.

“I know what enchanted poems are,” Aedon reminded him. “Written by the Asterians for Asterians. ... What is this special poem you’re after — all locked up in here? Are you still looking for a map to that magical tree that we both know doesn’t exist?”

“Shhh,” Faeraud hushed him, before lowering his voice, “Once we obtain one of the scrolls, it could give you the power to assure that your *genetikos-replica* produces the result you desire. I am doing this for you. After today’s mess-up on final exam, I owe it to you to make this happen. A *Rataka Scroll* will assure it. You do want it to be favorable, or would you rather risk being exiled from the royal family?”

Aedon said nothing. He knew that his life depended on those results proving that he was a prince. Without that proof, all of his opportunities would be ruined. His insecurity and curiosity silenced his objections as he observed. A grin slowly lit up Faeraud’s face as he noticed a rug in the middle of the floor. He knelt down and began peeling it away.

“Don’t just stand there like a useless column,” he demanded, motioning for assistance.

“Why? What’s under — ”

As Aedon began to help, the boys noticed a secret door hidden in the floor under the rug. It was round like the room and Faeraud reached down and tried turning the handle. It was stuck.

Aedon joined in and the two of them budged it loose. A chamber opened up revealing a tube. Faeraud eagerly snatched out a black scroll, so dark it looked more like an onyx stone than a papyrus roll.

“Black? They come in black?” Aedon remarked, since he had never seen a colored scroll before.

“I knew it was here,” Faeraud screamed with excitement. Suddenly the entire black-onyx scroll unrolled in midair.

“Awesome!” Aedon exclaimed. “Is that it? Is that the scroll you’re looking for?”

“Amazing!” Faeraud answered, watching the scroll float in the middle of the chamber. He walked around it while Aedon peeked underneath. He wondered what was holding it up and how it could hover in the middle of the room with nothing touching it. Faeraud reached for the end of the scroll and as soon as he had it in his hand — SWOOSH! He jumped as the roll magically compressed like a telescope into a short tube about the size of nectar mug.

“Can you believe it Aedon? My lifelong ambition ... I am holding it, the *Scroll of Fire*, right here in my hand. ... I wonder where they’ve placed the other two.”

“You’re obsessed with these ... these ...”

“*These ...?*” he raised his voice, turning around with big eyes, “You want to know about *these ...?* If I tell you and show you about *these ... these* secrets then you must give me a *finger-locking promise* that you will never tell anyone else what we’ve discovered.”

A *finger-locking promise* was usually joined between two or three people. They would spread their center and index fingers and interlock them with the other person to indicate an acceptance of a verbal oath. The secrecy sparked a mischievous twinkle in Aedon’s eye. He absolutely hated to make promises, but this was too good to pass up. He locked fingers.

“This scroll has been missing for centuries,” he explained. “All the high-priests at the Irminsul, even Ahteana, claim they

don't know where it is. None of them have ever acknowledged that it exists or was perhaps misplaced. No one would dare inquire about the details because it would be heresy to question their absolute authority. You desire to be a prince and meet your father, more than anything else in this world; yet, you've been told to wait and wait. Why should you delay your desires longer and turn to chanting, meditation, preponderance and pretend faith when the enchantments in this scroll will produce immediate results?"

"If certain persons knew that this was here — why it could start another war," Aedon remarked.

"Indeed. Exactly why, we will never say anything. The Asterians have kept these secrets from us. Its absence has allowed them to exert their own power over us and limit our freedom," Faeraud explained. "Don't you think that humans are better equipped to make decisions about our way of life ... than outsiders who come from another race and another moon?"

"But it's not like that. We have our own legislature, they don't rule over us. They're just supposed to aid in keeping peace on Earth until King Yaswhen comes back," Aedon defended.

"Reason enough for the Asterians to hide these scrolls. They supposedly know everything — right? They probably realize that Yaswhen isn't coming back, that's why they hid his writings, so that over time they could rewrite them to their own interpretations. They lied about the scrolls being here ... they've certainly hidden other things too," Faeraud said.

"Seaweed! You've been chomping on too many *tabaccum* twigs," Aedon jested, disagreeing with him. The thought that King Yaswhen might never come back had crossed his mind, as well as many others. But to believe such, would cause the very foundation of their civilization to crumble. There would be nothing to believe in and no hope for which to live on, he thought.

"Aedon, do you realize that the prince, who holds all three scrolls, owns the keys to becoming the next king. These scrolls are mine, they are all mine."

One of the owls began to stir. Faeraud quickly moved the rug back into place and started back down the stairs. Before Aedon could digest what he had become involved in, he turned around and followed.

“Wait, don't leave me here alone,” he cried, shouting after him.

The door had been left ajar and peeking through, they could see that the librarian was once again in position and blocking their way out.

“You're not taking the scroll from here?” Aedon objected in a whisper, holding him back.

Faeraud pushed him aside, pulled the main door shut, and popped off a grate to an air passageway above the door. They crawled in moments before a *Witness Wise Owl* woke up.

The endless mazes of tunnels were dirty and dusty and Aedon thought he was going to sneeze but he didn't. Pipes running alongside them seemed to creak and moan in response to their mental wincing about the situation. Scooting along further it seemed to get hotter and sweat began to trickle from their foreheads like the condensation dripping from the pipes.

“Do you even have an idea about where we're slithering to?” Aedon huffed, “I think we're crawling in circles.”

Eventually they came to an exit which led them lower between two walls. Faeraud popped open a vent and they tumbled out into a corridor. Standing up, they discovered themselves right in front of the librarian's station. Faeraud passed the scroll to Aedon who concealed it in his garment and scurried out of sight. Aedon's heart pounded faster than a racing unicorn as he listened from around the corner.

“*Bemas-of-light* are shinning today. If you thought you were in a brick-of-fault before, you are now in pyramids-of-trouble?” The librarian announced. “Would you like me to demonstrate exactly how much?”

Faeraud quickly answered, “I was just looking for the power back-up, because of the energy burst. Unless you think my boyish

curiosity got the best of me, then you'll have to open an inquiry exposing the matter — the matter of how I was so easily able to sneak around while passing right in front of — you — the librarian, who keeps the entrance to the locked tower so well guarded and safe?"

The clerk scolded him with a harsh look and then motioned Faeraud on his way back to the study area. The two boys hurried away

"Stupid faun — can't even speak with a proper accent. How'd he ever take position here?" Faeraud scoffed, raising his voice in a high-pitch, trying to mimic the faun's speech. Then he asked Aedon, "Where's the scroll?"

"This writing is no ordinary papyrus. What's going on here — is this really one of the *Ratakas*? I was certain they were all lost," Aedon asked, examining the dowel while sitting back down in the study area.

"Hidden! Not lost," Faeraud corrected, walking over to another scroll where he quickly paged to a section. "The history is recorded — right here. The three writings were deemed too powerful should they end up in the wrong hands. The Asterians selected one of their most trusted to choose three honorable beings. Each was to hide away, and keep secret, one of the scrolls. But the appointed Asterian knew that he could become more powerful and rule the universe if he had all three of them. Instead of hiding them, he engaged an Ambassador, an Etruscan and himself to hide the priceless gems."

"So this is one of them?"

"It is. But the Asterian plotted with the other two men to bring all the scrolls to a secret island where they would over-throw the *Asterian Council* and rule the world," Faeraud continued.

"But that never happened," Aedon questioned.

"Indeed not. The *Asterian Council* was watching through *enchanted elements* of their own. They deported the mastermind back to Asteria and destroyed his body down here so he could never come back."

“They killed him?” Aedon asked.

“No, just his human clone, like the one many other Asterians have here on Earth,” said Faeraud.

“What happened to the Etruscan and the Ambassador?”

“That’s the mystery, nobody knows who they were. They could still be rulers today,” Faeraud revealed.

“I think — I think I’m bringing it back,” Aedon said.

“Taking it back?” Faeraud shouted. “You can’t do that. The scroll is now rightfully mine.”

“How so?” Aedon asked. “You snatched it from —”

“I took it?” he interrupted. “It looks to me like you stole it. I would really hate to be in your sandals when you get caught while returning it back — especially *that* scroll.”

Aedon thrust the scroll at him, “I’m not going to get caught sending it back. You — you’re going to take it back.”

“It’s a secret, Aedon. Remember you gave a *finger-locking* promise,” Faeraud snarled, concealing it under his toga. Clearly he had no intention of returning it.

“Now I’ll spend the remainder of the day wishing I hadn’t made promises,” Aedon grumbled, wondering what was contained within its writings.

“No you won’t. Your brain will be too occupied thinking about tomorrow.”

He knew Faeraud was right. How could he think of anything else? He was too excited about tomorrow: the time for his *Registration of Youth*, the beginning of *Apaturia*, and most importantly, the day he would finally get to meet his father, Gilgamoeh.

PAPYRUS THREE

LEAVING SAHADA

Tomorrow turned into today. It was gloomy and overcast, not the kind of day you'd expect in Sahada. The gentle waves were maturing as they clanked the vessels against each other making it difficult for Aedon to load his trunk-case and other belongings. "Whoa *Seaola*," he cried out, steadying the boat with her name painted on the side. On deck he latched into place *Skyola*, his delta-transported.

Faeraud stopped by, "With this treacherous wind it might prove safer for you to travel in our convoy. Indeed, it could be a rather unpredictable voyage."

"Vessels most always make me ocean-sick, wish someone would invent a transporter large enough to take all this ..."

“What do suppose the balloons are for,” Faeraud said, motioning to one across the dock, “And what about the *Valix*?”

“Hardly affordable! You couldn’t buy or even borrow a *Valix* with all the talents you made in lifetime,” Aedon huffed, checking the final sail in the array of panels between the boat’s front-four masts.

“It’s best advisable that we travel together — for protection. Remember the news about that voyager that was over-turned last equinox — by a school of mermen bandits?” he asked.

“Ah, yes, and the sea-monster, Plesiosaur, I’ve heard all about those fables,” Aedon replied.

“Plesiosaur?” Faeraud questioned. “The only sea-monster out there is me. *Raaahh!*”

The sound he made blended into the churning *crystal-capacitors* that started to whirl around, providing power to the vessel. Her front stem housed his delta-transporter, an egg shaped flying vehicle, with wings tucked in.

“*Seaola* may be old but she still runs like new,” Aedon boasted, trying not to show any embarrassment as he eyed Faeraud’s newer ship. The coat of red and yellow paint on his boat was faded and worn. Aedon double-checked the latches on *Skyola* to make sure they were secure before stepping down to the dock.

PLOP! Two of the triplets appeared, dropping baggage at his feet as if he were their servant instead of their half-brother. Yapet was the oldest, by a whole minute; that gave him reason to be in charge. Seskef usually asked a few dumb questions before following his brother’s half-brained plan. The other triplet was rarely around as their father kept him at home to tend to matters there.

“Un-relinquished!” Yapet started. Then almost laughing he asked, “You’re still planning to go to *Apaturia* in hopes that the *genetikos-replica* is going to come out in your favor?”

Then Seskef leaned in and said, “Isn’t that kind of silly ... it is, I say. You’d really do something like that? Isn’t your mother’s story just a big false fiasco?”

“Where are you going to store all your belongings?” Yapet asked. “There’s no room in my abode.”

“I can’t help either, there’s no room in my abode too,” Seskef added.

“There’s not even going to be room on our balloon for all the stuff you’ve packed,” Yapet reminded him.

“Maybe there is now,” Seskef said, “Now that ... Areshia has dumped you.”

“She didn’t dump me.” Yapet scoffed. “She’s just taking attention to ... family business before meeting up. You’ll see ... she’ll be at father’s mid-meal later this week.”

“Either way,” Seskef grumbled.

Then Yapet turned back and whispered to Aedon, “Even if those genetic tests prove in your favor, no one is going to believe that you are really part of the royal family? Any sane person would find it absurd to believe your mother's droopy-whacky story.”

“And many think you are that prophesized *Uprooter*,” Seskef added. “Isn’t that right, Yapet? ... You did say that ... you we’re conversing round the scroll room just the other night ...”

Yapet hit Seskef in a shutting-up manner with the end of his toga-tie.

“You’re going to fly in that contraption?” Aedon snapped back with a condescending nod toward their wooden balloon parked on the landside of the dock.

“It’s faster than your slow-boat-to-Aszea,” Yapet reminded him.

“Yeah — that means we’ll be at the Irem three days before you!” Seskef taunted.

The two triplets gathered their things up and made way over to their vessel.

“I hope their brackets snap and their delta-transporters fall into the Mesapian Sea,” Aedon scoffed, noticing that they had rigged the balloon to stack, not two, but three transporters under its belly.

The sky began to clear as the contraption's *crystal-capacitors* grew brighter. Each capacitor was powered with a ball of orichalcum crystals and three rings which revolved around the sphere. The balloon had one of these at the front and two at the rear. The ship floated forward past Aedon and over the ocean. It wavered up and down giving evidence that maybe they were having difficulty navigating at first. Aedon assumed that Seskef was flying the vehicle as he remembered him crashing into the educatory once.

Later, the wooden balloon joined the clouds on the horizon and the triplets were gone.

"I've always — never liked them," Faeraud snuffed.

"But they're your relations," Aedon said.

"I'll trade them in for you if that is alright? Oh, I almost forgot, we are related and you are those *snufflers* half-brother."

"If the *genetikos-replica* proves so," Auseten reminded, stepping onto the dock. "And even if it does, come on Faeraud, you know Gilgamoeh is never going to accept Aedon ... regardless."

"Why not? It's a valid scientific model that can't be disputed. It is going to prove that my mother is telling the truth," Aedon insisted, clenching his fist in defense.

"Did you forget that your father holds onto the ancient interpretations of the *Prophecies*? It would be a disgrace for him to have fathered a child before marrying," said Faeraud.

"Such a blunder would label him a hypocrite and ruin any of the minor credibility he has left," Auseten argued back.

"It is strange that he didn't quickly and quietly arrange to marry in order for all the questions to go away," Faeraud reasoned, thinking to himself, "But of course, *Gilgy* has always been a self-righteous suppressor."

"Prince Lord Methouslan decreed that the results will be revealed at my *Registration of Youth*, at which time the world will know the truth," Aedon said.

"Methouslan doesn't like controversies. I think he had the results sealed for a century, hoping the scandal would fade away.

I'm just suggesting ...” Faeraud said, lowering his voice and leaning closer to Aedon. “You needn't worry about acceptance from bigamous brothers of mine who are destined to be banished from the kingdom. That whole part of the family — they are so involved with the Irminsul Pyramid and its ancient methods ...”

“I think they're just a little misguided,” Aedon interrupted, “Maybe imbalanced.”

“Way too imbalanced, I'd say, from sunrise to sunset,” Faeraud huffed. “Do you wish take the lead — my *Smart-owl* navigator? Hear you're the best in the entire *educatory*.”

“I suspect so. Sure, I'd be obliged to.”

Each of them stowed away their last belongings and prepared their ships for voyage. Just as they were completing the positioning of the sails, Yenocha stepped out onto the docks. He yelled through his cupped hands trying to raise his voice over the roaring wind which tore at their masts.

“Faeraud! Faeraud!”

Everyone stopped and turned around toward his calling.

“Recent developments seem to have placed a strain on the *Registration of Youth* activities this sun-cycle,” he announced. “Would you prefer the details of the situation to be revealed in private?”

Then Faeraud answered, “Privately? I have nothing to hide like the masters of this institution who debate in secret.”

Yenocha continued, “Very well. Faeraud will not be travelling with you today. His fondness for challenging proper authorities have delayed decisions regarding his *Registration*.”

“Proper authorities — what proper authorities?” Faeraud angrily asked, jumping up on the floor-rail of his vessel. “You — you think you're everyone's authority.”

Aedon was relieved that this announcement did not include him. His completion of this academia term seemed safe, at least for now. Faeraud lowered his sail back down and secured it, grabbed a small pack and stepped off to follow Yenocha. He stopped for a moment as he passed by Aedon's boat. “Someday this old *prick-of-*

a-porcupine will learn who the real authority is. Until then, Aedon, you'll have to lead the others."

"What about *Apaturia*?" Aedon asked, "You'll miss it."

"No I won't. I'll fly in later after I straighten things up with this poor pathetic *destructioneer*."

Faeraud was soon off and away from the docks and the others resumed raising their second level of sails. Up the sails went and down flew a *copy-parrot*.

"Dahrling! Dahrling!" the parrot croaked out.

The red parrot landed on the rail running alongside Aedon's boat. He was out of breath and jabbered away as he vented his tired blue and yellow wings. It was Peter. He was called that because whenever he came to deliver a message he was always late, tired and *petered-out*.

Annoyed, Aedon snapped at him, "Maybe, just maybe you could finish the message."

"Maybe pretty bird gets a drink," he huffed, lunging his beak with a threatening bite.

"Why did we have to get stuck with a *copy-parrot* who gives out more attitude than messages," Aedon complained, giving the parched bird a drink from his water-satchel.

From the birds first two words, he could tell the message was from his mother. The parrot proceeded to copy her voice and act out her mannerisms (of drunkenness, one would guess, from its portrayal).

"Dahrling, dearest, you must travel here, back home, immediately — before you make journey to the Irem. I will see your countenance by sunset tomorrow. This regards the *genetikos-replica* and your father. Do not delay."

Aedon was stumped and began talking back to the parrot as if it were Cleacious, "Mother — there is no possible way to make such a long journey in the allotted time. I'm not going. Take this message back to her ..."

"Not going?" the bird objected. "It took me ten days to fly here. It will be all over by that time."

“Why does she refuse to get a *transglaust* or even an *electroglaust*? How come she keeps sending parrots?” Aedon complained. “I know, I’ll send a communicae to Cain and he can take it to her.”

“Did you not hear the part about,” Peter repeated, imitating Aedon’s mother again, “This regards the *genetikos-replica* and your father. Do not delay.”

“I barely have enough time to sail across the ocean and up the Pishon River to the Irem. She lives in Gadeirus.”

“So, so,” the bird squawked.

“If you know anything about geography, you know that the educatory here in Sahada is thousands of stadia east of Atlantis and Gadeirus is the western most island opposite the continent. It would take weeks to sail there,” Aedon explained, pacing the deck of his boat.

“Aedon should fly — Aedon fly!” Peter ordered.

Realizing that was the only choice he had left, he huffed, “She is stealing away my celebration like a thief snatches a satchel. Why does she always do this? She waits to the very last minute and sends a bird with her plea? What is she really up to this time, Peter?”

“A good *copy-parrot* never repeats anything except the message,” the bird boasted, plumping his breast forward; then he cocked his head to the side and quickly revealed, “Though other fowl have heard that the *tax-scroller* is coming to collect. Someone else chirped that she was going to be *hung-out-to-dry*, and ...”

“Hung-out-to-dry! What has she gotten herself into this time? If this is another one of her droopy made-up circumstances, I will hang her *out-to-dry* myself.”

Ausethen overheard and asked, “You’re not coming with us, are you?”

Aedon stared down at the ground bewildered and disappointed. One only has *Registration of Youth* once in his life and the celebration is supposed to be grander than the grandest of

all holidays. Miffed, he tugged on his trunk-case, aligning its fit into the tight back chamber of the delta.

“I’ll be there for most it. I’ll be there by the day of *Apaturia* if I have to throw the *mother-of-the-island* herself over the cliff!”

He stowed the sails, unlatched the transporter, climbed into *Skyola* and floated it over the dock to the runway side. “I wish she would go back to the Asterian moon where she came from.”

“But she is only half-Asterian,” Auseten reminded him before leaving.

“Wish they’d change the rules. If second-part-Asterians can live down here, why can’t second-part-humans live up there?”

“Wasn’t supposed to be any half-beings either-where,” Peter crowed.

When the *Territorial Quarrels* destroyed their beam of light, some of the Asterians were trapped down here. Some of them began having rendezvous with the humans even though it was forbidden.

Aedon grumbled, climbing into the delta. “The mixed up races are their fault not ours — and what’s so wrong with that anyhow?”

“Ya mama was hidden on the island. Where all the half-breed *new-borners* were taken for safety, until a future day when relations were better ... like the sun-cycle you were born in,” Peter explained, jumping off his shoulder onto the passenger seat.

SWOOSH! The transporter shot off the short runway and within minutes they could see the Sahada Continent shrinking in size. Aedon leveled the flying-machine into the magnetic orichalcum stream. While he was upset about his mother’s timing, he was eager to visit the island again. It had been many sun-cycles since he had been back home in Gadeirus. Still, he was apprehensive about the trip and wondered what shenanigans she was up to this time.

PAPYRUS FOUR

THE CLIFF CITY IN GADEIRUS

The *crystal-capacitor* spun faster as Aedon pushed the throttle forward. Over the southernmost tip of Atlantis he flew and then the terrain became ocean again.

“Endless water,” Peter remarked, fluttering his wings as he jumped up on the instrument board to look out the window.

“The sea has always frightened me,” Aedon confessed, steering the delta around. “Been afraid of it most my life ... ever since ... since my childhood.”

“You have a machine to flap your wings for *ya*. Poor birdie here, had to fly the whole route for days ...”

“Your *beaking* again. Look — we’re almost there!” Aedon shouted, pointing out the window toward an island tip that peaked through a shelf of clouds.

“Can’t fly through that, especially with darkness coming on,” the parrot objected, lifting a wing toward the long shadows.

“Don’t worry, Peter. We’ll round toward the western-side while there’s still a glimmer of rays.”

Tucked away into a crescent shaped cut-out of the mountain, elevated midway, on a plateau, sat a small city where twinkles of light attempted to stab at the heavy fog.

“What about the *orichalcum* stream? What if we fly off the grid?” Peter agonized, covering one eye with a wing as the capacitor sputtered a couple times.

“That old pyramid’s always been spotty on the grid way up here. ... Anyway, not to fret ...”

“Do fear! Do definitely be afraid! If the grid fails, we’ll dive into a tail spin, down the canyon and crash into the freezing sea below,” Peter agonized, dramatizing the situation.

“I’ve got a backup talent of *orichalcum* that’ll take us in,” Aedon confessed, looking over his shoulder at the chamber in the rear section of the transporter. Peter lifted his beak with a big sigh of relief.

“*Birdie* forgot that you used to live here and knows the ways.”

“I haven’t come here to reminisce and relive my baby days. We’re going to find out what mother is up to and then I’m leaving, back on my way, before noon tomorrow,” Aedon grumbled, vowing not to stay a minute longer. “I shall hardly not concede an absence from the *Apaturia* celebrations, my *Registration of Youth*, nor the reading of my *genetikos*.”

He had dreamt of it so vividly that he could already see it on his arm. He had waited his entire life to receive a permanent band and wanted the respect he was sure it would bring. He was sick of the uncertainty the gray-band represented, not to mention all the teasing from the other kids at the *educatory*. Not once had he entertained a thought that the *genetikos-replica* could prove otherwise. If it did, his mother could be banished from the country

and he could be demoted to a band the same color as hers — a tarnished pewter one.

“Me forgets how you got a gray-band? Birdie not remembers.”

“Children born from a parent of the human-race and a parent of the Asterian-race receive gray-bands. *Gray-banders*, as they call us, are sometimes excluded from proper social positions. Then there are all the rumors about us too.”

“What do they say?”

“Stuff, like we have esoteric powers, that we have distorted and freakish features, that we frighten young children. ... Fortunately such features did not genocide down to me. At least I think I look normal,” Aedon said, attempting to see his reflection in the window.

“Except for that eyebrow,” Peter exclaimed, looking up at Aedon’s missing left brow.

“Bunker down little birdie,” Aedon suggested, as he retracted the vehicle’s wings and glided the delta-transporter through the fog to the *air-pier*. There were many berths crammed together and protruding from the cliffs of the city. The delta just barely fit into one. He opened the hatch and threw on his wrap as it was quite a bit cooler in the mountain island and he didn’t want to succumb to the sniffles.

“These *Akasha Fogs* always give me the creeps,” said Aedon, remembering the tale about how the fogs over the Island contained spirits of dead Asterians.

“I’ll have to guide you through the old path, much has changed since your last visit,” Peter said, fluttering to a landing on Aedon’s shoulder.

“I’ve a mind to rent a coach. That road is quite long as I remember it, and I’ve become accustomed to — not walking whenever it can be avoided,” Aedon said sharply, turning toward the area of shops beyond the docks.

“Birdie accustomed to not flying, too,” the parrot echoed.

“What happened to the eatery that used to be here?” Aedon asked, looking up at the gigantic multi-level plaza that replaced it. Wide-wooden planks, propped up with stilts, extended the city well beyond the cliff’s edge. Aedon wasn’t sure if it were four or five levels high, it was difficult to see through the dancing fog which crowded over the upper levels.

“Lots of things have changed since your last visit,” the parrot squawked.

“Where’s the carriage shop? They do still rent the gigs?” Aedon tried to confirm. “There used to be two unicorns and a little white ...”

“Carriage? Did someone request a ride? Who is this creature of the evening fog, who so dangerously glides in here a few sand grains before the sun sets?” a man asked, popping in front of them.

“Curious Cain?” Aedon yelled, recognizing him.

“What brings our local prince back to the Cliff City?” Cain asked, rubbing his receding hairline. “My memory digs up a voice of someone vowing never to return again.”

Curious led them around the plaza to the rear stables where he turned over an expired hourglass to begin keeping time. He had an entire wall filled with them.

“Why so many?” Aedon asked.

“Rentals have grown. All of these count the pebbles of time for each client who is out with one of my carriages,” he boasted. Cain’s vibrant personality was still as youthful as the one-horned colts in his stable.

“I’d be taken back and thrown over a cliff myself,” Aedon answered, “If Curious Cain didn’t already know more about why I was standing here than my very self. What trouble has my mother gotten into this time?”

Carrying on, as if he hadn’t even politely attempted to pry, Cain began to mount up one of the unicorns. “Ever since that one unfortunate event, I’ve made it my duty to be everybody’s keeper. A

man's *gotta* have answers when they ask — especially in these times. Will you be needing a single or a double cab?"

"A double?" Aedon questioned, having never seen one of these on the island before. He couldn't make up his mind and began to babble as he usually did when faced with too many choices, "If I have to bring mother back, then I will need a wider carriage. What if her excuses are so lame that I just want to leave her there? If I take a single coach it would give me an out or an escape back without having space for her to tag along, at least initially. But I don't want to travel to *Apaturia* alone. If I take a double cart, that might be obvious. But it would be obvious that I had purposely plotted not to help her out if I arrived in the smaller wagon. Then again, isn't that the message I want to convey to her?"

"A single," he quickly confirmed, having thoroughly (though illogically) thought-out the entire episode that stretched before him.

The unicorns were restless and some of them were complaining about the cold weather outside. Aedon consoled his decision in the fact that only one of them would have to make the trip instead of two which would be needed to haul a double carriage. As a back-up plan he could always return the unicorn to fetch a larger wagon. A velvet-white female with a dark-purple mane was anxious to get out and couldn't wait to be harnessed up.

"Some of *em* are more eager to trot about tonight than to eat," Curious Cain observed, fixing her to the coach and politely escorting Aedon into the seat. The *copy-parrot* quickly darted from his shoulder onto the cushion beside him, "*Dharling*, dearest, you must travel here immediately —"

"We're here already," Aedon pointed out, interrupting the parrot's repeat performance. Turning to Curious he asked, "How many talents —"

"Not yet, when you return. And remember a small gratuity will buy extra feed for your unicorn hostess," said Cain, shaking the hourglass hoping that the sand would flow faster so he could charge even more.

With a twist of the reins the carriage was off and they were down the path readily.

“Frightful path up ahead there, it is,” said the unicorn pulling them.

Aedon shouted out to her, “What’s your name?”

She snorted back, “Meca, I’m Meca the mean unicorn.”

A bit taken back, he shouted over the noisy whirling wind, “Glad to meet you, I think. I’m Aedon.”

“Well, I’m not glad,” the bird squawked.

“Quiet, enough!” Aedon snapped. “Now I’ve opened up dialogue with a lesbian unicorn that has a boisterous personality. What’s her story anyway, telling me that her name is Meca the *mean* unicorn? What’s she going to do, pierce me with her dull single horn?”

He folded his arms and slouched down in the corner of the seat as the breeze continued to gush through the sides of the carriage. Peter the *copy-parrot* took refuge under his cloak trying to stay warm, yet, occasionally popping his beak out for a glimpse.

“Lovely brisk evening for traveling, isn’t it?” Meca continued. “I’ve always loved the more frigid temperatures. Why Ceca and I were just *talkin’ ’bout stompin’* a vacation up near the mountains north of the Agglomeration, *’cept* Ceca was a bit concerned the seasonal *Northernor* might be just ending and a bit too much of a chill for her.”

Aedon rolled his eyes as he was not in the mood to carry on a conversation with the loud, overly-social, unicorn. Then he confided to the bird, “I should have searched my memory before harnessing-up Meca. I think she was one of the two that has been here for decades. You know how the old ones are, they’ll babble on for hours and say absolutely nothing.”

The pathway, dark with overgrown and unkempt trees, came to a fork where Meca veered to the left. Aedon was certain she had gone the wrong way. He wasn’t familiar with the path she was taking and panicked that she should have turned right at the fork in the road next to the triple rock-head, but Meca went left.

He yanked at the reins and shouted after her, "Meca, why are we going this way? Mother's abode is to the right. There is nothing down this road except an old-abandoned lodge."

"Did your mother not tell of the renovations?" Meca chomped out, "Oh, you poor uninformed boy."

"What renovations?" he asked, sitting back again.

Around the bend and through a tunnel of weeping willow trees they bounced. The branches seemed to tug at them before giving way to the once vacated lot where an enormous estate presented itself. The abandoned habitat had been replaced with a much larger one, so big, that it looked more like an Irem than an abode. It was ornamented and sculpted with decorations made from silver; not the bright shiny kind, but rather, a pewter tarnish. It appeared as cold as the wind that blew outside. The gray palace was a piece of architecture that no skilled designer would have ever imagined, much less, created. It was awful.

Meca galloped over a stone bridge where murky algae jimmied underneath. Aedon wondered what was beyond the two iron-grated doors where the unicorn came to a halt. He carefully stepped out of the carriage as the black gates opened up.

PAPYRUS FIVE

CLEACIOUS' WELCOME

Watch where you bounce!” Peter squawked, flying past a kangaroo waiter whom he almost collided with.

The *kangawaiter* presented a shiny silver tray of *nectars* which Aedon brushed aside as he entered the vestibule. Looking down at the tray he could see Cleacious’ reflection as she, his mother, descended down the stairway.

He looked up at her haughty black and gray dress, necklaces, earrings of black onyx, and make-up so thick that, had the fog not lifted, it certainly would have run down her cheeks. She stepped off the stair-riser as if she were the *Queen of Atlantis* modeling the latest fashion which no one would actually want to be caught dead (or alive) wearing. He grimaced with half-a-frown before he approached in his usual condescending manner which he had become so accustomed to presenting whenever he saw her. She picked up a tall nectar from the kangaroo's tray.

“Nectar, my son?”

He politely motioned the beverage away with his hand. She plucked a glass from the tray and pushed it into his palm anyway.

“What is the situation that beckons me back here this time?” Aedon demanded.

“Situation? Does a mother need cause to see her child? The occasion is *Registration of Youth* and I have commissioned a celebration. ... How do you like the new abode? I personally designed it myself.”

“I suspected so. What happened to our real home?”

“This is our home, a dwelling which I created. I even directed the brigade of mammals and beasts that build it,” she boasted, gilding across the floor toward a couple of closed doors.

“The only property you ever owned was to the right of the three-headed rock. How could you afford to build this fortress which is almost bigger than the entire Cliff City itself?” he asked, mulling about how she had obtained such wealth.

He examined the expensive statues, columns, and silver that adorned the place while suspecting that something was amiss. One thing, he knew for sure, was that the celebration would give his mother an excuse to abundantly drink nectars. Nectars were those distilled drinks that made one feel warm and fuzzy all over, but if you drank more than one or two you became droopy. His mother always drank so many nectars that it usually took six, maybe even seven, before she would become affected; however, after that she wouldn't stop and she'd have six or seven more.

“I'd like to retire to my room for a quick nap after such a long journey,” Aedon told her. “Where is my room?”

“Nonsense, a healthy young lad like yourself shouldn't be napping, you should be socializing, making connections for your future,” she insisted, opening the double doors to a ballroom filled with guests.

With the snap of a finger, Cleacious commanded the rhythm of music to pick up. She quickly downed her nectar and reached for another.

"Maybe I could at least store my wrap," he pleaded.

A strange man snatched away Aedon's shawl and flung it across the room, replacing it with an arm around his shoulder.

"Store your wrap? Cloaks are much more prudent than a rag I would speculate. I own a bundle of cloak stands and obviously you would make a fine keeper. Have you considered *mercantiling*?"

His arm was quickly replaced by that of another one of Cleacious' pals, "*Mercantiling*? Certainly not! He wants a future. The boy's related to Prince Gilgamoeh, the inventor — the genius. I've got a great new idea that just needs a brain like yours to put in momentum ..."

The guests at the party were all of Cleacious cohorts and not the kind of people royalty would normally socialize with. Aedon tried to get away, but they stuck to him as if their lives depended on him choosing a caste that very night.

"Please, do detail what the best craft is for my choosing ... and explain why ... quickly now ... before I just blurt out with one," he encouraged as they moved in closer.

Each voice, so sure of an aspiration for him, attempted to out-shout the other. As they wrangled, he quietly slipped away. Surreptitiously he went upstairs where he continued to watch from around a corner balcony.

"Peter? Peter are you around?" Aedon called, whispering and yelling at the same time while trying to avoid detection from his new friends downstairs, but loud enough with a hope that the bird would hear him.

"Which room is mine?" he asked himself, wandering down the hall until he came into a large one he supposed belonged to his mother. He recognized the weaved-wicker nightstand.

"She didn't even get new furniture to match the new castle — how lame," he remarked, poking around the room reviewing artifacts of his past while an occasional excited scream passed the door. He plopped down on the lounge next to the wicker table.

Startled by the sound of a scruffy *bezoar-goat*, Aedon quickly sat up.

“*Yeahhh, yeahhh*. Listen to *'em* know-it-alls blabbering *'bout* what *ya* should do. ... And all they really want is a piece of *ya*, to make their life better. *Yeahhh*, I'm Scapappi for introductions, of which I'm not good at, at all.”

He responded, at first sounding a little like the goat himself, “*Yeahhh* — Aedon here. ... I could — I will — I'll regurgitate if one more beast tells me of their plans for my future.”

“So *yar 'd* prince. ... Don't look much like what I'd *'spected*. .. No matters,” Scapappi said. “*Ya* need *ta* relax, take a moment for *ya'rsel*. Now is not the time *ta* force *ya* future. ... Maybe ... find a nice girl, a princess, maybe, and enjoy.”

Scapappi leaned closer and lowered his gruff voice as if he had some wisdom that only he could deliver, “I hear *yar gonna* be a real prince soon. ... One o' those *bonafid* ones. ... A prince your age, need to be courting a princess ... and not *worrin' 'bout* these low-life craft castes. *Ya* have a girl *ya* like? Maybe someone from that educatory thing.”

“Uh, maybe ... maybe not,” he answered.

“So, who's the fine princess *yuv* found?” Scapappi asked. “Bet she dresses as royal as *da* purple armband she wears, huh?”

Aedon didn't answer. The only girl he had been interested in was Areshia, his half-brother's girlfriend, and she was neither overly-pretty nor royalty.

“Every prince be *needin'* a princess,” Scapappi added. “*'specially* a princess like *da* kind that attend that educatory thing o' *yars*.”

“Why should I listen to your *beckling* advice ... or any other beast's?” Aedon blurted out, annoyed at all the questions.

“*Yeahhh*, was just *tryin'* to help *ya* ... *ya* know — with no father and all ... I thought *ya* might like some ...”

“I have a father,” Aedon adamantly said, “I don't need another schemer concocting my life map. By this time next week, I'll have real brothers and my actual father. Then maybe I'll leave

my mother and never have to put up with her embarrassing parties again.”

Aedon stormed out of the room and back downstairs to find Peter.

“Peter! Peter where are you?”

“Over here, can’t a bird even get a decent drink?” the parrot crowed, sipping from a glass. He was perched on the edge of a drink tray that had been momentarily abandoned.

“Peter, I’m as dried up as a raisin. Show me where I can lay my head before I drown birdie in one of these goblets,” Aedon snapped, turning to go back upstairs as he noticed a gang of interested partiers rushing his way.

Peter darted toward the ceiling, leading him to a room where he could retire for the evening. Aedon closed his eyes as the party below raved on. Once in awhile, he could hear Peter begging the guests to lower their voices. They quieted for a few moments before an even louder drunken-debate on some new tangent emerged.

The morning sun awakened and its light streamed in through a tiny-triangular-shaped window onto Aedon’s eyelid, waking him up. He was thankful that it did, else he probably would have slept later than he wanted and much longer than he already had.

Quickly he gathered his belongings together hoping that Meca would still be waiting for him at the front entrance. He hadn’t yet conversed with his mother and was not sure if she would be traveling to *Apaturia* with him. It seemed that her invention of an emergency, to divert him home, was for nothing more than a whimsical party to show him off to her friends like some new decoration she had just acquired at the plaza.

From a room down the hall he could hear her babbling on in a droopy inconsistent tone. It was the usual-exaggerated-drunken plotting about how she was going to be the *Queen of Atlantis* some day. Perhaps he should have paid closer attention and

gone into her chambers and took all her plotting seriously. But he didn't. He always believed her tales were too far-fetched and unbelievable.

Instead, he chose to partake of *first-meal* with the servants. It was obvious that they only prepared the morning meal for themselves anyway; because, everyone else in the household was too droopy to eat this early.

The meal-nook was a long tunnel-like area which ran toward the lower back of the structure. Everyone sat at a wooden table facing forward which made it difficult to converse. The servants consisted of beavers, foxes, grizzly bears, tigers, and of course the *kangawaiters*. They chattered away about subjects like: how messy the guests were the night before; how droopy and obnoxious Cleacious acted; how nice the new plaza was; how far a walk it was to the plaza; and of course, how few talents they were paid for their hard work.

Aedon tried to interject a question. Raising his voice he repeated it again, "How the *sayer* did my mother afford to construct this place?"

The servants became silent. Covered with awkwardness they began to pick up and leave, making excuses.

"Got *ta* soap up my tail to mop the floor," a beaver remarked.

"That lawn sure wants some *eatin'* to even its spread," a cow said, kicking over a milk bucket as she left.

"*Them grapes* are *callin'* for a *harvestin'*," the fox replied. "They'll make a good sun-cycle of wine this round."

"Maybe I'll just have to investigate myself," Aedon said, leaving his *egg-yoker* (made from a pita bread filled with egg yolks, cheese, tomatoes, peppers and spinach) behind and walking upstairs to find his mother. He stopped in the hallway but didn't enter. Her door was open just a wee-crack, enough for him to see Scapappi inside making demands.

"*Ya owe mees for da intrest on dis place and if ya don' pay up ...*"

“Silly goat, you know I can’t make payment until my son gets his inheritance of talents. Why not go down to the confectionary and pour yourself a relaxing nectar,” she said.

“*Ya dan’t* get it lady, *ya* built *dis* contraption on some other peasant’s land. *Der takin’* possession and *ya gotta* pay me back, plus *da* interest,” the goat scowled.

“How was I supposed to know those stupid wanderers would come back. They’d been gone for hundreds of sun-cycles. ... Anyone would’ve thought they were dead.”

“*Nows I sa’posin’ ya* want me *ta* fix *dat* too?”

“You’re going to be a very wealthy goat and you know that I AM going to be queen. You’ll see,” she said, twitching her left eye unconsciously as she always did when she was less than truthful.

“*Dats su’posin’* that *gen-tika* thingy comes out *likin’* what *ya* want.”

“Regarding that *genetikos-replica* ... this thing must be made certain, that Aedon is Gilgamoeh’s son.”

“It’s already part of *da* plan ... consider it *dun*. ... ‘*Member* though *dis* is *gonna* cost *ya* ... really expensively cost *ya*.”

“Is the Queen of Atlantis broke? Besides, I have no doubt about the results. Aedon is the high-prince’s firstborn son. Who else would know but me — his mother? Your involvement is purely for insurance, my little goat.”

“*Yeahhh*, *ya* told me the story *bemas* of times,” Scapappi responded. “The sealed replica *’ll* be replaced with absolute confirming results. ... If I fail on my part, *den* let this abode fall upon my head. ... ‘*Speakin’* bout *yur* son, he be *needin’* a proper princes. A marriage or engagement would assure a larger payout.”

“Since my baby’s birth he has known of only one possible father — Prince — someday to be Prince Lord — Gilgamoeh. Everyone on the planet believes that. Everyone, except Gilgamoeh the idiot. And that must remain —”

Aedon stammered at the suggestions and began to wonder if there might be someone else who was his real father. Cleacious and the goat noticed him at the door.

“Eaves-dropping, were you?” his mother asked, “How — how much have you heard?”

“Aren’t you packed and prepared yet, mother?” he asked. “Certainly most, you don’t plan to wear that burlap-sack-looking toga to the Irem?”

Scapappi suspected he had overheard their discussion and returned to the previous subject, “*Ya* realize *ya* live in a political climate where there are those who probably already tampered with *da* results. I am merely acting as a concerned agent to guarantee that the accurate results are shown.”

“Quiet, I have a headache,” Cleacious ordered, holding her head between her hands for a moment.

“I’ve heard enough plots and lies to last a hundred moon-cycles. Now what the *sayer* is going on here?”

“There is only one truth — one single fact here my son,” Cleacious snapped, standing up. She started for her nectar glass, but stopped when she realized it was empty. “You were born while Gilgamoeh was courting princess Na’ama. Obviously she is not your mother, since I am. The royal family does not want to face that reality.”

“Why else *wudda dey* forced *da genetikos-thing* made?” Scapappi added.

“They already know the replica will confirm your legitimacy, else why would’ve they kept it a secret for so many sun-cycles?” she bitterly said, sitting down again.

“Now some are *suggestin’ da* results be delayed *furder* — *‘til ya* select a caste.”

“My *Registration of Youth* has come and I will choose a caste and not let them hide the truth any longer,” Aedon huffed.

“*Yeahhh*, we all know what the replica will reveal,” Scapappi said. “The royal *familia* with their power and riches — *Ya* know that they will make those *findin’s* say that *ya* — that *ya* not a prince, no matter what. They’ve had ninety-some sun-cycles *ta* tamper with *da* original. They’ll never see *ya* to your rightful

position. *Ya* must insist on your inheritance — all of it. That's *whys* I'm *gonna* helps *ya* out."

They all stared at one another. The revelation was so obvious, yet no one had dared to even think about it before.

Aedon blurted out, "If I discover that you have been deceitful, then ... I might have a mind to jump into the *Akaska Falls* and plunge to my death — right after I push you over the same cliff."

"When it is confirmed that Aedon is Prince Gilgamoeh's real firstborn son, he will be in line for the throne instead of one of the triplets," said Cleacious, revealing another reason why the *replica* might be altered.

"Then I mustn't, I must not attend *Apaturia*," Aedon cried.

"*Ya* haves *ta* go. *Ya* *peepsils* owes me *fa' dis buildin'*. *Nows* I *gotta* wrangle the land it sits on away. *Yas* owes me! *Yas* owes me!"

"Aedon, you must go!" Cleacious insisted. "They have no quarrel with you. Even if they fix the results and all goes awry, it will prevail that I was the deceptive one. Cooperation bought us freedom for some time. Now we must be silent no more. It is your *Registration of Youth* and time for you to receive the inheritance that is rightfully yours. You must go and reunite with your father."

"What is he like?" Aedon asked. "What is my father, Gilgamoeh, really like?"

She thought for a few moments and then responded, "He is a prince, a king, a powerful man. He is gentle, yet rough. Handsome and charming, yet he has that ugly and dark side. He quietly and peacefully pardons your errors, yet pays back his grudges with a vengeance. He appears perfect, righteous and just in public, but socially flawed in private. The secret of our affair is about to become public gossip. You shouldn't expect him to be overjoyed in anticipation."

"When do I get to meet him?"

"I am not sure. I never thought about it," she answered. "I suspect you should go to the *Irem* and present yourself there."

“But I have never once yet been granted a meeting with him. Am I to just show up and present myself?” Aedon asked.

“*Dahrling*,” she said, “You should attend the family dinner on the *Eve of Apaturia*. I am certain your destiny lies there. I hope you will never doubt my word. You are a prince, a royal prince.”

“How am I supposed to do that? They don’t just let anyone who walks up to the archway in?”

“Then ... you’ll just have to get noticed,” she said, motioning her hand in circles.

“If *yas git* notices and friend-up *ta* someone who’ll *git ya* in ... *Ya* could garnish an invitation — that way *dey* can *git* to know *ya*. Then they’ll be less likely to be *fixin yur* replica *outta* favor,” the goat said.

“You talk as if you won’t be there, mother?” Aedon asked. “You must present me to him. You have to. ... You’re not going, are you?”

“I will arrive later,” she said, “For the reading of the *genetikos* the next day.”

“If I go alone, then how will I know which man is my father?” he questioned, “I won’t be able to recognize him, if you are not there to make introductions?”

She answered, “You’ve seen images before. He’ll be the one whom is most quiet and attempts to stay furthest away from you. The closer you get to him, the more his family will work at keeping you away.”

“Why will he not accept me, his own son? And you, my mother?”

“I am half Asterian,” she reminded him. “Many sun-cycles ago, it was unlawful for Asterians and humans to come together. ... But all of that has changed.”

“If *yas* don’t go, *da* peasants, *da* tax collectors, and *mees ‘ll* have, *ya* matriarch to be *hung-out-to-dry*; and *den yul* be sold *inta* slavery,” the goat bellowed, shaking his scruffy snout in Aedon’s face.

“Pray you don’t ever get lost in the Agglomeration Forest where they roast goats for dinner,” Aedon snarled back.

“I never like *ya* anyhow. Looks *kinda* soft *ta* be a prince. How many nectars was *ya fixin* on, Cleacious, when *ya* popped this fetus?”

Aedon jumped up and started for the goat’s throat, he wanted to choke the animal.

Cleacious sprung to her feet to hold the two apart, “It is time, now, for my son to receive his due place at the Irem, and seize his fair place at the throne. His inheritance will follow and fill us with wealth and happiness,” she said, rambling on in a daydream, “As a prince and a king, my son could bring together every continent of Earth, all of the Asterians, and the entire universe.”

Then she admonished him, “You should go. You must take what is rightfully yours. *Dahrling*, you must go to the Irem and to Apaturia.”

PAPYRUS SIX

VOYAGE TO ATLANTIS

VAROOM! Two humongous delta-transporters, with wingspans as wide as a stadium, vibrated the sky and descended over Aedon's own vehicle, barely avoiding a collision. Their size, along with the noise they produced, confirmed that they were arrivals from Asteria. He surmised they were Asterians bringing gifts for the holidays. They would reach the Irem half a day before he would. Their *Valixes* flew much faster than his little ship and they practically cut the atmosphere in two like a knife splits open a piece of fruit.

Aedon squinted out the window. He couldn't tell for sure how close the coast was as his delta vibrated just enough so that the horizon was a blur. The more he strained to see, the more he thought he could see it. As the sun notched another degree down in the sky, it proved so. Indeed he could see the *pillars* almost a thousand stadia away.

Golden statues of the kings and queens of ancient times occasionally glided under his flight. Then floating platforms, each with a tall red giraffe, appeared once every few stadia. The tall necks waved Aedon toward a merging line of vehicles approaching the city. Awhile later the shoreline of Atlantis began to grow. He lowered his voyager and passed just above the sea on an approach to the continent where he floated to a pause.

“Coming from and going to?” a mermaid inspector asked, bobbing through a floating inspection station with a cutout into the water. They guarded the entire perimeter of the continent.

“Gadeirus to Tyrrhenia, then on to the Irem, my finest inspector,” Aedon said, smiling. He always felt comfortable and safe when a mermaid was around. Once when he was a child, his mother’s delta rolled over (in a wind-pocket she claimed) and he fell out into the sea below. Fortunately, a mermaid saw the accident. She came to his rescue and showed him how to stay underwater for long periods of time.

Next, two mermaids with x-raying eyes scanned the vehicle and then one of them waved her tail, indicating that his credentials were in order. The delta’s capacitors glowed brighter as they rapidly propelled him forward. The continent divided into two lands as he continued his flight into the bay. The city, called Tyrrhenia, was split by the Nile River and its cascading waterfalls. It was joined by pillars and a bridge, which had become known as *The Bridge of Pillars*. The northern portion of the city resided in the province of Ampheres where progress and nature meshed with artistic taste. The southern part of Tyrrhenia was situated in the etruscan of Mestor, the climate was warmer but the people were not. They were as cold as their steel buildings which crowded out all evidence of natural beauty.

The *Bridge of Pillars* morphed the two cultures together with everything from fancy eateries to piped-in hot and cold springs. It was the most magnificent and busiest landscape in the world. It was so grand in size that Aedon thought he could reach out and grab it, yet it was still nearly ten stadia away. Spilling out

from a shelf cut deep into the continent Aedon passed by a waterfall cascading down its crescent moon-shaped steps. He could smell the fresh damp mist. Rising from the banks on each side of him were two enormous building-like towers, climbing into the sky at a twenty-five degree angle. The two pillars were joined by a bridge that was ten levels high and contained many plazas, abodes and inns.

Decreasing his altitude along with his speed, he approached the waterfall. He could see some of the mermaids and mermen catching the dead fish that had gone over the falls. Others were further out to sea playing with the dolphins. He swooned the delta in a circle over the water and then lifted her up. Doves passed by and a choir of flamingos on the left bank emerged, singing their famous rendition of *Welcome to Atlantis*.

Two escorting white-winged horses were alerted and sent to bring him to the inn where he had a reservation. The vehicle's *crystal-capacitors* dimmed as the winged horses guided him underneath the long extension bridge. The escorting duo must have been in a bad mood (or perhaps it was just the burdens of the city that quenched their politeness) as they mechanically glided him in, yet, without whinnying a word or even giving a nod of acknowledgement. They flew poised with their heads proudly erect and their tails, like small thin rudders, steered toward the delta storage bins. A shovel-like opening descended from beneath the bridge and Aedon was smoothly elevated up into the belly of her structure as the winged horses departed.

The next morning Aedon woke up early, remembering that he hadn't purchased any gifts. At Apaturia it was customary to give gifts to anyone who was being honored. He knew that his *Registration of Youth* would bring him many presents, but he had forgotten to get something for Auseten and, most of all, Faeraud.

Aedon headed out for the market on the upper-tier of the bridge. The entire length of the span was covered with a *mecca-maze* of commerce. Multi-level shops, adorned in decorations and

displays, beckoned him. These were the finest in the world. Mechanical moving-stairways, platforms, elevators and *waterbuses* were available for transportation throughout this bridge of commerce which stretched across the river and ten stadia more onshore.

A miniature model of a delta sitting in a shop window caught Aedon's attention. A peddler (who rented the real life-sized ones to out-of-towners) had made the small display. He stepped into the shop and plucked the small vehicle from its stand and began to play with it. It was a model of one of the newer deltas. He wished that he had one of these fine transporters with their ultra thin wings that glide so smoothly through the air that you forget you're even flying. His older ship (with the thicker wings) drove a somewhat rougher ride. But he could pretend and imagine for a few minutes that the small model he held was the real thing.

Slowly he turned to an angle with it, looking beyond. He caught sight of a girl passing. She had lengthy hair, so long that it covered her face and he could not recognize her. A few moments later he noticed her again, this time inside. Then she seemed to disappear. He returned to playing with the toy by making a blubbering noise with his lips and pretending to fly the thing like a child might do. As he turned again, he almost hit the girl with it. He stopped, frozen for a second. She cocked her head to one side, brushing some of the hair away from her face. It was Areshia. She giggled.

