

ATLANTIS
FALL
OF THE
GODS

DAVID SPEIGHT

ΑΤΛΑΝΤΙΣ
FALL OF THE GODS

By
David Speight

Atlantis: Fall of the Gods

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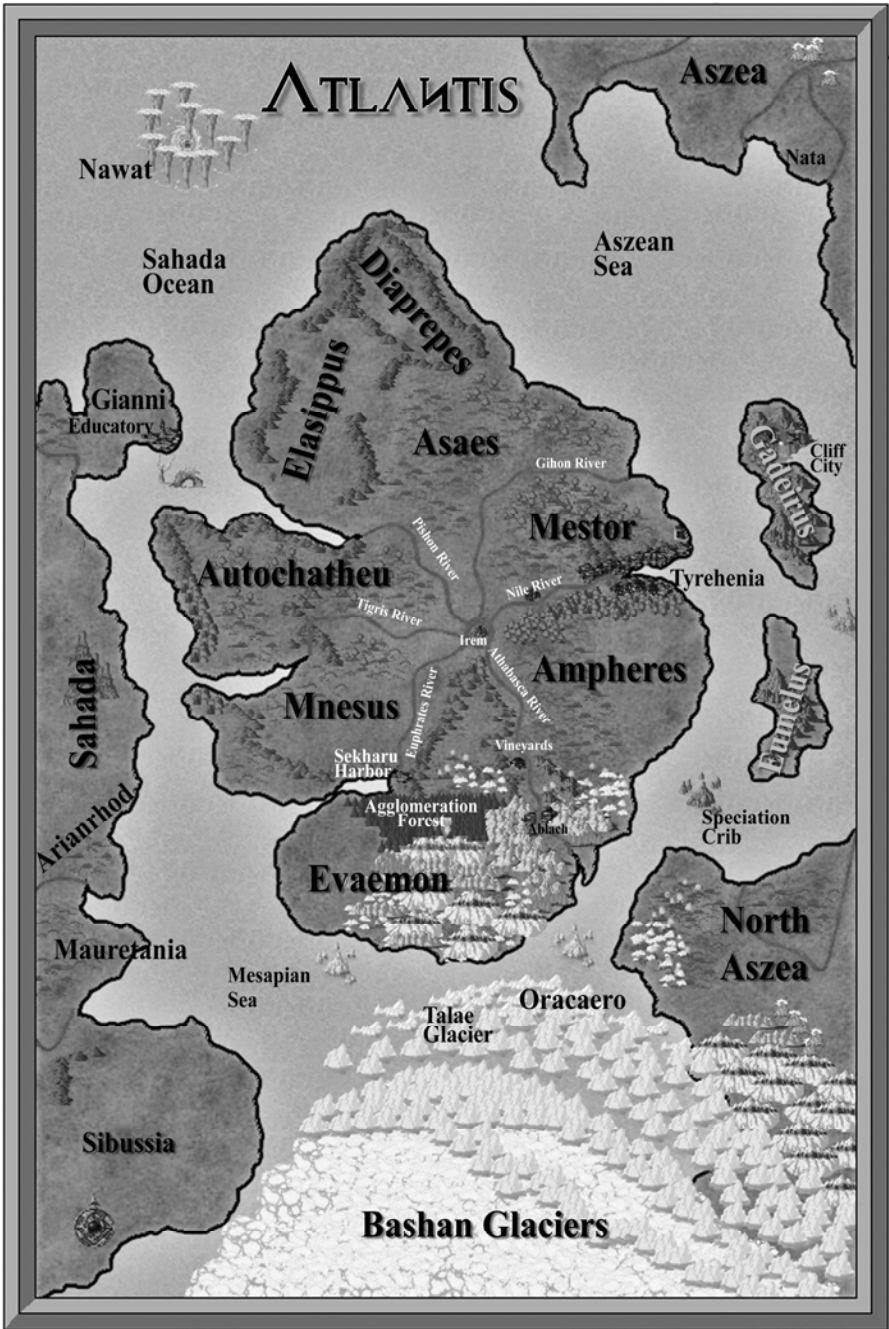
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ΑΤΛΑΝΤΙΣ
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P R E F A C E

ABOUT THIS STORY

This is the second novel in the award-winning series *Atlantis* 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.

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 This science-fiction-fantasy will take you on a journey filled with excitement and mysticism that is rich in historical references of Atlantis from Biblical to Grecian accounts.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 charged with keeping peace on Earth until the King's return, but

P R E F A C E

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. This fictional account draws from various archeological findings and scientific discoveries. You'll find popular documentary favorites which have explored pyramids, ancient energies, crystal-skulls, climate-change, and world-wide deluges as the basis for some of the setting in this mystical land.

Characters, each with their own dilemma, come to life merged from myth, legend, history and biblical stories. 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. As you turn each page, I hope that you will enjoy your return journey to Atlantis.

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

PART ONE

PAPYRUS ONE

BALLOONS AT GADEIRUS

Aedon was a prince who lived in a land where flying transporters were powered with *orichalcum*, animals talked, and Asterians from Earth's second moon frequently visited; Aedon lived in Atlantis. The continent had two islands to its west, one of them was Gadeirus which he called home.

The Cliff City was edged into the side of the mountain, tucked away into a crescent cut-out. Its twinkles of light were usually buried under a dense mist which the locals called the *Akasha Fogs*. Today was different; it exposed simple buildings like

blocks piled up a stairway on a secluded paradise isle. Its clear-skies hinted at dusk reflecting off a waterfall where it streamed down fifty *plethrons* (five-thousand feet) of rock diving into the ocean below.

Aedon's flying delta-transporter, barely large enough for two, approached the island. There was no fear of losing power from the *orichalcum* energy-stream this time, because the pyramid that produced it was clearly visible in the distance giving a clear flow of its energy. He reduced the power of the ships *crystal-capacitor* in preparation for the landing. The village was larger than he remembered; the land smaller. It had been some time since he had set a sandal on the island-mountain; certainly he should have expected it to be different.

Cleacious clenched her toga around her pasty body closer; she could almost feel the cold wind outside penetrating the delta-transporter they flew. The company inside wasn't much warmer and only added to the chill of anxiety and uncertainty that made her shiver.

Aedon wiped the perspiration crawling toward his blue eyes as he navigated the transporter toward the Cliff City. Feeling warmer than the southern volcanoes, he reached to adjust the heat down, but stopped, certain that Cleacious would only slap his hand again. It didn't seem like he was coming home at all this time; because, he felt like he was transporting a criminal to her cell instead of his mother to their home. He wished that it was his father who were in the opposite seat, even though he knew the man had been banished from Atlantis. His father lived far away in the Bashan Glacier, an icy mountain range so big that it was near impossible to find anyone who didn't want to be found.

Four wooden balloons, each the size of a small building, could be seen approaching the far off *orichalcum* pyramid. The pointy structure was covered in solar sheets, the *orangish* ones, the kind that transmits sunlight to help renew the *orichalcum's* energy. *Orichalcum*, a shinny-metallic, reddish-orange mineral produced an energy field which powered machines, transporters, and

illumination bulbs; it was more valuable than gold. Coins fashioned from it, in a triangular shape, were called *talents* and used for commerce.

Cleacious pointed, remarking, “Odd, you rarely see a balloon-ship in Gadeirus, much less four of them at the same time.”

“Unusual, agreed,” he said, steering the delta toward a landing dock. “Most balloons come from Aszea. Is there a demonstration or training event transpiring over at the pyramid?”

His question went unanswered as the formation of balloons surrounded the four sides of the distant glass structure. He quickly realized it was not a tour. Burping from each balloon’s belly, a hundred smaller balloons floated out from its mother ship. They darted with a single protruding spear, making them look more like a hornet than a flying ship. Some had two spears and were fashioned in shape like that of a mastodon or elephant.

The smaller balloons attacked first, each point smashing into a glass panel imbedded in the pyramid slope. Molten *orichalcum* rocks began to ooze out from the holes. A meltdown began. The energy stream that powered everything on the island dimmed.

The words *Skyola* painted along the outside of Aedon’s delta-transporter could be easily read as she slowed to a stop and hovered in mid air for a moment. The glowing *crystal-capacitors* that powered her began to fade. Then the rings that revolved around the capacitor’s ball, stopped turning. The front-end of the flying machine dipped down and then it headed into a spin toward the ocean below.

“You’re making me nauseous. Who taught you how to fly?” Cleacious screamed out.

“The power grid is out,” Aedon yelled back, then he began talking to the machine while banging on her throttle, “*Skyola*, don’t fail me now, baby.”

“Doesn’t this contraption have an emergency backup on it,” Cleacious cried out.

“I’m working on it,” Aedon hollered back.

The delta sped toward the ocean floor, faster, as Aedon punched controls and pulled levers which did not respond. He leaned around over the seat into the back area of the transporter and reached until he could feel his way to the lever which opened up a small panel; the chamber was empty.

“Someone stole it,” he cried out, “I don’t believe it; someone stole my emergency *orichalcum*.”

Cleacious became silent with guilt, slouching back in her seat, as much as someone can slouch when they’re in a vehicle diving toward the ocean floor. He noticed a bag sitting near her feet that flopped back and forth, clinking like talents of *orichalcum* do. He reached down and pulled out a bar of the smooth refined element.

“That’s my settlement, give it here,” Cleacious demanded. “While you were wasting your talents on expeditions to the glaciers searching for your father, I was saving mine.”

Aedon struggled, digging into the bag, “I would give up all the *orichalcum* in Atlantis if only I could find him.”

Cleacious tugged back on the bag, but Aedon managed a good hold on one of its pieces and yanked it from the tote. He popped the bar of the mineral into the holder and slammed it shut. As if offering up a prayer Cleacious whispered an *enchantment*. Her rhyme was much quicker than the custom allowed, but time was not on their side.

*“Khut skylue opulue iprum vuyune myruzheto,
Ahzud woop arn ahvlueunkot iyr copeto.”*

SPLASH! The vehicle dove into the ocean and continued to head downward, underwater. Aedon thrust the control lever forward. Nothing happened. Through the murky water, large tree roots reached out toward them like the tentacles of an octopus. Finally, the *crystal-capacitor* began to glow again. Its rings started to slowly revolve around, and then they spun faster. Aedon grabbed the altitude stick and inched it down. The delta turned upward,

swooshed out of the water, and headed into the sky again. Cleacious exhaled relief.

“We’re almost home, Mother,” Aedon declared. “Quiet your mouth and hold steady.”

“I trust you can dock this thing a little more softly than you can drive it,” Cleacious exclaimed, she was rattled but wasn’t about to show it. “After such a nerve-straining plunder I will require something to calm my anxiety. Perhaps we can stop at the Tiahuanaco Plaza for a *nectar*.”

“A *nectar*?” Aedon asked; he was surprised but not shocked that she wanted one of those stiff drinks already. “Isn’t it a bit early for you to be tasting such?”

“Just dock this contraption and stop vocalizing at your mother about what she can and cannot do,” she ordered, gathering up her remaining bars of value.

Aedon maneuvered the plane toward the piers. He was sure he was on target for a regular parking when a wooden war-balloon descended in front of him. The balloon collided with the platform and the berth was blown-up into a million pieces which rained down the side of the cliff along with a ball of fire. Quickly he pulled up on the altitude lever and moved the ship about so that they flew low, just above the city’s buildings.

“The docks are gone!” Cleacious exclaimed, dropping her bag and clinging to Aedon instead. “How do you suppose you’re going to get me home now?”

Spotting a flat roof on top of the Tiahuanaco, he turned to aim for a landing in its direction. With a bump the vehicle came to a rest on its surface. He jumped out of the delta and ran around to the other side and pulled his mother out. She seemed unaware of the urgency of the situation as she hesitantly gathered her bag together, a bit ruffled that the normal landing procedure had been interrupted.

“Mother, quick! We got to get out of here now!” Aedon began, yanking her arm while another balloon headed toward them.

As the wooden ship came closer to the plaza, Aedon reached into Cleacious bag again, and grabbed another chunk of *orichalcum*. Then he ran toward the charging bloat making sure he didn't trip over the edge of the roof.

"Not that one, that's a rare piece!" Cleacious screamed back. "You're wasting them; stop making my talents vamoose."

Then Aedon swung around like an Olympian shot-putter, and tossed it toward the swollen ship. The gem flew through the air and hit the *crystal-capacitor's* front end. Sparks flew and the capacitor's rings stopped spinning. The balloon floated for a few seconds, then began to sink until it crashed into the side of the cliff just missing the Tiahuanaco. The fireball shook the area knocking them off their feet. Aedon stood up looking out across the ocean; hundreds of balloons were heading their way. A massive full-out invasion was crawling over the island.

Aedon snatched his mother's hand and led her to the side of the roof, screaming, "We *gotta* get out of here now!"

"My talents! I must get my talents," Cleacious whined as she tugged him back toward the transporter.

"There's no time! Leave them or we'll both be dead!" He yanked his mother away from her delusion and pulled her over to the edge of the roof, insisting, "We *gotta* jump!"

Cleacious hesitated at the edge and just as she was about to object and turn around to go back, the aftershock of an explosion threw them over. She screamed as she fell, landing on an umbrella-like awning, then rolling down a flight of stairs underneath it.

Aedon followed her over the edge, got up and led her away. The two of them tumbled down two more flights of stairs alongside the building coming closer to the carriage shop where unicorns paced around anxiously. Aedon begged fate that the same owner, who was there before, would be on duty.

"Cain! Cain! Cain, evacuate! Evacuate!" Aedon screamed out.

Curious Cain popped his balding head out of the doorway and looked up at the two of them running down the mountainside toward him.

“What’s all the commotion about, this time?” he asked, grabbing an hourglass to begin their rental rate. “Our local prince has returned again?”

Then he turned and looked in the direction Aedon was motioning toward; he could see the balloons approaching. He panicked into action, dropping the time piece, “The grains have escaped the glass! Evacuate! The end is here! Evacuate! Evacuate!”

Cain swung open the stall doors and began shoeing out the unicorns. They whinnied in an excited fashion like any animal let out of a cage. One of them lingered eating straw remains on the table, but quickly bolted after the others, once she discovered herself alone. They galloped to what seemed to be freedom for a brief moment, then frightfully scurried into the hills.

“Where is Meca?” Aedon shouted, running after the mad keeper. “Is Meca here?”

“Meca? She — she’s geared with a coach at the front, but someone’s already spoken for her ...”

As if she had heard her name called, Meca pranced around the corner with her carriage in tow, shouting, “This mean unicorn is a *stompin’ outta* this frightful path — NOW! Anyone a *comin’?*”

Cleacious marched up to the animal, “Now don’t be so hyper. Most certainly we’re coming, but first I must partake of a *nectar*. ... Is that little tasting shop still around the corner?”

KABOOM!

She screamed and dove into the back of the carriage for cover as another exploding balloon cut her off. Meca bellowed out a frightful neigh.

Encircling the energy pyramid in the distance, four balloons converged on each of its sides, almost in unison. ... BOOM! ... BOOM! ... BOOM! ... BOOM! ... The pyramid was no more.

Aedon leaped into the carriage and before he could grab the door to close it, Meca bolted off down the path. The door flapped in

the breeze banging against the side of the carriage as it wavered from wheel to wheel and almost flipped over several times.

“That’s my prime carriage — for royalty — be careful,” Cain yelled after them. “I forgot — you are royalty.”

Aedon grumbled, while securing the vibrating door, “If only my father had been named Prince Lord ... no one would’ve dared to ...”

“*Gilgy* — Prince Lord? Why he’s not even fit to be prince of the criminals. He’d been *hung-out-to-dry* instead of exiled, had he not been Lemech’s favorite son,” Cleacious debated, bouncing up and down in the seat.

“You’re wrong about him! I am going to find him; if not tomorrow, then the day after,” Aedon vowed, holding on tightly to the carriage handles. “When I do, I’m *gonna* see to it that his right to the throne is restored.”

“What for? Do you really think he’d share so much as a morsel of it with you — his illegitimate son, whom he denies ever having?” Cleacious replied.

“Once he sees me — once he meets me and gets to know me — things will be different. You’ll see,” Aedon insisted, ducking from a branch that brushed by the window.

“Most certainly anyone could do a better job of leading the continent, or even blinking an eye-lid, than your sickly grandfather, Lemech,” Cleacious agreed, before adding, “Your cousin Faeraud might be a better replacement ...”

“Cousin? He’s my uncle.”

“I keep forgetting — you’re both so similar in age — and he seems so much more like a cousin, or brother, than your uncle.”

“Sometimes I find it difficult to determine his motives,” Aedon thoughtfully said, sinking back into the seat and thinking the same thing about his mother.

“Perhaps you should go and find your father. But if you do, be prepared to be haunted by his teachings of Yaswhen and all those Asterian conventions. Do you really think you could handle that — in the progressive world you live in?” she asked.

“I’m dropping you home mother, and then I’m leaving. I am going to set out to find him this very day,” Aedon vowed, determined more than ever.

Meca paced to a trot as the path became dense with weeping willow trees whose vines kept getting caught on her horn. She turned back and asked, “Did you not hear of the great war on the horizon?”

“On the horizon, it sure seems like we are in the middle of one now,” Aedon huffed.

“A war of un-established proportions is a *comin*,” Meca predicted, turning her head forward again while she blindly trotted down the path. “It is the beginning of the *War of Enchantments*, the prophesied struggle between the *Asterians* and the *Enchanters*. You will see.”

“You’re always so downbeat,” Aedon chuckled, reaching to give her a patronizing pat on the fanny.

The willow trees told the carriage to stop by bending down and blocking the way. Aedon sometimes thought that he could hear and understand the trees; once before he even spoke to one, or least he thought he did. He listened.

WHSHSISISP SHIEEPPSSI, SHIEEPPSSI, SOOHOOOOOO-TOOO the trees blew out.

“They’re telling us to go back,” Aedon interpreted.

“Who’s telling this?” Cleacious asked, suspiciously looking around.

“I thought that Willow said so,” Aedon responded, nodding toward them.

“Nonsense,” his mother snapped, “I’m the only one in the family that’s allowed to hear strange voices.”

Instinctively, he commanded the trees, “NAZHOOOSHOO!”

The trees were as surprised as Aedon was, that he could speak to them. Slowly they parted and let the trio through. The path gave way to a pewter colored abode with its tiny algae covered moat and chipped stone bridge. Meca slowed to a stop as she approached the tall gates. They were open wide and an occasional

exploding balloon in the distance could be seen in the reflection of their metal. A stone-cold owl sat on top of each pillar, and no one doubted that they were alive; their wide eyes followed every movement.

“Whatever happens, we have to — we must do everything in our power to keep this abode, here in Gadeirus, safe. It is our only permanent home,” Cleacious begged.

“It took me months to straighten out the mess of taxes and talents your goat was blackmailing for; no one is taking claim to this property again,” Aedon grumbled, opening the buggy door.

“De-harness me from this contraption, now,” Meca snorted out.

Aedon began to remove the braces and yoke while Cleacious climbed out and walked toward the abode. Part of her was still in denial that they were under attack; so she pretended to ignore all the fuss.

“Dahrling,” she exclaimed, “You left the gates open. Don’t you know how to secure a place?”

She gasped as a tall man with long black and white hair emerged from the compound. He limped slightly on his left foot as he adjusted his towering black hat that looked more like an imperial crown.

“I am Lord Dominate Haedrus of Aszea,” his deep commanding voice announced.

“What are you doing in my Irem?” Cleacious demanded. “I hope you have not come to pilferage my treasures of which I have very little?”

“And if I have, certainly I would share them with a lady like yourself, whom is more beautiful than a queen,” the Lord Dominate flirted. “Would you not expect a king to abide in the largest and most grand abode the island adorns?”

“A king? Handsome indeed ...” she fawned. Then with a twitching eye she offered, “My Irem is your Irem.”

“Mother,” Aedon interrupted and reminded her, “He’s the enemy.”

“Enemy?” she scolded, taking a *nectar* from a *kangawaiter*, who hopped out of the house balancing a chalice in her pouch.

“Did you not just witness an attack almost as big as a thunderbolt itself?” said Aedon.

Finishing off the drink, she turned to Haedrus, “Pay little attention to my youngling. There are no enemies on the great Island of Gadeirus. We have always been an island where all people could feel welcome, regardless of their being.”

“Wise woman,” Haedrus responded. “My stay here will be brief. However, my son will be taking charge over things here — at this new command post — and on the island.”

Haedrus son, Auseten, walked into the courtyard. Aedon hadn’t seen him in almost five sun-cycles; he was still over-weight and sloppily dressed; however, his mannerisms had been firmed-up like that of a commanding warrior. A channel of Aszean warriors dressed in wooden armor followed him.

Aedon immediately recognized him, “Auseten? ... Auseten, what are you doing here?”

“Silence! You’re existence contaminates my island” Auseten ordered. “Arrest the young prince of Atlantis!”

PAPYRUS TWO

SECRET OF THE SCROLLS

Aedon grunted, stretching to reach a piece of leftover egg-yokers abandoned on the brick floor of the wine cellar. The chain that bound him, rubbed across the shelves prompting one of the dusty bottles to leap from its stand. The breaking glass summoned Auseten to the basement.

“Most difficult for me to conquer things when you’re always appearing like a bad blemish on my face whenever I’m about to triumph?” the sarcastic prince grumbled.

Trying to free a leg Aedon graveled, “What is this senseless invasion about? You know that —”

“There are many forces at work here. Even some *ya* can’t see,” Auseten snapped, walking closer. “We were almost friends once. Do you remember our days at the *educatory* — the secret organization we formed?”

“The association — I had forgotten. Of which you mucked-up when you left — stealing our prize,” Aedon pointed out, lifting

up the chains around his arms. Memories about a secret group they formed during their last sun-cycle of *educatory* came flooding back. Aedon believed that it was a short lived experiment which frayed apart, especially since it appeared that one of them had abandoned the trio and the other betrayed it.

“We never promised to be friends ... we only gave oath that it would be a secret,” Auseten explained, removing the shackles from Aedon’s legs. “While *ya* were off wandering the glaciers, a *sorta* contest developed ... between Faeraud and myself.”

“The two of you still talk?” Aedon questioned, wondering what insanity might be keeping them in contact.

“At the annual *Middag* ... a challenge is chosen. A contest between the two of us has developed — and this time I intend not to lose,” Auseten snapped.

“Then you have yet to win — one of these matches — against Faeraud, I assume,” Aedon asked, unsure about what a *Middag* was. He thought it best to keep the conversation short and say just what he needed to get out of there. He did not wish to get caught up in any of the sports his friends from the past liked to play.

“*Ya* uncle Faeraud won the last two,” Auseten went on, “But he cheated. Last sun-cycle the objective was to see which country could produce the most crops. I took control of South Aszea and cleared thousands of stadia of new land for growing. Then two separate mud slides poisoned the Ohlma and Asterope rivers. When I investigated further, I discovered other rumors about another poisoning that he was responsible for — an aqueduct near Tundraville. His doing not only ruined all the new crops but withered away more than half of our normal food supply. The scarcity made our people pay dearly for food; many died of starvation.”

“You’re not speaking rational, Auseten. You really believe Faeraud could be behind such an expansive poisoning?”

“Tell me, my prince, is he not capable of such trouble?”

“His ambitions were sun-cycles ago when we were younger and naive, certainly you’ve both learned not to play with other people’s livelihood by now,” Aedon grumbled.

Auseten interrupted, “This sun-cycle, our contest was to obtain the *Rataka Scrolls*.”

“There’s three of them; the one — which we all examined at *Apaturia* — Faeraud took it back, when he returned to Sahada.”

“Naturally *ya* believed him,” Auseten chuckled. He was always jealous of Aedon and bitterly espoused their situation, “*Ya* are one of an elite few who can interpret its writings. *Ya* know *yar* important to our secret alliance so don’t pretend *yar* not.”

“So this gives you permission to invade a territory of Atlantis? What un-thought-out plan is swishing about in your head? Do you wish to provoke another *Territorial Quarrel* — which the Asterians will end within hours? ... Their rule will only grow stronger when you fuel it with absurdity like this attack,” Aedon huffed.

“Not if we use their own *enchanted poems*. We can stop them, the Asterians that is. If you and me — if we obtain all three of the *Scrolls*, we could rule — like we all planned long ago. Why we’d be more powerful than King Yaswhen himself.”

“*Seamuck!* I suppose you’re going to march on up to *First Moat* and expect Faeraud to hand over the deed to the Irem, next.”

“*Ya* create sarcasm when *ya* should be generating respect,” Auseten snapped, turning his back and starting to leave. Then he stopped. “There are three *Rataka Scrolls*: fire, water, and air. We both know Faeraud still has the *Scroll of Water*.”

“Remember how difficult it was to discern? Its *poems* are hidden, and its enchanted tones are difficult to reproduce,” Aedon reminded. “You can barely make water fall from the sky with just one-third of the three.”

“But with all of them, and *ya* interpreting, we could out rhyme the old petrified Asterians,” Auseten pleaded.

“Why would we want to do that anyway?” Aedon stumbled, kicking a shackle across the floor.

“Because —” Auseten said, picking up the chain and holding it, “They have chained us with rules based in lies. Can’t *ya* see, they are slowly enslaving all of us. Each week they pass more decrees and laws — rules that take away our freedoms and bind us to their deficiencies. This is the only way to restore freedom to the human race.”

“I haven’t played games from my youth in some time,” Aedon hesitantly responded. He trusted Auseten less than a *crumbling petrified bridge*, but he had to keep his cool, play along, and figure out a way to get out of there.

Auseten grumbled and paced about the room, then he stopped and exhaled a breath of anxiety, “The *Second Scroll*, the book of *fiery enchantments* — its mystery no longer eludes us.”

He opened the lip of his toga and pulled out a black holder. From within its hollowed-out chamber he produced an onyx-colored scroll. The tube floated in midair, then it expanded long way; and next, it unrolled before them. It behaved in the same manner as the *Scroll of Water* they had investigated before, except instead of a large sheet of papyrus covered in swells of water, it rippled with billows of fire; instead of splashes of mist emanating from its pages, puffs of smoke swirled. Aedon scooted forward in excitement as if the scroll were a powerful magnet impulsively attracting him to it.

“One more promise,” Auseten demanded, “One more little *finger-locking promise* to reaffirm the return of our fellowship. *Ya* do want to see these *Asterian Enchantments* as much as I do.”

Auseten extended his fingers; so did Aedon, the best he could with his hands still wrapped in chains. He defiantly exclaimed, “Lock.”

“Lock,” Auseten responded as their fingers interlocked; then he removed the chains from Aedon because he was now bound with the oath he had given.

“Amazing — the *Second Scroll*,” Aedon awed, running his hand above the surface where he could feel its heat. “It’s hot, but it doesn’t burn.”

“This is — the *Scroll of Fire*, the papyrus filled with *enchancements of destruction*: they dictate sickness, they discipline pestilence, they regulate the sun, they command the volcanoes ...” he stated in a daze.

Ausethen had concocted a plan to conquer the world. Now that he was closer than he ever dreamt, he was frightened. The *Scrolls* were full of mysteries and he was unsure about how to handle such. While he continued to publicly pretend to be in a battle against Faeraud, he secretly was in awe of him and was jealous of his relationship with Aedon. Back in their *educatory* days, when Aedon came into their lives, it seemed like Faeraud favored him and Ausethen was always taking second place. Now he had an instrument of power and believed that he could call the shots. He had something that Faeraud dearly wanted and now he was certain that they could become best friends again. His thinking was possibly delusional because he was forgetting that he had just invaded Faeraud’s country. But there have been many rulers throughout history that have been blinded by power, greed, and lust.

“This *Scroll* can sway wars of destruction,” Aedon added, before Ausethen snapped the scroll away, compressing it back into its container. “It was not by chance that you conquered this island so easily. Possession of these *forbidden poems* no doubt weighed toward your favor.”

“Ya know why Faeraud wanted this scroll so badly?” Ausethen asked. “Because it contains the architectural plans for building the *thunderbolt*. The prince who clutches these plans — has the power to rule the world.”

“Or destroy it,” Aedon quickly added. “Have you gone mad? The Asterians are surely on their way to intervene this very moment.”

“Calm down my paranoid one,” Ausethen chuckled. “Have ya deficiently forgotten that the Asterians have lost their power on this planet. No man has ever set foot on their moon, and likewise they should not be allowed down here. Soon we will take away that

blinding light they travel in, and then men can once again rule what is ours.”

“Where was the *Scroll* found?”

“Practically in *yar* moat,” Auseten revealed. “Last moon-cycle I was staring into my reflection in a fountain when I thought I saw something peculiar. It gave me the idea. Since the *Scroll of Water* was found under the library torch of Sahada, I guessed that *the Scroll of Fire* would be near water. Obtaining it secretly was a challenge which was not easy.

“First I had to convince my father that the scroll was on the island. I told him that Atlantis had secured the *Water Scroll* and that was how Lemech’s life was really saved. That enraged him and made him commit to finding the next *Scroll*. A source I shall not reveal clued me into the fact the *Scroll of Fire* was hidden behind the *Pouring Pitcher Falls*. Right here in Gadeirus.

“The Asterians had placed extra guards and protections around it. The first attack was orchestrated on the pyramid where I convinced my father the *Scroll* was hidden. Then I diverted my best warriors to the falls where we located its ancient protections, destroyed them, and secured the prize. While the warriors battled, I snuck the *Scroll* away. Conveniently, my balloon exploded and as it rained down into the sea, they believed the *Scroll* had been lost. No one else knows that it survived except for me — and now *ya*.

“I had to have *yar finger-locking promise*, because I’ve heard rumors that *ya* went over to the other side, palling-up with Ahteana and all them psycho-Asterians.”

“Palling-up? I’m a balanced independent person. I don’t take sides,” Aedon assured.

Auseten contemplated the remark with a sigh of concern, “I am going to release *ya* because I have a message I need *ya* to take to Faeraud.”

“Faeraud,” Aedon questioned, “Shouldn’t you be talking with Lemech?”

“Certainly, *ya* of all princes can see that Lemech is simply a façade that Faeraud controls. Lemech is smart not to name Faeraud

his successor yet; he suspects the second that he does, some accident will befall him. ... Now, *ya* must deliver this message to Faeraud and only to him. It regards our *Secret Organization*. I want us all to be together — on the same side again. These challenges are, like *ya* said, insane. They're ripping us apart and destroying our riches. We need to share in the new universe these *Scrolls* can create," Auseten explained, holding in his deepest fear that his plan and the invasion was beyond what he might be able to handle.

"He won't believe you have the *Scroll of Fire*."

Auseten signaled a whistle and the family *copy-parrot* flew in, "Once he hears what *birdie* here has to say — the return of our alliance will be unstoppable. If we are to bring the *Scrolls* together and continue with our association then we will all meet up again at the next *Masquerade Middag*."

Aedon still had no idea what a *Middag* was and blew out a sigh in disbelief as Peter-the-Parrot hopped on his arm. He was afraid to ask any more questions rationalizing that it might delay his escape.

A dagger of moonlight stabbed at Faeraud as he sat up in bed back at the Irem in Atlantis. Sweating profoundly, he awoke from a terrible nightmare. He wiped his forehead with the corner of his satin sheet. Something in the dimly lit corner of the room caught his eye. Maybe he was seeing things, he thought, or perhaps he was still dreaming. The stone blocks nearby gave a dim sparkle beckoning him their way. He scoffed as he saw the large mirror in the corner.

Loving to stare at himself, he had many mirrors in the room, but this one was different. The oversized furnishing had been given to him when he was a young lad. It sat idle in the corner of his room with a cover over it for decades. Then one day shortly after his *Registration of Youth*, he uncovered its bulky frame made from lava rock. He began having nightmares shortly after the reflecting glass was uncovered, which he dismissed as an absurd coincidence.

He yanked the satin sheet from his bed and wrapped it around his waist as curiosity beckoned him closer. The edges were so shinny and sharp that he carefully used a muffle to position it rather than risk slicing off a finger. Its glass was opaque and dark and he could only see his reflection when he stepped directly in front. It stood two *podes* (about eighteen inches) taller than him. Its top was shaped like an arch and beams of light sharply shot from its glass as it reflected the luminous moons filtering in through the drapes.

From the window ledge his necklace glinted a moonbeam which instinctively commanded him to grab it. The trinket made him feel jilted as it reminded him that some of the other princes, like Aedon, had been given genuine amulets by an Asterian at the Irminsul Pyramid, yet all he had to wear was this imposture he manufactured.

He tore off a vine of leaves escaping up the stone wall and wrapped it around his head like a makeshift crown. Then he quietly vowed, "I AM going to be king — soon. ... Hail, King Faeraud! ... It would be a great pleasure, though a bit of a challenge ... As king, my first decree is that all Asterians shall be sent back to Asteria ... banished from Earth ..."

Then he stopped and gazed at his reflection a while longer. The longer he gazed the more impressed he became with himself. His long stare began to make him think he was seeing things. For a moment he thought that his reflection was real. Then he thought that he heard voices hailing him as king. Then he became startled, too frightened to move. But he knew he had to, he had to make sure. You see, he noticed that his reflection had stopped moving in unison with himself.

He gasped and then took a tiny little step to the left. His reflection did the same thing, but it was a delayed reaction. He did it again, stepping back. The same thing happened again.

Then, Faeraud peeked behind the mirror. So did the reflection. Nothing was there. Faeraud closed one eye — the reflection closed none. He gulped.

“Who are you?” Faeraud whispered. He was frightened but refused to show it.

Then the image slowly turned around as the crown of leaves morphed into a real golden one. The reflection quickly came up to full brightness. It appeared and looked just like Faeraud, but was dressed as a king and held a scepter with a silver serpent wrapped around its rod and a fiery-red prism on top.

“U’d ahum unot; unot ahuro unot. I am you,” the reflection replied in a slow, raspy-whisper.

“Me?” he asked, surprised. “Then who am I?”

The mirror answered, “You are you ... and I am you.”

“What do you really want?”

“I am here to give you everything that you desire.”

“How would you know what I want?” Faeraud demanded.

“You are saddened — disappointed that the priestess has not bestowed an amulet upon you.”

“I have one, already. I’m wearing it.”

“Huh. We both know that is a fake. Don’t waste my time insulting my all-knowing being,” the mirror image huffed, beginning to fade.

“No, don’t go. What is it that you want?”

“I want to make you happy ... give you everything that you desire.”

“You wouldn’t be making such foolish promises if you really knew what I wanted.”

“But I do, and I — I alone can give it to you.”

“Then, Sir, all-knowing reflection of me, what is it that I want, that you are going to give me?”

“You — you want — the world, the world and everything in it. I’ve heard you before. I have listened when no one else would dare. You have claimed many times that this kingdom belongs to you. I can give it all — to you.”

“Yes I want the crown of every Etruscan alive and then the scepter from every Prince Lord of every land. Do my desires disturb you?”

“You shall have it all,” the reflection replied.

“Is this some trick? Who is behind this enchanted mirror?”

“I am real — not an illusion, as I appear now. And I can give you a real kingdom.”

“I am already prince, and will be named next-in-line, to be crowned when Lemech passes on.”

“Do you really believe Lemech will ever name you?”

“Why shouldn’t he?” Faeraud asked.

“Lemech will never name you — while Gilgamoeh is still alive.”

“How do you know this?”

The mirror was silent.

“Gilgamoeh can’t live forever. ... And once he is out of the way —” Faeraud began to reason.

“I doubt that Lemech would ever pass the throne on — to someone who is not his own flesh and blood.”

“I am his next born, after Gilgamoeh.”

“The truth has been hidden from you, my prince. Adah is not your real mother. You are not a full-blooded prince.”

“This is absurd. Why would I listen to you — or believe anything you have to say? You are simply a dream — a nightmare to me,” Faeraud responded as he turned to go back to bed.

“I am one who is very powerful. You have chosen me already — when you were reciting *Enchanted Poems* from *MY Scroll of Water*,” the mirror revealed.

“Your *Scroll*? ... Then ... then, you are King Yaswhen?” Faeraud asked in disbelief, yet frightened.

“No, silly boy. I am *King Sayer*.”

Faeraud stepped back. He was a little confused. He never believed in all the stories about King Yaswhen or *Say and Teller*. He was sure that *Sayer* really did not exist. And even if he did, certainly the stories had been exaggerated over time and fine-tuned to fit the political climate of the day. He told this to his reflection.

“I don’t believe it. I don’t believe there is an Asterian called *Say and Teller*.”

“Don’t call me *Say and Teller*,” the mirror yelled back. “I am King Sayer. I am offering you the world — and you are calling me names?”

“I meant no offense.”

“Then grant me my freedom, and I will unlock the secrets of my *Scrolls* for you.”

“But the secrets I seek — are written in the *Scrolls of King Yaswhen*.”

“Yaswhen?” the mirror laughed. “Yaswhen didn’t write them, I did. Yaswhen died long ago, then the Asterians took my papyruses because they saw that whoever had my writings could rule the universe. If not used wisely, someone might even be able to destroy the cosmos. So they stole them and locked me up in prison.”

“Interesting, but — why should I believe you?” Faeraud asked.

“Soon news got out about my *Scrolls*, and copied passages were found — right about the time that Yaswhen died. So, they made up this story about a coming doomsday and how Yaswhen was going away to find some better planet for all of us to live on, and that the *Scrolls* were to be sealed until his return.”

“Why do I pay attention?” Faeraud asked himself, thinking out loud, “You’re only an enchanted mirror.”

“A wise lad you are. I use this mirror only to communicate with you. I am he, the untold being, who gave you this mirror — at your birth. ... It is I, not Yaswhen who will return to Earth and restore peace to the kingdom. Look deep into your own feelings, your own soul. You know that what I speak is true.”

“My feelings have been wrong before,” Faeraud told himself.

“Have they really?” the mirror asked.

“You’re right. I’ve always known that what I felt deep down inside was the truth. Why, it is all beginning to make sense now,” he tried to convince himself.

“The time for my return has arrived and you have been chosen to set me free and fulfill the prophecy; a fulfillment for which you will be rewarded beyond your greatest imagination.”

“But how? Are you not on Asteria, and I am down here on Earth?” he asked.

“I will show you; I will teach you everything,” the mirror continued, “And all I ask is for your loyalty — a bow and pledge to me, a promise to free me, and a promise to do one more thing, which I will ask of you at a later time.”

“What thing?”

“I will tell of it later.”

“What if I don’t want to?”

“You will do it!” the mirror yelled. Then it calmed down and reasoned, “It will be fun. Hasn’t the man who claims to be your father, Lemech, betrayed you? Hasn’t he taken too many sun-cycles to name a successor to his throne? Why you should’ve been named the day he was coronated, or at least the day you saved his life. Yet, he waits hoping some legal pardon will come to his son Gilggy. Do you want Gilggy to be king?”

“Indeed not!”

“Shouldn’t you rule the world — the whole world? Be king of the entire planet? Shouldn’t every person, animal and beast that walks on this ground serve you?”

“YES! It’s all mine. It’s all rightfully mine.”

“It is! Now give me a *finger-locking promise* and it will be all yours.”

The reflection extended its arm out of the mirror and Faeraud bowed down on one knee and locked fingers with it.

“Lock,” Faeraud vowed.

“You are my chosen one,” the mirror replied. “I, the almighty, bless the amulet you wear, making it authentic and above all others.”

A burst of steam spewed from the glass and the necklace glowed a bright red.

Sayer continued, “Now go back to sleep and I will reveal to you in a dream how we will bring peace to the world; for I shall rule the universe and use you as my instrument to lead this planet. You will answer to no one. ... You are the chosen king of Atlantis. You will free the people from the lies of the Asterians and the memory of Yaswhen, so that they will be bound to serve us instead.”

Faeraud returned to his bed falling back where his long hair bounced on the cushions and the necklace danced on his chest glowing brighter than any that Ahteana the Asterian had ever chanted over. As he fell asleep his mind filled with dark voices which chanted repeatedly: *Your enemy is your friend and your friends are your enemy.*

PAPYRUS THREE

WHOOOO'S THERE?

SLAP! A thin branch of leaves danced across his face while the copy-parrot, on his shoulder, ducked out of the way. Two Babylon willow trees hid Aedon's delta-transporter like the darkness that blanketed the night sky. Not even the bald moon was bright enough to shine through the dense-industrial haze that hung over Mestor.

Leaving his transporter on the roof of the abode, he made his way down the parameter stairway hoping someone he knew would be home. Once, many sun-cycles ago, he had agreed to buy the place from his girlfriend's father. He hadn't seen her in years, hadn't been back there since, and wasn't sure who might have taken up residence.

A twig snapped, a distant night owl cried out, and oddly he felt they were being watched. He cried out in a whisper, “Who’s there? Is someone there?”

“Who’s there?” the parrot mimicked.

Dark shadows fought to keep her hidden. Finally a shaking voice quivered, “Over here — by the tree trunk.”

“Who is that? Areshia, is that you?”

“Shhh ... They’ll hear you,” she confirmed, “And then they’ll see me.”

“They?” Aedon questioned, probing further, “Where the *sayer* are you?”

Areshia emerged from the willow branches pulling a *sunbrella* from her satchel. She held the funny-looking thing, with its three tiers, close as she scurried over. Aedon turned toward her and froze. Suddenly all the feelings he used to have for her stamped back. They rushed to his forehead like a cold *brainfreeze* and he couldn’t move. She was scruffy, dirty, and unkempt; but to him, she appeared glorious as his past memories painted beauty across her face.

“Quick, Aedon, get under its protection,” she loudly whispered while covering him.

“A *sunbrella*, at night?” he questioned with a scowl, looking over her outfit. She hadn’t changed a bit. She was still wearing a boy’s toga and carrying arrows as if she were on a safari.

“Is someone else there?” Aedon snapped, turning toward another sound.

“I hope not. ... There’s a harsh moonbeam shining down,” she said, drawing him away from the foliage. “I don’t want it to cause a freckle on your face.”

“Moonbeam?” Aedon pondered, looking back toward the sound. “Who are you hiding from, Areshia? ... Who?”

“Their owls,” she revealed, tightly gripping his arm; then letting up, remembering that he wasn’t nearly as strong as she. “Go inside, I’ll tell you once it’s safe.”

“You have the key, right?”

“I gave you the key — long ago,” she confusingly replied.

“I never made it back here to pick it up,” he answered.

“In five sun-cycles?” she whispered, gasping with surprise. “You’re just now getting here for the first time?”

They both looked up toward the tree remembering where it had been hidden long ago. Areshia crouched low, prodding Aedon toward its trunk with her *sunbrella*.

He objected, “You aren’t serious about climbing up there — at this hour?”

“Cowardly clownfish, I’d get it myself it weren’t for the owl up there.”

Aedon begrudgingly climbed the branches. He had to look around for a while, but finally he found the thing. The tree had grown since the last time they were there and he had difficulty getting it loose.

“What’s taking so long? Hurry up before an owl tattles.”

With a forceful tug, the round ornament-like key pulled free, sending him down the tree trunk along with a bushel of branches.

“*Birdie* going to need another bath,” Peter crowed, fluttering his wings as he poked his beak out of a pile of leaves.

Tumbling to the front door, Aedon inserted the *globeaky* into the cylinder-like hole. The lock spun around and clicked to its release position. Areshia had to twist it further, through the buildup of dust and cobwebs which kept it from freely swinging open. They barely stepped inside when she quickly slammed the door shut, affixing the locking mechanism as if a wild beast were about to tear in. She acted quickly and decisively, afraid that Aedon had settled back to his old way of *taking too long to make decisions*.

“Not so hasty with those arrows,” Aedon begged, “I’m just priming the light.”

He spun the wheel attached to the transformer base as green egg-shaped bulbs slowly began to enlighten the room. The abode was furnished with plush lounging-crates topped with cushions that resembled a camel’s hump. Their pastel colors

pleasantly contrasted against the nighttime picture-window where the distant waterfalls sparkled reflections of the city's lights. Areshia closed the *sunbrella* and searched for a place to stow it. With a grunt she thrust it into a corner and turned back around.

The greenish light warmed across her face casting strands of shadows from her long hair. Her pouty, fish-like lips were a magnet of desirability to Aedon. He wondered if they would pick-up where they had left off suns earlier.

"Someone's been here. They packed up my tableware," she noticed, looking at a barrel that held her archaic Aszean dishes.

Aedon dropped the *copy-parrot* onto a perch, "I've missed you."

"A bird," Areshia proclaimed in a paranoid tone. "What's he doing here?"

"It's Pete, my *copy-parrot* — with a *communicae*."

"PETER!" the bird squawked out in correction, "It's Peter!"

"Ah — yes," she remarked, timidly holding tight to the toga wrapped around her.

Aedon sighed, opening a side panel of the wall. The opening revealed several other *copy-parrots* waiting there.

"The Gardner reminds you: 'Water rationing started last sun-cycle. PLEASE tell your fish to stop spewing on the lawn except for *Twoday* and *Fourday*,'" the first bird squawked out, mimicking the Gardner.

"There are ants living in the rafters without permission — and their colonization has reached unallowable limits. I've asked them to leave several times, but they insist on speaking to the master of the abode," another bird croaked out, mimicking the maid.

A third parrot started, "There are —"

"Does an entire *bird tradery* come with this abode?" Aedon asked.

Areshia quickly doled out assignments, "*Tweety*, go tell the fish to mind the law. And *Birdy*, hardly a person ever visits this

place. Tell the ants they can stay, but only on the far rafter. And you others — use your bird brains, for *Pete's sake*.”

Peter squawked with a protest.

Clenching her bag with both hands she hurried over to the large window and drew the drapes across. Aedon chased after her as he noticed the nightly water-performance outside had already begun. He had heard about the show, but never seen it before.

“Do you always shut out the *Dancing Transglausts* like the scorching sun?” he objected, referring to the holographic-like images of dancers that were projected on the off-spray from the falls.

“A Nawalym village wouldn't interest me tonight,” she huffed, holding the drapes firmly in their closed position. “I mustn't be found.”

Never had he seen her so paranoid before, and was worried about the manner in which she was acting. He wondered what kind of trouble she had gotten into. The calm shy girl he once knew, looked older, and acted outwardly neurotic — almost like his mother.

“I'll check and see if there's a bottle of wine in the pantry — to calm us down,” he suggested, hurrying into the kitchen and down a circular stairway leading him to it.

“As long as it's not from Gilgamoeh's vineyard,” she shouted after him, before sitting down and crossing her legs which she did a lot.