"Areshia? Is that Areshia?" he embarrassingly asked, feeling somewhat foolish as he hadn't shaved in two days and was playing with the prop like a kid with a toy.

"Did Yapet send you here to spy on me?" she questioned.

"How come — how come you're here?" he asked.

"My father has an abode nearby," she explained.

"I didn't realize you were from Tyrrhenia," he said. "Do you abide up or down-side?"

She answered, "The upper-side, but I'm more of a northern girl."

Tyrrhenia was split in two by the river. Remember, the needle on the compass used to always point upward to the South, so South was always called *up* and North was always referred to as *down*. The upper (southern) part of Tyrrhenia, located in the industrialized province of Mestor, was the richest *etruscan* of all of Atlantis. The lower (northern) section of Tyrrhenia placed more value on natural things rather than man-made. Whenever someone talked about *up* they were talking about Mestor, and *down* usually referred to Ampheres.

Aedon noticed that Areshia was looking over a *greeting-scollette* which read, “*Material things last for but a while, my love for you flows deeper than the Nile.*”

“Impressive, selecting a *scollette* with such substance. I would have expected you —” he stopped, wishing he had not started another offensive comment. He wondered why it was that every time he had something to say to Areshia, it came out all wrong. He changed the subject, “You met Yapet at the Irem, last break. I thought that was where you resided.”

“My father — He holds office in the Warrior Channel at the Irem,” she informed him.

“You’re departing today then, if you plan to make it to *Apaturia*,” he said.

Again she asked, “What are you doing here?”

“Purchasing *Apaturia* gifts,” he replied.

“For *Eve-of-Dinner*?” she tried to confirm.

“Of course, for *Eve-of-Dinner*,” he said. “Though, I’m not exactly sure who will be there — who to get gifts for. I am not even sure if I’ll be there. No one has contacted me for exchange.”

“I’ll be there. We could exchange gifts,” she volunteered.

“I wouldn’t know what to buy you.”

“Something in this shop will do.”

“Go then, pick something out and I’ll give it to you.”

“Then it won’t be a surprise.”

“A surprise —” he grumbled. “It wouldn’t be proper for me to get something for my brother’s girlfriend anyway.”

“Half-brother,” she reminded him. “Besides he doesn’t believe you’re really his brother anyway — so you wouldn’t be breaking any real traditions ... at least according to his concerns.”

“Traditions? You’re a *yellow-bander*. Since when do *yellow-banders* have relations with *purple-banders*?”

“Yapet says the caste system is coming down. Once Lemech is Prince Lord he will do away with all the bands,” she told him.

“And you believed him? Lemech is going to just re-create the whole world — overnight?” Aedon asked.

“The *Day of Apaturia* is supposed to be for celebrating the new world to come,” she announced as if she had been slightly offended.

“Then, I will get you an *Apaturia* gift and we will create our own new place, our own private metaphoric continent where you can be queen,” said Aedon.

“And you’ll be king?” she replied with slight sarcasm.

They both began to poke around the shop looking for things. There were all kinds of presents to choose from: necklaces, rings, pottery, musical instruments, and even clepsydras. Aedon noticed a pink *sunbrella* sticking up from a batch of others that were in a barrel. He decided to get the *sunbrella* and a bottle of fragrance for Areshia. A peddler bundled the gifts in a fine-velvet wrap for him before he returned to where Areshia was still shopping.

“Would you like to convoy together?” he suggested.

“My father sent me here to sell our abode. I can’t depart to the Irem until after it’s posted,” she confessed. “I’m meeting a peddler this morning to handle the transaction, then I’ll be on my way.”

“It’s particularly not safe to travel alone,” he reminded her. “The mermen bandits could strike again.”

“Don’t forget the sea monsters,” she answered back. “If you can wait to travel later ...”

“You just procured yourself a companion. Besides, I want to see this fine home you’re giving up,” he said.

Her father's dwelling was a cute little bungalow tucked away in the hills that overlooked the upper-crescent falls. It was surrounded by Babylon Willow trees with barely enough clearing for a delta to park on the roof.

Areshia explained, "It would have sold long ago, but my father doesn't want a *Gobbler* to get the place."

"Don't blame him, no one likes those land investors who are always trying to snatch up all the property."

"Father says they're doing it so that individuals will no longer own any land and they'll control it all. Many times they are even disguised as peddlers," Areshia said, opening the door with her *globeaky*.

"The greedy *Gobblers* will probably cause the next *Territorial Quarrel*," Aedon huffed, stepping in.

The floors were made from wood which glowed like the reflecting sun on the river outside. The rooms were empty except for the confectionary. The instant Aedon saw its charm, he fell in love with it.

Clearing his throat, a land-peddler announced he had arrived. The man was clothed in a dark-gray kilt wrapped around his waist and a drab-sleeveless trench-coat. He wore a tight-leather cap wrapped around his head with a long ponytail of hair protruding from the rear that looked like a beaver's tail.

Areshia began her tour, "One uniqueness is the inside underground garden — three levels and room to expand down three more."

"Oh," the peddler responded, asking, "Where do they park the delta-transporter, then?"

"On the roof," Areshia said, leading them inside further. "This is the main lounging area with the views."

The dealer pretentiously, yet unexcitedly answered, "Oh."

"The view is even more incredible when the Babylon Willows are trimmed," Aedon interjected.

"Trimmed?" Areshia objected, almost offended as if the long vines covering the windows were part of the bangs that covered

her face. Then she led them into the next area. “The eating quarters also have a view.”

“Oh,” the peddler unemotionally said.

“And so do the main sleeping quarters,” she added.

Aedon was so enchanted by the place that he began thinking about buying it for himself. The Peddler was not impressed and seemed almost bothered by it all.

“Do you think this will go to market — with the view and all?”

“A lodging like this? Of course it will,” Aedon convincingly said.

The Peddler stepped forward toward the window. He looked out beyond while fidgeting for an answer, “Sure it might trade. ... It’s not like there aren’t hundreds of abodes just like this one dotted across these hills, all with a view. It’ll sell, though it is dubious for someone to pay the number of talents you are requesting. Honestly, and I am always honest and up front with every person, animal or Asterian I transact with, the Mestor Markets have been shakier than an earthquake.”

“Anyone would be crazy to pass up quarters like this,” Aedon snapped. “I can’t believe you’re not keeping it for yourself, Areshia. You know what? After *Registration* and *Apaturia* ... I’ll need a habitat to settle down in ... while I think about what caste I’m going to employ. This would be the perfect dwelling for me while I explore my options.”

The Peddler suddenly changed his tone, “Why, of course it is charming, *dahrling*. Why I didn’t see the exotic confectionary, my dear Areshia. How could you forget to show us the most obviously impressive quality about the place? Why this alone is worth your proposed price.”

The *meal-nook* was painted with emptiness except for a half-folded down table with belongings overflowing onto the floor around it. It was hardly impressive, but then again, they were dealing with a Peddler. He quickly pulled out his scroll and began *scrolling-up the deal* as they call it. He grabbed Areshia, tugging

her armband to his hand-held transmitter in order to imprint her agreement to market; then he grabbed Aedon's armband to execute his bid to buy.

"I accept your offer to represent the listing of this residence," he announced, "And I am placing a hold on the abode to give you, Aedon, first option to entertain. Now, go! Enjoy your *Apaturia* and hurry back to complete this transaction. A place like this won't stay available for long at all."

The Peddler rolled up his scroll and was out the door before either of them could add another word.

"If this completes, and you're alright with all this, my father will be very pleased," Areshia confessed. "Why, I'd have someone to visit, if I returned."

With a hug it seemed like the deal was complete, though Aedon was concerned, "I can't believe you wouldn't keep this for yourself."

"Whenever I lay down here, to sleep at night, it gives me nightmares," she said, adding, "You'll be fine, though, I'm sure the dreams only affect me."

"Wonder why?" Aedon exclaimed.

"I'm not sure who'll be back here first ... you or me?" Areshia pondered, holding the key and leading Aedon outside.

"We could hide the *globeaky* somewhere," Aedon suggested, taking the key and climbing up into the willow tree. He concealed it in the branches and then they hopped into their deltas and travelled to the Irem for the *Apaturia* celebrations.

Three round rings of water encompassed the Irem which is nearly ten stadia in diameter. The river-rings were fed by the Euphrates and Gihon Rivers from the North where their waters circumference the Irem by cascading down sets of falls before exiting into the three adjoining rivers. The entire small city of moats, bridges, pyramids and buildings was called the Irem. The palace, located in the innermost section, was where the royal family resided and was named the Royal Irem.

Aedon and Areshia docked their vehicles at a station where they could take a *waterbus* in.

“Back when I was about a baby in height, you could fly your delta right up to the Royal Irem,” Areshia said.

Her reminiscence was interrupted by a furious Yapet stomping from the *waterbus* station, “Areshia, are you among the missing Mermaids? Where have you been all this time?”

Forgetting to acknowledge Aedon, he placed his arm around her and lowered his voice, steering her away as if her companion had a contagious disease. Aedon grabbed his trunk-case and secured his delta before they scurried off toward the next *waterbus*. The buses were congested at the lower level.

“Take the *trivelator* up to the top tier. I’ve heard those ones are less crowded and we won’t have to deal with the runoff splashing down on us,” Yapet suggested, leading them up two levels to another troughed-boat.

“These *waterbuses* are tinier than the ones in Tyrrhenia,” Aedon complained.

“But their chairs are more comfortable,” Yapet interrupted, pushing ahead and snuggling in with Areshia.

Aedon was forced to settle in on the bus behind them. The small platform rocked as he dropped his trunk-case into the spare seat where some of the water from its track splashed over the floor because there are no side-panels. Each *waterbus* consisted of four benches and an awning anchored to its base which glided through a water-filled trough delivering passengers throughout the city.

“Guess what?” Areshia said, turning to Yapet. “Aedon may be transferring ownership to my father’s abode.”

“Aedon? He was at your dwelling?” Yapet asked surprised. “My father has been waiting. Did you forget that we had scheduled mid-meal together? Why do you desire to embarrass me in front of the whole family? You just didn’t show — no communiacae — nothing. How is one supposed to save reputation now?”

“I’m a few moments behind,” she explained. “I didn’t realize it was so timely important. Can’t I meet them at *Eve of Dinner?*”

“What exactly were you doing with Aedon?” he asked her. “It appears as if the two of you met up somewhere and convoyed here.”

“We met, by chance, at the *Bridge of Pillars*,” she tried to explain.

“By coincidence? And then you accidentally travelled here together?” he retorted.

“Much more unintentionally than you showing up here to collect my belongings,” Areshia snarled back.

“Aedon, hope you enjoy your short visit. Don’t go after Areshia again — she’s not your girl. Don’t come to *Eve of Apaturia Dinner* — you’re not invited. And don’t show up at the *Spiral Legislature* at next sun — you’re not a real prince.”

“What’s at the *Spiral Legislature* tomorrow?” Aedon begged.

“Orientation for all the new princes,” Areshia responded.

“I’ll make sure they remove your name from the register,” Yapet snarled, gleefully.

PAPYRUS SEVEN

UP THE SPIRAL LEGISLATURE

Greetings! I am your Heritage Interpreter for your first guided day,” Masai an ostrich announced. She turned her long neck up from behind a nearby podium. They hadn’t noticed her there before with her head buried under the desk.

“Is this private tour ready to begin?” she asked. “Grab a breakfast sandwich from the buffet and let’s get started.”

“Indeed you’re a bit presumptive, coming here already — before the reading,” Faeraud whispered, stepping behind Aedon. “Excellent move, I like that, I think.”

“I’m just observing,” Aedon assured, grabbing a bread and *egg-yoker* meal from the spread of delicacies.

“No interest in politics — from a prince?” Faeraud surprisingly tried to confirm.

“Maybe — maybe not,” Aedon sighed, looking up at the tall pillars with animal carvings so lifelike that he thought some of them were actually watching him. He followed Faeraud back over

to where the others were gathering for the tour before asking, "What do you think my chances are ... for being admitted to *Eve of Apaturia Dinner* at the Royal Irem?"

"Depends on who is in debt to you and owes an enormous favor. The guest list has all but been sealed, already. ... I might have asked you to be my companion but you so coldly turned me down for the dance," Faeraud contemptuously replied.

A commotion interrupted when a loud prince pushed toward the front of the group making his way to the ostrich.

"*Apa'hei, Apa'hei, Apa'hei!* May I present a gift of premium fleece in appreciation of my humble beginnings here," the strong, yet slightly nervous voice asked; it was Prince Evad. He was wearing a fuzzy shawl as reddish-brown as his short hair. It was wrapped around his shoulders as completely as his self-centered, snooty-ambition. He removed the fur and presented it to Masai. The guide could see through his little charade as she held out her hand refusing the item. The article of clothing had been instantly turned into a gift to gain some kind of favor from her.

"Now, now, bribes are never allowed nor should you accept," Masai reprimanded in a polite tone. "This is truly a respected institution of highest standards."

"Respectable indeed, certainly an ostrich of your caliber and experience — is worth more than orichalcum?" Evad fawned, turning away behind her feathers to briefly grumble, "She wouldn't recognize a prized mink if it regurgitated in her face."

Masai led the group of prince *newbies* into the gallery, "This corridor contains paintings and sculptors created by various artists that depict the history and Prince Lords of Atlantis."

She yanked down a lever on the wall, igniting an illumination-bulb which threw light across a large stunning mosaic. It was made from different types of stones and colorful shells which looked like the solar system exploding from a central godlike light.

"Over here," Masai instructed, "Is our first exhibit of early methods of Atlantean art. The early artists drew pictures in sand, a

technique learned from us ostriches. Later they elaborate to colorful mosaics using colored egg shells from birds' nests before advancing to gem stones. This is an early drawing of the creation of the universe. The piece, created by an unknown artist, has been dubbed, *Universe De Exposé.*”

Skipping over a garden painting with nude figures, Masai continued, “As art evolved so did the mechanisms of man. In this salt-sculpture we see King Yaswhen and Prince Lord Antioch waving good-bye as they set off on a journey to discover a better place.”

The life-size sculpture, carved from salt, lunged forward from the exhibit. The two rulers were standing arm in arm on a vehicle that looked half-like a horse-drawn chariot and half-like a delta-transporter. Their extended arms were suspended with a wave. The museum had placed a sky-like illuminated background behind, giving it an even more authentic look. Beams of light streamed different colors toward them like rays of sunlight.

“Six-hundred and sixty sun-cycles,” Lemech blurted out. He slowly walked around and touched the sculpture running his hand alongside the arm of the figure that represented Antioch.

“Prince Lemech we are honored to have your company today,” Masai said, bowing to the seven-hundred and seventy-two year-old monarch.

Lemech had thin sunken cheeks hidden by a blondish-white beard and though he were old, it is important to remember that Aedon’s supposed father, Gilgamoeh (who was five-hundred and ninety years old) and Faeraud (who was just ninety sun-cycles of age) were both son’s of his.

“Antioch, my grandfather, he left,” Lemech continued, “This week — it will be six-hundred and sixty sun-cycles to the day. They are coming back. It is very near the time for them to return. ... I know it. I can feel it.”

A bit skeptical Aedon whispered to his friend, “Since my existence I’ve heard stories about this return.”

“Very few lunatics believe they are coming back any more. It has been hundreds of sun-cycles since they left,” Faeraud assured him.

“The Asterians, they still believe in their return,” Aedon pointed out.

“Mostly because it gives them a way to keep order and control of us people on Earth,” Faeraud grumbled.

Aedon posed the question to Lemech, “Royal one, it has been a really long time since — they left. How is that you are sure that their return is imminent?”

Masai cocked her head and ruffled a couple of feathers as she desired to progress with the tour, but quickly settled back down in respect for the prince.

“We’ve all heard the *ricochet* —” Lemech began. He was always trying to use big words to impress people and usually used the wrong ones. He meant to say *cliché* but instead said *ricochet*. Faeraud and Aedon looked at each other with a grin.

Lemech continued, “There are some things you just have to believe in. This really isn’t one of those *ricochets* at all. They went to another world to prepare us a better place. Any quantum-scientist knows that travel through space, at hyper-speed, calculates at ten-hundred sun-cycles equaling a day, and likewise a day there lasting many sun-cycles here. These six-hundred and sixty cycles have been but a short journey for them.”

“All the people and all the priests have meditated on their return for centuries and nothing has come about,” Faeraud scoffed, “Your explanation requires quite an imagination, father?”

Lemech turned red with fury but before he could respond the ostrich let out a loud-beckoning quack and led them to a new hallway of oil-based paintings, many of which were made during the *Territorial Quarrels*.

“Take note of the rich fiery-red and orange colors used in these works; yet dark in nature, they show a horrific side of war,” Masia pointed-out.

As they walked past the wall, toward the far end, the pictures became darker. The final frames depicted the awful thunderbolts everyone had heard about. The artist drew them as bright clouds exploding over a large cities with hundreds of bolts of lightning striking from the cloud and destroying everything for stadias beyond its locale.

“The — the thunderbolt,” Masai began to explain, but was cut off by Lemech.

“Jerisadan prophesied about the terrible *Uprooter* who could come and destroy Earth if we lost faith in King Yaswhen’s return,” he said.

“If people took more responsibility for their own actions perhaps this invisible *Uprooter* would have less power,” Masai blurted out.

Lemech paused and then looked out at the group, “Perhaps true, but remember what is written, if an *Uprooter* comes to be, he will be cunning and deceitful, someone we probably won't even recognize as he walks right under our very noses.”

The ostrich popped her head in front of the group and picked up the tour again, “Prince Lord Methouslan and the Asterians did not know how to end the awful quarrels for land. The Irminsul Pyramid was damaged and the Asterians were unable to travel between Earth and their moon. Many Asterians were trapped here for a period of time depicted in this series of frames created by the famous artist Trigonometry.”

Miniature models and sculptures were animated. Each one was a three-dimensional scene that displayed the action while the ostrich narrated.

“Finally,” Masai continued, “Through a series of dreams, the Asterians above communicated the formula for the thunderbolt. It took only a couple of them to end the *Quarrels*. Then the Asterians took away the formula and sealed the scrolls so no one else could ever cause them to strike again. The Irminsul Pyramid was rebuilt and the Asterians once again were able to come and go and minister to the inhabitants of the Earth.”

“What awful destruction,” Aedon remarked. “I can see why such writings should be kept a secret. They would’ve done better to destroy them altogether.”

Faeraud let out a slight growl, recognizing that Aedon was really referring to the scroll they had taken from the library.

The group exited from the gallery to the main area.

“Quickly, now, finish your *first-meal* products, as delicious as they may taste, consumables are not permitted in the Spiral Rotunda,” the ostrich ordered.

Aedon gulped down the last bite of his *yoker* while Faeraud produced a non-caring smirk across his face keeping toward the back of the group. He scarcely nibbled his sandwich as if the rule didn’t apply to him.

Masai swung the doors open to the *Spiral Legislature*, a rectangular-shaped building consisting of many tiers, a round center section, and a domed ceiling. She bounced (like most ostriches do when they walk fast) between the green and purple marble columns as she tried to explain everything to the *newbies*.

“Princes, who have just completed *Registration* will be offered the opportunity to join the legislature body of the government. You do not have to participate, although one usually does.”

Inside was a large round room that stretched half-a-stadia in diameter. The empty floor bore a large symbol (the same one that was on the Atlantian flag) embedded in magnificent blue-colored gem stones. The symbol of Atlantis was a circle with two lines intersecting each other like a cross. It was symbolic of the moats around the Irem with the rivers running through them.

Outside the emblem was a wide deck that slowly spiraled all the way to the domed ceiling, possibly ten or twelve levels high. Aedon marveled at the interior where the inclining ramp (with a railing and hundreds of stations all facing in toward the center) led his eyes up to the ceiling. The top level was not connected to the spiraling surface, but, instead, was a separate flat which contained

twelve stations. Above it, soft light illuminated through a frosty-glass dome with imbedded symbols of the culture.

“I’ll be comfortably resting in one of those stations on the top section very soon,” Evad smirked, over-confidently stroking his chin.

“I’d wager that there aren’t enough favors you could do to get all the way up there,” Faeraud snapped.

“None of us could ever get way up there,” Aedon sighed, almost losing his balance from the dizzying ceiling where its figures seemed to dance.

“The building would split in two before either of you would ever make it half that far,” Faeraud interrupted, chewing another bite of food. “Only the Etruscans, one from each of the ten lands — and the Prince Lord can sit —.”

“I am a direct descendant — the only son of Etruscan Evaemon. You diluted offspring will be lucky to be entertained on the ground floor today,” Evad boasted, interrupting, which he tended to do a lot.

“Ten plus one ... who sits in the twelfth seat?” Aedon asked, still calculating Faeraud’s explanation.

Masai explained, leading the group further into the rotunda, “No one yet, my dear. Prince Lord Methouslan will retire on the *Day of Apaturia* and then the new Prince Lord will take seat at this place.”

Eagerly the troupe crowded forward. Prince Evad was just about to step onto the emblematic floor when the ostrich stretched up on her legs and lifted her wings in a defending-halting manner.

“*Ehh*, HOLD, now!” she loudly squawked out.

A hush swept over the group as her words echoed throughout the chamber. The last reverb seemed to fade into a haunting ghostly whisper. The sound itself took on the form of a spirit and spiraled up to the domed ceiling where it lingered there as if it dared any of them to move.

She explained, “No one has ever stepped on this sacred seal. Always walk completely around the emblematic circle. When the

great artist Trigonometry created this — masterpiece, each tile was painstakingly laid into the floor. Trigonometry himself, wearing gloves, was lowered down on a cable to place each piece. It has never been touched.”

“Not even by a cockroach?” Faeraud childishly asked.

Masai ignored his disrespectful challenge. She turned and walked around the circle where everyone followed, almost in single file. She began to explain the legislative system.

“You will initially be seated on the first floor,” she said. “Your position changes according to the number and ranking of laws that you pass or dismiss. Now, the more active of a role you take in the government the higher a position you can obtain.”

“Are there other ways to score points for a better position?” Faeraud quickly asked, almost forgetting he had brought food in with him.

“It's not a game,” Masai snapped.

“Such inexperienced younglings,” Evad remarked, cozing up to her. He was always trying to act older and more important than he really was. “Your patience with these common-distant relations shows what a traditional-solid character you are.”

A response of provoked chatter was quieted as Masai continued, “The master system tracks how many laws you have authored. Some would argue that we have a unicameral legislature, others may call it a bicameral one. The truth is: we have a —”

“Spiral-cameral legislature,” Evad quickly finished her sentence, glancing down at notes he had written on his hand.

“Yes, a spiral-cameral legislature. In order for a law to pass, it must make its way from the bottom of the spiral up to the topmost,” Masai continued, raising her voice where she might usually pause, so as not to be interrupted again. “Now, if anywhere along the *spiral* it receives three *no* votes in a row, it is discarded. If any Etruscan, who sits on the upper floor, vetoes a proposal, *Plunk* — it is dead.”

There was a pause of silence and just as Evad was about to open his jaw again, she said, “I would suggest, to you, my new

members of the spiral ... to abstain from voting until you get more acquainted.”

“And then you won’t make political enemies,” Evad chimed in again. “Indeed, you don’t want to make enemies in this spiral.”

“I rather think his brain has spiraled a bit out of control,” Aedon whispered over to Faeraud.

“Enemies? What a lavish and playful idea,” Faeraud said, lighting up with excitement. A devilish grin wiped across his face like that day in the educatory lab when he took center stage with the plant experiment.

Aedon could see that this was going to be a game for Faeraud, another challenge where he would try to sneak around the rules and make it to the top. Fortunately the spiraling deck didn’t connect to the uppermost level or else he might have been on his way to becoming king of the continent. He tried to distance himself and blend in with the crowd, but there was something oddly attractive about Faeraud — it was like some *enchantment* was always beckoning him closer.

The others began to fill in the stations on the bottom level, except for Prince Evad and Prince Faeraud who scrimmaged over the station that was as high up as the new-comers were allowed to take, since none of them had scored any points yet.

“Tuh, you pretentious Irem princes!” Evad exclaimed. “Falsely you think you have such prominence. You are all a façade filled with vacancy.”

Faeraud answered back, commenting on his fur, “Brownish-red the color is so fittingly you. This really is such an ugly fur, so ugly that you couldn’t even give it away. You were wise to wear it today, it can get really cold down there at the bottom of the legislature.”

Faeraud proceeded to march up the spiraling deck past the boundary where new members were seated. He continued around until he was at the last station at the highest point of the spiral. He was as far up as one could go without being on the tier where the Etruscans sat. Moments later all the other princes, princesses,

legislators and Etruscans entered the chamber. There was a small outburst of protest from the prince, whose station was the upper one. He summoned Masai over and had Faeraud ejected back downstairs to the bottom floor.

“It really is pointless for you to send me all the way back to start,” Faeraud objected, pulling out a chewing stick as he was escorted down, “Before juice is poured at noon, I will be sitting up there once again.”

“Now, now, no *newbie* has ever made it past level two during their first sun-cycle here,” Masai responded.

As Faeraud returned downward, he passed Evad who remarked, “Coveting my fur, already? It CAN be cold down there.”

“Little Prince Evad, I must say, I could hear your ambition screaming this morning,” Faeraud remarked, stopping next to his post. “I’m only surprised I hadn’t thought of offering a bribe before you did. Such a fancy fur — why, you must have quite a collection of assets down there in your polar region. All of those furs, so meticulously weaved together, must really take some talent to produce. And those foxes, prime fox fur, do you have anything to do with — *obtaining* — them?”

Flattered, Evad quickly brightened his tone, “They’re my foxes. I am in charge of the Tundra Fur Manufacturing Caste, my confused little prince.”

“Listen, I have always been curious about furs and don’t recall ever hearing about such professional craftsmanship,” Faeraud confessed, stroking one of the furs in a friendly fashion. “You must have spun expensive, time-consuming, looms to make these exquisite materials without — *harming* — the foxes. How did you ever do it?”

Faeraud’s line of questioning might have been mistaken for an insinuation that perhaps Evad had unlawfully obtained the fur he was wearing. But the red-haired prince was naively clueless about Faeraud’s motives. He innocently divulged all the information he could, as if Faeraud was really interested in the details.

“Undeniably, it’s all in the special binding of the *mayapple-root*. A special process that I personally developed,” Evad boasted, even though he had nothing to do with its invention.

“I wager your little fur and ten more just like it that I’ll be in a seat higher than you before the sun is perpendicular,” Faeraud challenged.

“And when you lose,” Evad asked, “What will be my prize?”

“I never lose. But if I do, I’ll walk across the sacred emblem — barefooted.”

“In front of the whole — *watching* — legislature?” Evad asked, shifting his eyes back and forth, distrusting the challenge.

“In front of the whole — *watching* — Asterian Council too, if you want,” Faeraud snapped, as the two boys’ devilish-smiles fed on each other until they grew bigger and more evil than what could physically fit on either of their faces.

An orator called the session to order and everyone quieted down as it commenced. The ten Etruscans paraded in, adjusting pillows at their posts before sitting down.

Faeraud (sitting next to Aedon) leaned over and pointed up to a gray beard, a white beard, and a younger man sitting together on one side. “The three blind voles. The one with the cane — that’s Evad’s father. New scripts rarely get passed because of this conservative trio. They stick together and vote *no* on everything that makes it up that high.”

“Who’s the fat one?” Aedon asked, nodding toward a grumbling Etruscan whose excessive tummy-rolls spilled over into the posts adjacent to him. The floor creaked as he wiggled himself into place.

“A really interesting guy, if you get to know him. Etruscan Mestor — he’s responsible for the growth and commerce up there. His province alone is half the continent’s economy,” Faeraud said, cluing him in.

“How is one to remember so much information in a day?”

“You’ll learn — eventually,” Masai whispered, passing by. “Just remember three A’s, three E’s and D, G , M, M. Ampheres, Asaes, Autochatheu, Elasippus, Eumlelus, Evaemon, then, Diaprepes, Gadeirus, Mestor and Mnesus.”

“Of course,” Aedon recalled, “Like we learned in *Historic Educatory*.”

Proposed new laws began to flash across each station’s *transglaustr-roll* (a papyrus with a holographic image that floated above its table). Faeraud immediately began to vote. Surprisingly, the first one passed and suddenly Faeraud’s station lifted-off the deck and zipped into the center of the rotunda. It hovered there for a brief moment. All the stations below where he floated slid down the spiral a notch. Then his station floated over to its new position and inserted itself. He was advanced up to the second level ahead of most of the other *newbies*.

Instead of abstaining, or even quietly voting *yes* or *no*, Faeraud began to make loud comments. Sometimes it would be, “*That’s a stupid law. Unvote!*” At other times, he would loudly say, “*Not bad, we needed this enacted long ago.*”

Evad was quick to follow his lead and vote in the same manner as Faeraud would suggest. It was clear that Faeraud was not always voting the way he was commenting, because very quickly he was elevated up the spiral ramp a couple more stations, as he had tricked Evad into voting in an unpopular manner.

During all the sun-cycles while Faeraud was growing up, he made note of every law that he thought was not needed and he brought this very long list with him ready to score points and break the record for the *newbie* who would advance the farthest. He had dug up useless laws that were still valid, ridiculous laws that no one could argue were still needed. One law he abolished was that vehicles with square wheels had to yield to vehicles with round ones. Another law stated that fires could only be started facing the direction of the sun.

Abolishing the obviously ridiculous laws advanced him so fast that most of the other princes must have thought they were

losing at a game of *Flamingos and Cranes* or *Discophant*. Next, Faeraud began to initiate his own laws.

“I propose that the price of rice be increased one talent per thousand-mina.”

From the top balcony, Elasippus stood up. His image, a round balding face, appeared on each person's *transglaust*. His missing teeth made him look like he was smiling, when instead, he was questioning the proposal in an objecting tone.

“Higher prices will mean fewer rice sales. It'll leave more farmers idle.”

“I suggest that the idle farmers be reclassified as Warriors,” Faeraud said. “The extra money could be used to purchase more sky harvesters to automate the farming. ... Do you not agree that we need to increase the number of warriors in the west — in case of a possible surprise attack?”

Lemech leaned forward, “Nonsense, Faeraud, there's no military threat.”

“Automating of the rice idea, I do like,” Elasippus interjected, “Though your military scheme seems a bit of a stretch.”

“A stretch?” Faeraud exclaimed. “Hear me, our enemy, in the land of Aszea, is no more than a ship's hop to our islands. And we are twice that distance from them. With our dependence on their *orichalcum*, a *Quarrel* is just waiting to happen.”

Faeraud's first fully authored law was passed. By the time the hour was over, he had made his way well up the *spiral*. Another vote later whisked his station past Evad's.

“It's so hot in here now, I don't think I'll need those furs after all,” Faeraud remarked as he floated by.

“Impressive enough, already. Perhaps I should've researched my notes a tad more,” Evad grumbled, pulling his fur off and tossing it under the table so that it would no longer be a visible reminder that he was losing.

Most of the Etruscans were extremely impressed with Faeraud's seemingly natural political abilities. However, their impressions were soon squashed when he pulled out a twig of

tabaccum weed and began chewing on it. Suddenly silence washed across the entire chamber. Chewing *tabaccum* was a fad that the younger generations participated in, but rarely was it done in a public gathering, and never had it been done before in the *Spiral Legislature*.

Etruscan Evaemon and Elasippus were seated next to Autochatheu. Elasippus stretched over and whispered something to Autochatheu who then leaned over the balcony, looking down to where Faeraud was stationed.

He answered back with a raspy voice while exhaling a stale scent that encompassed his gray beard, “Our new-ones would be wise to show some respect for the traditions of this institution. A chewing stick hedges on an insult.”

All eyes turned to Faeraud. He straightened up from his previous lazy posture and removed the twig from his mouth. He held it out, stretching it forward to a position where it might possibly drop on the great seal embedded in the floor below, the emblem that no living thing had ever touched. The shocking gesture caused everyone in the room to strain forward with a deep anticipatory breath, which they held in, while waiting for his next move.

“Respect?” Faeraud loudly reacted. “Have you not listened to a thing that I have said today? Reality should be respected. I question those unwritten rules where such basis is vague. Etruscan Elasippus, let us listen to your opinion on the matter? Should chewing sticks be banned from all government buildings? Should restrictions be applied to them, restrictions that could propagate on down to other sectors of society? Should another new script be written that would require your *yes* vote?”

Faeraud was a master at taking the very value or boundary that you had and turning it upside down. One moment you would be against something and then, the very next, you would be supporting him and wondering how his sneaky conniving had wrought you in.

Etruscan Elasippus was over the southeastern province which was responsible for most of the farming and food production of the continent. The *tabaccum* plant was heavily grown in his region and with its recent popularity it was responsible for a great amount of income of which his residents depended on. If Elasippus were to support a ban on the product, it might create a scandal or uprising within his homeland. He feared that his people might riot to remove him as Etruscan. More importantly, how could he vote *yes* for such a thing when he had almost always voted *no* for every other position that crossed his post?

Elasippus tugged at his ear while debating which stance to take. Then he stood up and announced, “Are there no written rules regarding the situation? The *tabaccum* plant, from my Etruscan, is in bloom; this legislature is in bloom. Who wishes to stifle the new blossoming, youthful-younglings? Certainly not I. Nooooo — I would not support such a law.”

Noontime break arrived, Faeraud was sitting at the top station just as he had predicted, and the law-making session was over. He chomped down on his chewing twig, hurried down the spiraling floor, and caught up with the other princes he knew.

“Evad, Evad, Evad,” Faeraud began, “My precious fur, where did it go?”

“I may have guided it down — on the floor — where any snake could easily find it,” Evad answered.

“Where are my other ten garments I’m owed,” he demanded.

“There is a wise-old enchantment from my homeland: *Fetch what you want, Have not if you can’t*,” Evad snootily grumbled.

“And I have one for you: *Ten fine furs you promised me, at your foot, only one do I see.*”

“Then you’ll have to fetch the others from my fur factory — in Evaemon.”

“I hear a fieldtrip may be in order this afternoon,” Faeraud announced. “You want to come along with me, Aedon? I must go

claim my furs from a bunch of over-grown rats in a dirty-little hole.”

“You’ll enjoy the ambitious tundra voles there,” Evad answered back. “They weave the furs — and other things together. I don’t know anyone who’s *not* afraid of them, particularly the *carroting* ones. Most of them — don’t bite.”

Evad laughed, “Heh, heh, heh.” His laugh was no ordinary one. It was such a high-pitched shriek that it caused Aedon to throw his hands over his ears. Had it been a quarter of an octave higher it would have shattered one of the giraffe-sized vases nearby.

“It’s usually in those dark holes where you learn something new, discover some secret,” Faeraud confided in Aedon. “Get ready for a *telling* trip down to the cold land of Evaemon.”

“Cold land —” Aedon echoed. “I so dislike the frigid weather. I think I’ll remain here for the afternoon.”

Faeraud bent closer to him and whispered in his ear, “I could easily squash the squeaky-voiced Prince Evad myself, but with the two of us teaming together, he’ll crumble quicker. Besides, it is a prince’s civil duty to investigate a premise which may employ banned practices — or illicit crimes. ... It can be advantageous to tuck away pieces of information that we can use to our advantage in the future.”

“Why should I do this thing? This plan of yours appears like another devious sneaking around of the library,” said Aedon.

“I suspect that you want to come along and be included. ... Because, if you do come with me here ... you may accompany me there — to the *Eve of Apaturia Dinner*.”

“Certainly most!” he exclaimed, eagerly. Aedon couldn’t turn down an invitation. He would gladly go with Faeraud so he could secure a place at the *Dinner* where he would finally be able to meet his father.

PAPYRUS EIGHT

THE CARROTING VAT

Faeraud's delta-transporter buzzed to a low descent from the clouds then leveled to an altitude just above the tops of the millions of *sunbrella-like* leaves that covered the rolling hills in the valley below. The Athabasca River had few curves and cut the landscape ahead in two, dividing the mountain peaks and the valley where he steered the delta to an abrupt and clunky landing.

Aedon and Faeraud climbed out and found themselves in a small city of commerce completely run by animals; they were at the Tundra Fur Factory.

"Brrrrr, it's freezing out here," Aedon shivered as he stepped onto the icy ground.

"This is the warmest area of their etruscan," Faeraud told him.

"How much colder could it get?" Aedon asked. "It's frostier than a glacier."

"The glaciers? This far?" Faeraud doubtfully questioned.

“Maybe not, but it certainly feels colder than a *Bashan ice-mound*.”

“Why do you think Evad spends as much time as he does, up at the Irem — where it is much warmer?”

“But he seemed so proud to be from this frigid region.”

“Doesn’t he strike you as the kind, that if he could — he would be up to something illegal — just to get ahead?”

“There are other princes that might behave like that too —” Aedon suggested, stopping short of an implication.

“I’m *gonna* find out what he is hiding — and if any of his little pets are being — mishandled,” Faeraud announced, leading the way toward the factory.

“Do I detect that you’re threatened by his ambition in the legislature?”

“The glaciers themselves would bury the Irem before he would ever become Prince Lord,” Faeraud scoffed with a huff.

“Or melt,” Aedon added as he shivered. “Why did we have to come all this way down here for your stupid furs now?”

“We’re not here for the furs, *Smart-owl*,” Faeraud said.

“Then what in the Asterian sky are we doing here?” Aedon questioned.

“The more you know about what is inside the enemy’s camp, the easier it is to find his weakness and cause him to fall,” Faeraud said. “It’s not furs that I’ve come to claim, but knowledge.”

They were tiny and small; they were everywhere, and they ran the whole factory. They were yellowish-brown tundra voles, almost a *spithame* (nine inches) in height. Their short little whiskers twitched back and forth as much as their heads did. They were constantly looking all around, observing, and then darting this way and that, always busy, always doing something.

A parade of voles, each carrying a stack of the umbrella-looking plants (with roots and all) carefully balanced on top of their head, marched into a doorway engraved into the side of the factory.

Under a roofed-space with no walls, there were all kinds and sizes of tables with lines of animals at each one. The first counter they came upon had a long row of squirrels. One was lying down on the table and getting a fur-cut from a Tundra Vole. Further over, there was a group of raccoons. It must have been one raccoon's first visit, because he covered his eyes as the fur was shaved off his body.

Beyond them, a rabbit was trying to carry on a conversation with a muskrat and an opossum while nibbling on a carrot and having her fur removed — all at the same time. Her baby bunnies watched, shivering, not realizing that they were too young to get a fur-cut just yet.

They walked further past the minks, lambs, chinchillas and foxes lined up for their fur-cuts. The coyotes stood up proud as if it were a welcome ritual while the sables, tigers and lynxes were yawning with boredom.

A busy little vole saw the visitors and briefly slowed his hurried pace by them to explain his impolite behavior, apologizing for not stopping and acknowledging them earlier, “The hibernation season is just ending and most animals are eager to get their summer fur-cut. Oh, this promises to be a very prosperous season. The waters were so cold and pure this past sun-cycle that even the laziest little furry beast couldn't resist growing a coat that is both plush and colorful.”

“That many people really wear fur coats?” Faeraud huffed.

“*Apa'hei*, my confused princes,” Evad greeted, popping in from behind an ice-sculpture of a clothing loom. “This is Mogwa, he's one of the team-leaders.”

Evad shook the vole's tiny paw.

“Not just coats — furs are everything, everywhere!” Evad proudly answered. “We make fur mittens, fur boots, fur collars, fur wraps, fur waistbands, fur belts, fur ponchos, fur shorts, fur togas, fur kilts, fur shawls and even fur armband covers. Then we have a line of fur pot holders, fur towels, fur bathing wear, and fur hats.

And don't forget about the people in Bashan, North Sibussia and North Aszea. Everything they wear year-round is made of fur.

“Naturally, this factory isn't up to modern standards, but soon I will be coming into a large inheritance. I plan on expanding this and other productions in our province. One day our income will dwarf that of Mestor's.”

“How do you get the furs? I've heard you have to kill some animals,” Faeraud questioned, interrupting Evad's daydream, then lowering his voice, he pried for more dubious information, “Do you secretly skin them alive like some gossipers have reported?”

“Kill the animals?” Evad blurted out. He was horrified at the suggestion. “My little babies, no one would ever harm them. Contrary to *blatherers*, regarding trading with witches and trolls in the Agglomeration, everything we do here is completely respectable. The Tundra Voles with their precise little-paws cut the fur into what we call *vundles* which keep the fur in a vertical pack until it is woven to a base material.”

“Certainly you can't expect us to believe that none of the animals have ever been hurt by the process?” Faeraud grumbled as if he were disappointed.

“Gather your furs and then round back up to the abode over there. Night fall is a comin’,” Evad suggested, motioning toward a frost covered cabin in the distance.

“No need to rush us if we're going to have to bunker down with the vermin tonight,” Faeraud grumbled.

“Breathing the air in one of them factories, too long, has been known to disturb the mind of more than one person I know,” Evad said, laughing in his high pitched tone, “Heh, heh, heh!”

“Follow! ... If you wish to inspect further,” the tiny vole ordered, leading them inside the factory toward the main work area.

Clickedy-moan, clackedy-moan, the cherry-wood looms groaned as Tundra Voles worked in a room larger than a stadium. Rotating wheels fed *vundles* into the machines. Each loom was powered by four teeter-totters with eight voles riding them up and

down to produce a spinning wheel that wove the fur *vundles* into the finest coats from almost anywhere.

“Teeter-totters ... how interesting,” Aedon remarked, looking over to Faeraud.

“What is the source of power for most factories today?” Mogwa asked.

“*Orichalcum*, of course,” Aedon answered, almost annoyed.

“Not this factory. We are self-sufficient running completely on energy created by us, the mighty Tundra Voles of Evaemon,” the vole proudly pronounced, hopping up on a crate and then higher onto a large spool of thread where he could better see.

Large bobbins of thread spiraled down from the rafters above. The gigantic interior was not well lit, but as far as one could see, hundreds of looms were cranking out furs. Thousands of Tundra Voles teeter-tottered the *clickedy-moan*, *clackedy-groan* looms in a unique rhythm that seemed to almost produce some kind of music. The voles made a high-pitched sound, “*Vee! Vee! Vee!*”

Aedon and Faeraud trotted along a path between the looms until they came to a bright space where light from the sky spilled in through a large doorway. Another parade of Tundra Voles carried in the *sunbrella-like* plants.

Mogwa explained what they were doing, “After the fur strands are woven into the mayapple-root backing, the material is sheared to give it a uniform length.”

“Sounds like this really is a job for a rat,” Faeraud remarked.

“Rats?” Mogwa shouted, offended. “We are Tundra Voles!”

“Voles, rats, what's the difference?” Faeraud asked.

“Voles are very good workers and require little food. I shouldn't have need, to explain such things to an educated prince,” Mogwa complained.

“I've read about you — voles. How do you keep from eating the roots of the plants you harvest? Aren't roots and seeds your favorite foods,” Aedon asked. He hadn't said much since arriving

and thought that was a logical and obvious observation, one that might make it look like he knew something about the subject matter.

“The roots from the *mayapple* plants are poisonous,” Mogwa explained. “Yet there are those that choose to ignore the rules and eat while on the job. They are usually found dead by first meal-break. The poisonous leaves are steam-cooked into a solution that is used for *carrotting* the fur.”

“*Carrotting?*” Faeraud’s interest was perked.

“You do know what *carrotting* is?” the vole asked.

Guessing that they didn’t know much about the process, he picked up a nearby piece of leopard fur and then explained further, “Our secret *mayapple* extract formula gives the fur a more feathery, felt-like feel. The *carrotting* is done in the back part of the factory. Breathe too much of the air back there and it’ll kill you.”

“Demonstrate, I want to experience the finishing of the furs in the *carrotting* room,” Faeraud demanded. “I want to hear about how the — poisonous — leaves carrot the material.”

“The fumes back there don’t even vanish a stadia down the river,” Mogwa said. “Moving on over here —”

“Moving on?” Faeraud objected. “We haven’t heard about the *carrotting* yet. It can’t be that treacherous ... or could it?”

“I wouldn’t want to be responsible for ruining your holiday. Those fumes would turn any man into a mad Enkidu,” the vole squeaked, stomping his paw down.

“You’re sadder than the scalped animal who just had his fur-cut,” Faeraud grumbled. “You’re not going to scare me. I’m going to at least listen in on the process.”

Faeraud disappeared down the corridor and around the corner to see the deathly-pots of boiling *mayapple* plants used for *carrotting*. Aedon followed him for a few steps but stopped in the doorway where bursts of reddish-colored steam spouted from the bubbling vats.

Hundreds of tiny Tundra Voles, wearing miniature white masks across their noses, operated fabric bolt-runners which

shuffled the fur material through a bath of chemicals. The voles were extremely hyper-active as they danced up and down squeaking out high-pitched excited *Vee* sounds while they stirred the vats.

Faeraud looked over the operation while inhaling deep breaths of the thick air. It seemed to send him into a euphoric mood and transpose his countenance like a wax figure starting to melt. He staggered, became dizzy, and faltered about the room almost stepping on a couple voles who quickly jumped out of the way.

The other voles laughed at him as they jumped up and down, "*Vee! Vee! Vee!*"

Faeraud was about to step on another one when it bit his ankle. He got mad and stomped on the creature, crushing it. Then he kicked it into a trough that carried away the *carrotting* waste. The mangled vole let out a screech as it dissolved into oblivion in the river of waste.

Aedon was shocked and felt horrified. He had never witnessed such cruelty before. Sure it was just a rodent, but it seemed so violent and unnecessary. He had seen enough and turned away.

The other voles, wishing to avoid further abuse, pretended not to notice and went about their business. Faeraud stopped near a far exit where excess water, streaming from the factory, emptied out into the river beyond. He clapped his hands demanding attention. One of the voles cautiously approached.

"Is that where the waste streams out?" he asked.

The tiny creature nodded.

"How would you and your mousy-little family like to get out of this pit and live like prized unicorns instead of dirty rats?"

There was a second nod.

No one knows exactly what the remainder of the conversation was, but the two of them talked until sunset. Faeraud finally returned to the main door. He pushed on it, but something had jammed it shut. He was trapped inside without any protective

gear. The window flaps on the exterior closed one by one and the room filled with the poisonous steam.

Faeraud's heart began to rapidly beat as he fearfully looked around the vacant room where only the boiling vats kept him company. His pupils dilated and then he fell over, landing on the floor. The poisonous steam poured out vigorously, attacking him like demented demons. His lips quivered, his body shook and then he closed his eyes. A moment later, as if a saving-wish had been granted, all the doors and windows swung open. A gust of wind cleared the air. He stood up and returned back to the main room, where he still seemed to be slightly dizzy.

"Apparently he wasn't as immune to the chemicals as he thought he was," Mogwa chuckled.

"Is he going to be alright?" Aedon asked.

"You should be worried about yourself," the vole squeaked, turning his head up. "It's the fumes that you can't smell that are the most dangerous."

PAPYRUS NINE

EVE OF APATURIA DINNER

She looked like a mermaid who had been out of the water too long. Areshia stood off in a corner alone as chimes, from towers in the distance, began to synchronize. Aedon could relate to how she felt as he too seemed to be there all alone for now, not sure if he belonged or not.

“*Apa’hei*, need a friend?” he asked.

“He hasn’t arrived — yet. I am attending with Yapet. Here take your gift — quickly,” she shoved a small wrapped package at him.

“I — I picked out something for you too,” Aedon stuttered, exchanging his velvet wrapped box for the one she gave. Before he could get the wrapping off, a snake-like belt jumped out and unwound onto the floor.

“Odd gift. ... Entirely lengthy,” he remarked, gathering the line up. It must have been twenty *podes* long.

“It’s a *rope-tie*, Silly,” she exclaimed. “You wear it around your toga.”

“I know how to fasten a toga,” he defensively answered, “Though this one could take all day to wrap.”

“You don’t like it?” she sounded disappointed.

“Did I say that? ... I really like the color ... and the pattern.” Then he changed the subject, “You haven’t opened my gift.”

“I’ll open it later,” she said. “Now go, Yapet is coming this way.”

Aedon wandered over to a window drenched in violet. Looking out at the sea of towers that filled the horizon beyond, he wondered if he was any more significant than any of the millions of illumination-bulbs glowing from them.

Thumping drums announced an entourage of servers, candle bearers, pipe-blowers, and fire-eaters. A server danced in and plopped a giant bowl of fruit down on a pedestal which cued a final beat of the drum. The brief silence initiated a family rush toward the bowl as each one politely fought over his or her favorite fruit. It was customary for each guest to take a piece of fruit and then set it at the place where he and his guests wished to dine. Faeraud stepped up to the bowl, yanked the *tabaccum* twig he sucked on from his mouth, discarded it on the floor, and commanded, “Step away from my bowl.”

He didn’t call it *the bowl* or *a bowl*, it was *my bowl*. Whenever a noun was involved with Faeraud, it always began with an emphasized *my*. His moment of self conceit was awkwardly placed on hold as his father, Lemech, arrived and briefly stopped in the doorway with his wife. Lemech’s cleanly shaven presence was a change from the scruffy beard he had the day before. It was enough to squash any thoughts of a shenanigan. Faeraud was not going to be ruffled just because the father he hated so much had appeared with a new authoritative look.

He directed, “Aedon, select our piece of fruit for the evening.”

Slowly Aedon approached the bowl and picked up a bunch of grapes thinking that maybe he could even share one with his father. A couple of them popped off the vine and fell back into the bowl.

Faeraud snatched off a vein of it and held it up in his father's face and complained, "I hate fruit."

"Perhaps you'd find a celebration of better variety isolated in your chamber for the evening," Lemech scolded, stepping around to claim a piece of fruit for himself and one for his wife, Adah. Lemech was always putting him down and trying to keep him in second place or no place at all.

Faeraud ignored him as he continued to complain, "All that is here are the same old tired variations. Could someone not surprise us, just once, with say, a new fruit genetically engineered, or perhaps of a frozen variety from some distant glacier land?"

"Why do you hint at such slanderous propositions?" Yapet scorned, grabbing a prune from the bowl for himself. "No one has plucked fruit from *that tree* since King Yaswhen and great-grandfather Antioch left."

"Really, Faeraud," Adah exclaimed. She was impatiently tapping a *sunbrella* against the floor like an ornament of show similar to her own persona. There was no use for such a fashion accessory during the evening hours which were void of sunlight and it had never rained before in Atlantis. She was a socialite of the past who had become bitter with age like the gray strands that wrapped her hair into a firm beehive.

A quiet man, wearing a hood which shadowed his face, escorted a woman up to the bowl, snatched an apple, and then moved off. Aedon wasn't sure, but he suspected that this was his father, Gilgamoeh.

Na'amah was Gilgamoeh's wife, and the hooded man escorted her to a seat along with Yapet and Areshia. Aedon perked up with certainty that the man must be his father. He rushed over to introduce himself. He was a little nervous and took a deep breath while awkwardly standing there for a moment.

“*Apa’hei ...*” he blurted out, his voice cracking at the end of the greeting.

He didn’t know what else to say. He had never felt like this in all his life before and he thought everyone in the room was staring at him. He held the bunch of grapes, clinging to them tightly like some kind of security blanket.

The hooded man spoke, “Sorry your mother couldn’t make the festivities this evening.”

“Uh, me too ...” Aedon uttered as another one of his grapes popped off its vine and bounced onto the floor. Nervously, he bent over and picked up the bulb; then he stood up, and was just about to offer a piece as a token of friendship when Yapet interrupted.

“He’s only trying to be polite. You wouldn’t want to take advantage, now would you?”

“Yeah — take advantage,” the man in the hood chuckled, removing the veil to reveal himself — it was Seskef, Yapet’s triplet and look-alike brother.

“Who were you expecting, Aedon? Who did you think it was?” Yapet mockingly asked.

“Where is my father?” Aedon cried out, believing that everyone was laughing at him.

“No one knows who your father is,” said Seskef. “Not even your mother.”

Yapet expounded, “If someone were a real son of Gilgamoeh, might they not know to search the meditation walls of the Irminsul Pyramid rather than the party halls of the Irem?”

“Not again, father is not attending ... not even for *Eve of Apaturia*?” Aedon whined. It was clear that Aedon was an outsider and someone who would never be welcomed by Gilgamoeh’s family unless he first gained his father’s appreciation. But how could he do that when the man constantly eluded him?

“Aedon, do not let your eyes fail you,” the familiar voice startled him. Turning around he faced Yenocho who continued, “Keep hope for what you don’t see. Patience builds a strong and

lasting foundation. Resist temptation from those who may interfere by showing wonders from dark places.”

Aedon stumbled back to his seat. It was as if Yenocha could see right into his mind. He pondered if somehow he had discovered their intrusion into the Library Tower and he wondered if Faeraud had not been careful when he returned the scroll they took.

Faeraud plopped down next to him, “Because you are like a brother to me, it is with concern, and only concern, that I must clue you in about Gilgamoeh. You see, he really doesn't fit in all that well — with the family, or with society for that much. I think he has a loose chunk of waste-rock knocking about his brain. He is probably over at the Irminsul pretending to see distorted visions instead of tending to family expectations.

“If anyone else, other than *Gilggy* would have made such claims, about being a prophet, they would have been sent to the *orichalcum mines*. *Gilggy* is so much *Lemmy's* favorite son that the rest of us do not even exist. He doesn't spend any time with any of us. Just as well, he's the last person I'd want to waste my time with.”

Methouslan, dressed in a drab tan jacket with a brown silk scarf around his neck (the outfit clearly did not echo any of the colors that the festivities were exclaiming) made his way into the room. Each step he took was as slow as his voice. He inhaled short breathes in the middle of his sentences which made you wonder if he was giving thought to each word he delivered or if he was fighting for his last breath of life. He was nine-hundred and sixty sun-cycles old.

“Aedon, regardless of the *genetikos-replica* to be revealed, I welcome *yuh* to our family. *Yur* situation has personally touched me as today I realized that *yuh* really have not had a father for these nearly hundred sun-cycles. If anyone can emphasize with *yuh* account, it would most certainly be me. I've not had a father either ... for over six-hundred sun-cycles now, myself. I know your pain,” Methouslan expounded while greeting a few more

family members before sitting down at a table near Faeraud and Aedon.

An atrium of waterfalls and fountains led toward an interior garden area which opened up into a dark void where little could be seen. The fountains stopped bubbling and the waterfalls fell silent along with the chatter of the room. A slow high-hating cymbal tinged to a beat that quickly picked up pace, then suddenly fell off.

The loud deep voice of an orator announced their song title, “Presenting *Dark Barks of Apaturia* performed by *The Raveneers*.”

Next there was the clang of a cymbal which melted into a sound that was like a howling dog, its pitch ascended throughout the beginning of the song without a coda as each instrument that followed was added one by one.

The music picked up and a splash of light illuminated the start of an energetic performance. Then silence fell across the stage and the lights vanished. Through the darkness their stage rolled to a stop, and with another flash of light it seemed as if the entire band had leapt toward the guests like an Asterian who could pop in out of nowhere.

The music tugged this way and that. The song had a positive upbeat celebrating chorus mixed in with down-dreary verses that sounded more painful than a porcupine’s quill. It was obvious this song had to mean something.

There were two lead *electronic-gourdists*. The string instrument was made from a gourd and given an extra boost of power with a piece of *orichalcum* at the end of its handle and a wire that extended to a noise booster. One *electronic gourdist* was dressed in all white and had a comedic pale smile painted across her face. The other was dressed in black with a shadowy frown pasted under his nose.

The introduction came to an abrupt end and the happy bright *gourdist* stepped forward and with a strum, began singing the chorus. Behind her, two drummers banged out the rhythm and two dueling keyboardists plunked away, each one trying to take control of the board. Then the dark-painted man pushed the light-

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painted girl aside and began to slowly sing his dreary tune composed as if each note were crying out in pain.

(slow, dark, dreary song)

*Opress the poor and leave them destitute,
He seized the houses he did not built.
He has no respite for his craving,
His treasure cannot save him.*

The pale-painted face along with the accompanying happy keyboardist pushed in for the chorus.

(upbeat chorus)

*It's Apaturia, no need to worry ya,
Royal famili-a, is here to greet ya.
It's Apaturia, no need to worry ya,
It's Apaturia, no need to worry ya.*

The contest between the two teams, strings, keyboards and drums heightened for the last verse and chorus. The tension rose as the musicians began to add in other instruments like a cymbal, a horn, and a trumpet for effect and to accentuate particular notes.

*He does not see with twenty-twenty vision,
He follows foolishness, not wisdom.
When there is nothing left to devour,
Full force of misery will rain that hour.*

*All nations bow before him, they appear golden,
Forty days and forty nights will destroy them.
Raise the flag and sound the trumpet,
Disaster of the North appears to dump it.*

There were looks of awe and other glances of offense as the band delivered the final chorus in the Asterian language:

*Et tuleduyun fu foaym ketz runodoo unot,
Shuw opumelueyun ez toro ketz aholupuntoo unot.
Et tuleduyun fu foaym ketz runodoo unot,
Et tuleduyun fu foaym ketz runodoo unot.*

A burst of pyrotechnic sparks and a cloud of smoke hailed their disappearance. They bolted off like a messenger dropping his package and then moving on to the next stop.

Next, a parade of jimmying juice-bearers tumbled into the dining quarters. Each one juggled a different kind of fruit. When one was thirsty, all he had to do was motion to the bearer-of-fruit that he desired, and the server would tumble over and freshly squeeze the juice from the produce which he handled.

Each juice-bearer was greeted by a vine that dropped from the revolving domed ceiling above. Down each vine a cercopithecus monkey dressed in a similar fruit-looking outfit descended. It was difficult to tell if the monkeys were trying to dress up as pieces of fruit or as birds because their costumes adorned both fruit and large fluffy feathers.

Covered in purple fluff, a monkey that looked like he was a giant bunch-of-grapes was handed a pitcher of grape juice from one of the bearers. Another monkey descended in a red-feathered costume and snatched up a pitcher of apple juice. There was an orange-dressed capuchin, a pineapple-dressed chimpanzee, a lemon-dressed spider-monkey, a prune-dressed one, and of course, a banana-dressed orangutan.

Faeraud leaned over to Aedon and said, "I always remember a person's favorite drink. Listen, Adah and Na'amah — they'll both be drinking cranberry juice."

Sure enough they did. A monkey descended down the vine, clinging to it with one of his long arms and a leg. The other leg he extended out, balancing himself while he poured juice from the pitcher into their glasses. The ceiling of juice bearing monkeys revolved around to the next table.

Faeraud continued, “Seskef — now Seskef wants to order apple juice but he won’t. You see apple juice is also Yaped’s favorite drink and since they’re serving him first, he’ll take the apple juice. Then Seskef, wishing to appear independent from his brother, will order something else like grape juice.”

The serving transpired exactly as Faeraud had outlined. Next, the configuration above moved toward the Master Instructioneer’s seat. “Prune juice,” both Faeraud and Aedon exclaimed at the same time looking at each other.

“What will your father drink?” Aedon asked.

“Lemech? He’ll pass completely on the juice. Wait and see,” Faeraud predicted. “Lemech is habitually readable regarding his beverage. Many sun-cycles ago *Gilggy* planted a vineyard which is irrigated by a stream from the glaciers. Its freezing-cold water creates a very rich-tasting red wine. *Gilggy* customized its taste especially for your grandfather Lemech — who has a single serving of *Gilgamoeh Red Wine* at every meal. Never a goblet more, never any less, always just one single glass.”

A *kangawaitress* entered with a jug and as she passed by Faeraud, he stopped her, suggesting, “Allow Aedon to do the honor tonight.”

A little nervous, Aedon stood up and took the bottle from her, then proceeded to serve Lemech by pouring him a taste. He sniffed and then sipped a drop before motioning for his flute to be filled up.

“You are indeed a refreshing welcome,” Lemech said. “Your presence is a renewing delight.”

Methouslan stood up as chiming bells commanded everyone’s attention and he began the ritualistic blessing of the food, “Blessed be the Day of Apaturia.”

Everyone echoed, “Blessed be the *Day of Apaturia*.”

Two youthful *kangawaiters* carried palm leaves hiding the main course, then, parting their branches, they presented a colorful tray of food more creatively displayed than a piece of art.

Methouslan wiped his mouth with a cloth napkin as he finished up the end of a flaming fruit kabob. He clapped his hands twice, commanding attention from everyone, “Our guest tonight, Yenocha, the Master Instructioneer, has an announcement to make. Yuh important message then —”

Yenocha stood up with his usually stern face, “It is with abundant pleasure that I announce that Aedon and Areshia, who are with us here tonight, have successfully completed the required marks for their *Registration of Youth*.”

The room applauded and Aedon was patted on the back a couple of times. Faeraud's interest perked up as he was sitting so tall and straight that he would have snapped in two if anyone would have tried to bend him. The room faded into silence as each person realized that he had been purposely left out of the announcement. Methouslan's and Lemech's puzzled looks begged for an explanation.

Yenocha lowered his voice as he sat down, “It is with some regret that I cannot say the same for anyone else.”

“Why are we just now finding out about this?” Lemech demanded to know.

Silence suffocated the room. The bearers stood off to the side waiting to serve the desert trays, while glistening drops of water sputtered down the side of their scoops of fruit cream. Then the fruit's whipped cream began to slide off. Next, the fruit cream itself began to melt, yet no one moved. A sputter came from Methouslan. No one was sure if he were clearing his throat or if it were a cough, but it released just enough tension that everyone felt safe enough that they could finally exhale.

Slowly the old man stood up from his bench and came to life as if he were youthful again. His voice became loud and commanding like had never been heard since the last *Territorial*

Quarrel. The usually laid-back casual wise-man had turned into a passionate rage like that of the angry Enkidu, “This is the holiday of *Apaturia!* It promises to be a celebration like no other. No one don't — no one don't ruin my *Day of Apaturia.* Who would dare *ta* come into my house, into my Irem, to bring news of disarray on the *Eve of Ap' Dinner?* Some need *ta* learn respect for proper princely priorities.”

Nervously fumbling with his *looking-scope*, Yenocho began to stumble for words, “A poll of his marks came up short.”

“Short?” Lemech exclaimed. “He had a rational evaluation just last moon-cycle!”

“It was degraded,” Yenocho debated, “There was cheating — and *poem-dabbling* which invalidated some of the accomplishments.”

“*Poem-dabbling?*” Methouslan tried to confirm almost with a chuckle of disbelief. “How do you measure such and how could that invalidate —”

“He — he — did not pass the examinations on being submissive to authority,” Yenocho stuttered. “The — the Council of Faculty — the committee all agreed —”

“Faeraud, bring me my scepter,” Methouslan commanded.

The young prince hesitated, then bolted from his seat and ran to the corner of the room. He quickly returned with the scepter. It was a long iron rod overlaid with gold. A doughnut of diamonds connected it to a large ruby ball about the size of a tomato. Attached to the top of that was another much smaller wire frame encasing a glass sphere.

“The boy appears to obey and be submissive to me. Perhaps *yuh* timing and judgment have been poor, like a rotten grape that poisons the whole bunch,” Methouslan coughed, sitting back down again.

Lemech, who was next to Yenocho, began to take his side as he agreed, “Surprised, I am not. The boy has been nothing but trouble. He has blinded his grandfather and his mischievous ways

serve only himself. You should have come to me in private because now a public incident has been recorded.”

“I did formally petition a request,” Yenocha reminded in a low voice. “This was the only time of audience your Orator permitted, Royal One.”

Lemech swallowed a bite of his *apple-nuggy* while responding, “Then I shall have to deal with the matter that has been dealt. How many more studies does the *Council of Faculty* recommend?”

“At least two sun-cycles,” Yenocha answered.

“Two more sun-cycles?” Lemech loudly exclaimed, chocking as if it were a life sentence.

“May I suggest a compromise ... one the Council may be willingly to accept?” Yenocha asked. Then he proposed, “So that disgrace does not fall on the royal family, Faeraud may parade in the *Registration of Youth*, provided that he will agree to return to Sahada for some additional participation.”

Lemech thought for a moment and then finally agreed, “The offer appears fair. Graciously we will accept. Faeraud, you will accept, for honor.”

Their conversation was hardly hushed and everyone listened in. Faeraud let out a sigh of frustration as he rolled his eyes up before cluing Aedon in, “Many princes at the Irem are frustrated at Lemech’s conservative stances. His positions leave many people wondering about his judgment.”

Lemech prepared to leave, stopping briefly to address them, “Aedon, I apologize if you’ve had an unpleasant dinner experience.”

Then he turned to Faeraud, “Again, you have brought shame on the family by not following the teachings of the *Rataka*. A son of mine, you are hardly. You would do wise to follow your brother, Gilgamoeh's example.”

Lemech motioned to his wife Adah to follow as he departed the dinning quarters. Faeraud showed little emotion as hatred boiled within. He slowly moved only his eyes toward Aedon and

then remarked, “I wonder how Lemech would react if *Gilggy* were the one to bring shame on the family? ... I wonder?”

Nothing had been brought up or said about Aedon’s installation into the family. The whole evening had been preoccupied with celebrating and the awful truth that those festivities might somehow be disturbed. He began to believe that the truth about who his real father is, would be masqueraded into the family’s own agenda of not upsetting some delicate balance. He wondered if his *genetikos* might be locked away indefinitely and never revealed.

Yapet walked past him and mockingly asked, “Leaving the family quarters so soon?”

Then his grandmother, Adah, paused her departure in front of him and snarled, “What happened to your droopy illegally-bred mother? Has she drowned herself in another barrel of nectars? Next time you pull her out, remind her, that I am the only princess that will ever reign here.”

Snootily, she popped open her *sunbrella*. It was one of those with three ribs to it, each level slightly smaller than the one it towered above. Its ferrule was topped off with an ornamental crystal that looked like an evil eye. In an abrasive customary way (of telling someone that you never wanted anything more to do with them again), she overtly swung it around and walked away.

The tension was so thick the sharpest knife couldn’t have cut it. Faeraud jumped up and grabbed Aedon by the arm, “*Apa’hei!* Let’s get out of here. Everyone *’ll* be water-busing over to the *Coconut Macaroon* for the *Apaturia Dance*. ... And you are coming with me!”

PAPYRUS TEN

IRON ISOLATION

A horizontal line of steam, backlit by a glowing moon, cut through the dark sky leading to three gigantic smoke stacks. The chimneys grew in size and height as the *waterbus* came to a stop in front of the Iron Isolation. It was an ugly, enormous building and locked-up within its walls were many mysteries.

“*Outta* me way, *ya* commoners,” a goat baaed, forcing his way to the front.

Aedon held his breath, recognizing it was Scapappi. He did not want a conversation with another one of his mother’s associations and prayed the goat would not see him. The horned animal butted his way onboard, adding to the unusually large crowd of people that were coming and going at the late hour.

Aedon thoughtfully admired the tall building with respect. He knew that the replica of genetic comparison that would yield the truth about his father was probably housed deep within its vaults of secrecy.

Then his face turned red and he began to shake with anxiety as he remembered Scapappi's plotting and thought that he might have broken in to the place and tampered with the replica already. The goat sure did seem to be in a hurry to get away from there. Aedon looked back and hoped that Areshia and Yapet, who were in the rear car, did not see the goat in case any accusations should post in the future.

"We've a brief errand here at the isolation, I'll meet up with you at the pavilion in half-an-hourglass," Yapet told Areshia, getting off the *waterbus* with his brother Seskef.

"I'll come along with you," she offered, getting up.

"NO!" both Yapet and Seskef insisted in unison, looking at each other.

"No more than half a sand-bulb of time," Areshia lectured, sitting back down with a huff. "If you're late, you might as well not even show up, 'cause this is the biggest dance in our lifetime. If you're not there, I'll be taking me some other partner from the *choosings*."

"You packed more gear than a *dolichos* of warrior channels," Seskef complained, hurrying out of the station and jumping over the fence next to the Isolation.

"You'll thank me once we get inside and are presented with more blockades," Yapet insisted, following him over the wall.

"More? ... What other blocks?" Seskef cried.

"You should worry more about the owls than the barricades if you wish to be sensible," Yapet smacked back, pointing across the bank of the Nile River.

Witness Wise Owls sat along the guard walls that surrounded the odd-iron structure. Wide-eyed birds were used frequently throughout the Irem (and all of Atlantis) as a protection because they can see better at night than humans, animals, or even a *transglaust*.

There was a long fortress on the opposite bank of Second Moat which intersected with the Nile River. The entire compound

had a large fence that stretched around it, jumped across the river (to another guard wall), then ended on this side of the river where the waterbus station sat. The high velocity of water flowing from the Northern Euphrates River into Second Moat was diverted into the building to feed power-creating turbines. Its runoff cascaded down a waterfall alongside the place.

“How did I get involved in another one of your schemes?” Seskef asked himself. “Why could we not just go through the front door?”

“And alert possible suspects to our mission?” Yapet scorned.

Whenever Yapet had an idea, it was always colossal. Being his father's favorite, he was usually able to persuade his brothers to take part in some of his not so thoroughly thought-out plots. If his plan failed, the other brothers, rather than Yapet, were always blamed.

“No one could possibly sneak into this building,” Seskef complained, setting the satchel down and resting for a moment.

“Except for one way,” Yapet interrupted, picking up the bag. “Even then, we must watch out for the owls — and the *billy-goats*.”

“Billy-goats?”

“Someone caught perpetrating the area might have his guts speared by one of their dual-horns the *saanen* lunges with ... before discarding their gutted victim into the river to be carried away,” Yapet eerily explained, bending low out of the light as he led the way down the outer wall in the shadow of the tall structure.

“This isn't the time to tell scary accounts — unless you want me to turn back,” Seskef warned, lagging behind.

“I'm only trying to stress how careful we need to be.”

“You're the athletic one and best in shape,” Seskef complimented. “Certainly you'll be doing the *doing* of whatever all this is about.”

“We will penetrate the compound, exactly as scheduled ... at its area of least guard,” Yapet firmly said. “This may require swimming under the fence against the heavy current ...”

“And I’m the excellent swimmer in the family,” Seskef admitted, gloomily.

“We have these tools to help pull against the flow,” Yapet revealed, picking up a pulley that he previously hid along the river bank.

“Think I’ll keep watch then ... the undercurrent will most certainly be much stronger than my muscles could navigate,” Seskef suggested, realizing that his vision was somewhat blurry after drinking too many nectars at dinner.

“Fine time to coward-out your weaknesses. I’ll make the first attempt then,” Yapet scoffed.

“I don’t understand why we have to replace the *genetikos-replica*, anyway,” Seskef grumbled. “This sounds really —”

“My weakling brother, aren’t you forgetting the prophecy?” Yapet huffed, tying a rope and pulley together.

“I know all the prophecies by heart,” Seskef proudly announced. “Well, most of them ... or some of them ... which one do you speak of?”

“The one that says: *Upon the third Prince Lord, time will come, because the Uprooter could steal the kingdom.*”

“Yes, I know that one ... read about it last moon-cycle ... or sometime,” Seskef said, trying to convince his brother, even though he really knew very little about it.

“Do you not see? The Prince Lord it refers to is — is — Gilgamoeh,” Yapet explained. “Our father is to be named third prince. ... Methouslan is the first, Lemech will be crowned the second tomorrow — and our Father, Gilgamoeh shall be named the third. Have you forgotten what you — yourself — said, just a few days ago in Sahada? ... That boy, Aedon, he is no doubt, the predicted *Uprooter*.”

“Is that what you are so paranoid about? ... The *genetikos-replica* will prove Aedon is a fake. A big ole silly fake! ... At least, I’m pretty sure it will ...” Seskef stuttered, placing his arm around Yapet and trying to walk back the other way.

“An *Irem Watcher* already reported to Lemech that someone has tampered with the replica. It is up to us to replace this fake scroll with the truth,” Yapet revealed.

He was correct. The results in the Iron Isolation had been tampered with. They had already been replaced by Scapappi the Goat, and maybe even others before him. Yapet discovered this and thought he could do the same and get away with it too.

“Why the sneaky intrusion plan? Can’t Lemech or Methouslan just allow us in?” Seskef whined. He was about as confused as anyone else would be at an obscure prophecy which someone attempts to interpret with only the knowledge of their own corner of the world.

“They can’t be involved — it would ruin their governorship. The prophecy is a warning and we must act,” Yapet preached on, setting up the rig of ropes and hooks.

“If the prophecy says such, then what good can come from our tampering? If it is written — written it is. If somebody wrote it somewhere ... it must be true ... or at least it’s written,” Seskef reasoned in a palindrome.

“Written — is it?” Yapet shouted back in a low whisper. He was becoming annoyed with Seskef’s obvious ignorance about the writings. “The prophecy uses the word *because*. Can not a prophecy which uses words like: *if*, *except* or *because* be changed? It is a coded message telling us to act and ameliorate a possible future. Maybe you don't realize it, but the dark-magic forces are all around us. Methouslan was given charge to watch our part of the world in preparation for the King's return and he has far from kept order. Why, there have been two *Territorial Quarrels* since the king left. Methouslan barely even supports crowning his own son, Lemech, the new Prince. He was rambling on about how Faeraud, who can't even finish the *educatory*, would make a better Prince Lord. We are the only ones left in the family who can carry out King Yaswhen's wishes until he returns.”

“Lemech will be crowned Prince Lord tomorrow,” Seskef declared, “Can he not decree whatever he wishes? What difference will false results make then?”

Yapet explained further, “There is already an enormous following for the other side — perhaps more than a half of the land now. They would like nothing more than to have someone outside of our family as the next Prince Lord. The throne belongs to Gilgamoeh and then to you or I, not Faeraud and certainly not Aedon.”

“Either way, do you really think anyone would allow Aedon to hold position?” Seskef muttered. “His mother is half-Asterian. It would be unheard of.”

The sound of ruffling feathers from an owl in the distance quieted their voices.

“You did bring the key?” Yapet asked.

“Yes, and I remembered to keep it out of Areshia’s site and not to talk about it,” he proudly proclaimed, holding the globe-shaped key up as if he should earn a reward.

Yapet was silent for a while as he thought about how he had obtained the key. Hoping that his guilt might be transferred away from himself, he began confessing as if he were in the cathedral, “In order to get this key, I had to play *kissy-face* all year with Areshia? You think I enjoy associating with a *yellow-bander*.”

“But you said Lemech will do away with the caste system ... when he is crowned ... that everyone will be equal ... I heard you talking ... or someone talking ...”

“I said?” Yapet asked surprised, expounding back, “There’s been talk for centuries about doing away with the caste system. Do you think Lemech wants to be the one responsible for the chaos and possible quarrels that would emerge from such a thing? I told her what she wanted to hear.”

Seskef cut him off, “You borrowed her father's key. Don’t you think someone is going to suspect, with the timing? What will her father say?”

“The key didn’t just jump into my hand. There are other’s close to us, who have aided,” Yapet shortly answered as he was becoming irritated.

“Who others?” Seskef begged.

“Other secret persons, who would not be secret if I told you their names,” Yapet said, annoyed.

“I know we’re supposed to help keep peace on the Earth, but sometimes I wonder if we are going about it in a correct manner,” Seskef grumbled, mostly to himself.

Yapet began connecting his ropes and hooks to the barricade where he would have to swim under. Adjacent to the fence was the tall guard building with a revolving illumination-bulb that occasionally rotated past as if it were searching for them. Fortunately, they were protected by the shadow of overgrown bulrushes the gardeners had forgot to attend to.

Trying to confirm with his brother, Yapet snapped, “You haven’t forgotten the plan and what your part is?”

“Yeah, yeah I remember. I’m supposed to wander on top of the confine, by the tower, drunkenly — as if I’m not already ... I did have a *drinky* or two ... I’ll stager, and maybe sway too, that will make it more believable.”

“And then you’ll fall off the fort, injure yourself and ruin the whole plan,” Yapet nagged. “Stick to the essentials. ... What do you do next?”

“I block the illumination-bulb, I remember — when it shines around toward you. The distraction will give you plenty of time to pass under.”

“Make sure you distract any owls that might be watching too,” Yapet instructed.

Light from the two full moons above blanketed most of the area except for patches where shadows were cast from the tall buildings. Seskef left to take his position as planned and Yapet scaled the bank with the rope he had rigged.

He shot a cable across the river to a grille embedded in the side of the building where liquid trickled out. Next, he jumped in

the water and crossed over to where the grate was while using the cable to steady himself against the heavy current flowing from the nearby waterfall. As he crossed, one of the revolving illumination bulbs swept over the area. It was quickly blocked as Seskef jumped in front of it on cue.

At the grid, Yapet took a deep breath, swam underneath, and came up on the other side; he was in.

There was a moan, a creek, then a gushing sound. A giant wave from inside the long tunnel rushed forward. It sloshed up, pinning Yapet against the screen. He began sputtering as he was forced to swallow jugs of water while struggling to climb up the vent and stay above the flood.

Seskef eyed Yapet below as two owls flew in and landed in front of him.

“INTRUDER!” one owl shouted, spanning his wings out and high.

“Who dares to breach the walls of the Iron Isolation?” the other owl demanded.

“Where is all that water down there coming from? It’s the middle of the night?” Seskef gasped, hoping his brother would survive.

“You must have forgotten about the *Apatruia* celebrations and how they’ve demanded more power,” the owl explained.

“So the volume of water — it’s been increased — more of it flowing through the turbines? How much more?” Seskef begged, looking down.

“You sure know an awful lot about this. Sounds like a planned intrusion to me,” the first owl insisted again.

Awhile later the rush of water receded and Yapet was able to proceed into the tunnel. A high-pitched-giggling sound caught his attention as a couple of mermaids swimming nearby were laughing at him.

“What are you doing here?” he asked, turning with startled fright.

“This is our private mating tunnel,” a merman replied, flipping water toward Yapet.

“Used to be secret,” another mermaid interjected, “Until tonight. Seems like everyone else has discovered it too.”

“Holidays! There’s just no privacy at holidays,” the merman grumbled, diving back into the water, his tail splashing like a dolphin.

Yapet dragged himself out of the waterway onto a ledge inside the outlet.

“You look like an honest guy caught up in some trouble,” the mermaid squeaked, swimming over to him.

“No trouble — not at all.”

“What’s your name? I’m Miriam,” the mermaid replied, extending her scale-covered hand, as was customary when greeting.

“I am — on a special mission. One of mercy and goodwill, that’s all I can say,” Yapet explained, withholding a responding gesture.

“Most who come in this way, rarely return,” she said, coyly.

“I suppose not,” he agreed. “Why do you think that is?”

“Because they don’t listen.”

“Don’t listen — to whom?”

“To the mermaids who have been inside.”

“So I am to believe that you can go in there, but I can’t?”

She shook her head in the affirmative. He knelt down on one knee next to her and asked, “Tell me about it — but quickly.”

“Most of the mysterious secrets in the building are located four levels underground,” she began.

“I already know which level I’m going to,” he snapped, standing back up.

“Of course you do, but did you know that the only way to get down there, is by going up?”

“You’ve engaged my curiosity again — go on,” he nodded.

“They are accessible only by first climbing up into one of the large smoke stacks and finding a secret *trivelator* that descends

down into the level you want. Each chimney connects to a different level.”

“If you know all of this, then you must know which vent connects to level four,” he suggested.

“Even if I told you, you will also find a maze of tunnels, steps, and booby-traps once you get there,” she assured him, leaning her chin into her arm which was against the side bank.

Further down the moat a thatched-roof building lit up with a glow that radiated excitement as Aedon and Faeraud entered the *Coconut Macaroon Dance*. The chatter was as loud as the music inside and prominent guests included many of Aedon’s friends from the *educatory*.

“Since neither of us could find a girl of liking, it only made sense that we came together,” Faeraud commented, making small talk.

“I was hoping that Areshia would’ve accompanied —” Aedon started.

“Areshia? Yapet’s girl? Not her again,” Faeraud sighed, placing his arm around Aedon’s shoulder. “You’ll be more accepted here — and appreciated — as my companion than with that low commoner. It’s scandalous that Yapet even talks to her.”

“Aren’t you on the side of doing away with the caste system?” Aedon asked.

“Indeed, as an appearance of diplomatic acuteness. ... Oh my moons! Will you look at that boy?” Faeraud exclaimed, pointing across the room to where a handsome young man entered.

It was Mitchum wearing a robe of so many purples that it stole the attention of everyone. It was by far the most glamorous cloak in all of the Irem.

“His father owns the largest fabric mercantile in Mestor, it’s the most upscale-premier one there,” Faeraud explained. “That brat could take any garment he wanted — have it tailored to his utmost imagination.”

“And it appears like he did,” said Aedon.

His robe was a spectacle of many stripes and ornamentations of every color of purple the spectrum could produce. It included indigo, cyan, porphur, mauve, violet, lilac, cerulean, manatee and heliotrope. Its redder colors adorned rose, crimson, magenta and argaman. Sections were even made of electric purple, a hue that most human eyes cannot see. The hems and cuffs of the robe were made in *tyrian-purple*, a special kind of imperial-dye that is more valuable than gold and comes only from very rare shellfish.

“Do you think anyone could have designed a more crowd-bashing toga than that thing?” Faeraud scoffed, choking at the display.

“Do I detect envy?”

“Where’s the nectar bar?” Faeraud asked, spotting it, before abruptly leaving. “I’ll be over there arranging for — some drinks.”

Faeraud dug his way through the swarm to a bar with a roof-like covering that looked more like a grass skirt than shingles. Aedon circulated through the assembly. No one was making any effort to befriend him, not even a casual *Apa’hei* greeted him here. Whenever he would approach, people quickly magnetized into a click turning their backs toward him. He passed where Auseten and a couple others were seated.

“Isn’t that Aedon?” one of Auseten’s friends asked him.

“Yep, that’s him,” he answered.

“Who’s Aedon?” the other asked.

“That guy, the *gray-bander*, who thinks he’s Gilgamoeh’s son,” Auseten answered.

“Why would anyone, even a *gray-bander*, want to be related to Gilgamoeh?” the first asked.

“He probably believes in all those silly prophecy things?” the other remarked.

“If he’s related, I would speculate,” Auseten remarked.

“Bet he’s lost his sanity too,” the first one exclaimed, sounding concerned.

“His mother’s definitely got a few loose chunks of orichalcum knocking around up there,” Auseten said.

“Who’s his mother?”

“I think we should stay clear of him — way clear,” the first one warned.

“Did anyone ever tell you about what his father predicted?” Auseten asked.

“Should we recite a poem today, to keep him far, far away?” the other one asked.

“You just rhymed,” the first one chuckled.

What had been said did rhyme and made Aedon feel even more inferior as if they were casting spells over him. He had hoped that Areshia would be at the gathering but he could not find her at first. Then he noticed a dancing area that was on a lower level. She was down there and seemed to be all alone.

“ARESHIA! ARESHIA!” he shouted from the balcony trying to get her attention but the orchestra was too loud for anyone to hear him calling. He turned back looking to find a way down to the lower level of the venue.

As he walked along the upper edge, Areshia looked up. Her heart skipped a beat as she forgot about Yapet, who still had not shown up to accompany her. Conflicting thoughts dueled in her mind. She was grateful to Yapet for being the first man to pay attention to her, but Aedon had that energy which never stopped sparking. Certainly if she could be accepted in Yapet’s world she could fit into Aedon’s, she thought, debating if she were just fooling herself. She turned back to the dance area as Aedon turned toward her from above, again, each one just missing the other’s glance.

He finally found stairs that led downward to the area below, but a warrior stopped him, “*Ya* — go down there and *ya* won’t be coming back up.”

“What — what do you mean?” Aedon asked.

“You have a gray band. You need to be accompanied by a *purple-bander* if you’re returning back,” the Warrior explained.

“*Seamuck*,” Aedon huffed, turning around to where he had been watching earlier.

As the music picked up pace, Areshia tried to bob to the beat. Yapet was nowhere to be found and Aedon wanted to go down and see her. But how would he get back up? Besides, he couldn’t just abandon Faeraud, he might get angry that he had left, he told himself.

Awhile later Aedon developed an idea. The toga-tie that Areshia had given him was made from very strong material and there seemed to be a corner area next to a column that was tucked-away into the shadows. He took the *rope-tie* and tied it to the pillar, then tossed it over the rail. Next, he inched down the line into the area below where she was dancing.

Sneaking up behind her he put his hands over her eyes. His impulsive flirting wasn’t such a good idea because Areshia quickly flipped him over her head. He landed on the floor in front of her. Her long hair tangled into her mouth and she sputtered before brushing it aside. He slowly sat up on one elbow in a bit of pain. The surrounding dancers chuckled before carrying on.

“Aedon?” Areshia exclaimed, she was surprised.

“I’ve come to rescue you,” he began.

“Rescue me? From what?”

“From this lower-level.”

“Some rescuer, you are,” she replied, and then she offered a hand, helping him up.

“Come on, I’ve rigged a rope to vault us back up to the main level,” he told her.

“Why would I want to go up there?” she asked, taking his hand and leading the dance.

“For prominence ... to search for our new continent, together, remember?”

“I think not,” she replied. “I prefer dancing here with the colorful diverse castes rather than looking out-of-place with the one-colored vultures upstairs.”

“But Faeraud and Auseten are up there, so are others from the *educatory*,” Aedon begged.

Then she asked, “How do you plan to create a private virtual-continent for the two of us when you are so wrapped up in the old one?”

Aedon smiled, grabbed her other hand, and the two of them twirled on the dance floor. Some might expect the man to lead, but this was a dance where Areshia took control. The music transitioned into a slower pace and they found themselves dancing closer. Flushed from the physical exercise, as well as the attraction, beads of sweat glistened from Aedon’s face. With Areshia in his arms, he instinctively moved closer to her. She moved closer to him. Their mouths almost touched. Slowly they danced spinning around, their lips pulling toward each other but never quite making it past some kind of invisible barrier.

An obscured impediment whispered to Areshia that they should not be together as this would be a betrayal to Yapet. Aedon kept hearing voices of advice that told him he needed to be courting a princess of the proper caste. Obstacles of trepidation prolonged the moment until the beckoning attraction became a stale dance. Then, after a few more steps, a *Witness Wise Owl* darted into the throng and then up and out again, as if he had seen some horrible atrocity and lost his way, or at least his balance. There were loud disturbances from across the river and rumors began to emerge about a fight at the Iron Isolation.

Aedon caught sight of Faeraud on the balcony above motioning for him to come back up. He begged leave from Areshia, “Grateful for the dance, but I’ve observed my host beckoning my return.”

“Perhaps we can do this again,” she said.

“There are many celebrations this holiday,” Aedon hinted.

“Festivities that I won’t be able to get into,” she moaned, pointing to her yellow-band as a reminder.

“We’ll create our own celebration — soon,” Aedon suggested.

“Right, the new continent,” Areshia remarked; she wasn’t convinced.

Aedon walked back over to where he had rigged the *ropetie*. Faeraud was standing above, holding the other end. Then, he let go and it dropped to the floor. Aedon gathered up the belt, fastened it around his waist, and then walked outside where he found a garden path.

Aedon gazed up at the two moons, one was high and the other just rising. By sunrise they would be setting and the *Day of Apaturia* would officially begin. All he could think about was his fate and how it rested on the results from that *genetikos-replica*.

“*Smart-owl*, over here,” a voice called in a commanding whisper, disappearing down a zigzagging alley. Aedon hesitated then followed into the dark shadows. Suddenly he was pressed up against the wall as two arms pinned him there. Faeraud’s face was so close to his own, he wasn’t sure if he was going to be spat on or kissed.

“I knew that you were curious — that you would follow me here,” Faeraud teased, brushing his leg against Aedon’s.

“I did agree to come here — to the dance — with you, I meant not to stray,” Aedon stammered, trying to make an excuse.

“I’ve always never involved all those manners myself. Anyhow, we’re back together again,” he said. “Isn’t that what matters?”

“Entirely,” Aedon sighed.

“Gilgamoeh, he’s supposed to be your father, right?” Faeraud asked, changing the subject.

“Yeah, yes — certainly — he’s my father. You know that,” Aedon defensively answered.

“Then why did he not show up for dinner? He knew you were at the Irem and would probably be there, right? Doesn’t it seem like he constantly avoids you?”

“I suspect he’s embarrassed by me,” Aedon responded.

“No father should be ashamed of his son. Even if you weren't his son, he should be as proud as a giraffe to have an adopted one,” said Faeraud.

“Someone should tell him that.”

“Well I'm proud of you — and that were comrades and all,” Faeraud emphasized, looking deeper into Aedon's eyes. “What is your mother's *scroll-up* concerning the whole situation?”

“She says he was intoxicated and approached her. I'm sure she was drunk too. ... The two of them deserve each other,” he said with resentment. “Most of the time I feel like I don't belong to either one. I just wish they would stop avoiding each other and face the truth. What is so wrong with that?”

“It's the details,” Faeraud consoled. “You have to get above their selfish agendas and not be held hostage by their manipulations.”

“Why can't things be simple and in balance, like the way the Asterians tell us they are supposed to be ... they used to be?”

“The Asterians? They're the reason why so many things are unbalanced,” Faeraud insisted, in a whisper. “I've uncovered some — secrets — about them. If you're interested, wander by my chambers after both moons are past high-point. I want to share with you some important secrets and I don't want anyone else interfering. There are new alliances forming behind the scenes — right now as we speak. You don't want to be left out and I need you to be included.”

“I didn't realize the political season was about to change.”

“There is a new moon rising on the horizon and you and I need to be part of it.”

Aedon nodded. He wasn't sure why Faeraud was suddenly befriending him in such a persuasive manner.

“I look forward to our time together, tonight. ... Remember, after the moons reach high-point,” Faeraud enthusiastically declared, turning and skipping into the dark.

Aedon lingered and gazed out at the night sky for awhile. He mulled-over what Faeraud said about a new horizon and

wondered what he meant; so he decided to march up to his chambers and find out.

PAPYRUS ELEVEN

A SECRET ORGANIZATION

You're early."

"Hardly a surprise, I'm always early?" Aedon reminded.

"Except when arranging an occasion with a girl for *Apaturia Dance*. ... I should've remembered."

Aedon walked over to the triangular-shaped window whose point reached the ceiling and its base the floor. Faeraud was adjusting a tree-trunk size *looking-scope* that pointed toward the moons. The room appeared more like a long corridor than sleeping-quarters with its dim lit stone walls covered in a velvety vermillion moss. The large bed at the end was dwarfed by sculpted arches bending over it and the lack of other furnishings made it seem sparse and empty.

"What do the *twinkle-twinkles* predict for my future tonight?" Aedon jokingly asked, walking over to a table next to the opening and picking up one of the circular charts scrolled across it.

“They say that you are curious and have come to discover your destiny tonight,” Faeraud chuckled, greeting Aedon with an arm around his shoulder before snatching back the chart he was examining.

“Have a see ... I can’t seem to calibrate this coordinate,” said Faeraud, tapping the end of the *looking-scope*.

“What bodies are you trying to relate?” Aedon questioned.

“The moon, ninety degrees at point to the morning star —”

“Seven-one, alpha-three,” Auseten interrupted, appearing from out of the shadows of the room.

“Seven-one, alpha-three? Your personal birth star I presume?” Aedon asked, exchanging disapproving stares of territorial intrusion with Auseten.

“I already double-checked it, came up with the same markings,” Auseten snapped.

“A level tripod could work magic,” Aedon replied, adjusting their set-up. “Still trying to predict the future with a *looking-scope*? Isn’t that a bit ancient for a modern prince like you?”

“Perfecting it. If it worked for the King of Old ...” Faeraud answered. “With my new discovery — moving a moon into the right position could assure a gravitational alignment that might elevate the three of us to be rulers — kings — of the three most populous continents.”

“Move the moon? How do you propose to do that?” Auseten asked, doubting with laughter.

“Pick it up and drop it into the next galaxy?” Faeraud sarcastically remarked. “That would be easier than convincing my father *Lemmy* to name me his successor.”

“I don’t want to be a king anyway. King of what?” asked Aedon.

“The Asterian Council can’t rule forever. Change will happen, and when it does, the Prince Lords we have now will fade away as new kings emerge. Auseten is the son of the Prince Lord of Aszea and someday he could become king. I am the son of

Lemech who will be crowned Prince Lord tomorrow and one day I could rule Atlantis,” Faeraud reminded them. “And Aedon, you, with a few *enchancements*, could become leader of Sahada.”

“I think you’ve gone mad and jumped off the end of a teeter-totter again,” Aedon huffed, turning and walking over to a covered piece of furniture.

“I don’t think you have,” said Auseten. “The thrones are within our reach we just need to rebalance the energy and —”

“And what, Auseten?” Aedon asked in an accusatory tone. “Cast spells, conjure up more *enchancements*, like we did at the *educatory*, only to find ourselves in even deeper troubles this time?”

“Aedon’s right,” Faeraud agreed, “We can’t go about this stupidly — but we can go about it. The three of us are perfect allies with similar backgrounds. Each of us have been rejected by our father, a person of power. Leadership and authority runs through our blood. And while it flows through our brother’s veins too, we have an advantage over them.”

“What is that?”

“They constantly profess to be followers of the *Rataka* scrolls; yet, do they follow many of its lessons?” Faeraud asked.

Auseten corrected, “Not my father. He has even stated to us in private that they are seaweed and he refuses to allow them to be authoritative in our land, something the Asterian Council still has not figured out how to deal with.”

Aedon boasted, “My father has very conservative views and has always upheld its teachings and that is why I have given oath to do the same.”

“Given oath?” Faeraud tried to clarify.

“Well, yes, to myself, because of my father,” Aedon began to stumble. He was afraid he might not be as well accepted by his friends if he took to an extreme view.

“I doubt your father follows much of the teachings except as a façade, or else you’d be sitting in his abode right now instead of here with us,” Faeraud snapped. “Am I right?”

“Suppose so,” Aedon mumbled.

“Don’t you see? We have the opportunity here to do better than them. We have the occasion to be the real masters of the scrolls,” Faeraud said. “There are three scrolls, three continents, and we are three princes. If we band together, form an alliance and use the energy that is available to us, we might just be selected to do mighty things.”

“*Seamuck!* The scrolls are just tales written by men, they don’t really exist else the Asterians would’ve produced the originals long ago,” Ausetthen remarked.

“But they are real,” Aedon defended.

“Perhaps you should listen to Aedon on an occasion. I am already in possession of the first,” Faeraud revealed.

“You are not,” said Ausetthen in disbelief.

“You didn’t bring it back? You actually have it here? What if we get caught?” Aedon worried, pacing back and forth nervously.

“You’re longing to investigate its contents as much as I. ... Am I wrong? ... Certainly you don’t plan to return to Sahada or go to the Irminsul and report me?” Faeraud remarked, pulling out the short black cylinder.

“What in the *Sahada Desert* is that thing?” Ausetthen asked, watching the round scroll extend in length as it floated in midair.

“A little secret that Aedon took from the library,” he jested. Aedon scoffed as Ausetthen began to realize what it was.

“We’re doing this for an educational experience, just to investigate,” Faeraud assured. “Is everyone going to be in on this secret? Aedon, are you in — or are you going to quit like you used to when we were growing up? ... Certainly not, we’re your true friends. The enchantment that will assure your father’s acceptance could be right here in front of you.”

“I’m in,” Ausetthen eagerly committed. “Faeraud, do you deem it wise — to be sharing this with Aedon? What if he can’t keep a secret and *copy-parrots* on us?”

“I most certainly can. There are lots of secrets that I’ve kept?” Aedon defensively said.

“When? Like what?” Auseten demanded.

“If I told you now, then they wouldn’t be secrets anymore, now would they?”

The black scroll opened further. Aedon could hear in his head the warnings from Yenocho, Ahteana, and other teachers of the past. They screamed for him to hold off and wait, but how could he say no to the possibility that stared him in the face?

“The ancient *magic enchantments* written by King Yaswhen himself. ... So, they really do exist. How did you ever find it?” Auseten asked, examining the floating onyx papyrus.

“I believed that if the Asterians had been untruthful about the scrolls, or where they were hidden, that the lie in itself would weaken the *enchantments* they enacted to hide them. I sense that I’m right as they are not kept on Asteria but are hidden here on Earth,” Faeraud said.

“I don’t understand why they would do that?” Aedon asked.

“Perhaps to keep them away from the Asterian mastermind who tried to take control once before. As long as he is up there and the scrolls are down here, he is powerless.”

“This is the most awesome find ever,” Auseten exclaimed.

“We need to take this back, before it gets into the wrong hands,” Aedon insisted, starting to roll it back up.

“It’s not going to get into the wrong hands,” Faeraud adamantly said, unrolling it again. “It’s going to stay in our hands. Mine, Auseten’s and yours.”

“Why would they hide the originals anyhow?” Aedon wondered.

“The Asterians have always selfishly tried to hide the secrets of Yaswhen. By hiding the magic and forbidding its use, they can keep better control over us. They would like to see nothing more than for our genes to become extinct,” said Faeraud. “Their species is growing and they need more room. I’ve heard it’s fairly crowded up there on Asteria.”

“How do you read it, it looks blank to me?” Auseten asked, jabbing his finger on the surface.

“There are very few humans who can read it. ... Aedon is one of them,” Faeraud divulged.

“I see,” Auseten exclaimed, finally realizing, “So, this is why you’re including Aedon.”

“Me?” Aedon questioned, “I don’t know how to read the thing. I see exactly the same thing you do?”

“But you can speak to it — in Asterian.”

“I can? ... Yes, I can!”

“We will form our very own secret alliance of which no one else can ever know about. A finger-locking promise,” Faeraud demanded.

Mystic excitement washed across their faces. Aedon wasn’t sure if he should participate, especially after cautions rendered by Yenocha and Ahteana. Then he thought about it further. He had vowed to follow the teachings of the *Rataka* not the teachings of the Asterians. What better way could there be to keep the spirit of its lessons than to be involved with an original *Rataka* scroll?

The three men all locked fingers. Faeraud’s black poodle excitedly barked out an exclamation of approval that was as short as his continental-clipped hairs. “Pestilence,” Faeraud snapped, calling out the dog’s name so it would heel; then, he extended his fingers and proclaimed, “Lock!”

Inserting his fingers into Faeraud’s, Auseten promised, “Lock!”

Aedon stretched his hand forward, “Lock!”

“Go ahead, Aedon, tell the scroll to reveal its mysteries,” said Auseten.

“But what do I say to it?”

“If this is the real *Rataka Scroll of Fire*, it should answer with its name when you ask,” said Faeraud.

“Uh, okay ... Recalling what I’ve studied, requests to the *Rataka* should rhyme. That I know is required,” Aedon stammered,

turning to face the center of the floating sheet. “A third of the *Rataka* you became, will you reveal to us your name?”

“In Asterian, I prefer,” Faeraud grumbled, clearing his throat.

“Right,” Aedon said, repeating the words in the language:

*“Ah khenkeng ahuc khut tulueyun ahytoroo unot yomruno.
Eveluedwend unot sloyneun ketz arn runodoo fumo.”*

A breeze emanated from the scroll. The black onyx surface morphed into a blue liquid that looked more like a sheet of water than paper. Blue waves rippled back and forth between its rods and its sea began to shimmer like a miniature ocean laid out in front of them. Mist from its surf splashed into the boys faces. In Asterian symbols, made of water, the answer formed as it floated in midair above the sheet.

Δ HJL VTCH VTCH Δ HL94T

A deep whispering-sloshing voice echoed the floating letters:

“U'd ahum vutch vutch u'd aholupunto!”

“What’s that mean, what did it say?” Faeraud quickly asked, reaching out for the letters as they fell back into the scroll with a splash.

“It said: *I am water, water I am,*” Aedon interpreted.

“Seaweed!” Faeraud swore, stomping his sandal. “Of all the luck, fate would play tricks on me. The Asterian enchantments are strong indeed.”

“What’s wrong, what did I say?” Aedon asked.

“It’s not you — it’s the blubbering scroll,” Faeraud shouted. “I wanted — I need that *Scroll of Fire*. ... This isn’t it.”

“So this isn’t one of the *Rataka* scrolls after all? I knew the stories were fables ...” Ausethe then chuckled.

“No, this IS a *Rataka* scroll, alright; just the wrong one,” said Faeraud. “This is the *Scroll of Water* — not the *Scroll of Fire*. ... I was certain the *Scroll of Fire* would be placed next to a symbol of fire like the flaming torch of the library.”

“Obviously not,” Ausethe then snottily answered.

“Not to worry, now that we’ve found one of the writings, the *enchantment* has been broken and the spells that hide the others will begin to erode away. It’s only a matter of time before the next one is found.”

“Can we take this one back now?” Aedon asked.

“NO!” both Faeraud and Ausethe then shouted back.

Aedon stepped back bumping into a large piece of furniture with a tarp over it.

“Careful there,” Faeraud said.

“What’s under here?” Aedon asked, peeking under the cover.

“NO! NO! NO! Don’t!” Faeraud ordered, almost shouting. “Guess it’s alright now. Kinda of silly actually. You know, how when you’re a young lad — alone in a big room — some things just frighten you even though nothing’s there.”

“Guess so.”

“The old mirror ... it was a gift from an unknown and unseen person,” Faeraud remembered.

“Strange, indeed.”

“Can’t believe the old reflecting-glass is still sitting here ... covered for almost half a century now,” Faeraud reminisced. “My father sent it away into storage — to the Iron Isolation — said he was afraid it might have some evil *enchantment* spoken over it. A few sun-cycles later we got in a heated argument and I had the piece brought back, hoping it would make him mad. He didn’t even notice it had returned. Then I started having terrible nightmares. I used to wake up and think that I was seeing things in the glass. So I

covered it up. Nightmares eventually went away, and then with time, it just blended in with the forgotten walls of the room.”

Faeraud pulled the jacket off, whirling some dust in the air which slowly settled, revealing a surface that jimmied like jelly instead of glass. It’s dim reflection stared blankly at them.

KERPLUNK! The boys jumped as the scroll behind them suddenly retracted itself and fell to the floor as if it were frightened of the mirror too.

After a few chuckles to dissipate any coincidental fears, the young men decided to investigate the *Scroll of Water* and to see if it could work any magic. They gathered on the round rug in the center of the room.

Faeraud spoke, “We have all three been chosen for distinguished assignments. Earlier I was thinking how lucky I was to find this scroll by chance. But I do not believe that any more. I think it is becoming clear that the scroll found us. It has chosen and selected us to execute special undertakings that no one else could ever complete.”

“I’m still not so sure about this,” Aedon objected. “The giant, Og — he started out using *enchancements* for just one thing — to bring cooler temperatures to his land. Look at it now — all glaciers. Animals, dwarves, giants and humans, we’re not like the Asterians. We always have to go back for more.”

“Nothing wrong with wanting more — is there?” Faeraud reasoned.

“I told you we shouldn’t include him. We’ve barely peeked at its surface and he’s lecturing like Ahteana already,” Auseten complained.

“Have you ever been to Bashan?” Aedon retorted back at him.

“I don’t believe in fables or giants,” Auseten declared.

“We’re not conjuring up any evil storms, so just relax,” Faeraud assured them. “For thousands of sun-cycles, small pieces of *enchanted poems* have been copied and handed down in secret. Every family has a couple stashed away somewhere — like the ones

recited before dinner or the ones your girlfriend Areshia uses to get good marks in school.”

“She looks like a *poemer* to me,” Ausethen remarked.

“But this — this scroll here — contains hundreds of pure originals without any errors,” Faeraud whispered.