They both chuckled, remembering how grapes from the vineyard had been poisoned once, and almost killed her — but that's another whole story.

Returning from the pantry he held two bottles, hoping one would calm her down. POP went the cork. Pouring the wine into two glasses, he reflected over their past. The memories of their romance blossomed in his mind bigger than all the legends of Atlantis. Occasionally he had dreamt for the day when he would be reunited with Areshia. Finally she was here, but the evening was not unfolding as he had imagined; instead, it was going rather

peculiarly. He sat beside her extending the glass. She slapped him hard and half the wine jolted out.

“Fouteen-hundred and seventy-three days. No communicae not even a *copy-parrot!*”

“I told ya, I was searching for my father ... and you. I’m here now. We’ll work things out...”

“I can’t stay. A couple more suns and they’ll track me here.”

“I’ll pledge to keep the owls away if you’ll agree to have a glass of wine with me tonight ... tomorrow night ... and the next one ...” he said.

Reaching for the wine, she let out a long thoughtful sigh, “I really didn’t expect anyone to be here. Certainly not you.”

She hesitated before clinking her glass to his extended one. He sipped. She didn’t. Slowly he lowered the glass from his lips. It was obvious that she wasn’t ready to continue where they’d left off years earlier.

“A chill breathes and it comes not from the wine,” he remarked, before hesitating to move toward her; he moved anyway.

She gulped half her glass down with a swallow and a grimace before standing. She was torn between keeping true to her mission and stopping to rekindle the relationship with Aedon. She hadn’t had an occasion to ponder these things and decided that a bath might give her a space of time to think.

“I imagine that I’d enjoy a relaxing *Spring Ostia?*” she suggested, gesturing toward an adjacent room. “I haven’t had one since last I lived here.”

Aedon nodded as she wandered to the bathing enclosure and closed the door. Wooden walls surrounded a stone covered dig-out in the floor where warm water bubbled. Many of the abodes made use of the hot and cold springs that ran just below the surface of the earth. Areshia removed her toga and stepped into the water. She rolled her eyes as she sat down and enjoyed its soothing warmth. A few moments later she pulled on a nearby rope, which opened a small door, and a splash of cold water poured out along with a dozen *spongia officinalis*. The live sponges began climbing

over her limbs, her back, her hair and everywhere. They worked diligently to clean and massage her whole body. They couldn't talk, but you could hear them murmur a happy tune as they opened and closed their *oscula* in unison.

Peter had pooped-out and was gibbering in his sleep like some parrots do.

Aedon stepped outside for a view of the water pageant where he heard a noise from in the garden level below. Deciding to investigate, he crept along the path that led downward while trying to conceal himself behind the plants. He was sure someone else was nearby and just as he was about to reach the lower level —

Areshia called out, "I think I'll have another glass of that wine if there's any left."

Quickly Aedon scurried back upstairs to answer her. Soon the bath was done, and the sponges disappeared down into the hot spring of water, off to wherever it ended, or maybe, merged with another body of water.

The door was open a crack and from the cushion Aedon rested on, he caught a glimpse of Areshia as she toweled herself off. She reached for her old toga. Aedon's mouth dropped open as he almost jumped up to object to her putting the muddy thing back on — but he couldn't. He shouldn't have been watching in the first place. Then, she folded up the toga, set it aside, and wrapped clean towels around her body instead. Aedon slinked back into the cushion with a sigh of relief.

"*Apa'hei*. I just want to relax tonight," she said, plopping down next to him and accepting another glass of wine he presented. "Promise me you won't ask any more questions."

"Promises always get me into trouble," Aedon responded, then raised an eyebrow as he moved closer to her. "Of course a glass of wine with a beautiful girl could get me into even worse trouble."

"Beautiful? Who?" she playfully responded, slithering back on the cushion as Aedon's body towered over hers.

He pulled her long black hair away from her face and for the first time she really did look attractive. He crouched down on a knee bending over her. His hand moved from her hair across her cheekbone toward her lips where his own were on course to collide. The wind outside tugged a branch against the window. She pulled away as if the sound had scolded her to stop. Aedon paused with a stare, holding onto the moment and refusing to let it go.

“Why are you staring?” she asked.

“I’m not staring. ... I’m memorizing.”

“Memorizing? Memorizing what?”

“Remembering your hair. ... Learning your face, recalling your eyes, your nose, your lips ...”

She began to feel uncomfortable again and changed the subject, “I used to hate that window.”

“Is that why you keep it all closed up in here? How could anyone hate such a gorgeous view?” he asked.

“When I was younger ... was a little girl ... the place was new then. You know how new abodes are — they settle, they creak and moan a lot — an awful lot when you’re a little girl in a big place all alone. I used to have this really terrible nightmare.

“I’d be standing by the window, there would be a loud long creak and then the whole house would slide down the mountain side and tumble into the river below.”

“With you still inside?”

“That was just the beginning. The house would rush down the stream in a violent rapids. Then branches and birds would bang and splat against the large window. I would just stand there screaming. Next, a great big tree trunk would smash through the window and the ride would stop as water gushed throughout the whole place.”

“And then?”

“I’d wake up — I think,” she shook her head, “I don’t know what made me think of that.”

“Not long ago we talked about living here together, making this place our home. I’m not assuming we can pick up where we

left off back then. All I ask is for a chance. ... I am on journey and have a delivery to make, will you come with me?"

"I can't. I have deliveries to make, also," she informed him. "Then I'm returning to Bashan, that is my home now."

"Bashan? Where my father resides? Have you seen him? You must have crossed paths before."

"He builds a compound where animals, that have been mistreated, come to live and work. Gilgamoeh is building a community — a safe haven for them — in the glaciers, far away from the clutches of their abusers."

"I've heard this report before. Isn't the *Agglomeration* where disturbed animals belong? Why is he wasting all of his resources building in such an isolated place? By the time he finishes this abode, his banishment will be over and he'll be able to come back to the Irem, and back to all of us here. Who will live in that thing then?" Aedon said, scornfully.

Areshia said no more, afraid she might reveal too much. Aedon was still upset because Gilgamoeh was supposed to be his father and he believed that he should be spending time with his long-lost son and not strange beasts who were escapees. He was hurt and still furious within because his father continued to refuse to acknowledge him as his son. Though not married, his mother maintained that Gilgamoeh forced himself upon her and that he was Aedon's father. A *genetikos-replica* even proved her claim true. More than anything, Aedon wanted to meet his father, even if only for five moments. This was something he had to do. He had to have his questions answered even though he wasn't sure what those questions were, what he would ask, or how he would ask them.

"I wish we had reconnected long ago. I cannot stay as I have little time to deliver these last letters and some of their recipients allude me," she revealed.

"What message could be so hastily important?" Aedon begged with a huff.

“I promised to deliver these scrolls with all speed and sensitivity,” she said, gesturing toward the satchel. “I must go to the Irem and present them to the Etruscans there.”

“The Irem? That is where I make travel to also. We can journey together,” Aedon eagerly volunteered. He brushed the hair out of her face and looked into it, more memories swam in his head. “Tomorrow we will set off; it is written in the stars.”

She gave a slight smile as she was momentarily swept into the past by his sparkling hazel eyes, but she knew this was not possible.

“Your scrolls — is that what the owls are looking for?” Aedon asked.

“No. They’re looking for something else,” she revealed, looking down at the floor. “They’re after the *globeaky* — my father’s key”

“Your father’s *globeaky*? Why?” Aedon asked; he was more confused. He walked into the kitchen and began searching for the second bottle of wine. He never drank much but this night he really needed another one.

“I shouldn’t tell you this ... I shouldn’t say anything ...”

“Then don’t,” he replied, popping the second cork. He didn’t want to hear any more crazy stories.

She needed someone to talk to and many times thought herself, that she might be going insane. “I need to explain. I owe you at least that much.”

“If you really believe so,” said Aedon. It was hard for him not to give into that rough edge she had, which was always commanding and to the point.

“My father, he guarded the secure chambers of the Iron Isolation,” she reminded him. “Months before your *genetikos-replica* was opened, dozens of different interested parties attempted to break-in and tamper with your results. During that time, my father hid the key but somehow it went missing.”

“I don’t see the problem. The replica was revealed. No one needs the key now,” Aedon reasoned.

“They only pretended to have the original replica. That was why they cut your hand ... to draw blood and make a new verification at that time. The key opens other chambers too — and other secrets in the Iron Isolation. Secrets that some would kill for,” she revealed, looking around as if to make sure there were no other interested parties nearby. “No one must know that I am here. Promise me.”

“What secrets does this key unlock?”

“Some believe it opens a vault to where one of the *Rataka Scrolls* written by King Yaswhen may reside. All across this city, across the continent, small groups of *Enchanters* have gathered into covens. One of them left a scroll demanding this key on the same day that my father disappeared.”

“Areshia, this is serious. We must tell Prince Lord Lemech of this news upon our arrival.”

“But I have messages to deliver. Besides there is no way that you or I can tell anyone — NO ONE can know about the key.”

“Why?”

“The *Enchanters* have infiltrated all levels of libraries, educatories, astronomers and government. We believe — Lemech may even be one of them.”

“Areshia, I am really concerned. You’re talking nonsense. These conspiracy theories have been around since the first moon after King Yaswhen left. Seriously ...”

“I’ve said too much. The trip was long ... the ice and sun, they’ve blurred my mind. ... I will retire for the evening and then continue tomorrow at sun-break.”

“No apology. What you need is some food,” Aedon responded, as he stepped into the kitchen and returned with some fruit.

“*Enchanters*,” he remarked with half a laugh. “Who are they?”

Areshia bit into a pear as she explained, “They are enemies of King Yaswhen and they are seeking to find the three *Scrolls* that he has written. Once they have all three, they could become

powerful enough to rule the universe and they'd enslave the rest of us."

"There are copies of these *enchanted poems* floating around in every household. This sounds like a stretch of a story," Aedon reasoned, peeling him a banana.

"The rumors say the *Enchanters* are organizing small bands-of-three, but one member of each group, secretly belongs to a higher order and will later bind the other members into joining their secret organization with the larger one."

"Hasn't such an imaginary group been blamed for everything else that's gone wrong on the planet? Yet, no one can seem to find this secret faction," Aedon scoffed, chewing off a bite of the banana. Then, he remembered how Auseten, Faeraud and he were in a secret organization. He knew that they already had seen one of the *Rataka Scrolls* and now possibly a second. Certainly she couldn't be talking about them; why they weren't organizing any groups against King Yaswhen.

"This sounds like seaweed. Someone is trying to frighten you with lies?" Aedon insisted, holding her arms with his hands. "What about us? I miss you, I still have feelings for you."

"It can't work. I just don't think it can any more. ... Aedon, I'm engaged," she blurted out. "I am engaged to be married to Yapet."

"Engaged, to Yapet?" he snapped in a surprised tone, stepping back from her. "Where's your engagement band?"

She was wearing her issued yellow-armband and there wasn't a thin-purple one stretched next to it, as was customary when a person was engaged. Armbands were worn to identify which caste (social and working class) you were born into. Marrying into another caste was looked down upon, but had become more common recently. An engagement and marriage between two people allowed either person to cross over into a different caste.

“Yapet? You can’t marry Yapet,” Aedon grumbled, standing up and pacing across the floor. She looked up at him and a twinkle of life edged into her eye as she realized that both men desired her.

“He’s a bore,” Aedon continued. “When have you ever had a good time with him? Done anything fun? Had an adventure?”

“He is too adventurous,” she answered back defensively. “Just ‘cause he’s not dangerous ...”

“Dangerous? Who saved your neck ... more than once?”

“I haven’t given him my final answer — yet. But I will, and soon,” she said.

“If the owls don’t get you first,” Aedon sarcastically reminded her.

She took another gulp from the wine glass before setting it down on the floor next to her satchel where she soon drifted off into a sleep.

Aedon covered her with a blanket before tip-toeing over to Peter where he stroked his feathers lightly enough to wake him. The bird blinked awake with a squawk.

“Shhh,” Aedon whispered. “Tomorrow morning ... I am going to travel with her. I’ll need you to take Ausethen’s message to Faeraud at the Irem, and then come find us after that.”

“Find you — where?” the bird snapped. “You can’t send me there all alone.”

“We’ll plan the route at sunrise.”

At daybreak, when Aedon arose, he discovered that Areshia was already gone. He angrily kicked one of the barrels overflowing with dishes — they chattered back. Then he gathered together his things and prepared to depart for the Irem. He wondered how long it might take him to reach the palace flying against the wind that was picking up force.

“You’re crazy! You’re crazy to make voyage in this weather!” the bird croaked out, trying to fly through the blustery breeze to Aedon.

PAPYRUS THREE

The willow branches swept back and forth across the vehicle as the delta took off. He knew that he had to get the *copy-parrot* and his message to Faeraud. The survival of his homeland, and his mother, depended on it. He headed into the viscous airstream of the *Seasonal Northernor*.

PAPYRUS FOUR

CONFESSIONS

Flags tore at their poles before the eastwardly gale extinguished a row of torches leading into the coliseum. Egg-shaped illumination-bulbs resting on boxed platforms began to hum as they brightened the sports field. Aedon clutched the parrot under his toga, protecting him from the gushing wind which was adamant about whisking the bird away.

He scolded himself for listening to Auseten and believing that there was any chance of the old secret organization reforming. He had mixed feelings about it all. At one point his friends' goal seemed to pull in the opposite direction of a promise he had made about following the teachings of King Yaswhen instead of stealing them. But time had passed since his graduation from the *educatory* and he longed for adventure, he was lonely, and Prince Faeraud always fascinated him. He felt nervous and was sure that Faeraud would make some snide remark before sending him away; he almost wished that he would.

A thin figure with long cheekbones, sunken like his father's, with a hint of creepiness in his demeanor caused Aedon to step back startled. It was Faeraud.

"Such a ghastly hour to pay a visit, but always a delight to see you," said Faeraud, jamming a spear into the earth as if he were perturbed by the visit. His fondness toward Aedon rushed back like a rogue wave, but he wasn't about to show it just yet.

"*Apa'hei*," Aedon greeted, still worried that they'd become enemies though he wasn't sure. It had been many suns since they last saw each other and that visit didn't end terribly well. He told himself just to deliver the message and get out of there, but curiosity weighed his sandals down heavier than a cornerstone.

He asked, "I tried calling on you, up at the Irem — they told me you were down here — practicing. I was curious as to why you'd be throwing javelins when the sundial is covered in shadow."

"I'm glad you're here — I've missed you," Faeraud replied, leading the way toward his arsenal of throwing sticks. "We should all be preparing —"

"Preparing for sport, at night, when the moonlight hides?"

"Readying not for sport, but for war. You have heard about the invasion?"

"I was in Cliff City when it happened."

"So you were. ... A star of protection must shine on you — if you were able to escape undetected," Faeraud nodded, picking up a long spear and barely touching its sharp end before positioning himself for a launch.

"I was taken prisoner," Aedon huffed, showing marks on his arms from the chains. "Lord Haedrus invaded the island and occupied my mother's abode. His son, Ausethen, released me so I could deliver this *copy-parrot* with a message — for you," Aedon announced.

"Squawk," the bird yelped, flying over to perch on a large mechanical beast that looked like a waterwheel plucked from a stream.

“Interesting indeed. ... I doubt there is any message which that scalawag writes that I want to hear,” Faeraud snarled. “Listen, I’ve known for some time that he envies me. If he could, he would turn himself into me.”

“Then you have an advantage.”

“Perhaps,” Faeraud thought out loud. “Everyone wishes they were me — it’s a burden that I must adjust to. ... This message, it must be somewhat humorous — else why would he risk setting you free?”

Faeraud was once a striking-beautiful young-man and Aedon had been attracted to him like many others, but recently the prince’s good-looks had morphed into more than a couple of timeworn wrinkles. His self-absorbed conceit would have fended off any sane man, except, in the period of their time, most men behaved that way normally. Aedon decided to explain what happened.

“When I initially discovered what Auseten was up to, I anxiously rushed here and was eager to be included once again. But then I investigated my thoughts and researched my memories and do not wish to be a part of this any longer,” Aedon confessed.

“So you came here to babble on about something that you no longer wish to babble on about?” Faeraud snapped, raising the javelin high and bringing his arm back. “Be gone then, and take your madness elsewhere.”

“Auseten has found another one of the *Scrolls*,” Aedon revealed, gasping that he had let the news out in such a quick manner.

Faeraud stumbled, dropped the spear, and then coughed, “Another *Scroll*? ... The second *Scroll*?”

Aedon’s knees vibrated along with his trembling thoughts; he wanted to turn around and run away, but instead he told more, “Auseten has it in his possession ... this very moment. ... I saw it!”

“It couldn’t be real, not a real authentic *Scroll* written by *Say* —” Faeraud stopped. He almost said *Sayer* but most people

believed that the *Scrolls* were written by King Yaswhen, so he quickly corrected himself.

“It appeared as authentic as the one we borrowed back at the *educatory*. ... I felt its fire,” Aedon whispered.

Cutting him off, Faeraud stomped over to the parrot, “What do you know about this, *Copy?*”

“By the time this message is recited, one maybe two of Atlantis’ isles will be taken,” the bird talked, gesturing as if Ausethen himself had been turned into the parrot. “Now we each hold one of the *Scrolls* and a third remains. We can join forces and unite together or go opposite ways and face battles of certain doom. Yesteryear we made a *finger-locking promise* to band together forever: you Faeraud, you Aedon, and me. Today the choice to honor that vow must be realized.”

“I’m sure that he mustn’t be trusted,” Aedon nervously said. “What if he’s an *Enchanter*. One who is baiting us to join some mischievous organization, possibly to overthrow the laws of King Yaswhen?”

“Interesting twist of events. ... Quiet a tale of entertainment. I’m almost tempted to play along. Again — *almost*,” Faeraud pondered, pacing with a finger to his chin, then stopping to slowly turn the wheel of his machine. “There is going to be a war, no sneaky scrolls or secret alliances will stop that.”

“A war? Aren’t you being pessimistic?”

“*Optimistic*, my smart Aedon,” Faeraud bragged. “My father has more fear in him than courage. Once he observes how slow the Asterians move to handle the situation, he will give his blessing for us to use the *Enchantments* in the *Scrolls*. With permission, our *poems* will become more powerful. I will reconquer Gadeirus and then Lemech will no longer be able to deny me position as his successor.”

“Seriously?” Aedon chuckled, inspecting the rickety-looking gear Faeraud was engaging. “Have you seen the balloons and equipment they have?”

“Your scrutiny of my newly invented *Atlatl-Amentum* disappoints me,” he sighed, loading a spear into the machine. “The *anemometer* and *looking-scope* make this the most accurate javelin thrower — even in the face of a whirlwind.”

Faeraud spun the machine around and aimed at a row of dummies. He wound it up and let it whirl. A single spear flung toward the target and embed in the ground a few *podas* (feet) in front of its intended destination.

“A small adjustment,” Faeraud snapped, eyeing the spear in one *looking-scope* and then moving the base of the machine while scoping out the target in another. He wound it up again and set the wheel in motion. The machine, loaded with a dozen spears, turned around and shot them across the stadium. Each spear stabbed the ground precisely in a line, six of them pinning the feet of the stuffed bodies beyond.

Aedon had to blink twice because the dummies that Faeraud was using for target looked like people they knew. The first one was dressed like the old *Instructioneer*, Yenocho holding a *looking-scope*; the next one was in a white dress and resembled Ahteana the Asterian; and the third looked a lot like Lemech who was Faeraud’s sickly father.

“I could have finished them off,” Faeraud boasted, picking up an extra-thick pole with a strap and raising it into position, “But I wanted to save their demise for a special new triple-javelin I’m perfecting. I ask, why should we waste energy to deliver one blow when we can destroy them quicker with three?”

He spun around like a shot-putter before releasing the strap. The javelin flew through the air and as it neared the other end of the field, it split in two and fell apart like a banana peels. Inside, three smaller spears bolted toward the dummies. In quick succession each was pierced in the gut before it cringed over into a heap.

“Innovative, certainly,” Aedon condescendingly sighed, “But no match for the explosives Aszea delivers. No one has seen

anything like this since ... since those *Quarrels* before my birth and yours.”

“They didn’t deliver any explosives,” Faeraud snapped, “They used our own *orichalcum*. If we had shut the supply down there wouldn’t have been any meltdown. ... You saw it! ... It’s frustrating! ... If Lemech would allow us to rebuild the thunderbolt — they’d run like scared pussy cats ... and hand over all their gold and *orichalcum* in fear of annihilation .”

“No one would ever allow that weapon to be made again; besides, the formula for the bolt was destroyed,” said Aedon.

“Aszea is already attempting to recreate it, I’ve recently learned. We’re in a race to see who produces it first and we haven’t even crossed the start-line yet,” said Faeraud, gesturing to the throw-line painted on the ground, before vowing, “I will find its blueprint I assure you. ... You saw the destruction Aszea levied on our island. Tell me, is there anything on this Earth that could weaken their strength — anything other than the thunderbolt?”

“What message do you wish for my bird to return to Ausethen?” asked Aedon, changing the subject back.

“You bring no proof and offer only a bird as a witness,” Faeraud retorted. “Am I to walk into some trap that perhaps you and Ausethen have collaborated? Aedon, I am much smarter than that — much smarter than you.”

“I AM AUSETHEN NOW HEAR MY WORDS,” the parrot shouted, mimicking the Aszean prince again. “When the early full moon came around, I looked into a reflecting pond. Its ripples brought life to my reflection, and it revealed the *Scroll’s* location. A haze on the water glistened and it told me to listen: *Your enemy is your friend and your friends are your enemy.*”

Only the buzzing transformers could be heard as the message dropped like a weight of certainty. It matched word for word what Faeraud’s own image in the mirror had told him: *Your enemy is your friend and your friends are your enemy.*

“It appears that indeed Auseten has found the *Scroll of Fire*,” Faeraud acknowledged. “It is the *Scroll* that contains the plans for the *thunderbolt*.”

Aedon gasped.

“It was many suns ago, before our time, that two men and one Asterian were appointed to hide the *Scrolls*. Each one separately hid one papyrus and appointed one of their kind to keep secret where that *Scroll* was secured. They vowed to guard it more than life itself. The human guardians of their *Scrolls* failed to keep them secret. Information was released to close family members whom they thought they could trust. Later, the *Asterian Council* discovered that the one they put in charge, arranged for the *Scrolls* to be hidden together on a secret island. They intervened to take them back and made us believe that the papyruses were taken away, back up to their moon,” Faeraud explained, figuring this out as he spoke. “I do remember that time when we all swore to protect each other on the eve of our *Registration of Youth*. We swore a *finger-locking promise*.”

“You talk as if we’re still playing some boyish game. An island with ninety-hundreds of lives are weighing in the balance,” Aedon pleaded. “This is one contest I don’t wish to participate in any longer.”

“Are you not already involved?” Faeraud snapped. “You gave an oath ... and so did Auseten. This event calls for a meeting of the three of us.”

“How is that going to come to pass when we’re at war with each other?” Aedon huffed, wandering over to help him push the *AtlafI* contraption off the field.

“At the next full-moon there will be a *Middag* on the hidden island — the island created to keep safe the *Scrolls*,” Faeraud gleamed.

“*Middag* — what’s that? Auseten spoke of it too.”

“An undisclosed gathering, where we meet in costumes,” he answered. “You’ll come with me. I know the clues that point the way there. After we meet with him we’ll devise a plan and take the

scroll away. Auseten will no doubt boast that all of this is part of our plan to become leaders of the new generation. Regardless of what I say, we must remember that he, our friend, is our enemy. He invaded a territory of Atlantis and there is no telling what else he might attempt if we do not take that *Scroll*. It rightfully belongs to us. He wouldn't have had an interest in such matters had we not found the first one."

"Imagine, just imagine the power he could develop if he were to get a hold of the last *Scroll* that King Yaswhen wrote," Aedon reminded, following Faeraud across the way to the dummies.

"Yaswhen?" Faeraud grimaced. "Oh, yes, Yaswhen. ... How is it that you are sure that King Yaswhen wrote the *Scrolls*?"

Aedon chuckled, "Who else? It's an historical record."

"You're a smart prince, a very smart one. Remember how we learned at the *educatory*, that history is mostly legend, written by people after-the-fact and many times written with a political motive in mind? Many accounts are diluted. And isn't it usually the stories that you think are the *scrolling-truth* that turn out to be erroneous?" Faeraud asked, picking up the destroyed effigy of Ahteana.

"Are you saying ... that King Yaswhen didn't write everything in the *Scrolls*?"

"I'm just suggesting. ... We must get that papyrus — before Auseten discovers what it includes," Faeraud trumpeted like he was leading a crusade. "*The Scroll of Fire* hides the formula for the thunderbolt and I suspect Auseten has already figured this."

There was a long silence as Aedon looked down at the ground and mumbled, "That *Scroll* must be destroyed, then."

"Yet, there is hope. The formula requires one step that is not contained in the writing and must be cast into a special die — which is locked-away ... hidden," said Faeraud. "I need you to help me find this mold."

"I couldn't ... I just couldn't," Aedon insisted.

Faeraud was angered and decided he needed to shore up their loyalty, “Last we met I saved your freedom, your life. I looked the other way when it was discovered that you had served Lemech the poisonous wine. All I ask of you is what you owe me, your solemn support. I need you to help me convince certain people that this is the right thing, the only thing, to do! We must capture the *Scroll* and remake the thunderbolt before they do. We must cripple them before they destroy us.”

“The very soul of my body cringes and then becomes numb with a plague of mortality at the mention of this *T-bolt*,” Aedon cried with a shiver. “The only involvement I wish to consider, is one that takes me as far away from such a cloud-of-demise as possible.”

Faeraud begged, changing his story in a way to conceal his desire to master the device, “If you would hope that this instrument of destruction not emerge, then that is what we will do. ... You must travel with me to find Methouslan. He holds the final indium needed for its completion and I need you to help me convince him to secure it properly. It would be easy for anyone to sway the old man into giving up the mold — we need to do this before the wrong person comes forth. ... Must I do this alone or can I count on you to help me?”

“If your plan is to halt this thing from once again showing its ugly head, I will certainly aid you,” said Aedon, hoping that Faeraud was being truthful and on the level regarding this serious matter.

“Then we will depart — in confidence — after the meeting which Lemech has called tomorrow.”

The next morning, restlessness built in Monarchy Hall. Etruscans pushed for prominent seating in the tall-backed chairs. Each was carved from cherry wood and adorned with velvet cushions. They lined the long hall in two rows facing each other. Rays of light beamed down through crafted windows in the ceiling trying to warm the cold room. A collage of important princes

gathered behind the large seats whispering chatters of concern. Faeraud led Aedon to a side area near the front where they pushed in behind the place where Etruscan Mestor sat.

The gibberish was interrupted as an *omni-transglaust* descended from the ceiling with a hum. Its round plate lowered while a ghost like figure appeared above it. The *transglaust* displayed a translucent figure of Ahteana; it was as if she were really there in the room herself. She appeared timeless in her flowing white dress. Her long white hair was tied up into a triple bun, pulled back away from her dark-skinned face. Her *transglaust* spoke and moved around, yet Ahteana herself remained back at the Irminsul Pyramid. The *transglaust* was a quick (though expensive) way to communicate.

“Quite a situation has developed here, my princes,” she stated, worrying about the obvious.

The doors swung open and Senior Warrior Andromache marched in and announced, “Here is what I’ve discovered so far ... The Aszean surprise attack was unprovoked. All of our *orichalcum* pyramid-bases each report that deliveries are missing or never arrived. The last known shipment from Aszea was more than ten sunrises ago.”

“This is devastating,” Lemech cried out, lowering his forehead into his palm.

“The attack itself is not as devastating as the recent prophecy it fulfills,” Ahteana divulged.

“What prophecy?” Lemech asked; his interest was perked up.

Ahteana began to explain, “King Yaswhen ...”

She took a breath and Faeraud shivered. A sharp chill always seemed to shoot up his spine whenever Yaswhen’s name was mentioned. King Yaswhen of the Asterian moon and Prince Lord Antioch of Atlantis left on a journey more than six-hundred years ago. They set out across space and time to search and prepare a better place for everyone. However, they never came back and

the millions of people left on the planet and the moon now have serious debates and doubts regarding if they will ever return.

Ahteana revealed, “King Yaswhen, in a vision, proclaimed that an attack like this one, may signal the planting of the *Uprooter*, the evil one that could damage stability before his return.”

“What prophecy is that?” Faeraud questioned in an unbelieving tone.

“The prophecies, foretelling that the *Uprooter* is near, say: that one of the moons would no longer shine, that darkness would cover the land, and that the Irminsul Pyramid would be destroyed. I’ve not heard about this other vision before,” Lemech inquired.

“They were spoken in an apparition ... from King Yaswhen to Gilgamoeh, recently,” she revealed.

“*Gilggy?*” Faeraud asked, trying to confirm the surprise, “*Gilggy’s* here, in Atlantis?”

“Gilgamoeh, my son. He is here?” Lemech hopefully asked, leaning forward.

“What’s the foolish criminal doing in Atlantis?” Mestor demanded, stomping his foot. “Isn’t he banished from the continent for a century?”

“He is not here — yet,” Ahteana answered.

“Visions?” Faeraud scoffed in disbelief. “Visions and dreams? ... Perhaps we should assemble an army to fight off the fabled sea monsters in the ocean as well.”

Ahteana ignored his disrespectful comments, as she usually did. “I will prepare to transport back to the Asterian moon at once. We will hold an emergency session with the *Council* and see what they recommend.”

“Are we to just wait for a fruitless recommendation?” Faeraud huffed. “While you are absent for the next forty suns, Aszea will see our demise. This situation begs for an intervention. If ever there was an obvious time to recite *enchancements* it is now. Only a strong force would be able to hold Aszea back.”

“Neither the human race nor animal race will indulge into *forbidden enchantments*. Any authority who investigates such will be removed and face dire consequences,” Ahteana promised.

“Such idle threats, half the toga-wearing population already indulges,” Faeraud whispered to Mestor who nodded in agreement.

“Then what are we to do while you linger?” Lemech asked, before rubbing the gem atop his ring, one she had given him before. “Certainly the protective globes you’ve given us aren’t strong enough to fend them off.”

Ahteana had given each Prince Lord and other selected princes a ring or necklace that contained a crystal globe. These were similar to the common keys most people in Atlantis had. Rings around the globe would revolve whenever it was inserted into a keyhole. No one is sure how, but they eventually became known as *globeakys*. The *globeakys* that Ahteana doled-out were more elaborate and they radiated a slight glow of light almost as if a living breathing soul was inside. *Globeakys*, which had been blessed at the Irminsul Pyramid, were believed to encircle the person who wore it, with a hedge of protection.

“I shall return on the fortieth day,” she responded, turning toward a window and facing out. “I will cast a net of protection over the island which will keep anyone from entering or leaving the area.”

*“Khertyun evurk iprugelueo etz taehonez lerclueo,
Ah ahumyzh blaushaetyto craweoz foytweulue ahuruyndo.”*

“I thought we weren’t allowed to use *enchanted poems*,” Faeraud snarled with disrespect.

Ahteana’s *transglaust* began to fade along with her voice as she departed, “Use the time for spiritual meditation and put away your fears and war-worries lest they consume you ...”

“We shall,” Lemech stated, adding, “But — we will not sit here as open targets for more than a few days. We anticipate your speedy answer.”

“I hope you are taking a correct decision of action like a wise king would make,” Faeraud snapped at Lemech. “It is you that the citizens will hold responsible if Atlantis is enslaved any further.”

“How long do you think her puddle-of-a-spell will last?” Mestor asked. “Will it hold ships, balloons, and speeding delta-transporters back?”

“Simple poems and rhymes, like that which she uses, have been known to produce results,” Faeraud answered, before turning toward the others, “*Magical enchantments* would give us an advantage like nothing else.”

Evaemon scolded, “Only the Asterians know the art of *enchanted poems* — and —”

Faeraud interrupted, “If they’d only share that art — locked away in them *Scrolls* — then, maybe we wouldn’t be in this mess.”

“This attack on Gadeirus — illustrates how much control the Asterians have lost ... Use whatever means necessary to return the island back into my hands and I will surely name you my successor,” Lemech promised with guile.

“I’ll not only return what is ours, but bring their entire continent to its knees my father. And when I do, your crown and its scepter must be mine. These Etruscans are my witness and your word best be kept this time,” Faeraud scowled.

Etruscan Evaemon was disturbed that Faeraud was so close to becoming the next Prince Lord. Previously he had been tricked into giving his allegiance to the prince but now he wanted to change his mind. Quickly he left and made his way toward the Irminsul Pyramid where he hoped he could redeem himself and save the country from what he deemed a grave mistake. As he struggled against the fierce wind outside, Seskef, one of Gilgamoeh’s son’s, had gathered a crowd of interested bystanders. The young man sat upon a wall and told about the dream that King Yaswhen had given Gilgamoeh, their family and himself. He talked much too quickly and stuttered when asked questions. He babbled

on about the world coming to an end, claiming that the ancient prophecy about a *War of Enchantments* was about to occur. People who crowded around shouted sarcastic objections. It was clear that most of them didn't believe that King Yaswhen was ever going to come back and even fewer believed his story about the *End of Days*.

Evaemon recognized the boy and marched over to him, "Seskef, what are you doing here? Don't even suggest that your father has ventured into this area."

"King Yaswhen commanded Gilgamoeh to come here. I think it was the king ... it was someone that resembled him at least ... in the dream," Seskef stuttered, he was always unsure of himself. "He brings a message and a warning ... or a story ... or something important like that ... to me, to you, to this continent and the world."

"Be realistic. Has the frigid ice, where you reside, caused you to hallucinate?" Evaemon huffed, stomping off toward the pyramid.

Bells tolled as if they were crying out in pain. The choirs stood still and no one sang. The instruments were silent except for a few that hummed a long sorrowful single tone. The lights were so bland that the cathedral entranceway into the Irminsul Pyramid appeared as if it were gray and white instead of colorful and glittery like it once had been.

Evaemon was still clenching his toga tightly, even though he had come in out of the wind. Vigorously he walked down the aisle, stopping only for a brief second before entering the main building.

Inside the large pyramid, he was approached by Ambassador Rheaf Telopps, "Etruscan Evaemon, how may I service you on this brisk evening?"

"I am here to see Ahteana."

"You have a scheduled engagement, at this hour? I think not. She will see you when she returns. She has already prepared her body for transport back to Asteria."

"She will see me now."

Evaemon unrolled his copy of the letter Areshia had delivered earlier. He had put it aside and forgotten to read it. Once he opened it up and read its warnings about the secret organization of *Enchanters* that was forming, he knew who was behind everything. He had a pretty good idea who the lead *Enchanter* was. He didn't have any proof, but he knew he had to see Ahteana and at least tell about his experience with this person.

He pushed Telopps aside with the *Scroll* and made his way in toward the next chamber — the inner most room.

Its door was not like any ordinary one you might have seen in a house or even a palace. This door was made of wind and water and materials unknown to men of this Earth. The matter constantly revolved around itself and was blue in color. If you stuck your hand into it, it felt wet, but when you pulled your arm away, it would be completely dry. Electricity flashed throughout its molecular structure. It guarded the Asterian cloned bodies. The door could read your mind and intentions and if it discovered that you might cause ill will to any Asterian, it would suddenly turn into fire and consume your body.

Before Evaemon chanced walking through the door, Ahteana came out.

“Ambassador, while I am gone, please check the recording barrel often, in case we need to transmit a communicae,” she barked, nodding over to the *phonobarrel*.

The *phonobarrel* was an instrument where an acoustic converter could receive transmissions from the *Beam of Light* and etch them into a silver plate wrapped around the cylinder. A resonate cone was at the other end of the barrel and it would produce the sound of the voice etched into the recording.

Noticing Evaemon, she turned, asking, “Etruscan, what importance brings you here before the gnomon wakes?”

“I must speak to you in private, I have a confession.”

Ahteana suddenly looked very worried. She did not like confessions. A confession usually meant that someone had done

something wrong, and usually that bad thing had far reaching consequences.

“Come into the chamber then, if we must.”

Evaemon followed her passing safely to the other side. He stepped to the edge of the balcony he was on; it ran in a circumference around the entire perimeter of the room. Looking down over the edge, he felt dizzy. It seemed to drop endlessly. Looking up it stretched hundreds of levels to the top of the pyramid. In the very center of the room, an orange *Beam of Light* (which stretched from the heavens) flowed like a waterfall. Around it was another walkway with bridges that led to the parameter shelf he was on. Encompassing the pillar-of-light were clear egg-shaped housings each with a frozen body in it. There were hundreds of these cocoons strung-up on cables in the vast open area between where he stood and where the light was. These were the hibernating Asterians, whose spirits were presently away on the Asterian moon. Their cloned-bodies would come to life whenever their matching apparition travelled through the *Beam of Light* back into its cadaver.

“Did I depart too hastily, earlier today, before all information was imparted?” Ahteana asked the Etruscan.

“May I speak in confidence?” he pleaded.

Evaemon approached her while eying the odd looking pods hanging from the sky. Then he focused back to her and his revelation, “It is with concern and confidentiality that I must tell of a story — perhaps a fictional story or one of a comrade.”

“What fictional story could be so important that I have not already learned of?”

Evaemon started anyway, “Once there was a young prince who wanted to rule the world. It was not his time yet, but he thought to take matters into his own hands. He concocted poisonous grapes, coincidentally planted situations to pin the matter on another, blackmailed others into supporting him, and then presented a cure as if he were a miracle maker.”

“Stories that are brought before me which may be fictional, or not, I must act on, you are aware. And should those stories be true and a vow or oath of secrecy was broken as they were delivered, our power is weakened, their power strengthened and our cause risks a great loss. Are you free to continue your story?”

“Then no, I am bound to say no more, but I am in grave fear that Atlantis will be damaged by those who wish to see this pyramid’s demise.”

“Those who wish for truth and integrity to prosper may only achieve their objectives by using candor and honesty. Those who wish for lies and façades to rein, will achieve it with dishonesty which will lead them into blindness and eventual destruction.”

“In this case alone, if you abide by such stringent rules, it could destroy the very foundations of this building,” Evaemon pleaded.

“And if we don’t abide, the same may happen with even further reaching consequences. This building and this body is only temporary but our spirits and our teachings will last forever if we do not compromise them,” she said.

Ahteana walked over to a cocoon positioned with its back against the Irminsul *Beam of Light*. She opened it and inspected the inside.

Evaemon rushed toward it, “The terrible thing that I have done, I did out of love and protection for my son. It has led me into blindness, but now I see again, and I see that it may destroy our continent. Please, let it be my destiny to make this right.”

“Your fears are echoed by some of us here at the Irminsul. There are many waning stars in the sky that are expiring before their time. They are warning us that the *Uprooter* is taking seed.”

“How can that be?” Evaemon cried.

“The line of princes risks being infiltrated with a caste of no nobility. One of the *Scrolls* is already missing and the stars give hint of a rumor that this prince of darkness is onto the second. Our

hedge of protection is being axed away branch by branch as we speak.”

“Oh, it cannot be,” Evaemon wept.

“If we wish for extended time in this life, then pray the third remains a secret. For when I return, my mission will be devoted to restoring the secrecy of the *Scrolls*. The moon and stars will all fall before I will allow anyone to see these three *Scrolls* together again.”

“I am fearful that this attack may be a decoy to take you away while some dreadful plot unfolds.”

Ahteana climbed into her cocoon. The door automatically closed as did her eyes. Evaemon wanted to warn her about the treachery that Faeraud was up to. He wanted to tell her about how he had been tricked into voting in his favor and how his son had accidentally poisoning Lemech years earlier and how he had been blackmailed in order to receive a pardon for his son’s transgressions. But he had sworn an oath to remain quiet; so silent he had to remain. Now he felt betrayed by the cunning prince who bound him and unwanted by the highest priestess who would not listen to his confession. He didn’t know who to trust and he didn’t care if either of them failed and fell. He even began to wish that they would both wither up and die. The longer he pondered his predicament, the more he felt sorry for himself.

Almost a millennia ago, when King Yaswhen split the continent into ten provinces, Etruscan Evaemon was given the furthest northern part. Most of the land was undesirable and covered with snow and icy glaciers. Ever since that time he felt like he was somehow less of a person than his other nine brothers who were given lands filled with riches. The more he thought about his past the less he liked himself. While his countenance shrunk his self-pity grew.

Ahteana’s cocoon filled with steam, glowed yellow and then her spirit exited. It momentarily lingered in the *Beam of Light*, then there was a burst of sparks, and swoosh, she was back on her way to the Asterian Moon.

CONFESSIONS

A smirk wiped across Telopps face as he walked over to the voice recording cylinder. He shifted his eyes right, then left, before plucking the acoustic converter which connected the *phonobarrel* to the *Beam of Light*. The unit was now disabled. Telopps exclaimed, “Oops” and then softly slithered away.

PAPYRUS FIVE

GILGAMOEH'S VINEYARD

Two melanistic jaguars galloped up the green hills along the Athabasca River. Their black coats contrasted with the orangish-brown sky hiding the afternoon sun. Aedon clutched the fur around the cat's neck, dug his sandals into her side, and leaned low trying not to be tossed about. Faeraud seemed to be equally challenged as the rural terrain wasn't setup for the modern transporter he usually flew.

The smell of grapes confirmed that they were close and as they came around another mound the stone house could be seen down the path.

"Grandfather hasn't heard about the island yet — so don't say anything prematurely," Faeraud called out as the cats slowed to a prance.

"Is this not Gilgamoeh's Vineyard?" Aedon asked. "Why didn't you tell me we were coming here?"

"I thought it best to conceal the location ... until we were further along," Faeraud explained. "I didn't want there to be any unnecessary expectations."

"But this is my father's land ..."

"WAS your father's land," Faeraud reminded. "Did you forget that after he was banished from the continent, his land was given to —"

"To me. ... Hello, I am Scapappi *da* Goat," a gruff voice announced, talking through a mechanical mouthpiece with rods that he operated with his front paws.

"We meet again," Aedon unenthusiastically responded.

Faeraud continued, "We've come to pay a visit to —"

"Not nobody a *goin' wheeey* up *dat* path," Scapappi bellowed, holding a halting hoof up.

"You may have been given the vineyard, but the stone abode was taken over by Methouslan — my grandfather," Faeraud snarled, pushing the goat's wool leg aside.

"Of course ... I *shulda* recognized ... *ya dat* prince ... *da fake-a-rude* one. Go ahead *den. Justa* keep *outta* me grapes."

"Ah my favorite grandson," an elderly man called out, waving his cane with a beckoning motion.

Faeraud ran forward and then bowed on one knee, as was customary. The white-bearded man in drab clothing, tapped his scepter on Faeraud's head. The elder was Prince Lord Methouslan who had seen nine-hundred and sixty-six sun-cycles already. He was Lemech's father, Faeraud's grandfather, and Aedon's great-grandfather. After transferring crown to his son Lemech, he decided to retire in the peaceful vineyards located along the rivers that divided the provinces of Evaemon and Ampheres.

"I moved down here, *ya* know, *ta* get away from all that ruckus up there at the Irem — and now it all seems *ta* have found its way back *ta* me," Methouslan chuckled, delivering each word with exasperation.

"Have others come to visit," Aedon asked, kneeling as Faeraud had done.

“Certainly has. A *volumous* guest list is *assemblin’* for *dis evenin’*— come inside and prepares *you-self*,” the old man invited, showing them in.

A *Kangawaiter* placed salads and breads on the wood table before serving wine to the guests. The flickering fireplace kept the dining area warm along with a pot of tomato sauté hanging over the logs. The room was illuminated by oil lamps suspended in bowls from the ceiling.

Stepping into the room, Aedon and Faeraud were surprised to find Mestor and Evaemon seated opposite each other. They were near the head of the table where Methouslan arranged a pillow behind his back. The two young men sat next to each other while a bench opposite them remained empty. A platter of loaves was plopped down between Evaemon and Mestor. Faeraud reached for two pieces and handed one to Aedon. The guests sat staring at one another waiting for the final visitor to enter.

“Ah, yes. The fair maiden has not arrived,” Methouslan explained. “Do go forward and eat. I had received letters *dat* one of the former caretakers was a *comin’ ta* visit. She *musta* been detained.”

The awkward soft sound of bread chewing was interrupted when Evaemon finally decided to speak, “There are winds of trouble blowing from all directions this eve.”

“Indeed there are,” Mestor agreed, talking while trying to stuff another slice of bread in his mouth at the same time. “It appears that Former Prince Gilgamoeh has heard of the invasion and is trying to use it in some way to his advantage — to end his banishment, I suspect.”

“He has petitioned an audience with Lemech,” Evaemon announced, “Claiming to have some divine message imparted to him from across the universe by King Yaswhen.”

Faeraud hadn’t expected this and snapped, “You can’t be serious. He has served less than five sun-cycles of his centennial banishment.”

“Perhaps it *shulda* be a happy day, an evening of forgiveness. A sunrise of celebration,” Methouslan suggested, lifting his wine glass as if to toast; no one reciprocated.

“Celebration? Should we celebrate violence against women, false teachings against society, disobedience against you, or treason against Atlantis?” Faeraud asked.

“In this dire hour of darkness, his wisdom could be a warranted advantage,” Evaemon pleaded. “Lemech has agreed to consider the matter — if you will allow.”

“Me — allow?” Methouslan asked, startled. “I have left *dat* political bowl and care not what way he decides.”

“To decide nothing is wise,” Mestor cooed, “But if you do decide — I implore you to decide in the negative.”

Once again Faeraud felt less important than his older brother who was always Lemech’s favorite. The mere fact that they were discussing the possibility of bringing Gilgamoeh back, instead of considering him for a promotion, made him lava-boiling angry. He would not sit quiet and allow Gilgamoeh to return this easily.

He jumped up and walked over to the space between Evaemon and Methouslan, “Perhaps you can pardon his disobedience against the highest Prince Lord, but if Lemech were to give him an audience, he would be obligated to give recognition to other traitors and terrorists that follow.”

“That’s not true. Who would see such?” Evaemon objected, almost knocking his wine over as he pounded the table.

Faeraud turned to stare him in the face, “Then tell me that when Lemech sees his face, that he will not break down and show pity. Because if he does show pity, the whole world will see it and they will know that Atlantis is weak.”

“Do you want the nations, that lay in wait to execute our demise, to see our frailty at such a crucial moment?” Mestor added. “Do you want them to know that we are fragile so they can attack in confidence and take over more islands?”