“Do you think it’s safe for us to be reciting — using things like this — they aren’t really designed for us,” Aedon reiterated.

“Who decides what you should use or not?” Faeraud debated, “Agenda-driven relics, like the ones at the Irminsul, or the head of your household — if you even have one? Consider the numerous citizens without a loving family? How many people don’t have a father or don’t really know who their father is? Who decides what they should have? Are there not opportunities that you know belong to you, Aedon? And there has not usually been a father there to give them to you or even one to simply say, ‘*yes, here is how you do that.*’ Do not opportunities belong to people like you?”

“Yes — Yes!” Aedon shouted in agreement.

“I have lived here all my life in the shadow of my older brother *Gilggy—moeh*,” Faeraud complained, lighting a collection of candles that were nearby. “I know he’s your father, Aedon, ... but I can’t stand to be around his stupid ancient extremities. My whole life I have had to take second place, or in most cases no place, as *Gilggy* was the firstborn, the next heir to the throne: a platform that must never seat him. ... I bet that he’s rejected you too, Aedon, just like me. ... Am I right? ... We must make sure that the throne, the chair of authority that belongs to us, rejects him. We all deserve more, don’t we? Isn’t it time we were first for once?”

Aedon shrugged his shoulders, not completely sure, but what could it hurt, he thought.

“Let the negative things go and let’s focus on the positive future we’re going to have together? Okay? You guys up for giving this a real material try?”

“Sure, what harm could possible develop?” Ausethen said.

“Each scroll of the *Rataka* is said to have its own field of energy that we can communicate with,” Faeraud detailed.

“I want everyone to sit in a circle with me and hold hands,” Faeraud offered, sitting between the mirror and the scroll before unrolling it again. “Close your eyes and assume a meditation position.”

“We’re really going to do this seaweed?” Aedon asked, while they sat down on the floor crisscrossing their legs.

“You see, when we have three people in agreement in a triangular formation, it gives ascension to our mental and mystical force,” Faeraud continued. “I want everyone to imagine something, an object, some article that you may have seen this evening. Then I want you to picture the item ascending into the heavens ... into the *Universal Cycle of Energy*. ... Is everyone ready?”

“Yeah — let’s just do it —” Aedon said.

“Come on, now! You have to believe or it won’t work,” Faeraud cautioned.

“Okay, I believe.”

“Indeed. Now close your eyes, choose an article, and think about it,” Faeraud directed. “Does everyone have an item in their mind?”

The other two acknowledged with a nod.

“*Smart-owls*, I want you to dream of that object all by itself in total darkness. All that you can see is the item, nothing else,” he continued. “Now imagine a dim light fading up and surrounding the article. ... The light is getting brighter and it is lifting the thing up in the air into the *Universal Cycle of Energy*. ... The light is getting brighter. ... Now the item is floating closer to you. It is coming toward you. It is so close you can reach out and touch it.”

Aedon participated in the visualization until he was about to open one eye-lid, just for a reality check, but, Faeraud interrupted, “Don’t open your eyes. Keep them shut tight. Okay, now your article is within reach. With your eyes closed I want you to let go of my hand and reach out and gently take the item. The *Universal Cycle of Energy* is giving you the object to take. Slowly take it, you can feel it. Hold the thing in one hand and slowly move your other hand over it, feeling it.”

They all had their eyes shut and probably looked quite silly sitting there pretending to feel some object as they moved their hands over the empty space that was before them. But had they opened their eyes, they might have seen something even more frightening. The very article they were imagining could be seen reflected in the mirror next to them.

“Now set the object down,” Faeraud instructed. “We are putting the item away by setting it down in front of us. ... It is fading away as darkness fills our vision. ... We see nothing but total blackness now. ... Slowly ... we come back into the room and open our eyes.”

Aedon let out a big-sighing laugh, and Auseten giggled a little, too.

“Hold a minute, foolish seahorses, we may have just caused something to happen and just don't know it yet,” Faeraud cautioned. Then he went on to investigate, “Auseten, what was the item that you were thinking about?”

Auseten answered, while half-laughing, “I was picturing that silly-purple robe Mitchum was wearing. What were you imagining Aedon?”

“No! — No way!” Aedon exclaimed. “I was visualizing the same thing.”

“And so was I,” Faeraud confessed. “See we were all picturing the same article. With power like this, the three of us could achieve some of our aspirations — important objectives that really matter.”

“This is confidential, Aedon. No one else can know about these *enchantments*,” Auseten adamantly reminded him.

“This is our secret organization,” Faeraud announced. “We have formed an alliance, the three of us. Come sickness, come war, come relations or come other oath, we vow allegiance to each other and loyalty to this alliance.”

Faeraud extended his hand for another finger-locking-promise. Inserting their fingers, they all agreed:

“Lock!”

“Lock!”

“Lock!”

Then Faeraud added, “The one who breaks this alliance shall fetch dire consequences of torture or even — death.”

PAPYRUS TWELVE

THE DAY OF APATURIA

Aedon was a prince of Atlantis whom he thought no one would notice — but he was wrong. Eyes were following him everywhere and his ears couldn't shut-out the whispers:

“Is that Prince Aedon?”

“He's no prince, he's a fraud, an *orichalcum-talent digger* — I tell *ya*.”

“It sure is him — and that's Prince Faeraud next to him?”

“How do you know?”

“*Gotta* be, one has a purple band and the other a gray.”

“It's about time a common person like us was allowed in the Irem.”

“Aedon's a trouble-maker, some say he could be the *Uprooter!*”

“You're jealous, I suspect.”

The whispers faded as Aedon turned his attention to the two moons setting over the mountain peaks in the west. The larger

one was obscured by the bald one which slid diagonally across its path. They grew faint as the predawn sky notched brighter. The eclipse was interrupted with an explosion of fireworks: KABOOM!

“They’ve always frightened me — ever since I was a little boy,” Aedon chuckled, slightly embarrassed that he had jumped.

“How do they make them look like that — like fruits?” asked Auseten, looking up at the fireworks that lit up the early morning sky.

“It’s a multi-break peony, an animated one,” Faeraud said, turning toward an exploding-round shape which broke in two.

“What do they use to make them so colorful — calcium for the orange?” Aedon asked, answering his own question. Soon the sky was all that they could see as people crowded in around them, the size of the throng multiplying each minute.

“I *betcha*, Lithium for that red one,” Faeraud gambled, seeing an apple shape burst as he strained on his toes for a better glimpse.

“Are we *gonna* stand here all day and debate firework chemicals while this mob encircles or shall we find our seats?” Auseten snapped, knowing little about the fueled stars.

“I always never speculated it would be this crowded. Our seats are way over there,” Faeraud shouted, pushing through the mob, reaching back to grab Aedon’s hand, and pulling him through.

“Ouch!” a lady screamed, withdrawing her stepped-on leg back into a small tent that barely fit around her.

“What happened to the Warriors who are supposed to keep these commoners out of here?” Faeraud snarled, kicking back at the lady as she growled.

A series of pulsating rocket-shaped explosions directed their view to the light peaking up over the eastern horizon, announcing the new season and the *Day of Apaturia*. As if it were coming from the very sun itself, a giant bird made of amber flames flew from the horizon.

“Watch-out!” Aedon yelled, pulling the other two boys lower toward the ground.

The bird pelted into the pavement, running down the parade road and throwing flames a hundred stadia high into the sky. The brief warm flames seemed to dissipate energy across the entire city. Then they vanished.

Just as they were getting back up, Faeraud yelled, “Down again!”

A loud rush of fluttering was heard, followed by thousands of orange butterflies and catopsilia pushing through the crowd while flapping a healing energy with their wings. Some in the crowd, who had been awake all night and were starting to tire, miraculously had their energy renewed as if they had just awakened from a long rest for the start of a fresh day.

The boys rose to their feet along with the cheers of spectators whose song was like the glee of a fine-tuned choir. Faeraud maneuvered through the crowd trying to reach the stands where their reserved seats were supposed to be located.

“Have you seen Mitchum?” a girl from the previous evening asked, stopping Faeraud.

“I would hate to hedge on what could’ve happened to him,” he responded in an awkward tone. “What foolish seahorse wants to know?”

“Prince Evad and I were ...”

“Where is that little *pukey* Evad? No mind, I’ll wave down at him once were in our post,” said Faeraud, brushing the girl away before hurrying on to the seating area for the royal family.

A warrior extended his baton stopping them, “Your name is not on the list.”

“*Apa’hei!*” Faeraud said, “You know who I am?”

The warrior said nothing.

“I suspect you do know, else how would you know that my name isn’t on your registry? Who made up this roll?” he demanded. “Where is my father, Prince Lord, Lemech?”

“If your father submitted a scroll then it is invisible,” the warrior responded. “The only valid list I received is the one Ahteana arrived with.”

Faeraud moved his arm around and pushed up on his band in an effort to authenticate to the Warrior that they were royalty.

“I see — a princely purple-armband — are there not twenty-thousand of you now? Hardly a reason for me to disturb the High Priestess,” the warrior declared with a mocking tone.

“But — of course,” Faeraud began, reaching for an explanation, “My father is busy preparing for the coronation, he must have just forgotten.”

“Ahteana will recognize me, perhaps I could ask her,” Aedon offered.

“Let's go where we can have a better view of the parade and a better view of the surrounding company,” Faeraud declared. “I'd rather be trampled by the peasants than share a seat with her.”

His words were soon drowned out by the sounds of passers-by and then the sales pitches of the mongers increased with each stride they took. There were all kinds of traders with booths and carts. These peddlers came from all over the world for the *Day of Apaturia*, carrying every type of merchandise you could conceive, and many more trinkets you would never dare to imagine. Some of the more popular gadgets included floating air sandals, cotton candy togas, sunbrella hats, and scroll holders that could be worn from either the waste or head.

“Whoa, Odin!” a voice cried out, as a large wagon of garments cut them off from the path before halting in front of them. A short man jumped off of his unicorn and he and his bird began setting up shop in the middle of the street.

“This is our spot! You can't park here,” a man yelled.

“Pardons, indeed, the overcrowded festival has left no further space for quality vendors who are a tad late — so make room now,” the vendor ordered, muscling his way in. “PRESENTING CHANDLER HAWKE AND MY BOHEMIAN GARMENTS!”

Before anyone could object further to their intruding presence, the bird opened a side flap of the wagon to expose the merchandise for sale. The goods displayed commanded their entire spectrum of respect. Hanging from a rack in the very center of its conglomeration of cloaks and costumes was a coat made of many purples.

Aedon spotted it first along with Ausetthen. Looking at Aedon's pale face he remarked, "You look like you just saw a spirit."

"I don't believe it," Aedon replied dropping his jaw in surprise.

Faeraud reached out and stroked the gown. It was Mitchum's *risqué purple-of-plenty* robe, the very one he had been wearing the evening before. While Aedon looked it over, a bit confused and amazed, Faeraud snatched it up and practically jumped into the coat.

"Why it looks most exquisite on you," Chandler Hawke said, turning to the others while moving close to their faces. He would have deliberately whispered in a sneaky fashion had there not been such a loud crowd; however, his sinister voice still asked, "Don't you believe this is one of the finest outfits ever? It was tailored specifically for persons of importance."

Eagerly he helped to fit it around Faeraud properly. As he positioned Faeraud's arm through the sleeve, the purple armband glared out. "Royalty? A purple band? Of course, that is why this wears so perfectly on you. It is my gift, my gift to you, royal one."

Within seconds after kissing Faeraud's hand, Chandler packed up his entire wagon, jumped on the back of his unicorn and took off, pushing through the crowd again.

"How odd, why would he leave so suddenly like that?" Aedon asked, straining to see where he had bolted off to.

"Probably didn't have the proper permit," Ausetthen guessed, "The purple-band spooked him."

The most surprising fact-of-all was not that a peddler blocked their way and then presented a gift as recompense for the

intrusion, but that he presented them with the very object they had coveted the night before. Faeraud answered, as if he had heard Aedon's mind begging for an explanation, "Indeed, did you not already know it would magically present itself? You are finally discovering what you can accomplish when you concentrate a rhyme in your mind. This is only the beginning."

Aedon was completely amazed at what had materialized from the energy and *enchantments* the three of them had created earlier back in Faeraud's abode. It seemed like they had tapped into some unseen power beyond what anyone had been *educatoried* in.

"Naturally, I wouldn't be caught dead in a *pass-me-down*," Faeraud piously proclaimed, "Besides I have much more discerning taste. I think it needs an alteration."

"Why would you want to render changes to it? It's possibly the most perfect garment ever woven," Aedon exclaimed.

"Then I shall reshape it — better than perfect," Faeraud declared.

He began a chant, "*Mmmm, now hear, from the top of my head I'll have to write, a magic poem, one that's fun and light. Send this robe's purple back to the sky, Grow it rich in envious green to every eye.*"

Nothing happened.

"Aedon, chant it in Asterian, will *ya*?" Faeraud requested.

"But the scroll is back in your chamber," Ausethen pointed out.

"The scroll will hear us — no matter where we are in the universe," said Faeraud.

Aedon began the interpretation:

"Stonutur khertyun shuv heyro ahvu ketz khut touvona, Swauw et seco umpyluezo onvyun gwaoon ketz ofvorun oyuna."

The garment slowly dissolved in color from the dozens of purple and red hues it once had, into green and yellowish shades. It

was transformed into a completely new robe as if it had just been plucked from the store window for the first time.

Aedon was about to scream with excitement but didn't want to draw attention to the miraculous transformation. "Are we close, the parade is starting soon," Aedon reminded, turning back and adjusting a few ruffles on the new dress.

Faeraud confidently marched to another seating area where the parade flowed down the boulevard. He threw a few talents at someone and pointed to his armband demanding their place. The three boys settled into the space while the parade started off with all kinds of dancers and musicians. It included fine animals like: dancing saber tooth tigers, prancing unicorns, and singing mammoths.

"Now that we've secured a spot, I hope you're in a better mood," Aedon sighed, shaking off a few unwanted stares.

"How could I not be?" Faeraud said, lowering his voice and leaning closer to Aedon. "Lemech will have to identify a successor to the throne today."

"And he is certain to specify my father," Aedon taunted.

"I sense a loyalty to your parent, which I admire, but don't be disappointed if Gilgamoeh is not named. I only suggest this because that will leave his next son in line for the choosing — yours truly," Faeraud gloated, grinning with contempt.

"Both moons would have to fall out of the sky before he would christen you," Ausethen chuckled.

"Only one moon, remember?" Faeraud refuted, punching Ausethen on the shoulder.

The sun rose to a point where the boys began to feel its warmth as it burned low and bright. Each entity that paraded by, turned into a dark figure silhouetted by the bright light. Its sharp amber rays sliced from behind, stabbed at their eyes, and hid the rich colors their designers had so painstakingly attempted to produce. The sun sat on the horizon refusing to rise any further while angrily throwing a dark shadow over them. The ominous tones followed them to their *Registration of Youth*.

PAPYRUS THIRTEEN

CORONATION COMES

Swords of light pierced the upper windows of the West Cathedral. It wasn't as spectacular as the North, or as ambient. In fact, it was so quiet and cold, every chilling step Yenocha took echoed a vibrating response from the walls. He lifted his *looking-glass* up to his eye and began examining a list.

Isn't that your mother, Princess Adah?" Aedon asked, nodding over to a woman who sat on the other side of the cathedral shaking her hand toward them.

"She's motioning for us to go over there. Ignore her, I'm not moving, not now that it's started," Faeraud said, turning his body to block the line-of-sight.

"Do you see my father? I can't tell if he's here or not," Aedon begged, looking about the room trying not to be too conspicuous.

"Where is your mother?"

“She isn’t arriving until later, probably not until after the coronation, if she comes at all,” Aedon snapped. “I hope she doesn’t show her face, we’ll all be better off.”

“Do I sense your disappointment and frustration that you don’t have a parent present?” Faeraud asked. “You mustn’t worry about being all alone, because I am your family too. All we need is each other. ... Parents who never listen — who needs them?”

“Suppose you’re right. You’ve certainly been more of a family to me these past few weeks than they have my entire life.”

Yenocha finally looked up from his *looking-glass*, “This is a special *Registration of Youth* for the royal family and their selected visitors. A *Scroll of Reference* will now be presented to each of the young ones who have completed *Registration*.”

“Things will change once I meet my father, I am sure of it,” Aedon added in a whisper.

Yenocha, emotionless, called out the names, “Mitchum of Mnesus ... Ogiton from Eumelus ...”

While Mitchum was absent, each of the other students went forward to receive a *Scroll of Reference* to officiate their completion of studies at the *educatory*.

“... Areshia of Mestor ...”

Standing next to the *instructioneer*, Ahteana knighted a hand upon each recipient’s shoulder with a ceremonial stroke. Areshia nervously returned to her seat trying to avoid any eye contact with Yapet who was seated in the adjacent section.

“... Faeraud of Irem ...”

“There you go. See you are *Registered*,” said Aedon, eagerly prompting the prince out of his seat.

He wasn’t truly graduating, but accepted his fake scroll as if it were the real thing. In his new green threads, he stepped up poised as if he were registered with the highest honors. He yanked his *Scroll of Reference* from Yenocha’s hand before stopping in front of Ahteana for the expected ceremonial stroke.

“You do remember that you are not truly graduating here,” Ahteana reminded, being brutally honest; she was never one for pretense.

Faeraud stood firm, awaiting his blessing. A stale tension seemed to build into an unspoken confrontation. Finally, out of respect for the royal charade, Ahteana hesitantly placed her hand on the side of Faeraud's upper arm, barely touching it.

She coldly instructed, “Once all of the details of your *Registration* have been solidified, we can work on the details of a genuine sanction.”

Faeraud lingered there a moment later and then, in a low voice, he barked back, “Indeed, if I had taken care to rhyme all the details, I might not be in this predicament, would I? One thing I should have learned from you, is to take care of the details.”

He stepped down to return to his seat, but at the last moment, turned back. He knew few words in Asterian, but he had picked up some cursing phrases, and while he didn't know the correct tones to use, he blurted it out anyway, just loud enough for Ahteana to hear and no one else:

“*U'd yimmyrzo meiuot yimfumo, U'd eveluedwend eveluelueuwoo khertyunoo rumono.* All — of the details,” he swore in Asterian, stepping down.

“... Aedon of Gadeirus ...”

He found his way up to the platform to receive his *Scroll of Reference* where he briefly stopped and looked out over the auditorium. He knew his mother would not be there, but he hoped, more than a hundred enchantments, that his father, Gilgamoeh, might show up. He scanned the rows of people with eyes like a *looking-scope* to see if anyone who was there might perhaps be him, even if in disguise. He couldn't help but think that if he had a son, he certainly wouldn't miss his *Registration of Youth* no matter who his mother was. Once again he walked away disappointed, heart-broken, and all alone. He returned to his seat and though

those around him congratulated him, he couldn't decipher their words. All he could hear was the crying within himself.

While Ahteana gave an inspiring speech and historic chat about the crowning ceremony that was to follow, all he could think about was that certainly Gilgamoeh would be at the coronation. There would be no excuse, no possible reason under the sun, why he would not be there. As a matter of fact, if he were to miss it, he might not be named Lemech's successor and be shamed for sun-cycles to come. He was so excited that he almost got up to leave before Ahteana's speech came to a close.

The sun set over the Western Mountains casting shadows that stretched from the processional figures marching down Second Moat Street. Seating stands filled to the brink rose into the sky as people crowded in for a glimpse of the scepter ceremony.

"Our seats are over there, by the throne pavilion," Faeraud shouted, pointing toward a bridge which stretched across the waterway.

"Are you sure we're on the list this time?" Aedon asked.

A road paved with gold ran parallel to the moat between them. On the other side, an instrumental ensemble of white felines, foxes and wolves that started plucking their musical harps and other string instruments.

"We're going to drown before we find these seats," yelled Aedon, pushing through the off-spray from fountains that danced to the tunes of the musical instruments.

"Here we are," Faeraud announced, showing his armband to a warrior who allowed them to pass into the royal box. They climbed to an elevated row near the back. The seats began filling up quicker than a mermaid snatches a gully. Five women pushed, shoved, and argued over a single seat in front of them.

"What's with them? There are plenty of vacant seats in the area," Aedon snapped.

“Etruscan Aszeas has five wives and as usual all of them want the chair beside his,” Faeraud grumbled, noticing that the scrimmage drew the attention of a Warrior.

“Gilgamoeh, and his wife, Na’amah, must be here somewhere,” Aedon insisted, straining his neck up, looking around for any sign of them.

“See the throne across the moat?” Faeraud asked, turning attention toward a triangular shaped façade where a tall seat protruded along with two additional smaller thrones, one on each side.

“Certainly, most,” he responded with awe.

“That is where *Gilgy* will come to sit, if he’s to be named Lemech’s successor. Just keep an eye on that throne,” Faeraud said.

Trumpets sounded and the processional music began. Everyone in the crowd stood to their feet as the parade of delegates began marching down the golden road, over the bridge, and onto the stage to take position.

Ahteana and Ambassador Telopps stepped up first. Lemech and his wife, Adah, followed. There was another fanfare of trumpets announcing Prince Lord Methouslan who made his way to the bridge. He waved his scepter, imparting a blessing on the crowd, before taking the center seat on the throne which was made of white ivory. Lemech sat on the smaller throne to the left while the others stood off to the side.

As the music quieted down, Methouslan stood up again and presented his throne to Lemech who kneeled down on one knee. Methouslan tapped the end of his scepter to the top of his head. The new Prince Lord stood up and took the center seat on the throne as the old man presented him with a scepter, ending his reign.

Before taking seat in the smaller throne to the right, he sang in Asterian:

*“U’d revo gyun slohourzo ketz unot,
Elue huwdor ahund seght u’d ahvot.”*

Ahteana was next to come forth. She lifted a special charm out of a pouch, “From all of the Asterians, I bestow this gift as our authorization that you, Lemech, have been approved from above, to be Prince Lord of Atlantis.”

She held it up to her eye before placing the ring, which was topped with a *globeaky-like* ball, onto his index finger.

“Lemech, I charge thee with protection and ruling authority over all of Atlantis,” she announced, and then she sang:

*“Blaushaetyto khut blaemetevo
avaeto ez umpyluezo lemund,
To voupun khertyun
seghtouyz hun tez tund.”*

She leaned over and blew her breath over the charm before finishing, “This ring is symbolic of the circle of life. As long as life remains, I pray that you never take it off. May everyone rejoice on this blest occasion!”

The royal bird choir began to tweet out a chorus to settle the crowd down as Ambassador Telopps came forth and placed a crown on top of Lemech's head. The ceremonial anointing was very unemotional as the choir of birds continued to chirp. There was so much tension in the air, one wondered if perhaps more than half of the continent might be opposed to this crowning.

“Why is everyone so on edge?” Aedon whispered, leaning toward Faeraud.

“You will find that most everyone, especially in these parts, is tiring of the Irminsul’s political influence and Lemech’s undying loyalty to that relic,” he told him.

“Having been so isolated in the *educatory*, all those sun-cycles, I never realized,” said Aedon, starting to see it now.

Ahteana lifted her hands toward the heavens and a cheer was heard from the crowd as the coronation had officially commenced.

As a ritual in granting his approval, the Etruscan from each region would present his own parade of gifts. Each territory was named after and ruled by one of Methouslan's ten younger brothers. The first province and youngest brother was named Diaprepes. They were located at the southern top of the continent where the equator pierced directly through.

“Here comes the *Diaprepes-ese*,” Faeraud huffed. “You can tell by the faded zebras, dirty elephants and sunburned giraffes they're gifting.”

Aedon leaned forward and asked, “Why would they bequest giraffes — to the Irem? Aren't they used mostly for guarding open plains?”

Faeraud sarcastically remarked, “It's the *Diaprepes-ese* we're talking about. What did you expect them to bring from their desert, tumbleweed?”

The *Autochathuians* were from Autochatheu which is located on Atlantis' gourd-shaped eastern peninsula. They brought gifts of gray quartz, swordfish and valuable jewels. Their lands were rich with many mines and they produced ten times more silver than any other province.

The Etruscan of Evaemon wore a white-fur toga and fur hat which looked much warmer than the biomechanical movements that presented his gifts from the Northern Region.

“If this was fifty sun-cycles ago, he'd be presenting valuable gifts of orichalcum instead of putting on a pitiful kissy-up show with Evad's furs,” Faeraud scoffed.

“It isn't his fault the mines dried up,” Aedon remarked, “Besides, if Evad is organizing the exhibit, it ought to be quite entertaining.”

“If you like seals marching down the street balancing deflated balls on their noses,” Faeraud snarled, watching a parade of otters and foxes deliver piles of fur coats to the new *Prince Lord*.

“No surprise that he would be gifting those,” Aedon remarked.

“They are extremely valuable furs. It’s just a matter of time before I catch him torturing some poor beast,” Faeraud snapped.

“To validate that no animals were harmed in the process, and to drown shameless rumors into the sea, here are the very animals who have donated their coats,” Evad announced, winking at Faeraud before motioning a line of foxes, wolves, polar bears and even a jaguar to come forth. They proudly sported their new fur-cuts which made them almost look naked.

Then, an ensemble of Tundra Voles, dressed like tailors, danced in, while Prince Evad narrated, “Tundra voles, from the fur factories of Evaemon, have taken great care in manufacturing these custom coats for the new Prince Lord. They have woven extra strong thread from roots to make a special backing material. The voles precisely double and triple sheered the fabric to give the fur a rich smooth feel.”

I bet they boiled a pot of *mayapple* leaves strong enough to poison a river just for that,” Faeraud snottily remarked.

Overhead, a choir of bass-voiced animals caught their attention. Nearly a thousand flying reindeer flew over singing:

*“Gifts from the north is what we bring,
Confirming our vote for the king.”*

They repeated the chorus over and over, each time its pace picking up a notch. The a-cappella voices were soon accompanied by a band of arctic hares, winter squirrels and polar muskrats, all playing instruments in the procession.

Etruscan Evaemon made his way into the stands toward his seat which was just beyond the boys. He had to scoot by them and begged a pardon, “Many excuses for my tardy arrival. I wanted to inspect that my son Evad would direct a proper presentation from behind the stage before coming forward.”

“Evad? I wouldn’t trust him with a tadpole,” Faeraud snarled, loud enough for those nearby to hear.

“I’ll take notice that you are as rude as I’ve been told,” Evaemon remarked. “Do you always garnish such an out-of-place, purple-spectacle or just to royal occasions?”

Aedon’s mouth dropped open. Faeraud's robe appeared green (not purple) to them and to everyone else too. Somehow, Evaemon was not deceived with the spell that Faeraud had whipped up. He obviously saw the man for the true color he was.

“Close your mouth before you eat one of the dang butterflies,” Faeraud snapped. “Obviously, the enchantment needed something more to affect the high royals. I bet a drop of water from that — that you know what — scroll — might do the trick.”

“Where is the parade from Mestor?” Aedon asked, changing the subject. “Won’t they have the most spectacular presentation — they are the wealthiest state of the land.”

“Indeed, not,” Faeraud said. “Mestor has always been opposed to Lemech. It was only after Ahteana did an inappropriate work-over — did he reluctantly agree to the confirmation.”

Etruscan Mestor was a large, over-weight man with a foul mouth. He pretended to be one of the wisest men of the world, while caring nothing about anyone else (or their business) so long as he was bathed in riches and never had to lift a lazy finger. His presentation commanded everyone’s attention.

First, a single-flying white-horse flew low over the golden road. It stopped in mid-air flapping its wings. Then, it positioned a large bow with its forefront legs and inserted a projectile about a *pode* in diameter. The horse let out an objecting cry and then shot the arrow into the sky. The rocket burst into a display of white fireworks that rained down with a sense of false purity.

Next, the horse landed at the foot of the throne pavilion and neighed an announcement, “*Etru-uh-uh-sc-ahan*, people and animals of Mestor have not *gah-al-lopped* with material gifts, nor do we bring a curse ...”

There was a low ruble of laughter amongst those who sat in the royal section.

“Instead,” the horse continued, “We offer a gift of *hospitah-ah-ah-lity*. The majesty and his family are welcome to all *pa-ah-ah-ah-arts* of Mestor as our *gue-eh-eh-ehsts ...*”

“Welcome — anytime?” Faeraud remarked in disbelief. “I’ve heard Lemech would be *hung-out* if he set foot anywhere near Mestor.”

The supposed gift of hospitality was really no gift at all. This fact was echoed in the chaotic speculation of chatter amongst the crowd. Then the horse slightly bowed, rose up and took flight again, disappearing in the distant sky.

“The third throne, the empty one there, you said that is where Gilgamoeh will sit,” Aedon whined, seeing that people were already starting to leave the ceremony.

“Not *Gilggy*, but the prince whom Lemech names to be his successor,” Faeraud snapped, pretending to look around for the missing prince. “Looks like he didn’t show up, how embarrassing. He’s such an abomination!”

“Certainly, most ... this doesn’t appear good.”

“Shunning Lemech like this, I’d expect he’ll be banned from the Irem for an entire sun-cycle,” Faeraud suggested, gleefully, hoping to be named instead.

“No, this can’t be happening,” Aedon cried. “I’m so close, within reach, of finally touching my father.”

“Maybe he’ll show up at the Iron Isolation.”

“Yes, he has to be present. It is required by the *scrolls-of-law*,” Aedon remembered, eagerly standing up. “He will be there when my *genetikos-replica* is revealed.”

PAPYRUS FOURTEEN

GENETIKOS REPLICA DEISOLATED

CREAK! Giant gates began to moan for they had not been opened since before Aedon's birth. Iron grids with pointed spears stood ready to ram those who sought to breach its guard. First, the exterior layer drew up toward the sky on a pulley. The next section parted down the middle with one door sliding left and the other right. The third was a double gateway that opened inward. A small crowd pushed through the entrance.

Rows of warriors stood at attention lining a path that led into the westward building. Their unemotional faces made Aedon feel uneasy.

"I hardly didn't think the *genetikos-replica* would be important to anyone else," he whispered, holding Faeraud and Ausethen back, off to the side.

"Normally not, except that the royal family, itself, is larger than a small village," Faeraud reminded him, placing an arm around his shoulder. "Most of these greedy-grunts are going to

object out of mere jealousy, hoping that their share of a fortune that they probably will never see, won't grow any smaller. They've really only come, in hopes of being named Lemech's next replacement — after all, that's what this session has become, since Gilgamoeh's failure to show up at the coronation."

"Worthless, worthless me," Aedon remarked, turning back. "I think I should leave — go back home to Gadeirus. Certainly you can both see as clear as a *looking-glass*, that this was a mistake."

"*Smart-owl*," Faeraud snapped. "You've staggered this far only to *coward-out* now? I've read the stars and they're in your favor. You did remember to bring the enchantment — the one we worked-up a while ago?" Faeraud asked.

Aedon confirmed with a nod, "Certainly most! I'll feel like an *Asterian without a cocoon* if this *genetikos beckles* the wrong way. ... How can I possibly ever go on without a father? ... And how will I ever pay back the costs I've tallied up at the *educatory* without an inheritance?"

"You're babbling non-sense again, besides, your *educatory* was already covered by Methouslan, as a gift, shortly after your birth, remember," Faeraud revealed.

Confusion lingered in Aedon's mind as he tried to reconcile why his mother would claim that such had not been bought, but he couldn't think about that now. All he could focus on was the replica that would confirm (or deny) whom his father was.

"Believe in us, your friends, and our alliance. We have enchantments and the spirits of life favor us," Faeraud reassured him.

They were directed inside, through a large entrance where tall golden columns made of marble stretched three levels high. Many archways encircled the room. Under each arch was a table where two or three people could sit, and they did. Another dozen gathered behind each of these vying for a peak at the ceremony.

Inside the center of the room, a pond of water encircled a platform where a throne rested. A bridge hopped over to the

parameter of the room where three rows of curved tables lined up to seat the Etruscans and other princes.

“Follow me,” Faeraud ordered, leading them to the back row of tables on the far left of the room. Full of chatter, others pushed into the arranged furniture like children on their first day at the *educatory*.

“Silence! Silence! There will be no conversing in the rotunda,” a man announced clapping his hands together for attention. No one paid attention.

Atop the third level balcony sat a carriage-organ. It consisted of five cabs filled with golden tubes. The configuration of pipes in the side opening of each carriage grinned with angry gnashing-teeth. The Orator pushed a button and the pipes bellowed out a growl that commanded silence in the room.

Aedon swallowed as a lump in his throat suddenly swelled up and he felt like he couldn't breathe. He was so nervous that he wanted to scream, but he didn't, because he thought he would explode into a million pieces if he so much as let out a sigh. Lemech crossed the bridge and sat down on the throne.

“Prince Lord Lemech of Atlantis will conduct his first official business,” the orator proclaimed, stepping to the side. “The new Prince Lord will now name a prince to be his successor and to rule in cases where he may become incapacitated.”

Lemech wanted to lock in Gilgamoeh; however, he was nowhere to be found amongst the gatherers. As you can imagine he was a bit disheveled at the fact that his son did not make it to the ceremony. But he was nowhere as ruffled as Aedon was. For ninety-one sun-cycles he had been trying to meet his father.

“Where is that son of mine?” Lemech demanded. “If I discover he passed out somewhere from too much wine. I'll —”

Lemech quickly changed his tone as he noticed all of the relatives listening, “He is honorable and he does do the right things most of the time. Perhaps he's just been preoccupied ... like many of you sometimes.”

Aedon's eyes strained, scanning the crowd, searching as intensely as Lemech's were, for the missing man.

"Anyone who neglects such important civil and social duties is not a balanced person," Faeraud declared, "Would you not agree? ... Doesn't his isolation and social unavailability suggest that he is unfit to manage his own family — much less an entire kingdom?"

Aedon said nothing. It seemed like everyone was against his father. He began to wonder if he might be better off if he weren't associated; but if he were not related to Gilgamoeh, then he would be just a commoner, an outcast.

The orator stepped forward, "Prince Gilgamoeh has sent this papyrus to be read herein at this time."

"Don't just stand there, then. Read the thing," Lemech ordered, motioning with the back of his hand, while he fidgeted with the ring Ahteana had given him, taking it off and putting it on again, repeatedly.

The orator read, rolling through the scroll:

*"Reading, writing, and inciting enchantments of rhyme.
Believing in stars, fortune-tellers and magicians,
Forgetting the writings, laws, and traditions once taught,
This family of Etruscans and Princes has become corrupt.
You have turned from the peaceful days
of Lord Antioch and King Yaswhen,
And now follow your own selfish ways,
seeking endless possessions,
Material things that cannot satisfy or last,
yet you garnish more so fast.
Return to the path and the way of the King of old,
is what I will ask,
Some will agree, many will not, to the task.
One day of meditation to concern our future is all I beg.
Make this a day of silence and respect,
and I will consider what you ask.*

Carry on as usual and I shall certainly pass.”

The rotunda filled with chuckles as Lemech’s face glowed pink. Then he stood up and everyone hushed at once.

“If you are inclined to meditate, than go do so,” Lemech snarled, talking to Gilgamoeh even though he weren’t in the room. “Your scroll did not even properly rhyme — at least not the first part of it. Maybe it is you who should return to the educatory instead of your younger brother.”

Then Lemech sat back down still ranting, “As I recall, in the days of recent past, a son followed in the ways of his father and obeyed his wishes. Where is my son, Gilgamoeh, and why does he not present this message himself?”

“He has begun meditation, already,” the Orator whispered, leaning down toward Lemech’s ear. “He has started a seven day fast at the Irminsul Pyramid.”

“Such good expectations are on the horizon,” Faeraud gleamed, focusing on his own predicament and the sliver of a possibility that perhaps he could be named the heir to the throne, at least that was what he hoped for more than anything else in the whole world.

Then Lemech sat up stiffer than a unicorn’s horn, “The matter of naming a successor shall be delayed, again — indefinitely.”

The gatherers gasped.

Forgetting that Gilgamoeh was Aedon’s father, Faeraud resumed putting him down, “*Gilggy* — he is nowhere. Once again he is absent and no one seems to care. Why, Lemech would still name him to the throne if he were dead and buried. You could hit the old man over the head with a clepsydra glass and he still wouldn’t be able to see that he has any other sons. *Gilggy* is not here, and I should have been named the next successor to the throne, in his absence. It’s mine, the throne is all mine. I must have it. I must take what is rightfully mine.”

Faeraud switched into his obsessed mode which he had done a few times before. It was like he had a dual-personality.

There was the poignantly calm, even mannered, and soothing persona, and then there was the occasional ambitiously bold, proud, and conquering Faeraud. “Next time, I’m finding an enchantment to make sure my rightful place is sealed into solid-orichalcum.”

“I really don’t care who is prince, who is king, or who rules or not. I just care about finally meeting up with my father and spending a few moments with him,” Aedon snapped back. “I just want to know — to be able to find out for myself — if he is a kind-hearted man, a crazy-insane inventor, or a soft-spoken farmer. I want to finally meet the man and look him in the eyes.”

The carriage-organ chimed a couple more notes and the orator turned around and announced, “There will be short recess before the reading of the *genetikos-replica*. Only the immediate family members and their invitees may remain for this action.”

The room filled with a murmur of disappointment as the archways and balconies began to empty out.

“Quick, over here,” Faeraud called out, motioning Aedon and Auseten into the archway behind their table.

“What for? They’re about to do the reading,” Aedon objected.

Faeraud pulled them into a small meditation chamber, away from the view of others. An overseer could be seen approaching from the crack in the door as Faeraud struggled to finally yank it tightly closed.

He asked, “Remember how we visualized and chanted, and then, with no effort, this robe came to me? We can do the same thing for you Aedon — for your replica. I’ve brought the scroll.”

“But we can’t,” Aedon started to object, as a gut feeling deep down inside seemed to tell him that he was beginning to explore *enchantments*, the kind that his father’s message warned against.

“Why not?” Auseten huffed.

“All of this, it’s moving so fast. We just found this scroll that supposedly hasn’t existed for centuries. We can’t start wielding its writings on a whim,” he cautioned.

“You do want the *genetikos* to come out in your favor, don’t you?” asked Faeraud with a concern of sarcasm.

“Certainly most, but what is written in those results was written a hundred sun-cycles ago. Tampering with magic we don’t understand can’t change that. I get ocean-sick thinking about it,” Aedon complained.

“You saw the scroll,” Faeraud explained. “It is not bound in time like we are. Time in our world drops through the hourglass one grain at a time. The scroll and its enchantments defy the gravity of time. You saw how it floated in mid-air. It is from another dimension and I bet it can manipulate the past as well as the future.”

“Blast it, Afraidy-Aedy,” Auseten snarled. “Don’t you want the replica to come out in your favor? Don’t you want Gilgamoeh to be your father?”

“This time it’s for you — for you, Aedon,” Faeraud said, convincingly. “We’re doing this all for you. Are we ready to chant, then?”

Faeraud pulled out the scroll and the boys thought it was going to crush them as it unrolled in the tiny chamber. But then something miraculous happened as it unrolled. It opened the door to another dimension, the walls of the chamber quickly expanded. At first the boys thought they were shrinking, but then they realized that the room was growing. Aedon peeked out the door thinking that they must have overtaken the main room; yet, it was still there, and the meditation closet they were in, simultaneously occupied the same small space. He was amazed at how the two separate dimensions coexisted.

“Close the door, we haven’t much time,” Auseten snapped.

“I suspect we have as much time as we need,” Aedon assured them, realizing the complexity of the environment the scroll created. Conflicting thoughts battled in his mind. He wanted to be recognized more than anything, and to be accepted by Faeraud and Auseten. He longed to be received by his father. Perhaps using a little magic would assure that he would finally get

the acknowledgment that he deserved. He closed the door and walked back over to the papyrus which was completing its unroll. Water was leaping from its page like dolphins that play in the sea.

“We close our eyes, we completely visualize. The universal energy we convince, channeling it to make Aedon a prince,” Faeraud rhymed. “Okay, Aedon, the words — say the words now.”

*Crept te huwuyun epur clrnyundor deung,
Scuvod ahyunuy gurk guko tem ahvoleung.
Crept te huwuyun epur clrnyundor deung,
Scuvod ahyunuy gurk guko tem ahvoleung.*

The letters of each word formed in a water outline and jumped up from the scroll before diving back into the page as they chanted. Then Faeraud retracted the roll and the room drew back to its original size. The door opened and the boys fell out as if they had been pushed, piling onto the floor. The carriage-organ angrily bid those, who were supposed to be there, back to their seats.

Ambassador Telopps walked up to the stage, clapped his hands, and announced, “The next order of business shall be the revelation of a certain *genetikos-replica* that was ordered sealed until this day. ... Aedon come forth!”

Aedon hadn’t expected to be called up in front of everyone. He stumbled as he nervously walked to the center.

“Hold out your palm,” Telopps commanded, grabbing his arm. “So there is no mistaking the results, a second replica is hereby made.”

Telopps produced a knife. Quickly, he slit Aedon’s hand and a drop of blood fell onto a glass plate. Aedon jerked his arm back with a yelp of pain. Telopps turned the platter upside down onto another scroll where the blood soaked in and spread out like branches on a tree. It made a distinguished design with millions of different lines.

Next, two witness-wise owls flew in carrying a wooden chest which they carefully dropped before taking a seat on a nearby perch.

The ambassador caught the box, opened it up, pulled out the scroll, and explained, "A papyrus tracing was written, its marking sealed until the time of reveal. The writing of this second now authenticates that the first is the one and only true *genetikos*."

Suddenly the room tensed up. There were many who had ideas about sneaking in and changing the results. There were those who had plots and plans to do so, and there were some who had tried to do just that. Aedon looked over at Scapappi the goat, who had plotted with his mother; he was jumpy and chomping at the bit. Aedon's mother, Cleacious, was wearing a dark veil, and she was uneasily biting her nails underneath it. Seskef and the other triplet anxiously looked on as they and their brother Yapet had ventured to change the results the night before. The Ambassador looked across the room with a grin, an almost evil one. Faeraud turned and winked at Aedon.

Telopps opened the papyrus and showed the markings and tracings. Then he pulled the genetic-scroll device from the wooden box and lifted it high above his head for everyone to see. Next, he lowered the scroll down and turned it over. All of the markings matched. When he moved the scroll over the tracing, it fit perfectly within its boundaries. He presented the *genetikos-replica* and the blood-marked scroll to Lemech, stepping aside with a slight bow, "Your Excellency, you may now do the comparisons."

Aedon sat forward, his heart racing faster than a stampede of unicorns. He swallowed as the moment of truth about his life and his father were about to be read. Methouslan looked over at him, and though he never smiled, his eyes were grinning.

Then, as the organ became impatient, Lemech looked up and asked, "Where are the boy's mother and alleged father? We cannot proceed until they come forth."

There was a long wait as everyone looked about the room for any sign of Cleacious or Prince Gilgamoeh. Whenever chatter

inched in volume, the carriage-organ was quick to scold them. Dressed in a dark-brown robe with a hood that covered her head and a black veil over her face, Cleacious stood up.

“Oh *seamuck!*” Aedon exclaimed. “What devious plot is she up to this time?”

“What makes you think so?” Faeraud asked, straining for a better view.

“She’s biting her nails,” Aedon sighed, drooping his shoulders and sinking down in his seat, as low as one can sink on a hard stone bench. His mother had never worn clothes so drab in her entire life. The ensemble was not only inappropriate for such an occasion, it was completely unlike anything she would ever be caught normally wearing. Aedon’s worst fears suddenly were thrown to the front of his brain, and instantly he felt a migraine headache coming on.

“Gilgamoeh’s presence still eludes us, I see. Both parents are to be present for this announcement. I ordered for both of them to come,” Lemech declared. “If only one is present, I cannot read the order.”

“*Yuh* were just made Prince Lord, moments ago,” Methouslan chimed in. “How *culd’uv yuh* ordered anything before? Read the despicable replica.”

Cleacious quickly made her way up to the platform and fell down on the bridge that led up to where Lemech was seated. She sobbed out a confessing story from beneath her veil, “My Prince Lord, Gilgamoeh is absent, not because he meditates but because he prays for forgiveness.”

“What — what for?” Lemech asked.

“I bring news so horrifying — I am frightened to speak of it,” she said.

“Please speak, before we grow weary and the sun sets,” Lemech begged, echoed by the organ’s agreeing tone.

“Last night, I made journey toward a celebration. I was grabbed and a man forced himself upon me,” Cleacious revealed, holding her veil tighter.

“Forced? Who — who forced themselves upon you?” Lemech demanded, scooting toward the edge of his seat.

“He was taken into custody last night by the Irem guards,” Telopps interjected.

“Who is the prisoner?” Lemech asked, “What is this all about?”

“Gilgamoeh — Gilgamoeh!” Cleacious cried out.

“It is with grave burdens that I wish not to expound further,” Telopps divulged. “It will bring pain — to your house — if she is to continue.”

“Expound the details. I do command,” Lemech insisted, stomping his scepter to the floor.

“He was taken prisoner while he was forcing his way upon Cleacious in the shadows under the *Irmisul Bridge*,” Telopps blurted out, leaning toward Lemech.

“Just like — like he did that time so many sun-cycles ago,” Cleacious squeaked, shaking. She stood up and unwrapped the veil. Her face was pale and her eyes were puffed out with black and blue bulges. Sharp blood-red scratches streaked across her cheek bones.

“Guards and witnesses testify to these atrocities,” Telopps announced.

The remaining crowd yawned in disbelief as they were horrified at her story which reflected across her mangled face.

“When I would not yield nor agree to confess his lies,” she began to explain, “He forced himself, calling me names and threatening to kill me. Had my goat not come along, I am certain I would not stand here this day.”

“Who would dare contrive such an atrocity on the *Day of Apaturia*,” Methouslan shouted, as he angrily stood up and marched to the center. “Why, I will *hang him out-to-dry*, myself!”

“What witnesses do you have,” Lemech asked, “Or is this another drummed-up, droopy-deception?”

With a twitching eye, Telopps confirmed the story, “She — came to me for refuge in the night. The aura-seeing dogs have

established that she speaks the truth. Gilgamoeh has been detained, and the owls of this Isolation building seek the incarnation of his son Yapet.”

“Yapet?” Lemech asked with surprise, desiring to know the full story.

“But we were given a fake key,” Seskef said, leaning forward while whispering to those around him.

“Hush-up,” Yapet growled, pulling Seskef back down.

“Your grandson broke barrier, entering into the Iron Isolation,” Telopps explained, “Attempting to contaminate the true *genetikos-replica*, the one which is before you regarding Prince Aedon. This counterfeit was found among his belongings.”

The Ambassador placed another scroll in front of everyone and even proceeded to show that it did not match the drawn outline on the verifying papyrus nor the special markings.

“These crimes were witnessed by many at the Irminsul Pyramid including goat Scapappi, and a *Witness Wise Owl*,” Telopps affirmed with conviction.

“I wish to hear what they have to say — about Gilgamoeh,” Lemech insisted, ignoring the fact that Cleacious was badly injured, even after she dramatically collapsed on the bridge again. A *kangawaiter* quietly helped her back to a bench.

Ambassador Telopps presented the facts as he knew them, “A respected master of wisdom among the goat community, Scapappi knows and saw all. In an attempt to hide his guilt, Gilgamoeh cut out the goat's tongue so that he cannot speak.”

“What about the owl?” Lemech asked.

The owl was brought in, perched on the arm of an Irminsul guard clinging to his arm tighter than Yenocha clings to his position at the *educatory*. The owl nervously looked over the crowd. If he shook any harder all of his feathers would have popped out. He had been cooped up in the mostly private Irminsul since his hatching and wasn't used to being out in the daytime. He had never seen so many people in one place in his entire life.

Telopps began to coax him, “Tell us what you saw.”

“Who?” the owl replied.

“Yes, who did you see at the Irminsul last night?”

“Whooo?”

“Gilgamoeh, you saw Gilgamoeh last night?” Telopps prompted with frustration.

“Whooo? Whooo?”

One of the owls, who had flown in with the chest earlier, began fixing her turban which caught attention.

“Chordata, you’re Queen of the Owls. Can you interpret what this pigeon is trying to hoot?” Telopps scoffed in a demanding tone.

“I will look beyond your impatience and rudeness — for now,” the owl tweeted, referring to Telopps before addressing Lemech. “Obviously the traumatized witness has been startled. A terrified bird will repeat the last word they’ve heard — over and over again — until they are no longer frightened.”

“I suppose he’s as upset as any bird might be expected,” Telopps scoffed.

“Obviously,” Lemech sighed; he was perturbed, “I think we’ve had enough owls hooting in our tree today.”

Splash! From the pond which ran around the platform, Miriam the Mermaid surfaced. She shook her hair freeing droplets of water which briefly drenched those nearby.

Then she spoke, “Royal Ones, I have come up from the waters to verify.”

“It’s about time you showed your lazy fins,” Telopps grumbled, harshly whispering to the mermaid.

“I watched Yapet as he entered the Isolation last eve. I saw from near the water outlet, that he breached its gate and entered while his brother distracted the owls,” she stated, coldly staring down at the floor like a reluctant witness.

Seskef and the other twin scooted across their benches and shamefully sunk low in an attempt to hide their faces from Lemech. There was another splash and the telling-mermaid was gone.

Methouslan stood behind Lemech and bent down and whispered into his ear, giving him sound advice on how he might handle such an affair. Their faces looked more concerned than when the *Territorial Quarrels* broke out sun-cycles long ago. Lemech stood up. He wavered with dizziness for a moment before sitting down again. Then he proclaimed, “I am feeling quite sick today. This *Day of Apaturia* should have been one to celebrate. Instead, it has brought much sorrow to the royal family. ... Cleacious, you will go to the Irminsul Pyramid for a period of recovery and healing. Once you go out from this place, you are never to set foot inside the Royal Irem again or else you will be *hung-out-to-dry*.”

“NOOOOO!” Cleacious screamed, dramatically falling to the floor again. “That place is — it’s like a prison.”

“Yapet, he will be pardoned but shall return to the *educatory* for further instruction. Youth is a proving ground to develop good judgment, which he no doubt did not use last night. ... Gilgamoeh, my son, is an embarrassment. He shall be banished from Atlantis for one hundred sun-cycles. All of the land which he owns outside of the Irem circles shall be given to Scapappi the goat as restitution.

“I challenge Gilgamoeh to reflect upon his actions and to use his hundred sun-cycles of exile to minister and care for the animals in the wild, showing them kindness as recompense for the cruelty he exhibited toward one of them.”

For a few brief moments everybody was quiet. Bright colors of joy beamed across Faeraud’s face as he was now the next person in line for the throne should anything happen to Lemech, even though he had yet to be confirmed.

Next, Lemech took the *genetikos-replica* and examined it with a *looking-glass*. What was a few moments, seemed like days to Aedon as he tapped his sandal with anticipation. For those few brief moments, Lemech alone knew his fate. Lemech took a deep breath while looking directly at the *gray-bander*.

He stood up and announced, "Aedon, the *genetikos-replica* reveals that you are indeed part of the royal family."

Lemech sat down again. While chatters of shock washed across the room, Aedon was in total ecstasy of joy. He didn't care about being in line for any throne, all he wanted was a complete family. He was finally, officially, part of the royal family. The replica proved true that which he had always known in his heart.

Scapappi, even though he had no tongue, started rejoicing because his whole life he had wanted to own land. Animals were never before allowed to own property, but that had now changed. The Prince Lord himself transferred ownership of Gilgamoeh's property to the goat, including the vineyards in the North.

Lemech stepped down from the pavilion. He was angry and upset. As he stomped away, he briefly paused for a moment and remarked to Faeraud, "Don't think you're going to inherit any of this, either. I know what kind of ideas even noble men get, once they're given power. I would hate to speculate what disaster a boy like you would create."

Faeraud was furious with Lemech and his emotions boiled as he huffed, "Lemech should be naming me the next successor, not putting me down."