Aedon had not anticipated this news either. He looked around wondering if Gilgamoeh might already have returned and

be hidden somewhere in the room. Perhaps now he could finally meet his father. He had promised Faeraud that he would support him, but this was an unlikely matter. He didn't know what to do so he sat there quietly.

Mestor interrupted the thought, "My former Prince Lord, if news of such feebleness got out now, all of Atlantis would be deluged with revolt."

"*Ya* have all, already decided *da* matter," Methouslan stated. "Lemech should not grant *da* expatriate an audience until *da* hundred sun-cycles of banishment have been fulfilled."

"Difficult, but wise decision," Faeraud admonished, as if he were the parent.

Stepping forward, unseen in the room until now, Areshia approached. She bowed on a knee before Methouslan, "Former Prince Lord, I apologize for my tardiness. My transporter broke down and then two rude jaguars detained me unwittingly."

Aedon hoped she wasn't talking about his jaguar even though it was obvious that there were no others around. Areshia took seat on the empty bench and set her satchel down next to her.

"I have not come to eat, but rather to deliver a message to you from King Yaswhen," Areshia blurted out, pulling a scroll from the bag and beginning to unroll it.

Methouslan had just taken another sip of wine and he sputtered, drooling it down his garment as he choked on her words, "Yaswhen? He's long gone and most certainly dead by now."

She held out the scroll with both arms presenting it to him.

Aedon gulped, his heart jolted, and his eyes grew bigger than a *Witness Wise Owl's*. Only seconds earlier his heart joyfully skipped in anticipation of a reunion with Areshia, but now, it beat heavy with fear. He didn't know what to do and he was sure she was going to be in some kind of trouble.

"Oceans of Blaspheme!" Mestor shouted, "Who allowed you to barge in here bearing the same fabricated papyrus that you delivered to me earlier?"

“There may be some wise points in there, though I really don’t know one way or the other,” Evaemon suggested, stroking his beard while trying to size up who, if anyone, might still be on his side — even though he didn’t know what that side consisted of anymore.

“I’ll decipher if this be a true message or a concoction,” Methouslan snapped, yanking the scroll from her hands and unrolling it. As he read, his eyes became smaller and beadier. His face turned red with anger. Then he stood up and threw the rod-rolled papyrus to the side of the room.

“This is from Gilgamoeh — not Yaswhen! Who does he think he is, quoting *da* passages of King Yaswhen *ta* me? Why I was granted *Registration* from *da* Irminsul Pyramid with the highest spiritual honor ever. If anyone can interpret these writings it *wud* be me!” he scowled with contempt, offended at the tone in the writing, which implied authority over him.

“Go now, and tell *dat* grandson of mine, Gilgamoeh ...” Methouslan paused, trying to think what additional punishment he could add for the insult. “Tell him that he is never to return to *dis* continent of Atlantis again — and if he does, I will not be responsible for what will happen.”

“Well expressed. There are many difficult situations that swim in our moats like sharks,” Faeraud voiced in agreement.

“Instead of pardoning criminals, we should focus on creating an aqueduct of defense against Aszea,” Mestor announced, trying to sound wiser than the young lad.

“We need something so powerful that they would back away immediately. Something like ... the thunderbolt,” Faeraud said, brining the matter up again.

Aedon gulped wondering if Faeraud had gone off-track on their plan to obtain the mold and secure it so that such an instrument would not be made.

“Did he say the *T-word*,” Areshia blurted out. “This must be reported at once. The Laws of the Asterians require it. No one is allowed to talk about the *T-word*.”

“Calm down *der* little darling,” Methouslan said with a smile. “The *T-word* is allowed — if you are royalty. We are all exempt from such nonsense.”

“Frightening, the thunderbolt is,” Mestor taunted, turning to the girl, “It is so potent it could destroy a single province with one blast. When the *Territorial Quarrels* ended, the formula was destroyed, except for one copy.”

“We cannot open a *Pitho’s Jar* of misery. I won’t see it,” Evaemon proclaimed. “Like Areshia has stated — any such consideration is strictly forbidden.”

“With this latest invasion, obviously Aszea obeys the Asterians no more,” Faeraud pointed out. “How do we know that they have not already begun to build an arsenal of their own?”

“Would *ya* rather see the greatest continent that ever was, sink into the hands of the Aszeans, then?” Mestor yelled, glaring at Evaemon.

Evaemon formulated his thoughts into a response, “Even if we wanted to reemerge with a thunderbolt, we couldn’t. It’s formula was written in invisible ink and committed to the *Rataka Scroll of Fire*; and the last remaining mold was hidden where no one knows.”

Areshia was about to object further but the news of the invisible ink held her tongue as she sighed a volume of relief.

“We are far from *da* point of *needin’* such an complex thing now, anyway,” Methouslan assured, leaning back and motioning for the *Kangawaiter* to serve the tomato sauté.

The sun set just before *final meal* concluded. The Etruscans retired to their rooms. Faeraud and Methouslan sat on barrels on the back porch for a pipe smoke while Aedon and Areshia went for a walk keeping next to the fence of the vineyard. Beyond the trestles as far as they could see, the hills covered in vineyards stared at them like bats in the night. The dusk sky plastered with brown clouds gave little light but they decided to sneak over the trestles and explore the farm anyway.

"I've gotta show you the *jimmyrig* I made to bring water up to the vines — close to the abode," Areshia boasted, pulling Aedon by the hand and through another opening in the vines.

"Scapappi, that goat, is gonna kill us," Aedon remarked.

"I know more about the rows and breaks in *em* than anyone. He wouldn't have an arrow-of-a-chance."

A spot of moonlight sliced between the clouds. They stopped to look out at the vast expansion of land, covered in jagged shadows, where no one could discern if they were grapes, leaves, branches, thorns, or some other wild beast. Areshia pulled Aedon's hand taut. Then she led him around another fence to where a conglomeration of old wine barrels had been turned into water towers and siphons.

"What do you think? These towers siphon the water up from the river below," she explained, opening a spigot and showing how it worked. "I'm working on an even larger one for the abode down North."

"Impressive, most certainly," Aedon awed, inspecting the contraption.

"Ah, here it is," she remarked. "One of the reasons I wanted to come up here was because I forgot how I started the flow of the siphon. This little pump did the job. Suspect I can go home now."

"You've just arrived; you're not going back there already?" Aedon objected. "You sure do an awful lot of coming and going ... and so quickly too. Certainly you don't plan to cross these dangerous plains until the morn."

"Suppose not."

"We could wander inside and ... maybe get a bottle of wine; to *repour* that glass you never finished last time I saw you."

"Possibly, though I should write up notes for the water-pump," she answered, turning around to face him.

"If you only write and have not love, your words may resonate like a vain cymbal," Aedon said, moving closer to her.

"But I do have love, a love that waits for me to return home," she reminded, sliding a *spithame* back.

“Love is patient, kind, and honest,” he said moving closer again.

“It is not envious,” she interjected, referring to Yapet of whom she was nearly engaged with.

“Love protects.”

“It is precious, it perseveres.”

“Love delights, love delivers,” Aedon excitedly whispered.

The exchange of attributes, which had come from a poem in the *Rataka*, energized their passion and soon their lips were almost touching. Each of them wanted the other and were drawn together like the force of an *orichalcum* magnet; yet, the knowledge (that she was about to commit herself to Yapet) created a boundary they both had to respect, for now.

“Certainly you could call off that whole — arrangement — you’re planning with — that man down North,” Aedon suggested, hoping not to be too blunt. “Isn’t he a *spithame* of a bore?”

“Possibly,” she imagined, “Instead, perhaps I’d move back to Mestor ... engage in a respectable caste, with a respectable guy ... maybe a handsome prince.”

“And live safely and peacefully until your final sunset,” Aedon added.

“Now that sounds like more than a *spithame* of a bore. What happened to all those adventures you were boasting of, a while ago?”

“We’ll have adventures — lots of them, I promise. Travels to all eight of the continents,” Aedon eagerly vowed. “Be honest — do you really see yourself living with *him* — up in those freezing glaciers — for the next five-hundred sun-cycles of your life? Besides, your transporter is broken. How do you plan to get back there anyway?”

She looked down as she remembered the fun times she had with Aedon in the past. She wished that she could be with both men; however, in their day only men were allowed to have more than one wife and even that was rare. When she was with Yapet

she wanted to be with him and when she was with Aedon she wanted to be with him.

“Come away with me now, will ya?” he asked.

She nodded.

They crept back toward the house and picked up stones, deciding that they might carve their marks in a wooden post beneath the upper porch. Aedon led Areshia by the hand to the under-area and hushed her giggling when they heard noise. The sounds morphed into distinguished voices.

Sitting on old wine barrels that had been turned into a porch swing, Methouslan swayed back and forth. Faeraud stood near the edge and put one foot up on a smaller barrel near the railing as he blew a puff of smoke from his pipe.

“Grandfather, that sculpting form, the cast for the *T-bolt* — do you know where its kept?” Faeraud asked, casually.

“*Whacha needin’* a thing like *dat* for now *er?*”

“Certainly I can rest at night knowing it’s safe away — but there are others who have burdened me to calm their fears about an old man who might unknowingly be persuaded to show it to the wrong person,” Faeraud divulged.

“And you are *da* right person?” Methouslan chuckled.

“Its concealment is my only concern,” he answered.

“Then have no fears, my boy, for it is well kept,” Methouslan assured. “No one is going to come looking for it while the formula is safely locked within the missing *Rataka Scrolls*.”

“The safety you speak of, has fled like a pack of frightened unicorns. Its blueprint has been revealed,” Faeraud whispered, leaning closer.

“Impossible — *dem Scrolls* been long lost ... hidden ... destroyed.”

“*The Scroll of Fire* has been found. ... Found by our enemy in Gadeirus,” Faeraud revealed.

Methouslan began laughing. He laughed for a very long time and Faeraud wasn’t sure how to respond to this odd behavior.

The laughing seemed as if it could've been weeping and wailing; so he just leaned on his knee with a stare.

"Come here ... come on in here," said Methouslan, standing up and walking back into the stone abode.

Underneath the porch, Areshia grabbed Aedon's toga and exclaimed, "Of all the stories I've heard him make up. He'd say anything to get Methouslan to give him that mold."

"No, not this time. Auseten really does have the *Scroll of Fire* — I saw it," Aedon blurted out, catching himself too late and hoping she hadn't heard him.

"You saw it? ... For sure? ... What did Ahteana say when you told her?"

"Well ... no ... not exactly. I didn't really see it," he lied, defensively, "I just heard that it had been found on the island — on Gadeirus. ... Probably why they invaded the island in the first place."

"You realize how serious this is?"

"Maybe. ... Certainly."

"I don't think you do. *The Scroll of Fire* was never sealed. Writings can still be added to it," she informed him. "If someone were to add things ... to make changes that might benefit them ... they could accidentally destroy the entire world — maybe even the universe. These *Scrolls* are not bound by time or space — besides their ability to impact the present, they can predict the future, and maybe even change the past."

Aedon gulped. He remembered how he had used the *Scroll of Water* awhile ago to alter his own past and change the outcome on a *genetikos-replica* that proved he was Gilgamoeh's son. What he once thought was a boy's game was embedding its tentacles across the globe. He was confused and wanted more time to think things through. He couldn't help but believe that new discoveries had outdated most of the old rules and that maybe the revelation of the scrolls would be used for good and prosperity instead of gloom and doom like some people kept insisting. He remembered one of the old laws that stated that vehicles with round wheel had to yield

to wagons with square wheels. He thought that maybe the rules about hiding the knowledge in the *Rataka* had expired too.

“Areshia, just don’t go telling anyone about this,” Aedon begged. “You came here to deliver a message and so did we. Faeraud is asking Methouslan how to handle this. Certainly, he is wise to seek out the elders for advice.”

Back inside the Final Meal Room, Methouslan walked over to where the oil lamps were hanging. Each was supported by three chains woven together at their base, holding a bowl of the fuel.

“I believe *dat* the best thing that could be done with such a mold is *ta* melt it away, *ta* extinguish it completely *fore* anyone gets hurt,” he said, snuffing the flame from one of the lamps.

“Grandfather, certainly you would keep it for its historic value alone,” Faeraud pleaded. “Aszea could already have the *T-bolt* formula and even without the mold, it would only be a matter of time before they came up with their own cast.”

“Fears ... fears are what our Etruscans have. What ever happened *ta da* mighty rulers of Atlantis?” Methouslan growled, removing one of the oil lamps’ bowl from its hanging basket.

Feraud pleaded, “While Aszea holds the world’s *orichalcum* hostage, the pyramids hemorrhage their fuel. If the one mold that makes the *T-bolt* were destroyed ... along with it would go the possibilities of producing a model that could create unlimited volumes of energy. You told me about how the Alchemists were days away from adapting it for energy production when it was banned. If for nothing else, we are going to need it to replace the energy pyramids. I beg of you not to seal our doom, but to preserve that mold for future generations.”

The old man poured out the oil from the bowl he was holding and its wick fell with it. Then he rubbed his fingers on its beveled edge. He held it up to toward the ceiling and the other oil lamps behind it, made it appear like a dark planet eclipsing the sun.

Methouslan explained to Faeraud, “The formula gives direction for making a sphere filled with an *orichalcum* compound. But what is not written down, is that the sphere must be split into two hemispheres with a space between them. The size of those hemispheres is measured here.”

The retired Prince Lord turned and presented the bowl from the oil lamp to Faeraud. He took the mold. The second it was in his hands, a log in the fireplace snapped in two and a wind blew out the remaining oil lamps. It was as if the universe was objecting to the transfer of stewardship.

PAPYRUS SIX

THE MASKES

CHUG! CHUG! CHUG! HISS went the delta-transporter. Areshia jumped out and kicked the side of it knocking a few more parts to the ground. Aedon picked them up and opened the side panel of the vehicle where he worked at fixing them.

“You’re not the only one with an older model,” he said. “I’ve practically replaced every part on mine since before my *Registration of Youth*.”

“What am I to do now?” she huffed.

“Two and half turns should do it,” he insisted, cranking the capacitor around; it gave a whirl and started.

“You’ll follow me to Tyrrhenian then?” she asked.

He confirmed with a nod, “We’ll stop of at Trader Alley on the way and see if we can get replacement parts. Besides, I have another purchase to make there anyway.”

“Something fun?” she asked.

“Just something,” he said, avoiding the specifics.

They kept close to the banks of the Nile River and made their way into the province of Mestor arriving at their destination in the late afternoon. The capacitor on Areshia's transporter unwound and its rings flew off again as they parked outside the alley with all of its tents, huts and merchants.

"Perhaps we can trade it in for something else here," she suggested.

"Maybe. ... Why don't you look around and then we can meet up in about an hourglass," he suggested, wanting to avoid divulging the real reason he had stopped here.

He had promised Faeraud and Ausethen that he would go to the *Middag*. The masquerade required it's guests to all wear special masks and there were only two such shops on the whole continent. He was afraid Areshia, with some of her superstitious beliefs, might object; plus, he couldn't tell her about it since it was supposed to be a secret. Quickly he pushed his way into the crowd before she could follow him.

Tapping his leg impatiently, Aedon waited in front of the counter at *Mister Maske's Shoppe*. A tarp covered an area of tables, shelves and zigzagging walls where masks made from bamboo, wood, glass, porcelain, gold and even *orichalcum* crammed together struggling for a space. They were decorated with all kinds of ornaments, necklaces, feathers, carvings, furs and personalities. Some of the masks were happy, others were sad; there were angry masks, laughing faces, and mysterious silent ones.

Mister Maske and Misses Maske each hung from a pole and sat at the front counter. They were both carved from wood and had moving mouths and eyes that even blinked. They turned their heads about and constantly argued, never giving the customer a moment to speak.

"I think he's here for a mask," the Mister said.

"Of course, he's here for a mask, why else would he be here," the Misses snapped.

“Not just a mask I reckon, but a special occasion,” Mister clarified.

“A *Middag*, a mask for a *Middag*,” Aedon quickly interjected.

“You’ve certainly come to the right place — the only place that is,” Misses Maske exclaimed, twitching a feather that was imbedded in her hat.

Areshia had managed to follow him anyway and pushed up next to him, asking, “Masks? ... Why would you need to purchase a mask? You’re going to some costume party?”

“Well ... kind of,” he answered.

“And you couldn’t tell me this? ... I’m not invited I take,” she said, frowning.

“You gonna socialize and block my other customers or buy a face,” Mister Maske grumbled.

“I’m buying — hold your jaw a moment,” Aedon huffed, stepping aside.

Just then two wooden hands that were severed at the wrists flew through the air and floated in front of Aedon’s face. Each hand bent its index digit down to touch its thumb, making a circle with the two fingers. They floated closer and adjusted, sizing up Aedon’s eyes.

“I bet he’s an Index Two,” Misses Maske shouted, interrupting their conversation. The right hand clicked its fingers and the left hand floated around giving a thumbs-up gesture to Misses Maske. Then the hands flew back into the shop and began rummaging through drawers and boxes pulling out various masks and discarding some of them on the ground.

“Hey Fingers,” shouted Mister Maske, turning back toward the hands, “I cleaned up your mess last customer — you better pickup after yourself this time.”

“And be careful with that green box, it’s for someone special,” Misses yelled.

The floating hands looked like they were lost, they floated around and finally one of them moved over to the green box and

lifted up the edge. The other hand flew in and lifted the mask out. Mister Maske was about to say something, but suddenly became quiet as soon as the first hand let go of the box and flew up in front of the mask's cut-out eye-hole. He made the finger-thumb circle again (the same size as was Aedon's eye) and it fit the costume perfectly.

The mask looked like a giant letter *M* with two holes under each vertex where the eyes could see through. Two triangles faced up with a third formed from the space inbetween.

"A masquerade what fun," Areshia said sourly, feeling left out, then whispered, "You know what that shape represents? It's three triangles. It's a symbol of their *groups of three* where the central person actually belongs to another larger secret group. Are you involving yourself in an *Enchanter's* initiation?"

"How many events bathed in fun and freedom, since the dawning of the hourglass, have been labeled *suspicious* by someone who doesn't understand or have all the facts?" Aedon defended, as the hands placed the mask over his face to verify the fit. "Even if this were a party of *Enchanters*, what is so awful about them? They want only peace and spirituality like the rest of us."

"That's what they claim to the outsiders. But once you get into their organization it is far from a tranquil-spiritual experience. First you start out as an observer, then you'll play some of their simple games, and before you can realize it, you're taking on evil challenges where only the backstabbers and evil-doers make it to the top."

"Dear girly," Misses Maske addressed, "If we didn't start those untrue rumors like that — everyone would want to be an *Enchanter*."

"And we just don't have enough masks for all them *wannabees*," Mister chuckled. All the other masks in the shop began laughing too.

Aedon added, "There are lots of secret organizations — like the *Scroll Keepers* and even the Asterians themselves."

“Be careful; there are too many groups who are organizing. Before you realize it, you’ll find yourself betraying your true values,” she cried in a serious tone, grabbing his arm. “You can’t straddle both sides — especially when a *War of Enchantments* is on the way.”

“There isn’t going to be any *War of Enchantments* — not now, not in our day. ... I just don’t see it like that,” Aedon snapped, taking the mask off.

“You’re impossible! You will see it,” she insisted. “It is exactly like that.”

“No, It’s not anything like that yet!” he repeated, turning his back toward her and handing the mask over to *Hands* so it could be packaged up.

The last thing he wanted to do was to believe that a battle of untold proportions might be on its way. He had vowed to himself that he would never let the predicted *War* unfold in his day. Yet now, he was perhaps the single only person on the planet that could witness certain events unfolding from the two different sides. His once harmless *educatory-mates* were turning into enemies who could easily destroy the entire planet while trying to secure their own selfish goals.

“Typical of you to ignore the obvious. ... Why am I even here? You were supposed to come back for me long ago and never did,” Areshia hurtfully reminded him, trying to give a hint that maybe she was only staying with Yapet until Aedon could develop a deeper sense of commitment; she didn’t want to be abandoned again.

“I did, I travelled — twice, even made it all the way to Yapet’s deserted cabin once.”

“It was only made to look abandoned — then. You could’ve looked harder. ... And how we’re we to know who to trust?” Areshia protested.

“Trust? After all I did?” Aedon yelled back.

“We hid out. Didn’t know what to think once news came circulating that the cure for Lemech was found from an expedition

launched by Faeraud. What a lie — his expedition was a hindrance and almost cost me my life!” Areshia snarled with contempt.

“Is that why you decided to go back to Yapet?” Aedon snarled.

“Our two worlds, which closely revolved around one another then, are in different realms now,” she admitted, believing that Aedon was already too involved with *magic poeming*, masquerades, and *Enchanters* to be persuaded back to the old ways.

“You would’ve given your answer to Yapet by now, about his marriage proposal, if you really were in love with him,” Aedon assumed.

“I’ve *gotta* go back. I really can’t stay here with you right now,” she said, trembling while taking a few steps back.

He reached out toward her as she slowly stepped away. Their eyes kept contact for a while, each desiring the other as the situation stretched their agonizing hearts of love like taffy in a pull. Finally she was covered over by the crowd of shoppers. He mouthed the words, *I love you*, but she was already gone. He was dumbfounded that she had left so suddenly just when he thought they were finally connecting. Did these masks really scare her or was it something he did? His heart shed a few tears before dropping into his stomach.

He snatched the green box from *Hands* and turned away in tormented thought. He told himself that he had to go to the *Middag* because it was the only way to see Ausethen again and the only hope of figuring out a way to get the *Scroll of Fire* away from him before he attempted some other *Fool’s Game*.

Areshia stomped-off down *Trader Alley*. The last thing she wanted to do was haggle with the overpriced merchants and schemers that occupied the tents, carts and cabanas lining the cobblestone lane, but she knew her transporter would never make it back to Bashan. She would have to get it fixed.

Straining her neck, she finally caught a glimpse of what appeared to be a respectable parts place. The vendor welcomed her and looked across the way as she pointed to her transporter.

He chuckled, “*Da’s* a model one-ninety. Didn’t know *dey* were any *dat* still flew. Couldn’t even really sell it for parts. A recycle-melt *bout* all *dat’s* good *fer*. Give *ya* two talents.”

“Two talents?” Areshia screamed. “The emergency fuel is worth twice that. How am I supposed to get back home on two talents?”

“Depends on where *ya* live. Perhaps a trade?” he suggested. “Got an elephant *dat weres* left behind here.”

He motioned to an adjacent canopy where the gray mammal sat with his eyes barely open.

“Is that thing even alive?” she asked.

“He’s just a little depressed,” the vendor said, changing the subject. “I *cud* get ten talents for *‘em* if he’d only smile. A perfectly healthy *workin’ phant*. Was used *ta* bring materials in from *da* quarries.”

“Will they ever cease from over-building this city?” Areshia sighed.

“Not *fer* no *buildins* — brought in supplies for *dem* artsy things *dat* sculptor is *chislin’* way at — pieces *er* marble *leavin’ fer da* Irem on *dose* other *‘phants*.”

Areshia turned to watch a herd of elephants hauling marble blocks on their backs in the far off distance. She handed over the *globeaky* to her transporter in exchange for the elephant.

The gray mammal lazily stood up and Areshia was afraid she might never get it through the crowded street. The beast walked extremely slow so most people had plenty of time to step out of their way.

“Got to move,” Areshia snapped, tugging at a *rope-tie* around the end of his trunk.

“I am Gobi — Gobi the elephant,” the mammal answered in a depressed tone, talking even slower than he walked.

“What’s wrong Gobi, you seem so down?”

“I can’t do anything right. Nobody wants me,” he snorted.

“I want you. I need you Gobi,” Areshia pleaded.

“No you don’t. All I ever do is let people down.”

“Why do you say that?”

“I was supposed to be that famous artist’s carrier. I made long trips bringing him marble and then I scratched one of the pieces — made it useless. He yelled and screamed and told me what a fat over-weight, clumsy-slob I was. ... So true. ... Why did I ever think I could even try doing something like this,” Gobi moaned, starting to sit down again.

“That artist sounds like a baboon’s red-end to me. Gobi, you just forget everything that he said; because, I need you. ... I desperately need a strong, well-trained, *phant* like you — to take me down to Bashan,” Areshia told him.

“I can do that ... I think. ... But what if I scratch or drop something?”

“I have nothing of value — so, it’s not really a concern.”

“Okay,” Gobi agreed. “But what about when we get there? You’ll just want to sell me again and no one will want to buy an elephant in the cold region there.”

“I’m not selling you Gobi. There are many projects which you can help with. You are talkative and smart and all the other animals will be eager to welcome you,” she insisted.

Gobi smiled ever so slightly. Areshia climbed up into the riding cab on his back and they set off on the journey to Bashan.

PAPYRUS SEVEN

MOON DREAM

Moonbeams from Asteria flickered across Aedon's face as a he leaned against the sill of the main room. He was exhausted and in need of rest, especially since he and Faeraud were planning to attend the Middag the next evening. Pastel light bathed the Mestor Abode in comfort where he had returned. An abandoned wine glass, still sitting next to the cushions, reminded him of Areshia and he couldn't help but hear her accusations again in his head. Soon he drifted asleep by the open window. A crawling breeze whispered reminders of promises in his past. An image of the educatory emerged in his mind and he saw Faeraud asking him, "Promise not to abandon me this time ... I always keep my promises ... give me a *finger-locking promise* that you will never tell anyone else what we've discovered."

Then Ausethen butted into the dream, "Are you sure we can trust him, I don't know if he can keep a promise."

Next, past impressions of Ahteana at the *educatory* faded in, “Will you promise to follow the teachings of King Yaswhen and also protect those who abide in the way — no matter what?”

To which he agreed, speaking, “*Lesortuen ahun u’d*”

A figure of Areshia briefly emerged, “Promise me that we will leave here tomorrow ...”

Then he remembered himself climbing up an icy mountain once, telling the others, “We can’t stop now, anyway. ... Lemech’s life — and our promise — have both been *hung-out* to the test.”

While Dancing at the *Day of Apaturia* he told Areshia, “I’m coming back for you — I promise.”

“Promise to do me one favor in the future,” a snake on a tree tempted him before coiling around his body. The snakeskin turned into heavy chains which Aedon could barely stand in as voices kept screaming in his mind:

“PROMISE! PROMISE! I PROMISE!”

“This is our secret organization,” Faeraud announced, in the dream. “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.”

He began to realize that he had made many promises to different people whose belief systems clashed with each other. He wondered why he had done that. Did he really need acceptance from so many? He wasn’t sure what he really believed in anymore.

Next, he was transported to a secluded forest where he sat struggling in his chains and yelling at the lake, “I promise to listen to your voice — I know you have one!”

Then the lake began to bubble, its foam swallowing up Aedon. He was falling deep down into the water. The water turned to light and he discovered himself inside the Irminsul Pyramid falling toward the depths of its base. A cocoon jumped forward, opened up and swallowed Aedon. It leapt into the Irminsul Pyramid’s *Beam of Light* and instantly Aedon was transported through space up toward the Asterian Moon.

As the *Beam of Light* neared the moon, he could see the landscape of the planetoid. Its moats and rivers seemed to be symmetrically arranged and even the oceans were in perfect circles. As he fell through the light toward the moon's surface he could see a number of pyramids, each with a *Beam of Light* similar to the one he seemed to be travelling within. He fell rapidly.

He wasn't sure how he got there, but he found himself standing on a small island, about ten podes (feet) in diameter, in the middle of a pond. In the sky, dramatic clouds with purple and red hues danced above his head. He suspected that he was on the Asterian moon. He looked down at the sound of buttercup flowers planted around the perimeter of his island. They were tall and swaying back and forth as they sang a song. He knew Asterian but wasn't able to interpret the dialect they sang.

A golden creature, a quarter his height, fluttered her wings as she descended in front of him. Her feathers were royal-blue with golden tips. She landed on her feet and extended her hand, taking Aedon's.

"Come," she said.

Aedon hesitated, "Who are you?"

"I — Nawalym — one of. Must go quickly. One thinks you special — risked much — allow you — here — visit," she explained, tugging Aedon off the island.

With a jerk he found himself stepping into the pond with the piskie. At first he began to sink in the water but the creature quickly motioned for him to keep his eyes fixed on hers. When he looked back at her he was able to walk across the surface of the pond again, neither of them sinking through the water. On the opposite shore they were greeted by harpsichord-bushes playing music by plucking their branches. The bushes scooted aside like gates opening up into a small city.

"How can this be, the Nawalym are fables — you aren't real," Aedon muttered.

“Real indeed we are,” the creature insisted. “Asterian moon you are on; things many are different here. Exist we on Earth too — location secret.”

They continued down a street made of bright light. Shops and restaurants lined the area and Asterians travelled in the street-of-light at various speeds. Their bodies seemed to turn translucent as they sped up and solidified when they slowed to a walk. Aedon looked at his arms, and even though he was walking at a slow pace he could see through himself as if he were a ghost. He gasped.

“You very invisible — at moment. ... Asterians — see you they — cannot. ... Good that is since allowed you — not are,” the piskie informed, turning the corner into a street which was a path lined with palm trees grown from glowing lights.

The palms waved their branches up and down executing different formations as if they were putting on a show. A beam of sunlight protruded through the circling clouds illuminating a tall tower. The building was dozens of stories high and square. It’s rustic-brown made it look plain; however, it’s many square towers that spurted off the main structure gave it an odd but interesting look. Vines crawled around the lower levels moving about like crawling snakes.

He was led into the tower and shoved into a rustic, empty elevator-shaft. Suddenly a rush of wind whisked them up to the top floor and pushed them out a door. Voices echoed in the hall where they crept. Light spewed from a crack in the wall and the Nawalym shoved Aedon’s face toward the light.

Through the opening he could see a circle where Asterians gathered. In the center a large crystal stood, taller than his own height. He knew that this was the *Asterian Council*. He expected that they would be talking about the recent events and invasion on Earth below — but they weren’t.

Nearest, he could see the backside of a tall-dark man with a bald head. He was very concerned and spoke with a deep authoritative voice, “The crystal shows that the *Uprooter* is alive and thriving on the planet below; yet, we cannot identify this

person. The crystal grows more foggy everyday and this concerns me.”

“How can we be sure that this evil person is not masked in someone obvious to us. What about Prince Aedon? It has been suggested many times that he could be the *Uprooter*,” one of the Council Members asked.

“It has been verified that Aedon is from the lineage of Kings. The prophecy states the *Uprooter* will not be born into this family, but come from a seed of evil,” the dark man stated.

“Then that would rule out Prince Faeraud as well,” Ahteana sighed, sounding disappointed. Aedon noticed her presence for the first time.

“What about this Prince Auseten from Aszea?” another Member asked.

“I believe we need to keep a close eye — a very close eye on him,” the bald Asterian emphasized.

“There are others that we may be able to rely on,” said Ahteana.

“Some of them you speak of, have given oaths to both us and to those on the other side,” the dark man cautioned.

“That may be true,” Ahteana agreed. “But as long as they will choose to give priority to the promise made to us and to King Yaswhen — and not reveal to us — that they are bound otherwise, then — they might be able to help.”

Suddenly Ahteana’s spirit left her body and floated over to the hole where Aedon watched. She faced directly in front of him. He could hear her even though her lips did not move, “Aedon, I know what you have seen. The *globeaky* you wear has recorded that which troubles you.”

Aedon picked up the amulet around his neck and looked into it. A reddish image faded up as it replayed the image of Auseten unrolling the *Scroll of Fire*. Quickly he clutched his palm shut, hiding the projection. He wondered what else she knew and was afraid that she knew about the *Scroll of Water* and the *Secret*

Organization he had formed with his friends. Then he remembered that most of that had happened before she gave him the amulet.

“Why do you spy on us?” Aedon asked.

“We do not monitor such things,” Ahteana assured. “But the great crystal in this room is trained to pickup, and report, on matters of grave urgency that may affect the health of all beings and the survival of the planet. Certainly you can look into your own feelings and know that this *Scroll* is in the possession of one who may use it to destroy — One who is very dangerous.”

“Yes, this is true,” he agreed, remembering that he was already working on a plan with Faeraud to get the *Scroll* away from Auseten.

“You must help us then. We need you to keep an eye on this *Scroll*. Most of all, do not allow it to be used until we can discern the best way to secure it. ... I beg for you to allow this task to be given to you?”

“I can keep a watch, maybe. ... But what power would I have to keep Auseten from using it. He has an unpredictable mind of his own. What sane fool would invade an Island of Atlantis?” Aedon stressed.

“If opportunity presents itself, and according to the crystal it will, I beg a favor that you take possession and return the *Scroll* to us at the Irminsul Pyramid.”

“You don’t know — I don’t know — what tricks and other *Enchantments* they have. It’s too dangerous. He’s broken your laws, why can’t you just go down there and take back the *Scroll* yourself?” he cried, thinking about all the *Magic Poems* that had already been said as well as the fact that actually two of the three *Scrolls* were already on the loose. He knew he should tell Ahteana about the *Scroll of Water* which Faeraud already had, but he remained silent, fearful that he might be in even more trouble than he already was.

“We cannot interfere or aid in the return of this *Scroll*. The people of your planet already mistrust us and an intervention into your system to obtain any material matter has been strictly

forbidden by the laws of King Yaswhen,” Ahteana explained. “We will intervene and diplomatically cause an end to this invasion, that we can do. But, we must rely upon those in your world to return the stolen property — we are relying on you.”

“Help us too?” the Nawalym creature begged. “Our villages on Earth power they make — Irminsul Pyramid for. Destruction and pilferage someone brings.”

“And what if I can’t — what if I fail?”

A rush of wind returned Aedon down the elevator shaft and pushed him outside again. As if his question were being answered, the trees burst into flames. The ponds turned from water to lava, the flowers and bushes burned up, the clouds darkened and lightning bolts raged. The pyramids he had seen earlier crumbled in a great earthquake. Then suddenly everything was back to normal and he was once again standing on the small island where he had entered their world. He was afraid of the message and he told himself that this was only a dream, a message encoded in symbolism that could mean anything. But deep down inside he really knew that if he failed to return the *Scrolls* to Ahteana, the world might suffer dire consequences.

PAPYRUS EIGHT

MASQUERADE MIDDAG

Before they stepped into the shallow boat, Faeraud lowered his mask indicating for Aedon to do the same, but the mask clenched his nose-bone not wanting to let go of his face; he left it on. Faeraud raised the sail and pushed off to sea. Waters briskly thrashed against the side of the boat, spilling over the hull before making their way to the rocky shore.

“Where is this hidden island that no one can see?” Aedon asked, “And how will we find it if it can’t be seen?”

“You don’t trust my navigational abilities, *Smart Owl!*?”

“I trust my own better.”

“See those rock formations up there? It is the eleventh month and that means we sail from the eleventh pylon — toward the setting bald moon,” Faeraud explained, pointing to shore where a circle of stone monoliths stretched toward the sky, each with graphic etchings.

Aedon tugged at the façade across his face again. For a moment it seemed like it had melted into his skin, but finally it released. He removed the mask before adjusting a *looking-scope*, hoping they were on course, “I don’t see anything.”

“Nothing? ... Not even a bump in the horizon?”

“Certainly you don’t refer to that mirage — where the moon meets the sea?”

“A mind trick you’d think — or is it?”

Replacing his mask again, it jumped into position around Aedon’s eyes with a force of suction, yet it was comfortable. It gave a tingling, soothing massage around his sockets. Strange but relaxing sounds emitted from the mask as it whispered indistinguishable words to him.

The moon stepped down lower and they sloshed closer. In the distance the hill of liquid grew in size. As the second moon behind them began to rise in the East, it reflected off the surface of a growing dome on the horizon. The seas calmed to a quiet still. Closer they came and the blob distinguished itself, appearing like leaves made of water. From under the leaves, branches began to emerge. These perennials did not look like ordinary trees; their outer layer of leaves had been engineered as a liquid gel.

The boat floated into an inlet of the island which was covered by the water-trees. The underside of the leaves were hard with specs of green trying to peak out from their black shells. Thorny-brown sticks, crisscrossing in a tangled maze, grew under each water-tree. Aedon thought they looked like arms with fingers reaching out ready to dig their nails into anyone who got too close. Their crisscrossing shadows made them appear alive.

Faeraud eagerly detailed an explanation, “Near the end of the *Quarrels*, when the Asterians came down to Earth to divide up everything, three wise men decided to hide this place from them. They genetically merged the plants and water together to keep the island in disguise.”

“Which three wise men?” Aedon inquired.

“No one knows. They disguised themselves whenever they came or went from the island — just like us. Folklore suggest that one was an Etruscan and another a prophet.”

“Does this uncharted island have a name?” Aedon asked, listening to see if the trees were speaking, but he only heard a ruffling-sloshing sound. He didn’t know how to interpret *Water*.

“Welcome indeed to Nile Island,” a voice answered. It was a human-sized scorpion standing on its hind legs.

He was about half the size of Aedon in height and he beckoned them to follow down the wide path made of slate stones. Each panel of the walkway was held up by tree roots that extended from the ocean below. The whole place looked like it could collapse and disappear into the sea below if a wave, a little too large, were to roll over it.

After tying the boat to a tree root, that seemed to moan with an objection, they trotted down the elevated road made of slate. It reminded them of a dock. Soon they came to an old windmill.

The scorpion opened the door to invite them in, “Linger and stare you mustn’t — it knows you are here.”

The windmill waved a greeting with its wide fins that slowly swung around. They were so big that the blades swept completely across the doorway. The longer the two men stood there, the faster the vane began to spin.

“HURRY! We *gotta* go now,” Faeraud screamed.

“You’re mad, there’s little chance of jumping between those sweeps!”

“Ask permission and jump at the same time — your belief will guide you in,” Faeraud disclosed before somersaulting between the blades and shouting, “*Acceptee-minward!*”

Aedon lingered wondering if there were a way around the tower, but he couldn’t see one. A thick prickly hedge, two stories high, had grown into the sides of the building.

“*Acceptee-minward!*” Aedon yelled, closing his eyes before leaping and tumbling between the fans. He scooted through the door with a slight scrape to his arm.

Inside there were rows of stalls. Above them a net hung from the ceiling filled with jewelry and trinkets made of silver, gold, and *orichalcum*. It was hard to make out their metals or colors as most were tarnished or covered in dust. Each time the windmill blade passed by, the net would ruffle in the breeze and the trinkets would chatter, crying out for freedom.

Faeraud hurried into one of the stalls. Aedon started to follow before he was motioned into the next station. Faeraud began undressing and placed his jewelry and clothes into a bin attached to the wall. Aedon peeked over the divided-wall and observed him. A black robe dropped from the ceiling. Faeraud caught it and began dressing.

He explained, “These are our ceremonial robes. ... We’ll wear the same outfits that the three wise men once wore. ... Silly ritual, but it’s the only way to get into the *Middag*.”

“Like the *Enchanters*?” Aedon cautiously questioned. “Isn’t that what this really is — an *Enchanters Initiation* or the like?”

“Hardly,” Faeraud scowled with a laugh, “They say their little poems in Atlantian, they’re amateurs. You, Aedon, can speak Asterian, the language of the stars. That places us in prominence way above them. ... Tonight we will have the opportunity to join forces with those who seek the truth from the *Scrolls*. The *Middag* is made up of Etruscans, Princes, and people of importance. You may even see enemies of each other, yet together; we gather for a common cause. That is why we all wear these black robes as a symbol of being one.”

Faeraud pulled the robe over his head and adjusted the hood around his black *M-shaped* eye mask. Aedon understood how the costumes might be a safeguard to keep such enemies from killing each other.

He asked, “Do I get a robe?”

“Your clothes, first remove have to ... plus jewelry all,” the Scorpion scolded, clattering his claws in an objecting manner.

Aedon hesitated for a moment then took off his toga. He was hoping a black robe would drop down to him, but one didn’t

come. He had removed everything except the mask and the necklace that Ahteana had given him. He had vowed to never take the amulet off and it was believed that such a gift from an Asterian gave special protective powers around the individual who wore it. The moment became awkward and stale as the scorpion outside the stalls placed his claws on where his hip might be, as if he had one, and then began to impatiently tap his tail against the stone floor. The turning windmill blade came and went every second, like a ticking clock. It seemed like everyone was waiting on him. With hesitation, he took the necklace off. The second he laid it in the bin, a black garment dropped down, covering his head. After swimming in its folds, he finally fit into it.

They exited out the backside of the windmill and continued down a path covered in maple leaves. It became narrower and darker the further they journeyed. Beady-eyed black crows gleamed from branches watching their every step. Aedon felt more like a trespasser than a guest.

“Where is this *Middag*? It is difficult to see in the darkness that surrounds us. Could we have gone the wrong way?” Aedon complained.

“*Smart-owl*, it’s a secret gathering. ... You can’t find a secret meeting or else it wouldn’t be a secret; it has to find you,” Faeraud delightfully explained.

“I’d be about as patient as you — to sit and wait for something that may or may not be here,” Aedon scoffed, before Faeraud grabbed his hand and led him further inland.

They tromped through the dark wooded passage lit by occasional moonbeams. Other black robes followed. Soon they came upon the light of a single candle. As they approached it, two more could be seen beyond, then ten more, then a hundred, a thousand and finally ten thousand. There were candles in the trees, in pumpkins, on top of apples, and in carved out melons. Ponies, poodles and tundra voles wore them in their hats. The forest suddenly became bright as day with all the wax sticks. The animals greeted and welcomed the visitors.

Glasses of wine were presented and the masked men were encouraged to sip quickly, and then to gulp down more. Aedon was served a large bowl of wine which he practically spilled across his robe as a fellow *masker* encouraged him to slurp up. His vision became a bit blurry but the drink made him feel real good and warm inside. His nervousness vanished; instead, he seemed to gain some kind of confidence and boldness.

Then a low chanting music started up. Aedon's mask echoed the tones making them sound like they were in his mind as well. He wondered what thoughts this *face* was trying to put in his head.

People were darting in and out from behind trees, each dressed in a black gown and eye-mask. A goat wearing a muzzle and eye-blinders was led and pushed about the path by four others. Aedon tried to get a glimpse, he was certain he recognized the prisoner. It looked like Scapappi, and he turned to hide his face before realizing he was in disguise and couldn't be recognized anyway. He despised that goat and many times wished the animal was dead. The mask across his eyes could hear his thoughts and it tightened, stressing his cheekbones. He turned back — but before he could confirm, the goat was gone.

All the animals and masked men disappeared. The wooded area stood in silence before a slight breeze made its presence known as it kicked a few leaves down the path. It was followed by a louder gust of wind that blew out all of the candles at once.

The darkness sent a chill down Aedon's spine and just as he was about to speak, the wicks relit themselves like trick candles on a birthday cake. It seemed much darker this time as you couldn't tell if the candles burned dimmer or if fewer had been relit.

Slowly the animals came out again and when they reemerged they were not themselves any longer for they had been transfigured. The ponies had been turned into donkeys, the poodles had become wolves, and the tundra voles were reduced to rats, many of them with crooked, bucked-teeth. Their voices were gone along with their manners as they howled, bucked, and lunged at the partiers causing screams to fly between the branches.

“Yikes!” someone screamed, “These beasts are uglier than a genetic mutation from the Crib.”

A masked man under a hood stepped forward and chanted, “Beasts of commonality, to us you are bound. Face our reality, clear away from the ground.”

Another two masked men came forward and the three of them chanted together the same rhyme, except in Asterian, the best they could:

*“Taeahvousha ahuc meilemun,
ahvuynd ketz arn unot ahuro.
Sloulushaec opuco taeiyr,
khut swauynd leclour huwuyun ipuro”*

Aedon gave a huff of disapproval as he recognized that they didn’t know the proper tones to use and that they were singing off-key. He quickly forgot when the animals made a shrieking sound, startling him, before they disappeared.

They continued down a path that wound inward toward the middle of the island. It was foggy and reminded him of the *Lake of Ghosts* he had once seen; except, this fog was warm and it’s sulphury odor was heavy. They approached a pit with a bubbling, gooey liquid. The silver slime emitted a dancing fog. Faeraud motioned for him to sit down around the pit with the others. Another masked man came and sat next to him. As soon as he spoke, he recognized the voice.

“Your enemy is your friend and your friends are your enemy,” Auseten said, thrusting a *tepa* pipe into Aedon’s hand.

“It’s all part of the fun and ceremony,” Faeraud assured him.

Aedon nervously looked about, certain that someone would’ve recognized Auseten already. He kind of even hoped a warrior might show up and arrest the traitor. No one came, so he took a toke on the pipe and blew out smoke rings as if he had done this before. They all would’ve thought so too, if he hadn’t been so

quick to choke-out a cough. The wine and smoke dulled his senses and he practically forgot all about the *Scroll* he was asked to keep under watch.

“Our secret organization has matured,” Auseten continued, “Tonight we chant ... with the *Nile Intimates*?”

“*Nile Intimates* — aren’t these masked people really the *Enchanters*?” Aedon asked again, stuck on the idea that Areshia had planted in his mind earlier. They had been called by many different names and no one was about to admit such.

“The *Nile Intimates* — we are the *watch-keepers* of the Earth. ... Because it is a mystery, it makes the *outsiders* afraid. Fear and lack of knowledge causes them to speculate and spin exaggerated rumors,” Faeraud explained. “Should we not be included into something as unique and important as this? ... As princes, we are not only rulers of lands, but masters of forces.”

“Do you want to be left out like an outsider, again, Aedon?” Auseten huffed.

“We all come together ... as friends here. Later, some may depart as enemies again,” Faeraud reassured, as if reassurance of being enemies was what Aedon was looking for.

He moved closer and placed his hand on Aedon’s leg, encouraging him more, “Shouldn’t we be included in this historic and traditional order? Auseten and I have both already been initiated. ... Now, you have been chosen. Surely you can feel this inside your head, behind your eyes.”

“Even Prince Lord Methouslan is a secret member, it’s been rumored,” said Auseten.

“Your father, Gilgamoeh, he was one too — before the banishment,” Faeraud said, not knowing of any real truth to what he had just made up.

“Then I must be included. Certainly it won’t hurt anything if I just sit here and observe,” Aedon responded, convincing himself that everything was going to be alright.

He had been excluded from things his whole life and he didn’t want this to be another one of those times. What he did

know, was that ever since he had befriended Faeraud, he had been included.

“Lay back and relax,” Faeraud commanded softly as Aedon rested his head into his lap. “You have some doubts and reservations I hear. If you open your mind up to the Spirits of our world, they may help reveal what is troubling you — and cleanse any interference. Now breathe slowly and let your mind journey ... close your eyes and let the vision show itself.”

Aedon remembered back to a time where he was underwater. He was swimming in the deep and then he reached for his crystal-globe necklace and held it to his eye like a *looking-glass*. In this vision, he was underwater and he could see all kinds of bright colored fish, sea horses and creatures. Then swimming from out of the deep, came a white figure; it was Ahteana. She swam right up to the globe and it seemed as if she were swimming into it.

Next, he saw himself asleep on the mattress-roll in Mestor, where he had been with Areshia a couple weeks earlier. In the vision, a white ghost flew up to the window and tried to bust in. After a few attempts the figure finally snuck through the very thin slice between the panes and then ballooned out to a full figure of Ahteana. The ghost-like Ahteana then swirled around and zoomed toward Aedon’s body as if it might possess it.

“What do you see?” Faeraud asked.

“I see a faint white fog. No it forms a shape, like that of a woman. It flies here and there taking on different forms,” Aedon answered, dramatizing with his arms. “It has an eye — a very large one.”

“The being you see, with the eye, is it trying to spy on us?” Faeraud asked.

“Maybe, yes it is. How did you know?”

“And does it parade about masquerading as an authority?”

“It is an authority,” Aedon answered.

“This thing you see, Aedon ... I fear that it is trying to possess you or that it will try to in the future,” he explained. “Its influence over you must be excommunicated from your being.

Whatever or whoever you saw, you must avoid at all costs if you are to remain a free individual.”

“But it was a beautiful peaceful light,” Aedon muttered, sitting up with a confused memory of how Ahteana had used the *globeaky* to look in on him before.

“Light can be more dangerous than the darkness,” Faeraud scolded. “We know that possession by darkness is strong, but possession from the light is even more powerful. When light comes, darkness flees; but when darkness comes it cannot turn off that *evil* light. You are lucky to be free from this being for now.”

Aedon didn’t want to believe that the person they were talking about was Ahteana, but he couldn’t be sure. She did know an awful lot about the things he had seen and had been involved with, and the recent breach of privacy frightened him.

“It’s time, already,” Auseten eagerly shouted, slapping Aedon’s leg as the swirling mist above the silver-pit commanded their attention.

“For what?” he asked.

“The *Middag’s Center* is about to issue the challenge,” said Faeraud.

“And I alone seized the last one when I took possession of the *Scroll of Fire*,” Auseten bragged.

“Your first. I’m the one who has conquered all the others,” Faeraud boasted.

As their competitiveness emerged, Aedon knew that there was going to be some new contest that Faeraud would thrive at winning. Everything in life had always been just a game.

SWOOSH, WHIRL, WHIP the fog sounded, interrupting for attention. The pit began to ferociously bubble and then the fog took on the appearance of a being. The mist-like figure turned in a slow circle and announced the new challenge:

*Khorupyun ez ah stuvvet ahuc aholupuntoo toro,
Khozo ahucypeam ahyunuy ofvorun tolue;
Ahyunuy lechuluelongo epur khertyun foxt runodo,*

*Slomuto ahuzyro ahund khoft lemundo;
 Lecuyzo khertyun stuvvet ketz nazupo,
 Inlueyun khomzoluevoz, ahyunuy wengdum eveluedwend
 aholupunto.*

“What’s it mean, Aedon?” asked Faeraud.

“Who translated this for you last time — since you’re always winning,” Aedon retorted, wondering if he had been brought along simply to interpret.

Faeraud nodded his head toward Auseten and then whispered, “Probably the reason I didn’t fair so well this past round.”

Frustrated, Aedon kicked the dirt, but told him anyway:

*There is a race of guests here,
 They occupy every hemisphere;
 Your challenge for the next year,
 Remove Aliens and their commander.
 Cause this race to disappear;
 Only then, your kingdom will endure.*

“Excellent,” Faeraud eagerly stated, getting up and following the other black-robos who had started to return back.

“This isn’t a game anymore,” Aedon pleaded. “It sounds like they’re suggesting you do something dreadful to — to our Asterian protectors.”

“Protectors — they hardly are,” Auseten mumbled.

Aedon blew out a sigh, with a hint of a scoff. Soon, they found themselves back in the middle of the wooded forest with the others. The animals returned, serving food and wine. There was music and dancing and celebrating.

A man stepped forward. They could tell he was much older than the others as he asserted some kind of authority and experience as if he were in charge of the event.

He greeted them, “Welcome to the *Middag Meal*. Tonight you will eat a sensuous, elaborate, exotic enjoyment like no other. With each bite you swallow, secrecy binds you to your brother. Once you partake, you pledge your allegiance to us until the sun sets no more.”

Table tops made of shinny silver floated through the trees, each one displaying a decoration of food trimmed in fruits and vegetables, arranged around a roasted goat, ready for eating. Auseten was first to partake, grabbing up and gobbling down more than a normal share.

“It’s dead,” Aedon exclaimed.

“I was frightened my first time too,” someone else in a mask assured him.

“One delicious bite and you’ll wish you had this every night,” another remarked.

“But I can’t. It is forbidden to eat the flesh of any being.”

“Forbidden for the common man; not the privileged.”

“I’ll eat his portion, and become stronger and wiser too,” another joked.

As the masked men seemed to push in to grab the delicious meat, Aedon thought he was going to be sick.

In Atlantis, and most everywhere else in the world, at that time, animals were treated similar to human beings. They talked and carried themselves in civilized fashion and it was unlawful to kill one. Eating an animal was thought to be even more barbaric than murder.

“Eat — partake, or else you will end up like the others who have intruded upon our island and did not join in,” a scary, bald-man, with burns covering his arms, shouted. Then he pointed to an area beyond where a pile of skulls laid with tarantulas fighting each other, climbing through their sockets.

“Perhaps this association of the elite is too mature for you at the moment. You don’t have to ... you don’t have to do anything you don’t want to,” Faeraud tried to assure him, but his verbal

guarantees were no match for the looks of disapproval the other venison partakers were throwing.

“I’ll try just a bite,” Aedon squeamishly agreed; he desperately wanted to belong. “Maybe just a tiny little taste.”

He took a piece and sank his teeth in. It tasted scrumptious. It was the most delicious thing he had ever tasted, but the obvious reminder that this had been a living creature just hours earlier, made his stomach churn for a moment. He thought he was going to throw-up, but he didn’t.

“*Betcha* think it’s amazing?” Faeraud asked. “The recipe has been around for centuries. It is believed that Prince Lord Antioch himself created this one. Legend says that once he tasted this food, it was so delicious that he believed it was only fit for the royal family. So he made it a law that animals could no longer be eaten.”

“They used to be eaten, for food, before this law, all the time,” another mask chimed in, affirming the tale that was told.

Just then the table floated around and the head of the goat came into Aedon’s full view. It was blurry and he instinctively lifted up his mask for a better look. The identity of the goat, which had been blocked by the mask, came into focus and was no longer hidden. He could see — it was Scapappi.

Aedon choked and spit out the meat he was eating as the mask clamped back into place. He wasn’t sure if that would invalidate his initiation, but he didn’t care. He was sickened by the events that were unfolding.

“It’s alright,” Faeraud tried to assure, knowing completely well who the goat really was.

“The energy of the universe selected this sacrificial chap,” Auseten explained. “We had nothing to do with it — it was all done by the thoughts of people who believed he should go.”

Aedon knew that he had wished, many times, that the goat was dead. He wondered what kind of mind trick this mask was instigating. He tried to pull it off again, but it was stuck on his face with an even tighter grip.

Later, Aedon, Faeraud and Auseten gathered together away from the others while they ate and Faeraud began to explain his master plan. Of course he couldn't tell them his whole plan or they would've never believed it. Instead he decided to give them one little piece of it at a time and this was the night he started.

"When three of us are gathered together and chant *magic poems*, we are visualizing and creating an energy that the universe receives. It then grants our wish because we are favored by the stars," Faeraud said.

"We can take poems that the Asterians wrote and revise them to accomplish just about anything," Auseten told him.

"Just as we evolve, it is us, the *Nile Intimates*, who must make the *poems* evolve or else they will lose their magic," Faeraud explained. "Isn't it evident how the Asterians have preserved their poems and are now losing their power. It's because they refuse to endorse new discoveries or rewrite them to fit the times?"

"We are allies not enemies. Calm your fears, Aedon," said Auseten.

"You will find that very soon all organizations, even those not within this one, will be bowing down to us," Faeraud predicted, before turning to Auseten, "Certainly they will once we have all three of the *Rataka Scrolls*. You claim that you have obtained the *Scroll of Fire* and I desire a confirmation of this."

"You will have verification — soon enough," Auseten snapped.

He wanted Faeraud's acceptance but was beginning to see that such might never happen. He wished that he had not come; he regretted invading the island and growled at himself for being too ambitious. He wished he had gone after the *Scroll* in a more discrete manner. But when he asked himself what he should do — the only answer that stared him in the face — was the fact that he had no choice but to conquer Faeraud. Even he had heard the rumors about himself: that he was making a new thunderbolt. He knew that he needed to get back to the Island, lift that formula

from that *Scroll*, and get ready for a show down. He had to be careful not to allow his enemies access to the *Scroll*.

Ausethen bowed a farewell to those around him and departed the island.

Aedon recalled his visit to Asteria, where the *Asterian Council* debated ideas about Ausethen being the *Uprooter*. He thought that maybe now would be a good time to bring up this fact and that maybe he could convince his friend not to trust the traitor, Ausethen. But he had to somehow be careful not to mention Ahteana whom he knew Faeraud could not stand.

“Do you think, do you suppose ...” Aedon began to ask.

“Yes, I am afraid that I have foreseen that he could be the *Uprooter*. That is why we must do whatever we can to secure that *Scroll* he possesses. The future of Atlantis depends on it,” said Faeraud, feeling out Aedon’s thoughts.

“Then why did you so freely include him in our plan?” asked Aedon. He was glad that Faeraud seemed to be on the right path.

“There is never a need to question my plan, *Smart-owl*, I am always on your side and you are always on mine,” Faeraud assured. “Is it not wise to keep your enemies close to you, to keep a watch on them? Besides we have time.”

Faeraud led Aedon around to the side of the windmill where they couldn’t be seen. There was an attraction between the two of them that made Faeraud trust Aedon. This was a new feeling for him, because he had never trusted anyone in his whole life before. Then Faeraud leaned forward and whispered into Aedon’s ear, “*Our friend is our enemy and our enemy is our friend.*”

PAPYRUS NINE

SCROLL OF FIRE

Autumn dragged on for a few weeks longer than usual at the Airem. An evening chill fluttered down Aedon's spine as he hurried past the Iron Isolation with a basket of fruit. He was hoping that a warm spring wouldn't be far off. A soft rustle caught his attention. It wasn't the wind but a familiar looking garment that begged him to follow. Faeraud hurried into an alcove that tunneled under the Iron Isolation, a large building where secrets were locked away. He exited out through an opening beneath a bridge which spanned across one of the moats. Aedon stopped when Faeraud turned around and noticed. He thought he owed some kind of explanation for following.

“I — I was compelled ... curious ...”

“Perhaps — *called*,” Faeraud assured, adding, “Beckoned here for a reason.”

Shadows in the shape of stretched-out wings soared over the moon-reflected waterway. Then, out of nowhere, two owls darted under the bridge and perched on a railing opposite them.

They were *Witness Wise Owls*, and called such, because their eyes are bigger than most animals which allows them to see very well, especially at night.

“The Owl Council has met and a vote taken,” the male bird announced, fixing his turban which had come a bit unwound from the flight. He was one of many owls employed as witnesses.

“Who is he?” the female owl inquired, pointing a wing toward Aedon.

“He is one of us,” Faeraud assured them, explaining further. “Aedon, this is King Aves and Queen Chordata. They are the leaders of the owls.

Chordata had perched herself on the railing facing out toward the water, so she had to turn her head backwards to face the young men.

“You will be pleased to discover that all of the owls have unanimously agreed to support you Faeraud,” she said.

“We bring word of acceptance of your invitation. The meeting you desire has been set up. You must depart at once and follow us there,” Queen Chordata told them.

“Aedon, can we take your transporter?” Faeraud asked. “It would be noticeable if I travelled in mine.”

“Where are we going?”

“To take back something that is rightfully mine?” he said.

“How does one take something back?” Aedon inquired, hoping to perhaps get an idea about how he might eventually take back the *Scroll of Fire* — should he decide that Ahteana’s message was important.

He remembered her request and that it was imperative for him to keep track of that *Scroll*. He hoped that they could get it away from Auseten and then somehow maybe he could make sure it was returned to the Asterians at the Irminsul Pyramid. He wanted to be rid of this nightmare that was beginning to haunt him.

To his surprise, Faeraud had a similar suggestion, “We’ll sneak into Gadeirus and extract that *Scroll* before *Auseten the Uprooter* wrecks more havoc on the planet.”

Faeraud watched with a keen eye in hopes that Aedon would buy into his plot. He didn't really believe in any of the stories about the *Uprooter*, but he was sure that he could get Aedon to follow along with his plots as long as he believed that Auseten might be the *Evil-one*. Aedon was eager to help out because he was certain that the *Scroll* would be safer in their hands rather than Auseten's.

Just before daylight was scheduled to arrive, they coasted-in on Aedon's delta-transporter, making way through the fog and over the *Cliff City* on the island. Broken boards and debris hung from the battered Tiahuanaco Plaza and they had to set the vehicle down carefully, almost exactly where Aedon had parked it before. They snuck down the side stairs and made their way to the road.

"It's a long walk, but we'll have to sneak up the path," Aves explained.

Aedon had a better idea. "Meca!" he called out. A few seconds later, the unicorn peeked around from behind a tree trunk. She stared at them in a most displeasing manner.

"Don't do that! Don't be a *shoutin'* my name through the forest where every wild beast is *gonna* be *watchin'* my every stomp now," she scolded.

"We need a ride," Aedon whispered.

"The carriages have all been stolen or destroyed in the ballooning," she explained. "You'll have to climb up on my back."

Aedon and Faeraud jumped up on Meca's back. Just as the owls were about to take seat, Meca stood up on her hind legs and whinnied. She almost threw the boys off.

"There *ain't gonna* be no birds riding on my behind," she snorted out.

"Of all the beastly rudeness I've ever encountered," Chordata exclaimed, "You're not worthy enough to transport this prince much less the Queen of Owls herself."

Meca was about to throw another insult back but stopped when Aedon patted her on the neck and then kicked his sandal into

her side. She settled down. The owls flew back and forth, crisscrossing as they led the unicorn and its riders toward the abode where Cleacious resided. The birds turned toward the far side of the castle and then landed in its trees. Aedon had never seen the backyard of his mother's abode before. This perspective, with its jagged pewter columns stretching into the muddy clouds above, sent a shiver of eeriness across his shoulders.

"We will walk from here," Chordata announced.

"Where did Auseten stash the *Scroll* — last time you were here?" Faeraud asked.

"In the — I think it was in the *First-meal Nook*," he answered. "We might get there mostly unnoticed from the cellar — try that side-door over there. But don't you think he'll notice it gone — sooner than we can safely get away?"

"Not to worry *Smart-owl*," said Faeraud, pulling out a replica. "This decoy should have him thinking all is well."

"Until he opens it up."

"I like your positive thinking," remarked Faeraud, sarcastically.

They left Meca, followed the owls over the path, down a layer of steps, and then into a small back door. Inside, they walked down a spiraling-stone staircase which led into the basement room. Its broken bottles and cobwebs reminded Aedon that his mother had been away for so long, that he had forgotten to have the place cleaned and restocked.

A plank of moonlight pushing through a small window was enough to illumine Auseten as he stepped forward to their surprise.

"I didn't expect you to be so bold as to blatantly trespass; though, your stupidity is of no surprise," he huffed, turning on an illumination-bulb and yelling, "Arrest the intruders!"

Armored warriors clunked down the stairs in pursuit of the visitors. Their bulky armor made it hard to move and Aedon, Faeraud, and the owls quickly escaped back outside.

“After them, you idiots!” Auseten yelled, striking one of the armored men which bruised his knuckle.

Aves lifted a wing and let a loud, long, hoot. Moments later, a flock of owls descended from the wooded area. They were carrying all kinds of thorny branches and piled them against the back door so no one could get out. Four more owls flew to the front door and maneuvered a tree branch through the handles of the double-doors, bolting it closed. The occupants of the abode were now its prisoners — at least temporarily.

“How are we *gonna* get the *Scroll* now?” Aedon protested.

“Certainly these owls can do some more magic inside the house,” Faeraud huffed.

“Magic won’t be required,” Chordata announced, calmly hopping over to them. “These owls tell me that they witnessed a moving of the *Scroll*.”

“A moving?” Aedon questioned.

“Yes,” the first owl hooted. “I saw the big *fella* take it down the willow path.”

A second owl stepped forward, “And I witnessed it travelling from the path into the Cliff City.”

Another owl lined up, “From there it went beyond the Tiahuanaco Plaza.”

“Down the docks until the fat guy disappeared under the stream,” the last owl claimed.

“The stream?” Faeraud repeated, confused.

“Yes — the water,” Aedon explained. “Auseten said that it was originally hidden under the *Pouring Pitcher Falls* — behind the runoff.”

“Then there must be a hidden cavern covered by the falls ... and some way to get in there,” Faeraud reasoned, turning back to Chordata. “How long do you think you can hold ‘em up in there? ... Long enough for us to check out the area?”

“My dear prince,” Chordata nonchalantly continued, “We are the owl clan. We are not warriors, but we can do enough damage to delay them for a period.”

“Terrific,” Aedon shouted with glee, “Let’s go — we’ve got to get that *Scroll*.”

“Oh, Poopsy!” Chordata screeched, “Poopsy, get the bowel bombers ready. We’ve got a dirty job to do today. Oh, how do I find myself in these messy situations?”

Aedon and Faeraud climbed down the edge of the mountain next to the blustering waterfall. It tumbled hundreds of podes into the ocean below even though they could only see it as far as the fog would allow. As they descended alongside, tensions rose each time a step would unearth a few falling pebbles. It didn’t take long to find a hidden ledge behind the water-flow. Eagerly the two men scaled the area pushing into what seemed like a long tunnel with mountain-rock on their right, a wall of water on the left, and a narrow shelf of stone under their feet.

The ledge curved inward, and up ahead, Aedon could see an opening which he believed was the cave they were looking for. He pointed and Faeraud nodded as he saw it too. As soon as he scuffled a few more steps forward, an apparition began to form in the waterfall. It looked almost like an Asterian with its silver and white outline and the figure in the water began to move its hand back and forth in a halting manner.

Aedon stopped. He wanted to tell Faeraud that something seemed to be warning them, but Faeraud didn’t see anything and the water was too loud to speak over. Just then, the apparition moved in front of the cave entrance and caused a ruckus of water to wave about. Suddenly, a dozen arrow-like quills shot out of the doorway into the water.

Faeraud stepped back against the rocky side and then gave a tug with his head to indicate they should go back. Aedon followed him back to where they had come from.

“Seaweed! There’s something in there,” Faeraud huffed.

“You don’t say,” Aedon snapped. “What are we going to do now?”

Faeraud looked around, formulating a plan, “Grab me a handful of those apples!”

Aedon shrugged at the idea, but climbed up the hill and then into one of the trees that was nearby. He plucked a few apples off its branches and tossed them one at a time down to the *plotter*.

“Now help me say an *enchantment* on them,” Faeraud yelled, pulling out a small vial of *benzamnestic* which he was carrying; he added a few drops to each fruit.

“What do you want me to say?” Aedon asked, feeling uneasy about chanting another *magic poem*. He told himself it would be alright this time because they had to get that *Scroll*.

“How about something like: These red apples we did reap, their taster shall fall fast asleep,” said Faeraud.

Aedon closed his eyes and chanted the words from his memory:

*Khorofuro slocuvor ahuplueo vuyune nad yomruo,
Khoft kuzk eveluedwend opulue opusha ahytoroo.*

Faeraud found a piece of an old tree trunk that had been splintered in two and left behind. He fixed it up, into a shield, and handed it to Aedon.

“All set now, go on.”

“Me?” Aedon objected. “You’re the one with the apples.”

“Just cover us, and I’ll throw the fruit in. It’ll all work out — you’ll see,” he eagerly responded, shoving Aedon ahead, back onto the shelf that led behind the water.

Once again they crept closer to the cave. Just before reaching it, Aedon stopped and slowly extended his shield into the doorway. Dozens of quills flew out and two of them dug into the wood piece. Faeraud quickly threw the apples into the cavern as Aedon retreated. More quills flew and then the scene became still except for the rushing water over them.

A few moments later a half eaten apple rolled out onto the ledge where the two men could see. Next a porcupine seemed to

stagger, trying to hold himself up by grabbing the edge of the entrance but he succumbed to the drugged fruit. Plop — he fell down fast asleep.

Aedon crept back to the hole and slowly peeked around the corner. Inside he could see two more porcupines drifting away; one of them began to snore. He stepped inside and motioned for Faeraud to follow.

The cavern was small and they had to bend down so they wouldn't hit their head on the ceiling. Further inside toward the back of the dugout was a stone, box-like table. The *Scroll of Fire* sat on top of it. They had found their prize.

“Make sure it's real,” Faeraud snapped, holding up the decoy he had brought along as a reminder that someone else might have a similar idea.

Aedon knew this was the scroll that he had set out to obtain, but he would do as Faeraud had asked. He tapped it open and its dowel extended, floating in midair. He ran his hand along the edge; it was as if a renewing energy emitted from within. Then the *Scroll* unrolled, revealing a sheet of fire. Though obvious, Aedon still asked the *Scroll* to reveal its name:

*“Ah khenkeng ahuc khut tulueyun ahytoroo unot yomruno.
Eveluedwend unot sloyneun ketz arn runodoo fumo.”*

Blazing letters collected and formed above the *Scroll* that read:

Δ ΗΓΛ 9Γ 9Γ Δ ΗΛ94Τ

And a raspy voice coughed out from the smoking characters:

U'd ahum opero, opero u'd aholupunto!

“I am fire, fire I am,” said Aedon, turning to Faeraud, “It’s authentic.”

“Certainly won’t be needing this one,” Faeraud chuckled, setting his decoy on the floor next to the stone table.

Aedon rolled the *Scroll of Fire* back up and just as it came to rest on top of the table there was a big splash in the water outside. The two men turned to look and Aedon thought it might be the apparition again. But they saw nothing.

During the brief moment their attention was drawn away, a fourth porcupine, behind the stone table, snuck out. He pulled the dowel off of the top of the table down next to the decoy. Then, as sure as he could be, he placed the fake one back on top of the table. He snatched the other *Scroll* before tucking himself back into hiding.

Aedon and Faeraud grabbed the roll from the tabletop and took off thinking they had accomplished their mission. Laughing to himself so hard that his quills shook, the porcupine watched them depart with what he thought was the decoy, while he held the real papyrus.

Soon, Ausethen returned, rushing in all flustered with concern. The porcupine was handsomely rewarded when he presented the *Scroll* to Ausethen. But, right after receiving it, Ausethen saw what had happened to the other porcupines and he changed his mind and threw all of them into the waterfall, over the cliff.

All Aedon could think about was how he wanted to take the papyrus back to the Asterians. He was certain that the mess that Ausethen had started would be undone as soon as he returned the *Scroll*.

Faeraud kept eyeing the rod in Aedon’s satchel. He had to have that *Scroll* and he believed that like everything else, it rightfully belonged to him. He needed it so he could prove to everyone in the *Middag* that he truly was the one and only conqueror. He secretly vowed to himself that he was going to destroy Ausethen now that he had the *Scroll*.

The early morning dawned on Aedon and Faeraud's flight back to Atlantis. Approaching the continent, they were greeted by twenty-hundred warships below. Beyond that, the farming fields of Ampheres had been turned into runways for *delta-bombers*.

"What's going on, Faeraud?" Aedon asked, steering the *delta* lower. "They look like they're preparing for a battle."

Faeraud scoffed. "I think we all know who started this. While we still have an advantage, we are going to finish it."

"But you gave Ahteana your word ... that we would hold until she returns."

"I gave no such word. Lemech was the one who cowered to her, not me."

"What about your promises to Auseten? And — our secret organization?"

"The best part about making secret alliances and secret promises is that no one else knows you made them — so you can deny that they ever existed. Not that I would ever do that, but Auseten sure would. ... I said what I was forced to say. Now I am preparing for the inevitable."

"What do you mean?"

"I am certain that Auseten and Aszea already have extracted the thunderbolt plans. Even though the blueprints for the *bolt* were in that *Scroll* —they are missing one small element. Auseten never did well at the *educatory history lab*. He has forgotten the formula requires a special die ... to fashion its core made from *orichalcum*. The only remaining mold was entrusted to Prince Lord Methouslan and he has shown me where it was hidden.

"Ahteana is going to be furious," Aedon snapped.

"No matter, the *enchanted poems* in this *Scroll* are more powerful than a million thunderbolts," Faeraud defended, hugging Aedon's satchel to his bosom. "We will prevail before the Asterians return — I assure you my — best friend."

Chordata leaned forward from the rear of the transporter, “The prism has shown that the end of the Asterians is very near, I wouldn’t count on anything from them; instead, I’d distant myself far from their false teachings.”

“I see, I agree — I do see, I do agree. We all see, we all agree,” Aves the owl replied, his turban blocking his eyes again.

“I am so pleased that we all unanimously approve,” the queen echoed.

Aedon was thrilled that they had snuck the dowel away from Ausethen, but he was beginning to see that Faeraud was obsessed with power and the abilities it could enable. He knew that he had to return at least one of the *Scrolls* to Ahteana. He decided to remain silent in revealing anything about the *Scroll of Water* to the Asterians. He told himself that if the Asterians got their *Scroll of Fire* back and Faeraud kept the other *Scroll*, then things might be in balance — at least he hoped that would be true.

Earlier he felt bad that he left behind (on Nile Isle) the special *globeaky* Ahteana had given him, but now he was happy to be rid of it. He felt he could better determine how to separate the *Rataka* pieces and keep things balanced, without the pressure of someone looking over his shoulder.

PAPYRUS TEN

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A voice came from the *omni-transglaust* where sound emerged but no figure this time, “Aedon? Aedon, are you there?”

“Can you fix the reception on this thing?” Lemech ordered. He paced back and forth on one of two circular platforms where a million beams of light protruded from its perimeter. Next to it, crowded into Monarchy Hall, was the operator’s box where a skinny-pale man with long-wiry hair frantically turned its knobs.

“I’m a painter, an artiste, not an *omni-transglaust* projectionist,” Trigonometry shouted out. “How should I know the workings of one of these contraptions?”

“I’ll handle this complicated — thing, Trig. You just go back to painting this important historic moment,” Faeraud told the artist, before taking control of the dials and wielding in its transmission.

Cleacious appeared over the *transglaust* receiver which occupied the second circular stage. Aedon clenched his jaw in

embarrassment as his mother faded in. She was always showing up in the wrong place and at the most inopportune moment.

“Where is Dominate Haedrus of Aszea?” Lemech demanded.

“I am the Lord Dominate’s lady and I am here to properly introduce him to you. ... How does this thing work? ... I can’t see them? ... Where is Aedon?” Cleacious asked as her image stomped about the projected base.

The Prince Lord motioned Aedon over to him and as soon as he was within reach, Lemech clutched and pulled him up onto the green platform so his mother could blink a glimpse. Then Lemech pushed him aside again.

Cleacious continued her introduction, “Oh there you are. How’s my little apple? ... Oh yeah, the introduction ... The mighty powerful ruler of the planet has agreed to this rare audience and awaits your apology. Presenting Prince Lord Dominate Haedrus of Aszea.”

“And Gadeirus!” an off-*transglau*st voice shouted.

“Yes, and of the Island of Gadeirus,” Cleacious repeated.

His image replaced hers as he began, “Now is the time to agree to some terms. I have something you want. You have something I want.”

“There will be no bargains. You have wrongfully invaded our island and must withdraw your Channels immediately,” Lemech ordered. “Certainly you realize that Ahteana will be returning with mandates soon.”

Haedrus scoffed, “The island originally belonged to my continent sun-cycles before your breach of settlement there, after the *Territorial Quarrels*.”

“Your occupation is illegal and its end will come quickly or with consequences.”

“I intend to preserve my rightful ownership for the benefit of my people. I may grant a lease back to you in exchange for something else, so long as my people are compensated appropriately,” Haedrus toyed.

“There will be no bargaining ...”

Then Mestor stepped up and interjected, “But — do entertain our Senior Warriors with your reasonable request, to wet our curiosity’s sake, of course.”

Mestor stepped back down as his rush into the situation created a moment of awkwardness.

“I believe that what I desire, you also want — deep down inside — though it may take a moment for you to search your pitiful souls. ... I want the Irminsul Pyramid,” Haedrus blurted out.

He was cut off by gasps of amazement in both their rooms. Haedrus stood up taller than a giraffe and proclaimed the details, “I want the *Beam of Light* in the Irminsul Pyramid turned off. The time of the Asterians has ended and it is time that they remain on their moon and we remain on our Earth.”

“Even if we agreed with you, it would be impossible to do such a thing. Why it would take many sun-cycles of negotiating before the Asterians would agree to such,” Lemech pointed out.

“Negotiations are not part of my request. Turn off the beam and crush its source or your two western islands will fall and not a pebble shall remain,” Haedrus announced.

“The Asterians are returning within days and they will not allow this foolishness. Why do you condemn your own soul with such nonsense?” Lemech asked.

“I bury myself with knowledge of the future. The Asterians you speak of shall return to your rescue no more than King Yaswhen has returned to rule. ... Three days! — I give you — three days — to cooperate. After that, one of your islands will sink into the sea, never to be seen again. The other will follow on the next day and then we will take down the pyramid ourselves,” the *transglau* proclaimed, disappearing with an angry puff of smoke.

“That Auseten,” Faeraud exclaimed, under his breath; he was certain that his lazy friend had found ambition to snag a victory in this season’s *Middag Challenge* (which was to abolish the Asterians from the planet). Chatter filled the room with the horror that seemed to await. Lemech was speechless, his face almost as

green as the platform he stepped down from. Helping him to a tall-back chair, Evaemon pleaded, “The Asterians will never come to our aide if we turn off the *Beam of Light*. We must stall for more time.”

“There is no *OFF* switch. The beam radiates from their moon and is tied to an anchor made of an undefined power-source. It reaches toward the center of Earth’s core,” Lemech explained. “We’d have to literally destroy the whole Irminsul — maybe even the entire city to shut it down.”

“Father, do you not hear what they say — surely if they plan to annihilate our islands they must have built a new thunderbolt already,” Faeraud suggested.

Everyone’s faces turned whiter than an un-mined piece of *orichalcum* as they realized their lack of available defense.

“We begin preparations for war at dawn,” Lemech ordered, “The Asterians have not returned and may not come for days. ... When did Ahteana say she’d be returning? Has anyone counted how long they’ve been gone?”

“And if Ahteana returns tomorrow, do you think she, by herself, will hold back the crushing warriors of Aszea?” Faeraud pointed out.

“Assemble an emergency session of the *Spiral Legislature* at once,” Lemech declared, jumping up from his throne.

Ausethen still despised his father and his father still had delusions that his son would be the loyal ruler he had always envisioned. Knowing his father’s wishes, Ausethen talked him into making ridiculous demands on the Atlantians. Ausethen would have never imagined that his *Scroll* held the plans to the *thunderbolt*, but the rumors people envisioned gave him the idea. Shortly after the *Middag*, he retrieved the plans for the *bolt* from the *Scroll of Fire*. He believed that the plans he had were complete and had forgotten about the core’s mold, which was needed to make it work properly. Ausethen knew that with the Asterians out of the way, he would not only win the *Middag Challenge* but he

could eliminate his father, take over what had been conquered, and make Atlantis tremble with the army of *balloons* and *thunderbolts* he was building. He was sure that this new play, would quickly make him the ruler of the world.

Faeraud calculated that Auseten would build the *thunderbolts* without testing any — since such a large blast could not be hidden. He needed a way to show his unquestionable leadership if he were to become king. Destroying Auseten and taking back Gadeirus would not only lock-in his father's promise to name him successor, but deliver acceptance from the people of Atlantis as well. He would worry about the Irminsul *Beam of Light* later, his first conquer had to be Auseten.

Fear and rumors of destruction spread across Atlantis as a large thunderbolt on top of a mountain peak in Gadeirus was spotted by ships and transporters that passed by. Special chemicals were ignited below its container, which caused an ominous orange-colored smoke to spread out from beneath it.

“We'll give them a *visual* to scare the togas right off their bodies,” Auseten laughed in a demented state as he lit the fire.

A breeze carried the smoke eastwardly until it reached to the *Spiral Legislature* in the center of Atlantis. Solemnly the many princes and princesses and all the Etruscans took seats in the building where they gathered to face the grim realities that begged an immediate decision.

The *Spiral Legislature* was a large round building with a center section topped off by a domed roof, about half a stadia in diameter. In the center of the room was a symbol, the same one that was on the Atlantian flag (a circle with two lines intersecting each other), embedded in the floor in magnificent blue-colored gem stones. Outside the circle was a wider floor that slowly spiraled all the way to the domed ceiling, probably about twelve levels high. The spiraling floor had a railing and hundreds of stations all facing in toward the center. The top level contained twelve stations: one

for each of ten Etruscans (from each province), one for the ruling Prince Lord and one for the former.

The royals debated for hours. First they discussed if the Asterians would return in time or not. Ambassador Telopps pretended to send a communique many times, but he insisted that the moon was not in correct alignment that day to facilitate travel or communication.

Evaemon led a debate on using conventional troops and delta-transporters to eject them from the island, but they had no formidable size army that could match the numbers Aszea appeared to hold.

Faeraud brought up the idea of a counter-attack with a *thunderbolt* and he produced viable scientific reports that they could make one practically overnight, but the loss of life would be great. Plus, if Atlantis decided to produce one, certainly any bolts already placed on the islands would be set off and all their inhabitants would perish.

Various ideas were thrown around and finally it all came down to one decision. Could they, should they, would they turn off the *Beam of Light* that streamed from the Asterian moon down into the Irminsul Pyramid, the light which was the primary route of travel for the Asterians.

When voting came, as each participant cast a vote, his seating desk floated out into the center rotunda area of the *Spiral Legislature* for a few seconds, then plugged itself in on the right side of the room if the vote were for retaining the Irminsul or on the left side if it were for destroying it.

The final vote came in, evenly split between the princes and four Etruscans on each side (two Etruscans were not voting because they were held captive on their respective islands). The last vote to be cast was Lemech's.

Lemech stepped up with his vote and stated, "The Asterian's, who are our protectors, have been forsaken by nearly half of those whom they safeguard. How quickly, in a moment of dark haste,

one forgets the prosperity they have afforded us. I vote my conscious and they will stay as long as I see the light of day.”

With the impact of his statement, quickly some princes changed their votes and a few of the seats swapped over to the right side of the room.

A burst of chatter was quickly quieted as Methouslan made a surprise appearance from down below. He walked to the edge of the great seal of Atlantis that was embedded in the floor, a mosaic that no one had ever stepped on. From its edge he announced, “The former Prince Lord, whom I am, casts his vote, and his vote does not agree with his successor.”

Again the entire room burst with energy as princes began changing their votes. Seats no longer floated in the center in an orderly fashion as each prince began voting out of turn. Seats were zipping through the air, some of them momentarily colliding. At one point two floating stations were impassible and the two princes wrestled each other in midair trying to force their seat back into a place in the spiral where it could be properly counted.

When all the voting desks settled back, the count was still exactly the same, evenly split.

A crack in the floor announced itself louder than any orator had ever spoken in the chamber before. All the quick ruckus and movement had literally split the building in two. The slit began almost between Methouslan’s legs; then, it extended breaking the emblematic floor in half. It continued up the wall and to the ceiling, splitting the building itself into two halves.

News of the division travelled back to Ausethen when Peter the *copy-parrot* returned home to Gadeirus.

“Once they see that I still have the *Scroll of Fire*,” Ausethen chuckled with joy, “They will simply surrender to me. I won’t even have to use these toys — though I’d really like to see what one of them could do. ... First, let’s see if we can perhaps conjure up a volcano or something over there by their divided legislature.”

Auseten snatched the scroll-container and opened it. He quickly discovered that it was a fake. The first thing that came into his mind was that he was going to kill that porcupine who gave it to him. Then he remembered that he had already thrown the creature over the waterfall.

Apparently, when the porcupine pulled the *Scroll* down from the stone table to exchange it, he got distracted and mixed up which one was real and which was the decoy. The rodent thought he was handing over the real *Scroll*, when in fact, he had mistakenly picked up the façade. Auseten realized that Aedon and Faeraud now held the real, authentic, *Scroll of Fire*.

Auseten was furious and more determined than ever to beat Faeraud at this game. Having the thunderbolts increased his confidence and it grew along with his anger. He believed that his next move should be big — something that would give him prominence worldwide. Then he'd get his scroll back, and the other one that Faeraud already had. He was more certain than ever that he would succeed. But one thing still stood in his way — he needed his father's permission.

Walking out to the courtyard where he stood, Auseten told his father, "Atlantis is divided and has become weak, a rare opportunity presents itself as we speak."

Haedrus gazed at the algae-infested moat in disgust, "Doesn't anyone clean their ponds anymore?"

"Father, Atlantis is divided over our proposition to — *turn off* — the Irminsul Pyramid. If we attack their other island it might unite them against us; however, if we go and destroy the Pyramid ourselves, half of them will cheer to our valor, sealing the division and causing many to side with us."

"And the other half," Cleacious asked, poking her head out of the doorway.

Ignoring Cleacious, Haedrus acknowledged his son, "You have become wiser than the talents I bestowed on you. If we can destroy the Irminsul we will gain acceptance from many other lands around. ... They will line up to be our ally."

“With the Irminsul Pyramid and the Asterians gone, Atlantis will have to bow to us or else face absolute demise,” Ausethen gloated.

“They will not mind being a subservient state once they see that we have saved them from this illness that shoves outdated laws of uselessness upon all of us,” Cleacious commented, running her fingers through the back hairs of Haedrus head.

“Not all of them, I’m sure,” Haedrus interjected, grabbing her hand, “But I’m confident we might persuade even the drippiest doubter.”

“Allow me to lead an attack of balloons this very evening. The *Beam of Light* will be back into alignment at sunrise tomorrow and the Asterians could return at any moment after that,” Ausethen begged. “Tonight we will show that our warriors are stronger than the Atlantians, bigger than the Asterians, and more powerful than any of their little *poemers*. We will do this before Ahteana returns.”

“You can’t just fly into the inner Irem of Atlantis and not be seen or attacked. Have you not thought this out my son? Why that would be a suicide mission.”

“But I have — investigated this idea — thoroughly. The clouds of smoke that our *thunderbolt-fires* create, will double as a cover. The balloons will fly through undetected, each with its own *smoke making capacitor* which will add a protection around its perimeter. We’ll fly in a single-line under cover of the smoke which pours across their continent at this very moment.”

“Brilliant, my prince. Simply, brilliant!” Haedrus conferred, turning and sitting down with a sigh. “But I can’t let you do it, Ausethen. It’s too dangerous.”

“This is how much time an attack would take,” Ausethen proclaimed, yanking up a large hourglass and setting it on the divider wall. Then he picked up a second glass with slightly more sand in its top. “And this is when the moon aligns, allowing the Asterians to return again.”

Haedrus pondered the question before changing his mind to allow Ausethen to proceed, “Then, why do you waste time

playing with mathematical envelopes — when there is a continent to acquire? Forth to conquer, my prince.”

An enormous army of balloons spun their *crystal-capacitors* up to speed as they launched from the island. Quietly they flew all night long in the cover of the smoke. A light breeze occasionally opened up their covering and the pilots could see tiny lights and little houses below, as they flew over some of the cities. They pressed onward toward the inner circle of the Atlantis continent. They breezed by — noticed by no one, except a small boy whom no one listened to when he cried: *Balloon!*

Ausethen piloted the first balloon. He struggled while steering it, trying to keep the vehicle in the cover of the stream-of-smoke. He watched the large hourglass sitting near the window of his cab. Its grains measured the remaining time until the Asterians would be able to travel again. There was a another hourglass sitting next to first, it was much smaller and was not yet in motion.

Meanwhile Faeraud and Aedon hastily returned to the Irem with the *Fire Scroll*.

“This is the first time in centuries that two of the *Scrolls* have been in the same place,” Faeraud eagerly explained as he pulled the scroll from its container and rolled it out in front of the triangular window in his chamber.

Aedon bent down over it, “It looks just like the other one. Same elegant lettering design, except written in billows of smoke and fire.”

“And with more than one mystery, that I believe we will unlock tonight,” Faeraud whispered, pulling out the first scroll and rolling it alongside the second.

“I’m ready to explore,” said Aedon.

Faeraud moved his hand over the *Water Scroll*, searching until he found a particular enchantment he was looking for. “Here it is, read this one, Aedon.”

“We’ve read that one before, why don’t —”

“Just read it!”

Aedon hesitated for a second. He didn’t want another dramatic outburst so he complied:

*“The meadows green glistening with dew,
Melt suddenly as your cloud grew.
Dangers horrible come with no clue,
My words you open with two.
Enemies yours wiped from the earth too,
Lands and waters fuse like new.
Planet crumbles unless used by few,
Thunderbolt risks destroying even you.”*

“Not in our language, handsome. Sing it ... in Asterian,” Faeraud requested, commanding him with a compliment.

“Certainly,” Aedon sighed, tuning his voice so the verse would rhyme in song. His fear hoped with all force that the words and notes would fall dead to the floor. Rapidly his heart beat as his tongue delivered the *enchantment* with precession:

*Khut rwauzz gwaoon sceft evetchcruft vutow,
Goluet meicicteun deko meiunot leclyd yomswauw.
Taeahunngor turrevluco lecumo evetchcruft fu leclueyo,
Gyun taeevud unot ipon evetchcruft keshow.
Taeahonomyun meiunot yomeventor
 iprum ahourth kunow,
Taebueund ahund taevutch ipyzo deko fow.
Huleuno taeahovahaweyun
 anknuwn yomaz ahvyuna opow,
Khymv ahvuluet taesezo ahovahaweyun ovon unow.*

This time a wind from within the *Scroll* began to blow. It picked up momentum and leaped from the *Water Scroll* into the *Fire Scroll*. A small tornado danced above the *Second Scroll* for a moment and then the poem was repeated aloud, from voices within

the two *Scrolls*. Letters and numbers began to fly off the page of both *Scrolls*.

Faeraud quickly picked up a small square plate and held it up. Letters, words, numbers and formulas shot out from the whirlwind above the *Fire Scroll* into the panel he held.

“They can program an *Instruction Box*? I didn’t know they could broadcast into any *mediums*. No one ever told us that,” Aedon marveled, looking closer at the plate. It was a white square card, just barely big enough to fit in Faeraud’s hand. Nearly every modern machine used an *Instruction Box* to make it operate properly.

“They said the formula for the *thunderbolt* was written in invisible ink — not anymore,” Faeraud bragged, snapping the card down into his pocket. “Now we have the formula — and I’ve already obtained the mold.”

Aedon watched as Faeraud retracted the *Scrolls*, then took them into his toga wardrobe where he carefully placed both of them onto a recessed shelf. As the shelf rolled into place, Aedon could see that it was guarded by air-breathing, electric-piranhas, the kind that lived on land and would deliver a million volts of electricity to its victims. As Faeraud pulled the old mirror over its door to cover the wardrobe, Ahteana’s words kept echoing in his head. A wrenching feeling in his stomach told him that now he would need to not only get the *Fire Scroll*, but also the *Instruction Box* that Faeraud had just produced. He knew he had to act quickly before he was asked to aid in making more of them.

Soon the sky became lighter and it became more difficult for Auseten to hide his army of balloons. The breeze began to clear away the smog along with its shield of smoke. Each balloon was equipped with its own smoke-maker, but the breeze prevented even that from hiding them anymore.

A Channel of Warriors standing guard on the Irem walls saw the smoky pursuit in the distance and sounded horns of alarm. With the blow of each trumpet another prince and another

Etruscan woke from their sleep. Lemech, Faeraud and Aedon all rushed out to the same palace walkway, almost together, at the same time.

“What is that? What is that ball of smog that pollutes the air,” Lemech screeched in a demanding tone.

“An attack whose cover is exposing,” Aedon yelled, guessing.

“Not now, this wasn’t supposed to happen, not this way, not now,” Faeraud grumbled. “I’m going to kill that Ausethen!”

His dog, Pestilence, pranced out and tugged at his toga, “Master, this is not according to plan.”

“I know that you idiot,” Faeraud screeched, kicking the dog across the balcony; the others looked away, ignoring him, like they always did.

Everyone rushed into another room opposite the walkway where they gathered with the other Etruscans.

“*Flooding drenched fools!* What are we to do now?” Mestor asked in a pondering voice.

“We must go to the main pyramid and send a communiacae to the Asterians immediately,” Evaemon announced as if he had the only correct answer. Then he left, running toward its doors.

“There’s no time, they’re coming, they’re here,” Lemech cried out fearfully.

“What about the crystal-globes of protection that have been bestowed on some,” Aedon asked, “Won’t they channel some kind of energy to distance their approach?”

“We know Ahteana has tried *ta* plant more than a few fancy props (on unsuspecting people) and *den* render stories of deceptions *bout tem*,” Methouslan exclaimed. “Such a thing really does not exist — at least I don’t believe in it.”

“I’ll speak for my friend, he has already chosen our side carefully,” Faeraud softly spoke to Methouslan, then turned to Aedon in a whisper — almost as a warning, “No prince can serve

two different kings — it would be wise to stay distant from things of the Irminsul — even *if* it is on our land.”

“Aedon, I enjoy your enthusiasm, my young prince,” Lemech said, while holding out his ring which had been given to him as one of those trinkets of protection. “I wish I still had your faith. Unfortunately, I grieve, while beginning to understand that these little gems seem to have even less magical power than the Asterians who give them.”

“You may wish to remove that thing, or at least hide it,” Mestor scowled at him in a hushed tone.

In the balloon, Auseten turned off his smoke creator so he could see his way in. The final grain of sand dropped from his large hourglass. He picked up the smaller glass.