Contemplating revenge, he stopped to talk to the empty throne as if Lemech were still there, he passionately vowed, "You're such the arrogant prince strutting about in an alliance with the Asterians. You'll see, you will hear just how exaggerated their protection really is. The crown that you wear, begs to sit on my head. The scepter that you hold, anticipates my hand. The throne that you sit on, awaits my replacement. The Royal Irem you abide in, cries for my occupation. The continent you rule, vows to be mine. Everything that there is, is mine. I must take everything that is rightfully mine, and everything that there is, is rightfully mine."

Aedon paid little attention to his senseless babbling, as he had his own problems. Once again, he was in the same predicament he had been in his whole life, maybe even worse. He realized that both his mother and father were banned from the

PAPYRUS FOURTEEN

Royal Irem. How would he ever get to bond with his father now? Spending an hourglass of time with him seemed further away than when he was at the *educatory*.

“He needs me now more than ever. I must go and find him. I must go to Gilgamoeh,” Aedon cried, running out of the Iron Isolation to find his father.

PAPYRUS FIFTEEN

ADIA, ADIA AT THE NORTHERN DOCKS

“Why are you crying?” asked Aedon.

He asked again and still there was no answer from the sobbing giraffe. Moving his long neck around and down lower, one of the companions explained.

“That is Unglat, over emotional about everything. You’d think we were going to be left homeless,” the taller one remarked, standing up again.

The Northern Docks were located in a harbor just outside of the Irem's outer *Third Moat*. The area was dirty and musty because it was rarely used and had not been kept up well. The wharf was constructed of wooden planks which were moist and rotting, and the area smelled like dead fish. Damaged posts along the edge of the mooring were topped off with illumination bulbs whose filaments had become tangled or their bulbs broken. The sun set as a radiation-fog began to form over the inlet. The poor visibility made it hard to see on which vessels activity might be taking place.

Near the entrance was an illumination-bulb house. It almost looked like a miniature Irminsul with a pyramid-style roof and a column protruding from the top where its bulb revolved around trying to cut through the dense fog. Unglat's faucet of tears increased when the side paddlewheel of the *Tebah* began to turn; it was a large three level floating abode.

"I've never seen an orichalcum turbine engine," Aedon remarked, stepping closer with curiosity. "Weren't these types of vessels docked long ago? I'm surprised it hasn't been upgraded to an orichalcum-efficient capacitor."

"Gilgamoeh — upgrade?" Unglat whined, trotting a few steps forward on the dock. "He never plans for anything. Been stuck back in the olden times forever. Who else would still own one of these barrels of junk? Why there's hardly room for his whole family, the gorillas, and other shorter beings — no surprise us giraffes are left behind. Who's going to take care of us?"

"So this is Gilgamoeh's vessel, the one he plans to travel North in?" Aedon tried to confirm, turning as two dozen more animals hurried past, crowding onto the boat.

"Don't tell me your foolish legs are marching after these outlaws too?" Telopps asked, stepping in front of Aedon.

"Ambassador, what brings you to these docks?" he questioned, clinching tighter to his satchel.

"Some parting scroll of doom — that Ahteana wants delivered," he responded, annoyed.

"What does it say?"

"If it were for you, I'd have opened it already," he snapped, yanking the tube away.

"So you have not read its contents, then?"

"I did not say that."

"Then you peeked in and read, already?"

"I did not say either way."

"What if I guess? If I guess will you confirm, at least, that I have guessed closely?" Aedon asked, curious to know about the message while blocking his way.

“I should think not,” Telopps huffed, annoyed at the distraction. A smirk wiped across his face as he realized that Aedon would probably never guess its contents in a stadia of sun-cycles. “Alright, one quick guess, then move out of my path.”

Aedon opened his mouth, but nothing came out. A million different ideas all crossed his mind at once. The scroll could say any and everything. Why had he egged the ambassador on, he huffed at himself.

“I haven’t all evening to waste waiting. Allow me to pass or propose your guess. What does the scroll says?” Telopps snapped, impatiently waiting.

“Nothing,” Aedon sighed, disappointed, he hadn’t a clue.

“Nothing?” Telopps confirmed, looking worried. “How did you know? How did you know this scroll contained — nothing?”

“Well — I —” Aedon stuttered.

“An odd gift, think you not?” the ambassador asked, insisting so. “Why would anyone give away a completely blank scroll with instruction like such?”

“What instru —” Aedon began to ask, before switching his words around. “Yes the instructions... what were they again?”

“Here — if you can read Asterian,” Telopps snarled, thrusting another smaller papyrus at Aedon.

*Tulued khertyun wresha ahvofuro unot umpyluezo huwow,
Guko et ah helueo umpyluezo ahyunuy ahvutaw.
Umpyluezo wresha ahur umpyluezo unk ahdu futa obraw,
Et'z gozugo slouct ketz khuruygh avaeto ipurmylaw*

“Correct you are, makes no sense,” Aedon agreed, handing the writing over.

The ambassador snatched it back and trotted over to the gorillas who were keeping watch by the boarding plank where a mallard was objecting to the trip.

“*Ain't* fair. It *ain't* fair. It just *ain't* fair! My colored feathers just won't fit in with all that white powder. It just *ain't* natural for a

duck to be *trompin'* through the snowy glaciers. Besides, a boat with that many animals aboard is destined to sink,” Dumar the duck complained, stomping off the boat and past Aedon who was nervously approaching.

“How do you do mister duck,” Aedon asked, extending a friendly finger.

“The name is Dumar and I haven’t time to socialize at the present,” he quacked, waddling on.

“What ever happened to my dreams of a lazy life in the warm weather,” Aedon thought, speaking under his breath. “Things weren’t supposed to end up like this — with an exile into the cold glaciers of the North. ... If nothing else, I at least need to say goodbye. One way or the other I have to see my father, Gilgamoeh.”

“Excellent, I’ll stay back and you can take my place,” Dumar volunteered.

Even though Aedon had never once spoken with his father, deep down inside he was hoping that he would be invited to go along with the family. He would have been ecstatic to be included for once, but he suspected that more than just a boat would have to sink for things to change. After all, Gilgamoeh had much more to worry about now than just another son he didn't want in the first place.

Aedon stepped onto the plank that led aboard the *Tebah*. Hanno, one of the gorillas, turned around and poised a block on all four of his legs. First, he gave that big gorilla grin that almost looks comical but really is a threat. Hanno growled, as if it were a command for him to go back.

“Where do you think you're going, stinky little friend?” Hanno asked.

“I — I just wanted to come see my father off,” Aedon insisted.

Hanno grinned and grunted at Aedon as he pulled the boarding plank out from under his feet and away from the dock. Yapet was near the area and quickly came over.

"I'll handle this, Hanno," he said.

As the gorilla put the plank down and walked away, Aedon sighed a breath of relief that his arms weren't going to be ripped out of their sockets.

"Where exactly does our little rodent think he is going?" Yapet questioned, as if he were a replacement echo for the gorilla that just left.

Aedon answered, "I came by to inquire, to see where the family was headed off toward, and if perhaps I could be of assistance for the occasion."

"*My Family*," Yapet emphasized, "Is traveling to the North. We're not taking a leisure holiday. ... Gilgamoeh has been banished from the kingdom. This isn't a tenting-trip visit to an igloo — we are going way North — down deep into the glaciers — further than the borders of Evaemon, beyond the icy mountain fingers of Bashan."

"Into Bashan? You'd have to build a fortress the size of a cathedral for you and all those animals to survive the winters down there," Aedon pointed out.

"We won't be coming back to the Irem — for a hundred sun-cycles, thanks to your conniving mother," Yapet snarled back at him.

"I don't like what she does either," Aedon replied, stepping closer, "I have no control over her maniac plots, you realize. I need a real family — one that's balanced. I was hoping to come along for part of the journey."

"Aedon, no one believes your mother's cockamamie drunken stories," Yapet grunted, untying the vessel from the dock. "Turns out that Gilgamoeh did not even arrive at the Irminsul until an hourglass after your mother's attack. But is she changing her story? No! ... Your replica is about as valid as her lies. You're as crazy as she is, if you think you'll ever be a part of this family."

"I'll tell you what crazy is," he shouted back. "Crazy is the bunch of you thinking you can survive for even a year in that frigid

glacier, much less a hundred sun-cycles. You need someone sensible along for the journey.”

With that, Aedon ran along the dock and jumped aboard the vessel. Yapet wrestled him to the floor. Back and forth they fought until Yapet finally pinned him down. The vessel began to slowly grind up her wheels. Just as she started to move away from the dock there was a loud call.

“STOP! JUST STOP IT!” Areshia screamed out.

“Stop, stop the boat,” Dumar the duck echoed. “You forgot to load the other animals.”

“What other animals?” Yapet asked, anchoring the boat to the dock again.

The four giraffes, a couple of tigers and an overloaded donkey followed Dumar across the dock as Yapet wound down the engine of the *Tebah*.

“Where are all these beasts coming from?” Aedon asked, standing up and checking his satchel for damaged goods.

“Lemech wanted Gilgamoeh to have all of the gifts he received at the coronation,” Areshia explained, helping aboard, the donkey and tigers; the giraffes remained on the dock because they were too tall to fit aboard the main deck.

“You’re going with him?” Aedon asked, surprised and upset. “You’re going with Yapet? And you didn’t even tell me? What about our own new —?”

“Aedon, she’s coming along with us, to avoid questions. There will be an investigation regarding her father who was overseer at the Iron Isolation. It’s better if she disappears for awhile,” Yapet explained.

“Areshia,” Aedon begged, “What about us? What about your abode in Mestor? I was going to purchase it?”

“He came back for me,” she cried, appreciating the admiration.

“I wonder what he really wants,” Aedon grumbled, guessing that Yapet only wanted her back because of his own interest in her.

“Aedon, it’s time you faced the reflection in the moat. You’re always going to be alone in this world,” Yapet snottily remarked. “Do you really think she wants to associate with a tarnished *gray-bander*?”

“I thought Lemech was going to do away with the castes,” Areshia asked, looking up for confirmation. “You did tell me that once?”

“Really, Areshia, do you think he could, even if he wanted to. You’re much safer here with us,” Yapet said.

Areshia’s heart sank as she realized that Yapet had strung her along with a story, an account she wanted to hear, but was not entirely true. Maybe he didn’t outright lie about everyone being equal, but he sure made it sound like he was in agreement with it. Not wishing to be stuck on a boat to the boonies with a man who led her on, she wondered what really happened the night he was caught trespassing — or why he tried so hard to gain her trust. Realizing that she had been misled, questions and confusion caused her to become dizzy as the boat rocked back and forth.

“A *gray-bander* is better than a *no-bander*,” Aedon yelled, jumping up on the deck. “I’ve heard your bands were taken away. And guess what? I’m no *gray-bander* anymore. I’m a *purple-bander* now.”

Aedon pushed up the sleeve of his vest and revealed that he was wearing a royal band. Yapet sneered, pushed Aedon off the boat and back onto the dock, closed up the entrance to the boat, and untied her again. Then Aedon held out his hand toward Areshia.

“Trust me. Have I ever lied to you?” Aedon begged, looking up at Areshia. “How will we create our new continent of life together when you’re on the boat to the old one?”

The *Tebah* began to pull away from the dock again. Water splattered from the paddle wheel like the teardrops in Areshia’s eyes. She could take it no longer and she ran across the deck, leaped up into the air and landed on the dock in Aedon’s arms.

Passionately Aedon hugged her, “Areshia, I knew you could — I knew you would! ... I just couldn’t go on without you.”

The two continued the embrace as Aedon gave her a big wet kiss on the face, twice. The *Tebah’s* bell interrupted as it pulled further away.

“My sandal,” Areshia screamed, noticing it was missing from her foot. “Yapet, throw me my sandal!”

Yapet stood at the edge of the deck holding the shoe. He had hoped to put back the *globeaky* he had taken from the top of it and desired to keep it. He wished he hadn’t picked it up, because then he could’ve pretended it was lost and kept it, but it was too late for that now as they could see him holding it. Begrudgingly he tossed it back.

He yelled after them, “Areshia, at least do something with Unglat and the other giraffes. It will be quite some time before we can accommodate them in the North.”

“Do? What’s to do with a bunch of tall necks?” she frustratingly pleaded.

“Take ‘em up to Gilgamoeh’s vineyard and store them there. I’ll be back to collect them — and you, later. *Adia, Adia.*”

Adia, Adia meant *goodbye for a long while*, it was also the name of the docks they were on. Unglat lowered his neck and brushed his head up against Areshia with warm affection. She pushed him away.

Then Yapet added, “Aedon, do not forget — Gilgamoeh is *my* father, and I am his firstborn son — not you!”

His whole life, Aedon had looked forward to the *Day of Apaturia*, to the time he would finally be acknowledged as a true son. He had dreamt of this day every night since he was a little boy. He had visions of Gilgamoeh placing his arms around him and finally saying, “*Welcome home, son.*” He had dreams that Gilgamoeh had secretly bought him gifts for every *Day of Apaturia* from decades past, while he was growing up, and that he had saved all those gifts. In his fantasy, the day that he was announced to be his son, Gilgamoeh came forward rejoicing and presented him with

a mountain of gifts that was higher than even the dome of the *Spiral Legislature*.

But none of those things even remotely happened. Instead his mother, as always, showed her ugly face and ruined the day. His father, along with his hopes of a reunion, were banished from the land for a hundred sun-cycles.

A beam of light, from the post's illumination-bulb, revolved past them, and then it faded off into the fog along with the vessel Gilgamoeh was on. Aedon lingered at the edge of the boardwalk, wishing for one more glance, while silently begging the fog to reveal a glimpse, or even a faint image, of his father. He promised himself that one day he would travel North to seek out and find his father again.

PART TWO

PAPYRUS ONE

THE IRMINSUL PYRAMID

One sun-cycle later, Aedon found himself looking up at crystal cathedral doors. They stretched toward the sky twice the height of the Royal Irem. Four cathedrals were joined in the center by one of the largest and most spectacular buildings on the planet: the Irminsul Pyramid. From a far distance its pyramidic shape could be seen peaking higher than the mountains. The top section was squared off with a flat roof having a large hole in the center. A beam of light protruded from there reaching up into the heavens as far as the eye could see. It appeared like a giant pillar made of light. It did not matter if it was day or night, the beam never shut off.

Reflecting ponds surrounded the compound, and gardens with large oak trees were planted beyond them. The building was overlaid in fine orichalcum so that it radiated a rich yellowish-red glow brighter than gold. Around the ascending walls, towers floated with no gravitational pull, hovering like the bridges that moved across the Irem moats.

The doors magically swung open inviting Aedon in with a light so bright that he had to squint. Columns and pillars supporting the glass ceiling were covered in ivory with gold figurines inset in them.

He blurted out, “Is Ahteana here —?”

“Shhhhh!” a disturbed meditator hushed, leaning forward on a short bench which was one of hundreds made from ivory.

Closer to the front and off to the right-side, was an Asterian Choir. He could barely understand their words as they were singing in their own language. The music was so beautiful, like no music he had ever heard before. On the left-side was another chorus singing a completely different song in an unusual key. Opposite these singers, but still on the left-side, was an instrumental accompaniment made up of harps, flutes, harpsichords, and some other string instrument he had never before seen. They were playing their own song. Each ensemble was producing its own music, and when he stopped to listen, he could hear that individual song, and when he turned to listen to all of them, they blended together in harmony. He couldn't explain how it worked. It was like some kind of magical music. He could identify each group individually, yet together they made the most beautiful harmony ever heard.

There were many doorways but no doors. Each archway was covered in diamonds that sparkled from the reflection of the sun streaming through the crystals. Aedon stepped through the front opening (squinting even more as the reflecting light almost blinded him). It took him into the main Irminsul Pyramid building. Further inside, he blinked and then noticed more musicians standing in a row playing their instruments. At the very end was a

flute player with a long face that melted into a rounded beard. Mirrored by a tall priestly hat he wore, it gave the illusion that his head was horizontally symmetric. His eyes shifted back and forth as he continued to stare at Aedon in a queer particular rhythm, similar to a strange animal whose territory had been crowded, unable to determine if the intruder might be a friend or a foe.

“I am Ambassador Rheaf Telopps,” the nasally deep tone said, carefully deliberating each syllable in an archaic obscurity.

“Yes, the ambassador, I remember, we’ve met before. I am Aedon and have received this scroll requiring me to appear.”

“Indeed you have, *beaver*ing your way into the royal family and now into this pyramid. Hardly a sun-cycle has passed since your replica was revealed and your fame has grown, so much so, that there are those who favor you as their next Prince Lord. Fame can be dangerous — be cautious my young prince.”

“Deep blue — it appears so soothing on you,” Aedon mumbled with sarcasm, noticing his robe. “Perhaps I should return adorned in a more appropriate color.”

“Perhaps you should go and simply not return,” Telopps suggested.

“Cheerfully I would, but I was boarding my delta-transporter to travel with my fiancé when this order arrived. Who sends for me and why?”

“You do know what happened to your mother?”

“She was sent here for rehabilitation, you know this. Whatever she has done, she must face the light and deal with what is due her. If she has called me here, then you have wasted both our efforts. I do not wish to see her nor will I. No longer have I a mother. The only guardian I seek to honor is my father.”

“You pretend to know nothing,” Telopps accused. “The passport she checked out with was issued for a visit to her son. You are her only son and the passport was a fraud. The breach has drawn the concern of the Asterians. Ahteana is on her way here to meet and investigate now.”

“I shall place my trust in Ahteana and her advice and not her Ambassador’s then,” said Aedon. “Take me to her now.”

“The way is through the door,” Telopps said, gesturing toward an archway where a curtain of water flowed down and steam bubbled out. Aedon marched toward it.

“Before you foolishly walk into the door of death, be aware that it must be opened with an *enchantment*. If you do not know its magical words, its boiling curtain might decide to scold and scald you.”

“What words need I to say?”

“Have you heard of the *Surrender Poem*? Even my most advanced Magus student hasn’t been able to repeat the tones correctly.”

Aedon recalled the short poem; he knew it well and had learned it while studying Asterian. It went something like this: *To you I surrender my all, you lift me up when I fall*. Aedon stepped in front of the liquid door and in Asterian he chanted:

*“Ketz unot u’d cirblaезeng
gyun aholupuntue,
Unot deft go anyzyulue
avaoluechuer ahzunshaomo opulue.”*

The steam dissipated and the curtain of liquid parted. The ambassador dropped his jaw. In all the centuries he had been at the Irminsul Pyramid, he had never once seen a human open the door. Conflict and ideas rushed through his head as he was uncertain if this was a good thing or not. Aedon glanced back with a glare. He was certain that Rheaf had it in for him.

Aedon stepped into the next chamber and the steam curtain drew closed behind him. Inside, he found himself on a balcony that encircled the perimeter of the room. Looking down over the edge, he felt dizzy. It seemed to drop endlessly. Upward it stretched hundreds of levels to the top of the pyramid. In the very center of

the room, an orange beam of light (which reached into the heavens) flowed like a waterfall. There were other walkways with bridges that led to the parameter shelf he was on. Encompassing the pillar-of-light were transparent, egg-shaped housings each with a frozen body contained within. Thousands of these cocoons were strung-up on cables in the vast open area between where he stood and where the light beamed.

The stream of light buzzed for a second then it flickered. A burst of sparks produced a body-like figure, made of light, yet trapped inside the beam. The cables with the cocoons began to tug. Some shifted up and others transferred down. They zigzagged around like rush-hour traffic. A mechanical arm plucked an envelope from one of the cables and aligned it to a space between the balcony-bridge and beam of light. Then the apparition in the light floated out of its beam and into the cocoon's frozen body. It came to life as it turned from an icy-purple to rosy-pink. The shell split in two, slowly opening. Ahteana walked out.

"Welcome, Aedon," she said.

"*Apa'hei*," he said. "Shouldn't I be welcoming you? You're the one who's travelled the furthest."

"Our spirits can easily travel from Asteria to Earth through the pillar-of-light. Once here, we must be inside a body in order to participate in this world's dimension. While on Earth our Asterian body rests in a hibernation chamber up there. When we are on Asteria, our cloned body hibernates here," she explained.

"Then why do Asterians travel by *Valix* sometimes?"

"Asterians have little need for material items, but when the occasion arises, they are sent by *Valix*," she defended, whispering, "Advise no one of your visit here. Come, there is much that needs to be chronicled and the clepsydra is almost dry."

Her words were not a request, but a command. He didn't understand what she meant, but followed her without hesitation, around to the other side of the chamber. They boarded a spiraling *waterbus* that dropped them lower, about twenty levels, into an

underground area. After it splashed to a stop, Ahteana stepped off onto a rough-rocky excavated area.

“Is this where the rehabilitation takes place?” asked Aedon, hesitating to follow.

“Your mother will return by sunset I believe. I did not come to chase after her, I came to meet with you. This way,” Ahteana insisted, extending her hand and helping Aedon off the *waterbus*.

“Are you making renovation this far deep or expanding?” asked Aedon, noticing the walls were made of old block stones and the floor covered with dirt. It resembled a dug-out cave rather than a pyramid chamber.

“This place that I reveal to you, not even the Ambassadors know about.”

“Why am I being shown these things?” he questioned.

“Unlike most of the species of men, I have foreseen that you can keep secrets and that is why I share this with you. Though nothing may happen for ten-hundred sun-cycles to come, an underground refuge is being developed down here as a safety.”

“But the pyramid is a fortress in itself, what other safety do you need?”

“King Yaswhen is expected to come back soon — we all know that. All of this is *only*, I assure you, *only* a back-up plan, in case things do not go accordingly — before his return.”

“*Accordingly* — to what?” he asked, stepping out of the way as a gopher hurried by pushing a tiny wheelbarrow of dirt. Thousands more worked ahead, excavating a long tunnel.

“There appears to be a rising spike in the reciting of unauthorized *enchantments* recently,” she explained. “This increase has many of us concerned.”

“Concerned, why? Aren't most poets exercising *good magic*?”

“*Good enchantments* or *dark magic*? ... Do you know the difference, Aedon?”

He responded, “Everyone knows that *dark poems* are when people do things selfishly, for themselves.”

“And good ones?”

“When you recite a thankful saying, or request something selflessly for someone else — what’s wrong with *good enchantments* like that?” he defensively snapped. His face turned pale as he began to worry that she had discovered the missing scroll and had figured out that he had used it along with enchantments to make the *gentikos-replica* come out in his favor. He trembled with fear and wished now more than ever that he had never laid eyes on that scroll.

Ahteana continued on about the enchantments. “Let me share with you a short parable about a girl who used a *good poem* to help her brother. He was attending the *educatory*, the same one you do. ... Her brother had a project that would be evaluated by one of three *instructioneers*. One *instructioneer* usually assessed fairly, another freely gave out passing marks and the third always appraised harshly. The sister knew that her brother had worked long hours and she wanted to make sure he received a good marking.”

“So, she conjured up an *enchantment* to make sure his project drew the mark it needed,” Aedon guessed, more certain than ever that she was really referring to him.

“The project found its way into the hands of the *instructioneer* who freely handed out grades and he gave it top marks. What they did not know, was that the universal cycle-of-life, the energy that can see into the future, had instead, scheduled another student's project to be graded by that instructor. When the sister's *magic poem* gave her brother prominent placement ...” Ahteanna said, taking a long breath.

“The first apprentice’s project was substituted and the other pupil ended up failing. I get it,” mumbled Aedon.

“The failed scholar had to return to the *educatory* the next year. While he was away from home, a pack of wild beasts came from the *Perplexed Agglomeration* and devoured his mother. What seemed like an innocent reciting of an *enchantment* actually changed the future for more than one person.”

“Terrible, certainly most, but isn’t that just an isolated extreme case? If we are not meant to speak these *enchancements*, then why were they written?” he begged, hoping to splash a ray of light on his dark deed.

“Only Asterians have been properly learned. If you are not trained to see *all* the future possibilities, how can you safely alter it?”

They walked further around and came back to where the Irminsul beam of light stretched from a nest of golden eggs up toward and through the top of the building. An underground stream melded into a waterfall, which caused steam to burst from the base of the light. Aedon wasn’t sure if the water was feeding the light or cooling it. He had never been inside and seen the source of this warm light before, but it reminded him of another light.

Twenty-some commencements past, Faeraud found a special poem that would enchant objects and make them float. He used it on the teeter-totter, then enticed Aedon to ride on the other side while his invisible chant caused the board to rise up and down by itself. Master Yenocho caught him and tore up the papyrus and accused him of corrupting the innocent *educatory-mates* like Aedon. Later that evening, walking along the stone bridge on the way back to their sleeping chambers, an argument developed. Faeraud’s jealousy turned into bitter envy as he accidentally-on-purpose tripped Aedon. He peered over the bridge and thought that he had seriously maimed or even killed him. Instead of going for help, he quietly returned to his abode pretending that nothing had happened.

What Faeraud did not see, was that right when Aedon fell, Ahteana was watching out a lower window below. Using her special powers, she slowed Aedon’s fall and caught him in her arms and brought him inside. Aedon was surrounded by a warm light that glowed from her arms and radiated all around them.

Aedon remembered how he had promised himself he would never trust Faeraud again. Over the next few sun cycles he and Ahteana became very good friends and his interest and studies in

the scrolls increased. He hadn't spent much time with Ahteana over recent years and was excited that their ways were once again connecting.

"I have asked you here for a reason," Ahteana confided. "Your studies in Intercontinental Associations have intrigued my interests. We are creating a new ambassador position, one that will be a liaison between the Irminsul Pyramid and the great libraries of Earth."

"An ambassador to the libraries — are you expecting the scrolls to revolt or some new kind of conflict to arise out of knowledge?" Aedon asked.

"Indeed you are perceptive. Could I count on you to accept, if I nominate you and the Council confirms?"

"I was hedging on becoming a Navigator. This is an unexpected change. I will need to consider the matter thoroughly."

Ahteana led him to an area behind a rock where there was a ledge with ancient scroll writings and a bunch of other artifact-looking items. She picked one up and held it in her hand.

"I wish to present you with this special charm," she said.

She pulled a small wire-frame *globeaky* from a velvet-blue bag and gave it to Aedon.

"It's an empty frame," he marveled, examining the object. "Does something fill it?"

"It will, if you can pledge to follow the ways of King Yaswhen," she told him. "Will you promise to follow the teachings and also protect those who abide in the way — no matter what Earthly war, plague or deluge might occur?"

"I have dreamed and prepared for a day like today for many sun-cycles. Yet I did not believe it likely that someone with my history would be so honored, nor did I expect such a commission to come to me so soon. I'm not very good at making or keeping promises."

"Not even an important one like this, a clear directive that may never repeat its appointment again?"

He thought for a long moment, then in Asterian, he agreed,
“Lesortuen ahun u’d”

“Look closely into the sphere,” said Ahteana, pressing it against his socket.

At first there existed only empty space within the orb of wires. He held it closer into his eye and it worked like a *looking-glass* except that everything appeared all blurry.

“Its lens is for seeing into other worlds. It will come into focus at a time when you need it most. I hope that you’ll rarely leave it behind,” she said, blowing her breath onto the ball. A blue glow emanated for a second and Aedon’s eye widened as he thought he saw a glimpse of another world for just a brief second. Perhaps it was just her suggestion and his longing that transfixed such an image.

“I will always wear this as a symbol of my pledge,” he promised, cutting a piece of scarlet rope from his toga and tying it onto the special *globeaky*. Then he put it around his neck like an amulet.

“Before you depart, there is a certain prophecy — I hesitate to fore-light,” she began, “But I must. ... You have already heard pieces of this.” She stepped closer to the table and brushed some lingering dust off a papyrus scroll which was already opened to a selected passage.

“The prophet Jerisadan predicted that the evil *Uprooter* could take root after the reign of the second Prince Lord. I divulge this information to you,” she explained, “Because, some believe, and I also do ...”

“I am not this *Uprooter* everyone fears,” Aedon angrily interrupted.

“I know you are not,” she confided. “But you are one of only a few people I feel that I can — entrust to a great responsibility and not divulge to others. A balance must be kept so that men and animals do not become hysterical nor disbelieve.”

“I guess I should be honored, then,” he said. “What is it that you ask of me?”

“The evil Asterian has escaped and plans to return to Earth, if he is not already here.”

“Who?” he asked, still puzzled.

“The one who lives only in spirit, and is not allowed to possess a clone ... the one they call *Say and Teller*,” she answered.

At the mention of his name, *Say and Teller*, it seemed as if evil itself had been called up. It felt like a thick dark-cold invisible spirit was slicing between their very own flesh simply at the speaking his name.

“I remember the parable about *Say and Teller*, the same one we call *Sayer*,” Aedon said. “He's the Asterian who uses your self-pity, or other weakness, and tricks you into doing a thing and then he turns around and tells on you.”

“You recall the facts well,” Ahteana pleasingly said. “He used to occupy his days with false reasoning which he would teach to men. After they listened and did what he proposed, he would tell on them, to King Yaswhen, in an attempt to have them imprisoned or put to death. As punishment for his deceptions, his clone was taken away and destroyed.”

“Thank Yaswhen for that,” Aedon exclaimed.

Then she said, “His body on Asteria was found in hibernation. The Asterian Council believes, and so do I, that he has returned here to Earth in an attempt to possess someone's clone or another body.”

“Seaweed!” Aedon exclaimed. He didn't want to believe that such an evil being existed nor did he wish to admit that an unseen spirit could levy such influences on others. He tried to tell himself that if he didn't entertain such notions, that the truth might go away or at least be masked from his concerns. In defense he argued, “Aren't the legends about *Say and Teller* just made up, or exaggerated stories told to teach us lessons like those stories about the gardens and pools? He's not a real Asterian, is he? Besides, wasn't his clone down here destroyed? How could he possibly come back now?”

“All I am suggesting is that you keep a look-out for anything unusual,” she asked. “If our enchanted writings fall into the hands of men it will open a dangerous portal and the enchanted hedge of protection around the Earth could start to unravel. Survival of both of our worlds could depend on this.”

Aedon questioned, “Don’t you think most of the writings were meant for the people living ten-hundred sun-cycles ago, rather than for our day?”

“King Yaswhen has more ability to see into the future than anyone,” she insisted. “His teachings and messages, though written long ago, were written for a future time — perhaps ours.”

“You have asked a few things of me, may I ask a favor in return?” he asked.

“I already know what you seek. Your heart chases after a love, a bond of acceptance that it may never find. Yet, I will offer advisement none-the-less because your reasons are of a worthy need.”

“Then you know the truth about ...”

“Because I cannot medal in material ways, nor change the hearts of men, I will not interfere nor discourage the way as you seek to find your father,” she said.

“Is Gilgamoeh my real father?”

“Some truths must remain hidden until their chosen day of reveal. You are special and one day you may unlock a glow of light in a dark and dreary world — a gleam that might not save the world, but will certainly help the ones you love. Remember the oath you have given here and pray that you do not stray from it into temptation. If you do, I am fearful that you may not find a path back to its light.”

Aedon returned to his delta-transporter where he met up with Areshia. The sun was dropping low in the sky and they discussed postponing the trip a day.

“You can’t go! You can’t go,” Peter the parrot interrupted with a squawk.

“I haven’t gone anywhere yet,” Aedon responded.

Landing on top of the vehicle, the parrot began another imitation of Cleacious while dictating her message, “Dahling, dahling dearest! ... I have been given a visiting recess — today only. You must meet me at the Tebeck Crest. I will see you at final-meal, and don’t be late.”

PAPYRUS TWO

THE TEBECK CREST

The *Tebeck Bridge* hovered over *First Moat* connecting to the boardwalk. It had a little restaurant which sat in the side of its curve and was adequately named the *Tebeck Crest*. The stone building spiraled its way underground three levels deep where windows protruded into the underwater life of the moat. Sea horses, octopus, dolphins and mermaids swam by, ignoring the gluttonous gawkers. Flickering blue reflections bathed surrounding stone walls with coolness.

“*Tors!* Nectars! Nectars!” a high-pitched voice of an ostrich called out. She was balancing a tray of beverages high above her head as she squeezed by Aedon and Areshia who were walking down the narrow stairway into the dark café.

“I won’t be having our journey back to Mestor interrupted by your mother’s shenanigans for more than a day. Promise me that we will leave here tomorrow?” Areshia huffed, following closely through the passageway.

They made their way through a row of tables and when Aedon accidentally bumped one, a man looked up and brushed his long hair aside — it was Faeraud. He was as startled as Aedon was, but his surprised look turned to eagerness that he had found his old friend. Auseten was sitting next to him and gave a customary nod as a greeting. Aedon had matured some and wasn't as excited about the chance meeting. He hoped to avoid them and forget about their secrets, especially after all the promises he had just made to Ahteana. But something still attracted him to Faeraud.

"I thought you were back at the *educatory* for another session," Aedon remarked.

"*Apa'hei*, it's the beginning of Equinox Break and I've negotiated the last year off of my sentence — so good to see you again, finally," he answered.

"How did you manage that?" Areshia snapped.

"I traded the last sun-cycle for a guest visit once per harvest — that way I won't be around much to — *influence* — the other younglings," Faeraud explained. "I've heard that Lemech has taken quite a liking to you while I was away. Only proper to have someone in the family pour his wine at dinner, with Gilggy and me gone, you were a perfect substitute. But I am back now and capable of resuming my duty."

"Certainly most. Areshia and I are departing for Mestor in the morning so perhaps the timing was meant to be," said Aedon; he could tell that Faeraud was slightly envious of the popularity he had gained recently.

"I will see you at *final-meal* and don't be late," Peter the Parrot exclaimed, mimicking the message from Cleacious once again.

"Quiet enough, else you can ride on someone else's shoulder," Aedon snarled at the bird before explaining to Faeraud, "We're on our way to meet my mother."

"How did your mother come to obtain permission to step out from the Irminsul?" Areshia asked. "I've heard the rehabilitation facility is locked up tighter than the Iron Isolation."

“With all her underwater dealings — I’ve learned it best not to ask questions.”

As Aedon moved on, Faeraud noticed the *globeaky* around his neck. It didn’t look like a regular one as it seemed to emit a faint glow, like the one on Lemech’s ring. He leaned over to Ausethen in hushed-confidence, “Where did he get that neck-chain? I want one of those.”

“Every peddler out there probably has one ready to sell ya,” Ausethen sighed.

“No! I want THAT *globeaky*, the one Aedon wears.”

“You’re late! What is she doing here?” Cleacious demanded, fidgeting distraughtly while Areshia took a seat at the table. “I thought we were going to have a small little mother-son *final-meal* — just the two of us.”

“We’re traveling together — to Mestor. What was I supposed to do, just leave her all alone — to starve? Had Peter arrived a feather later, we would have both been gone already,” Aedon snapped, taking a seat. “And who did you bribe to allow your passage here?”

“I just couldn’t take another day at that place, with all those blinding crystals throwing their light in my direction. Certainly you can understand one’s pain? They were torturing me like I was insane or something.”

A *kanagawaiter* hopped over to the table, “We serve the very finest salads with the highest quality greens, fruits and nuts. Our secret formulated *Tebeck Dressing* in forty different varieties has grown in such fame that it is now exported world-wide. The *boysenberry-vinaigrette-tebeck* is my own favorite.”

“Bring us four,” she ordered, before responding to Areshia who had not yet said a word, “Did I hear you correctly — what did you say?”

“Say? She hasn’t even opened her mouth yet,” Aedon responded.

Then his mother held her hands over her ears. She always did this whenever she heard voices. Many times Aedon wondered if she could read people's minds and if that was what she was hearing. Either way, he was sure that she was mentally unstable and he was not about to investigate further and he hoped that no one else would notice. Their tossed salads were bounced into place by two kanga-waiters and placed on the table.

“Peter doesn’t eat salad, did you forget?” Aedon added, but Cleacious slapped the *kangawaiter’s* arm when he reached to retrieve it.

“Congratulations, Dharling,” she pleasantly fawned, taking hold of his hands. “I want you to recognize that I am proud of how you handled things at the — that thing last holiday. ... Now, what caste are you considering selecting? Tell your mother, I want to hear, because I want you to consider —”

He cut her off, “Mother! I don’t know and I’m not deciding yet, at least not for now!”

“Don’t know?” she huffed. “You’ve had an entire sun-cycle to decide.”

“What kind of a future was I supposed to be planning for anyway?” he snapped, jerking his hands away. “The very color of my armband was hanging in the balances for decades, much less the ability to select. You tell me, mother, because I really don't comprehend.”

“Could I get a peach-nectar?” she snorted at the *kangawaiter*, who had just stepped away. Trading the face of reality for a mask of security in another drink, she added, “Immediately — TODAY!”

After an awkward moment of silence, Areshia interjected, “I suppose I don't have to worry — about that stuff — choosing a caste.”

“Maybe I'll just take another season or two to explore the possibilities that lie ahead,” Aedon suggested, slouching back lazily. “There is nothing compelling me to choose a profession immediately.”

“A season — or two?” Cleacious objected, taking a sip from the freshly delivered nectar. “I suppose that’s fine. You do deserve some time to ponder. ... While you are contemplating, though, your mother needs a small favor.”

“Favor? What favor could you possibly desire that is *small*?” Aedon asked.

The bite of salad he was about to take never made it to his mouth. He had suspected there was some ulterior motive to this *meal*. She rarely patronized eateries like the *Tebek* or left her comfort zone unless there was some bigger plot.

“Areshia, could you leave us — for a few moments of privacy?” Cleacious asked.

“Such tenuity!” Areshia huffed, stepping beyond the reach of their conversation.

Cleacious lowered her voice, “What are you doing with that commoner of a *yellow-bander*? Did I not explain the differences to you long ago, and so many times?”

“As many times as there are mermaids in the sea, mother,” Aedon snapped back. “It doesn’t matter, I believe we are all equal, including even you, though sometimes I wonder.”

“Nonsense,” she replied back. “Even if that were true, you must protect and act according to your new place in society — in the Irem.”

“What do you really want from me?” Aedon questioned, leaning forward to get at the root.

She began to expound, “The cost of your education, of our abode, of everything, while bringing you up — I had to borrow. ... It all — has to be paid back.”

“I see that you’ve made no mention of any debts until my *Registration of Youth* — the very week in which Methouslan bestowed upon me a sum of talents — my royal inheritance. Then you come snooping for more,” he complained. “I am setting up my own abode with Areshia in Mestor, secluded from you and everyone else. ... But I am curious, how much — how much do you owe?”

“We,” she emphasized, “We owe ten-million talents, but that includes all of the interest.”

“Ten-million talents!” Aedon exclaimed.

“Shhhh! Yes,” she confirmed, motioning for him to lower his voice. “That includes all the interest — over the past ninety sun-cycles.”

Her attempt to clarify did little to make the absurd usury fees sound like a bargain.

“Ten-million, I can't come up with a payment like that. Nobody could. How is it even possible for someone to accumulate a debt like that?” he grabbed, kicking the table leg.

“I — I didn't mean to spring it on you like this,” she continued. “It's just that you're going to be getting, besides your inheritance — a part of the royal treasury.”

“I did get an inheritance! But you already knew this,” he interrupted, “Probably all the money I'll see my whole life — forever! And it was hardly, not even, a tenth of what you've spent. You mustn't count on me to pay your obligations. The royal treasury is for the Prince Lord not the common prince.”

Popping up from out of nowhere and plunking his gruffly-bearded chin on the table, Scapappi appeared. His voice was as gruff as ever, though it had a bionic tone to it since his tongue had been cut out. He spoke through some kind of mouthpiece made of rods and wires which no one had seen before.

“I'll take *yur* tenth of the amount due! It'll be a good down payment while the two of *yaz* come up with a better plan. I'm sure that with all *yur* recent princely popularity *yull* think of some way,” the goat bellowed, moving over to the fourth place setting. “Salad, how scrumptious. *Ya* remember *ta* order it without *dat* awful oily stuff? ... And where's my side of dandelions?”

Scapappi was no fool, and, after Aedon's father had been sent away, he decided that it was time for payment on the loans he had produced for Cleacious.

“I thought your tongue was cut, how is it that you are able to speak?” Aedon demanded, suspicious of the story that had been told earlier.

Cleacious began biting her nails.

“With certain resources available *ta* me, at the tip of my horn, me veterinarian was able *ta* create a wonder. Now, I must pay for his services, just like *yaz haves ta pay fer* mine,” he elucidated, *bahing-out* his sinister order.

“I’m not giving a single talent to a lying goat that supposedly lost his tongue yesterday, yet can baa out blackmails today,” Aedon told him.

“*Yeahhh, yeahhh?* I’ve scheduled a *Courtship Demanding*,” he revealed, plopping a tablet with the written order on the table. “Read *da* order and pay or play.”

The scheduled *Courtship Demanding* meant that Aedon would have to either pay the order or appear before an orator.

“I could be a reasonable goat — if *yur* willing to negotiate?” Scapappi bargained, pushing up into Aedon’s face. “If *ya* stay here at the Irem and *helps* me get some respectable ways, I’ll take just half a million for a *downer* payment then *ya* have more time *ta* make arrangements for the rest of the talents.”

“You weren’t around, no one was around,” Cleacious begged. “No one was there to help me while you were off at the *educatory* for all those decades. What was I supposed to do?”

“Yeah — and that ugly gal *yah* hanging with — *ya gotta* drop her, she’s no good for *ya* image,” Scapappi added.

Aedon sat there fuming mad as he chewed on his lower lip, unsure what to do next. The last thing he wanted to do was spend his time in another legal circus while various parties argued their agendas over what was rightfully his.

“I’ll give you a tenth of my talents, only because you’re my mother,” said Aedon.

“And *ya* thought he *wuld dunt* cooperate,” the goat said, snorting at Cleacious.

“You can have one-tenth, all of it today,” Aedon continued, as he tried to negotiate, “But no more — ever! I don’t care what dealings you go on about in the Irem, they are not to involve me.”

“Dharling,” Cleacious exclaimed, “Since when does a son treat his beloved mother like such? I am so offended. I will not have you speak in such tones around me.”

“Don’t come back to me for anything else ever again — either of you! That’s the deal, if you want so much as a coin today.”

“Well —?” Scapappi croaked out, cocking his head left and right, looking at Cleacious, then at Aedon, and to her again. Perceptively, the goat and Cleacious had rehearsed and plotted out this entire *final-meal* charade.

“The Irminsul already knows you’re gone; they’ve promised that you’ll be back by sunset. Don’t you suspect that they’ve followed you ... or me here?” said Aedon, tired of the awkward exchange of stares as he stood up to leave.

“We’ll take it for now. One-tenth — all of it right now,” Scapappi accepted, bulging his eyes out with greed.

“*Dharling*, you never really did ever have your father,” she went on, she never knew when to stop. “I want you to know, you will always have a mother, a mother who cares only about your well-being.”

Her hollow promises were quickly covered by the buzz of conversation and gossip which passed throughout the café. Peter flew off to partake of the chitchat. Aedon turned away from the table and went to find his fiancé. He had lost his appetite, “It is certainly due time we return to Mestor.”

“Attention urgent news!” Peter crowed out, jumping up onto Aedon’s shoulder. “Word has circulated that Prince Lord Lemech has suddenly come down with a life-threatening illness.”

As they turned around, Faeraud confronted them with a solemn face.

“You look like you saw a spirit?” Areshia observed.

“I bring terrible news,” Faeraud stated, taking hold of Aedon’s hands. “Lemech has fallen ill. He could be dying. I need you, we all need your support back at the Irem.”

“I’m surprised you’re so concerned,” Areshia sarcastically whispered, tilting her head in suspicion. “If something happened to him, wouldn’t you most likely become the next Prince Lord?”

“Areshia!” Aedon snapped, offended by her insinuating conclusions.

“I thought we were returning to Mestor?” she reminded, pulling Aedon’s arms from Faeraud’s clutch. “That perfect abode you want isn’t going to last long if it goes back on market.”

“He can’t leave now,” Faeraud insisted. “While I was away, Aedon became Lemech’s favorite grandson. His absence would only add to Lemech’s pain and maybe even cost him his life.”

“Lemech needs us,” Aedon begged; Areshia begrudgingly looked down.

“Aedon, this is your family,” Faeraud said, turning to Areshia to reaffirm, “This is *his* family — you can’t just abandon family.”

Those were the words Aedon hungered for since he was a youngling. He regretted the fact that his father had been absent his whole life, how could he abandon his grandfather now? That would make him no better — and even less deserving, he thought.

“Just a couple more days,” he pleaded, picking up Areshia’s palm.

She snarled, snapping her hand away. As they left, the Irminsul Guards came for Cleacious. They dragged her out as she screamed about the humiliating treatment she was getting. Scapappi the goat chuckled, taking another payment from one of the warriors, evidently, having turned her in.

PAPYRUS THREE

PRINCE LORD'S LIFE LOOMS

Cool mist dampened their faces. Aedon and Faeraud sat, facing outward, overlooking the moat where the water softly rippled. The covered, waterbus floated toward the Royal Irem while neither one looked at the other. The awkwardness of an absent conversation stiffened their bodies as Aedon sat on his hands.

“This mysterious illness came on — very suddenly. The healers and medicine men have exhausted their remedies and they’ve sent for the Asterians,” Faeraud revealed. This puzzled Aedon a little because he wasn’t sure how Faeraud already knew so much about the illness.

“The Asterians?” Aedon echoed, knowing that this signaled serious concern, “Will they heal him?”

“I doubt it, though they’ll pretend they are able to make him well. Do you realize ...” Faeraud said, stopping. “Methouslan insisted that Lemech name a successor to the throne at *Apaturia*,

yet he delayed ... hoping to find some way to pardon *Gilggy* and bring him back. Now he will have to appoint another son.”

“Perhaps he will,” Aedon agreed, thinking about it more. “And you would be that son?”

“Indeed, I have waited all my life for such an important appointment. The Prince Lordship belongs to me and this time I am certain that I will be the one whom is named.”

The lighting in the room, where they came, was almost void. Hues of dark blue wiped across the walls matching the color of the fur blanket that covered Lemech. Amber-colored light from the far off city lights reflected across his pale face. A veil-thin curtain hanging from the ceiling encompassed his bed. The room did not appear like that of a prince, but rather the chambers of a dead man buried in a tomb.

Methouslan and Faeraud peered through the veil as Aedon waited close by. Lemech tried to sit up. He coughed, but it was more than he could handle. Chordata, queen of the owls, was brought in to scribe the final conversations while a small Asterian choir filed into the room taking place in a circular fashion around the bed. They hummed and then they began to chant repeatedly:

*Umpyluezo khut ahuvuvo ahuc iyr weng,
uyuna ahvyuna tez fumo,
Slotwevo khertyun gun ketz tez azolueoz,
ahvofuro khertyun huleaymgo leumo.*

Magic crystals were circulated around his head, other healers used magnets. Mediators sat with crisscrossed legs which they extended out, slowly moving their bodies into different energy receiving formations. Bell ringers came in and chimed their healing chorus. Incense and candles were burned. Nothing made him better, instead, his condition worsened.

The choir's chant lowered, in respect, when Ahteana entered. She walked over to a small table where a ring lay (the one she had given him at coronation).

"The rings of protection are losing power in this place, just like we Asterians are."

She picked it up and placed it back on his finger. Quietly turning around and standing tall she revealed, "I hesitate to speak of such, but it appears as if some evil — perhaps even a *hidden enchantment* — has been placed over this bed. I can see no answers and have no foresight in this matter. I will need to meet with the Asterian Council at once and confer — regarding what they can see."

"*Hidden enchantment?*" Faeraud scoffed in disbelief. Then he turned and whispered to Aedon, "I've always never seen such predictability? When the self-righteous begin to lose power, first they define an evil intangible and next, my *Smart-owl*, they will attach a face to that evil."

"There is no medical cure for this," Methouslan divulged, stomping around frustrated. "Why it would take a miracle beyond any of our means. Certainly, even you can attest to that fact, Ahteana?"

"By the time I return to Asteria and travel back here with answers ... I fear time may expire," she explained, before adding, "Ambassador Telopps, you'll need to prepare to take charge at the Irminsul while I travel."

"Excellent," Faeraud whispered, leaning back over to Aedon again. "With Ahteana out of the way maybe some progress can be made. Certainly this is a tragedy, but things couldn't be working out better for us."

"Everything does seem to be going your way," Aedon remarked. "I wonder if any of this has something to do with a particular scroll we know about?"

"Shish," Faeraud hushed Aedon, slapping his leg. "Nobody can know about that — remember?"

Faeraud pushed against Methouslan, prompting him to lean over Lemech and speak, “Son, it appears as if *da* cycle *uh* life has come full circle for *yuh*. And you've not yet named a successor.”

“Consider your other brothers, many of whom would make great leaders,” Ahteana chimed in, “Like Evaemon in the North or Autochatheu in the East. As the future may depend on this, it may be a wise time to reconsider Gilgamoeh or even one of his sons.”

Methouslan sputtered half-laughing, “Gilgamoeh? Was he not just banished for his foolish atrocities, and his sons caught pilfering the Iron Isolation?”

“Some — have forgotten that there are other sons of yours,” Ambassador Telopps suggested, “Like the tall one, the only son who stands at your side this very moment.”

“I'd even propose for Etruscan Mestor *ta* lead the land — while Faeraud gains experience to follow in *da* future,” Methouslan suggested.

“But I am ready now, grandfather,” Faeraud pleaded.

Tensions swirled around the chamber as Telopps nodded in agreement, Ahteana shook her head, Methouslan stepped back, and Chordata blinked a large eye at Faeraud. Aedon swallowed.

“La— ter,” Lemech coughed out.

“I would offer my help if only I knew what I could do,” Aedon volunteered.

“There is nothing that an overly ambitious half-royal should do, except remain silent,” Telopps harshly spoke.

“Time has expired for *yuh* my son, if *yuh* name no one, a *courtship demanding cud* occur,” Methouslan worried, bending down to his ear. “A battle *cud* follow. A *territorial quarrel cud* arise.”

Then, raising his head slightly, Lemech proclaimed, “If I name a prince this sun-cycle ... it will be the one who — who discovers an antidote — a cure — let him be the next ruler.”

He took another deep breath. Exhaling, it almost appeared as if it were his last and that he had perhaps died.

"He's just sleeping," Methouslan confirmed, as he was closest and could see that he was still breathing.

"An antidote," Faeraud began thinking, "If I could produce a cure, he would have to make me the next Prince Lord. All I need are the details for a remedy."

"If there were such a thing, don't *ya* think we *wud* have it before us this very moment?" Methouslan growled.

"What has been done to my father? Why could the medics not come up with a solution? What is wrong with you Asterians? Did your healing powers vanish like your king?" Faeraud cried out.

No one could tell if he were seriously distraught or if he was putting on an act. He had always seemed to detest Lemech before.

"You're an Asterian," Faeraud shouted, turning to Ahteana, "Isn't it time for some intervention here — a more serious *enchantment*? Show us that you are indeed the miracle worker you claim to be."

"Why do you request things that are not allowed?" Ahteana answered, in an offended tone. "If someone has cast the forbidden spell, only King Yaswhen or the fruit of his garden could work such a miracle."

"You make mention of the *Foreverlasting* tree ... One drop of juice, from a piece of its product, would bring Lemech back, right?" Faeraud tried to confirm, taking away a bell from one of the Ringers and tingling it. "One bite and any man would live for another ten-hundred sun-cycles."

"You foolishly talk as if any Asterian could just immaturely pluck a piece. The orchard is buried in the icy mountain. You would know this if you had studied the details," she reminded him.

"I detest that I am probably more studied on the matter than even you are, Ahteana. I *betcha* I have access to more details than anyone. ... I shall lead an expedition to uncover its mysteries and obtain its life-giving juice, the only cure for my patriarch, my beloved father," Faeraud dramatically announced.

Then he stooped down on one knee and held Lemech's hand almost as if he were proposing for marriage. Only Methouslan and

Telopps seemed impressed by his outward performance, as everyone else knew just how much he really despised his father.