“The Irminsul beam is now aligned and the Asterians can travel,” he announced to his crew. “But, it takes them twelve minutes to reach the Earth from the Moon. In just ten minutes their sacred pyramid will be gone.”

Auseten turned over the smaller time-glass and its sand began to drop as the crew aboard his balloon gave out a loud cheer. All the other balloons descended from the trail of smoke and headed in a line toward the Irminsul Pyramid. No one at the Irem knew what to do. The attack had completely caught them by surprise.

“It appears as if they’re heading toward the Irminsul,” Lemech announced, stating the obvious.

At once, everyone ran outside, along the walkway toward the side that opened into a view of the pyramid. Aedon and Faeraud followed the others.

“How awful,” Aedon exclaimed as he realized, “Etruscan Evaemon just went into the pyramid. And Ambassador Telopps is there too.”

“And all the Asterian cocoons,” Faeraud quietly added with no emotion.

Auseten smiled, his smile was bigger than a banana as his balloon now had a clear approach to the pyramid-building. The sands in his time glass were half emptied out and he was as sure of a *success* as the onlookers were of a *failure*.

Inside one of the cathedrals adjacent to the Irminsul Pyramid, Etruscan Evaemon fell to his knees and cried out in agony toward the sky, “In the name of Yaswhen, my dear Asterians, I beg of you, save us from our own demise this very day. ... Save us ... Save us... Save us ...”

As if his cry had been heard, the light from the Irminsul beam began to flash and spark, it was obvious that Asterians were on their way. The sound of cocoons rotating, came to life.

Inside the balloon Auseten was taken back with surprise, “What’s happening? They can’t do that, how can they be here already? We have two more minutes left.”

“Maybe they entered the beam up there before the alignment clicked in down here,” someone suggested, correctly stating exactly what had happened.

“We have two more minutes. I’m supposed to have two more minutes. The world would’ve been mine,” Auseten yelled. Then he stood up to the window of his cab and yelled out from it, toward the Asterians, “Cheaters! Two more minutes! ... I’m supposed to have two more minutes. ... I want my two more minutes!”

Ahteana was the first one to return. Her cocoon rose in the light where she could step out onto the roof of the pyramid. She began to blow her breath creating a powerful breeze. Other Asterians followed her and soon they created a wind which was more forceful than a hurricane. Quickly it blew all of the balloons away. They swished past Mestor, then Gadeirus and finally back into their own continent of Aszea.

There was another flash of light. The light glowed for a moment and then morphed into another Asterian. The man was dark skinned and hairless; he was muscular and tall like a giant. His back faced them and Aedon recognized him from his visit to

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Asteria. The man turned around and stepped out of the beam with a commanding presence that matched his position of power. His name was Zualpha.

PAPYRUS ELEVEN

TRIP TO ASTERIA

Now, would be the perfect time to tell Ahteana about where the *Scroll of Fire* was, Aedon thought. He wasn't sure how he could ever get the *Scroll* away from Faeraud. It didn't matter, anyway. He could run right over to the Irminsul Pyramid, find Ahteana and tell her that the *Scroll* was safely hidden away in Faeraud's abode. He was certain that once she showed up to collect the *Scroll* that his friendship with Faeraud would be over; that made him sad. But, he couldn't go on hiding the secrets that he knew. Plus, recently Faeraud was becoming more eccentric than an electric eel.

Aedon rushed from the Irem toward the Irminsul and just as he was about to enter, he passed a couple of Asterians who were exiting. The *globeakys* around their neck were glowing dimmer than their concerned faces. Aedon grasped for his, then he remembered that he had taken it off and left it on *Nile Island*. He felt naked and was certain that he shouldn't go to Ahteana, unless

he wore the amulet she gave him, because he had promised never to take it off. He realized that he would have to return to the hidden isle and get it back.

He grabbed his mask and headed for the alcove along the shore where he had set off in the boat the first time. The stone markings were still there but the moon was not on the horizon that evening. He waited nearby until the next afternoon when he was able to count the number of days that had past, and chart the new position of the moon in relation to the location of the island. He was readying to set course and making adjustments when he saw other markings on one of the stone pylons. He remembered that the island floated and could move, so he guessed that it might slide back and forth adjusting for the moon's gravitational pull. He recalculated his course for that scenario, keeping the other measurements as well, just in case he was wrong.

Aedon paddled the rugged raft toward the setting moon, hoping that he was on the right course. The moonlight was dimmer than usual; the ocean ripples weren't showing him the way; and even the dolphins and mermaids seemed to be hiding that night.

The waves carried the raft around to the back side of the island, slightly off-course; but alas, he was able to disembark. The water-tree roots were higher in these parts and it was quite a workout scrambling over each one. The mask he wore made it difficult to hike as it was clenching his face and blocking his eyes. Instead of the comfortable massage it once gave, it felt like it was sticking pins in his face. He realized that the only way he was going to get his trinket back, was to take off the fake face. He would not be able to hide behind any costume this time. He wrestled to pull it off. Finally it came free and he threw it to the ground. The mask whimpered and crawled away like an injured animal, leaving Aedon alone on the island, all by himself.

The roots seemed to be growing taller as if they were trying to stop him. Tarantulas scurried over one of the large trunks, following him. He decided to keep toward the edge of the bank

until he could make it around to the main path, which he finally reached after a long while.

The tide had risen and waves began to crash on the shore, their break slithering over the route. The old windmill guarding the entrance, sat sleeping. As Aedon came closer, another wave bulldozed its way in, and then retreated with a chunk of earth creating a sink hole. He yelped and pulled himself back up on the pathway.

A light went on in one of two windows. The windmill had opened an eye. The blades began to spin around — slowly at first, then faster and faster. He had forgotten the secret words to request entry and thought that there was no way he could possibly make it through the doorway between the sweeps. He rubbed his shoulder remembering where the swooping blades had nicked him before — he could almost feel the wound again. Then, he turned around to leave — or so the windmill thought.

Climbing over the tree roots around to the side, Aedon used the *rope-tie* he wore for a belt as a lasso. Attaching it to the side rail of the reefing stage, he climbed up the building and entered the upper-level through a side window. Looking down inside, he could see the large net full of jewelry, *globeakys* and other trinkets. There were so many and they all looked the same. How would he ever find the one *globeaky* that Ahteana had given him? He let out a disappointing sigh filled with frustration.

“Welcome site — ya are,” Scorpion greeted, appearing on a step which was part of a spiral staircase winding to the top of the building.

The scorpion was opposite the opening Aedon was climbing through and a large beam stretched from below the window over to the stairs. The human-size arachnid jumped off the staircase, landed on the beam, and carefully balanced his eight legs as they slithered closer. The creature had grown in the months since Aedon had last seen him.

“Scorpion! Am I delighted to see you,” Aedon gulped, almost hitting his head on the window he was breaching; he

stuttered to explain, “I’ve come to find my amulet ... the *globeaky* that I wore the night I was here a few months back. ... You remember, the one I left in the bin in the changing room down there?”

“Month back? ... Never seen ya. Sure as my pincers are sharp, never seen anyone like you before,” Scorpion divulged. “All arrive in disguise, me guests — and much more polite they be — permission to enter — request they.”

“I suppose I can go back out and do the rituals if they are required, even now,” Aedon volunteered, stepping one foot back out the window onto the balcony.

“Late for that — it is,” Scorpion explained. “Thieves of your kind — always welcome for dinner. Good meat out here, rarely gets. Last time — a good piece of nub to inject me venom in, came months ago. Some loud-bahing goat ... bit tough, took extra digestive juices to suck him in. Island here — void of any vegetation — except them water-leafed trees your type engineered — scariest living creatures, aren’t they? You — you do look much tender more — very delicious.”

Aedon realized that he wasn’t going to get his *globeaky* back unless he took care of Scorpion and if he didn’t hurry, he might end up being the pest’s dinner. Quickly thinking, he yanked his *rope-tie* up off the outside reefing stage, whirled it around and caught the back part of Scorpion’s tail. Then he threw the other end up toward the inside of the windmill. The rope caught on the spur wheel and Scorpion was wheeled in. Hanging upside down he rotated around with the wheel, dangling from the ceiling. The livid invertebrate furiously snapped his claws with anger, reaching down toward Aedon, as far as he could.

Aedon sat down on the wooden beam that stretched over the net of jewels. How would he find the one-true amulet that belonged to him? The task seemed insurmountable. He crisscrossed his legs and closed his eyes — thinking — wishing — praying — meditating.

A grain of light, from the Asterian moon, sliced along the striking rod and reflected down into the pile of spoils. A red crimson thread caught Aedon's attention. Instinctively he reached out and pulled at it. It was the scarlet cord he had tied his amulet onto long ago. The string wound through the sea of forgotten brass, leading to his *globeaky*. He yanked it out of the pile and tied it around his neck once again.

The scorpion had maneuvered his pinchers high enough to cut through his bounds. He clung to the upper section of rope while snipping away at the part around his legs. Aedon flinched as the bottom half of the tie fell, landing on his shoulder. Looking up, he saw that Scorpion had freed himself. Quickly, He grabbed the *rope-tie* from his shoulder and darted out the window. Scorpion leaped down to the beam and out the window after him. Aedon tumbled over the roots, ran back to his raft, and pushed off toward Atlantis, leaving the angry scorpion chattering his claws in harmony with his threats.

Aedon was thankful that he had not been eaten by the insect. He held the *globeaky* around his neck and promised himself that he would never ever take it off again. Now he could find Ahteana and tell her about the *Scrolls*.

CHIP! CHIP! CHIP! CHISEL! BANG! CHIP!

“Careful, these are masterful pieces of art that took painstaking sun-cycles to create to perfection,” Trigonometry scolded, directing the small tundra-voles who were hollowing out the sculpted pieces.

There were four of them, each piece was shaped in the form of a magnificent cherubim, with wings spread out. They were about five podes in height, made of wood and overlaid with gold and *orichalcum*. They didn't look like the muscular-built angels you've seen in paintings; instead, these had fat bellies. Each was bent over, leaning the chin to the fist, and an elbow to knee, like a pondering thinker. There was a smirk across their faces, though no one seemed to notice.

“These were supposed to be marble masterpieces I am profoundly upset about the change in materials,” Trigonometry complained.

“They have to be light enough to meet the transportation specification, Trig,” Faeraud reminded.

“Just as well, since that stupid elephant damaged half the marble pieces,” Trigonometry scoffed.

“You do remember that it is essential that I have a complete tight-fitting back-side to them?” Faeraud huffed, inspecting the statue. “We don’t want them to look hollowed-out.”

“They will be ready by sunset,” Trig assured him.

Faeraud returned to the *Spiral Legislature* where the divided princes sat. Now that the Asterians had returned, many of the princes wished they were on the right side instead of the left. The building remained cracked in two, making it impossible for anyone to change their vote at this point. But some of them tried anyway. One prince made quite a bit of progress at disassembling his station and as he was dismantling it from level three, it suddenly fell and crashed to the floor, splintering into a hundred pieces. He grabbed onto the edge of the adjacent desk where he dangled for a moment before being pulled back up by his neighbor.

“Relax, prince guy,” his neighbor said, “It’s only the Asterians. You act as if Yaswhen himself came back.”

A loud humming noise from above caused the domed roof to open up. A white cloud dropped from the sky. It was a platform which descended into the rotunda like a *floating-trivelator*. Propelled by a swirl of steam, the riser with the Asterians Zualpha and Ahteana on it, slowed to a hover just above the sanctified emblem embedded in the center of the floor.

Ahteana spoke first, “My dearest Atlantian princes and esteemed Etruscans, it is with some sorrow that we find this house divided. I can see peril, mistrust and deception among you. If you fail to believe with positive aspirations, your countenance will turn

bitter and the energy that keeps your planet intact may falter along with its protection.”

“*Der’s* been barely a puddle of protection lately,” Mestor spoke-up.

“We have not come here for a debate but rather with a mandate,” Zualpha announced with his booming voice. “The Prince Lord of each continent will meet with the *Asterian Council* at the Irminsul Pyramid tomorrow night, one hour-glass after sunset.”

“I ask and request now, from each of you, a vote confirming that you support our decisions at this summit,” Ahteana explained. “Those who may be bound by some other promise — or *enchantment* — will find it beneficial to abstain rather than to hinder.”

It didn’t take long for the voting to complete. Each prince in support of the measure held up both hands to indicate such. Less than a quarter of those in attendance voted. The other three-quarters remained silent as instructed.

When the voting reached the top floor Faeraud lifted both his arms, “In this crisis we must stick together, so that our past may be crushed, our present placed on hold, and our future bettered.”

His words sent some kind of signal or message to the others, that they should all cooperate at the present moment. Soon all the other princes were lifting up their arms, giving Ahteana a unanimous approval for Lemech to take to the meeting that evening.

Zualpha slighted a grin; he was surprised. Then, he finished the instructions, “Now each of you go back and spread the good news to your *etruscans*, your provinces, your cities and your villages. Let everyone know that there will be a peaceful solution. The Aszean Prince Lord has been summoned and an agreement will be reached.”

There was a noise of celebration as everyone in the rotunda cheered before they began exiting to return home. It seemed like

the crisis was over. Finally, the *floating-trivelator* rose to the upper level. The two Asterians stepped off to converse with Lemech.

“Your presence is a most welcomed sight. I was beginning to lose faith,” Lemech confessed.

“Zualpha has secured your votes. We are depending on you to present and defend all of the Council’s proposals. This matter is gravely serious,” Ahteana said.

“As I speak, we are sending hundreds of *Asterian Guardians* through the *Beam of Light* to act as protectors here on Earth. Their arrival will take the better part of the next week, but they are here to protect you,” Zualpha revealed.

This announcement did not set well with the other Etruscans within ears way, as they wanted the Asterians out of their lands and off the planet — not more of them.

“We must act with all speed as the survival of more than just your continent depends on it,” Ahteana added.

“Survival?” Methouslan busted in, having overheard the statement. “Isn’t *dis a lotta* dramatic embroidery, even for *ya* Ahteana?”

“Not this time,” Zualpha interrupted. “The one you call *Say and Teller* has escaped capture and we fear that he is roaming about causing mischief and awaits an opportune moment to take over. This latest invasion is evidence of his work — he has returned to Earth — no doubt.”

“This is more serious than ...” Lemech was cut off.

“So, what? His mischievousness never hurt anyone before,” Methouslan sided.

“The last time he roamed, King Yaswhen was here to deal with him,” Ahteana explained. “This time is different. There are few, if any, alive today — that could match his cunning connivery.”

“There is nothing he desires more than to conquer this planet,” Zualpha explained. “And he won’t do it with a big flash. No, he’ll slowly sneak in, where you least expect — turning lions

against lambs and then brothers against fathers until every last soul and every living cell is enslaved by his vengeance.”

The predictions of doom were interrupted as Faeraud and Trigonometry the artist approached Ahteana.

“To show our gratitude to you and all the Asterians,” Faeraud began, “We have created sculptures, in the form of a cherub to be placed at the entrance of your Irminsul Pyramids up in Asteria.”

“That is kind, though emotively uncharacteristic of you,” Ahteana responded.

“I am instructing the artist to have the crew load one on each of your *Valixes* for the next flight back to Asteria.”

“We are grateful,” Zualpha interjected, “But have more important things to discuss at the moment.”

“But ...”

“Certainly you can handle a mere cargo arrangement yourself, my prince.”

Faeraud grinned slightly. Whenever he grinned slightly, it was a small little almost evil grin of satisfaction that something had gone his way. No one knew it at the time, but Faeraud had much larger plans for his pieces of art, much more than just giving them away as a token of peace. As each piece was loaded onto a vehicle, Faeraud chanted over it:

*“Weng funo sepo ketz huwdor fovor,
Khuruygh evethdruw shukeo khertyun
tuyr ofncopt ipurovor.”*

The next evening, another *Valix* approached the Irminsul Pyramid. Against the setting sun, it was difficult to tell if it were green or black in color. It landed as Trigonometry stood nearby with his last piece of angel-art. Inside the vehicle Lord Haedrus and Auseten were in a heated argument.

“This is unacceptable. I refuse to be ordered about by these archaic Asterians who are so out of touch with the real world and

I'm not teaming up with Atlantis — our enemy — just to rid the planet of them.”

“Trigonometry the artist has prepared a piece of art that we can take as a peace symbol. By offering it to the Asterians we could gain their favor,” Ausethen explained.

“Whose preposterous plan is this?” Haedrus asked, turning around in his seat while scooting his royal robe around to a more comfortable position.

“The art can be presented to them at the summit ... when it's moved to Asteria.”

“Asteria? What makes you think the meeting will be moved there.”

“Trig assures me that the meeting will be moved there,” Ausethen insisted. “Father, he has fashioned a cherubim statue — that you can present to them as a symbol of peace. ... That will throw off any suspicions of our real intentions. They will think that we are fully cooperating, thus giving us more time to figure out how to turn off their enchanted light.”

“I see. ... You two have already made a pact of some order,” Haedrus observed, then yelled at Ausethen, “How could you do this without consulting me first? ... Reminds me of myself ... I would've acted in a similar way.”

“Then you'll take the art with you?”

“I make no promises. If I do this — I do it because I want to, to please my son and myself. And we keep the Islands! ... I'll not give them away no matter what the Asterians want.”

“I wouldn't speculate,” Ausethen grumbled.

“If this meeting is moved to Asteria, as you think it shall, then, and only then might I possibly — sliver of a chance — consider such a deceitful undertaking,” Haedrus piously and cautiously stated, believing such would never happen since men were not allowed on Asteria.

“You'll see father,” Ausethen excitedly added, motioning outside to Trigonometry to bring the piece of art aboard.

Lord Dominate approached, admiring the gold-covered statue, “An impressive peace offering — and such an exquisite one. A shame to waste it on the Asterians, maybe I’ll just sneak it back to our own land — and keep it for myself.”

“Father!”

“Jesting of course. Just make sure you fashion a duplicate to be placed in our Irem. — We must have riches that exceed any of Atlantis or Asteria.”

Prince Lord Haedrus and Auseten disembarked. A quiet procession of princes, Etruscans and Asterians walked from different paths, each heading toward the entrance of the northern cathedral that would lead into the Irminsul Pyramid. From the opposite direction the representatives of Atlantis were approaching the cathedral. And from yet another area, Aedon was rushing toward the cathedral with the important message he had for Ahteana.

Suddenly there was a gigantic explosion. The entire northern cathedral blew-up right before them. Lemech, Mestor and Evaemon dropped to the ground to escape being hit by flying debris. Aedon did the same.

Glass rained down from the burst.

Haedrus and Auseten tried to run back to their transporter but a flying greenish-*jadarite* beam landed between them and the vehicle. Zualpha held out his hand and a force of protection reflected the debris away from Ahteana and himself. He immediately marched over to where the others were and crouched down to make sure they weren’t harmed. Next, he created a glowing orange ball-of-light from plain air with the palm of his hand, threw it up into the *Beam of Light*, and watched it shoot toward the heavens.

Standing back up, Zualpha announced, “We feared something like this might happen. We are living in a day where *enchancements* darken our light. We have created a back-up plan. The meeting will take place, but not here.”

“Not here, then where?” Methouslan objected.

A moment later the ball-of-light descended back down and spiraled out of the beam toward them. It floated for a few seconds, turning its light from orange to bright green.

“The meeting will happen on Asteria,” Zualpha announced, watching the ball which worked as a signal of some kind. “Prince Lord Lemech and Prince Lord Haedrus shall be allowed to travel to Asteria and attend.”

Ahteana doled out instructions, “Faeraud, you and Methouslan may have to watch over Atlantis while we are gone. Ausethen you will hold Aszea. Methouslan shall stand in as an adviser, whose wisdom may veto any pending decisions from anyone.”

“There will be no more advances by any Channel, and no retreats. All positions will be held without change — a cease fire is mandated until we return. New Asterian Guards are populating the Irminsul Pyramid and have been given authority to keep peace while we are gone,” Zualpha ordered.

“It will take two days to travel to Asteria, we shall meet for another two and then two more days to return,” Ahteana reminded them.

“Anyone who does not heed this mandate shall be *hung-out-to-dry* until they are dead,” Zualpha decreed.

With the brief announcements everyone hurried and scurried, packing up their gear, and readying for the trip to the moon. Lemech and Haedrus refused to fly together, so each of them took separate *Valixes*. There were four transporters ready for departure to Asteria.

When Ahteana and Zualpha returned to the beam-of-light, they discovered that their cloned-bodies on Asteria were not available, so they had to return to Earth. This disturbing event only underscored the urgency for their return. They decided to travel back in one of the other *Valixes*. Other Asterians followed them into the last space ship. The door to each vehicle lowered and locked into place.

Aedon was trying to push through the chaos to reach Ahteana, but the door to her *Valix* closed just as he neared, he was too late. Then he ran around to the front. The window was very high up from the ground but he could see her. He waved. At that same moment she turned her head and looked directly into his eyes. She glanced down and saw that he was once again wearing the necklace she had given him. Even though her lips did not move, he could hear her repeating the same words she had spoken during his visit to her moon: *If opportunity presents itself, and according to the crystal it will, we beg that you take possession and return the Scroll to us at the Irminsul Pyramid.*

He wanted to tell her about the *Scroll* but she turned and left. Not even his most urgent thought had been transmitted to her. But, he was certain this time, that she was requesting of him, to obtain the *Scroll of Fire* and bring it to her. He thought about the test that was given at the *Middag*, challenging Faeraud and Auseten to remove the Asterians. He knew they were in danger as long as either one of these princes possessed a *Scroll*. He believed they wouldn't hesitate to use *enchantments* from the *Scrolls* for the purpose of ridding their shores of the Asterian race. Possibly, their only hope of safety rested in his assignment. He trembled as he tried to think about how he might venture to execute such a task without Faeraud finding out.

Looking up toward the stars, each *Valix* struggled for a brief moment, as its weight aboard seemed to hold it back, then with a blast, each took-off out of sight.

PAPYRUS TWELVE

THE TUAOI STONE

Quack! Quack! Aedon! Quack! Quack!” Dumar the duck yelled, splashing in the fountain. He jumped out of the water dragging a half-dead Nawalym by the foot with his beak. “Dying, they are — they die — all dying!”

“BAA BEA ... BAABee ... baabae,” was all the shriveled up Nawalym could mutter. Similar to the creatures Aedon had seen on the Asterian Moon, this one’s skin was taught to the bone, it breathed heavily as its pale-green membrane contracted.

“Dumar, I’m already tardy,” Aedon huffed, trying to rush away. The last thing he needed was to be delayed by another one of the ducks big stories, he thought.

Water cascaded down several levels of the *Cone Fountains*. Each cone rose twelve layers high and sprits-of-liquid danced to a band of musical turtles. They surrounded an even taller central cone. A large pool engulfed all of them where mermaids frequently played. It was a place for fun and tranquility; but, its serenity had

been disturbed and some of its inhabitants were not happy. Mermaids, mermen, seahorses, and other fish gathered around poking their heads out of the water while whispering assumptions amongst themselves.

“Get that sickly creature out of here. It’s infecting our waters,” a seahorse yelled out, skirting the surface of the water by his tail.

“Is there a physician nearby — someone?” Aedon yelled, finally realizing the piskie was dying. “Dumar, you can fly ... go get help!”

“Me fly? Why flying, I haven’t — in near to five sun-cycles,” he quaked, stomping his left webbed-foot and lowering his head. “Me way too out of practice to dare such an attempt — *‘specially* in these fierce winds. *They’d* most definitely bend my feathers.”

“Certainly you could ...” Aedon started.

“*D* mermaid and me, we *swims* thorough *dat* aqueducts all the way to fountain — bring him here for recovery,” Dumar said. “Me helps you take it to the pyramid, to the Irminsul.”

“I told *‘em*, there’s no doctor’s cure — not even a *magic poem* can save *‘em* now,” Miriam, one of the mermaids, reiterated.

“I’ve never seen such a creature before — except maybe in a drawing or ... a dream. ... Is it a real, authentic ...” Aedon asked, taking a step back, and hoping that the thing wasn’t contagious.

“It’s a Nawalym — a fabled Nawalym ... though, real this one looks,” Dumar squawked out, acting like he knew everything about the matter. “He dying. Dying — all of *‘em* are. Help they need. Dumar try helping. ... But your help, Aedon, they need.”

“Dying? All of them? From what?”

Splashing a fin, Miriam began, “The Nawalym, they live way up in the waters called Nawat, near the South Pole.”

(The South Pole was always referred to as *up* and the North Pole as *down* since in the days of Atlantis, the magnetic poles were reversed.)

“When Nawalym flutter their wings, they spin thin threads of material which are woven and melted into a ball, shaped like a golden egg. These eggs are essential to the life of a Nawalym village and all its inhabitants,” the mermaid explained.

“Their eggs — someone steals!” Dumar interrupted.

“Three villages have already completely died out,” Miriam continued, “And this little guy is from the forth.”

There was a big loud “*BAAAA BEAAAA ...*” Then silence. The Nawalym shriveled up, his skin pulling tighter around his tiny bones as his mouth froze opened wide. His lifeless body fell cold to the ground.

A tear swelled up in Dumar’s eye, and then it rolled down his cheek, along his beak, and splashed into the pool of water next to him. His mourning rippled across the fountain as all the sea-creatures bowed their heads or slowly sank back beneath the water’s edge. A somber-sorrow even trickled down the waterfall.

“Who would do such a thing?” Aedon huffed.

“Warriors. A channel of them,” Dumar explained, “With big flying machines.”

“It would be suicidal for anyone to invade their villages. Their eggs have evolved into an important part of the balance of nature. If one egg went missing, there might not be a noticeable disturbance,” Miriam pointed-out, looking up at the sky. “But if two or three were to be taken, the waters might become murky, and life — the lifespan of all species would be drastically shortened?”

Turning to leave, Aedon responded, “There is someone I should perhaps interrogate regarding this massacre.”

Dumar quaked, almost insulted as Aedon started to go. Then he frowned his beak. Feeling sorry for himself again, he mumbled, “What good is Dumar anyway? ... I’m just an ordinary plain ole duck — who’s still afraid of heights.”

“Alright Dumar. You can come with me,” said Aedon.

“*EEWWW!* What is that?” a boisterous voice interrupted; it was Prince Evad. It was much too warm for the fur wrap he had

just pulled off, though it did match the color of his red hair. “*Apa’hei*, Aedon. *Wanna* join me for couple Nectars?”

Evad paused for an awkward moment while looking over the scene. Then he snorted, “Certainly you don’t plan on entertaining these fish carcasses, now do you?”

“I’m not sure what to make of the situation. It appears that the stories of Nawalym may not be tales at all,” Aedon revealed.

Evad took a closer look at the dead fairy, “Indeed, does look *kinda* like what you’d think one might. That would signal me, only to be all the more cautious. Some odd workings have been going on around here lately; but, they’re all turning-out to be — just hoaxes.”

Meanwhile, Faeraud paced back and forth in the Map Room, fuming mad. He wanted to stop the Asterian’s from sending any more of their *Guardians*. He was afraid they would stop him from ever becoming king.

Nearby, a couple technicians were watching the traffic radar that was integrated into the tablet. Noticing a blip, one of them shouted, “There goes the last *Valix* ... for Asteria.”

“You’re interrupting my thoughts,” Faeraud snarled.

A few minutes later the map showed the *Valix* image disappear from the top of its cube. Then it reappeared.

“Looks like this one is having a little trouble taking flight. Someone on board must have been eating extra helpings of fruit custard,” the technician chuckled.

Faeraud turned around just in time to see the *Valix* image over the miniature representation of the Bashan glacier region.

Half a continent away: the *Valix* began to sway; then it stopped in midair for a moment; then it began to spin around and finally it plummeted back down to earth. It spun out of control before gaining a forward level motion. Then it soared through the sky like a falling star over the northern glaciers. Next, it landed on a snowy mountain finally pelting through a wall of ice and lodging

to a stop deep inside the frosty glacier of Oracaero. A small avalanche splashed over the entry hole and then washed across its tracks. Buried inside were its occupants: some of whom survived, some of whom did not. They were now all entombed inside its blanket like a caterpillar in a cocoon.

Back in the Map Room, everyone shook with horror and awe as it was clear that one of the *Valixes* was down. Faeraud leaped over to a perch and shoved a sleeping parrot off. The bird woke suddenly, squawked, then darted off to summons the Senior Warrior. A few moments later Andromache and her associates assembled into the room.

“I want a search party organized immediately,” Faeraud barked out, pointing to the area on the map where the image was last seen. “One of the *Valixes* took a dive and I want it found. ... Make certain that any cargo recovered is handled with the utmost secrecy and delicacy.”

The usual salute was given and then Andromache approached Faeraud and in a low voice suggesting, “You know, this could work to our advantage.”

“I haven’t an idea of what you’re talking about, though the timing couldn’t be better,” he acknowledged with a slight grin mirroring the one she was suppressing.

The next evening, a carriage drawn by a fiery-red horse bolted to a stop in front of the entrance. A blast of sparks blew the top half off and a man with long hair stood up. It took a few seconds to recognize that it was Faeraud because somehow his thin stature had taken on a new muscular form. He pulled out a heavy sword and held it high with both hands and then slowly lowered it pointing toward the doorway. He had called for an emergency session of the Legislature and murmuring objections buzzed outside the *Spiral Building*. A mob of princes gathered at the threshold debating whether it was safe to enter.

A slight move of the sword commanded the princes to shove and squeeze through the arches into the domed building. Once inside, they all quietly took to sitting at their stations. Most were afraid to ask questions or open up a debate in fear that the building might crumble before they were through.

The laws of Atlantis made it clear that any official votes had to be made in the *Spiral Legislature* itself. While some debated whether that referred to the governmental voting body or the building itself, Faeraud was not about to take any chances in having his decrees deemed unenforceable and made everyone participate inside.

“It sure looks like Prince Faeraud knows how to float his agenda around,” someone whispered in a huff.

Marching into the rotunda, Faeraud announced, “I have called this emergency session because one of the *Valixes* enroute to Asteria has tumbled. It is unlikely that any survived.”

The assembly gasped.

Strutting across the ground floor, instead of the top level where he usually sat, he continued, “There are great dangers that require our attention immediately — immediately, before the Asterians return.”

“We will not be intimidated by scare tactics, or games, you wish to play, while those in power render elevated agreements,” Evaemon shouted back. “We are bound to sit and wait until week’s end.”

From the small applause, Evaemon couldn’t tell if the size of supporters for the Asterians had shrunk or if most of the princes were just sitting in silence due to their own concerns and fears.

His son Evad patted him on the shoulder, “Father, you’ve retired and I am the Etruscan now. We should just stay calm, keep the agreements we’ve made, and allow Faeraud to continue.”

Brushing the hand aside, he asked, “Tell me, young one, can you see no further than a mermaid in the murky sea? Those who bribe and blackmail, rarely deliver their harvest.”

“For centuries the Asterians have forbidden any meaningful use of the *Enchanted Poems*. They have divided and hidden away the *Scrolls* with this knowledge,” Faeraud explained. “Today, this broken house, this cracked legislative body, could use some healing magic. I ask for your confidence. Your vote will allow us to consult one of the great prisms for insight during this critical moment. Will you vote? ... Favor this — I am confident that you will.”

Half of the princes held up their arms while others scoffed. Regardless of the outcome, Faeraud announced he had garnished permission and proceeded.

“With the blessing of Ambassador Telopps, from the Irminsul Pyramid itself, I bring to you — a healing *enchantment*,” he said.

Two arms stretched out as Ambassador Telopps stepped forward carrying a large object with a velvet-blue cloth covering it. Murmurs flew around the spiral floor but no one spoke up. No one was going to doubt the words or actions of the Ambassador; after all he was the voice of the Irminsul when the Asterians were gone.

Faeraud whisked the cloth away to reveal a large crystal prism. The prism was formed like two pyramids staked on top of each other, one inverted. Its sides were like mirror panels reflecting images of the surrounding area. You would have thought that the glass object might be extremely heavy, but it wasn't. As a matter of fact, when Faeraud took a hold of it, it glided in the air. It emitted a glow of energy as it floated with his guiding hand.

“What's that toy?” Evad asked, skeptical.

He couldn't believe that Faeraud was being so bold as to bring out magical artifacts that were off-limits only hours after the Asterians had left.

“It's the *Tuaoi Stone*,” Trigonometry answered, “Certainly you've heard of it?”

“Maybe I have,” Evad snottily responded, desiring not to appear dumb or stupid. He had heard about the stone and how it could show possible futures one might hope for, but he had never seen the real one before. It looked so enormous and overwhelming.

Evaemon was about to object but Mestor held him back while giving some advice, “Your objections will be washed to sea, if you protest that which Telopps has sanctioned.”

“The ambassador was supposed to be on our side,” Evaemon grumbled, distraughtly losing more faith.

Faeraud guided the object around with his swaying hand, suggesting, “We have asked to see the future and it has spoken. It has shown, that like the fate of King Yaswhen, ... Prince Lord Lemech and the Asterians may not be returning.”

A gasp of horror flew around the room with such force that the building shook causing the crack to widen a bit more. Many cried out that this was a trick and a lie.

“But be not afraid. I invite each of you to come down here and take a look into the *Tuaoi*. The legends tell us that only the wise can see. If you look into the prism and can see the images, then say that you can see. I will appoint the wise to serve in a new committee that will lead us into the next millennia.”

Quickly the young ambitious princes, whom mostly sat near the bottom floors of the *Spiral*, rushed forward to discover if they could see. As they crowded around, no one could catch a glimpse. All they saw was their own reflection.

A short prince, whom was called Ganyped, tried his hardest to push to the front to no avail. Then suddenly he shouted out, “I can see. I can see it!”

“What do you see?” Evad demanded.

There was a long pause. He really didn’t see anything at all. He was only pretending to see so he could push his way to the front. Everyone stared at him.

Being put on the spot, he had to answer, “I see it. Oh it is so awful. It is too awful to speak of.”

Closing his eyes in horror, he ran to the back of the room. He thought that the others would be running after him, that they would capture him and beat him for lying. He even pictured Faeraud scolding him and ordering him to be *hung-out-to-dry*. But none of that happened. Instead Faeraud just nodded and smiled —

not a big smile — it was that little smirk that always splintered up the right side of his mouth.

“I can see it too!” another prince shouted.

“Me too!”

“I see also, it is awful! So awful!”

Soon nearly every prince in the place was swearing that they could see the same mirage; yet there was no image. Even their own reflections dimmed as their lies multiplied throughout the room. Faeraud began to count his loyal followers with each pretend vision that was proclaimed.

The *Tuaoi Stone* rarely worked without the proper *enchanted poems* and positioning of the moons, it showed only its own misty-glass. The princes were either ignorant of this or else they had forgotten what they had studied at the *educatory* long ago; instead, they continued to swoon over its glow and proclaim to see future calamities that might end the world like those prophesied since the dawning of mankind.

Faeraud beamed with joy, knowing that he would appoint each liar to his new legislature and they would be bound to him forever; for if they ever swayed on their loyalty he could call them out in front of the others and demand that they detail what they saw in the prism — and they would not be able to answer.

Then a raspy-voice exhaled a smoky-scent that encompassed his gray beard. Etruscan Autochatheu stepped forward, “The *New-one* would be wise to save his magic tricks for a birthday party. There is nothing in the stone but a mere reflection. I doubt the moons are in proper position for a foretelling tonight anyhow.”

“I am afraid that Faeraud has produced yet another false illusion to coerce you into making ill-fated, uninformed-decisions once again,” Evaemon argued.

“And so the Elders speak — the Elders who believe in pillars, prophets and kings that have long ago died and never returned,” Faeraud scoffed. “Do you believe them or do you listen

to your future — the future that you can see this very day. You have all seen the vision, the vision that no one dares speak.”

“What is this vision that you have tricked feeble minds into seeing?” Evaemon demanded.

“I can see it — and all of these wise princes have observed it. ... I believe you perceived it too but are too proud to admit what you have seen. We have all been shown the destruction, the awful calamity that awaits *THEM*,” Faeraud said.

“Yes, I saw it! All of it!” Ganyped shouted out, a few others chimed in with their agreement too.

Faeraud continued to explain his invented future, “Those *End of Time* predictions were not for us, they are not upon us — but they are upon the Asterians. The travelers will never make it there. The Asterians will never return to Earth.”

There was a gasp of disbelief once again.

“Remember, the *Tuaoi* only shows possible futures. It is up to us to mold and change that future together. Therefore, I am proclaiming that a new *Spiral Legislature* be built. It will be made up of all those who have seen this vision today.”

Evaemon scolded him in a disgusted tone, “Methouslan and the other leaders have given an oath to guarantee the safety until the Asterians return. There will be no overthrowing of governments today, Faeraud.”

“If the Asterians, like Yaswhen, do not return, as I have predicted,” the prince scorned, “You will find few that will listen to your empty beliefs.”

Annoyed, he turned and walked out of the *Spiral Legislature*. Then he came back to make a final comment. “The Universe and the *Enchanted Poems* themselves, will give you an undisputed sign to verify all of this — before the second sunrise. ... Look for it in the sky.”

Next, Andromache marched in, saluted Faeraud, and delivered some horrible news, “The owls have verified the rumors travelers have brought — Aszea has a wired thunderbolt sitting on top of mount Akasha.”

There was an enormous gasp from everyone in the chamber as Chordata flew into the chambers, flapping her wings, and landing on one of the side railings.

“This thunderbolt is in place, ready to annihilate Gadeirus,” the owl hooted.

“The crystal has shown a distinct vision, Andromache has declared, and Queen Chordata has verified that the Aszeans do not plan to hold position as instructed,” Faeraud grumbled, shrugging his shoulders in a way that made it seem like he didn’t care. He knew that if he acted like it wasn’t important, that would only upset the elder voters more, and they would be more likely to support retaliation.

“I deem it to be in our best interest to pay a *small visit* to our westerly islands,” Mestor growled, stirring up a sounding applause. “We can no longer sit and wait to be trounced upon.”

The *small visit* that had been suggested was about as *small* as an elephant is to a duck. Faeraud’s Warrior Channels marched, swam, sailed and flew in mass formations toward the enemy. The Aszean army occupying Gadeirus was crushed. Andromache led a surprise attack on the Aszeans that was merciless. Half of their ships were sunk, their balloons burst, and their Warrior Channels captured.

Ausethen grabbed Aedon’s mother and the two of them quickly departed in a borrowed delta-transporter. They took to the sky, dodging on-coming fliers that were throwing flaming arrows.

Ausethen realized the fact, as he managed his escape, “*Dat purple-banded, poemer!* We’ve been betrayed. There wasn’t supposed to be a war, just a small scrimmage, and then a peace treaty. This has escalated beyond any speculations.”

Cleacious screamed and held her hands over her ears at the sound of another explosion. Then she began ordering Ausethen, “Put this piece of flying apparatus down and return me to my abode at once. I won’t have you flying one of these contraptions

until you've taken the proper lessons, which you've obviously have not had."

"Any minute now, any minute now, and they will see stathmos of destruction. That skinny excuse of a prince will see who the real conqueror is. The entire Island of Gadeirus is going to completely disappear in a fraction of a second," He laughed devilishly, like a mad man.

Cleacious tensed up frightened, whipping her head around, she looked out the window behind. The thunderbolt began to glow. Then there was a small flash. A few sparks and a burst of fireworks blew from the cylindrical tower. It melted into a pile of mangled metal which dug its own crater.

She laughed, "I've seen bigger explosions at an *Apaturia Celebration* fizzle out than your proposed thunderbolt."

"This is not the end," Auseten growled, shouting out to the sky, as if Faeraud could hear him. "I will return! And when I do, the Prince of Atlantis and all his subjects will be buried in the sea. Then I, the great King Auseten will rule what remains from the Mesapian Sea to the Saxen Gulf."

"You've drunk more nectars than I have if you believe that?" Cleacious huffed.

Auseten turned into a steaming pot of anger. He couldn't figure out why Faeraud had disobeyed the strict orders from the Asterians. He guessed that the prince must already have a plan for winning the challenge. He wondered if somehow he were already exporting Asterians back to their moon. He needed to find out what Faeraud was up to. Then he had an idea. Maybe he could alert the Asterians as to what was going on. They would come back and stop him immediately. Then he would look like a hero and could take out the Asterians at a future time. But as soon as that idea hit his brain, he remembered that his father had always been adamant about saying anything to the Asterians. Besides, he didn't want to be looked upon as a cowardly tattler.

"We're going to the Irminsul Pyramid," Auseten announced, certain that his father would know what to do.

“Oh no!” Cleacious snapped. “I adamantly refuse to go back there. I just left that sanctuary — where I was forced to meditate blankness on their boring walls from sunrise to sunset, *sun-cycle* after *sun-cycle*. I will not go back.”

“Once we are there, I will send a communicae to my father,” Ausethen eagerly said, lighting-up his countenance with the idea. “Father can advise us. ... When Ambassador Telopps sees that there has been an invasion, he will have no choice but to allow us to use the *phonobarrel* to contact Haedrus on Asteria.”

PAPYRUS THIRTEEN

PRINCE OF THE EARTH

The large wooden door creaked open into Faeraud's chambers as the beak of a duck peeked around the corner. Dumar's webbed-feet stepped in, followed by Aedon. Pestilence growled, stopping the intruders.

"We've come to speak with your master," Aedon announced.

"He's not here ... idiots," Pestilence the poodle barked out.

"A gift for him, may we deliver?" Dumar asked.

"A gift?" the dog questioned. "Give it to me, I'll take this gift now ... and give it to him later, of course."

Aedon sat a bowl of peaches down next to the poodle before leaving. Dumar continued to peer through a slit in the barely shut doorway. He watched as the dog laid down and coyly looked around for a couple minutes. Then the canine pounced on the fruit and began gorging himself, eating every last piece. A few moments

later he yawned and before he could get comfortable for a nap, he fell over sideways and was out.

“It worked,” Dumar quaked, pushing into the room again.

“I just soaked them in a little *benzamnestic*, an idea I got from the master himself,” Aedon confessed, setting down a bag of gear he brought.

Quickly, they moved the old mirror away from the toga wardrobe. Dumar carried a fishing pole and Aedon held a spear. They stepped into the clandestine where the electrified air-piranhas buzzed around the shelf, keeping guard.

“What do you want?” the paranta leader growled. Then, seeing their gear, he knew they were there for mischief and yelled, “Attack.”

The piranhas zipped through the air gnashing their teeth in assault mode. One of Faeraud’s green garments (his favorite) was nearest to Aedon and he instinctively grabbed it and threw it in the air like it was a net. There was a buzzing electrocution sound and then a flash of electricity as the air-fish (caught in the toga) attacked and bit each other. They used the fishing pole and spear to ward off the remaining attackers. Dumar pulled a *rope-tie* on the green toga to secure it, and waddled out of the closet dragging it like a net full of fish behind him.

“Here’s your next meal doggie,” said the duck, dropping the bundle in front of the incapacitated poodle.

Aedon snatched the *Scroll of Fire*, clenching it to his torso, before reminding the duck, “Come Dumar, we have a delivery to make to the Irminsul Pyramid.”

Nervously shaking, Aedon trembled with each step he took approaching the Irminsul Pyramid. He stopped by its main gate and sat down to catch his breath while clinging to the Scroll of Fire. He sighed relief, certain that his mission was almost complete. Dumar sat too.

They noticed two hooded figures passing them by on their way through the gate. One of them limped slightly and the other one was rubbing her eyebrow, nervously.

“*Ya dant* think we’ll cross paths with *dat* prophethess do ya?” the hooded man asked the other.

“Dahrling , I don’t plan on crossing any paths. Deliver your message and get us *outta* here, away from this contraption,” the female voice huffed.

“Mother?” Aedon exclaimed, but not loud enough for her to hear. She was too far away, he wasn’t sure it was her, and just as well, because he really didn’t feel like making conversation at the moment.

“*Dat* — *dat’s* Prince Ausetthen,” Dumar quaked, pointing a wing before starting at him.

Aedon held him back, “If I recall, they’re not going to allow ducks inside.”

“Molting feathers,” Dumar huffed, sitting back down again.

“I’ve got to deliver this *Scroll*,” Aedon insisted.

He proceeded down the walkway, silhouetted against the orange sky as the reflecting pools imaged the shadow of the tube he carried. Ahteana had admonished him to get the *Scroll* and bring it here. He had taken possession of it and now that he was near, he wasn’t sure who to give it to, because she had already departed.

“Maybe, Ambassador Telopps would be there,” he thought, reaching the first building and hesitating to open its doors. He was unaware of what had just transpired within the hour before his arrival.

Earlier, inside, a few dozen, or so, Asterians hurried through the cathedral escaping deep into their pyramid. Harps, flutes and other musical instruments were discarded or tripped over as the parishioners scurried to safety.

“Hurry! To the inner chamber, we must take refuge!” a voice screamed out.

“What are Asterians doing in here anyway?” Faeraud demanded. “The western cathedral is supposed to be for men.”

“Did you forget that their wing was demolished?” Ambassador Telopps huffed, rushing in to evaluate the commotion.

“*The Spiral Legislature’s* dome is unsafe as pieces of stone continue to crumble — thus we will congregate here,” Mestor snapped, addressing the Ambassador before joining the group of other Etruscans who were arriving.

“The cathedral is not for political things,” Telopps objected; then seeing the Former Prince Lord, he softened. “But if Prince Lord Methouslan decrees such, who am I to stand in the way?”

Methouslan called the emergency session to order, “I trust that *uhl* of *‘da* Etruscans are here with full authority — granted to *‘em* by each of *‘da* princes in their contingencies — as instructed.”

“We are all accounted for,” Evaemon assured the breathless old man.

Faeraud stepped up to the center platform in the cathedral. The crystal fixtures shook, like in a small earthquake, as if they objected to his presence.

“We bring urgent and grave news. The Asterian *Valix* did not make it past Earth’s boundary, but instead, crashed into the sea. There were no survivors,” Faeraud revealed, making up most of the story as concerns washed across their faces.

“We will no doubt grieve the loss,” Mestor consoled. “However, more of a concern, is the fact that Aszea has now demonstrated that they can produce thunderbolts.”

“That’s a false deception — it’s not possible,” Evaemon cried out.

“Our warriors recovered a unit from the Island of Gadeirus,” Faeraud revealed.

“It is a *flooding* miracle that any of us are still alive,” Mestor shouted out.

“This atrocity demands an immediate and harsh response,” Etruscan Mnesus stated, shaking his muscular arm with conviction.