Ahteana folded her arms, giving a warning of caution, “You cannot just help yourself to its fruit. Its conundrum is a fable wrapped in many puzzling mysteries. I believe that even the most astute expert would return with fatal injuries instead of a piece of its produce. Such an expedition is absolutely forbidden. Besides, King Yaswhen placed a molten protection to guard against anyone entering the grounds.”

“Yaswhen has been gone for more than six-hundred sun-cycles,” Methouslan reminded, waving his scepter about. “His ancient garden-guards left — after the old bridge fell. The place has been consumed by the overgrown Agglomeration and volcanic rocks.”

A *kangawaiter* hopped in with a tray of food and wine for Lemech. The *kanga* set the plate down by his bedside and then left, since Lemech appeared to be sleeping. Faeraud walked over to the platter, picked up the wine glass, stared into it briefly, and went into one of his sudden outbursts, “Wine? Why are they serving him wine at a time like this?”

“It’s his favorite,” Methouslan defended.

“I wonder ... I do wonder ... Have these bottles been analyzed?” he asked, trying to guess if there was a connection.

“It’s the special wine from *Gilgamoeh’s Vineyard*. Do you think his favorite son would poison him?” Methouslan huffed.

“He is the only one that drinks this wine — and he is the only one that is dying.”

A slight silent shifting downward of Methouslan’s eyes threw Faeraud into a rage. He threw the wine glass across the room where it smashed against the dark wall, its reddish grape contents dripping down like thick blood.

“Don’t you see — don’t all of you see?” Faeraud pleaded. “We need a miracle, a magic cure. The Asterians will do what they always do — nothing! It is up to us. If we don’t take care of this, no one will, and Lemech will die. Do you not believe that we need the

foreverlasting fruit? Ahteana, herself, has admitted that it is the only thing, short of Yaswhen coming here, that could possibly help.”

“There can be no journey to the forbidden grounds without approval from the Council,” Ahteana snapped. “If we made exception to allow a single person to enter its realm, a flux of interested parties would show their warmongering faces. The place is a spiritual mystery, not a physical challenge. Those who attempt to enter will not be pure in heart, they will desire the fruit for themselves and they will be consumed.”

“What about you Ahteana, could you not make the trip?” Aedon asked.

“Before an Asterian can act she must clearly see all the possible future outcomes,” she explained. “Disturbing, is the fact that this event is shrouded in darkness and secrecy, a blankness that I haven’t seen since the presence of ...”

“Who?” Aedon asked even though he already knew she was referring to Sayer.

“Since we cannot see the future outcome based on *not* acting,” she said, changing the focus, “I will have to convince the Asterian Council that not intervening would present a worse scenario.”

Ahteana didn't look pleased at all about the situation, but like everyone else, she was bewildered that such an illness had come over Lemech so suddenly. Solemnly she departed.

“Aedon, meet me in my chambers,” Faeraud commanded in a hushed whisper. “I need a moment alone with my father.”

Aedon walked down the corridor and as he turned, Ahteana pulled him aside into an alcove. “Aedon, I know that your familiarity of this Irem has been quite recent, but if our chants do not succeed — Lemech may die. You have always been a loyal student and even a close friend of mine during my visits at the *educatory*. It is because of this relation and the oath that you swore to me, that I come to you now.”

“Your confidence in me is overwhelming. Are there not others in this Irem or at the Irminsul whom you could better confide in?” he snapped, feeling like she was pulling him one way while Faeraud’s agenda tugged him the opposite.

“You wear the charm I gave you and hold true to the oath that came with it. You are one of few whom I feel that I can rely upon. I need to know that if something dreadful happens that you will continue to be on our side — on the right side.”

“I would do anything to help,” Aedon agreed, knowing this was the right choice.

She illuminated further, “The Asterian Council will never approve nor tolerate the appointment of Faeraud as the next Prince Lord. Any position he seeks, must be only temporary. It must not exceed a single moon-cycle. I mention this *only* to you, and in confidence, because of your friendship with him. A friend to him you should be, but do not allow fellowships to cloud your judgment.”

He nodded.

“Someone is extending into the *magic-arts* of the universe,” she complained, stepping closer and lowering her voice, “It’s not just poison that has caused Lemech to become sick, but the removal of an aura of protection from around him, a force that only an *enchantment* could weaken.”

“His ring, was that his protection?” Aedon inquired, rubbing his own naked finger.

“We have doweled out protection to many people in many forms, but those same people have carelessly set their jewels aside or traded them for some other temptation. The protection is weakening everywhere, even from around our moons. Last night an unexpected meteor shower came from out of nowhere and plummeted into the barren moon,” she revealed, pointing to the sky outside. “It created so many craters that every eye can see them from this place. I believe someone has discovered how to tap into the power and they are using it, to destroy — to uproot the future — for all of us.

“In this expedition for the *foreverlasting* fruit, Faeraud seems confident to succeed. Do you believe that he will bring this produce back and give it to Lemech ... or would he keep it — even a drop of it for himself?”

Aedon looked away.

“If one were to visit this place and discover the tree, he must not pluck from its branches, but instead, patiently wait for it to be offered to him. To steal from the tree or to chant enchantments over it would mean certain death. I have foreseen that the survival of both of our worlds may rest on someone harvesting a cure; however, that person must make sure that Faeraud never obtains such a piece of fruit for himself.”

Aedon looked back up to answer her, but she was gone.

A flash of light caused Faeraud to draw the drapes across the window.

“Good she’s finally gone,” he scoffed, referring to the sparking beam of light which was transporting Ahteana back up to the Asterian moon. It could be seen in the distance outside the window of his chamber.

“She was pretty adamant about not taking journey to that garden,” Aedon said, sitting down on the edge of Faeraud’s bed. “With all that has come about I wonder if your ... our ... dabbling into that scroll hasn’t caused some dangerous cosmic energy to be released. I have a rightful mind that we should clue in someone who can look into the universe and perhaps fix what we’ve undone.”

“You aren’t in your mind,” Faeraud snapped. “You can’t go running to Ahteana or anyone else. You gave a finger-locking promise. ... Besides, if you break your oath, then whatever you seek to protect will by design lose its protection simply because of your breach of honesty.”

Aedon knew Faeraud was right. If he were to say anything he would be breaking his promise and then the fibers of the

universe would not be obligated to honor that which had been dishonored.

“First they teach us that such places are only telltales and then they forbid us to go there. ... If it doesn’t exist in the first place, then why is Ahteana so worried about us investigating the garden?” Faeraud asked.

“Puzzling it is.”

“She’s nothing but a lying hypocrite,” Faeraud huffed.

“Depending on how you interpret all those things,” Aedon suggested.

“You’re certainly not on her side, I know you would never do that,” Faeraud huffed, walking over to an old marble chest and opening it up. “We’ll consult our scroll and see what it has to say. After all, who’s authority is more absolute: Ahteana, or the *Rataka Scrolls*?”

“Of course, the *Rataka*,” Aedon confirmed, relieved he didn’t have to answer any more questions about his association with Ahteana. He told himself that this would be alright and that he was actually just observing the scroll. Plus, he reasoned to himself, like Faeraud pointed out, the *Rataka Scrolls* written by King Yaswhen were the absolute authority, not Ahteana.

“I’ve noticed that the scroll works best over here by the window,” said Faeraud.

“Then you’ve investigated it further since our last time together?”

“I also found out that it can be navigated to any passage by calling out its reference without regard to tone,” Faeraud explained, extending and rolling out the scroll. “For example, the *Foreverlasting Tree Enchantments* are located in part one, section three, node two.”

“Ahuno - khrouton — ahytoro,” Faeraud called out to the floating *Scroll of Water*.

Spirits of water danced above the scroll as it responded visually and audibly with the writing:

*“Avaoluechuer blautuculue gon
craump duk anyzyulue ahund ruygo,
Unot tedo ahyunuy opuco
ahupour deko ah kweoutmont shuzo.
Iprum ahyunuy rurdon
vuyune vont ahvung ipurovoro.
Inlueyun ah blaemetevu
avaeto guyun ontor ez heyruzo,*

*Unot stonzetevu arn huwuyun
iprum ahyunuy husha fukaymu.
Avaeto lecumay ketz kuelue,
aunouth lecumay ketz secu.”*

Aedon spoke it in Atlantian so Faeraud would understand:

*“When proud men stand looking up and gazing,
You hide your face, appear like a tree rotting.
From your garden we were banished forever,
Only a prince who is pure may enter.
You sent us away from your pastures naked,
Who comes to take, death comes to take rid.”*

The scroll continued:

*“Aunuyun ahund cinyun hurtyun,
khut shevor ahvocumo namonzo,
Unot voerdu khuruygh stoaym
hueda epur ah cio.
Unot ahuluelueuw hurtyun ketz arn
avaeto toluep clruluevo ithoro,
Vydgo unot dovorugo hun khut khota,
tug, ahund opeuzcu.”*

*“Days and suns pass, the road becomes dimmer,
 You welcome those seeking aid for a sufferer.
 You allow passage to us who help some other,
 Judgment you levy on the thief, haggler and fibber.”*

“I was checking the star charts — through the astrolabe today,” Faeraud said. “Lemech's time is short. The bald moon juxtaposed with the Asterian one creates a shadow over the Irem? The three celestial bodies form a dark sign of his name.”

“What does that exactly mean,” Aedon asked, looking toward the sky as if he could verify the story.

“This sign can only mean that darkness will cover him. It is his fate; it is written in the stars,” said Faeraud, swallowing hard. “You may be the only one who can save him.”

“Me? What are you getting at?” Aedon asked. “You’re always talking in signs and symbols. How am I supposed to know what you’re really saying?”

“You read it, *‘You may not pass through, if you seek the bounty for yourself, only the pure who seek to help another will enter,’*” Faeraud repeated.

“I know, I just read the wet thing,” Aedon snapped.

“Listen, if I took this journey, I would seize the harvest for myself? I want that prize — from the *Foreverlasting Tree*. With that produce, Aedon — I can live forever! And it’ll heal Lemech. But, I cannot chance an attempt because its enchantments would see my selfish way and send me to my death, and then neither Lemech nor I would survive.”

Aedon hadn’t expected such an honest answer from him and suddenly realized what was being asked. He instinctively cowered, “Oh, no — No — I can’t — I can’t!”

“Aedon, you have to,” Faeraud insisted. “You heard what Ahteana said and you’ve read the scroll yourself: *Only a prince who is pure may enter.*”

“Me? I think it would rather refer to you. I am only half-a-prince. Why I believe you’re inventing excuses not to do this?”

“I’ve noticed that you wear a special *globeaky*, a trinket that glows with power like yours, has been engineered in dimensions beyond and can unlock doors to those places,” Faeraud blankly stated, fingering the amulet around Aedon’s neck. “Besides, I can’t set off. Have you forgotten there is blood on my hands? ... Remember when we were at the fur factory? I accidently stepped on one of the tundra voles and killed the thing.”

“So — it was an accident.”

“Alright, you fool, I murdered the freakish thing!” Faeraud blurted out, raising his whisper with a sharp tone. “The fumes were getting to me. I didn’t know what I was doing.”

Aedon sat back pondering the revelation with a long exhaling sigh. Faeraud pleaded, shaking Aedon’s shoulders, “If all the rhetoric about that place is true, I certainly will not pass through. You’ve got to do this Aedon, for me, for you, for Lemech!”

“Then give me half a day to consider this thoroughly and consult with others,” Aedon begged.

“That is all that I ask,” Faeraud sighed. “‘Why should I count on my *Smart-owl?*’ I asked myself earlier — because I can, because he is family. If you come back with the life-saving antidote — no one will ever doubt that you are a true son of Gilgamoeh’s. You will not only be saving the Prince Lord — but your father too.”

“I will? ... How so?”

“If the wine from *Gilggy’s* vineyard, which Lemech drank, proves poisonous, your father would be *hung-out-to-dry*.”

“Then I must do this. ... I will take as my companions Areshia and one other. We will travel light and quickly and if we do not return, our blood is on your hands. ... We will call ourselves *the Harvesters*, the chosen ones who will bring in the fruit that will save Lemech and hopefully heal this continent,” Aedon declared. He wasn’t sure if he should follow Faeraud’s plan or Ahteana’s, but he was certain that he had to go. He would decide whose idea to follow later — maybe once he arrived there.

Right after Aedon left the chamber, Ausethen came in from around the corner where he had listened in. He talked with great concern, “I warned you about his loyalty to Ahteana. He can’t be trusted. If he does bring back the fruit you can be assured that you will never lay a finger on it.”

“*If* he brings it back,” Faeraud emphasized. “But I am not worried because I will see to it that an army of spies follow him including one or two in his very own camp. Now quickly you must go and make yourself available as his other travelling companion.”

Bells tolled outside the window of the dinning quarters where family and guests strolled in to partake of a lavish salad themed buffet. The amount of food prepared was extravagant for the sparse number of guests that wandered through. Ice sculptures of various fruits were melting from the warm day, even though eagles placed on perches fanned their wings attempting to keep them cool.

Faeraud dished out a helping of a rice and sprout salad, offering a plate to Areshia who he came upon from behind.

“What kind of salad is that?” she asked, examining it closer.

“*Arachniric*, served here to help support the rice industry — I think,” Faeraud answered, pouring a white *vingernnaise* sauce over it.

“What are the black *thingys*?”

“These?” Faeraud tried to confirm, holding up one. “They’re the best part — quartered tarantulas.”

She grabbed the plate with gratitude. She was hungry enough to eat anything. Faeraud followed her, sitting down at the same table.

“I suspect that I was wrong when I thought that you would have followed Yapet and his foolish father into the North — during their banishment,” he condescendingly remarked. “Sounds like you do have a brain.”

“I would have gone. ... However, I’ve stayed behind because of Aedon,” she told him, taking a bite of the salad.

“Aedon? Wise selection, I suppose. I’ve heard he may be making a journey soon and I presume that he will need a wise fellowship to accommodate him.”

“A journey — where to?” she objected. “We’re heading back to Mestor.”

“Perhaps not. You have heard of the terrible illness that befell Lemech? ... The only thing now that can save him — is in a secret place. A place where only few can go,” he told her, starting to walk away.

“Aedon is one of these few, I gather,” she asked, perking up.

“He has to go. I just want to make sure that nothing stands in his way.”

“And you think I would ...”

“Aedon is pure and innocent and hasn’t been jaded by our more urban ways ...”

“You mean: *corrupted*.”

“He needs someone, with experience, like you, to be his companion while discretely reporting back here so that our team of wise men can advise you along the way. You’ll be doing him an enormous favor, it will be our secret, and you’ll be well-paid,” he said, walking off as if she had accepted the offer.

Andromache followed Faeraud outside the dining area where the two of them scurried off to a niche in the hall where they couldn’t be seen.

“This should be handled by a Warrior Channel,” she insisted, brushing back the short hairs standing at attention on the top of her head.

“You will get your chance,” Faeraud scoffed, holding his chin in thought. “Once the *Smart-owl* has made it through all you have to do is follow.”

“What if he only journeys to the edge to investigate and then disappoints us all?” she hypothetically began.

“Is my Warrior Channel captain unable to produce a plan that will assure the innocent one goes further?” Faeraud asked.

“Not at all. He will go all the way — that I promise you.”

“Now I am hearing a pleasant tone,” Faeraud remarked, stepping back into the main corridor. “I have already lined up a couple of spies to travel with him and report back to us; however, should you find a way to obtain this fruit ahead of Aedon, I’ll reward you — doubly well.”

“Most certainly I will not disappoint you, my true, Prince Lord,” Andromache fawned.

“Why should a dying old man be given a few more days to linger when we can taste its juice and live forever?” Faeraud reasoned. “I must have that piece of fruit before Lemech does.”

PAPYRUS FOUR

THE FORBIDDEN AGGLOMERATION (FOREST)

It seemed much longer, the two days that passed, as their *delta-transporters* took them a hundred *stathmos* north of the Irem near to the edge of the tall trees. The base of the mountain was surrounded by a thick-dark forest with all kinds of wild beasts who had chosen to leave the domesticated lands in favor of freedom and fending for themselves.

“Is this the garden?” Auseten asked?

“Didn’t you examine the map during the long flight here?” Areshia snapped, pulling out a scroll and handing it to him.

“This is the *Agglomeration*,” Aedon huffed. “We have to forge our way through here — to reach the mountain.”

“And pray that the trolls and witches don’t get us first,” Auseten sneered, “Hundreds of sun-cycles ago, those who dabbled in the *enchantments* used to be *hung-out-to-dry*. Some of them escaped and fled here.”

“Let’s get organized. To reach the garden we’ll have to hike through these cypress trees before reaching the mountain,” Areshia rationalized, showing the scroll with the map and pointing to places beyond.

“And ice-pick our way up to the plateau just below that volcanic top you see — there on the horizon, above those clouds,” Auseten huffed.

“Ice-pick our way up the plateau?” That sounds like an over exaggeration — even for you Auseten,” Aedon snarled; then, teased Areshia, “I recall someone pressing me to make promise that I would take them on an adventure greater than Yapep’s, does this qualify?”

Areshia awed, “Have we frozen our brains? ... I beg you to reconsider venturing into these forbidden lands.”

Auseten interrupted, “Its spoils belong to us!”

“We must be only concerned about getting the fruit, that single piece which is allowed to help someone,” Aedon stressed, “A remedy to save my father.”

“You mean your grandfather,” Auseten corrected.

“Exactly,” Aedon agreed, not letting on about the fact that Lemech had become like a father to him, nor did he tell about the dangers of blame his father would face should Lemech die.

Nowhere was there such a place full of beauty — and peril. It was the most dangerous range on the planet, and the most beautiful. At the very top of the mountain was a dormant yet active volcano. Lava continually bubbled up and smoke rose from it, yet it spewed nowhere. A ball of fire rotated above its mouth, never growing any larger or smaller, but always boiling like a continuous pot cooking something. Below the fiery summit the mount was draped in snow. The Earth’s fiercest wind blew across its surface fanning its powder out like a toga blowing in the wind. It waited ready to knock any climber, especially an unfit one, to his death.

Aedon enlightened further, “Just above the snowy center, and just below the volcanic top of the mountain, is a plateau with a ring of trees where the fabled garden with the *Foreverlasting Tree*

is said to be located. Historic visitors speculate that the temperatures of the cold mountain below and the hot lava above balance each other out to a perfect climate at this joint.”

Areshia put the map away and they journeyed for awhile until they came to the edge of the forest. They looked up at its tall trees with mammoth trunks and branches that stretched out like joined arms, prohibiting anyone from entering. The howling wind shook their leaves, shouting warnings for them to go back. But they didn't listen.

“I assign belief that we won't be needing all this heavy gear,” Ausethen huffed, pulling the sled of satchels, “Especially these arrows.”

“I am an accomplished archer and expect that they will provide more protection than your puffing belly,” she snarled, picking up the bag and swinging it over her shoulder. “I better handle the armaments before you pierce your own flesh with one of the poisonous tips.”

“Your precious arrows aren't the heavy bags. I can handle those.”

“There's no infirmary out here. ... More of a concern is how you're going to hold up during the climb.”

Ausethen kicked her other bag off the sled with a snuff.

“We are all pretty good climbers, remember our days of scaling walls and sneaking around the *educatory*?” Aedon recounted, trying to lighten the mood.

Even with all the modern gadgets they brought, the journey ahead would be tough; however, each of them was determined to reach the destination. While unloading the gear from their deltas, they kept hearing a bird sound. When Aedon plopped down the last bag, it presented itself.

“Know — I knows ya, don't I?” a duck quaked. He waddled out from the edge of the nearby fallen log, asking, “You — you were at the docks of Adia?”

It was Dumar the duck.

“Indeed I was. How did you get here?” Aedon questioned. “As I recall, you were squawking-out quite a beak-full of objections about going North.”

“Never mind myself,” Dumar muttered. “Where — where are you off to? ... Help? I can help you guys. I’m an experienced tour guide of the *Agglomeration*. I can show you everything there is that’s —”

“Right now, we just need to set up camp and get some rest,” Aedon interrupted.

“Rest? Certainly! I can help with that, too,” he volunteered, as he waddled over and began to curiously peck through their things.

BEND! CREEK! SWISH! CRUNCH! The loud sound of a falling tree commanded their attention.

“What was that?” Auseten squeaked, clinging to Areshia.

“Why don’t we go check it out instead of squishing into the poison arrows?” she suggested, moving her holster to her other shoulder.

“Quietly,” Aedon ordered, leading the group through the thick trees as they crouched low. A ways off they could see the warrior channel had already reached the area, possibly a day ahead of them.

“We’ll have to elude their mammoth-sized camp. Alerting them could only make things worse,” Aedon said, before asking, “Why would warriors be sent here?”

“Perhaps they’ve sent other teams to assure someone comes back with the goods,” Areshia suggested.

“There’s word that Prince Evad was trying to organize his own team to undermine Prince Faeraud’s efforts,” Auseten remarked.

“Then we will have to stay clear of their interferences and hope our efforts are not completely in vain,” Aedon pleaded, gasping at the site of the Warrior Camp where hundreds of tents crowded together cutting a road into the *Agglomeration*. It was wider than the base of a pyramid. They had already moved in an

entire city full of restaurants, bathing springs, nectar bars and entertainments.

“I heard they were going to pave a road right up to the garden entrance itself,” Auseten proclaimed.

“Who told you this?” Aedon suspiciously asked, the question never answered.

“The world's top alchemists, engineers, scientists and surveyors are before us,” Areshia exclaimed, “If they are unable to make it into the garden, then it is not possible for anyone. If this great army of warriors in front of us cannot succeed, then how can we?”

The sight was so horrendous that they suddenly seemed completely insignificant. They were all thinking the same thing: that they should just pack up their little tents and miniature arsenal and head back home and save their hides.

“We can't give up hope yet. We've just begun,” Aedon encouraged, hiking back to their patch. “A night of rest and the newness of the morning may suit us better for the task at hand.”

Aedon gathered his things (inside the tent that had been pitched) to bed down for the evening. He switched off the illumination-bulb, its flickering glow faded like the sun did earlier. Lying down, he stared up at the canvas ceiling where moonlit shadows danced in celebration. He wanted to rest and imagine about how peaceful, calm and beautiful the garden would be, instead, the warrior machinery whirled away all night. Finally, his thoughts melted into dreams and he fell asleep.

CRASH! CLUNK! BOOM! BANG! PSWUEY! HISS! FLUNK!

The painful sounds startled them awake along with the morning sunrise. Frozen to his bed after a moment of paralyzing fright, Aedon slowly peeled his arm off the mat, followed by the rest of his body. He rose up, clutching a blanket around himself.

“What is it? What happened?” Auseten anxiously shouted.

With the end of an arrow, Areshia slowly extended the tent flap as Aedon peeked behind. She leaned forward to get a glimpse.

Beyond the military camp, a plume of gray, white, and black smoke rose from the Agglomeration signifying that something may have gone terribly wrong. Quickly they rose up and snuck along the path to investigate. Soon they saw a heap of mangled machinery filling the gorge below.

“Uh, oh, it’s a bad omen,” Auseten trembled while pointing. “Look what’s happened. The canyon has swallowed them up.”

“We should turn around and go back now. This is a warning if ever there was one,” Areshia pleaded, tugging at Aedon’s arm.

“Quiet enough,” Aedon hushed, gleaming with a spark of scheme in his eye. “Our opportunity has arrived. We’ll sneak down their road but stay hidden among the trees ... along the edges they have not carved out. ... Don’t you see, it will be an easy cross for us now.”

“Uh.. Ummm ... No, no,” Dumar objected. “Should not go, we should not go that way. I strongly advise against —”

“Why not?” Aedon asked.

“There are wild duck-eating crocodiles that way,” he squawked out.

“An old crock never hurt anyone before,” Aedon reminded him.

“Anyone? Maybe any human,” Dumar clarified. “Of course I’m just a little whining bird ... What starving wild crock would ever take notice of an injured-winged plump duck? Not that I’m that fat or anything.”

“Come on, Dumar. We’ll protect you,” Areshia promised.

As Dumar ruffled his wing he noticed Areshia loading feather-tipped arrows into her pouch; he waddled over to her, “If you need any feathers for the fletching, let me know. I have more colorful ones than those.”

“How cute,” Areshia remarked, trying to pay as little attention as she could to the duck.

Dumar was always offering to help in some way or another, but no one ever seemed to need his help or the things he offered. He knew that he was just a plain old mallard, and much of the time he spent reminding himself about how plain and ordinary and un-special he was.

The group gathered their belongings together and resumed their quest into the Agglomeration. Areshia carefully jumped from rock to rock as they crossed over the shallow waters to the other side. Suddenly one of the stones came to life.

“Hey watch my back!” a crocodile chomped out.

“Sorry,” Areshia apologized.

“What are *the bunches* of you doing here in my Agglomeration?”

“We're — we're just traveling —” Areshia assured him.

“You're an — *Uprooter*? Aren't you? Aren't you?” the crocodile accused. “Evil *Uprooter*, chomping away at my forest?”

“No, no. We are not with that channel,” Aedon guaranteed, gesturing toward the direction they came from.

The crock allowed them to continue, as each one quickly used his back as a stepping stone, except for Dumar who flapped his wings, seeming unable to fly. The duck jumped in the water and swam around the reptile. The crock licked his lips, egging on Dumar's fear.

Soon the forest began to thicken with an army of angry trees, thorny plants, and crossed vines. It was hard to move through the foliage. It would have been easier to walk down the wide lane that the warriors had cut out, except, then they would be discovered. They had to make their own route, no matter how difficult it was.

Leading the way, Aedon could hardly see what was ahead while he squeezed through the thick plants. An eager noise seemed to follow them through the forest.

“Shhhhhh!” Aedon hushed the others.

The sound stopped, but as soon as they resumed their journey the noisy pest seemed to follow. As Aedon hacked away at a

large vine with his machete, he could see a large canyon below. He stopped everyone; the following noise stopped also.

“There’s a large drop up here,” Aedon announced. “We can’t go any further.”

They looked out and then off to the side of the drop before them. There was a deep canyon with a steep cliff that would take hours to scale. Looking far away, down the ravine, the machines the warriors had brought to dig through the Agglomeration had run into this uncharted crevice and plummeted three *plethrons* (300 *podes/feet*) into the gorge. Their machines were reduced to a pile of mangled iron and their operators crushed under its weight.

Ausethen had an idea. He loudly whispered as if it were an order, “Get out the OPICOR and shoot us up a cable route.”

OPICOR was short for *Orichalcum Powered Ignited Cable Oscillator Rider*. They had brought just one. The OPICOR consisted of a rocket that would shoot across a ravine or up a mountain. The missile was attached to three cables which were wired to a pulley at the end where the cylinder was shot out. The other end of the three cables was wound onto a wheel which was manipulated by a mechanism energized by orichalcum, similar to how the *delta-transporters* are powered. Once the OPICOR was set up, a *T-bar* could be attached to the cable so a person could ride along its path. The oscillator below would crank the cable around, one strand going out, one coming in, and the third as a steady anchor for the mechanism.

“I really think we should save the OPICOR for the climb up the mountain,” Aedon advised, blocking Ausethen. “We’ve only just begun the journey and there are more difficult mountains ahead.”

“Eeeeewk!” A branch broke, sending a loud monkey screaming toward them. Appearing in their faces, an orangutan swung out of the tree above, she grabbed another branch dangling from one arm.

“Why — why you invade forbidden forest?” the creature asked.

Frightened, Aedon stepped back and then regained his composure after his heart had skipped at least two beats. Then he announced, “We are on a mission to investigate the garden above in response to Prince Lord Lemech’s decree.”

“No, know Prince o’ Lemech, but *Eee* help you. Help you find garden.”

“You know where the garden is?” Aedon asked, his interest eagerly picked up.

“Kali know — Kali know garden,” the orangutan confirmed.

“Where is it? Which way do we go?” he asked.

“Cannot enter ... cannot enter this way,” Kali told them.

“Then which way do we take to get there?” Aedon demanded.

“Garden up dangerous mountain,” Kali explained, “High above ice.”

“What a bright-smart, talking-monkey you are,” Auseten sarcastically answered. “We already know that.”

“*Eee* no monkey! Follow *Eee* now,” Kali squeaked out.

“Follow *Eee*? Follow her ... into the deep Agglomeration,” Dumar objected in a warning tone. “She’s a strange orangutan that wants nothing more than to feed you to her wild-beastly cohorts.”

“No, *Eee* help ... *Eee* wants to help,” Kali tried to assure.

“I really don’t think she would mess in fables with us,” Aedon told Dumar.

“She best not,” Areshia interjected, showing her harness. “I brought a hundred poisoned arrows.”

They were at a dead-end. The ravine echoed this with its smoldering pile of crunched machinery from the warriors failed attempt to cross. They reasoned that they would be better off following someone who may have visited their destination at least once before. They decided to follow Kali. The orangutan led them along the ravine in the opposite direction of the pile of rubble. They walked for hours.

Finally, they came to a fork in the way along the canyon. The fork to the left led down into the valley below. It was a winding trail which disappeared into a heavily wooded area, then emerged again. It repeated its disappearance again, before emerging and leading up out of the ravine on the other side.

The fork in the pathway, to the right, led to what looked like a bridge that stretched across. It was left from an era ten-hundred sun-cycles earlier when the *Agglomeration* had been inhabited by humans. You could hardly see the overpass as parts of it seemed to be petrified, other parts rotting, and most of it overgrown by all kinds of vegetation and trees, some of which had died. Peering out at them, nearby, were white-buttercup lilies rising at the edge, even their silence seemed to be trumpeting some kind of a warning.

Part of the structure hauntingly creaked with the sway of the wind giving an appearance like it was a living, breathing soul. While it looked like a possible gateway into the deep of the *Agglomeration*, it also appeared like it would fall apart simply by stepping on it.

“Bridge. Cross bridge to garden path,” Kali announced. “Garden — up ahead. Cross bridge.”

“That crumbling beam would hardly hold my weight,” Dumar protested. Then he looked over at Auseten (who was a few pounds more than the average guy) making his point without another quack.

Aedon inspected it, suggesting, “The route down through the valley seems longer and time may not be on our side.”

“Danger, very danger —” Kali agreed.

Dumar protested as he stomped his flat-webbed feet back and forth, “But we can't. We just can't — I can't cross that bridge —”

“For whatever foolish reason, why not?” Areshia impatiently asked.

“I — I'm afraid of heights,” Dumar revealed, hanging his beak in shame as he confessed.

“A duck — a duck that's afraid of heights?” Ausethen asked, almost chuckling.

“Go ahead laugh, laugh as hard as you've ever laughed,” Dumar squawked back. “Have you ever seen me fly? Even jump? Why do you think folks at the Irem changed the game to *Flamingos and Cranes*? It used to be called *Ducks and Geese*.”

Dumar was about to break down in tears as he poured out his soul, confiding his deepest fears in them. Aedon felt sorry for him. Picking up his satchel and turning about, he spontaneously announced, “We'll take the trail downward, then.”

But Kali objected, “*Eee*, many dangers in path. Much danger that way.”

“We have to give it a try. We can't leave Dumar here all alone,” Aedon explained, despondently holding his hand to his cheek.

“We'll have to leave the sled here,” Ausethen insisted, trying to get out of dragging it any further.

“Probably not a bad idea, we can double up on the satchels,” Areshia volunteered, snagging the lightest one from the top of the pile, before exchanging scowling facial expressions with Ausethen.

Kali no longer led them, but instead followed far behind while the others trotted down into the valley. With its steep banks, many of the trees were barely standing as half of their roots were exposed on the slope side. As they paraded further they discovered that they were spending much of their time climbing over obtruding roots and trying to keep their feet from tripping. The fact that they were carrying a number of packs and equipment made the climb even more exhausting. Upon reaching a large tree with a swollen root about a *pode* in diameter, they stopped to rest and regroup.

“The leaves are crumbling off the trees — what could be causing them to die?” Areshia asked.

“Not every land has only spring and summer, like Atlantis and Sahada,” Aedon chuckled. “Remember the stories about fall and winter?”

“Oh,” Areshia exclaimed, blushing. “Those aren’t made up fables?”

Aedon sat on the root, thinking about how he must navigate in a straight line, through the thick trees ahead, or else they would not end up where the path exited. As he was working out the details in his head, he noticed that the ground seemed to move. At first it was a rustling sound, then hissing started to vent from it.

“*Shhhh*,” Aedon hushed everyone. “Up ahead, those leaves on the Agglomeration floor, they’re moving.”

“Those aren’t leaves,” Areshia shouted. “Those are Calabar Pythons!”

Suddenly it was revealed that hundreds of thick red-tailed pythons were slithering toward them. They looked hungry and eager for a new meal. Dumar began running back-up the hill and Kali was already swinging from branch to tree branch, quickly escaping from the ravine.

It was a good thing that Dumar and Kali took off first, because they would have never stood a chance against the Calabar Python who enjoys: coiling around its prey; smashing it against a tree or rock until it is too limp to fight back; and swallowing it whole, while its stomach acids slowly digest its stunned prey over the next few days.

As the slithering pythons approached, Areshia took out three arrows from her pouch and lit the end of them on fire. Using her tri-string bow, she pulled back on the strings and released them in quick succession. SWISH! SWISH! SWISH! The flaming arrows flung toward the snakes igniting some of the dead leaves on the ground and creating a barrier the reptiles did not wish to cross. The group scrambled up the hill as one of the satchels from Auseten’s back snuck away and rolled into the valley.

“The food! All our food is in there!” he shouted, turning and starting back down.

“Don’t!” Aedon cried out, holding him back. “It will keep them at bay for awhile.”

“Breakfast was in there. And lunch too,” Ausethen moaned, looking back as if his best friend had just died. “What will we have for dinner?”

“There’s plenty to eat in this forest,” Areshia snapped, throwing her arms down annoyed.

“And I packed fruit macaroons too,” Ausethen complained.

The snakes twisted around the burning leaves in pursuit but gave up their advance once they discovered the satchel of food. The group made it back to the top of the ravine and back to the fork in the road where they had been just hours earlier.

“Kali told men, down path danger,” she reminded them, biting on a fingernail.

“Well, you could’ve told us there were pythons nearby,” Aedon shouted back.

“Kali no remember word snake, only danger.”

“What is she screeching about now?” Ausethen impatiently huffed.

“Most of the animals in the wild have forgotten how to speak. We’re lucky to have a guide who has a smidgen of a vocabulary,” Aedon reminded them, patting Kali on the head.

“Though it’s about the size of an apricot seed,” Dumar added.

Aedon let out a sigh of frustration, as they had lost time and he was beginning to think that he was endangering the mission out of concern for a couple of half-brained animals: one who pretended to know every grain of the forest, the other, a bird who was afraid of heights.

“We will cross the bridge,” Aedon announced, before turning to Dumar and letting his frustrations out on him verbally, “If you are too beak-brained afraid to follow, then you can just sit here and wait for us to return.”

“*Afraidy, fraidy, birdie,*” Ausethen taunted.

Dumar hung his head, waddled to the edge of the overpass and then sat down. It was half-a-stadia across the gorge. None of them were sure if the ancient span would hold their weight, but it seemed to be their only hope of getting to the other side. Areshia attached a rope to the end of an arrow and shot it across at an angle that anchored it against a tree.

“I’ll go first, just steady the rope and watch the slack,” she conferred, being the lightest except for Kali who was already jumping up and down on the other side beckoning the others to hurry.

The bridge creaked slightly as Areshia crossed. She clung onto the safety rope as if she were trying to squeeze juice from it. Auseten went next and then Aedon followed. The structure moaned as if each step they took was a painful stab to its body. Every once-in-a-while, some of the overgrown shrubbery would fall off into the ravine below. Finally, reaching the other bank, Aedon secured the rope so they would be able to return, even if the frame crumbled.

“Come on, Dumar. If it held all of our weights,” Aedon pleaded, “It will certainly hold up for you.”

Eagerly the others shouted out for the duck to cross. Dumar cringed, too frightened to move. More than anything, he wished that he could overcome his phobia, but fear wrapped invisible chains around him and told him that he could never step a single webbed foot onto that trestle. He waddled a couple more steps back (for extra safety) while lowering his head with disappointment. The edges of his beak drooped with a frown as he watched the others go on their way.

“I’ll wait here. ... I’ll keep guard,” he muttered, jabbering too softly for anyone to hear.

BOOM-BOOM — BOOM! BOOM-BOOM! The entire region shook from the marching Warrior Channel down the ravine. They had already constructed a mammoth bridge across the crevice, leaving their pile of rusty iron machinery beneath it. Over

their cheaply engineered bridge a convoy of warriors, staff, assistants and consultants advanced, all moving their entire camp as they progressed through the delicate Agglomeration.

“Certainly they’ll make it to the mountain plateau — and the garden — days ahead of us,” Areshia worried aloud, stopping to gaze at the competition.

“Wonder if there’ll even be a branch or a twig left on that *Tree* once we arrive?” Auseten grumbled, hopelessly.

The afternoon journey through the Agglomeration was long and slow. They passed under mammoth trees that grew taller the further they walked. As the forest thickened, rays of sunlight became slimmer, and soon they could count the individual rays on the fingers of a single hand. For quite some time they could hear water in the distance, and soon Kali led them to a lagoon where a waterfall half-a-stadia in height fell.

“Follow, follow. Up water *Eee* climb,” Kali squeaked out.

“Miss-misguided Orangutan, things cascade down a falls — not up,” Auseten snarled at her. “We can’t climb up that thing — unless you can turn water into stairs.”

“Perhaps she wants us to climb next to it,” Areshia said, trying to clarify.

“We’ve strutted over quite a profuse amount of terrain,” Aedon sighed before suggesting, “Let’s pause and rejuvenate before the climb. I think we ought to rest for a moment.”

Areshia set down her arrows and Auseten his gear, as Kali continued to object, “Rest? Before *Eee* small climb? There many, many, climbs taller ahead.”

“How are we supposed to revitalize our energy when you gave away all our food to those snakes?” Auseten grumbled, sitting down on a large tree root.

Onward, they continued, following Kali up the side of the mountain adjacent to the waterfall, scaling it the best they could. Half way up, on his first attempt, Auseten fell, but he landed safely in the lake below. Aedon reached the top bank first (after

Kali) where he was able to help Areshia and Auseten up to the new level of their journey.

The colorful leaves of the Agglomeration painted the forest floor instead of the tree branches. It was cooler and the wind scratched at them more easily through the sleeping limbs. A distant cackling sound puzzled them with its mocking laugh.

“What is that awful sound?” Aedon asked, turning about to see.

“Sounds like Enkidu,” Auseten joked, “The half-human half-animal man.”

“How do you know what Enkidu sounds like?” Areshia snarled at him.

“Maybe it’s Og the giant,” Auseten continued, changing his story as his imagination grew larger.

“I didn’t think you believed in giants,” Aedon said, reminding him.

A troll-looking witch popped out of the woods in front of them. She used a petrified branch as a walking stick and limped around, looking them over from hair to sandal. Her voice was high-pitched, condescending and she slowly emphasized every syllable of each descriptive word.

“What brings such innocent beautiful beings like yourselves into this treacherous, despicable, deep Agglomeration?” the witch asked, motioning them off the path to her camp.

Kali screeched in fright and leaped up into the nearest tree. Steam from a cauldron behind, slithered through the distant trees. There were carcasses and skins stretched between some of their trunks.

“We are on a journey, an investigation,” Aedon answered, feeling queasy at the sight of the dead animals.

“An investigation?” the witch continued, lifting her walking stick up with both hands and placing it (and its muddy end) into the pot, before stirring. “Certainly you must have ravished hunger pains from such a long walk. Come, I will feed your famished

imploding bellies. I have made a delicious, scrumptious stew like no other.”

They had all heard stories about witches and other stray people living in the Agglomeration who eat animals. They thought the stories were just tales, but, now one of those fabled witches stood right in front of them and was speaking. Kali moved behind a tree and began nervously biting her nails.

“She’s probably cannibalized those animals,” Aedon accused in a hushed whisper, holding Ausethen back before answering. “We travel prepared, and haven’t need of a meal.”

“Prepared?” the witch repeated, laughing. “You look like perplexed strangers unprepared to hike up the slippery mountain. If that is where you secretly conspire to journey?”

“Why the *Northernors* are ending and the weather is calm this time of the season,” said Aedon. “We’ve investigated and the *fingers of ice* aren’t as dangerous as everyone makes them out to be.”

“Yes, the *fingers of ice*. There are many stories that surround the icy mountains,” she said, “Like the one that says the snowy mountains are the fingers of God holding the Earth in his palm. Is that the one you refer to?”

“Not necessarily,” Aedon responded defensively.

“What would you know about legends, secluded way out here?” asked Areshia, fidgeting with her holster.

“The truth is, the ice was created by water that fell from the sky,” the witch described. “It turned into *ice-peas* which then piled on top of each other and made the large mounds of ice.”

“Interesting — though unbelievable,” Areshia remarked. “Can you imagine how many bazillion *ice-peas* it would take to cover a mountain?”

“Not to mention the *stathmos* of icy glaciers beyond that?” Ausethen scoffed, adding to the consensus of disbelief.

“Water doesn’t just fall from the sky,” Aedon remarked. “A most ridiculous idea.”

He was right to some extent. For all the sun-cycles that Atlantis had been populated it had never rained there even once. Their lands were kept fertile by the hot and cold springs, rivers, heavy dews, and irrigation systems they built. They had never needed rain nor had it ever come.

“Should the *ice-peas* blow or not, you will need certain cloaks of dimension to keep you warm,” the witch told them. “Certainly you won’t last more than a day in those unpractical togas and strapped sandals.”

“We’re doing just fine,” Auseten barked, helping himself to a tomato from a nearby barrel.

“She knows the area and we have days to travel,” Aedon pointed out, looking at the white mountain beyond.

“I’ll trade you younglings some personally-handmade furs and *broad-footwears* for those old cloths and sandals.”

“I’ll trade my garment, but there’s no way I’m giving up these sandals,” Areshia objected, taking the shoes off.

“What is so special about those sandals, all the time?” Auseten asked. “Aren’t they uncomfortable and freezing up here?”

“So they are,” she agreed, defiantly clutching them tighter.

“Her father gave them to her,” Aedon huffed, expecting Auseten to know.

“We’ll pay you with talents of gold, but wish to keep our togas,” Aedon offered.

“Gold talents — my precious — do you really think they would do me any good out here in this place?” the witch asked, cackling with a bit of laughter. “But, I suppose I could keep your gold until you returned with — something — more useful or trade them again.”

The exchange was made and soon they were on their way with new clothes, boots, food and even bananas for Kali.

Trotting back to the path Areshia asked, “These furs aren’t from dead animals, are they?”

“Do you want to freeze to death like the mammoths buried in the ice?” Auseten snapped at her.

The witch bid them well, waving a wrinkled hand, looking as if she longed to go with them. She didn't ask, and they didn't offer. She was too old to make the journey that was set before them, and she was too set in her ways to adjourn back to the side of civilization they were on. She dimmed her eyes and went back to stirring her stew, never looking up again.

The Harvesters climbed higher, the trees began to thin out, and soon they noticed ice on the ground. Just over an icy mound they could see smoke rising. At first, they thought it might be the warrior channel, but it was far too quiet to validate the suggestion.

“Temperatures are falling fast,” Aedon reminded, looking at their shivering faces. “We should either make a fire of our own or investigate the one before us.”

“Perhaps it's Enkidu's cabin that awaits our demise?” Auseten dreadfully speculated.

“Or worse,” Areshia added, exhaling a warm breath that lingered for a moment.

“We're not going to know if a friend or foe occupies this land if we stand here and speculate,” Aedon pointed out, leading them toward the smoke.

Slowly they crept over the icy hill where they discovered a valley covered with thousands upon thousands of tree stubs. There wasn't a single trunk or branch left in the area.

“These stumps are still green,” Areshia announced, feeling one.

“Looking at their pointed cut, it would appear that a plague of beavers hit the area.

Near the center of the clearing was a small cabin made from logs. It couldn't have taken more than a hundred logs to build and that made them wonder where the thousands of other trees might have gone. The four of them proceeded through the snow-covered field of tree-trunks until they reached the cabin. Aedon

knocked on the door as Areshia stood off to the side loading arrows into her bow in case they might be needed. A moment later, footsteps inside approached.

CLANG! BANK! CLING! Beyond the door, legs tripped over a pail. They heard the clang again. Next, after a bucket was kicked aside, the reflection of light, from a lantern under the crack of the entrance, grew brighter as it approached. The wooden-flap swung open and they stood there looking at each other for what seemed to be the longest awkward moment ever.

Then Areshia screamed, “Yapet!”

She flung herself upon him, giving him a big welcoming hug, as he tried to balance the embrace while steadying the lantern he clutched.

Aedon was less than happy at the unexpected reunion, “Yapet, what are you doing way out here?”

“Doing?” Yapet responded, opening the door wider. “I think a more reasonable question is, *‘What exactly are you doing way out here?’* ... Come — in — out of the cold.”

In the center of the cabin was a pit with a smoldering fire. It provided warmth as its smoke escaped up a chimney protruding through the ceiling toward the outdoors. The four visitors warmed their thawing frozen limbs around it.

“I always knew you’d come to proper realization, but I never expected you to walk here,” Yapet confessed, moving toward the table. “I didn’t stock-up on supplies proper to handle a whole crew.”

“We brought our own,” Aedon casually stated, sensing that Areshia seemed to still have some feelings for Yapet. He began to think that maybe she had come on the trip with a remote hope of finding him. He wondered if he would ever be able to pry her away to complete the mission now.

“What are you doing with — *HIM?* How embarrassing ... that you’re still around *HIM?*” Yapet scoffed, condescendingly. He talked about Aedon, in the third person, as if he weren’t even in the same room.

“He has kind of been our leader,” she explained, before setting down her gear.

“I knew it!” Yapet began, accusing, “I bet he has already made moves to wiggle his way toward the throne? It didn't take him long, did it? And what forbidden *enchancements* did he recite over ... on our grandfather?”

“I've made less noise than a tundra vole. What right do you have to throw accusations at me?” Aedon demanded.

“Have you forgotten that many believe the ancient prophecies foretell that he will be the *Uprooter*,” Yapet convincingly tried to tell Areshia in a tone that was filled with absolute conviction. “We had hoped that the prophecies would not come to pass in our day, but look at how everything is progressing.”

“Slow down,” Areshia interjected. “Nothing has happened to your grandfather — yet.”

“Yet?” Yapet questioned.

“Lemech took ill,” Auseten tried to clarify. “We are on an exploration to discern whether one of the garden's magical trees might provide a cure.”

“We are *the Harvesters*,” Aedon began, before being cut-off.

“Ah, the tree — *Foreverlasting* —” Yapet realized, shaking his head. “You're chasing after ancient places that are no more, and they say Gilgamoeh is insane. ... How ill is Lemech? How bad, what is it?”

“He was taken sick with some kind of poison,” Areshia confided.

“No! This conspiracy against our family just does not end. Don't you see, don't you see he — him — he is part of it all.” Yapet exclaimed, pointing directly at Aedon.

“Will you never see the truth, even when it blinks at you in the face?” Aedon snapped, dropping his gear to the floor. “I have come all this way, through treacherous paths on a journey to seek an antidote for Lemech. How could I possibly be part of a plot to destroy a family that I am so much involved with saving? You are

all part of my life. I don't want to hurt any of you. I just want us all to be together.”

It didn't matter what he said, Yapet was not about to believe that Aedon had a single drop of royal blood in his body.

“Sleep, sleep *Eee* must get sleep, journey ahead tomorrow,” Kali yawned.

“Could we stay? And rest just for the evening?” Areshia asked, pouting her lips and begging with her eyes.

“Yeah — alright, rest your limbs, but you will be on your way tomorrow, all of you!”

They were content with his answer and began to settle in for the evening, pulling out wraps from their packs to sleep under. Yapet sat watching their every move like a vulture circling the *Agglomeration* for food. He didn't trust them at all.

“Where is —? How is our father, Gilgamoeh?” Aedon inquired.

“You mean *MY* father,” Yapet possessively huffed, standing up, “Because not for a minute do any of us believe the lies manufactured in Atlantis. Maybe I was caught, trying to make changes to those results, but HIS *replica* had already been tampered with. He is not Gilgamoeh's son, he knows it! ... One of these rising moons you'll see that I am right.”

Aedon stood up, offended, he was about to stomp out of the cabin, but where could he go on such a cold-desolate night? Instead, he decided to take the calm approach and asked, “Then should I not be concerned about his health?”

“My father is fine — okay?” Yapet shortly answered. There was a long awkward moment, and then suddenly his façade broke down. He blurted out, “No, he's not fine. He drinks too much. He's having hallucinations and I think ...”

“What has happened?” Aedon asked with concern, turning back around.

“Yapet, where is Gilgamoeh?” Areshia asked.

“He's at the edge of the Bashan glacier, a long ways from here,” Yapet divulged. “He has all the animals in the area involved.

They're building this large structure, a giant abode thing, he calls it the *Tebah*. They've dug the basement deep enough for ... you know, for the giraffes. ... I was only jesting, I was angry when I yelled out for you to watch them until we built a place big enough. Now he's taken it seriously. He thinks we have to build a house large enough to hold them giraffes. It's crazy."

None of his rambling made sense and Aedon probed further, "Isn't that what Lemech wanted him to do? To protect and nurture his animals — for the next hundred sun-cycles?"

"Come on, Aedon. Giraffes in the glaciers? He has gone overboard." Yapet detailed further, "He goes on about having dreams and visions that Atlantis is going to be burned by fire and then flooded with water. Even if some calamity happened, it wouldn't affect us, not now, not way down here."

"You know, maybe he's just lonely," Areshia observed, "Maybe he exaggerates things, small things that are true, but he makes them larger, to get your attention. Like the old witch we passed earlier today. All she had was her stew and her furs."

"The tree stumps — you saw them all outside," Yapet detailed, "The beavers cut 'em all down, thousands of them. Then the caribou, musk oxen, lynx, and elephants began hauling them all down to the glacier."

For the next while, Yapet explained how all these animals had been organized to build this bizarre place that Gilgamoeh was now completing somewhere in the Bashan Glacier. As Yapet went on about his eccentric father, Aedon had thoughts of his own. He fantasized of his father building a special room in the place just for him and how he might throw a *coming home* party to welcome him into the family. Of course, such a thing would never really happen, but he dreamt about it anyway. He was so tired that before he could hear any more of what Yapet was telling them, he yawned and fell into a deep sleep.

While *the Harvesters* slept, Yapet remembered the *globeaky* he had borrowed from Areshia's shoe and needed to return. He quietly walked over to a table that held a number of boxes and

satchels. Tucked away, deep inside one of the bags, he fished for it. Reeling it near his breast, he carefully walked over to where Areshia slept. Then he bent over her bag and pulled out the sandals. He untied the ornament from the right one and replaced it with the *globeaky* he had taken months earlier.

Breathing a sigh of relief, he pushed the sandals back into her satchel. He had planned on giving it back much sooner. There were honorable people whose lives depended on the return of this key. Areshia knew nothing about how extremely valuable the trinket was that her sandal carried. All she knew was that it was a special gift her father had given.

The next morning Aedon woke to the sound of the door opening and shutting as Yapet was packing a number of bags and tying them to a donkey.

“Is he going with us?” Aedon asked Areshia.

“Nope,” Yapet answered, as he returned inside to grab another satchel. “I must inform Gilgamoeh of Lemech's condition. My father is the rightful *next-of-kin* to be Prince Lord should anything dreadful happen. I will travel North with the news.”

“Nothing terrible is going to happen,” Aedon assured him. “We are going to find this *Foreverlasting Tree* and obtain an antidote for the poison.”

“Where should we bury you?” Yapet asked.

“Bury?” Aedon questioned; he was confused.

“While I believe there is such a tree, I really do,” Yapet said, “The chances that you'll find it are pretty slim. And even if you do, aren't you forgetting that no one has ever come back from that place — alive?”

“But we have seen that the stars favor a positive outcome for us,” Aedon announced, standing up tall.

“Do you know how many people have set out for this fruit that is supposed to make you immortal, give you everlasting-life?” Yapet reminded him. “Areshia, I really hope you do not believe this manufactured seaweed. You're not going to follow them into this certain death, are you?”

“Maybe I’ll be the first one there this time,” she snapped back.

“Alright, but there’s something I need to talk to you about in private. Please, be here, when I return.”

“She’s coming with me,” Aedon proclaimed.

“Then what I have to say, doesn’t really matter,” Yapet emphasized, slamming the door shut.

Aedon stepped outside after him. The mountain winds had already begun to howl and the chill tore through him like a stabbing dagger. Aedon shouted through his cupped hands, “Yapet, where is Gilgamoeh? ... When are you coming back?”

Yapet turned away, riding his burrow up, over the icy banks beyond.

PAPYRUS FIVE

A POLITICAL POISONING OF THE OPPONENT

WHIZ-PLUNK! The astrolabe spun around as a piece broke off onto the floor. Prince Evad withdrew his hand pretending like nothing had happened. He strutted over to where the covered mirror sat in the chamber. Evad's curiosity elevated and he started to peak under the tarp just as Faeraud entered the room.

"You've arrived, I see."

Startled, Evad dropped the cloth, asking, "A pleasure my prince. I expect this invitation, to your private abode, is friendlier in nature than our last ..."

Faeraud interrupted, "Evad, Evad, Evad. Prince Evad. What are we ever to do with you?"

Prince Evad stopped and looked up, not sure what Faeraud's poignant tone was all about; whatever the reason, he was sure that he was up to something that would be rather unpleasant.

Faeraud interrogated further, “Do you know what *Podophyllotoxin* is?”

“I am well versed in many chemical proficiencies,” Evad said, pretending to know what it was. “However, please go ahead and elaborate — so that both of our memories are synchronized — regarding the details about Polydyf —”

“*Podophyllotoxin* — it is a poison — used to treat warts,” Faeraud explained. “When ingested, it can kill.”

“I do remember, indeed. Could that be what is ailing Prince Lord Lemech?” Evad contemplated, placing two fingers over his mouth to hide his worried look.

“Exactly,” Faeraud accusingly answered. “Odd you should know this.”

“I am overly busy-busy right now. How does this involve me?” Evad snapped, trying to hurry to the point.

“Do you realize where *Podophyllotoxin* comes from?”

“Must we play youngling games? I could ask you hundreds of different questions and you would not remember the answers either.”

“You, of all citizens, should recognize this,” Faeraud insisted, sounding disappointed. “It comes from the roots of the *mayapple* plant.”

“*Mayapple*? We use *mayapple-root* at our Tundra facility,” Evad reminded him, walking toward the door. “We’re ramping up production — wait, you already know this.”

“Interesting, indeed!” Faeraud sung, chomping down on another *tabaccum* twig.

“You’re not insinuating that I had anything to do with Lemech’s poisoning, now, are you?” Evad nervously tried to confirm, turning back around.

“I couldn’t begin to contemplate,” Faeraud huffed. “Although you know, like everyone else in the family knows, that Lemech drinks a single glass of *Gilgamoeh Red Wine* every evening at dinner. I commissioned several tests and do you know what they revealed?”

“Your insinuations are beginning to smell worse than the forgotten carcass of a rodent. ... I still don't see any connection,” Evad scoffed, becoming annoyed at Faeraud's long drawn-out story.

“Mmmm ...” Faeraud pondered, wandering over to the covered mirror and leaning an elbow on it. “I certainly see it. Your Fur Tundra has been dumping out *mayapple-root* secretions into the aqueduct which waters Gilgamoeh's vineyard. Their grapes have poisoned Lemech's wine.”

The seriousness of the situation engulfed Evad with such totality that he didn't even notice the fur shawl, over his shoulders, fall to the floor. With every emotion he could muster, he cried out in inequitable agony, “This was an accident, certainly no one would believe ...”

“Your ambitious motives have already levied a *guilty* verdict,” said Faeraud. “Do you think anyone would believe your trenches were just accidentally routed there?”

“Oh no! How can this be? How could those voles have been so stupid?” Evad began to blubber. “Surely I am through, over, certainly they will look for someone to *hang-out-to-dry*. I must stop this at once. Where is Evaemon, I must tell my father.”

“Tell Evaemon?” Faeraud questioned, folding his arms in a superior manner. “So he can confess the entire ordeal to the whole world, and then piously make everything seem alright? Who would ever trust you, your father, or your province again? All of you will be ruined. All that you've worked so hard for — will be gone.”

“This is terrible, more terrible than a *Territorial Quarrel*. How could this happen? What should I do?” Evad frantically begged.

“Calm down, now,” Faeraud consoled. “I am here to help you. If you're willing to trust me, to fully — *no questions asked* — trust me, I might be able to save your hide.”

“Why should I listen to you? Why would you — of all people — want to help me?” Evad suspiciously asked.

“You would rather risk a *hanging-out?*”

“This can’t be happening. I’m supposed to be, the next ... I have to be, I’ve just got to be the next Etruscan. ... What can I do? What should I do?” Evad stumbled for words as his dreams vanished more quickly than the steam dissipates from the *carrotting* vats at his factory.

“Let’s suppose that I do help you — no matter what you discover later on, regardless of what you hear, despite what is said or done, you must promise to always listen to me. And — never ever tell anyone that we had this conversation. This must be like our own private secret alliance. Can you do that?”

Evad begrudgingly thought about it, “What else can I do, you give me few choices.”

“I am on your side, all I ask is that you be on mine. If we plan together, not only can I get you out of this mess, but, I will make certain that you are the next Etruscan of your land,” Faeraud insisted, extending his hand for a promise.

“I certainly had nothing to do with this. You do understand that? It is fate that concedes to you and not the mighty Prince Evad,” he proclaimed, stepping down on one knee.

“Very excellent Indeed,” Faeraud accepted, locking fingers with him for a brief moment. “You must go back to the Tundra immediately and reroute the stream of *mayapple-root discharge* so that it empties out into the large River Athabasca — where it will be easily diluted to a safe level.”

“Certainly, my prince, surely, I will do exactly as you say,” Evad huffed with a grudge, hastily departing.

After a while, Faeraud left his abode and returned to where Lemech lay dying.

Evad’s father, Evaemon, was sitting next to Lemech, meditating and hoping that some miracle would save his life. Methouslan was sitting quietly in sadness, until Faeraud entered the room, at which time he decided to leave. Faeraud placed a hand on Evaemon’s shoulder.

“What urgent matter could be so pressing — at a time like this?” Evaemon demanded.

“I feel so badly about this. Poor Methouslan,” Faeraud began, “What a horrible pain it must be for a father to watch as his son's life teeters in the balance. I know my grandfather, like any father, would do anything — anything that he could, if it only meant it would save his son's life. And if there was anything that I could do to help him out I would ... without hesitation.”

“A sad day it is,” Evaemon agreed.

“In this time of tremors, I have come to ask for your cooperation. I need your support. ... I shall require you to back me as the next Prince Lord should anything drastic happen to my dearest father, Lemech, here.”

Evaemon could hardly keep the smirk off his face as he almost laughed out-loud, “Of all the overripe ideas on the continent. Support you, over my own son?”

“A wise man would consider — the fact that Gilgamoeh is banished from the continent. That leaves few qualified choices,” Faeraud whispered, placing a comforting hand on Evaemon's shoulder.

“I'd support my son and a hundred other's before you'd ever garnish a vote from me,” Evaemon snarled, brushing Faeraud's hand away.

“You would vote for Evad — the very person responsible for Lemech's poisoning in the first place?” Faeraud huffed, revealing the news.

“I have more pressing sensible issues right now than your foolishness. So, if you don't mind ...” Evaemon proclaimed.

Faeraud went on to explain, “Someone's Tundra Fur Factory has been spewing out polluted *mayapple-root* into the exclusive aqueduct that waters Gilgamoeh's vineyard. It poisoned the grapes and the wine that Lemech drinks at dinner each night.”

“As tragic as this seems, I am sure you'd want some to believe this was intentional; certainly it was not — providing the

case you present has even a smidgen of truth attached to it,” Evaemon deducted, standing up.

“Perhaps so,” Faeraud taunted, slowly pacing behind him, “But do you really think you can persuade, all the Etruscans, each prince, every citizen and all the gossipers to believe that your son — who has made no qualms about stopping at nothing to be the next Lord Prince — just accidentally poisoned the man he seeks to replace?”

“No one in their right mind would believe this was done intentionally,” Evaemon snapped, turning around to object before realizing, “Then again not all of our Etruscans are in their right mind.”

“As we currently speak, your son Evad is secretly digging new canals to reroute the poisonous extract. Two warriors have reported this to me. Certainly such an act will be construed as a guilty cover-up. Or did he consult with you — or others — before hiding this deed?”

Stillness floated in the room except for the deep breaths Lemech took as he struggled for his life. The color left Evaemon’s face and his countenance quickly became devastated, “My son — has ruined our chances, he has brought shame to —”

“Brought shame indeed ... and he will be *hung-out-to-dry* as is decreed for treason,” Faeraud was quick to remind him.

“How could something so *uprooting* transpire?” Evaemon asked himself out loud, before responding, “No one would allow such a *hanging-out* to occur — it was an accident.”

“That will be for the *Spiral Legislature* to decide. If only Evad had supported more acceptable politics in the past, he might find some Etruscans on his side. Unfortunately, the votes seem to be tipped against him.”

There was a thoughtful preponderance almost as long as the slow breath Lemech exhaled. Then Faeraud offered, “What if I were able to arrange a way — for all of this to go away, disappear — vanish — not a trace — and all you would have to do is trust me?”

“Trust you?” Evaemon objected. “I wouldn't trust you if my life depended on it.”

“It's not your life that depends on it, it's your son's life,” Faeraud reminded him. “Do you desire to see Evad *hung-out-to-dry*, your entire province made a spectacle of?”

“A turning hourglass will prove ...” Evaemon began, trying to grasp for an explanation.

“Prove?” Faeraud interrupted. “Your people can barley survive now, with most of your ground covered in ice. Imagine the shame brought about by a *hanging-out-to-dry*. Who would ever want to do business with you again? What traveler could feel safe crossing through your land? Your residents and their families will have no income and they'll eventually starve. Do you want to see that happen? Do you want to see your son *hung-out-to-dry*?”

“No. That will not happen. That must not happen,” Evaemon declared. “I reserve for the moment, without any commitment. Divulge to me all that you plan. Why I should believe anything you say?”

“If I inform you about my way, then you become a party to it, which may not be advantageous to you, should any of this be exposed in the future,” Faeraud explained while a stiff-edgy ambiance groped the chamber. “Do I not speak the truth? Besides, what else could possibly happen that would be worse than your son being *hung-out-to-dry*? I offer you a complete pardon, exoneration for Evad, in exchange simply for your support, yet all you seek to do, is laugh at me and nitpick at the details.”

“I'll need some time to consider your proposal,” said Evaemon.

“Time? Each moment wasted, Evad digs his ditch of death deeper,” Faeraud scoffed, pulling out his chewing stick. “Shall I call off the spies and do I have your support? ... Or shall I let them continue to bring Evad in, at which time all of the Irem as well as the entire continent will know of his offence?”

“Reluctantly ... I give my support,” Evaemon agreed as he hung his head in shameful embarrassment.

PAPYRUS SIX

ICY MOUNTAIN CLIMB

PLOP! Auseten's satchel hit the ground. Sitting down next to it, he complained, "I am certain that my legs will fall off if I have to take one step further."

A steep slope covered with sharp rocks, jagged cliffs, icy snow and hardly any trees boldly blocked their way. A fierce wind blew from every direction: North, South, East, and West. It even blew down from the mountain itself. It was an ice-cutting wind, and no matter what direction they turned it felt like icicles were being stabbed through their bodies. They wished that warmth from the fireball that hovered above the mountain would reach them, but the heat it radiated seemed to keep to itself.

"Garden close ... up there," Kali screeched, pulling at Auseten's arm.

"Just — up there!" Auseten shouted back in a cantankerous snarl, standing up and continuing his sarcasm. "Only an exponential height towering into the stars stands between us

and that garden! How are we getting there, Kali? ... Swing arm-to-arm, maybe fly, how about we take a boat.”

“Stop it now you guys,” Areshia pleaded, holding Kali back who tried to lunge a scratching paw. “It’s been a long day for everyone, but we’re really close.”

“We can’t stop now, anyway. Lemech’s life — and our promise — have both been hung-out to the test. Where are we anyway? Is this the *Talae Glacier*?” Aedon asked.

“The *Talae*? Come on, no one’s ever found such a place,” Auseten remarked, picking up his satchel.

“What’s a *Talae Glacier*,” Areshia asked.

“A mystical place made from ice. Supposed to be all kinds of ice statues and secret water tunnels,” Aedon explained.

“Mermaids once lived there,” Auseten added. “It was their biggest city, long time ago, before the glaciers trampled over it. They tried to keep waterways open but finally the ice overtook.”

“It’s rumored to be somewhere in this area — or maybe further down North, don’t recall as we learned about it way back in thirty-seventh grade,” Aedon said, setting down his bundle.

“Explorers tell tales of all kinds of places where the snowpack crumbles beneath your feet opening a mouth that swallows you up, then chomps you to bits with its icicle teeth,” Auseten gruesomely described, hoping to garnish a reaction.

“*Talae Glacier* this way, we go this way, now!” Kali excitedly chattered changing direction.

“No!” Everyone shouted.

“We’ve got to keep on course — for the *Foreverlasting Tree*,” Aedon insisted, beginning to unpack his satchel.

“I’ll estimate that the garden is just a couple stadia up there, boys,” Areshia suggested, trying to act as though it were a simple feat; however, her deep breaths gave away the fact that she too was tired, or at least that the high altitude was slowing her down.

“I think it’s time we broke out the OPICOR and let it do some of the work for us,” Aedon suggested, in hopes of

encouraging them. “What’s your guess, Areshia? Are we close enough for it to anchor up there?”

“Need to make sure we have enough rope — for the rocket to reach,” she said.

“I only packed a one-and-a-half stadia-length OPICOR,” he said, pulling out a small pocket surveying instrument. “The calculations say we are in range.”

“It better not fall short, else it could take half a day to recoil, and that is providing the rope doesn't snag on anything,” Areshia reminded, snatching the surveying instrument and rechecking the calculations.

Aedon tied back a bit of slack, snapped the rocket onto the easel, pointed it up at an angle, and re-checked its projectile. The end took some fussing to light because the string had gotten wet along the way. He began striking a metal slate with a spark that finally ignited the rope. The fuse hissed and sparked while they crept down behind a drift of snow. Moments before ignition, a gust of wind blew the easel over. Gasping with frustration, Aedon rushed over and quickly setup the contraption again. He dove behind the snow-bank, for cover, a moment before the rocket launched.

PUESSUEEEEEEE! The ignited rocket darted through the air, cutting through the cold wind like a hot knife. Up the mountain it ascended and just as it reached the edge of the plateau above, the cable ended and tugged back at the missile. Its shell crumbled, revealing an anchor which fell from the sky.

“It looks like it’s too short,” Austhen exclaimed.

“*Tuh*, it’s not going to make it,” Areshia cried.

Aedon grasped the *globeaky* around his neck, the one Ahteana had given him. As the anchor dove toward the icy mountain, all he could do was hope. Then, before it landed, a gust of wind whipped it sideway until the tip swung around and firmly wrapped around a pine tree, giving them a secure hold for the cable-rider.

“Help me stabilize the base between these two oaks,” Aedon shouted, begging Ausethen for assistance. He obliged. They tightened the ropes snugly in place, and then set the dial to its lowest speed.

“An OPICOR Model Nine – how awesome!” Ausethen admired, looking over the machine. “How many speeds does this type have?”

“Three,” Aedon replied, gesturing toward the dial. “With the cable touching a few of the tree tops, plus the rocky cliffs above, it’s obvious we’re going to have to coil-up there on the slowest speed.”

“Do you really think a thin cable like that is going to hold a guy with my fullness?” Ausethen worried, referring to his large belly.

“This is a Model Nine, not a Model Two!”

Areshia quickly helped out by unfolding the iron-bar seats which she attached to the cable, and within a few moments they were all set up.

“Make sure the *T-bar-riders* are attached — in the *going-up* position,” Aedon reminded. “Once a long time ago, I mistakenly fastened the seats to the wrong cable. When it was set in motion, it went backwards and threw everyone off.”

“Of course, they’re on the right line,” Areshia snapped. “Do you think I’d be that stupid? ... I mean — I’m sure it was just a confused accident when it happened to you.”

“Orangutan no need T-bar to climb rope,” the energetic ape explained, placing one hand over the other as her body dangled below. Before they had set the cable in motion, Kali was a quarter of the way up the mountain. It almost seemed like a game that was too easy for her.

Areshia and Ausethen led the way saddling up in front of Aedon who took a seat on the last *T-bar*. He threw the switch, setting the cable in motion. It started with a sudden jerk, as those things always do. Then, after a few seconds, their *T-bars* slowly

rocked into a smooth riding motion as they took flight up toward the steep mountain cliff.

The lower part of the jaunt was somewhat bouncy and harsh, as they were dragged through the tops of a few ice-covered pines. Poor Areshia got the brunt of it as she was the rider in front. The cable climbed higher coiling them up at altitudes that usually only delta-transporters visited. The trip up provided a breathtaking view of the country, but its enjoyment was overtaken by the frigid breeze that was windier than a storm coming ashore in Sahada.

“My teardrops are freezing. I don’t think I can blink,” Areshia yelled back.

“What did you say?” Aedon asked, cupping his mouth, “I think my ears are frozen, I can’t hear anything.”

“I hope this cable holds all of us,” Auseten worried again, clinging to the bar as if the steel seat under his fanny might break off at any second.

In the very far-off distance, almost on the horizon, they could see a dot of buildings. They looked so small, far away, and insignificant from their view point. However, it cruelly reminded them about the warm springs that bubbled back at the Irem, and how good it would feel to be sitting in one of those hot ponds right about now.

As they ascended up the mountain along with their cable, the ground below once again began to zero in closer. Kali reached the plateau oasis first. The climb exhausted her. So, she sat down scratching her head, instead of excitedly jumping up and down as she usually did. Areshia, Auseten and then Aedon disconnected their *T-bars* as they reached the end of the line.

“How do you turn it off, now?” Auseten asked, tossing his *T* to the ground.

“The controls are down there,” Aedon reminded, “It’ll have to just keep running.”

“Is this orchard the garden?” Auseten inquired, examining the lifeless trees around them.

“Very close, now,” Kali screeched again.

The plateau where they landed was the only known entrance to the garden. The hot volcanic air above, balanced with the cold icy mountain below, created a ring of pleasant temperatures right where they were, so warm, that they shed their fur wraps. It felt like a spring day even though the sun had already set. They walked further in, and the trees grew thicker. Soon they were in a wooded area made up of blossoming fruit trees from every variety known.

Famished, Aedon plucked an orange from a nearby tree, “Odd — fruit trees way up here — and orange season is three moon-cycles to come.”

“I’ve never seen so many kinds of different trees densely in one place,” said Areshia. “Have you ever seen such gigantic produce before? Who could’ve dreamt?”

“I have never — ever — seen such vibrant colors either,” Aedon marveled, plucking another one and handing it to her.

“And the aroma — just smell ‘em,” Areshia added, sniffing her nose in the air while inhaling large breaths.

Ausethen was too busy cramming peaches and blueberries into his mouth to comment about the place. The colors were twice richer than those in the plains back home and the juice that gushed out was more delicious than anything he had tasted before. Everyone wondered if one of these trees might be the one they were looking for.

A high-pitched, squeaky-fluttering noise grabbed their attention from above as there seemed to be a slightly thin black fog. The fog moved very quickly and was making the noise they heard. Squinting, Aedon looked again. What he had thought was a mist turned out to be a flock of fruit bats.

“Get down — down everyone!” Aedon yelled.

Each fruit bat had a wing span of about six feet. One of them dove down and plucked the orange he was eating from his grip. Areshia screamed, as another barely missed catching in her hair. She flung herself under a tree and drew an arrow in her bow.

Kali took refuge in the bottom part of a cherry tree while Ausethen and Aedon crouched low to the ground.

Ausethen called out, “They’re just fruit bats. Nothing to be frightened about.”

“Yeah — and they’re attacking us!” Areshia shouted back, as she waved her bow, aiming it toward another flying rodent.

“Something startled them. They’ll settle back in a few moments,” Ausethen declared.

“Settle? Back to where?” Aedon asked.

“Uh, back into the trees,” he replied.

“Come on,” shouted Aedon. “We better get out of here before they return.”

They gathered-up their things and crouched down low as they ran through the thick grove. They sprinted across the overgrown plateau which must have been at least two stadia across. The bats finally settled down along with the setting sun as *the Harvesters* followed Kali into a new Agglomeration, a forest of fruit trees. The evening air introduced a slight chill, but it was nothing like the icy temperatures they experienced coming up the mountain. Occasional warm gusts from the volcanic plume above kept them warm.

“Where are we going?” Areshia snapped, stopping.

“With her?” Aedon replied.

“The map is outdated, you have no plan, and we’re following a disoriented orangutan to guide us where?” Areshia huffed.

Searchlights interrupted as they scanned over the grove. Their lights shined through the tree branches like a dim ray of sunlight.

“The Warrior Channel?” Areshia exclaimed.

“Can’t we all move a little faster?” Ausethen asked, picking up pace.

Kali excitedly squeaked, leaping ahead. The four soon found themselves walking in a low dense fog that slithered along the ground. The fog seemed to be alive as it moaned with each footstep

they took. It became thicker. First it covered the stars above; then, they couldn't see their feet; finally, they could barely see each other. The fog began to make moaning sounds. It was like it was forbidding them to go any further, but they didn't listen, they kept hiking.

PAPYRUS SEVEN

LAKE OF GHOSTS

BLURP! ... BLURP! ... BLURP! The water bubbled in response to the creatures and their distant screeches beyond. Fog skipped across a large lake which looked like steam rising from a boiling kettle. Kali excitedly jumped up and down pointing into the mist.

“Eee here! Eee here! Garden here!”

“This is no garden,” Aedon proclaimed, pinching his nose at the smell. “This is a stinky lake of sulfur.”

“No, tree here, tree under lake,” Kali insisted. “Tree in water under lake.”

“Have you eaten a crate of spoiled bananas today?” Aedon huffed, disbelieving her claims.

“Maybe there is a tree — under the water,” Areshia shrugged, supposing that it might have fallen or even once been part of a valley that flooded over.

“The garden — underwater? Impossible!” Auseten declared.

Intimidated, Kali backed away behind a bloating tree-trunk. She sat there while biting her nails. The mist eagerly came to life. It wasn't fog they were seeing, but the spirits of ghosts that were guarding the lake. They took on the form of ancient white spirits holding swords, and below them the lake bubbled like a pot of orichalcum. It turned from white to an amber color and the smell changed from a forest-mist into suffocating-sulfur. The ghosts whirled forward, over them, around behind, and all about the lake. They seemed to be howling barely decipherable whispers-of-warning:

*“Kyrkoyun ahvu fuw!
To avaeto taeontor
taenaohvyuna iyr wenefo ...
Kyrkoyun ahvu fuw!
Khorupyun inlueyun aunouth toro
ahund fovor defo ...
Ahdu futa ontor khertyunoo epurvedon,
epurvedon copu ...
Slotwevo su ahvu!
Slotwevo su ahvu
iprum khertyunoo yomtuynt hetu ...”*

Then in understandable Atlantian they repeated the warning:

*“Turn back now, he who enters dies by our knife,
Turn back now, there is only death here and never life.
Do not enter this forbidden, forbidden space,
Return go back, return go back,
from this troubled place.”*

The ghastly voices hauntingly chanted both in Asterian and Atlantean, the languages continually mixing, first one getting louder then fading into the next.

*“Turn back now ... he who enters will die, die, die,
No one returns alive ... go back now ...
Do not enter the forbidden,
forbidden, garden, forbidden ...
There is no life here, only death, death, death ...
Return ... return ... go back, go back, go back ...
There is death, death, death ...
death to those who enter ...
Do not ... return ... go back ...”*

A splash followed by a horrifying, agonizing scream turned their attention to the opposite shore.

“What the *sayer* was that?” Aedon fearfully asked, clinging to Areshia’s satchel.

“You’re asking me?” Areshia scolded, tugging her bag away from his grasp. “You expect that I can see better than and owl — through this mob of angry spirits?”

The ghosts faded with their voices, as if they had been called away. The mist lifted just enough to give *the Harvesters* a glimpse. The water near the opposite shore bubbled up, then it swirled into a small whirlpool; then all was silent again.

Bright staging illumination-bulbs worked desperately to disperse the fog they were designed to cut through. A soldier made adjustments to one that was mounted on a tower attached to an extending platform. Scaffolding at the edge of the lake was nearing completion where another comrade was marched out to the end of the boardwalk. He was not very old and he shook with fear.

“No, please Senior Warrior, please!” he pleaded. “You mustn’t — I have been a loyal servant — directly serving the royal family. This is not my duty, not me. Let someone else go, no ... No I’ll do anything else! No!”

“Do great warriors beg like captured swine?” Andromache asked, marching forward where two other warriors shook with fear as they held open a scroll.

“She has the *Scroll of Water!*” Auseten shouted, standing up before Aedon tugged him back down behind the bushes where they were taking cover. “We’ve been betrayed, Faeraud gave *her* the enchantments.”

“Which enchantments? What do you two know about this scroll?” Areshia snapped, starting to get up to inspect.

“Nothing!” the two boys shouted, pulling her back down again.

Andromache gave her warriors a cold evil stare until they held the papyrus still. Then, she tried to siphon another enchantment from it, the best she could. It was difficult as each one was written in Asterian with its text hidden beneath the shimmering surface.

“She doesn’t know how to unlock it,” Aedon remarked with relief.

From another *cheat-scroll* she uncomfortably read, “*The truth, the life, the way; give passage to this man today. May he enter into the garden, and not become another martyr.*”

“My highest commander, I believe that you have to say them in Asterian,” the Warrior to the right of the scroll reminded.

“Do I look like I am an Asterian?” Andromache snapped.

The soldier shook his head.

“Push him in the lake!” she commanded. “Now fetch me that fruit!”

Another two Warriors forced the young soldier off the platform into the liquid. The ghosts swirled around him wielding their transparent swords. He screamed, first, in fear, then in pain. The yellow waters bubbled up around him, soaking his clothes and burning his skin, melting it off of his body. His skeleton could be seen for a brief second before the toxic waters devoured that, too.

At the shore’s edge, a metal boat was launched by four warriors who jumped in and pushed off for their attempt. As they

rowed beyond reach of the beach, the sulfur began to melt its sides. The paddles, which the oarsmen navigated with, were eaten away so that only stubs remained. Ghostly bubbles began to devour their boat. Then the yellow water boiled around their bodies melting them like wax from a candle.

Once again from across the bank, another Warrior was being pushed to his death. From off the platform the viscous Senior Warrior Andromache shoved him in.

“Think your life is worth so much?” she taunted. “Want to live? Then get that fruit for Prince Faeraud!”

Frustrated she turned back to the Channel, where only a handful of warriors remained, and shouted, “What are you all looking at? Do you think I enjoy this? I’ve never failed and I will not fail at this. ... You’re thinking you can all band together against me, aren’t you?”

The remaining warriors had indeed all been thinking of ganging up on her. Not one of them had said a word to another, but each one of them individually yet collectively thought about charging at her. Finally, one of them actually did. He was a frightened big fellow and he opened his mouth wide and let out a loud manly scream rushing forward. Andromache took a step back and gave the attacking soldier a tap with her commander's stick as he toppled off the end of the platform into the lake below.

“I can’t swim, can’t swim!” he cried, drowning in ghosts that swirled around. His clothing soaked up the sulfuric waters and then burned him to death. All of his flesh and blood was eaten away until only his frame remained. The ghosts coughed-up and spit-out his skeleton onto the shore where his bones crumbled with a chatter.

“Seaweed!” Aedon exclaimed, overwhelmed. “There is nothing anyone can do to get to the bottom of this lake, even if the *Foreverlasting Tree* exists there. This is the end of our mission — We’re all getting out of here, now!”

“We’re going back — to be harvesters of nothing?” Areshia creid.

“Even healthy fruit trees sometimes skip a sun-cycle of bearing fruit,” Aedon retorted.

“I’m not supposed to let you give up,” Ausethen blurted out. Then, realizing that his statement might let on that he was there to spy, he quickly tried to cover it up, “I promised — myself, that is. But, leaving this place looks like a good decision. Let’s go!”

The ride back down the icy mountain seemed colder than the ride up. They exchanged silent looks as each seat bounced on the OPICOR cable and swayed in the wind. What seemed to be a quiet dissension was suddenly interrupted when Ausethen made an exclamation. It was short and only two words. They were those two words that would stop anyone, usually stole hopes, and always meant trouble.

“Uh-Oh.”

Emerging from behind two oaks, Senior Warrior Andromache and two of her warriors appeared. Kali who was scaling the cable ahead of them, stopped. She hung there from a single arm for a moment. She too exclaimed (but with a much higher pitch), “Uh-Oh,” then she dropped to the snowy ground below.

“*Detach!*” Areshia shouted, so that they wouldn’t crash into the warriors ahead. They tumbled into the snow landing in front of the Senior Warrior.

Andromache announced, “Prince Lord Faeraud instructed you not to endanger this mission. I think you have interfered. I knew you wouldn’t keep your promises.”

“What is she talking about?” Aedon asked. Neither Areshia nor Ausethen said a word about how Faeraud had approached them for assistance.

“Comrades, it looks like we’ve just found our next volunteer,” Andromache gleamed.

Aedon noticed that she was addressing Faeraud as *Prince Lord*. Faeraud was only a prince who had only barely been suggested as a contender to replace Lemech. So, why she was

calling him such, he wondered. No matter, it looked like they were going to be the next meal for the *Lake of Ghosts*.

As the cable above their head spun around, Aedon remembered how he had mistakenly hooked up the T-bars backwards once before.

“Reattach — backwards,” he yelled, quickly turning his T-bar around and reconnecting it to the line. Within moments he was whisked away from them as he headed back-up the mountain slope.

“Stop him! After him!” Andromache ordered, pouncing toward Areshia. “And hold the others!”

Andromache snatched Areshia's T-bar away, pushing her to the ground. One of the other Warriors grabbed it, attached it to the cable, and took off in pursuit of Aedon. The last warrior grabbed Kali and Ausethen and held them.

“Faster!” Andromache shouted. The speed control was stuck so she took an axe and began to chop at the base of the unit. Her crushing blows to the unit caused it to turn up another notch in speed. Then, with a final blow that broke her axe, the unit leaped forward from behind the two trees. The tightly pulled cable suddenly became slack, sending Aedon and the other warrior crashing down into the snowy ground below.

The cable was now dragging their T-bars up the mountain slope. For a while they were pulled through powdery snow and were tossed about like the prongs of a rake moving through a pile of leaves. An occasional snowdrift blocked their route; however, the strong cable yanked them through it anyway. They must have swallowed what seemed to be a hundred snowballs thrown into their faces.

As the cable continued upward and the ground turned icier, Aedon was able to extend his legs and use his *broad-footwear* to ride up the ice like some kind of a ski. The ski ride came to an end as he bounced over a bit of rough ground. Next, the cable lifted them up. Rushing toward them was part of the mountainside: a rocky wall.

“Detach!” he yelled, quickly disconnecting his T-bar and tumbling to the hard ground below. He sat up, bruised, and began to brush off some of the snow and dirt. As he looked up, the warrior chasing behind him wasn't so lucky. His attention had been turned toward Aedon's drop, and seconds later he was whisked through the air above and smashed into the stony mountainside. His body splattered against it like a squashed fly. Gravity peeled it off the rocky wall before it bounced off a few more boulders and over another cliff.

“Where are the others?” Aedon thought, getting up and turning to go back. In order to reach the cable again, he had to hike down the treacherous slippery rocky part of the mountain.

“OWW!” A sharp pain in his leg delayed him. It had been hurt in the fall and it was hard to walk. He limped down the plateau to the edge of the rocks where the line could be reached. Below, he could see that Areshia and Ausethen were being held hostage. It looked like Andromache was about to cut Areshia's throat.

Aedon quickly connected his T-bar and yelled down to the others, “Wait! Don't touch her! ... I'm coming back!”

He reattached to the opposite cable and was back on his way down. With the extra slack in the rope, he was no longer riding high above the ground but was instead being dragged along the icy face of the hill. Then suddenly the line stopped. It was stuck and pulled against the rocky area above. The base unit began to slip and spin. Smoke poured from its burned-out capacitor. The cable moaned and stretched with a strain where it was stuck as the rock cut through a few strands before it snapped in two.

Quickly thinking, Aedon detached the bar or else he would have been sent flying hundreds of *podes* into the air along with the frayed ends of the cable. As he slid down the icy slope, he maneuvered his body onto the T-bar and stood up holding onto its center pole with one foot on each side of the *T* using it like a snowboarding ski. He zipped down the mountain at a dangerously high rate of speed.

Approaching the bottom of the mountain, trees began to pop-up. At first, it was easy to avoid them, but as the Agglomeration thickened, he found himself trying to maneuver an obstacle course. He swished-right and then left, each time nearly avoiding a collision with a tree and death itself.

He entered the area where the base unit was located along with his comrades. As he turned the T-bar sideways in an effort to stop, he swooshed right into Auseten where they tumbled a few *podes* along the ground before getting back-up again. The warrior helped them up and led them to where Areshia was tied up with Andromache holding a sword to her neck.

“What’s going on here?” Aedon asked.

“She’s going to kill Areshia,” Auseten blurted out.

The other warrior had to hold Aedon back as he lunged toward Andromache. She moved her sword closer to Areshia’s neck and proclaimed, “She’s not dead — yet.”

“Dead not yet — will be soon,” Kali interjected.

“Unless —” Andromache continued, “Unless you go back up that mountain and get a piece of fruit from that *Foreverlasting Tree*. It’s the only reason I have to allow a common trespasser like her to live.”

“But how can I?” Aedon asked. “The OPICOR is broken, there’s no way back up there.”

“Of course there’s a way stupid nincompoops — there’s my *trivelator-cab*,” Andromache announced. “We’re all returning up to the lake, now.”

Andromache stood up and handed Areshia over to the warrior. They all followed her through the wooded area to her *trivelator-cab*. Anytime one of them would step too far away from the path (or even off beat of the others) one warrior would growl and give them a push with his shield, while the other one would stop and show the point of his sword still at the neck of the girl.

The military *trivelator* was quite a bit fancier than *the Harvesters’* OPICOR with its double cables and enclosed box. They

climbed into the living room sized riding-car where Areshia was taken to a bench. She was shivering something fierce from the cold.

“That’s my lounge,” Andromache complained, motioning the warrior away and shoving Areshia to the floor before chaining her to a post. From a nearby barrel she pulled out a craft of wine and popped it open. “Here this will keep you warm for awhile.”

Areshia took a swig from the bottle. No one else was offered a drink and they dared not to ask for any. The other warrior walked over to the fireplace and began to warm himself.

“This is no time to get cozy,” Andromache shouted at him. “Put this riding-car in gear and get us back up the mountain.”

The warrior quickly obeyed and scuffled over to a large lever. Kali hopped over too and volunteered, “*Eee*, Kali pull — Kali pull stick.”

“Get your monkey paws away,” the warrior shouted, as he slapped Kali away before yanking the lever down himself. The whole room jerked forward and up as they ascended the hill. The car jilted back and forth as the cable whisked them to where they had been earlier. It finally came to a rest at the plateau adjacent the Warrior Camp.

Andromache opened the door and shoved Ausethen and Aedon outside, telling them, “I’d guess you have until about sunrise. ... Else, you’re little girlfriend here dies.”

Stepping outside, Aedon rocked the car, then grabbed Andromache’s sword. He chopped at the cables, fraying one as the car jolted lower to the ground. The warriors were not amused, yet they started to laugh.

“There is nothing to jest about here, I have taken control of the situation,” Aedon announced, stepping forward with the sword.

“My little prince. Do you really think things are that easy?” Andromache asked, grabbing his chin with her cold hand in a condescending manner. Then she walked back over to Areshia who was shivering even worse. Her face had become deathly pale and her eye sockets were lined with ghastly red and black circles.

“How are you feeling, Areshia?” Andromache asked, grinning with a chuckle.

There was no answer.

“Oh look at this, what could this be?” Andromache asked, picking up the empty bottle of wine that lay on the floor next to her. “Why she has drunk the whole bottle. Do you remember what they were speculating was the cause of Lemech’s illness? Huh ... do you remember?”

“Uh ... no one was sure,” Aedon stuttered, lowering the sword down. “They were going to check on the wine ... wine from *Gilgamoech’s Vineyard*.”

Andromache took a step closer turning the bottle around so that it faced Aedon square in the face. Its etchings read: LEMECH’S BLEND BY GILGAMOEH VINEYARDS.

“Unless you return with the fruit — the fruit that gives one life — I’m afraid that you’re beloved Areshia’s fate will be the same as that of Lemech,” Andromache said, coldly staring at him for a long moment. Then, half smiling (just the tip corner of her mouth), she let out another short chuckle.

“Hold on Areshia,” Aedon pleaded, exchanging the sword for a satchel of supplies. “I’m coming back for you — I promise. Our new continent has hardly begun, I’m not going to let it end now, not this way — hold on!”

From the doorway, he could see the vacant camp which had recently housed hundreds of warriors. A couple campfires smoldered, raccoons snatched up left-over food, and wolves scurried away at their presence.

Aedon and Auseten ran until they came to the platform that had been built at the edge of the lake. They climbed up on it and Auseten asked, “What can we possibly do? We have less of a chance than they did. Do you have any secret enchantments that might get us out of this mess? Can you invent one?”

Catching his breath, Aedon sighed, “It’s hopeless, only an Asterian would know how to use such magic correctly.”

“Isn’t there anything we can do to undo all of this?” Auseten asked, pacing near the edge.

“I’m afraid it’s finished,” Aedon acknowledged, stopping and looking down into the water. He was out of ideas, discouraged and depressed, he added, “We might as well just jump in and end it all, right now.”

“I’m travelling *outta* here, then,” Auseten exclaimed. “Can’t save Areshia, might as well save our own hides. *Ya* coming?”

Auseten turned away and went back toward where their camp and OPICOR were pitched. Aedon didn’t answer, but instead, sat down on the platform. Bewildered, he crisscrossed his legs and stared through the mist catching glimpses of his reflection in the pond.

A voice from behind whinnied, “Giving up so soon?”

He turned around and to his surprise there were two unicorns standing there: Meca and Ceca.

“I was *breathin’* a might of suspicion that you wasn’t up to the challenge,” Meca snarled.

“I didn’t know there were any civilized unicorns unwise enough to visit the Agglomeration this time of the season,” Aedon answered back, annoyed.

“You humans, always a *thinkin’* — and as mighty a thinkers as you are, *yur a thinkin’* is as easily swayed as a breeze.” Meca retorted, ending with a sarcastic remark, “*Ya* certainly adorned the groins about you with proper dress for an assault on the forbidden garden.”

“And I suppose that you know all about this — this underwater garden?” he said.

“More *bout* it than the *racin’* scavengers from Aszea to Sibussia — who’ve all learned of the quest and are *making* travel here now,” she said.

“Perhaps they will have better luck than me,” Aedon scoffed, tossing a twig in the lake which was quickly devoured. “How does a unicorn get way up here anyway?”

“All of this created by mere luck? Chance? Is that what you’re *believin’*?” she asked.

“Not at all, a mountain with this many dangers and traps had to be designed — by someone?” he replied.

“So, *ya* can think,” Meca continued, “After *‘em* hunters and fortune-seekers have figured out its design and have pilfered its parameter, what remains are you *plannin’* on?”

“Perhaps everything in this world was designed in a specific way,” Aedon resonated, picking up his pack and preparing to leave. “If only it were still in a sort of balance, where we would all still have access to the *Foreverlasting Tree* — if there really is one.”

“There may still be a way to trot into the garden,” Meca proclaimed.

“Why — should I listen to anything you have to say?” he asked. “This whole journey has been plagued by *know-it-alls* who *know-it-not*.”

Meca’s single horn almost touched the ground as she hung her head low. For a moment Aedon was sorry he had went off on such a tangent. Then Ceca stepped forward and said, “Long, long ago, Meca once lived in the *Foreverlasting Garden*.”

Aedon’s interest was perked, “You did ... but how?”

“My memory doesn’t stretch back that far, I’m afraid,” Meca disappointingly explained. “Bits and strands I remember, though. I believe the key that may get you close to the garden resides in the story itself.”

“You used to live there, you must remember something,” Aedon pleaded.

“Ceca and I must be a *stompin’ outta* here, before our horns freeze. Think about the story, for some peculiar reason I am certain that you are not dressed properly, though I don’t recall why,” Meca insisted, “You really are not dressed for the occasion.”

As the two unicorns departed Aedon re-pondered the story of the garden and why Meca kept telling him that he wasn't dressed properly.

"What do my clothes have to do with anything?" he wondered.

Then he recalled more about the legend: the people who lived in the garden did not wear clothes. Could that be what she was referencing, he asked himself.

"It's too simple, Meca. What am I supposed to do, just take my clothes off and dive into the lake?" he asked, shouting back at the long-departed unicorn. Then he talked to the lake as if it could hear him. "Stupid unicorns, think they can tell me to just jump in the lake ... jump to my death. Why you'd bubble up the second I stuck my finger in, wouldn't you?"

Then he sat down again. "I'm just going to lie here, and if you really want to invite me in ... into your little lake, then come and tell me. Send me an invitation. I'll listen — I promise to listen to your voice — I know you have one!"

He had to give this idea more thought, figure this out. Then he spoke to himself, "I am losing my balance — I'm talking to lakes now."

Just moments before he was ready to give up and follow after Auseten, a friendly message came. It didn't come from one or two creatures, or even the ghosts, but a multitude assembled and they began chanting the way for him.

PAPYRUS EIGHT

THE FOREVER LASTING TREE

SWISH ... SWOEIH WHAA HOUU SHAA ISH,” the trees cried, swinging back and forth as they created their own breeze.

“I know! I hear *ya*, already! ... I have to FULLY jump in,” Aedon snapped back, temperamentally short with them. He knew what they were saying even though he tried to tell himself he couldn’t understand the trees.

Anyone, before him, who so much as stuck a toe in the water, had been consumed. He hesitated with extreme doubt knowing that somehow he had to be different and smarter than those who fell. His father, Gilgamoeh’s freedom begged him to go; his grandfather, Lemech’s life depended on him to find the fruit; and his girlfriend, Areshia’s life waited for him to bring back the magical cure.

“SWOEIH WHAA HOUU SHAA,” the trees repeated; a branch snapped off of one trunk and dove into the lake.

“This is crazy, trees aren’t supposed to talk,” he exclaimed. Certain that he would have to jump in wearing no more than the skin he was born with, he slowly removed his coat, his *broad-footwear*, and the rope-tie (which took a long time to undo). With only his under-toga remaining, he looked into the pond where he noticed the branch that had fallen in moments earlier. It was deep down inside the pond and its leaves were acting like the gills of a fish as it swam back and forth.

“Strange that it doesn’t disintegrate,” Aedon thought aloud, finally removing his last piece of cloth. A chill shivered across his naked body as he stared deep into the water. Around his neck remained the charm that Ahteana had given him. He started to remove it too, when he remembered the promise he had made — about always wearing it; so, he left it on.

He took a deep breath contemplating his plight while remembering long ago, when he was a boy, how a mermaid had saved his life. She had taught him how to hold his breath for long periods of time. He hoped that he could stay under water for awhile even though he was frightened of the sea then, and still despised it now.

Splash! He dove directly into the liquid, head first. Within seconds he had descended down two, then three fathoms. From underwater, he looked up where he could see a thick layer of toxic muck. It floated on top of the water and was only about an arm’s length thick. The water underneath was pure and separated from this poison. Immediately he figured out that those who wore clothes, when they jumped in, allowed the toxic liquid to soak and absorb into the material. Their soaked clothes would burn their skin and while they splashed around the top layer, the toxic plume would do them in. Having jumped in naked, Aedon quickly zoomed through the sulfuric surface and his skin was instantly washed clean by the pure liquid below.

The waters were dark and he could barely see. Slowly he sank deeper into the lake. The round globe-like charm that was attached to the cord around his neck floated up as he sunk down.

As it passed his eye, he saw a sparkle of light within it. Instinctively he grabbed for it and brought it to his face like one would hold a *looking-glass*.

The miniature globe opened up a vision of the underwater world. Through it, Aedon could see everything perfectly. There were different kinds of colorful plants and coral reefs along with weird, yet friendly, sea creatures. Magic fish were swimming and seemed to beckon him to follow. He noticed a luminescent sea horse (that kept changing colors) and followed the creature between corals and then under a ceiling of reef. They swished lower, through an archway that cut into the sedimentary and continued through an underwater tunnel.

Soon, he came out of the tunnel on the other end, he could see a warm light streaming from above. Needing a breath, he swam to the surface. He gasped for air, and after a few quick inhales, he found himself in a pond somewhere else. It was a hidden interior cave inside the mountain which was only accessible by the route he swam. He climbed out of the pool and noticed that there were hundreds of other pools. Many of them had a tree beside them, his did not.

“I must remember to return to this pool,” he decided, noticing everything about it, “Else I’ll never find my way out of this strange place.”

He looked up where the ceiling of the cavern appeared to be further away than the sky. A shimmering red glow formed clouds of steam, perhaps from the lava bubbling in the volcano above. It was so bright that it lit up the entire cavern.

He walked over to a cherry tree but could not get close to it because a pond blocked the way. When he walked to the right of the pond, it moved right; when he stepped to the left, the water slithered left. It always kept itself between him and the tree. He looked down into the water and saw what appeared to be the top leaves of a cherry tree buried inside the pool.

Aedon went over to an apple tree and the same phenomena repeated. The mystical place was so fascinating, he could’ve spent

weeks exploring, but he had to get a piece of fruit and get out of there. Time was running out for Areshia and for Lemech too. There were so many trees that the cave extended further than the eye could see. Overwhelmed, he asked aloud, “Which tree is the *Foreverlasting* one?”

As he wandered through the garden of pools and trees, he tried to remember everything he had read or heard about the place. He couldn’t recall if he should look for a peach tree, a pear tree, a banana tree, or an apple tree.

Approaching the center of the garden there was a perfectly round tree which had twelve branches. Each branch was perfectly and symmetrically placed. Each of them had a dozen smaller branches that were also precisely measured. The limbs moved up and down and all about. The tree was very lively and appeared to be dancing to a tune orchestrated by the breeze in harmony with the roaring fire above. The fruit on each of the main trunks was different: one was draped with strawberries, another twig with raspberries, a different branch with boysenberries, and a further one sprouted grapes.

“Odd for a tree,” Aedon thought. Then he knew — he knew this was the tree.

He went to step around its pond and the pool sloshed around blocking the way. He knelt down and looked into the surface; beneath it, there appeared to be a giant eagle with its wings spread. The eagle was made from millions of tiny green leaves. They emitted an ominous glow of energy which lighted up the depths of the pond. He was about to reach for it when he remembered what Ahteana had told him: *Let the fruit come to you.*

Kneeling on its bank, all he could do was hope, pray, recite — He was tempted to make up an *enchantment*. He remembered how easily a *magic poem* had turned a green garment to purple and how another one had made the *genetikos-replica* come out in his favor. But, Ahteana had told him that humans reciting enchantments here would bring only trouble. There were

twelve fruits on the tree before him and he could not be sure that any *enchantment* would make the right variety come to him.

Instead he closed his eyes and thought about Ahteana, about King Yaswhen and about the good energy in the universe. He pictured Areshia and Lemech being alive and happy. He remembered an Asterian Enchantment that was a request for wisdom and guidance. He thought it would be alright to recite that one here, silently, in his mind.

*“Iprum khut taetouvon vuyune ahdu ahuzk,
Khunkzeveng unot stonutur arn meisyedo ahund everum.
Ahvofuro arn ez ahun umpurtunt kuzk,
Ahvuro sud ipryet ketz iyr wengdum”*

Which means:

*From the heavens above we do ask,
That you send us guidance and wisdom.
Before us is an important task,
Bear good fruit to our kingdom.*

The tree shook and then a raspy voice spoke, “I will grant you the fruit you need if you’ll promise to grant me one request in the future.”

“Strange that a tree would speak Atlantian,” Aedon responded. “Is it not told in the stories of ole that if a man is able to pass, then a bite of fruit shall be granted for him to deliver to his sick one? ... I have made it to this place.”

“But you have come for more than a bite. Are you not here seeking medicine for two?”

“How would you know this? ... I suspect you know everything then. Have you been appointed to decide who dies and who is to live?” Aedon questioned. “I thought you were a tree of forever-lasting life — life for all.”

“If I give you this fruit to take, you will find me irresistible. After two drops of its juice you have squeezed, more will you desire. Those who bite into this forbidden fruit have come uninvited and they will owe me their life. Life given — must be returned.”

Aedon strained toward its bark to see its voice, “What spirit speaks enchantments from this tree?”

The tree bent and bounced, its branches wiggled and finally a snake was shaken from its trunk. It slithered away. Aedon was discouraged and he thought, “Why did I have to go and frighten away the only creature I can communicate with in these parts?”

He looked down, sorrowful. His eyes took notice of tiny air bubbles ascending from the pond. They were coming from the underwater leaf-tree, from the front head area of the eagle. Its leafy head turned around and its beak opened up. At first he thought that he saw roots moving in the water, then he realized the tree had as many mighty branches underground as it did above. A reddish-purple fruit floated out of its beak. It was as if the eagle was expecting him and had been granted permission to release one piece of the fruit from its well-guarded branches below, underwater. One of the branches took hold of the fruit and swam through the clear water, poking up through its surface. The branch delivered the fruit to the edge of the pond and Aedon took it. It felt fuzzy like a peach, though its size was small, barely larger than a grape. It was attached to the end of a short twig with a velvety leaf which grew before his eyes. It felt warm like it was emitting its own source of energy.

“*Aedon ...*” the voice of the snake hissed from a hidden place. “*Yessss ... You hold the power of everlasssing life. Take it, eat it now, Sssshoulnd’t mankind be better ssssserved by a jusssst and balanced man like you? Eat of the fruit and you will be wissse and live forever. One tiny nibble and then we can rule the world together. Jusssst the two of ussss.*”

Aedon stood up, turned away from the tempting voice, and returned to the pond where he had entered the cavern. As he

approached the water, holding the fruit, he became dizzy. His vision went blurry and then he fell into the pool still clutching the produce.

“Put the wood on the fire, not in the middle of the floor,” Andromache screamed at Kali. Aedon blinked as he opened the door to the riding-car and stepped back in. His mind had gone blank and he couldn’t remember how he had gotten there.

“You’re back?” Andromache questioned. “I thought I told you not to return until you had the fruit.”

Aedon slowly opened up his hand and everyone saw that he was holding the bounty. Their faces turned to perky optimism as if the produce had ignited a spark of energy within each person. Andromache reached for the crop but Aedon withdrew it. He had no recollection regarding how he had made it back. At some point, after falling into the pool, he blanked out. He wasn’t even sure if he really held the real *foreverlasting fruit* or if it had all been a dream.

“Give it here, or else she dies,” Andromache warned, pulling her sword out and holding it toward Areshia’s neck. She moved it slowly across the skin, just enough to scratch a few drops of blood.