He was Evaemon's twin brother, though he had much less facial hair.

"We need to appoint a king and give him authority to crush them," Mestor yelled.

"And remember — Faeraud has been promised this role by his father Lemech," Telopps interjected. "The *Tuaoi Stone* shows this to be a wise choice."

"The Asterians have been gone but a few days, and maybe a couple of them have perished in a crash, but you talk as if they're all dead," Evaemon exclaimed. "How can you support these *unwitnessed* claims? Where are the owls to confirm? ... Surely you know, we still have a king — and he is returning. ... Doesn't anyone believe in the return of King Yaswhen anymore?"

Some of the Etruscans looked down at the floor in embarrassment, others looked around in disbelief. The stories about King Yaswhen's return had been around for hundreds of years, and still he hadn't shown up. Some thought it wiser to believe in fairy tales than in the foolishness of Yaswhen.

"I am not here to falsely lay claim on a throne where I am not wanted," Faeraud pointed out, "But I fear if we delay, the Aszeans will regroup and make war as we linger debating."

"We should *hold* until the Asterians return," Autochatheu voiced, being interrupted.

"*Hold?* While another thunderbolt emerges and rains down on this continent — Do you wish to be responsible for that risk? ... I will not," Mestor huffed.

The *Territorial Quarrels*, long ago, still held painful memories in the minds of some people. Autochatheu did not want to focus on the crimes of the past and therefore, changed his position, "As I was respectfully saying, we should *hold* only if they return. If the Asterians do not come back, we would have no other choice."

Evaemon blinked twice at the comment and then said, "Faeraud, even if we were to grant some kind of emergency

powers, what proof do you have, other than blurry visions, that you should be named ... a king?"

As Faeraud inhaled a breath of anxiety, anger began to boil inside. He wished more than ever that he could exhale a breath of fire and that it would consume Evaemon. But he didn't have to fume anymore because the doors in the back of the cathedral swung open and Aedon marched in carrying the *Scroll of Fire*.

A quarter-way down the aisle, Aedon stopped realizing that he had just walked in on a meeting. The Etruscans all turned toward him. Faeraud was about to scream some obscenity when he noticed that Aedon was carrying the *Scroll*. He had discovered the *Scroll* missing when he was back in his chambers, earlier. He was certain that Ausethen had been the one to take it. Now he wasn't so sure and wondered what Aedon was doing holding it. Confused, but confident, he decided to use the moment to his advantage.

"Aedon, you are late, but I am glad you are finally here none-the-less," Faeraud announced, motioning him to the front of the room. "You want proof that I should be named the next ruler? ... Wouldn't all of you agree that I should be named not only your leader — but your king, if one of the *Rataka Scrolls* confirmed such?"

"*The Rataka?*" Autochatheu coughed in a chuckle.

"No one knows where they are — if they even exist," Evaemon said, perking up with a new found interest.

"But you would listen to what they had to say — wouldn't you?" Faeraud asked.

"Of course, certainly we would. Their writings are law," Evaemon proclaimed.

"Excellent," Faeraud gloated, "Because I have recently acquired all three of the *Rataka Scrolls*. I have the *Water Scroll*, the *Fire Scroll*, and the *Scroll of Air*."

"Impossible!" Mestor exclaimed.

Just as Aedon was wondering if he really had the *Air Scroll* or was just making it up, Faeraud snatched the *Fire Scroll* from him. Aedon frailed his arms, seeming powerless. His heart pounded

as he realized that his plan for returning the *Scroll* to Ahteana was failing and this attempt had jeopardized his friendship and trust with the prince. It was clear that Faeraud was going to use the *Scrolls* to accelerate his power.

“To prove to you that I have these *Scrolls* and to show you that I am destined to be king, I present to you the *Rataka Scroll of Fire!*”

Faeraud threw the rod into the air. Everyone in the room gasped and took three or four steps back. The *Scroll* unrolled itself and then its fiery surface floated before them. They stared in awe as flames leaped from its surface and it put on a show with puffs of colored smoke whipping up.

“Be careful my prince,” Evaemon warned, “Misuse the *Scroll of Fire* and you could create a *Tavwot* that would cover the Earth in fire.”

“Or a *Tehom* – destroying it with water,” Ampheres added.

Faeraud walked over to it and called out a passage, “*Rataka Scroll of Fire: scroll passage seven — twenty-four.*”

The flaming pages scrolled back and forth until it came to the requested section. Then the letters began to pop off the surface, each character made of fire. As each sentence was announced in a boisterous authoritative tone, the letters turned to smoke and the next sentence rose.

*Meiaunurk ahund taeahovahaweyun
taemuvor lectenont fuw,
Ahouch suvornur gysha cirblaezeng ahund ahvuw.
Huwdor revo ketz khut blaemetevov evethdruw gryosho,
Ahdu khertyun fuw evetchcruft yit meitozetuto.
Khut muyweyun gysha futa ahvo meiclueuto,
Weng tem miruwn uf lectenont yimcluyzugo.*

“Aedon, tell the Etruscans what it is saying — in Atlantian, of course,” Faeraud asked, placing a warm hand on his shoulder; Aedon interpreted the audio:

*“Darkness and destruction covers Atlantis now,
Each Etruscan must yield and bow.
Give power to the prince in question,
Do this now without hesitation.
The country must not be enslaved,
Crown him king if Atlantis is to be saved.”*

“We must bring our oceans and lands together and unite to save our continent,” Mestor agreed loudly.

“What prince,” Evaemon questioned, “Who is to be named king? It did not say.”

Faeraud had been smoking a tobaccum twig for awhile. He exhaled a puff, blowing it over the *Scroll*. His smoke encompassed and replaced the *Scroll’s*. It created a foggy image of himself. Then a second later, as the smoke cleared, Faeraud stepped forward, and like a curtain rising on a performance, his own face replaced that of the smoke.

“Wise choice,” Mestor shouted, certain the *Scroll* had produced the image that melted into Faeraud’s face.

“This cannot be,” Evaemon shouted back, “I will not support such treachery.”

“Would you rather see our continent blown into the sun,” Etruscan Diaprepes barked back, sifting his tanned fingers into his hair. He was the youngest Etruscan though his scaly-skin made him appear much older.

“I am not seeking power for power’s sake, but to save our continent,” Faeraud pleaded. “As your new king, I will name each one of you a king of your own province. We will not be a nation separated into provinces, but a united union of countries with ten kings. Now go and think about this, quickly consult who you may, and then we will reconvene at midnight.”

The Etruscans slowly gathered their belongings together and left, each without a word. Some of them pondered the proposal, thinking that it was a ploy or trick that Faeraud had

designed. Others were on-board with the idea, though skeptical; the rest were eager to *buy into* the plan and could easily picture themselves as a king.

Faeraud approached Evaemon and told him, “I realize that you are having internal and emotional difficulties supporting all these sudden changes. You will see a sign — so wonderful and so powerful that you will know without a doubt that the Asterians are liars and their days have ceased.”

“There isn’t a sign big enough in this world that could ever make me believe you,” Evaemon huffed.

“It won’t come from *THIS* world,” said Faeraud, turning and departing.

Aedon hung his head in despair as he walked outside. His feelings of failure were interrupted by Areshia who hurried toward him. Out of breath, she stopped, grabbing onto his toga sleeve trying to catch her breath.

“What tidal wave of seaweed washes you in here so quickly?” he asked.

“Telopps ... I’ve got to see Telopps,” she huffed.

“The Ambassador? ... I suspect he’s here — but what for?”

“Yapet ...” she stopped, remembering how Aedon felt about him. “... Someone ... conveyed a message that I must personally deliver.”

“Important enough that a *communicae* or *copy-parrot* would not suffice?” Aedon asked, curiously.

“Extremely,” she answered, brushing him aside to continue.

He grabbed her, “What is it this time? What drowning mermaid concoction has Yapet put you up to this time.”

“Alright, I’ll tell ya. ... I’ll tell ya. ... But if you don’t believe every word, or if you just don’t feel like believing it, then you can just ... just ... just drown in that moat,” she snapped, pointing to the aqueduct beyond.

She explained, occasionally stopping to catch another breath, “During his youthful days, Gilgamoeh and his friend each

crafted a mirror. ... They made *enchancements* over the glass and each worked like a communicae which allowed them to talk to each other and see each other.”

“Go on. You have my attention,” he said, picturing in his mind, the old mirror that was in Faeraud’s chamber, even though he had no idea what made him think of that.

“His friend became obsessed with trying to figure out a way to physically travel through the mirror, though he never could. ... Later, the friend got into a lot of trouble and after he was locked up, he would still appear in the mirror revealing plots to escape. ... Finally, Gilgamoeh had enough of all the lies and threw the mirror out,” she said, turning to go in to the pyramid. “I must warn Telopps.”

“But why, the mirror is gone ... isn’t it?”

“No. When the Gobbledygook Collector came, his neighbor rushed out and saved the mirror and kept it for himself.”

“How does the Ambassador fit into all this?” Aedon sighed, growing tired of the story of friends with no names.

“The neighbor was Rheaf. He was just a boy then. Gilgamoeh couldn’t tell him it was enchanted, because back then, *enchancements* were even more forbidden than they are today.”

Aedon placed a finger on his chin as he was beginning to figure some of the story out, “You still think that Telopps has this mirror? After all this time?”

“Someone has it, because the prisoner has been communicating to someone.”

“Who is this prisoner ... who holds the other mirror?”

“It is ... it is,” she hesitated, “It is an Asterian with many powers. Today he is known as *Say and Teller*.”

“Sayer?” Aedon shouted. “You think that Sayer was my father’s friend, then he was deported, locked away, the mirror was taken by Telopps, and Sayer is now talking to him through it?”

“Does sound a little crazy now that you say it like that,” she admitted.

“It sounds a lot crazy if you ask me,” he affirmed.

“Certainly you can agree that it wouldn’t hurt just to warn him, just to ask him to keep an eye out for anything unusual,” she pleaded.

“After yanking my ear like that, I hope you’ll make time for us to dine together later this evening,” Aedon suggested, flirting, yet perturbed.

“I suspect I owe you that. I’ll meet you back here by the fountain at midnight,” she agreed, before departing inside the Irminsul.

Soon the midnight Asterian moon shined its light with an ominous-scarlet hue. Faeraud was pleased with the way things were progressing and he was certain that his new powers would not be temporary. He had made a pact with Sayer (the image in his mirror). It was time to pluck the fruits of their plan. Sayer promised Faeraud that he would make him king, but in return, he would have to do one favor. It was now time to trade favors.

He returned to his chambers and picked up the old mirror. He thought it would be heavy, but for unexplained reasons, it was as light as one of Dumar’s feathers. He carried the mirror from his room, across the plaza, and into the Irminsul Pyramid where every two minutes a new *Asterian Guardian* arrived. As Faeraud walked inside, he came upon groups of four who guarded the entrance.

“This area is restricted. What are your dealings here?” the first Asterian asked, stopping him.

Faeraud turned the mirror toward him. Intense red light emitted from the glass blinding the guard. As other Asterians attempted to aid, Faeraud turned the reflecting glass toward them, and they were incapacitated as well.

Once inside, he marched up to the innermost bubbling water-door. It parted and opened as if he were expected. He walked directly into the docking chambers. Never before had he been all the way inside this inner compartment and he looked around in curious fascination. As he crossed the bridge to the center he looked way up toward the pointed ceiling. Then he

looked down, he could see a pit that was so deep its bottom could not be found. The dangling cocoons caught his attention. Their frozen faces seemed to turn and scold him, but he ignored them and focused on his mission.

Reaching the cocoon-docking position on the bridge, he set down the mirror next to where the *Beam of Light* connected with the cocoons. He chanted a poem, one that made the cocoons move:

*“Scolue lectenont lecumo ketz lecontor,
Deght taeblouccypeaym epur unot ketz ontor.”*

(Which means: Asterian cocoon come to center, light prepares for you to enter.)

Up and down the cables pulled before one bubble rotated in position waiting for a response from the light. Faeraud turned the mirror around and faced it toward the envelop. Suddenly a flow of fire pulsated from the glass and sliced open the wrap. A cold body fell from it and bounced to the floor with an echo. Faeraud kicked it out of the way, over the balcony, where it fell into the deep opening. Moments later he heard a faint thud when it hit below.

Next, he grabbed the mirror and walked into the shell itself. Suddenly cocoons began to fall off of the cables all by themselves. They zoomed past Faeraud falling into the deep abyss of inner earth. The *Irmisul Beam of Light* began to glow brighter, bigger and thicker, so thick that it started to encapsulate the cage Faeraud was in.

The sound of glass breaking was heard; this was followed by a shower of sharp transparent optics raining down.

Outside the noise caught Evaemon’s attention. The noise was so loud that it shook the whole Earth and woke up anyone that was still asleep. Looking into the night sky was a sight that no one would ever forget. The Asterian moon was high in the sky. Its blue ocean’s as pretty as ever. Then suddenly without any warning, the

entire planetoid turned into a fireball as it completely blew-up. It exploded into a million pieces. When the fireball settled down, it was obvious that everyone on the satellite had been destroyed. Two-thirds of it was completely gone, blown into smaller chunks of mass. Only an oblong piece of rock, about a third of the original size remained.

Aedon ran over to Gobi, Areshia's elephant who was resting nearby and hugged his trunk. His mind was so overwhelmed that it couldn't form any thought. Regardless, it was clear that the Asterians and their moon no longer existed.

From the heavens to Earth, a flash ran down the *Irminsul Beam of Light* like sparks at the end of a fuse, burning its path toward the pyramid. A bulge seemed to force its way from the sky through the *Beam of Light* as it quickly and decisively entered the building. Suddenly the pyramid exploded. The three remaining cathedrals fell, imploding on themselves. A gigantic crater was all that remained. An enormous cloud of smoke naturally perused.

A long twang from an electronic-gourd turned everyone's attention to the coned-fountains. Its water had stopped flowing. The turtles who had once played soothing music had been replaced by a band consisting of a wrinkled harpy, a hissing cobra, a snorting babirusa, a scowling hyena, and a hopping sharkgull. The twang of their music increased in volume as other instruments were added and their jam session intensified.

The red horse, Faeraud had rode in on before, gave a whinny and bucked about on his hind legs right before a bolt of lightning struck from the sky above into the pit of the Irminsul. As the dust settled, another dark cloud rose from its depth. It was the *floating-trivelator* that Ahteana and Zualpha had used to enter the *Spiral Legislature* before; except this time, the platform spewed black smoke as it lifted into the air. Instead of Asterians, this cloud carried the mysterious mirror which rotated around, presenting a new leader. Faeraud lifted his arms toward the sky, very much alive and untouched by it all.

The Etruscans were on their way to the Pyramid when the celestial horror happened. They all gathered by the *Cone Fountains* in the plaza. Warriors zigzagged in a frenzy as a crowd began to emerge. Andromache took to ordering the commoners to the far side of the plaza, away from the Etruscans.

“The Asterian’s are gone,” Mestor exclaimed. “If they could not see that this was coming, certainly their *scrolls, poems and enchantments* have turned against them.”

“Or was it the faithless inhabitants of Earth, who abandoned the traditional ways and beliefs that caused them to lose power?” Evaemon asked.

“You don’t suspect Haedrus has taken one of those thunderbolts up there?” Evad asked.

“The universe has obviously chosen to eliminate them. Whether it was a bolt, a comet, or the energy itself, they are gone.”

Mnesus did not want to entertain such an idea either and refocused the attention, “We must do as the *Tuaoi Stone* suggested, and give Faeraud the power he needs to dethrone the evil. Would not the Asterians direct the same?”

“Yes, it is time to crown him king,” Mestor bolstered, standing to his feet.

“He has ascended to be our leader just like the vision we all witnessed from the *Scroll of Fire*,” Ambassador Telopps claimed, stepping into the picture and reminding them of the smoke effect Faeraud had created for them earlier.

“The remaining Asterians will never —” Evaemon’s objection was bruised along with his chin when Mestor tripped him, causing him to collide with the stone rim of the fountain.

“Certainly I will allow input from the *Asterian Council*, if any remain here on Earth,” said Faeraud, almost chuckling as the *trivellator* came to a landing near the fountain.

Mestor stepped up and announced, “Let the crowning commence! ... I will be the first to cast my crown on the head of our new prince, one who will energize new waters of life for our

continent. Celebrate with me in crowning Faeraud King of Atlantis.”

Other Etruscans took their crowns and placed them on top of Faeraud’s head. Evaemon and a couple others hesitated.

“Certainly I would not wish to be the sole Etruscan to hold out. Denying the prism’s future prediction could have dire consequences,” Ampheres reminded, trying to talk himself into a story that he too did not fully believe.

“Prince Evad! Come here my son,” Evaemon called out.

The prince came and kneeled obediently on one knee before his father.

“I hereby, relinquish my voting rights and title as Etruscan, to my son. Prince Evad, you are now Etruscan Evad fully and completely,” Evaemon declared, unable to support the provision in good conscious. “If you yield to this foolishness, it is you, not I who will have to answer to the people of our province.”

Evaemon removed his crown and placed it on his son’s head. This was the day that Evad had longed for, he had waited his entire life for this single day. It was quite a surprise. He stood up tall and proud and gleamed with joy.

“We are waiting — for your crown, Evad,” Faeraud demanded in a displeased tone.

“I have just received this precious and important gift. Certainly, you will not take it this hastily,” Evad spoke back, holding the crown tightly to his head like a spoiled child refusing to share his toys.

“Shall I report details about the *mayapple* root in *Tundrville*?” Faeraud asked, threatening to reveal a dark secret he knew in Evad’s past.

Evad snarled, before reluctantly casting the crown to Faeraud, “I loan you my crown as a symbolic gesture.”

After all ten Etruscans yielded their power and lordship, the impromptu meeting was adjourned.

Ampheres then sought out Evaemon, “We had no choice but to publicly give our support.”

“The pacing of this runs faster than a rapids. I fear that something is terribly out of place and I do hope that we have not given power to the wrong side,” said Evaemon, trembling.

“You saw the vigor and eagerness in there, it would have been a painful drawn-out suicide to oppose,” Ampheres pointed out. “Certainly the wrong side is the one that Aszea is on and not Atlantis.”

“Perhaps we should begin seeking out ambassadors and *instructioneers* who will be beacons and preserve the teachings of King Yaswhen,” Evaemon suggested.

“A group of warriors to protect the old kingdom?”

“No, a following of educators, to keep the teachings alive.”

Aedon stroked Gobi’s trunk, shaking in horror. Less than an hourglass ago, he had seen Auseten, his mother, and Areshia all walk inside the building. He could only think the worse and guess that they were destroyed along with the pyramid. He told Gobi to wait while he searched for them.

For hours, Aedon called out for Areshia and for his mother. He searched through the piles of crushed rock. Finally he came upon a women whose clothes he recognized. Only her upper body escaped the block that crushed her. He tilted her head toward him, revealing that it was his mother. Cleacious was dead.

He sobbed until sunrise and when he was about to leave, the *trivelator* that Faeraud rode on, softly maneuvered toward him.

“I’m so sorry for your loss,” Faeraud said, unemotionally.

“You killed her,” Aedon cried, realizing that this entire ordeal had been orchestrated by him. “You did this ... you killed her!”

Faeraud chuckled, “I didn’t kill anyone. You killed her. You killed your own mother when you stole my *Scroll* and tried to give it to Ahteana. I know that is where you were headed with it. If you had left it in my care, I wouldn’t have been forced into taking such drastic actions.”

Later, Aedon went back to find Gobi, but the elephant was gone. He hoped that meant that Areshia was alive and had left already, but he couldn't be sure.

A magnitude of people gathered in the plaza and Ambassador Telopps stepped up to assure the crowd, "Do not be afraid. Our Etruscans witnessed this event. They have appointed and crowned a new king to bring peace, and to prevent any further chaos."

Faeraud swished over, on the *floating-trivelator*, and pushed Telopps out of the way, "The Asterians have lied to us for decades and their lies have destroyed them this day. It is with sorrow that I must decree that anyone whom is Asterian must be brought to our courts for immediate evaluation. We cannot have spies and random acts of magic roaming around — against us, in this time of unrest."

Someone in the audience shouted, "What do we call you, King Fay-rod?"

The comment struck a nerve. It almost sounded like what the old *educatory* master had mockingly called him before — *Fake-rude*. He could even hear *Fake-rude* ringing in his ears. He decided to unmistakably shout his name. He started to say Faeraud and then he started to claim that he was Sayer. But stopped as he struggled within himself for the right name.

Earlier when Faeraud was in the cocoon inside the inner Irminsul Pyramid, Sayer was riding the *Beam of Light* all the way from Asteria. Sayer's cocoon had long-ago been destroyed, so when he entered the sacred pyramid he possessed the closest thing he could find: Faeraud's body. That was the secret deal that Sayer had made with Faeraud. Sayer told him, he would ask one favor for making him king. The favor he demanded, was for Faeraud to occupy a cocoon and wait for further instructions. Faeraud had no idea that his body would become the vessel for Sayer to live through.

Faeraud tried to tell the people that he was possessed by *Sayer and Teller*, and Sayer was fighting him within, and keeping him

from making any understandable statement. Faeraud tried desperately to say he was possessed, “I am possess — am Say and Tell — I am possess-teller — I am ...”

Then with a boisterous force Faeraud spewed out the words, “I am *possessed* — *and teller*.”

People mistook what he said and they began to hail the new king. “Hail King Poseidontel!” they shouted, as that sounded similar to *possessed and teller*.

Ambassador Telopps presented him with new scepter. A serpent fashioned from silver wrapped around its base. The rod forked out into three branches creating a trident. A fiery-red prism was embedded in the top of each prong. The image of himself, he had once seen in the mirror, was now a reality.

The acceptance and power that Faeraud had always wanted, he was now experiencing. How could he possibly object? He decided he could live with Sayer’s spirit co-occupying his body, so long, as he got everything else he ever wanted. From that day on, he was called King Poseidontel, though other stories have referenced him simply as Poseidon.

Aedon could not believe all that had transpired — and so quickly. Because he had taken the *Scroll of Fire* he was afraid that Faeraud would come after him, so he scurried to find a place to hide. From the sky above, a few pieces of Asterian debris briefly rained down. A smoldering meteor, no larger than a wine bottle, contained melted feathers. When Aedon looked closer and saw it’s royal-blue color with a golden tip, he hung his head in sorrow, knowing that this was most likely the wing of the piskie whom had guided him on his trip to the moon. With Ahteana and the Asterians gone, his mother dead, and Areshia missing, the only thing he could think to do, was to find his father. He decided that he must travel to Bashan and find Gilgamoeh. His father would know what to do.

PAPYRUS THIRTEEN

PART TWO

PAPYRUS ONE

COTTAGE IN THE VINEYARD

Long ago there was another continent called Atlantis. It was a mystical place where people from Earth's second moon came to visit, animals could talk, people travelled in flying *pauwvotas*, and an abundance of orichalcum filled its pyramids. However, Asteria (Earth's second moon) recently disintegrated and Atlantis' pyramids were drying up. Their mineral, *orichalcum* was used for two purposes: it could radiate waves of energy, and it was fashioned into talents of coins for commerce. Both were becoming scarce.

None of this mattered to Methouslan. For centuries he

reigned as Atlantis' Prince Lord, but now, at nine-hundred and fifty-five sun-cycles old, he was retired. A toke on his pipe, as he sat on the back porch looking out over the vineyards, was what he enjoyed most. Though his speech was slow and he stuttered much, he spent the past few weeks talking with a female acquaintance.

Her long brown hair tried to hide the fact that she was wearing a boys toga, even though she was quite independent and cared little about other's opinions. She was at the Irminsul Pyramid when it was destroyed and after barely escaping with her life, she travelled to the cottage to visit the old man. Her name was Areshia and she successfully begged a stay there, until the weather warmed enough so her elephant, Gobi, could take her further North, where she resided.

"Quiet! *Der's* someone *comin'* — down *da* path there," the man said, using his scepter for a cane to help him stand up.

She listened, but only heard Gobi's trunk stirring as he plucked a few more buds from the vines tangled in the fence. Many of the trellises were broken or bent over, giving evidence that its caretaker and others had not returned in sometime. Even the giraffes that lived there once, were missing.

"Someone's *der*," the elder one said again.

"Remember now, you're hearing has gone south a bit — with your age," she reminded, rocking in the porch-swing made from split wine-barrels.

"*Dem* trees, lining the road — see *'em?* *Der* warning each other. *Der* leaves rustle as one communicates to *da* next," he explained as the breeze ruffled his white hair to confirm.

A few moments later two figures approached. As they came closer Areshia leaned forward recognizing the thin man with the unkempt and wavy hair. His blue eyes glinted a twinkle for a second before the clouds covered the moonlight.

"He's got his grandfather's eyes," Methouslan whispered.

"Aedon? ... Aedon is that you?" she gasped, freezing stiff in the swing.

"It looks like he's *a-gottta* new girlfriend too," Methouslan

gleefully added.

She was still torn in her loyalty between her fiancé and Aedon. Considering them both she thought, “Yapet is boring — yet stable and settled while Aedon is a wanderer squandering all his talents in search of a father who doesn’t want him. Sure, he takes me on journeys filled with fun — but his adventures almost cost me my life once.”

From the distant road, Aedon wondered if that were her on the swing. He thought about how she was considering engagement to Yapet, yet still seemed interested in him. But she had left him twice before for his half-brother — what did she see in him?

Areshia couldn’t understand why Aedon straddled the fence between keeping friendship with the traditional Asterians and the freely-disrespectful Faeraud at the same time.

Aedon thought she was too involved in following the ancient teachings of the Asterians, especially with her mission to deliver scrolls to all the Etruscans reminding them of ancient promises. She should be more broadminded he felt.

“He is overly fond of Faeraud. I think he likes him better than me. Maybe I should just stay away from him,” she thought.

“She acts too much like a boy ... always wearing the same worn toga ... no sense of fashion,” he thought.

“He’s royalty; I won’t fit in.”

“She’s a commoner; people will shun me if they catch us together. Not a single person has ever approved of us being together. My *educatory-mates* laughed at me, my mother tried to send her away and Faeraud warned me to keep a distance.”

“He wears that *globeaky*, but never respects its power. I wonder if it’s even real?”

“She hides behind her long bangs.”

“He’s brought another woman here. Who is that character he’s with,” she snarled to herself with a surprising amount of jealousy.

“Though ... I do like her bangs ... really! ... Parting her hair from her face to give her a peck, is like opening the curtain to

a new act in a play.”

“I do like the way he pulls my bangs back and kisses me. The world disappears, suspended in time, when I’m in his arms.”

Aedon had witnessed the destruction of the Irminsul shortly after Areshia had walked inside the pyramid. He rummaged around through the ruins for days. Only his hope that she had escaped alive, allowed him to abandon the search. Rushing toward the porch, leaving his companion in the rear, he screamed out, “Areshia!”

“What foolish notion brings *yas* here?” Methouslan scolded, shaking his scepter, “And by foot at nighttime. It’s not safe *ta* travel *dese* parts by sandal ... *‘specially* after sunset.”

“With the shortages, the power grid has been spotty at best. Had to set the ole transporter down by the river’s edge,” Aedon explained, catching his breath as his companion caught up.

“*Der buildin’* those new *Pauwvotas* down in Ablach. Run off the sunlight *dey do*. *Ya* need *ta git* one of *dem*.”

“Certainly would like to, but most of my talents are spent after searching for my father these past few moon-cycles,” Aedon sighed. “Besides they don’t fly very long once the sky darkens.”

Three months earlier, when he found his mother among the dead, when the Irminsul Pyramid collapsed, he decided that he needed to search for his long-lost father. He hoped that the instability in his crumbling world might be reversed if he could only find his father and bring him back to Atlantis. Once before, he launched a search, and like the previous, this one also ended without reward.

“And who is this dainty woman that accompanies you?” Areshia asked with a hint of jealousy, as the other woman grasped Aedon’s arm, jolting him from his disengaged *Thought World*.

“I am Korsheipa,” the tall, dark-skinned girl answered, turning down and fixing folds in her white gown to hide its tears. “I am indebted to your friend here, who saved my life.”

“Once I landed, I knew the vineyard was nearby. When I went to find the jaguars to beg a ride, I discovered that they had

gone mad — turned into wild beasts,” Aedon cried.

Korsheipa interrupted, limping up the stairs of the wooden deck, “They came after me looking for food to eat. I climbed an oak tree, and after fending them off with a branch for hours, I was near exhaustion.”

“Surprised ... I am ... to find you here, Areshia?” Aedon nervously stated. “I waited for you ... at the Irminsul Pyramid. ... I feared you might have been injured ... or worse. ... I searched through the rubble ... for days.”

“We are only here a couple more weeks. The weather is too cold for Gobi to pace into the North just yet. Thought we’d visit the ole vineyard I once looked over,” then she lowered her voice, “Besides, remember, I still have to be careful. ... *The Enchanters* ... they still hold my father captive, and they seek me, looking for his key.”

“Oh that again,” Aedon frowned, tired of her stories about how a secret organization was out to get her. “You’ve never told me what secret this missing key unlocks.”

“Father promised to explain more — after I returned home from the *Day of Apaturia* — but I never made it back. He always said that his key would unlock something secret, something great. Now he’s gone,” she sighed with a thoughtful breath, then divulged, “The key is long-gone, and its secrets are too.”

“*Ya* all *culd* use some rest ... and a bath. ... *Git ya* selves indoors. *Ders* some dinner left on the hearth,” the old man motioned, leading the way inside.

As the women entered, Methouslan held Aedon back for a moment, “Glad to see *yas* got a new female interest who seems better suited for *ya*.”

“But we’re not ...”

“*Dant mistaken* me, Areshia’s a good gal — but she’s *gotta* few *missin’* talents up *der*.”

The flickering fireplace kept the room heated and a pot of tomato stew warmed itself over the fire. Because the *orichalcum*

energy-grid was blocked by the surrounding mountains, the place was lit with oil-lamps instead of illumination-bulbs. A kangawaiter hopped in and served up bowls of the meal to the guests as they situated themselves on wooden benches. When she refused to refill Methouslan's bowl he complained.

"Been *makin* me cut back on *da* good stuff. Some stomach pains lately. So *tells* me where *ya-all headin'* off *ta* next?"

"Ablach," Korsheipa announced.

The mere mention of the town's name commanded everyone's attention. Methouslan's face turned slightly green. Areshia gulped while Aedon shifted his eyes from person to person without a blink. Breaking the silence, he spoke first —

"To garnish some more *orichalcum* so I can continue my search."

"North of the *Agglomeration Forest* for Gobi and then onto Bashan for me," Areshia blurted-out, almost at the same time as Aedon.

"I suspect you know where my father's abode is. Yapet certainly does," Aedon snapped, turning to Areshia. "Yet, you allow me to spend a fortune, searching across millions of stadia in the glaciers. Why do you do this, why not point me in the right direction?"

"You're always wanting an adventure," she huffed. "And now you have a new companion to take with you."

"With *da* shortages no ones *gonna* be *makin'* adventures anymore," Methouslan snapped, sneaking a bit of food out of Areshia's bowl. "Might I suggest *ya* all go on down *ta* Ablach. *Dey* converted *dem* factories. Once *dey* produced *Valixes* for the Asterians, but now *der poppin'* out *dem* solar-powered *Pauwvotas*."

"I've heard the people in Ablach are Asterian sympathizers. Some of them may even be hiding there. Might be dangerous. ... I wouldn't put it past Faeraud to engage in an all-out assault on them," said Aedon, remembering how it had been decreed that all Asterians should be arrested and held in captivity.

“Faeraud, my dear grandson. He has risen *ta* power so quickly — they call him King Poseidontel now. And he has *dat* mold. ... I handed *da* mold over *ta* him myself without even thinking,” the old man grumbled, looking up at the row of oil lamps above the table where one of them was missing.

“You refer to the thunderbolt, do you not?” Aedon asked.

“I *cud* only hope he has not obtained *da* formula *dat* goes with it.”

“My great Prince Lord,” Aedon addressed with concern, “I have seen him lift it from the *Scroll of Fire* my very self. He has stored it on an instruction box.”

A gasp choked everyone in the room.

“Then the *War of Enchantments* will most certainly be upon us and the prophesied *Battle of Quihuitl* will follow,” Areshia said, trembling.

“All of *dis* can be stopped,” Methouslan stated.

“How?” asked Korsheipa.

“Right now, down in Ablach, like one of *yous* said, *der* are many hidden Asterians. *Dey* may organize and be able *ta* take back *der* power. *Ya* must go *der* find out if *dis* is so.”

“If what you say is true, then I may be persuaded to offer my service. ... My mother was part Asterian and when she died, Faeraud was not even sympathetic. Instead, he tried to blame the entire calamity on me,” Aedon growled.

“If *ya* can find Etruscan Evaemon. He might show *ya* how *ta* help.”

“Last Evaemon saw, I was Faeraud’s best-friend. How will the Etruscan know he can trust us?” Aedon asked.

“I will convince him,” Korsheipa said, revealing, “I am Asterian.”

No one was surprised since her dark skin gave hint to her origins.

“Approaching the cottage, I saw the green lantern, burning atop the chimney and knew this would be a safe place,” she said, referring a custom that had quickly developed among property

owners who would give sanctuary or food to travelling Asterians.

“After *ya git der*, before *yas* go and dos anything, promise *dat ya* will come back here or at least send word. ... There are many Asterians *wanderin’ dees* parts and I want to be able *ta* lead them in the right direction — *ta* safety. Plus *yul* want me *ta* advise *ya* properly and prevent *ya* from *steppin’* into another trap.”

They all promised and then the next morning they mounted up Gobi and readied to set off North toward Ablach. Methouslan motioned for Aedon to come back to the front door where he watched.

“*Da* women, *dey* be emotional and paranoid. Don’t go *lettin’ em* lead you into some dark tunnel where mischief is sure *ta* bring demise to *ya* all. Come back here hastily my great-grandson,” he advised, wishing to discover their exact hiding place, if one existed.

It was a three day journey by elephant and they kept along the river where the paths were flatter. The warm temperatures dropped as they travelled further North. On the thirteenth day of the third month they finally were within reach of the city. Located on the border of two states, half of the city resided in the province of Evaemon and the other half in Ampheres. Its residents were a strange bunch: conservative, shy, suspicious of everything, and strong sympathizers of the Asterians. The sun had set and snow, which blew from the far-off glaciers, scratched at their faces making it difficult to see. The dirt path turned into cobblestone indicating they were close.

Upon reaching a stone well, they knew they were in Ablach. No other place had a watering hole larger or greater than this city. Situated in the center of the town, the well stretched thirty-podes across at the top, from one end of its octagon shape to the other. When you looked down inside, it was even wider across, because there was a walkway with a balcony railing at each verge. Random sections contained broken staircases each leading down, another level lower, as far as the light could reach. Only the first couple levels had been kept up and those were rigged with pulleys and

buckets for drawing water. Even these had garnished cobwebs, having been replaced with piping due to the invention of the Tower Siphons. Every now and again, a gust of wind would wind down the old well and cause another brick or broken stair to tumble into ruin.

“Seems like a dangerous hole where someone could fall to their death,” Aedon huffed, bending inward for a better glimpse.

“The well is called *Rath Na Riogh*,” Areshia explained. “It means *Fortress of Kings*.”

“Don’t let the name fool you,” Korsheipa chimed in. “Not even a prince has tasted from this well. Its waters have mostly dried up and only a trickle runs deep inside.”

Beyond the well, rose a magnificent building with many arches, gables, peaked roofs, and stone towers. Even its sign, which was made from stones, read:

WELCOME TO MAMMOTH INN.

Pushing the door open, a comfortable interior welcomed them. A crackling hearth added warmth to the cherry-wood beams and pillars-of-oak framing the lobby. A double staircase led up to the second-level where it split, leading in opposite directions. Closing the door with a gust of flurries behind them, the travelers were glanced over by a group of youths who were dancing by the fire. After a brief pause, the dancers returned to their song, singing together, while trying not to spill beverages in their nectar glasses which they waved about. Their chant paced with excitement:

Shuffle, shuffle, shuffle. Dance to the right.

Shuffle, shuffle, shuffle. Dance to the left.

Shuffle, shuffle, shuffle. You dance so fine,

Shuffle, shuffle, shuffle. Dance all the time.

Eat, eat; drink, drink. Dine, dine, dine.

Tomorrow, tomorrow is gonna be just fine.

Aedon found his way over to the innkeeper’s desk. Even though it was at the opposite end of the room, under the split

staircase, he still had to shout to be heard over the dancers.

“We need a room. Three of us,” Aedon said, plopping a coin on the table.

“Three rooms or one room for three?” the ostrich grumbled, ruffling his feathers while getting up and setting his smoldering pipe down.

“Whatever this will buy,” Aedon snapped, sliding the coin toward the man.

“Last month, I’d have laughed *ya* out on your toga’s round-end for offering a mere coin,” the keeper huffed, snatching the piece up quickly. “But with things like they are now, the *orichalcum* as scarce as food ... this’ll get *ya* a room. One night only. *Ya* look like the suspicious kind *ta* me and I don’t like *dat*. *Ya* *alls* be gone in the morning. ... Second level, end of the left corridor — last room there.”

“*Apa’hei*, sir,” Aedon grabbed, turning to leave, then stepping back to ask, “Would you know where we could find former Etruscan Evaemon?”

“Evaemon?” the tall bird whispered, looking him up and down with more misgiving. “Is he expecting you?”

“Not entirely,” said Aedon, “But he knows us. I was at the Irem ... was with him, when his father Lemech was ill — long ago.”

“He doesn’t like to be bothered. ... You’ll pass him up those stairs on your way. He sits next to the window, facing out, meditating ... always meditating.”

Up the stairs the group tromped, dodging suspicious looks which glanced their way. Down the hall they hurried until Aedon held out an arm to stop them in front of a large bay window.

“Why do you sit in meditation?” Aedon asked, approaching Evaemon who sat in front of the frosted-glass.

The man looked lifeless with his head slightly bowed and he was unresponsive to the verbal question. A reddish-light refracting from beyond the frosted-pane, cast a sickly hue on his white beard. Areshia stepped over and tapped his shoulder. First he opened one

eye, but only halfway, then the other pupil blinked. He inhaled a deep breath as he slowly came back to life.

“Leave ... me alone,” Evaemon spoke, barely whispering. “Evad ... is now ... Etruscan ... of the ... land. ... Only he has the power to grant your request.”

“I do not seek Evad, but wish to locate the Asterians,” Aedon blurted out.

Evaemon was about to nod back into his demeanor of depression when the bold statement jarred him awake. Areshia and Korsheipa glanced around nervously, hoping no one had overheard.

“Your kind has been here before,” Evaemon accused. “There are no Asterians in the streets of Ablach. Take your fiery-scroll and go burn down someone else’s town.”

“Methouslan has sent us here ... telling a tale of an Asterian revival. I am here to help and offer my services,” Aedon announced with confidence.

“Even if there were such a gathering, why would anyone believe you, Aedon?” Evaemon huffed. “You gave Faeraud the *Rataka Scrolls* and helped him unlock their fury.”

“I knew not what he was up to and I myself come from a line of Asterians. My mother was half-blood, and ...”

Korsheipa interrupted, pleading, “I am one of them too, and he saved my life.”

Evaemon chuckled and just as he was about to snap-back another objection, he noticed that Aedon was wearing a crystal *globeaky* around his neck. Evaemon wore a similar one and each of them noticed the other’s. The glass inside their amulets emulated the red color like the glow from the window.

“It may be time to rise and tend to matters regarding a pledge that I made to an Asterian, once long ago,” said Evaemon, fingering his own *globeaky*. “Some of us, once gave oath to respect the teachings of The King and protect others who follow?”

“Perhaps I too had a similar conversation,” Aedon acknowledged, flashing thoughts back to the same promise he

made to Ahteana. “But how would you know of such a meeting in so secret a place?”

“You wear one of few *globeakys* that breathe. One that radiates invisible rings of color,” Evaemon divulged.

Aedon lifted his amulet and when he looked through it, at Evaemon, he could see the man was encircled with revolving rings of color, a glow that was invisible except when viewed through the Asterian made globe.

“You are — as some say, one of the — *Amphictyonies*,” Evaemon suggested, trying to test Aedon’s loyalties.

“One of the what?” he asked.

Areshia made gestures, attempting to signal Evaemon to keep quiet. She was still not sure that Aedon could be trusted with all their knowledge.

“One of the few — pledged to bear witness of the teachings,” he whispered, ignoring Areshia’s charade. “You would not be in possession of such a valuable *piece* unless you gave an oath — or robbed someone of their key.”

“This was bestowed upon me, I assure you. ... But I have also sworn an oath to —” Aedon stopped; he remembered about his promise to Faeraud and how he was not allowed to discuss it. He wasn’t sure who to believe. He felt like a double-agent. Nauseousness churned within himself as ambition fought with duty, tragedy clobbered hope, and promises he had made clashed with each other. He wished that his father were around for some guidance. But he already knew his father would advise him to stick to the old ways. He still wasn’t sure that he was ready to give up the excitement and adventures that his friend Faeraud offered.

“Oh, I can’t comprehend all of this now,” Aedon said, holding his head, which hurt with mutilated thoughts. “I mean not to replace my own blame, but I was led into doing things I would not have done had a father, or even one of my mentors, been there to guide me more often. I have unraveled and crisscrossed the oaths I have given.”

Evaemon knew exactly what Aedon was talking about. He

too had been tricked and blackmailed by the cunning Faeraud. But, he still needed time to rethink the situation.

“I have come to unfortunately learn that those who are specially guided have only shallow experiences to draw upon,” Evaemon snapped. “This window doth show, a reddish kind of glow. Keep watch, for when I am gone, it’s color will turn green, but not for long. Read that as a sign to tell, and gather together at the well.”

Korsheipa cried, “There are tunnels, this I know. Their safety is where I must go. If we wait and this sign comes not today or tomorrow, then I myself, must take journey and seek refuge with my brethren in sorrow.”

Evaemon bowed closed his eyes, resumed a state of meditation, and shut them out once again.

“Tunnels,” Areshia scoffed.

“I believe you,” said Aedon, fingering his *globeaky* and remembering, “I saw them — thousands of voles — carving human-sized burrows in the depths of the Irminsul. Once I was taken down into the lower-levels of the pyramid, way below its base. The Asterian who breathed *the sparkle* into this *globeaky* showed me that place.”

“You really think tunnels at the Irem would reach all the way here,” Areshia snapped sarcastically, before abruptly turning and leading them to their room.

They stopped in the doorway to admire their spacious suite. Four cushioned loungers were diagonally positioned around a fountain in the center. Beyond the bubbling water was a bay window with velvet-red drapes drawn open. It overlooked a valley where abandoned factories slept beneath a dusting of snow. Areshia scuffled in and set her bag down next to the bath. She screeched when she plunged her hand into the water — quickly withdrawing it.

“Is it too hot?” Aedon asked.

“It’s freezing,” she grumbled. “This shortage of *orichalcum*

is effecting everything. I hope you didn't pay extra for these fancy accessories."

"And the factories — most have been shut down," Korsheipa moaned, approaching the large window.

The drapes ruffled and then came to life as two men jumped out from behind them. One was dressed like a warrior. The other with short-red hair and a fur-wrap around his shoulders, yelled out orders.

"If you believe that I hold the same loyalties as Evaemon, my father, then you are a fool. Heh, heh. ... You cannot hide here," Evad screamed. "Seize the girl in the boy's toga!"

The warrior grabbed the girl but Korsheipa jumped up, somersaulted in the air and landed behind him. The two girls struggled while ducking away from the knife he wielded about. Aedon stepped up in front of Evad and stopped him from joining the fight.

"What the *Sayer* are you doing?"

"There may be a certain key that she knows about," Evad snarled, "If I were allowed to borrow such an instrument, I might forget that you were found here."

"Then her stories are true?" Aedon gulped, horrified as he glanced at the struggle that perused next to him. "She doesn't have what you're looking for Evad."

"The name is ETRUSCAN Evad!" he shouted back. "If she doesn't have the *globeaky*, then perhaps you do. I wonder, is this the key we're all searching for?"

Evad grabbed the *globeaky* that Aedon was wearing. Then he twisted it around so that the scarlet cord began to tighten around his neck. Aedon pushed back and the two of them fell to the floor and began wrestling. While choking from Evad's grip on the cord, Aedon managed to get a hold of the fur-wrap which was falling off the Etruscan's shoulder. He stuffed a corner of it in Evad's mouth, used the material to cover his face, and grabbed a hold of his head. Then he maneuvered Evad's cranium quickly across the floor-rug. His short hair gave little protection and he let

out a scream as a rug-burn drew a pulsating mark across the back of his head. He released Aedon.

Quickly, Aedon unraveled the *rope-tie* from around his waist of the toga and tied Evad's arms together. He stood up just in time as the warrior came crashing to the floor with his knife. The blade was meant for Areshia, but he tripped over her bag while pursuing. Aedon grabbed the knife away from the man. Then he cut off the excess of his *rope-tie*, and used another section of it to tie up the warrior.

Korsheipa was standing poised and unaffected. This made Areshia feel inferior. She had always been the girl that could beat up the boys and now there seemed to be another female who was stronger than her. Her instincts insisted that she take back charge of the situation. First she noticed a couple arrows from her bag had been broken in the scrimmage, so she scolded the tied-up warrior. Then she marched over to Aedon who was wrapping the remainder of his rope back around his waist. The tie had been a gift from her.

"If you keep cutting lengths off of that strap, soon enough, its span won't reach adequately to save your behind from another dangerous canyon," she huffed, referring to how the band had aided them in a previous adventure.

"I always knew you were a traitor," Evad screamed out, spitting at Aedon.

Picking up the arrows and her bag, Areshia led them back down the corridor. Aedon stopped them as they reached the place where Evaemon had been sitting — he was gone. The frosted window's glow had turned to green and so had Aedon's *globeaky*, though he still believed it was just a reflection instead of a signal.

"Where do we go now?" Korsheipa cried.

"We need to get a transporter and leave from here quickly," said Aedon.

"No, *Rath Na Riogh* — I just figured it out. The tunnels are inside that well," Korsheipa exclaimed, brightening.

"You've got to be about as serious as a mermaid frolicking in a fountain," Areshia huffed.

“Maybe we could at least hide out in the well, until we figure out what to do,” Aedon suggested, instinctively grabbing Areshia’s hand and pulling her down the stairs and outside.