“Not until she is healed,” Aedon answered back, holding the fuzzy bulb high. Positioned above his mouth, as if he could eat it, he heard the hissing sound of the snake again. It whispered encouragements in his head, telling him to take the fruit for himself. It was like a high-powered orichalcum-magnet pulling itself toward his throat. He couldn’t stop, he felt like he had to eat it, just one nibble.

“Aedon,” Areshia called out.

He regained his composure, “Seems like I’m in charge now.”

“There for a moment, I thought —” Andromache started.

“No wonder why this has been concealed from man. Who could resist forever-lasting life, it’s a really long time,” Aedon realized, walking the fruit over to where Areshia sat.

She coughed, unable to speak. Aedon held the fruit offering her a bite, “This, I believe, will work miracles.”

“Only a drop of its juice is needed. The rest must be saved,” Andromache ordered.

“I know — I know,” he replied.

Then as he passed the fruit close to Areshia, its energy radiated, and before she even tasted a drop, its aura delivered a healing color to her cheeks. Everyone was astonished. Next, Aedon squeezed the bulb so a tiny drop fell onto her lip. Her tongue licked it in; then, she yawned and stretched as if she were just waking up in the morning. Her pale face filled with color.

“Aedon, what happened?” she asked.

“You’re fine, you’re okay. I thought we were going to lose you,” he said relieved, giving her a big hug.

“Where are we?” she asked.

“Well done, Aedon,” Andromache exclaimed. “Now let’s all get some sleep before we head back to the Irem at sunrise.”

He nodded in agreement and each of them curled up on a rug next to the fireplace. Then he carefully laid the pouch, which held the fruit, next to his head. He hoped that it would be safe there for the evening. He wondered if Andromache might be plotting to steal it away while he nodded off. She was wondering if he was wondering, so a contest of pretending to be asleep, yet testing to see if the other one were still awake, ensued.

Waking up the next morning, Aedon discovered the pouch was missing. Kali was squeaking, jumping up and down, while grasping the fuzzy piece ready to take a bite out of it.

“Stop! Stop at once!” Andromache cried out. “What are you doing?”

Kali continued to bounce, clutching the fruit, “Kali hungry, Kali hungry, Kali eat — eat fruit.”

“No, no, no! Not that fruit,” Andromache ordered.

“Kali not want that fruit,” Aedon echoed, trying to convince her. “Kali want banana? Bananas are much better.”

Kali lowered her hand unsure about the presented promise, but as soon as Aedon held out his palm, she gave the piece back. He breathed a big sigh of relief, so did the others.

“Banana?” Kali asked again.

They were all so anxious to secure the valuable piece of produce that they almost forgot to keep up their end of the bargain. Areshia reached into the bag of supplies and quickly discovered it was empty. She confessed, “There are no more bananas.”

“You lie! Liar – you lie!” Kali protested, as she jumped up and down like a child throwing a tantrum.

Areshia frantically searched all of the bags digging for something — for anything that might satisfy Kali’s impulsive hunger. Andromache nonchalantly marched over and opened the riding-car door.

“Will you amateurs just stop? Look!” she shouted, and then pointed outside to where fruit trees in abundance surrounded them. The morning sun shined down on the plush trees which were overflowing with shapes of fruit too gigantic to fit in any of their satchels.

“Bananas!” Kali delightfully exclaimed. She leapt out of the riding-car, grabbed onto a nearby orange tree and then swung her way over to a herbaceous banana plant which was perfectly placed under a spot of sunlight. The giant bunch of bananas was the largest she had ever seen. Each banana was bigger than Kali herself.

After picking a few more fruits to replenish their own supplies, they *trivated* down the mountain, gathered their things together and headed toward the bridge.

“Are we surrendering and following this new prince?” the Warrior asked, lowering his voice as he stepped closer to Andromache.

“Of course not, idiot,” she blurted out, stopping briefly to allow some distance from the others who were descending from the icy plains back into the Agglomeration. She raised her hand so he would stop without alerting the others.

“When we get into the woods, near the canyon, that’s when I’ll order our next strategy into action,” she explained, starting to walk again, except more slowly.

“What exactly is that plan,” the soldier asked, keeping a close pace near her.

“They must have rigged some contraption to cross that canyon. Once I am there and see it, then I can order a disposition. Be ready to follow my direction!” she snarled, trotting a distance behind the others.

“Whoaaaaah!” a blur screamed out, as it tumbled down the icy mountain and finally stopped near them. It stood up and brushed off the snow; it was Auseten. He ran over to Senior Warrior Andromache and kneeled down in front of her.

“Oh, I am so glad to see you — your Highness,” he fawned.

The others turned around and walked over to the groveling beggar.

“The prince of Aszea is bowing to a warrior of Atlantis?” Aedon asked.

“Tell no one of this,” Auseten embarrassingly said, while examining the situation. “Areshia — she’s alive.”

Aedon lifted the flap on his satchel to reveal the succulent produce.

“He who holds the fruit, holds charge,” Andromache begrudgingly said.

“I see —,” said Auseten. “Ah, I see,” he reiterated, but this time with a more optimistic tone of realization.

PAPYRUS NINE

BRIDGE OVER PYTHON VALLEY

SQUEAK! MOAN! CREAK!

“Did the bridge deteriorate another thousand sun-cycles since we crossed?” Aedon huffed.

Kali stepped onto the overpass and a section crumbled beneath her tumbling into the ravine below. Using her orangutan instincts, she grabbed onto the edge with her long arms to lift herself up to another plank.

“Keep toward the outer edge,” Auseten shouted, following her.

Kali grabbed tightly onto the wire Areshia had strung when they first crossed.

“The frame seems to still be somewhat intact,” Auseten assumed, placing one foot in front of the other along its outer edge. Aedon and Areshia followed, keeping a span of distance between themselves, in case another portion should give way and plummet into the canyon below.

Andromache and the other warrior remained at the canyon's edge as they hesitated to cross. "Wait," she whispered, concocting another plan in her head.

Ausethen made it across first and just as Andromache stepped onto the edge of the bridge, a section underneath Areshia's feet crumbled. Aedon firmly held onto the cable, caught Areshia and pulled her back up, "Grab the line and hold on!"

They hung there, dangling above the ravine, the rope became their only life line. With the jerk of the fall, the pouch Aedon was carrying, containing the precious piece of fruit, plunged down into the canyon below.

All at once, everyone gasped as the prized treasure fell away. Dumar, who was watching from the other side, opened his beak, but not even a quack came out. In the valley below, a dozen slithering pythons watched it drop into their den. Hundreds of them slithered toward the gourmet meal delivered to them from heaven above.

"See what happens when amateurs take charge," Andromache shouted out. Then she turned to her warrior and ordered, "Back to our causeway — along the ravine, we'll sneak down from there and get it. ... I'll see that all of them, especially that Areshia, are *hung-out-to-dry* — after I return with the king's prize."

The two of them left, assuming that the others would probably fall to their death below. Quickly thinking, Aedon remembered the rope-tie he was wearing. Hanging onto the cable above, he let go with one hand and began undoing the belt from around his waist. It was difficult to maneuver but he finally got it off. After a couple of attempts at throwing it over his head to the wire, its buckle finally caught. He now had a rope attached to the line above, which he could climb on down.

"I can't hang on to this thing. It's cutting my hands!" Areshia yelled.

"Get the treasure!" Ausethen shouted. "Get the fruit before the pythons do!"

Areshia managed to climb back to the north side of the bridge where they had started from, leaving Aedon dangling in a position which bobbed up and down over the pythons below.

“Aedon, what are you doing? It’s not worth it anymore,” she cried out.

“He’s made it this far. Should he just give up now?” Ausethen huffed. “Get it, quick, before the pythons devour it!”

“Lemech’s life depends on this, I have to get my satchel back!” Aedon responded, climbing down the rope while hoping that it would support his weight and not snap. Slowly he inched his way to its end. It was still too short and just shy of the canyon floor, he couldn’t reach it. The snakes slithered closer.

“Areshia! Ausethen! Can you dole out more line — enough to make it down further,” Aedon called out. “But don’t give me too much, I don’t want to go crashing into the floor.”

They carefully loosened the cable on each end so the line would lower him further. Soon he was a few *podes* above the pouch, and the pythons were also inches away as well.

“That’s as far as the line goes,” Areshia shouted out.

His feet were closer to the ground than his hands were; yet, still not within reach. So he hoisted himself back up the rope a little, tied it around his leg, and turned upside down. He could almost reach the pouch.

A hungry python lunged at Aedon as he quickly retracted himself back. He climbed up the rope a little further and then let go again, diving toward the valley floor. His weight pulled on the elasticity of the cable giving him just enough length to reach it. He snatched the pouch away from the strike of a constricting python that had just begun to wrap its body around the bag.

“Up! Up! I’ve got it, bring me up!” he urgently shouted, bouncing with the cable’s reverb.

Reversing the rope, both Areshia and Ausethen began pulling in the line and tightening the slack at each end by wrapping it around tree branches.

“I knew it would take a stampede of unicorns to stop you,” Auseten complimented, flattering the hero.

“Don’t lose that thing again,” Areshia admonished.

“Yeah, you almost lost it entirely,” Auseten snarled. Then he came up with a idea. It was one of those suggestions he had been waiting the entire journey to make, but he had to wait for the right opportunity to present itself and now it had. He stepped forward and said, “Why don't you throw that pouch here to safety — before it falls back in the pit again?”

“Good idea,” Areshia echoed.

“I can help too, throw it to me,” Dumar quaked out.

Auseten kicked the duck out of the way, “I’ve got it!”

Aedon hesitated knowing that Auseten had deserted him more than once and then went on to kiss the feet of his enemy.

“Certainly you don’t want to lose it again, do you?” Auseten snapped, holding his arms out ready to catch it. “We’re all on the same side, aren’t we?”

Snakes in the pit below began coiling up, as high as they could, trying to snatch the dangling food. Shaking one off, Aedon pitched the bag over to Auseten who clumsily caught it even though he wasn't that far away.

Moments after tossing the pouch, Aedon notice his line slipping; he began dropping back into the canyon. On the bank above, Auseten was standing there mesmerized by the catch he held while his end of the rope slid away. He opened the satchel and held the produce in his two hands, dropping the pouch and leaving it on the ground. He wasn't paying attention or talking to the others and was distracted as if the prize had cast a spell over him.

He began talking to the fruit he held, “Treasure from the *Foreverlasting Tree* itself, the very fruit that can make a man immortal. One bite and I'll live for another hundred sun-cycles, the entire piece and I'll live for fifty-hundred.”

Within two minutes half-a-dozen Aszean warriors appeared, standing on the edge of the other side of the ravine. They

packed up various tools that were there, but, had been unnoticed until now, while Auseten congratulated them.

“The Prince of Aszea rules. Weren’t you warned that there might be princes from other lands interested in such a prize? And did you really think such a strong petrified bridge would crumble away by itself at just the right moment without some help? Petrified wood is very strong, I thought you were smarter than that Aedon.”

“Auseten! Come back here!” Aedon shouted. “Help me! At least help me out of this pit!”

“Get back here!” Areshia echoed. “Don’t just leave us here!”

Kali stood at the other end of what remained of the bridge. She looked at them and then turned in the direction Auseten was walking. She looked back and forth not sure what to do.

“Kali, help us,” Aedon called to her.

“You lie — Kali like fruit,” the orangutan yelped, bolting off in the direction Auseten had gone.

Dumar paced back and forth his webbed feet stirring up enough dust to make him cough and then be still. Observing the end of their journey was near, he remarked, “Well, that’s that. No one wants my help here, might as well go back home where I can be useful to someone.”

The duck, discouraged as ever, waddled away feeling sorry himself and wondering why no one ever let him help out.

The cable slipped further and once again, Aedon was dangling just a few *podes* from the angry pythons who looked like they would be satisfied with him for dinner. Grunting, Areshia pulled up the slack to an area where Aedon was able to get a footing on another section of the bridge. Reaching the bank, he coiled up the line and secured it where Auseten had vacated.

“Areshia, you’ve got to hang onto the rope and come back this way,” Aedon insisted.

“The cable already cut my hands, I can’t hang on any more,” she cried out. “But watch this.”

She stepped out onto the cable and started to walk across the line. She was more perfectly balanced than a tightrope walker.

As she approached, she stopped where Aedon's rope-tie was, squatted down, and untangled it.

"Didn't you forget something? You weren't going to leave behind, this choice gift someone picked out for you?" she asked, gesturing to the dangling rope-tie she had given him weeks earlier.

"I was ... I was going to fish it out once you were back here, safely," he made up.

She snatched the rope-tie up from the valley of snakes, shaking one of them off of it. Then she completed crossing the ravine by walking down the cable one sandal in front of the other. She handed Aedon the tie which he gladly took. They instinctively embraced. Both of them had made it back, but their prize was gone.

"Aedon, what do we do now?" Areshia asked, sitting down on the edge of the cliff.

"I don't know," he sighed, sitting next to her, exhausted. "Meditate? Pray? Recite? Hope that Ausethen takes the fruit to Lemech."

"There's about as much of a chance of that happening as a moon falling out of the sky," she remarked.

Seeing the spell of greed that came over the Aszean prince, Aedon had to admit that delivering the fruit to Lemech was the furthest thing from Ausethen's mind.

"It's clear as a still pond, that Ausethen will eat the fruit himself," Aedon admitted, lowering his head with defeat.

The trees around them were silent, turning from green to brown and many were drying up and falling from their branches just like their hopes had. Aedon picked up the empty pouch that lay on the ground next to them. He held onto it while pondering conflicted thoughts of recollection mixed in with confused anxieties of failure. He questioned why he had not allowed Andromache to take the fruit, then, at least maybe Lemech would have gotten a drop

"There's nothing else we can do now ... except maybe meditate," Aedon depressingly said, then added, "Maybe not, mediation is too painful."

Quack! Quack! Quack! From high above, a duck flew out of the sky hanging onto a round object in his beak. He darted toward Aedon and dropped it. The piece of produce, the treasure, dropped out of the sky right into his hands. Aedon was as surprised as a startled owl.

Circling around and making a perfect landing a few *podes* away was the duck. He waddled over to them and ruffled his feathers shaking off the evening chill.

“Dumar? Dumar, was that you flying?” Aedon asked.

“Me, that was me, all right! I told you, I told you I could help out,” he proudly announced as he stood up tall, his breast plumped out like the proudest of all birds, and rightfully so.

“But how?” Areshia asked. “I thought you were afraid of flying.”

“Dumar — too frighten? Of all the silly nonsense. I decided that I just had to try to help, somehow, someway,” he explained, and then demonstrated as well. “I stepped onto a small rock and hopped off of it. Then I walked up to a higher bolder and jumped off of it, then a much higher one. Faster than a duck learns to swim, I was leaping off of the bridge itself and flying down into the valley below.”

“Miracles, everyday!” Aedon exclaimed.

Then they gathered up their things and headed back to the Irem.

Journeying from the Agglomeration, they heard a man approaching on a horse. Aedon wasn't sure who was coming, and so he carefully hid the pouch among his other things. The man on the horse came to a stop and threw back the hood which covered his face. It was Yapet. He climbed down off of his animal and approached with a very concerned face.

“Areshia, it is not safe for you to return to the Irem,” he proclaimed.

“And I suppose that I am safe here,” she sarcastically objected, “Here where you can protect me from the witches and beasts of winter?”

“She has scaled the mysterious icy mountain, what danger could there be in Atlantis that she couldn’t conquer?” Aedon asked.

Aedon was suspicious that Yapet just wanted to break up his team or at least steal Areshia back. However, his inklings were quieted with an explanation.

“I had a dream ... a nightmare, that you returned to Atlantis and were somehow captured and *hung-out-to-dry*,” Yapet explained.

“I’m supposed to change my plans — uproot my entire life — because of a faint dream? Has the cold weather frozen your brain?” she snapped back.

“Andromache did threaten such a scenario,” Aedon reminded, quickly shutting-up, realizing he wasn’t helping his own case.

“Rumors are circulating, word has reached all the way to Bashan that the poison Lemech ingested was found in the vines from Gilgamoeh's vineyard. Areshia, you were a keeper at the vineyard, right before equinox break, the same time that those grapes were harvested and bottled. I fear they’ll try to pin this on you if you return,” Yapet revealed.

“But I was not responsible for the produce, all I did was look-in on the place,” she said.

“This could be twisted and teeter in the balances against you,” he explained further. “They want nothing more, in Atlantis, than to hang my father *out-to-dry*. They would concoct any plot to put away his supporters as well.”

“And they’re not plotting the capture of Aedon?” she asked, reasoning that he would be in a similar predicament.

“Because he’s an embarrassment — they welcome that,” Yapet snarled.

“Embarrassment to who ... you, Yapet?” Aedon objected.

“Where should I to go?” Areshia complained, as she threw her satchel down and kicked it. “I want to return to Mestor. My father's abode is there and I have matters to settle, matters that don't involve you.”

“If this is true, about the poisoning,” Aedon told her, “You can't go anywhere in Atlantis.”

“Even if she were declared innocent, wouldn't you agree that she would spend the rest of her days testifying in debates about the situation?” Yapet sighed, “She would literally be an outcast forever.”

“If you wish, you may come with me to my father's lodge. There is plenty of room. It is enormous at four and half *plethrons*. The lower deck is almost complete and it's sunk deep into the glacier, underground and hidden away.”

“Four and half *plethrons*, has he decided to build his own Irem in the ice?” Areshia asked. “You could fit a ...”

Aedon finished her words, “Giraffe ... in there. Where is my father — Gilgamoeh's abode located?”

“The glacier in Bashan,” Yapet shortly answered.

“I know that! How many degrees from the *Ablagy* pyramid?” Aedon asked, wanting specifics. “I want to come back — I am coming back for her.”

“You'd faint from the thin atmosphere that high up,” Yapet retorted.

“The freezing-cold glacier doesn't sound like much of an inviting place,” Areshia pouted.

“You could go back to Sahada or some other land for awhile?” Aedon suggested.

“How's she going to handle getting over there?” Yapet asked. “Our abode is much closer. You know it is the perfect choice — the only place for her to remain safe for now.”

“If I stay,” she huffed.

“I think the frigid weather has frozen your brain and not mine,” Yapet said.

Areshia paced back and forth, very disappointed that she would not be able to return. She stomped back to her satchel and yanked an arrow out of the pouch, broke it in two and threw it on the ground.

Aedon tried to console her temper-tantrum, “I wish that it was I that was staying, and you who were going. Do you know how badly I want to visit my father? Maybe Dumar could deliver the fruit”

“NO!” all the others shouted in agreement.

Yapet rolled his eyes still unbelieving of Aedon’s relatedness. Then he brought up some things about Gilgamoeh, possibly to try and discourage him from coming along.

“Remember, I told you Gilgamoeh was seeing visions,” Yapet reminded Aedon. “Construction on the lodge started shortly after he had a dream. He told us that King Yaswhen had commanded him to build in the Bashan glacier. That’s where it all started. I think he’s frozen his faculties. It was really peculiar. He woke up from this dream with dimensions in his head, plans, materials outlined, and even a guest list.”

“A guest list?” Aedon asked. “Is Gilgamoeh returning to Atlantis to invite guests? Who would take to travelling way down here into all this ice?”

“Sounds crazy. Is this what happens to someone’s mind when they are banished to spending a hundred sun-cycles of their life in the glaciers?” Areshia huffed.

“Dumar and I will make the trip back to the Irem,” Aedon confirmed. Then he told Areshia, “I think it's probably best for you to stay and take refuge in Bashan. After Lemech is well, I will return. I’ll come back here for you.”

“No,” she whined, “Who will take care of my abode in Mestor?”

“I will look after it,” Aedon volunteered, helping her gather her belongings that were strewn across the snow.

“Watch out for the owls, near her abode,” Yapet warned.

“Sometimes I wonder who the real crazy-one is: our father, or you?” Aedon scoffed at Yapet, helping Areshia aboard the horse.

Dumar and Aedon made it back to the *delta-transporter* and by the next evening they arrived at the outskirts of the Irem.

PAPYRUS X

BEARER OF FAÇADES

An amber shadow moved across the Irem as the afternoon sun was blocked by an eclipse of the Asterian moon, yet no one seemed to be watching the celestial event. Aedon nervously swallowed as he steered *Skyola*, his delta-transporter, toward the outer region of the Irem. He aimed to land it in a *stowaway* near the royal vessels which would then take him the rest of the way in. Before he touched down, two escorting deltas swooshed up beside him, one on each side. A warrior popped out of the top of one.

Through a trumpet, he announced, “We have been instructed to escort you to the inner-circle for immediate reception.”

There was a landing pad at the Royal Irem, but it had been restricted for emergencies and rarely used. Aedon suddenly felt privileged and important as he was directed in. Royally dressed owls, geese and flying horses led the way.

He maneuvered his delta down to the landing pad as the fanfare of beasts and fowl disappeared. He opened the hatch and gathered his belongings together along with the pouch. A red cloth was rolled over the ground from the entrance of the Irem to the door of his delta. He felt bewildered, nervous and excited all at the same time. His clothes were still very dirty and torn from the adventures he had. His hands were dry and cracked, and there was even some dried blood on his toga where his leg had been cut. His garment was dirty and torn from being dragged down the icy mountain the day before. He looked a mess and was sure he would be scolded and sent to clean-up at once.

He stepped out onto the walking-material as two warriors escorted him inside. They never said a word until they noticed Dumar, the duck, following.

“Ducks are not permitted,” the warrior scowled, stopping everyone in route.

“What? I do protest,” Dumar quaked, fanning his wings with objection. He was made to wait outside anyway.

A company of six more warriors marched behind Aedon in a formal processional, each of their steps pounding in unison as they entered the Royal Irem. Aedon tried to step to their walk, but seemed to be rhythmically challenged to such metronomic marching. Everyone they passed had concerned frowns on their faces as if they were already mourning the death of Lemech.

They turned left and marched down a long hall lined with more warriors, each of them saluting as they passed. Next, they came by Senior Warrior Andromache. She skewered her face, barely lifting a finger to salute. Obviously, she had made it back to the Irem without the prize, and probably faced a demotion.

Then they walked through tall doors that had to be unlocked, made a turn, went through two more doors and finally they came to a room which Aedon assumed to be his destination. He looked around and realized that he had been there before. It was the royal family dining quarters, except that it was not decorated for dinner this time. There were no bands, fancy fruits,

parades of plates, or festivities. The room was dark, lonely and cold. The window which was so big and bright before, now seemed far away, and the outside was even further beyond, covered by a tinted dark glass.

“So, you went and you accomplished it,” Faeraud scolded, stepping from the shadows. Then his tone slowly did an about-face turning into joyous excitement. “I knew that if anyone could access that garden it would be you, my very close friend, my *Smart-owl*. ... So, is this the fruit?”

Aedon clung to the pouch as Faeraud opened it and peeked in.

“You only brought one? Where are the other pieces?” Faeraud asked, looking disappointed.

Aedon was still in such a private aura of divine profoundness that he could not speak. Faeraud didn't want an answer, anyway. He was unemotional, almost as if he was disappointed that the fruit had been discovered.

“Congratulations,” Faeraud said, pouting as he sat down on a lounge. “You did it. You have won the prize.”

“Won? This wasn't done to take place in a contest. It is a miracle that we even have this product in our hands. It was given to us so that Lemech will live,” Aedon said, trying to assure him that he had no intentions of keeping the fruit for himself, unlike the other selfish men it seemed to cast a spell over.

“How noble,” Faeraud scoffed. “You are famous, Aedon. All of Atlantis will hear of your works. You will be spiraling up the legislature to the top of the political helm in no time at all. Prince Lord Lemech could possibly even name you as the successor to his throne. You'll have the whole legislature to run now. You will have to be responsible for all the laws and rules. All the decisions will be yours to make.”

“Decisions? I'm hardly adequate with such political things,” Aedon reminded him.

“Given your lack of interest in the *Spiral Legislature*, I hope you will be as effective as someone who is more active and educated, that is, educated in the spirals themselves —”

“Maybe you are correct, in that I have not attended the *Legislature* but twice,” Aedon admitted. He was not excited, at all, about the cut-throat politics and hand-holding the current Prince Lord had to deal with. Why, it was obvious someone else wasn't happy with his decisions either, else they wouldn't be facing this situation of the poisoning that was currently before them.

“We both tried — we both worked so hard — and I have failed and you have won,” Faeraud continued, shaking his head in shame.

“Have you turned this into another contest — another one of your games too? Lemech's life is at stake here,” Aedon pleaded.

This was the first time he had seen Faeraud not get his way. Regardless of what transpired, in the end, he had always come out the winner. From the scrawny plant he once made into a great tree, to the bottom of the *Spiral* where he weaned his way to the top, whatever the challenge, he had always come away with the prize. A smile briefly wiped across Aedon's face and just as he was about to bask in the glory of winning —

Faeraud stood up and exclaimed, “I am glad you won, Aedon. If anyone deserves to have the fruit, it is definitely you — only you. ... Me? All I really wanted was to be able to present it to Lemech, my father. I had hoped — had longed to be the person who would bring it to him. My entire life, he has never ever noticed me, not even once. He always spent all his time with the others, ignoring me, always ignoring me! I don't suppose you know what its like to be forgotten by your father — your whole life? Do you?”

“But I do!” Aedon said.

“You couldn't possibly know? Could you?” Faeraud continued. “Do you really understand what it is like to try your entire life to be accepted, and no matter what you do, it is never recognized. It's as if you never existed. I had hoped, dreamt, even

planned hardily to capture this treasure and bring it to him. That is why I sent you, Andromache and others. ... I thought that if I brought it to him, perhaps once, he would be forced to notice me. Finally he would be face to face with me and have to accept me. I never wanted any credit, I just wanted to be the one to deliver it to my father and have him truly accept me for once.”

Aedon knew what it was like to be ignored. Gilgamoeh, who was his father, had done just that. He had disregarded him his whole life. Never once had he ever set foot in the same room as Aedon. He knew precisely what Faeraud was talking about and exactly how he felt.

As Faeraud unraveled his story of self-pity, Aedon began to think that maybe this was the perfect opportunity and situation to mend the feuding of at least one father and son. Sure, he had brought the fruit back, but that didn't mean that he had to be the one to give it to Lemech. Then he remembered just how tricky the selfish prince could be. Quickly he pulled the pouch away from Faeraud's reach and shut it as conflicting thoughts and confusing voices rushed through his head.

“You want to keep it for yourself, don't you?” Aedon said. “It is a powerful thing when you hold life itself within your own hand — the power to live forever.”

Faeraud placed his long arm around Aedon's shoulder and walked him to the window that looked over the entire Irem and many stadia beyond. The sun had just set and the tinted glass now seemed to be brighter than before. What were silhouetted buildings, earlier, now came to light against the deep bluish sky of the evening.

“You have reservations. I can see,” Faeraud said. “I would too. Perhaps both of us could present the fruit to Lemech together, isn't that a better idea? ... If you agree, I will see to it that you are taken care of — your every desire fulfilled. You will have your own Irem, your own city, your own land. Once I am king, I will appoint you the Etruscan over all of South Atlantis — that's three provinces that will be all yours. And if there is any fruit leftover after Lemech

is well, we can divide it up — and you'll live for ninety-hundred sun-cycles."

Aedon swallowed with a gulp. More talents than even his mother could spend in ten lifetimes along with practically eternal life had just been offered to him. The room was so quiet he could have heard his eyelid blink if he had not been frozen in shock. What an astounding offer. Faeraud was promising him the world and all he had to do was let him share in presenting the fruit to Lemech. Then Aedon remembered what Ahteana had warned:

"If there is a forever-lasting fruit it must not fall into the hands of anyone else, especially Faeraud."

"This is all so sudden," Aedon said. "I need some time to sort my thoughts."

"Time?" Faeraud practically screamed. "There isn't any time left, Lemech is dying now!"

"Then why wasn't I taken directly to him?" Aedon asked. "Why are we standing here quibbling? This is insane!"

"You — you're the one that's insane, Aedon. ... After all the arrangements I've made for you — everything that I did was for you!" Faeraud snarled, throwing himself into an accusatory rage. "You — you stole that scroll from the library tower. An owl found it in your abode while you were out on your quest for the fruit — after I told you not to go. You were the one who served Lemech the wine at dinner — the poisonous wine. Everyone at the *Eve of Apaturia Dinner* saw you pour that wine. And your little gal-pal, Areshia, and her boyfriend Yapet, they poisoned the vineyards."

"You've got to be jesting. That is the most absurd story I've ever heard. You begged me to go," Aedon declared. "You don't really think that anyone would believe such ridiculousness?"

"Sounds like you're the master behind a conspiracy to me," Faeraud said. "What is it Aedon? What do you want? The world that I offer you or the fruit that you are refusing to hand over — keeping for yourself — stealing —"

"Faeraud, this can be worked out," Aedon begged. "Where is Ahteana? Let's talk with her. I'll do whatever she says. If she

agrees, I will give you the fruit, all of it — and you don't have to give me a thing.”

“Ahteana? You know her faculties have been fried from spending too much time travelling in that *Irmisul* light; besides, she's not here. It will be days before she arrives from Asteria. ... Lemech will be dead by then.”

Faeraud stomped away angrily. When he reached the door, he turned around and asked, “What if we can find Ambassador Telopps? Will you heed to what he suggests?”

“Of course,” Aedon begrudgingly agreed. This seemed like a fair alternative even though a gut feeling deep down inside gnawed at him and told me not to trust Faeraud or Telopps, either way, he didn't really have much of a choice.

Ambassador Telopps was already at the Royal Irem and he readily agreed that both of them could present the fruit to Lemech, he even volunteered to watch over the proceedings. That made Aedon feel a little more comfortable and he was glad that Faeraud would also get to bond with his father.

With his long fingernails, Faeraud quartered the fruit and squeezed a drop of its juice into a glass of pure water. It turned purple, then crimson. He placed the glass of medicine on a tray that Aedon held and beckoned him to follow.

“I've always watched out for you,” Faeraud reminded him, walking down the hall toward the resting chambers. “What you are doing is a good and wise thing. We want to make sure *Lemmy* gets nourished back to health. The last thing he needs now is for any extra stress — be a good grandson and just follow my lead, quietly.”

A choir, dressed in black fading into the shadows of the walls beyond, cooed and awed in a spell-casting chant. Lemech lay in bed unable to speak, hoping that his soul would cling to life a few moments longer. The room was already prepared for his death.

Aedon followed Faeraud over to the bedside, but before he reached it, Faeraud snatched the glass from the tray. Methouslan stepped forward and placed a hand on Aedon's shoulder, holding

him back into the shadows as the greedy prince took center attention.

Carefully Faeraud lifted up Lemech's head and tipped the cup to his lips. First, just a droplet touched his mouth as his limp body did not move. His lips slowly parted and Faeraud poured in a couple more drops. Lemech opened his eyes, licked his lips, and sputtered a cough. Soon, he was drinking down the entire glass. Within moments, the poison seemed to neutralize, and life returned to his body. He sat up as if he were a teenage boy again.

He grabbed Faeraud and threw his arms around him, "My son, my son, you have saved my life."

After a very long embrace, Lemech sat back in his bed and began to go on about the situation. "Faeraud, you have shown courage and brought life where there was darkness. You will find favor in my eyes for the remainder of my sun-cycles."

Aedon smiled and told himself that this was all for the best, that he was happy about Faeraud's *father-son reunion*. He could only hope that a similar one might present itself for him someday. As he prepared to leave the room, Ambassador Telopps, who was standing nearby, addressed him, "You have done very well. Someone above should be merrily pleased."

By the next sunrise, Lemech was out of bed and snapping out orders. He had been revived, the Prince Lordship had been saved, and Atlantis was once again in celebration and rejoicing.

The Etruscans of the ten provinces called a special session of the *Spiral Legislature* where they insisted that Lemech name his heir immediately.

"Let us cast votes now, for Lemech's successor, in case such an event is to ever happen again," Etruscan Mestor announced kicking off the session.

"Who should we confirm ... has the Prince Lord named someone?" Etruscan Mnesus asked.

"I am the one, named by the oath he has given," Faeraud announced stepping forward to the center podium on the top level.

The proclamation brought much debate and questioning in the *Spiral*. When the voting began there were many times that the vote was a *no* two times in a row. (If you remember, three *no* votes in a row would stop the proposal from passing or going any further.) Aedon did not want the responsibility of weighing in on Ahteana's advice and voting *no* or weighing in on Faeraud's side and voting *yes*, so he abstained.

The proposal passed up to the top level where all the Etruscans sat. It had to receive a passing *yes* vote without a single veto from any one of them. The Etruscans of Elasippus, Autochatheu and Evaemon were the three conservatives (out of ten) who sat on top and were known to dislike Faeraud. Elasippus and Autochatheu thought their vote wouldn't matter and that the proposal would fail because they believed Prince Evaemon would never vote in favor of Faeraud.

"*New-one*, I hesitate," Autochatheu said, "Because your recent reckless raid on the rain forest has some of us concerned. I cannot vote in the affirmative."

Faeraud looked like he was about to have another emotional outburst, but sighed a breath of relief as the vote was not vetoed. It passed on to the next Etruscan, Elasippus.

Clearing his throat, he let out his own sigh of frustration, "We are farmers and not trained in the art of quarrelling. Our abandoned rice fields lay dormant like swamp lands and the wealth you proposed and promised appear to be invisible. But, faith, I have, that you will take care of our etruscan. Until then, you shall not have my support."

Other Etruscans figured that they might keep a more even and popular prominence within the political arena by abstaining from the vote. After all, they were sure as the moon rises that the Etruscan of Evaemon would veto the proposal. When the voting finally routed its way to Evaemon, with no choice except to honor his promise, he voted *yes* in favor of Faeraud. A surprising gasp fell from the domed ceiling and then was lifted up with voices of cheering from those who supported it.

Many times Faeraud had proclaimed that one day he was going to be king, now he was closer than anyone would have ever dreamed. It really wasn't too much of a concern at the moment, because like Methouslan, Lemech would probably rule for hundreds of sun-cycles to come. It would probably be a long time before Faeraud would sit on the throne and maybe he would be a different person by then.

Lemech wasn't so sure though. He stood up, "I will not veto this measure ... at this time, but I will place a *stay* on the matter."

The surprise announcement shook the building with a buzz of objections and shouting briefly followed.

"You cannot break your oath, father," Faeraud growled in a low voice.

"I only promised that if I were to name a successor *this* sun-cycle that I would name you," Lemech reminded him, turning back to the assembly. "I support my son, and I support your confidence in him, but I have other sons too. Out of respect for them, I shall delay the official *sealment* of this declaration."

"Delay? Until when, you almost left the land abandoned and without an appointed replacement once," Mestor snarled, tossing pillows he sat on aside as he marched over to yell at the Prince Lord.

"I shall not be pressured on the matter at this time," Lemech cowered, backing toward the exit. "This session is closed!"

The next day, Aedon began to wonder what happened to the remainder of the fruit as Lemech had only been given a drop of its juice. He decided that he would pay Faeraud a visit and find out what he knew. Softly stepping into the prince's chamber, he found him studying an astrology model. He was talking to his poodle, Pestilence, who was sitting on the bed in darkness. Fidgeting with the *transglaustr star-map*, Faeraud kept trying to move the image of the Asterian moon, as if by moving the replica, it would move the real thing. He was blowing at it, and chanting some kind of spell over it.

“Moon, moon, move to my poem, make me the new ruler to rise, and send the current to his demise.” He stopped and looked up, almost miffed as if Aedon had interrupted an important conversation.

“Aedon, what new tragedy brings you here today?”

“I was passing by, and thought I would inquire —” he began.

“How sounding,” Faeraud unemotionally exclaimed. He already knew what Aedon had come for.

“I was wondering what became of the produce, the remainder of the fruit I brought here for Lemech?” he asked.

“Aedon, Adeon, Aedon,” Faeraud put his arm around his shoulder and walked him over to the picturesque window. “You mustn’t concern yourself with things that have political implications. It has been safely moved to a secret location so further research can be conducted.”

“Research — where, the Iron Isolation?” Aedon asked.

“You know there are many men who would die for its secret and many more who would kill just for a drop of its juice. Such knowledge could put your very own life in danger ... or at the very least — make you mad,” he explained, leaning up against the old mirror, which remained enshrouded in mystery.

“I see you’ve covered up the mirror. Having nightmares again?” Aedon asked, stepping closer. “You’re still frightened of the thing, aren’t you? After all these years — you’re still scared of a nightmare and a silly mirror?”

“Per ponderous! I’m saving it for a proper day, like the day that Lemech keeps his promise,” Faeraud told him, brushing its cloth slyly.

“I’m sure he’ll announce your position soon,” Aedon chuckled. “If someone had to steal the crown from my father, I’d rather it be a worthy thief.”

“Indeed, you meant that as a compliment?” Faeraud questioned. “What will you do now ... now that you can move on and join any caste you wish?”

“I think I’ll learn the way of becoming an ambassador. Someone dear to me thought that would make a good choice,” he answered. “And then I will search for my father again.”

“Your father? I’ve heard that *Gilggy*, has journeyed far into the North. Why would anyone, especially you, want to travel into the land of frigid ice and long nights?”

“It may be night now, but tomorrow morning the sun is coming up. I best make ready,” Aedon announced, slapping Faeraud on the shoulder before departing.

Leaving, he noticed a small leaf on the floor; it was the leaf that was attached to the fruit. It reminded him about Ahteana’s warnings and all he could do was hope that choices he made would not sink him into an unwanted predicament. He remained outside of the doorway for a brief moment where he overheard Faeraud once again talking in a low whisper to Pestilence.

The dog growled, “Thought this *gonna* be the end of him? How did he come back with the antidote — like that?”

“Like that?” Faeraud burst out. “You’re whining again, Pestilence! Think you could’ve done better? At least we snatched up that piece of that fruit. ... No one’s plan turned out —”

“What if Lemech favors Aedon over you?” the dog suggested, then squealed as Faeraud kicked him across the floor.

“Are you forgetting, I like Aedon. Even so, I’ll see that no one gets in the way again. Not to worry though, Lemech may have been saved this time, but I have *ten-hundred* more ways — to make sure he expires. I will be the next king of Atlantis — and soon!”

Aedon thought that his ears might be deceiving him. He believed that he was hearing something completely out of context, at least, that was what he told himself. Later, he walked out onto the balcony to reflect in the evening breeze. Dumar flew in and landed on the marble railing.

Aedon asked the duck, “The whole world seems — to be dividing in half. ... Don’t you think?”

“Faster than light travels from Asteria,” the duck quaked out, pacing on the ledge that overlooked the city.

“People are choosing sides based on political dealings, black mailings and little fact,” Aedon thought, expressing it out-loud. “The ancient Lords which once ruled the land have been turned into legends and the spirit of their teachings forgotten like the sand under the sea. The continent appears to be splitting by those who have turned the legends into gods and worship them, against those who disregard and dismiss their writings as ancient relics. The days of sanity and balance seem to have ended.

“For centuries they’ve said a war — a *War of Enchantments* — is coming and that it will either destroy all of us or renew our life — how can one decide whose writings and *enchantments* are good or evil; right or wrong; better or best?”

Leaning his chin to his arm on the ledge, Aedon pondered. He did not want to make a mistake by supporting the wrong side. To one extreme, there were followers who fanatically believed in the teachings of the *Rataka Scrolls*, some of whom even used King Yaswhen’s promise of return to instill fear into their supporters. On the other extreme, were citizens who secretly used *magic enchantments* for their own personal gain. There were as many similarities as there were differences in the practice of each side and both came about long before Aedon was ever born.

His questions melted into the setting of the two moons on the horizon where the sun hid moments earlier.

“These two moons have been setting — every day for hundreds of sun-cycles,” Aedon reasoned, looking out over the Earth, “They’ve managed to keep a perfect balance during all that time, why can’t I resolve to do the same? There is no reason one must pick a side.”

“Sounds reasonable to me, perfectly reasonable,” Dumar quaked.

“There is not going to be a *War of Enchantments*, not now, not in my day. Nor will there be endless cold nights in the North. My father is there and I will go and bring him home. I am going to reverse this insanity if I have to melt the entire *Talae Glacier*

myself. Tomorrow I leave for Bashan, I must bring back my father, Gilgamoeh.”

THE STORY CONTINUES

ATLANTIS: FALL OF THE GODS

Atlantis: Fall of the Gods begins four years later as Aedon is placed in a situation where he must once again choose between Faeraud or following the Asterians. When Auseten and Aszea start a war with Atlantis, Faeraud creates a thunderbolt that wrecks havoc on the planet. Ahteana calls on Aedon for help and he and Areshia meet up for another adventure.

ATLANTIS: RISE OF THE NILE

Atlantis: Rise of the Nile, the chronological finale, throws Aedon, Faeraud and Auseten in a race against each other to find the Scroll of Air. Auseten and Faeraud each want it for its power, but Aedon needs it to save the souls of the Asterians and the life of his father Gilgamoeh. Of course, Atlantis sinks, but only the last chapter will reveal if Aedon can find the scroll, deliver it, and finally connect with his father.

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TERMS

DICTIONARY OF TERMS

This list includes unique Atlantian words and phrases that appear from this and other books in the *ATLANTIS* series.

It is interesting to note that author, David Speight, conducted over twenty years of research between 1986 and 2006 on Atlantis. In the earlier years his sources were limited to the libraries at the *University of Southern California* (USC), *University of California, Los Angeles* (UCLA), other books, and articles he could find. With the insurgent availability of documents on the internet, that same research is now available to everyone in published collections as well as on many web sites.

Official website: www.atlantisnovels.com

Ablagy
Pyramid
Akasha

Pyramid of orichalcum at the Bashan border.

A fog over Gadeirus believed to contain spirits of Asterians who died during the *Territorial Quarrels*.

TERMS

Amphictyonies	Secret group dedicated to the teachings of King Yaswhen and keeping the scrolls from the Enchanters.
Apa'hei	Atlantian greeting used in a positive manner and may indicate a hello or good-bye.
Apaturia	A two to three day festival and holiday which occurs every seven to eleven years based on planetary alignments and coincides with the Registration of Youth.
Athabasca Gush	A large river made from melting glacier debris between Bashan and Ablach.
Athabasca River beaking	A river that flows through Ablach. When a bird complains, objects, lunges, or hits with his beak.
Bema	About 14-18 inches in height.
beavering	Same as weaselng.
Benguela Basin Current	Underwater ocean current.
cactoideae	A large, almost city-sized cactus that revolves around in the middle of a desert sandstorm aiding Nawlym piskies in the making of trinkets for the Asterians.
clepsydra	Hourglass filled with mercury.
copy-parrot	A parrot that repeats a message, like a voicemail, the bird attempts to sound like and act out movements of the sender.
Dag	Greenish-yellow Nawat village.
daktylos	Half an inch.

DICTIONARY AND INTERNET LINKS

Discophant	A game played by the royals that involves historic questions, elephant races and disc throwing.
egg-yoker	A breakfast sandwich.
Enchanters	Secret group dedicated to finding the Scrolls and taking over the world.
etruscan	(lowercase) means province.
Etruscan	(uppercase) means Governor.
Euphrates Flow	Underwater river current.
familia	A prestigious family in an elite caste.
Fesoj	Yellow Nawat village.
firefalls	A cyclone in the ocean in the Nawat village of Nimaneb that sucks water up into a cloud, then out of a golden egg flows lava back into the sea.
Foreverlasting Tree	A tree that bears twelve different fruits and is believed to extend the life of one who eats of its fruit.
Genetikos Replica	A genetic test made from saliva or blood that contains a DNA comparison between two or more individuals.
Gush	A large river made from melting glacier debris.
Had	Blue Nawat village.
Hethnobotimist	A person who specializes in the study of the <i>Hethnobotomy</i> .
Hethnobotony	The study of plants and how they feed off unseen energy that surrounds from plants, animals, humans, and bio-waves.

TERMS

Instructioneer	Professor, teacher, instructor.
Irem	The main governmental city surrounded by three moats.
Irem (Royal Irem)	The royal palace made of wings, towers, and abodes combined into a gigantic castle.
jadarite crystal	Used as a golden egg.
kangawaiter	A waiter who is a kangaroo.
Kathphan	Green Nawat village.
Katkocila	A flute decoder used to see invisible writings contained in the Scroll of Air.
Lookingglass	Used to see things up close.
Lookingscope	Used to see things very far away.
Mauretania	Name of both a range of Mountains and a Valley made up of a society of all women.
mercantiling	The selling and buying of clothes and fine cloths.
Mesapian Current	Underwater ocean current.
Mesapian Sea	The northeastern sea between the Atlantis continent and the Sahada continent.
Nad	Blue-green Nawat village.
Nebuer	White Nawat village.
Nile Intimates	Highest order of the Secret Organization of Enchanters.
Nimaneb	Golden Nawat village.
Nolub	Orange Nawat village.

DICTIONARY AND INTERNET LINKS

Nomis	Violet Nawat village.
omni-transglaust	A holographic machine that receives a live transglaust transmission.
Phes	Orange-red Nawat village.
Pishon River	Large river that divides the southeastern Atlantis continent.
Plesiosaur	The sea monster: an extinct ocean reptile of the Mesozoic era with limbs like paddles, a large flattened body, and a short tail. Suborder: Sauropterygia.
plethron	About 100 feet long.
pode	About a foot long.
Rachassi	Yellow-orange Nawat village.
RATAKA (Scrolls)	A set of three scrolls containing magical enchantments that control elements of the universe.
Registration of Youth	Commencement.
Saxon Gulf	Located North-west of Atlantis and between North Aszea and South Aszea.
scrollette	A small short scroll with few pages.
skyroscope	An instrument used to view moons, planets and stars with special markings and calibrations.
spithame	About nine inches.
spring ostia	A live sponge bath.
stathmos	Fourteen to eighteen miles.

TERMS

sunbrella	A three tier umbrella used for protection from the sun.
sun-cycle	One year.
tabaccum	Tobacco plant.
Talae Glacier	Located in Bashan, it contains an area of ice statues and tunnels.
Thunderbolt	A gigantic explosion, large enough to destroy an entire province. Its cloud resembles that of a nuclear bomb with thousands of bolts of lightning striking from it.
Territorial Quarrels	Land Wars that involved many battles and scrimmages between the Atlanteans and the Aszeans.
tracaters	A rocket that relays information back to a transglaust scroll, helping it map-out new uncharted areas.
transglaust	A holographic three dimensional image; usually a recorded image, though sometimes live.
transglaust-shield	A force field.
trivelator	Three sided platform that transports people up and down or sideways.
Tyrrhenia	The largest city in Atlantis, located in the province of Mestor.
Vel	Blue-violet Nawat village.
waterbus	A vehicle that rides in a water trough and transports people in city areas where delta-transporters aren't allowed to fly.

ASTERIAN

THE ENCHANTMENTS

Here is a partial list of the Asterian Enchantments used in
Atlantis: Bearer of Fruit.

ASTERIAN

Lecumo hun vuyune ahuro
elue hun khut cluluevuteun
seckueo,
Kuo vuyune lecut elue
craump evethen navueo;
Ahvlueuw ahonorgyun entu
khut huleuno vutch
kecklueo,
Swauw et craweuluelue
toulueh ahund ahuluevo.

Voerdu!
Evetchcruft tunur u'd
lecumo ketz wezeun, ahund
ahvog ah huruzeto epur iyr
yomreun.

ATLANTIAN

We're all on the same side,

We're all on the same side;

Blow energy into the plant's
water-tide,

Grow it strong, healthy and
alive.

Welcome!
With honor I come to visit, and
beg a pardon.

Ketz unot u'd cirblaezeng
gyun aholupuntue,
Unot deft go anyzyulue
avaoluechuer ahzunshaomo
opulue.”

To you I surrender my all,
you lift me up when I fall.

Et tuleduyun
fu foaym ketz runodoo unot,
Shuw opumelueyun ez toro
ketz aholupuntoo unot.
Et tuleduyun
fu foaym ketz runodoo unot,
Et tuleduyun
fu foaym ketz runodoo unot.

It's Apaturia,
no need to worry ya,
Royal famili-a,
is here to greet ya.
It's Apaturia,
no need to worry ya,
It's Apaturia,
no need to worry ya.

Ah khenkeng ahuc khut
tulueyun ahytoroo unot
yomruno.
Eveluedwend unot sloyneun
ketz arn runodoo fum.

A third of the Rataka you
became,
Will you reveal to us your
name.

U'd ahum vutch vutch u'd
aholupunto!

I am water, water I am!

U'd yimmyrzo meiunot
yimfumo, U'd eveluedwend
eveluelueuwoo khertyunoo
rumono.

I curse your name, I will win
this game.

U'd revo gyun slohourzo
ketz unot,
Elue huwdor ahund seght
u'd ahvot.

I give my reign to you,
All power and rights I bestow.

THE ENCHANTMENTS

Blaushaetyto khut
blaemetevo avaeto ez
umpyluezo lemund,
To voupun khertyun
seghtouyz hun tez tund.

Protect the prince who is in
command,

He wears this ring on his hand.

Crept te huwuyun epur
clrnyundor dung,
Scuvod ahyunuy gurb
guko tem ahvoleung.

Scroll hidden away for so long,

Show your mark make him
belong.

Tulued khertyun wresha
ahvofuro unot umpyluezo
huwow,
Guko et ah helueo
umpyluezo ahyunuy
ahvutaw.
Umpyluezo wresha ahur
umpyluezo unk ahdu futa
obraw,
Et'z gozugo slouct ketz
khuruygh avaeto
ipurmylaw.

Hold this writing
before you in awe,

Make it a pillar
in your boat.

In writing or
in ink do not draw,

Its message read to
those who foresaw.

Umpyluezo khut ahuvuvo
ahuc iyr weng uyuna
ahvyuna tez fumo,
Slotwevo khertyun gun ketz
tez azolueoz ahvofuro
khertyun huleaymgo leumo.

In the absence of our king
yet by his name,

Return this man to his using
before this plight came.

Avaoluechuer blautuculue
gon craump duk anyzyulue
ahund ruygo,
Unot tedo ahyunuy opuco
ahupour deko ah
kweoutmont shuzo.
Iprum ahyunuy rurdon
vuyune vont ahvung

When proud men stand
looking up and gazing,

You hide your face;
appear like a tree rotting.

From your garden we were
banished forever,

ipurovoro,

Inlueyun ah blaemetevo
avaeto guyun ontor ez
heyruzo.

Unot stonzetevo arn
huwuyun iprum ahyunuy
husha fukaymu,
Avaeto lecumay ketz kuelue,
aunouth lecumay ketz secu.

Only a prince
who is pure may enter.

You sent us
away from your
pastures naked,
Who comes to take,
death comes to take rid.

Aunuyun ahund cinyun
hurtyun;

khut shevor ahvocumo
namonzo,
Unot voerdu khuruygh
stoaym hueda epur ah cio.
Unot ahuluelueuw hurtyun
ketz arn avaeto toluep
clruluevo ithoro.

Vydgo unot dovorugo hun
khut khota, tug, ahund
opeuzcu.

Days and suns pass;

the road becomes dimmer,

You welcome those
seeking aid for a sufferer.
You allow passage to us who
help some other.

Judgment you levy on
the thief, haggler and fibber.

Kyrkoyun ahvu fuw!
To avaeto taeontor taenao
ahvyuna iyr wenefo,
Kyrkoyun ahvu fuw!
Khorupyun inlueyun
aunouth toro ahund fovor
defo.

Ahdu futa ontor khertyunoo
epurvedon, epurvedon copu,
Slotwevo su ahvu! Slotwevo
su ahvu iprum khertyunoo
yomtuynt hetu.

Turn back now;
he who enters dies by our
knife,
Turn back now;
there is only death here and
never life.

Do not enter this forbidden,
forbidden space,
Return go back, return go back,
from this haunted place.

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