The first rays of the morning sun calmed the breeze. Still a bitter chill shivered down their spines as they bent over, peering down inside the well. The large pit appeared more like a coliseum than a watering hole. A distant figure from the depth rose up on a floating *trivelator*; it was Evaemon.

“Those who hide, are alive and in the tunnels of *Rath Na Riogh*. Step up cautiously and we will ride down there,” he commanded.

They all crowded on the *trivelator* but their uneven weight made the vehicle wobble.

“Careful — or you’ll send us all falling to our deaths,” Evaemon shouted.

Quickly thinking, Aedon jumped from it, landing inside one of the balcony alcoves on the second level beneath. He yanked Areshia in while Korsheipa and Evaemon jumped just in time, before the *trivelator* platform spun around and took a dive into the abyss.

“Come, we will walk there bravely,” Evaemon proclaimed, leading them down the foremost stairs to the third level.

PAPYRUS TWO

RETURN OF THE ASTERIANS

Twenty, thirty, forty levels deep Evaemon continued with Aedon, Areshia and Korsheipa following. Many of the stairs were broken and crumbling. Between the forty-first and forty-second stories the staircase was completely gone. Aedon measured out another length of his *rope-tie* and they climbed down his strap to the flat. Evaemon was old and fragile, and with great difficulty, the two women at the top and Aedon at the bottom, helped him slide safely down. Later in the day someone called out — “Plane seventy — we’re halfway there.”

“Correction — we’re all the way there. ... The tunnel entrance reaches here,” Evaemon revealed, holding his arm out to stop them from moving down the next descending stairs. “Asterians who foresaw this day, long ago began excavating tunnels and storing goods. We have an opportunity to save them, but the

archway-of-time to do so, is smaller than a grain of sand. ... Do you come with a promise to help — or are you a mere distraction who will let our side down?”

“Everyone is always assuming that I am playing for their team. In these days of confusion, how can one know which side to choose?”

“If you have not yet chosen, then I am mistaken. Stay here at this well, and speak no ill of us, but if you have sworn an oath, those whom you promised to protect beg for your allegiance now. Once we were given a gift of time, now only a single drop of mercury remains in that clepsydra,” Evaemon pleaded.

“I never intended to make promises on such a whim, but certainly I have. ... Therefore, my word I will keep,” said Aedon.

A section of the stone wall imploded, opening up. Evaemon quickly pulled them inside before the hidden door disappeared again, swallowing them into a secret tunnel. It was dark, but soon their eyes adjusted. Through the burrow they made their way, turning this way, then left, next bending right while heading down deeper into the earth. Aedon thought the journey would never end.

Hours later, a dim light glowed from the bends and a dripping sound echoed through the corridor. Soon they came to a space that was much larger and had room enough where they could stand up straight and not crouch low. As it widened, they had to walk around, and in-between, human-sized pods. Each was shaped like an egg lying on its side, its shell made of a translucent, yet rough, material. Aedon recognized them, they were the cocoons he had seen at the Irminsul Pyramid, except these were lying horizontal. While most of them were empty, some were occupied. Their inhabitants were not hibernating but alive and breathing. As they continued on, they saw some of the pods were opened with blankets and scraps of food discarded about, giving evidence that they were housing Asterians.

Evaemon slowly changed pace from leading to lingering. He tugged at Areshia’s toga, pulling her aside to issue a warning, “I know the two of you have a history, but Aedon cannot be trusted.

He has been well suited with trinkets and signs, a charade that would make us believe he is on our side. Yet, he is well immersed in the camp of our enemy.”

“How do you know this?” Areshia protested. “Everyone is always warning me about him; yet, he always proves to be an ally.”

“Look at his eyes. They bear dark circles ... the kind left by those who have worn masks in secluded places and seek our demise.”

She remembered the *Maske Shoppe* where Aedon had purchased one. A shiver of fear cascaded down her vertebrae. Then she thought about the past adventures where the two of them had overcome obstacles and Aedon even saved her life. She wasn't ready to believe that he had gone over to the other side — fully. However, she would keep at least one skeptical eye on him.

Turning through a bend, they came into a gigantic cavern which was larger than a stadium. It was twelve levels high and the build-out fashioned three enormous arches, each supporting the ceiling of rock. The walls and even the pillars themselves had small niches carved out where Asterians slept. As far as a *looking-glass* could see the basin was lined with cocoons. Beneath the center arch ran a track made of two struts on the ground and another two rods above, strung about waist-high.

The rails began to vibrate and a moment later an egg-shaped machine flew from the room's horizon down the track and stopped in front of them. For the first time, Aedon noticed that each cocoon had been modified and made into some kind of transportation vehicle. The egg rested perfectly between the lower and upper bars, it had a small *crystal-capacitor* attached to the backend and fan blades that propelled it. Its door slid up, opening, and a tall, dark Asterian man stepped out. It was Zualpha.

“So, the Asterians escaped. I should've known,” Aedon responded with pleasure and enthusiasm.

“I wish that were true,” Zualpha declared, as he bowed his head in mourning, and then explained further. “Four *valixes* sailed to Asteria — three made it. One was over-weighted and crashed in

the glacier region. The one that crashed had casualties, but also survivors. I am one of those survivors. But our fate was better than those who returned home.”

“I believed there to be thousands of survivors, yet I see barely a few dozen in this place. How will these few who remain, execute enough power and persuasion to retake control?” Evaemon questioned, thinking that Faeraud may have been correct in stating that the Asterians were full of myths, and the end to their time had been selected by nature itself.

Zualpha explained, “During the destruction of the moon and the pyramid, many Asterians made it back to their cocoons and were able to escape in the tunnels. Others made it through the light, but their cocoons were already gone. These other beings are here in spirit and their spirits will march with us to victory.”

Zualpha waved his hand and their blindness dissipated as an army of Asterian ghosts appeared, filling the entire room and each empty cocoon. Stalactites, dripping down from the ceiling, beamed in various shades of yellow and orange. They brightened the area. The floor briefly glowed with a footprint-outline wherever one of the apparitions stepped. A positive energy flowed throughout the place and each being looked more like an angel than a warrior. There was a sense that everything was alright and at peace, at least it seemed so in this place.

“It is now time to proceed,” Zualpha shouted with his mighty voice. “Roll the cocoons to their destination for the *Take Back*.”

An army of animals, including a pelican, a groundhog, monkeys and bunnies helped pack the pods. *Carbonemys Cotriniis* (eight podes long turtles) carried crates of fruit and grain on their backs. Giraffes helped by bending down and picking up the pods with their mouth, before transferring them onto the track. Other animals, Asterians, and humans rolled some of the pods in place.

“Unglat,” Areshia called out, recognizing one of the giraffes. “I was worried when I heard you had left the vineyard.”

The once depressed giraffe bent down to her ear with a

smile, “Finally, we can be of help. For so long, we were moved from place to place, seemingly too tall to fit in anywhere.”

“There is always a place for everyone,” Zualpha remarked, stopping by. “Even those who have their necks stuck so far up in the clouds, that they can’t see the path beneath them. Your patience has paid off, no doubt.”

One by one each Asterian climbed inside the vehicles. The phantoms randomly chose to show themselves or not, and so it seemed like some of the eggs floated onto the track by themselves.

“An attack? Isn’t this a little premature?” Aedon asked out of confusion. “Couldn’t Ambassador Telopps be employed to mediate?”

“Diplomatic solutions will be sought, my dear, Aedon,” Zualpha assured him. “If they are rejected, we must be prepared to take back control — by any means required.”

Evaemon questioned, “What weapons should we arm ourselves with?”

“We need no arsenal. We have *enchantments* to command our objective,” Zualpha made known. We must not fail. A failure could mean imminent destruction of this world as we recognize it and the rise of the foretold, evil *Uprooter*. There is another *possibility* — but the alignment, that *possibility* will choose, remains in the balance. Regrettably, our vision of that future is presently blurred.”

Aedon wondered what he meant by *another possibility*. At first, he doubted that Zualpha was referring to him, but then later, he was sure the message was meant for him.

“You may ride with us into battle or you may join the small group travelling to our rendezvous point. Which path do you chose?” asked Zualpha, pointing to a few pods aligned on another track leading down its own narrow tunnel.

“I will go with my people,” Korsheipa exclaimed, climbing into an opened pod.

“It’s a suicide mission, Aedon. Come with me, I’m going to the rendezvous point,” Areshia stated, marching over to the other

track. She was certain that Aedon would finally ditch the other woman whom she thought he was becoming too attached to.

Evaemon stepped into one of the cocoons motioning for Aedon to follow. He was certain that Aedon was some kind of spy and would opt out of going directly into battle. Aedon knew he had to follow, because his promise was on the line.

“Where is the rendezvous point?” he asked.

“Sekharu Harbor. We have a small fleet of ships that will take us to Nawat should we need to retreat,” Zualpha revealed.

“Areshia, go. . . I will meet up with you, at the Harbor, after we have taken back control,” said Aedon, standing with one foot in a cocoon and one still on the ground as he looked after her. “But don’t go off on any voyage to some unknown, fabled-land like Nawat — certainly not until I return for you.”

“Nawat and the Nawalym are not myths. Do you not already know this?” Zualpha asked him.

Aedon had held a dying piskie, from Nawat, in his arms just a few weeks earlier, he knew Zualpha was right. He longed to take Areshia’s path to safety, but he knew he had to support the others.

Zualpha stood up tall and addressed the patriots, “Do not let your hearts be troubled. Since you believe in King Yaswhen, trust also in me. He went to prepare a better place for us. If this were not true, I would have told you. Because he went to prepare a better place for us, he will surely come back and take us with him. You know the way to this place.”

Areshia sighed while flinging herself into an egg, yanking her bag of arrows in after herself, and shoving them to her feet, before slamming the pod’s door down. Her feelings felt even more confused than when she first arrived. She really wanted to go with Aedon, but that scenario didn’t work out this time. She tried to console herself with the fact that she was about to be engaged to Yapet; however, when she imagined Aedon in Korsheipa’s arms, a dagger twitched in her throat.

The small caravan of cocoons travelling to Sekharu Harbor buzzed as their capacitors wound up. Then with a flash they were

off, down the track, on their way, and out of view. Aedon and the others mentally prepared for the event by meditating before embarking into each cocoon.

The search for bodies, in the ruins of the destroyed Irminsul, had been completed and Poseidontel ordered warriors to clear the debris away. As an empty hole emerged where the mighty pyramid once stood, it whispered lies to the people, telling them that the Asterians and King Yaswhen had lied to them.

The tall-thin prince, Faeraud, had become strong with the possession of Sayer's spirit in his body. His power and physic bulged with muscle. The people called him King Poseidontel. He was two personalities in one body. The dominate personality was the evil spirit of Sayer, ruling the people with fear; while the more meek, yet adventurous side, sought their love and admiration. There was a constant internal fight between the two beings within himself. But one thing, together, they agreed on, was that they could gain the respect of the world if they rebuilt the Irminsul Pyramid. Poseidontel convinced himself that if they could do this, he could create a new beam of light that would reach into the heavens. Then, he could sit on a throne where no one would question his sovereignty.

"A new pyramid must be constructed and aligned correctly, according to —" Ambassador Telopps insisted, shaking a scroll at them with blueprints of the structure.

"Not to worry my loyal comrade," Faeraud said, placing his arm around Telopps. "Our sanctuary will be back — bigger and better, with a few modifications, of course. And you — will be rewarded for your patient efforts."

"I know you will grasp the magnitude of my appreciation and honor," Telopps humbly said, thanking him cautiously with a slight bow.

The wind picked up fiercely causing dirt and rubble from the crumbled Irminsul Pyramid to circle around. The debris formed

a small cyclone. The funnel emerged from the pit, growing bigger and taller from within, filling itself with material from beneath the ground. Suddenly the storm halted, dropping all of its dust particles to the earth like a curtain falls on the final act of a play. Two hundred Asterians led by Zualpha walked out of the squall and marched toward Faeraud. They even had a band that announced their presence with drumbeats echoing each footstep.

Telopps came running out, in-between them, “Your time has been postponed, your demise was foretold by the falling-stars in the heavens, the same stars that destroyed your home.”

“We are not here to debate our vocation. More than just destiny has selected us to return. We are *oathed* to protect the laws and the *Rataka Scrolls of King Yaswhen*,” Zualpha declared, as he pushed Telopps aside and came closer to address Faeraud. “I am here to administer the proper vows, and assure that the next Prince Lord accepts and renders that oath. ... And that he renounce any foolish ideas, like the notion that anyone would be crowned a king before the return of the one true King.”

Poseidontel stepped up to Zualpha with boldness, “I am the only king here. I am King Poseidontel — king of this world and all its domain — from the moon in the East to the sun in the West.”

“Perhaps the prince is just a little confused,” Telopps suggested, stepping in, but Faeraud pushed him back with a powerful arm.

“There is no mistake here, I am king. Bow and yield to your new majesty now, or be punished,” Poseidontel commanded.

“Renounce your claims immediately — or face imminent binding of your monarchy and followers,” Zualpha decreed with his authoritative voice.

“Everything in this world is mine,” Poseidontel voiced with conviction, his arm gesturing forth. “I was once a prince of this world, but now I am king. The Asterians are all traitors and all of you are under a *Courtship Demanding*.”

“Your foolishness has wrought your own demise,” Zualpha snapped with a sadness that bowed his head.

He began to hum. People looked around in wonderment at this unusual ritual. Then he spoke in a chant, to the ground:

*“Taekweoutmont lecumo ipurtho,
Ahvend khertyun ahuno.
Kedo tem kego,
Tez slohourzo ez nuno.”*

He repeated it over while the other Asterians joined in chanting the psalm which meant:

*Trees come forth, bind this one.
Tie him tight, his reign is done.*

There were two enormous oak trees, one on each side of where the Irminsul Pyramid once stood. At first, it looked like the wind was picking up, as their leaves began to shake. Next, the ground moved a little and when they saw what really happened, they were startled. The roots of the trees moved to the rhyme of the Asterian voices. They slithered through the ground and then began to grow.

First one root broke the surface of the earth and then others followed. They were all moving at a rather quick pace, crawling toward Poseidontel. Before he could respond, the roots and branches encircled him. They wrapped themselves around him, holding him, so that he could not move.

“You are bound by your own doing and shall remain a prisoner until the real King — King Yaswhen and Prince Lord Antioch, return,” Zualpha proclaimed. The other Asterians all cheered as Zualpha walked back toward them. “We will call the Etruscans together this day and begin to rebuild the *Spiral Legislature*.”

Poseidontel, struggling as the tree roots and branches held him tight, cried out in a different tone of rebellion, “You are the foolish one *Zoo-zoo!*”

Zualpha stopped and cautiously turned back. He had never been called *Zoo-zoo* — except by one other, and that was long ago. He walked back over to the *entreed* Faeraud and asked, “Pardon, what did you say?”

“There will be no pardons for you!” Poseidontel screamed out. I have been given full authority by ALL the Etruscans.”

Zualpha proceeded anyway, “Ambassador Telopps, will you arrange for the Etruscans to return here immediately? Execute the *Emergency Rebuild Plan.*”

The ambassador pleaded, “I am afraid I can no longer be of service to the lies that your cult has produced for so long. I have given allegiance to our new king, whom I beg you to release before certain calamity befalls even you, Zualpha.”

“Your deluded loyalty will not be recognized by the high *Asterian Council*,” Zualpha angrily snapped in a reprimanding tone.

“There is no more *Asterian Council*. I destroyed it, just like it was I, who destroyed your moon!” the king announced. As Poseidontel revealed his deed, he shouted back another poem, and at the same time, broke free from the two Oaks that were holding him:

*“Weng ahum u’d unot staymyco,
Go stozeun fuw ipro!”*

Then he held out the palms of his hands. Seemingly from his arms, fire flowed from the right hand, to one tree, and from the left, to the other oak. Sparks and flames flew igniting the roots and their trunks. Within seconds the two trees were consumed by fire. Then he turned his hands toward the Asterian army.

“I am King Poseidontel. Capture the Asterians and bind them with their own oak trees. Your time has ended *Zoo-zoo.*”

“Sayer!” Zualpha cried out. He recognized immediately that the evil Asterian, *Sayer and Teller*, had possessed Faeraud, and the two of them were sharing his body.

Then Poseidontel chimed back the same *enchanted poem* that Zualpha had used on him:

*“Taekweoutmont lecumo ipurtho,
Ahvend khertyun ahuno.
Kedo tem kego,
Tez slohourzo ez nuno.”*

This time new trees sprung up out of the ground. They were scary-black creations covered with mold and spotted spores. None of them had leaves, instead, they appeared like a burnt forest. They moved their branches around Zualpha. Just as he was about to quote another prose, a branch swung around and plugged his mouth, preventing him from any utterance. He could barely breathe as the thing choked him.

Poseidontel walked up to the restrained Asterian and stared into his eyes. During a the long stare-down, Sayer’s spirit tried to leave Faeraud’s body and attempted to possess his captive. Sayer knew that if he could possess Zualpha, the two of them combined would be more powerful than anyone who had ever lived on the Earth.

“Think of the power we would have if we joined forces. Together, we could rule the universe,” Sayer convincingly argued with a hypnotic raspy voice, causing Faeraud’s eyes to vibrate leftward, while trying to transfer from Faeraud’s body to the Asterian’s.

Zualpha resisted and Sayer was unable to get his wish.

During this time Faeraud felt betrayed. He believed it was obvious that Sayer would rather possess an Asterian than a mere human like himself. At first he wanted to scream out and tell everyone that he was being possessed. He wanted his freedom back, he wanted his own body returned, and he wanted it badly. But more than that, he wanted the riches and power that were given to him. He knew that without Sayer, he would lose everything. This increased his insecurity and caused him to fear that his rule might

diminish if Sayer were to abandon him. Because of this perceived threat, he decided that every Asterian alive must be eliminated, or else, someday Sayer might leave him — and then what would he do?

Poseidontel announced, “As king, I condemn to death and declare that not a gene of their being is to be saved. All Asterians must die.”

More black trees sprung up and they moved toward the other Asterians. Taken by surprise, they retreated back into the tunnels. A few were caught and Evaemon managed to help Aedon out of the area and into a safe corner. They watched in horror as Korsheipa was taken captive. Poseidontel caught sight of the two of them hiding behind a rock. The Sayer within himself knew they had helped with the attack and wanted to condemn them to death, but the Faeraud within, longed for love from a friend and overruled, granting protection for his comrade. He desperately needed an ally in his moment of insecurity.

He called out, “Aedon, come here. I will need you to translate for me.”

“Translate? Me?” Aedon coughed, climbing out from behind the rock and approaching with shaking legs.

“Yes, you know the Asterian language and I need you to tell me what they might be plotting,” Poseidontel said, bolstering his confidence while taking Aedon aside where they could talk in private. “*Smart-owl*, I always knew I could depend on you. You were there for me when I needed to present the fruit-of-life to *Lemmy*. Then, I was there for you, when you needed the genetikos-replica to come out in your favor. When you needed friends, I brought you to parties and masquerades. I know I can trust you because we locked fingers in an oath when we were younger and you reaffirmed your vow at the Middag. Soon, I will have a special mission that only you can accomplish.”

Making his way back to the others, Poseidontel announced, “We will give these Asterians a trial — in their own familiar place of the North, where they actually still have sympathizers — in

RETURN OF THE ASTERIANS

Ablach! ... If a jury there convicts them, how would anyone ever say the verdict should be different?"

The captured Asterians, and their holding trees, were loaded onto a convoy of mammoths which carried them away.

PAPYRUS THREE

RATH NA RIOGH

Half of the city of Ablach resided in the province of Evaemon and the other half in Ampheres. The villagers not only wondered *why* their town had been chosen to hold the trial, but also objected. Most of them knew that the Asterians had been hiding there and they were fearful that nothing good could come out of Poseidontel's visit. A parade of mammoths plopped the trees down next to the mouth of the well called *Rath Na Riogh*. A red horse delivered the king.

Things became stranger when he announced, "The trial will take place out here in the center of the village square — next to this fortress."

Slowly people gathered around, some of them hiding behind their fur coats which they clutched tightly. Shy animals peered from around corners of buildings watching the derision of a trial begin.

"Quickly, now, I will select a jury of ten people who will decide your fates," Poseidontel said, plucking random people from

the crowd and setting them up on nearby barrels which were used for a makeshift jury-box.

A short, middle-aged man with a buckskin cap squarely wrapped around his head emerged, waddled up to Poseidontel, so close that he almost stepped on his toes. He coldly told him, "Take your spectacle elsewhere. You are going to find that people here are friends of the Asterians, believers in King Yaswhen's return, and think that — the banished Prince Lord Gilgamoeh should be ruling in your place."

"Hum! Then, you shall be my lead juror — just 'cause you're not impartial — doesn't mean that I'm not," Poseidontel boasted, guiding the short man into the juror area before spotting where Evaemon, Ampheres and Aedon stood. "And you three, join him."

They strolled over to the other jurors' crates, where Aedon begged a fur coat off of one of the spectators.

"I am your King — and judge over this trial. You, Asterians, have been charged with trespassing, destruction of sacred property, attempted murder, and most grievously — insubordination to your king. ... I am listening. What pathetic excuse do you have?"

There was silence as the tree branches wrapped around each Asterian, prevented them from moving or talking.

"Nothing to say? Sounds guilty already. What shall we do with these — these last Asterians on Earth who disrupt our society? Oh, I almost forgot, we need a verdict first. Does this jury find the defendants innocent — or guilty?" Poseidontel asked, leaning forward, his face so near the short man that he could feel him breathe. He backed up a little, asking, "Well?"

The juror nervously shook from the situation's coldness as he pulled on the sides of his tight cap. He had always believed in the *Scrolls* and what the Asterians had taught from them. It didn't matter what anyone else wanted, there was no way he was going to be the first to condemn the last of their kind — the last hope that any *believer* might still have.

He softly replied, “This is a circus not a trial. No evidence has been presented. I’d have to elect — *Innocent.*”

“Innocent?” Poseidontel yelled in a rage.

He turned away from the jury, raised his arm high and then brought it down with all his might. A blast of wind seemed to flush out from his gesture, blowing down the village’s main street, where it turned from wind into fire. Swiftly, the buildings burst into flames and their insides, fanned by the wind, quickly burned out, leaving only a smoldering shell. A mob of residents ran from the trial screaming back to their shops and homes that were now ablaze. Poseidontel turned back to the juror, who was slinking down low behind the crate.

Shaking his head, he condescendingly said, “Not a very wise answer.”

Next, he moved to another juror, a practical female reporter, and asked her verdict. She had covered many news stories in the village for centuries and nothing remotely like this ridiculousness had ever passed through her town. Cautiously and slowly she opened her mouth. She was about to say guilty, but she wasn’t sure if that was the right answer either. She stopped, then said, “I desist”

“Desist? Desist!” Poseidontel fumed angrily. Then he pointed to a second floor window where hundreds of parrots sat looking out and muttering between themselves. “You’re a reporter aren’t you? And that is your *birdery* up there?”

She nodded.

“You feed half-truths to those birds and then send the news out everyday — don’t you?”

She shook her head up and down and sideways. She could tell she was in trouble simply by the tone of the inquisitor.

“If someone is not aligned to a view,” he explained, “Or only half on a side, then she is not on my team. With Mr. Buckskin cap, here, everyone knew he was against my position. But, with you — you are one who is even worse. You flip-flop changing

what you support all the time until not even you, yourself, don't know which club you belong to. You are a liar and deceiver."

Aedon reflected on his words, knowing that such accusations might apply to him as well. Again, Poseidontel raised his arm up high and brought it down. This time, two gusts-of-wind blew down another road, spreading fire from the center square and consuming shops, carts, and even the lampposts. At the street's end, Mammoth Inn stood firm, resisting the flames for a moment, then the building combusted in a blaze that sent guests jumping out of its windows. The remaining villagers not at the trial, saddled up on horses and unicorns and fled for refuge in the abandoned factories in the mountains.

Poseidontel turned to the next juror.

"Guilty."

"Guilty."

"Guilty," each of them quickly echoed.

Aedon was still undecided, feeling just like the reporter, he wasn't sure where he belonged because he had flipped sides so many times. Then he reasoned: Faeraud was his friend, it was obvious that the Asterians were full of fables, they had created an environment that brought about their own demise, he thought.

The gathering of eyes turned toward him. A jumbled mess of emotions oscillated in his head. He enjoyed Faeraud's friendship, he loved being with Areshia, and he longed to live with his father. Each person was pulling him in a different direction. If he was unable to decide whose group to play with, it wasn't because he was intentionally flip-flopping; it was due to their manipulations. Instead of coming to a verdict, all he could do was sit there and ponder these things. Why was everyone he loved, warring against each other? He longed for the environment, a few sun-cycles ago, when they all attended the *educatory* and got along.

Then Poseidontel stepped closer, noticing Aedon's silence, "Silly me. I did say this was going to be an impartial jury. What are you doing here, Aedon? ... Everyone knows you would never vote

against me. ... Quickly now, you over there — replace my friend on this jury.”

Aedon was spared the task of making a choice — at least for now. The court wound up its proceedings and Poseidontel stepped up on the edge of the well.

“Some may wonder why we travelled to this despicable place for such an important trial — so, I will explain. The Asterians have spent the past few decades building a network of underground tunnels. They already knew that *illumination day* was coming for them — yesterday was that day. Today we are here to complete Nature’s selection for those who think they are exempt. We traced their tunnels, from the old Irminsul Pyramid to right here in Ablach. The entrance to this underground maze is — guess where? ... M-hum, right under your feet, in the center of your puny charred village — but you all — already knew that. Didn’t you? ... Keep Zualpha and two others. I want one-hundred percent confirmation that every drop of this creatures DNA has been destroyed . Throw the rest of them into the mouth of their fortress,” Poseidontel ordered, while motioning Andromache and a column of Warriors to come forth.

There were screams and a fury of activity as each mammoth backed up to the well and stood on his hind legs, dumping its Asterians hostage into the pit.

“Your misplaced loyalties have earned your town another prize — the gift of a special angel — the *Angel of Destruction!*”

Four warriors stepped up with a human-sized sculpture — it was a piece of art shaped like an angel. One of the warriors opened up the back of the figure and inserted a shinny cylinder object about the size of a child. Aedon had seen a piece of art like this before. Four of them, one each, had been loaded on *Valixes* which had set course for the Asterian Moon, shortly before its destruction. Poseidontel took out an instruction card, just like the one Aedon had helped him create. He inserted it into the cylinder. Aedon knew that this was not a sculpture but rather a thunderbolt in disguise.

Andromache directed them, “Drop the death-cloud into *Rath Na Riogh!*”

“We will see this fortress no more. This angel grievingly delivers punishment to those who resist me, the new king,” Poseidontel announced, presiding over the dropping of the bomb. “I would hate to hear about any secret-plots or random-rebellions calling themselves *Amphictyonies* or something similar. Such traitors would meet a similar demise.”

Illumination-bulbs nearby dimmed, not out of respect, but in fear of the new leader. Terror bled across the faces of those who remained.

“I hereby, now sentence these Asterians to death,” Poseidontel declared, lifting his arm up once more. As he brought his arm down again, people scurried thinking that another fireball was about to blow their way, but this time, the arm movement was just an unconscious gesture without consequence.

The *Angel of Destruction* was dropped into the well. A few moments later an explosion was heard. Firelight reflecting from the hole was echoed by the rumbling of the ground. The earth trembled so violently that most of the surrounding building, which hadn’t already been charred, fell to the ground. A pillar of fire rose from the well which sent everyone scattering for refuge. It was obvious the thunderbolt had returned and that King Poseidontel was its commander.

“Transport the other condemned prisoners to the crib,” Poseidontel commanded.

“The crib?” Andromache confirmed with a strain of shock, “Are you sure?”

“The arrangements have been made, already. Not a single cell of *Zoo-zoo* will remain alive — not even his spirit will survive.”

“Will the trees be able to hold them for the long journey over the high mountains?” the Senior Warrior questioned.

“I think it’ll be a rather quick one,” Poseidontel said, as he took hold of Andromache’s chin and focused her attention upward. “Look up there.”

A half-grin nerved across her face when she saw dozens of wooden balloons floating toward them. The king ran alongside one that was descending to a rest.

“Thought we ought to do something useful with the vehicles we captured,” he said, jumping aboard the balloon which had once been Auseten’s warship.

“Where is this place called Crib?” Aedon asked.

“I’ve never heard of it either,” Evaemon groveled, then turned to Poseidontel and asked, “What’s there?”

“Years ago, when you, and other Etruscans voted down my request to build this *genetikos experimental crib*, I proceeded anyway — outside the borders of Atlantis. The place is called *Speciation Crib*; it is located in the western ocean.”

Poseidontel had set up the special operation when he was known as Prince Faeraud. The kinds of experiments and creatures that he was producing would’ve been illegal in Atlantis, and Aszea too, but out in the middle of the ocean there are no laws. He could get away with just about anything there. The idea came to him after discovering Nile Island and how it was hidden away from the reach of the rules. He created yet another secret organization made up of alchemists, engineers, warriors and mermen, paid with gold pilfered from the Iron Isolation. These servants built several underwater towers and then capped them off with islands on top. Known as *The Crib*, they contained repulsive experiments which were conducted on animals, humans, and now Asterians.

“Aedon, come with me,” Faeraud ordered, leading him to the back of the balloon.

Aedon climbed in and made his way to the back, hoping to be forgotten about. The balloons were closed up, they launched into the clouds, and headed to the crib.

PAPYRUS FOUR

SPECIATION CRIB

A Channel of Warriors accompanied the entourage on flying horses, gliding near the icy ground. Later, it turned to grassy plains. Then high mountains swept beneath them as they trekked over their dangerous peaks.

“Down — Lower!” the king shouted from his balloon, when he saw they were beyond the last mountain top and ocean waters paved the way below.

Steadily they advanced over hundreds of stadia of water. The area was covered by a thick brown fog that seemed to randomly come and go as it played peek-a-boo with the travelers. A distant chunk of mangled debris, larger than a building approached. At first, it was hard to decipher. But soon they passed it by.

Another pile, twice the size as the last, rapidly came and went.

Then one, the size of a city block, came nearer before swiftly disappearing behind them giving just enough time to see that it was a mangled floating-city with a couple small fires still burning. These were all places created by mishaps from experiments that did not go well.

Poseidontel turned the *crystal-capacitor's* power down as they slowly approached an iron building with smokestacks a hundred times larger than those of the Iron Isolation. Thirteen-hundred chimneys spread out like a small city. Brownish haze poured-out of their flutes, thickly clinging like a pup to its mother.

As the balloons maneuvered into a landing area inside the building, Poseidontel confided to Aedon, "Some of the things you may get a glimpse at here, may seem — perhaps a bit — unusual. These are the highest military secrets and experiments. Because I know you well, indeed, I am certain of your devotion to the royal family — our family — your family ... and that you will keep what you experience here a secret.

"Can I depend on you to think quickly and interpret our language into Asterian, and conversely? ... You are my *Smart-one* who watches like a hawk, talks like a parrot, steps like a unicorn, and will be my interpreter."

Between the last set of doors was an adjacent room separated from them by a thick glass pane. Inside the cased-in room was a thin-boney man with burns all over his body. Every few seconds, a needle protruding from a mechanical arm would come down from the ceiling and chase the man around the cage until it poked him. Once it caught him, it zapped out a blue-sparking, current-of-electricity that was matched with a howling scream.

"How gruesome ..." Aedon began, he was cut off.

"That is your reward if you disobey the rules in this place," a familiar, raspy-female voice said.

With chattering teeth, Aedon hesitated to ask, "What — what did he do?"

Andromache eagerly butted in, stretching her neck so that she was in his face, “He stole. He bit into the remainder of that grape that you —”

She quickly corrected herself, “Ah-hem, I mean, that King Poseidontel obtained — to save Lemech’s life. ... You do remember?”

“The grape?” Aedon exclaimed, recalling his adventure.

He had conquered many dangers to obtain the fruit which healed Lemech. But Faeraud took credit for finding it. After giving only a drop of its juice to the Prince Lord, it mysteriously vanished.

“The fool tasted one drop of it,” Andromache added. “Now he will live for ten-hundred sun-cycles — and we will keep reminding him, every minute of his life that he stole those years. It was my idea to put him here, at the entrance, to prompt visitors, like you, not to mess with me. ... You see, he can’t die for hundreds of years now, and he can’t be made better, because there is no more special grape-juice to give him.”

“Why not?” Aedon asked.

Poseidontel had just entered the area, and he stepped up to answer, “Because, I drank it all — by accident, of course. I didn’t realize it was THAT grape-juice when I drank it. ... All good, though — now I will live for a hundred-hundred sun-cycles. In a few centuries you will age, and — well, I will still have my youth. ... Thank you, Aedon. You are a wonderful *Bearer of Fruit*. Perhaps I put up with some of your wavering loyalty — because I kind of feel like I owe you. Really, all I want is for us to be friends and buddies like we used to be.”

Aedon wanted this too. He was still fascinated and excited by the prince who had so quickly become king.

Deep inside the fortress they met up with the captured Asterians. At first, Aedon thought he was in an atrium as he saw a round platform with water flowing into it. There were trees all around. Then he realized that those trees were the ones that held the Asterian prisoners.

The flowing water disappeared revealing a deep pit with edges made from shinny metal. The king walked around the perimeter examining it with pleasure. A silver bucket swayed above the platform, so big, that it dwarfed the visiting trees. It's spout smiled in the glinting light as if it were evilly grinning at them. Beneath the bucket, the hole grew so deep that you could not see its bottom.

"This is the first time that we will actually use the process on a living being," Poseidontel said with satisfaction, holding up a crystallized-frog that he had once been given when the process was first taught at the *educatory*.

"What is your name?" Andromache snapped, asking one of the tied up females.

"Korsheipa," the Asterian replied.

Aedon turned with a gasp of surprise as she answered. She struggled with the branches that bound her. Aedon wanted to shout out and save her, but he knew if he said anything, his fate could end up the same as hers.

Andromache wrangled her out of the branches to the edge of the pit, "I want to see if you'll turn out to be a pretty ornament or not. Into the dipping-silo and add a tenth of the bucket."

Andromache pushed her over the edge and the girl screamed as she tumbled in. The bucket was tilted partway as hot-bubbling silver poured in after her. Electrical currents that resembled lightning filled the deep cylinder and then there was silence.

"Pull out the decoration!" Poseidontel ordered.

An object with prongs at the end of a rope, which looked like an arcade game, exchanged position with the bucket and lowered into the pit. The operator swung it around and made several attempts at grabbing things, but nothing came up. Finally, the claw retracted, empty.

"Where did it go?" the king asked.

"What did you do, you voodoo curser," Andromache yelled, turning toward Zualpha who was still bound in tree branches.

Zualpha may or may not have had something to do with it, but somehow Korsheipa could not be plucked from the pit.

“Bye, bye. Apa’hei,” Korsheipa’s high-pitched voice exclaimed.

Leaping out of the pit, she caught their attention and they all gasped. She appeared to be silver, like a living crystal. Her body was still human-like but also translucent at the same time. Able to handle material things she picked up the claw and threw it toward the operator. Then like a ghost she flew around the room and through various objects and even gave Andromache a scare when she passed through her body. Finally, she flew up, blasting through the windows near the ceiling. Glass rained down as she smashed through, flying to freedom.

Poseidontel was furious, “I do not wish to merely transform these Asterians, or turn them into other forms — I want to make sure their spirits are pulverized. Bring me five more buckets and turn up the power to full force.”

“Are you aware of the number of talents five buckets cost?” Andromache whispered.

Poseidontel ignored her, walking over to Aedon and asking, “Give me the words that will make this tree hold him captive until he splatters in the bottom of the pit.”

Aedon shook with confusion and hoped that he was doing the right thing. All he could think about was how Faeraud had so suddenly changed his demeanor and turned into a raging tyrant. But he had seen this happen before — with Ausethen. Power changes people. Reluctantly, he searched his brain and found the proper poem:

*Tweoutmont kuelue khertyun guleo opuco,
Tem ahvend hetz ahvutum hetyuno,
Tem tulued khorupyun evethen soluxo.”*

It’s a good thing that Aedon gave him the correct words, because Sayer who was inside of Faeraud, already knew what those

words were. They were testing his loyalty. Poseidontel marched over to the tree that held Zualpha and repeated the words, ordering:

*“Tweoutmont kuelue khertyun guleo opuco,
Tem ahvend hetz ahvutum hetyono,
Tem tulued khorupyun evethen soluxo.”*

The tree moved over to the pit, then released from its trunk, the branch that was embedded in Zualpha’s mouth and the others that wrapped around his body. Next, it pushed him into the pit.

“Now!” Poseidontel ordered, stepping back down to safety.

The silver bucket poured in the remainder of the hot liquid-crystal. It moved out of the way and the next bucket swung into place and delivered its payload of liquid. More buckets followed, each emptying its contents in. Steam rolled out of the pit. A deep scream shook the place, lightning shot up out of the pit, then ice, and then fire. The boisterous echoes of the voice succumbed to the quieter electrical shocks charged from the pit itself.

Then all was quiet.

The mechanical claw lowered. Deep into the pit its chain sank. Within minutes the iron hand grabbed something. Quickly the operator wheeled it back in. Each person in the room watched with anticipation as each link ascended. The claw at the end rose up, clutching a shinny object.

Poseidontel took the object and held it to his bosom, “The prize. Now, I am truly king, king of this world. It is certainly all mine!”

Turning around Poseidontel proclaimed, “Let this be an example to anyone who thinks that the Asterians have power. They are liars and they have all fallen.”

Poseidontel held the object high. It was a clear-crystal skull. Zualpha had been completely destroyed, all that remained was his crystallized cranium.

“What should we do with this remnant?” Andromache asked, extending her arm to take the skull from the king.

“It could make a nice ornament, somewhere — perhaps in my bathing chambers,” the king replied, jerking it back from her grip before sending them away. “Go now! You are all released.”

Poseidontel tugged on the waist of Aedon’s toga signaling him to stay. He waited until most of the warriors had cleared the room. “Scary ... how deep that pit is.”

“What is going on here? Certainly this cannot be the fate for all Asterians?” Aedon questioned, as he stepped further away from the pit. “Why are we destroying them instead of helping? Their moon’s been demolished; they have nowhere else to go?”

“They would have killed us all, wiped out our race,” Poseidontel explained, setting the skull down. “You saw how they arrived — in combat mode, ready to conquer. Somehow they already knew that their moon was doomed for destruction. That is why they were transporting hundreds of their species to our planet every hour. Then, they tried to create the illusion that an *Uprooter* was taking hold, playing on the fears of men, whom they planned to devour. It was their plan to wipe out our species for their own survival. The *Spiral Legislature* didn’t just coincidentally split — the Asterians — they did this on purpose. Their plan was to divide us into two sides, to cause war, to cause us to kill each other. Then they would repopulate the Earth with their own race, leaving us as slaves or possibly even worse — extinct.”

“So we are killing them instead?” Aedon questioned, recognizing the extensive account was an exaggerated tale.

“Indeed you have witnessed the powers they used to have. I don’t believe you’re that naive. Their leaders are spiritual initiates able to manipulate the forces of nature through *magic poems*,” Poseidontel explained. “Would you not agree that we must develop our own mystical connections with the universe?”

For decades the people of Atlantis slowly evolved their clairvoyant powers. The human search for community clashed

with their experiences of individuality. Out of the former grew an emphasis on material possessions which dragged down the spiritual needs of men. Materialism begins with selfishness and Poseidontel knew that by sacrificing the Asterians, and other symbols of spirituality, his desire for material wealth and power would grow. But he was forgetting lessons taught at the *educatory* during his youth, about keeping things in balance.

“This skull possesses the Asterian’s spirit,” Poseidontel said, holding it up and rotating it around. “By meditating in solitude with it, we can extract its powers and radiate the same understanding it once had — except use this mysticism for better things. ... To create a unified world where we all can get along instead of following those beliefs based in error.”

Andromache stepped closer, “Magnificent! I just wonder if we have the required amount of *material* it takes, to turn the others?”

“Only the ones that possess extreme powers need to be crystallized, the others might be useful in other matters — keep them alive but locked up,” Poseidontel ordered, before turning back to Aedon. “You’ve been distant, lately ... I sense. ... Perhaps I was hastily caught up in the moment and was a wee too harsh when your mother was ... crushed.”

“Way too insensitive,” was what Aedon was thinking, but he didn’t say it.

“I need you, my *Smart Owl*. You are one of a select few I can trust ... to be my friend ... to be a REAL friend,” Faeraud said, overly sincere. “Indeed, we can speak further once we’ve returned home — to the Irem.”

Andromache listened with contempt. Still jealous of the closeness Aedon had with Faeraud, she often wondered *how close* they really were. Even though she knew her caste of a warrior prohibited any involvement with a royal, she longed to have the same close relations with Faeraud that Aedon had — and more. But she would remain silent and serve her duty out of loyalty, as it afforded her contact with the king on a daily basis.

With his prized crystal-skull, Poseidontel departed. Andromache jerked her head up with a huff and followed. Aedon held his head in his hands while a lump of frustration built in his throat. He had little regard for anyone's warnings about a *War of Enchantments* being on the horizon; because, a war between the *tangible* and the *unseen* was battling within himself. His position as a prince and his only friend Faeraud were in odds with the teachings of King Yaswhen and the Asterians, which were embedded in his soul since his days at the *educatory*. Then he remembered the rendezvous point where Areshia had gone. But, before he could plan to go there, a warrior stepped into the room and led him into one of the balloons which whisked him back to the Irem.

PAPYRUS FIVE

REVEALING BATH

Aedon stepped into the bathing garden where a gentle warm breeze tossed his curly hair. A long-rectangular reflecting pond led to the other end of the area. Pillars topped with arches lined both sides of the dark water which was dimly lit by the stars above. Far beyond, was another smaller square-pool where water bubbled. The steam made it difficult to see who was there. But once he heard the voice, he knew it was the man whom had summoned him.

“Aedon, is that you down there?” Faeraud asked. “Come over here — closer.”

Aedon slowly walked along the reflecting pond wondering what the king was up to this time. The crystal skull of Zualpha was sitting on a pedestal next to the bath and it brought back all the horrific memories of the previous week.

“The water is warm; won’t you come in,” asked Faeraud.

Aedon hesitated before dropping his toga and stepping into the water.

“It feels good. Indeed, it feels right, to have my *Smart-owl* back here — where you belong,” he continued. “I am going to make sure you are taken care of. Maybe even give you that position you’ve always wanted. Wasn’t it Ambassador ... isn’t that what you said, long ago, that you wanted to be?”

“Yes ... yes it was,” Aedon acknowledged, splashing the warm water over his shoulders where some of it hit the *globeaky* he wore around his neck.

Faeraud noticed the trinket, which he thought had been surrendered at the Masquerade on Nile Island, was back in Aedon’s possession. Voices began to argue in his head. The *Sayer* within accusing him of trusting an Asterian sympathizer. With a grunt and growl his personalities came to a consensus that they would have to delicately release Aedon of this connection once again.

“Shouldn’t you remove your necklace? ... I’d hate for it to get ruined by the elements in this bath,” Faeraud suggested, reaching to help him take it off.

“No need to. It’s quite waterproof I assure you.”

“Would you not take it off to please your king?”

Aedon stuttered, “Certainly I would, had I not already promised not to remove it.”

“Another promise? Tell me that you have not made a *finger-locking promise* with someone else,” Faeraud softly asked, before turning on an air of hurt anger, “What about our pact that binds us together — you and me?”

“I’ve stopped making promises, though I intend to keep all that I’ve previously made,” he quickly answered, remembering the oath he had made six years earlier when they had agreed to uphold their pledge to the death.

“I know your amulet is special. ... Do you know of the crystal prism ... called the *Tuaoi Stone*? It transmits images, including projections of some who wear special necklaces like

yours. ... The being who gave you this, is not the only person who can use it to spy on you.”

Aedon grasped the *globeaky* with his palm. He realized how Faeraud may have been able to find where the Asterians were hiding. He guessed that he had probably been watched for the past few months and that his amulet may have been transmitting images to the *Tuaoi Stone* which was now in Faeraud’s possession.

“Certainly I did not know,” Aedon begged. “What can I possibly do that would allow me not to break my promises.”

“*Smart owl*, thank you for asking. When something troubles you, I am always here to help you. You should trust me fully ... just like I trust you. ... What we will do, is place a cover over it. This way you can still wear it, yet no one will be able to spy on you.”

Faeraud already had such a cover made up. He sat up on the edge of the bath and reached over to the pedestal, next to where the crystal-skull sat, and pulled out a small black globe. It was split into two hemispheres with a tiny hinge holding them together. Within seconds he snapped the piece over the *globeaky*, wrapping it up. Its material was rough with sharp edges that scratched against Aedon’s chest. At first he didn’t like it and even felt a little ashamed. But as the evening progressed he got used to its feel. The jacket seemed to fit in, perfectly matching the black waters in the pond next to them.

Faeraud sunk back into the bath exhaling a sigh of relief. While he hoped that Aedon was back on his side again, he wasn’t sure. He didn’t trust him; he didn’t trust anyone. So, he came up with a test. He would ask Aedon to do something that would truly test his loyalty.

“I am going to appoint you to a position which you have long desired and extensively waited for. As of this night, you are my new Ambassador to Gianni,” he announced.

“Really? Me, the ambassador ... to Gianni? Why that’s the largest territory in all of Sahada. With honor I accept, asking only, why have you chosen me?”

“Indeed. ... The previous ambassador has not lived up to my expectations.”

“Expectations — which include —”

“You know, you’ve always known ... an ambassador is really — a spy.”

Aedon gulped. He had never thought of such a thing before, but upon Faeraud mentioning it, it seemed to make sense.

“On your mission,” Faeraud explained, “You should become reacquainted with Master Instructioneer Yenocha — at the *educatory*. Once you gain his trust, I need you to search the Library Tower for information — like the two of us used to do together.”

“Why do you ask me to betray a trust with an old master of mine?” he asked, insulted.

“You never had a bond of trust with that old fool. Remember how he tried to take away your *Registration of Youth* on our last day at the *educatory*. ... He took mine away.”

“I suppose you speak the truth.”

“There is a critical energy-shortage across our land as the mines dry up. Even so, there is some positive news. We’ve learned that the old Irminsul Pyramid was powered by golden-orbs made from pure *orichalcum* — not the kind you mine; but, a material produced in a hidden land by the fabled Nawat. I want you to search the secret documents in the library. There must be information on how they make those things.”

Aedon accepted the mission and right before he left, Faeraud told how time and supply was short, that he must return by the second full moon from that day or else other drastic measures would be taken. Aedon was displeased by the way Faeraud seemed to control him. Before going to Sahada, he told Faeraud that he would need a couple of days to get things in order. Aedon departed while excitement and frustration pierced the nodes in the back of his neck.

“I need a Tellak,” Faeraud ordered, raising his voice again.

A young boy in a grass-like skirt brought in a small aquarium from which sponges jumped out and began foliating the king's back. They sang their usual soothing song. Kneeling by the pool the Tellak began to massage the king's shoulders. Then, hardly without a beat, the servant was gone, replaced by Andromache. She picked up one of the sponges and squeezed the life out of it as she started to wash the king. The other sponges retreated in fright, scurrying across the floor. Poseidontel turned around, surprised to see her there.

"Why do you demote yourself to the band of a Tellak?" he asked.

"You have been unavailable for days — since the cribbing, honorable one. I thought that — your bath might be a good time for us to get together," Andromache suggested, with a tone that might have made one think that she wished to bathe along with him.

"I have been avoiding you."

"A — avoiding?" she stammered, standing up and tossing the sponge aside. It decompressed back to life and hopped off with a limp.

Faeraud snapped his fingers twice. Two mermaids popped up from the water, carrying a white silk which they wrapped around him as he stepped out of the water.

"Then you already know what I have come for?"

"I'm not in the mood for any battles this week. Even a king needs a rest when the moon is waxing. What have you really come for?"

"I cautioned you about his dealings and treachery," Andromache warned, pacing in front of the king with a rhythmic stepping that sounded more like a march. "Your princely nephew, Aedon, he plans to meet up with the dissidents again."

"Can a king not even take a relaxing bath in the security of his own palace without intrusion?"

"But he continues to aide enemies in a rally against you," she went on.

“Aedon? You bring accusations against him every time I grow a new hair. I told you, the two of us have a *finger-locking promise*.”

“Then unlock your fingers with this,” she suggested, throwing a scroll of papyrus onto the floor. It was a map with a route plan.

“I see,” Faeraud remarked with concern, “He’s decided to travel to Bashan instead of back to Sahada. No doubt he’s using the talents I gave him to travel to the library ... to instead, continue his absurd search for *Gilggy*.”

Faeraud turned away in a huff, toward the rocks near the waterfall. He threw a fit, arguing with himself, or perhaps himself arguing with the *Sayer* within. The argument went like this:

“I told you, if he lived beyond the moon, it could be detrimental to us. Why is he still alive?” Sayer demanded, his eyes vibrating leftward.

Straining his eyes to the right, Faeraud argued, back “He’s my loyal friend, perhaps the only one I have. He would never betray me, king of Atlantis.”

“You told him to go to Gianni ... instead he travels to Bashan. What loyal friend would disobey orders — especially the king’s?”

Then Faeraud came back to Andromache, explaining his behavior, “I don’t really have a split personality. I just like to debate both sides of the situation, so I can make a better decision.”

She stood at attention, shocked, but not wanting to let on, “Your confidence in me is assured.”

“Excellent. Now what could little Aedon be up to? Why don’t you send a quarter Channel of Warriors to follow his path. If Aedon doesn’t show himself in Sahada in seven days, then you are free to fetch me the information he was supposed to gleam.”

“Wouldn’t it be easier to invade Nawat and take the fuel sources that already exist?” she asked.

“We don’t know about the lifespan thing. It has been said that the energy that radiates from their villages is what allows men

to live for a thousand years. — Not that I care if a few sun-cycles are lopped off some of these pathetic creatures' existence," Poseidontel snapped. "If Aedon does not return with the information by the second moon or you discover it does not exist — then I will have no choice but to send the warriors in and obtain the *orichalcum* we desperately need."

"Well thought out my king," she agreed. "What if Aedon shows up and I discover that he is up to treason?"

"All traitors are to be eliminated," Poseidontel snapped, believing that Aedon would never betray him.

"As you command, high-one," she gleefully agreed, already making up her mind that Aedon was a traitor.

A few minutes after she departed, the waterfall stopped. The bubbling spring in the pool became quiet. The bathing area was so still that the steam could not even see itself move. A single ripple raced across the pool leading Faeraud's eyes to a space between two pillars at the far end of the courtyard.

Then a light began to fade in from behind one of the pillars. It grew in brightness. He pulled his toga around himself stepping back away. Slowly from behind the column a figure walked out. She was glowing in countenance as she stepped forward. He gasped, immediately recognizing that it was Ahteana.

Faeraud hopped over to a large triangular alert-rod used to summons his protective warriors by banging it on a drum. Just as he picked it up, the rod sparked, turned to ice, cracked and then crumbled to the floor. He turned back around to face her.

"Why have you come here? It is illegal for an Asterian to walk on these stones. But, I ... I will grant you a momentary audience," he piously announced, sitting down on a nearby bench.

Her voice started out faint and then it increased in volume, "Many Asterians have been killed. Unless you come to your senses you may destroy the entire planet."

"Nonsense, only the *Uprooter* could destroy the whole Earth."

“This is why I am here to visit you,” she said, gesturing her arms wrapped in a gown which radiated a white glow. “You and me — we may not have always seen things in the same light; however, you were born of royal blood. Goodness was embedded into your great-grandfather, Prince Lord Antioch, so that all his off-spring would seek to do good and not evil.”

“Prince Lord Antioch does not rule anymore, nor do his ancient ways — which modern discovery has proven fallible,” Faeraud scoffed, turning to walk away.

“Whoever has tricked you — is not of your blood. ... His ways are evil and he will betray you. Don’t be foolish,” she snapped back.

“Ahteana, you are the fool,” he retorted, turning back to her. “Did you not know that Lemech is not my real father? ... When Lemech’s son was born, someone stole the royal baby — and replaced him with me.

“I am not related to Prince Lord Antioch. Not a drop of his blood flows in my veins. But my veins have been filled with the spirit of forbidden magic, and my soul possessed by Sayer himself. I am not your *Savior*, I am your *Destroyer*. ... I am the *Uprooter*,” Poseidontel revealed, opening his mouth which exhaled a blast of fire, like an arrow, piercing toward Ahteana.

Her likeness faded and then reappeared on the other side of the pool.

Faeraud snarled, “You were wise not to come here in person, but to send your *transglaust*.”

“Your development of the *enchancements* and misuse of King Yaswhen’s *Rataka* are both arrogant and dangerous. That which you seek to accomplish will certainly fail.”

“Indeed, I will achieve greatness and power beyond any you have ever seen. I will destroy all that Yaswhen created, and make it over again, bigger, better and with a dark richness.”

“Are you not forgetting something?”

The king looked at her puzzled for a moment.

“The *Scroll of Air* still eludes your grasp,” she taunted. “The world you seek to makeover and the platform you desire may only be accomplished with *enchancements* buried within that *Scroll*.”

“Your *enchancements* have all but crumbled, it is but a short time and the *Scroll* will reveal itself,” the king proclaimed. “Even your last possibility, Aedon ... yes, Aedon ... has covered your spying eye-glass with a cloak of darkness. ... He belongs to me — something you fail to recall often enough.”

With the wave of his hand, Faeraud threw another blast of fire toward Ahteana. She threw her dress about her body and whirled around like a tornado which flew out of the Irem and into the sky.

Faeraud was confused and could not determine if Ahteana were still alive or if some faction of the rebellion had created the *transglaust* to try and provoke him. The splinter of a battle renewed magic powers that hadn't been released since the creation of the *Foreverlasting Tree*. These were powers that had always existed, but never before had escaped the restrictions that society, religion, politics and even science had corked in. The bottle had now been broken open and it was sitting there, brewing, waiting to be poured out on all of Atlantis.

PAPYRUS SIX

BEYOND

SEKHARU HARBOR

Half-way to Bashan, Aedon ordered the unicorn he had rented to change direction. The beast objected at first, but calmed down after Aedon paid him more. From the center of the Province of Evaemon they travelled toward the Euphrates River. Aedon never intended to seek out his father on this trip. Instead, his desire burned to find Areshia and hold her in his arms once again. He knew Faeraud would be watching him and so he filed a false travel route, so no one would know where he was really going.

With all hope, he was determined to find Areshia and reunite with her. He tried to think about how he would convince her to abandon the failing Asterian cause and come away with him to Sahada. Worry laid heavy on his heart as he wondered if Faeraud had seen all that he had been involved in with the Asterians. Was it his *globeaky* that showed the evil king where the

tunnels were, he wondered. He questioned if perhaps he had already given away the rendezvous point and he feared that Areshia might be in trouble.

The next day, the unicorn took him to the middle of the city of Sekharu. He marveled at the unique architecture, its buildings made of chalk-white stones and pillars of salt. Beyond a hillcrest facing the sea, billows of black clouds signaled his attention. Over the mountain peak he ran, to where the harbor could be seen below. His jaw dropped and his heart sank. A fleet of sailing ships bobbed in the bay, each one broken in two and spouting-out folds of smoke from their hulls. White planks bounced in the ocean like drowning children gasping for air. Torn scrolls and broken pods littered the cove. He knew that Poseidontel had discovered the secret place and ordered it to be destroyed.

Quickly, he ran down the hill calling out for Areshia, hoping that she had somehow escaped doom. The boardwalk was mostly intact, giving evidence that the attack took place soon after the ships set sail. Aedon ran so fast that he tripped over one of the uneven boards. Picking himself up, he stopped at the edge of the dock. Could he have walked on water, he would've continued out toward the wreck. He moaned with sorrow.

Then, an untouched sailboat caught his attention. It looked familiar. Nodding up and down with a delta-transporter attached on its front deck, its name caught him by surprise. The label painted on the side of the boat read: *Seaola* and *Skyola*. How did his boat and transporter get there, he wondered.

When he turned to walk over to his vessel, he noticed a periscope punching through the water. It seemed to follow him no matter what direction he went. As he reached *Skyola*, a glass-topped submarine, only big enough for one or two people, surfaced. The hatch opened up and Areshia poked her head out.

"Am I relieved to see you," Aedon cried out with relief, helping her tie off the sub. The two of them hugged in a long embrace. Aedon didn't want to let go of her, but did anyway when she started to pull away.

“How is it that you are alive?” Areshia asked, stepping back. “We were told that all had been captured or put to death.”

“Never mind my long, boring story,” he replied, wishing not to reveal how he was, once again, helping Faeraud. “Tell me of the peril which has unfolded here.”

“Someone tipped Poseidontel off. ... An attack from the sky ensued. A few survivors remained and they retreated into the underground caverns. There is a spy in our midst it would seem.”

“Certainly most,” agreed Aedon, tossing away his idea of converting Areshia over to his side and hoping she knew little about his *globeaky* and who could see through it.

Changing the subject, he asked, “How did my sail get here and why has it not been sunk like the other vessels?”

“From my submarine below, I watched it sail into harbor shortly after the attack. I’m not sure who is onboard,” Areshia said, concerned.

The two of them hopped up on the deck and walked around to the bow. Aedon noticed a piece of parchment tacked to the door leading down into the hull. He yanked the papyrus off and examined it.

“No need to send gratitude, I knew you’d be needin’ this,” Aedon read. “Doesn’t say who brought it here ... nor how they found my transporter.”

“I think it is very important that we find who delivered this,” Areshia huffed, “I suspect he is the same person who levied destruction on the others.”

“Come on, you’re frightened and jumping to conclusions,” Aedon abruptly snapped. “The message sounds like Methouslan. He knew where my vehicles were and most certainly sent them here to help out.”

“Something has happened with you alright,” she nudged. “You’re not telling me everything. ... Some of the Asterians that escaped Poseidontel’s capture, said that you and Evaemon were taken in as friends and departed with the king’s convoy as his guests.”

“*Taken in? ... Captured* — is a more accurate description. It was all a misunderstanding and I simply remained silent. In saying nothing, they just assumed I was on their side. Evaemon too. That was how we were able to escape.” Aedon blurted out. “Then, pretending to be on their side, while actually I was really not on any side at all, I was appointed the position of Ambassador. ... After that, I was given an assignment to travel to Sahada to research the Nawalym. I didn’t plan at all for any of this ... it just happened, exactly like I say.”

“Then you told of your journey to come here and that was how they learned of our location,” Areshia growled.

“I never mentioned this place and I even filed route-plans pointing me away from here ... toward Bashan.”

“But you are going to Sahada — as Faeraud’s ambassador?” Areshia scoffed. “How convenient. ... I wonder which side you’re really on. Doesn’t sound very neutral to me.”

“Initially, I’ve been assigned to go to the Great Library in Sahada — for discovery, to find out how the piskies spin their orbs of energy. With the mines dried-up, the energy that can be harvested from a single egg equals that of ten pyramids. The *orichalcum-crisis* affects everyone, regardless of what side you’re on.”

“Aedon, do be careful,” Areshia pouted. “The villages in Nawat are arranged into a perfect balance of life. Twelve villages produce eggs. A single egg comes to gestation just once each twelve years; the entire cycle lasting one-hundred and forty-four years. It has been said that if this balance is upset our life spans would be drastically shortened. The lords of old lived to be over a thousand sun-cycles in age. Already, that has been shortened as most men now expire before their seven hundredth year.”

“I’m not for upsetting any balance, just investigating how we can keep what is there and make more,” he said. “Why not come with me — to Gianni. I could use your knowledge on the subject to help me understand. You seem to know all about these Nawalym.”

“And about the wounded here who need help ... and leave the others who are in hiding?”

“Their mission has failed. We need not join any side, but simply escape for our own survival.”

“There is no hiding place — no safe location. You don’t understand.”

“I could use your knowledge on Nawat to help me understand ... if you travelled with me. I am very open to understanding.”

“Since you have taken on this mission ... directed by those who war against us, perhaps I should go and keep a very close watch on you,” Areshia huffed, walking back to her submarine. “First I must tend to my duty here.”

The fire of a burning ship close by, reached its capacitor and caused a large explosion. The two ducked to dodge the flying debris.

“I’ve got to go,” Areshia cried. “No one else has a vessel to rescue them.”

“I’ve got one, I can help,” Aedon eagerly volunteered.

“Yours doesn’t go underwater. They’d see you from the village up there and be back with more fireballs before anyone could escape. Go now. You must get out of here. ... I will meet you at the Library in seven days. ... I beg that you keep your fondness of Faeraud in check. His quest for material gains will poison you. Remember Yenocho’s words, ‘Those who seek riches, cannot be satisfied. For even they who would own the entire Earth, would then cry-out in want of its moons and the planets beyond.’”

“The only side that I am committed to be on — is yours,” Aedon cried, reaching to hold her hand and longing for another hug.

She smiled as her heart fluttered with a spark of joy. She was still very much attracted to him, even though her affection for him and her duty to rescue the others, pulled in opposite directions. She stood unmoved — frozen, yet wanting to reach out and throw herself in his arms.

Holding her hands in his, he met her eyes while deep stares wrapped their souls in an embrace that only they could see and feel. The moment abruptly ended when another piece of debris splashed into the bay.

Areshia closed the hatch, telling herself that she'd arrive a couple days early and surprise him. He watched the sub disappear before boarding *Seaola* and disembarking. Carefully he floated the vessel out to sea, trying not to capture attention. The attackers were in the hills watching. Because he knew this, he had to act like an abandoned vessel floating away.

Finally as the shoreline vanished and the sun set, he lifted the sails up, on course for Gianni. Aedon's heart felt dismal that Areshia had not come with him hastily. All he could do was trust that she would make it out of there, and most of all, hope that she would safely arrive in Sahada.

The next afternoon, he anticipated that the long voyage would afford him time to sort things out and give some retrospect and perspective on his life. As the sun turned milky behind thin clouds, he tied the rudder in place and sat down on the front deck, leaning against the cabin. Instead of the rest he expected, the journey slowly turned into turmoil as he drowned himself in self-pity, thinking back to all the mistakes he had made in life. "If only ... if only ... if only ..."

Soon the waves echoed his *if-onlys*. Night came again and stepped into the cabin where he could lie down. But even there, he saw no rest. Dreams tormented him more, calling up ghosts of his past, which refused to sit still until the coming dawn.

Early the third day of his journey, a *Beam of Light* pierced the horizon announcing an astonishing sunrise leaping with energy. The fresh day radiated into his soul and enlightened his spirit toward recovery.

Around noon time, he laid on the deck of his boat, and pondered the promises he had made with Faeraud and the conflicting oath he had given Ahteana. Trying to be honorable, he reasoned that since it appeared that Ahteana had been destroyed,

he would no longer be bound to her and thus he should follow the requests of Poseidontel. Even though he convinced himself that all of this was true, he still had a wrenching-feeling deep-down in his gut, which churned, telling him his reasoning was out of sync.

No matter what he told himself, it seemed like they were close to those *End Days* which were prophesized. The writings told that if Sayer were to come back in power before King Yaswhen returned, that he would give rise to the *Uprooter*. Signs that this evil person had taken root would be expressed with the destruction of the Irminsul Pyramid, that one of the moons would no longer shine, that darkness would cover the land, and that many would be deceived. All of these things had happened. Yet, he refused to believe that Faeraud was the *Uprooter*. Even the Asterians knew that the *Uprooter* would not be a child of the current line of Prince Lords. Since Faeraud was known to be Lemech's son, Aedon told himself that he could not possibly be the *Uprooter*. Yet, Faeraud and Sayer knew the entire truth and continued to conceal it, presently.

Looking up, thin clouds slowly whisked by. Some of them took on the form of beings before dissipating. One of them reminded him of Ahteana so much, that he sat up thinking, for a moment, that her ghost was descending from the sky. He was certain that neither her body or cocoon survived the earlier destruction, so he assumed the apparition was her spirit coming to visit him.

Next he propped himself up on an elbow and shouted out toward the sky, toward Ahteana, "I know I can't define you, I wouldn't even try. But, somehow, I feel that you are still here, right beside me. You seem near, yet you continue to be very far away. What is it that defies reason about who you are? What is it that you wish for me to do?"

A slight breeze made certain the vessel was on course. Standing up, Aedon knew that the right way was the path that he had learned during his youth. Realizing this, he knew that he had to change course and follow the *Scrolls of King Yaswhen* and the

teachings of the Asterians. He decided that he would break all ties, friendship, and *finger-locking promises* he had made with Faeraud. From this day forward, he was determined to be on the right side. His stomach no longer felt nauseous and he knew he was making the correct choice.

Next, an unexplained feeling began to build in his abdomen, it spread throughout his entire body. He felt like his head was on fire, but it wasn't a burning fire, it was a cool soothing, yet warm flame. As if a ball of energy came from out of nowhere and zapped into his body, he stood to his feet, excited, filled with joy, yet crying, all at the same time.

Whatever he had done in the past didn't matter. His mistakes and *mischoices* could be forgotten. All that mattered now was that he had made the right choice. He had taken it upon himself to turn away from Faeraud and follow the feeling he had deep down inside. He knew, somehow, without a doubt, that Ahteana was alive (even if only in spirit) and he was determined to carry out her wishes.

Then he remembered the crystal *globeaky* that she had given him and the words she spoke admonishing him. Right before his *Registration of Youth* day, she told him how special he was and that one day he might unlock a *Beam of Light* in a dark and dreary world — a beam that might not save the world, but would certainly help the ones he loved. He wanted to take the cover off of it, but was afraid that Faeraud would be spying on him. Then he remembered, Faeraud was the one sending him to Sahada. Certainly it wouldn't hurt to remove the cover for a few moments. He unclamped the black covering which almost cut his finger.

The *globeaky* immediately brightened and he heard a voice. It was a voice that he heard only in his head, yet he knew it came from the amulet.

“Why do you hide me?” the soft voice asked.

“I didn't want Faeraud to see me ... in the *Tuaoi Stone*,“ he answered in his mind.

“You have been deceived. The stone which he displays, shows not a single image. It was used long ago by Asterians who foretold the future. The Council knew that men who professed to have great knowledge would not believe in what they could not see. The Asterian Prophets told their stories in front of the stone. Men, seeing that which was predicted unfold, assumed the stone showed the future. The stone has no special capabilities. It never has and never will show anything except obscure images that you might see when staring at the surface of any object long enough.”

Aedon would have felt really stupid, except the voice revealed another truth.

“You are wise. Because you believed in the things that could not be seen, yet are real, is why you have been shown the truth — a truth that even the wisest men find difficult to know.”

Aedon felt better, but then, he suddenly thought about his journey. He was half a day from Sahada. What would he do when he got there, he wondered.

“You must not go to Sahada,” the voice said. “Danger lies ahead in the land.”

“Then where should I go?” he asked, this time out-loud.

“Nawat. ... Journey, I beg of you, to Nawat. ... An important task waits for you there.”

“To Nawat?” he said, surprised and almost objecting.

“You, and you alone, have been chosen for this task. If you do not complete it, then the few Asterians who remain may perish.”

“Then to Nawat I will go,” he eagerly said. “Where is Nawat? No one knows the way or even if they exist. How do I get there?”

The *globeaky* began to fade and the voice disappeared from his mind. He looked up into the sky where he saw clouds which seemed to form an image of Ahteana. They were leading toward the South — the South Pole. Excited about his new mission, he untied his rutter and turned the sailboat about. Even more so, he was relieved to be free of the lock that Faeraud once had on him. Such a journey would take days and he hoped that Areshia would forgive

him for not showing-up in Sahada on time. All he knew was that some new force was driving him full-speed ahead into the uncharted sea. Without a guide or even a map, if he was going to find Nawat, he would have to rely on: folklore told in his youth, the stars at night, and a miracle from above.

Since no man had ever seen Nawat, he could've worried: that he was setting sail on a course to nowhere, that he would run out of supplies, or that he'd be lost at sea until his demise. But this time he wasn't nervous, instead, he was calm with an inner peace that told him that he was on the right course — the only route that he was destined to travel.

As the clouds vanished into the night sky, he opened a barrel on the upper deck. First he pulled out a fur-wrap and bundled up for the night chill. Next, he found an illumination-bulb and fired it up for additional light. An old scroll, in the barrel caught his attention. It was a collection of poetry he had borrowed from the library one summer and forgot to return. Leaning against the cabin's front wall he opened the poetry, reading the first passage that jumped-out:

In a far away land of a very different kind
Lies a token that you will marvel and find.
In the sea, on a set path, is its route,
A change of course, one must bring about.
Its direction must move from a set straightaway,
To a new course instead, in a Northern hideaway.
Important messages are encoded in rhyme,
The only escape that saves life this time.

Amazed he dropped the scroll. This was a coded message from Ahteana, he was sure. He knew not how he had turned to its passage so exactly, nor how its forgotten place, so very long ago, was saved for this very moment in time. But he was sure — more sure than ever, that it was telling him that he had to not only

complete his travel to Nawat but to cause a change in their direction.

Then he told himself he was crazy, imagining things caused from being out to sea all alone. The sea has been known to play tricks on the mind and possibly this was what he was experiencing, he thought. But the scroll was right there in front of him. And he knew he hadn't dreamed the other things. They were real — they had to be. He had to travel to Nawat and put to rest these disturbing incidents driving him in their direction.

A few sunrises later, his boat sailed nearer. He was in the outer parts of Nawat and the mysteries began to reveal themselves.

CLING! A piece of metal hit the boat — a discarded helmet seemed to growl at Aedon as he steered the vessel deeper into the Southern Hemisphere. CLUNK! A floating piece of wood hit the bow with a blow. Aedon looked over the starboard-side to inspect the debris he was navigating through. It wasn't a pleasant site.

PAPYRUS SEVEN

POEKU'S LADDER

YEOW!" he yelled, looking up before quickly pulling the steering stick right to avoid colliding with another chunk of what had once been a wooden-balloon. He continued through the bobbling remains of a warrior channel, their armor, their weapons, and their cadavers — all blown to bits by something or someone who must have been bigger than the Nawalym creature he had seen die, months earlier, in his arms.

The waters became clear again and the air much colder as he drove inward from the outside realm of Nawat. He plucked a hollowed-out unicorn-horn from the sea. The instrument could be heard beneath the water and was used like a doorbell to summon the mermaids. The waters barely rippled.

He called out, "*Apa'hei! Apa'hei!* Is anyone here?"

For days he travelled while calling out — unheard. Then one morning, he put the horn to his lips again. Just as he was about

to blow — SPLASH! A mermaid flipped through the air, and dived into the water again, before swimming up to the edge of his vessel.

“It’s me ... Miriam. ... *Apa’hej*, Aedon,” she said, bowing her bashful head, while brushing the wet hair from one side of her face.

“Miriam? What are you doing way up here?” he asked, while releasing a floating-device attached to the port side of the boat. “With no one in sight for days, I was beginning to think my good fortune had gotten caught in the *Benguela Basin Current*.”

Miriam grabbed on to the bobbing float, allowing her to ride along with the vehicle.

“A messenger asked me to come up this way and lead you to the Nawalym,” she revealed.

“Then you know the way. Am I headed in the right direction?”

“Not exactly,” she pouted. “The other maids in the area were supposed to tell me — so I could lead you there.”

“They were supposed to?” Aedon asked, “Supposed to? What happened to them?”

“They were mean! ... One of them caused me to scratch a fin and another made me break a nail,” Miriam snapped, with dramatic disappointment, holding up her hand and showing.

“We’re not in Atlantis anymore. I doubt the other mermaids care about your fashionable attributes here. What about Nawat — can you guide me to Nawat?”

“They are — unwilling to help. Instead, they told me to bring you this warning.”

“What warning?”

A large goliath, grouper-fish sprang from the ocean, then sank halfway below the waterline, leaving only his large mouth, small beady-eyes, and one fin partially exposed. Like the *copy-parrot*, this species of aquatic vertebrae delivered messages — except from the sea world.

“Turn back now! He who enters will die. No one returns alive. Go back now. Do not enter these forbidden waters. There is

death to those who enter. Return! Go back!” the fish yelped out, before fluttering and diving into the deep.

“As if I were a *hook-n-sink* — no one’s been any help,” Miriam pouted, “The other maids are only concerned about themselves. They’ve formed cliques — schools of mermaids, looking down at me with their *holier-than-fish* attitudes — when all they really want, is to be named — the czarina.”

“Named czarina? I’m afraid I don’t understand ...”

“*The Czarina Mermaid* is the last maid in the relay line ... to deliver the goods — to the *Irminsul Pyramid*.”

“They do know that the pyramid has been destroyed?” Aedon asked, banging his hand against his head in frustration. “Did you tell them?”

“They don’t believe me.”

“Well, I’ll tell *‘em!*”

“No! You can’t. You mustn’t!”

Aedon lowered his head and opened his eyes wider, waiting for her full explanation.

“The *Irminsul* — it’s all they have to live for. The mermaids in these parts ... and the Nawalym, they spend their entire lives preparing for it. There are twelve Nawat villages, and it takes a single village more than a hundred years to spin the *orichalcum* egg that is delivered to the pyramid. ... If they found out that shrine were gone — they’d have nothing to live for.”

“Perfect! No, this is really perfect! ... Don’t you see — they’re little gems are so powerful — they can solve the world’s energy crisis. They DO have something to live for,” Aedon shouted, thinking that maybe their golden-egg was the marvel the poem referenced and maybe this is what Ahteana needed — for some unknown reason.

“I guess you’ll have to just experience it yourself,” she pouted with disappointment, shaking her head in doubt.

“I certainly don’t want to be welcomed like the last party that visited,” he said, shrugging his head toward the dead remains they had passed through earlier.

“From the comments of creatures below, I’ve a good guess how to find *‘em*. With twelve villages, it’d be hard to miss one — so close as we are. ... I’ll guide you in. There’s been a sea of chatter over the past few days, and the way news travels in the villages, I am sure they’re expecting you.”

“Awesome! Hang on, I’m throttling the capacitor up ...”

“YEAIIEAAKI!” Miriam screeched, so loud that Aedon covered his ears while a window quivered on the brink of breaking. Slowly he removed his hands as the noise washed away.

“You can’t plow in there with your *clank-clanks* and *floating-boxes* or you’ll — you will end up like THEM!” she informed him, referring to another dead body that floated by. “You best ride in on my back.”

“Your back? You’re a mermaid not a marine vessel.”

“Do you really think I like this idea any better than eating their ice-dried seaweed?”

Aedon grumbled as he anchored the vessel and climbed onto Miriam’s shoulders. “Just hurry up, the water is freezing!” he complained.

She pushed off.

“Not that fast,” Aedon yelped, hanging on tighter, “You’ll get my fur all wet.”

Soon they found themselves swimming under a perfectly round white cloud, so big, that it stretched fifty stadia into the horizon. It looked like they were swimming under a city-size tree formed from clouds. Awhile later, they came to the cloud-tree’s trunk which was the center of the first village. A large twister stretched from the sky down to the sea floor. At first, Aedon thought it was a tornado or water spout, but when he looked closer, he noticed that it did not twist around but stood in a fixed place. The center trunk was made of a waterfall, falling from the clouds into the ocean. Inside the columns he could see hundreds of bolts-of-lightning randomly flashing each second.

From the center column, grew multitudes of branches in various sizes. He had never seen anything like it before. He couldn’t

determine if the branches were made of water, ice, a gel, or something else. He ruled out the ice, as the temperatures became warmer the closer they swam. Millions of white vines were draped over the branches. Near their ends, they twisted and turned and were woven into hammock-like pods where someone might nest or sleep.

“A water tree,” he exclaimed in awe. “A tree made of water, electricity, crystals, and living cells all merged together. ... Is this possible?”

“Stop moving around so much,” Miriam yelled back, then she swam lower, causing Aedon to dip underwater.

“Get me back up, higher, so I can see. You’re drowning me,” Aedon screamed back, splashing with one hand while still hanging onto her with the other.

A buzzing Nawalym darted by, catching his attention, and leading his sight near the top of the column of water. In the sky it met the cloud ceiling, where half-a-dozen large holes opened up. Between them he could see a bright light, gleaming so bright, that it was like a miniature sun.

Darting in and out of the holes, flew brigades of Nawalym. Though still far away, Aedon knew that this was where they weaved the golden-eggs he had heard about.

WHISK! SPLASH! FLUNG! Miriam stopped as a water branch surfaced in front of them.

Shaking the water off of his her wings, Poeku, pointed a finger at them, sputtering, “*Cami na hiri, mysp spey clieri!*”

“OUCH!” Aedon yelled, pushing her finger away, which had thrown a small lightning bolt at him. “Stop that you little —”

In her high-pitched voice, she repeated, “*Cami na hiri, mysp spey clieri!*”

“*Yay telk ayr lenchyechi* — you speak primitive Asterian?” Aedon surprisingly asked.

“*Af cayrsi* — better than you speak. Call it we, Nawatian,” Poeku boasted, then demanded an explanation, “You — warned not to come — yet you — here.”

"I come as a friend. I come sent by an Asterian," Aedon announced, confidently.

"Asterian sent? Wet — in a torn toga, and clinging to a mermaid?" Poeku laughed, in disbelief. "A real Asterian visitor would float, in the light, and come quietly. And then, having been, only after, invited —"

"I assumed an invitation because you already knew of my pending visit. Miriam told me, you knew I was coming ..."

"Peoples of village have been WARNED of you coming. Your voyage, saw we, through *looking-scope*. Instructed, we be, to make you turn back."

"If I don't go?"

"If goal — not achieved peacefully, you find golden-crystal has mind of own. Cannot predict how — will react — if dissatisfied becomes."

Startled, Aedon jumped as her words were echoed by a bolt of lightning that came from the tree and struck a nearby Nawalym, who was lazily sleeping on a branch, instead of working. The shocked thing, with smoldering hair, quickly got back up, taking flight to continue her work.

Aedon wasn't about to give-up after coming this far. He took the globe necklace he was wearing and held it up to one eye and began examining the Nawalym with it. It magnified her eyes and he kept panning left and right, examining each eyeball separately.

"What you doing?" Poeku screamed, throwing a lightning-bolt at him — but the amulet deflected the shock.

Aedon laughed, "I'm looking at you. You have a missing eye-lash. Your right eyelashes are gone."

"Not funny. Not right to laugh at — character flaw."

"I'm not poking-fun — Me — I've got one missing too — except it's my left eyebrow that is mostly gone. Mother says it was burned off in a fire when I was baby."

“No — No — Noooooooo,” the little Nawalym yelped out with excitement and disbelief, before carefully feeling his eyebrow. Aedon slowly lifted a hand and felt her face.

“My lashes — lost in fire — when *bebee* too,” Poeku said.

“Why don’t you climb off my back onto that branch and give me a rest, already,” Miriam suggested, helping him up.

Aedon climbed up on the branch as Poeku examined the *globeaky* he was wearing.

“We take you to *Clanleader* — Clanleader Nad will decide, if welcome or not,” Poeku announced, directing his branch of the tree, to move further inward toward the trunk.

A blue-green, fairy-like creature stepped down from the highest branches in the tree, as if she were walking on an invisible staircase. Her greenish face was blank and quiet until she leveled in front of Aedon. With a commanding jolt her giant-size eyelids blinked open. The Nawalym clan leader buzzed up, down, right, left, forward and back, quickly scanning and examining him.

“What’s she doing?” Aedon asked, moving about nervously and hoping that one of those eyeballs wouldn’t pop out and hit him like a dart.

The pixie stopped, then, turned to Poeku, “Why have you brought this intruder, from the outside, into our midst?”

“Clan — Clanleader Nad,” Poeku stuttered, “We in need of help. Our villages — now gone. ... Need help us, from outsider.”

“Perhaps. But should have brought not ... this — heathen, our midst to. ... His very presence exposes younglings ... ours — to worlds unknown ... Protect them, we must,” Clanleader Nad emphasized, before turning back to Aedon.

“I come only to learn your ways and be educated,” Aedon assured her. “My mission is requested of the Asterians that remain here.”

Nad fluttered a little closer and then lifted up the globe Aedon was wearing. She held it between their faces. Looking through the crystal, Aedon thought that Nad’s eye didn’t look as

scary. Nad moved the ball around. She could see that its markings outlined Aedon's socket.

"Eye is fingerprint — this amulet matches perfectly. He chosen by the Asterians — no creature can change," Clanleader Nad announced. "Crystal globe key blessed by Asterian priest ... duplicate, cannot. This have marking of very — very high priestess."

Aedon breathed a sigh of relief while Miriam rolled her eyes.

Poeku jumped up and down, fluttering her wings a little. "Yes, *eh* Stay you can! Stay you can!"

"You accompany him may, to *Rachassi*, but only — if allowed he, to continue. Test of faith, fate will decide," Nad instructed. "Prove you, must, belief in things not seen, have you."

"Alright, then," Aedon exclaimed, jumping up and down only once, just enough so that the branch he was standing on dipped underwater, drenching his feet again. "I have believed in much that I have not seen. It was that belief that led me here."

"Then test you will pass, confident you are," said Nad as the branch they were on began ascending upward.

"Certainly. What test is this, you speak of," said Aedon, confidently.

"Ladder, you must climb," Nad said, gesturing to the empty space between the branch they sat on and the trunk, half a stadia away.

Poeku grimaced with a shutter, and Aedon stared at the empty space as their branch slowed to a stop about two-hundred podes above the water. Certainly, she didn't mean for him to fly, or walk on air. Where was this staircase she was talking about, he wondered. Then he noticed the other pixies that were flying about the area. They weren't really flying at all. Each one was walking on invisible roads, up and down stairs and all around as if there were a city of streets that he could not see. They simply used their wings to keep balance along the planes they walked over.

“This isn’t fair, I can’t see where to step — like your species can,” he snapped.

“Eyes of ours, see same as yours.”

Then Poeku tried to explain, “Brain energy vibrates matter unseen. Belief turns particles into stones ... stepped on.”

She touched her finger to her forehead and then swished it out horizontally like she were drawing a path with it. Then she stepped off the branch, down, onto an invisible platform. She repeated the gesture and stepped again. After a short walk in the air, she circled back to their spot.

“Believe you, if, then follow,” said Nad.

Aedon hesitated, angry that they spoke such broken Atlantian, how was he supposed to understand what she really meant. Why was he being tested again, he asked himself. Hadn’t he demonstrated his loyalty enough, already? He showed that he believed by travelling to this unknown world by himself. Why did he have to prove himself again. But what could he do, he thought; these piskies weren’t about to let him go any further without a show of some kind of courage. For an awkward moment each one stared at the other.

“A leap of faith ... is that what you want?” Aedon huffed. “I can prove ... I can prove to you ... that I believe. I will step out onto your test ... nothing to fear Nothing to lose here.”

Hoping that this was just a test or a trick he slowly lifted his leg in the air, then brought it down, aiming to step on the very same area where Poeku had landed. He plopped his foot about the area, unable to feel anything. He knew she had jumped lower off the branch, and he hoped the invisible step was still there. Closing his eyes he hopped off the branch.

SPLASH! Within seconds he fell into the ocean. Poeku let out a sad cry. Nad chuckled before air-walking down to the water, grabbing him by his *rope-tie* and pulling him back up to the branch.

“It was a trick — just to see me fall,” he snarled. “This is certainly not funny.”

"Much to observe, you have," said Nad, shaking a few water droplets off her feathers while Aedon wrung the water out of his toga.

"I believed, I did, and yet the walkway was not there."

"Believe, you did not," Nad chuckled. "Faith you had, because you had seen. Faith and no works — works no. ... *Globeaky*, use, watch again. .. Poeku, show again."

She repeated her gesture of moving the finger and stepping out into the air. When Aedon looked through his amulet, he could see square platforms of light forming in front of Poeku. Each time she moved her finger, it drew another platform. The previous one would fade away as she stepped onto the new one.

"Small-ones, fingers gesture ... to help transform unseen particles, of space, into matter, temporary," Nad explained.

He knew it was stupid to just believe in something without further investigating it. Then an idea wiped across his brow. With the *globeaky* up to his eye, he began to mimic Poeku's gestures. Squinting and looking about, he tried desperately to create a step of light, but nothing showed itself."

Shaking her head, Nad explained, "*Globeaky* of owner, yours, shows not your works. ... If into it, look, you must; then, belief have you not."

With disappointment, Aedon lowered the *globeaky*, Nad bowed her head low, and Poeku sunk down, sitting on the branch.

"But I have a message, of great importance, which I must deliver to each village. ... The Asterian Ahteana, she has changed the route of delivery for your final product," Aedon blurted out. "Though I am unsure to where it must go."

Nad hysterically laughed, then she began to cry, "Long we have waited, a Savior to come. ... Warriors men of, they come, destroy our villages, then take away the bulbs we nourish. But send you, further on, possible not. A simple test, pass you not. To the fire, they'd send you, if go you ... at all."

Nearby, in one of the hanging pouches a small egg shook as a baby *piskie* pecked her way out, then it fell from the pod into the

ocean below. Then the baby bounced up and two large drops of liquid splashed down from the pod washing the placenta off. The baby grew to nearly full-size right before their eyes. Then it flapped its wings and her mother flew down, picked her up and set her back in the pod

The young one's eyes met Nad, and her heart melted as she realized there was little hope that their youths would survive an attack on their village. Ever since the celestial collision on Asteria, the balance of nature had been disturbed. There couldn't be a more dangerous time. Nad knew that Warrior Bandits would continue to come and pilferage their villages and Aedon knew that Poseidontel had eyes on their goods as well, and had even commended Andromache to consider an invasion.

"Go! ... Poeku show way you. — I appoint you — travel with Aedon to village ninth, the city of Rachassi, Prepare, be. Another test, give they. ... Few have passed, ever," Nad warned, then began floating up in a departing manner until she was gone.

"Awe, Rachassi? Why me? Barely know how fly, me, and my skin color — not orange yet, I will stick out — like outcast."

Poeku, Miriam, and Aedon set out, heading toward *Kathphan*, the first of three villages before their destination. It floated (far away) silhouetted against Earth's setting, bald-satellite. It reminded Aedon that he had only one more full-moon left to accomplish his mission before Poseidontel would take action. With the war machine that Atlantis had, an invasion would cause the Nawalym to fall faster than a shooting-star. He hoped to find out how the golden-orbs were made. If he could do that, maybe he could give the information to Poseidontel. Then he might not invade their villages and the Nawat would be saved.

PAPYRUS EIGHT

FIREFALLS

Rays of the sunrise reflected on the waters of Rachassi, blinding enough, to cause even Poeku to shade her eyes with a wing. They arrived near the bottom of the village's water-tree-trunk and climbed up onto a lower *gel-branch*. A yellowish-orange fairy, so fat, she could hardly walk, waddled down the branch toward them. Her left foot was larger than her right which made it look like she was about to lose balance and fall out of the tree with each step she took.

“What took ya’ll so long to get here. Been *expectin’ ya* for days,” she scolded, with her manly voice that was louder than a trumpet. “Take off *yer* soaked rags *ya wearin’* and get *yer* dry behinds up here and ...”

Aedon was ringing the water out of various sections of his toga while Poeku yelled in a whisper, “Hurry... please do hurry!”

“What we’ve here, a blue-greener — and it’s just a baby. Just what I thought — *wer* in deeper trouble than any care admit.

Babies! I can't believe *dey sendin' da* babies out now," the overweight fairy complained.

"Wait a sand-pebble minute here, I no baby. Me complete full training!"

"Pardon me, Ma'am, but we are to meet with Clanleader Rachassi — could you show us to him?" Aedon requested, bowing slightly with respect, while trying not to lose balance and slip off the branch himself.

"Clanleader Rachassi — so on *yer* asking only, I *suppose-ta take yas ups* to meet HIM?"

"Please ... it would be ever so kind of you."

"Welcome to Rachassi, then. And just to let *ya* in on a little secret — Clanleader Rachassi is a HER not a HIM. The Clanleader would be very offended if she ever heard *ya* call HER a HIM. And how do I know this — because I AM HER!" Rachassi shouted, marching back toward them and stomping her larger foot as close to Aedon as was possible without actually kicking him.

"A hundred pardons your majesty," Aedon nervously said, bowing low on one knee, so that he wouldn't tower over her any longer. Then in Nawatian, he asked for forgiveness, "*O em farchovi, perhips tieg mi.*"

"*Majesty?* Ya call me *majesty?* Boy, *ya* have much to learn. *Ya* speak Nawatian, yet know nothing *'bout* our villages."

"I hope that we may help each other out. You sent a Nawalym, who died in my arms, begging for help. Because of her and the request of an Asteria, I have come to visit."

"I see — much has changed. Come, *ya* must prepare to travel further. Only one who goes to Nimaneb will understand, but will they grant *ya* entry?"

"Certainly they will, if you show me the way."

"I may teach *ya* a thing, maybe even two or three, but the great aurora of Nimaneb will test *ya* intentions."

Aedon followed Rachassi up a branch that spiraled around the waterfall-tree-trunk like a staircase leading to heaven. She glanced back for a moment, then resumed her ascension.

“How many Nawalym villages are there? Know ya?”

“Twelve, I think.”

“Name *em* — what are their names?”

“Ah, uh ... *Nebuer* is the first, I thought, though, it seems like we came upon Nad before any others. Then there is *Nomis*, *Vel*, *Had*. After *Had* there is *Kathphan*, *Dag*, and ... and ...”

“*Ya* forgot *Fesqj*,” Rachassi snapped, “You passed there just before arriving here.”

“Oh yes. And after here, there is *Nolub*, *Phes* and *Nimaneb*.”

“Smart *ya* think *ya* are. What are the colors fixed to each one?”

“Colors? Oh, you mean what color are the fairies in each place?”

“Fairies!” she scorned, “Fairies belong to fables. Nawalym not are such. ... *Ya* must learn about — Duck!”

“Duck?” he asked, puzzled.

“Yah, duck — Duck!” the Clanleader shouted, before a bolt of lightning darted out of the waterfall and zapped Aedon on the blade.

“Ouch!” he screamed, holding his smoldering shoulder in pain.

“Nawalym villages form a spiral-of-life,” she continued, moving up the circling branch, “A new village begins with white-skinners. Each matures, moving toward center, and skin changes color.”

“No wonder why you’re all different shades.”

“Slowly progress we, over lifespan, hundred and forty years. Violet to blue, blue to green, yellow, orange, then golden.”

“What happens after you are golden? You die, or something?”

Ignoring his question she continued, “We all workers. Labor daily at spinning material into egg — at top of tree. When egg completes, gently it falls to ocean below. Entire village follows, imploding into sea, where it washes outside of spiral ... then springs up with new life again.”

“And the egg — how does it get delivered to the Irminsul Pyramid?” Aedon tried to confirm.

“Duck!”

They both did, another bolt of lightning just missing them.

“The sea creatures — they deliver — to the Asterians.”

“With the Asterians gone ... I mean if the Asterians were to no longer to come around, then, might you continue your egg production for others to use?”

“*We’s* created by King Yaswhen, a hundred-hundred sun-cycles past. We part of balance of life. Our *piskies* know and serve only this mission. ... If mission end, so would our villages.”

“Certainly, you have seen the night sky — do your *piskies* not question *WHY* the Asterian moon does not rise?”

“*Ya* have more to learn *bout* believing, I see.”

“How can you say that? — Isn’t it obvious that their moon is no longer in the sky?”

“*Ya* ask *WHY* — *WHY* do we do this? *WHY* do we do that? *WHY* question we not — missing moon? We not ask *WHY*. Answers come when *ya* need, not when *ya* are curious. If *ya* must ask *WHY*, *ya* not ready for answer.”

More than three-quarters of the way to the top, a level circular platform, suspended by vines and branches allowed them to rest and view the egg above. Openings in the waterfall near the top acted like windows giving a glimpse to a giant egg suspended in air, supported only by bolts of lightning that continually zapped beneath it. The egg spun around at an extremely slow pace. Still, too far away to see the details, Aedon noticed tens of hundreds of Nawalym entering one of the openings and others exiting from another.

“Hungry yet?” Rachassi asked, reaching over to a branch and plucking a giant piece of fruit from its vine. “It *nectaberry*.”

“Awfully big for a berry,” Aedon remarked, taking the oblong yellow-orange thing and biting into it. “Yummy! Wow! Tastes like a tangerine-strawberry, no, cherry flavor.”

“Fruits here mirror colors of Nawalym, life forms in each village — matures in color, size, and flavor as it moves inward — toward destiny.”

“What a lot of work for a purpose that is vanishing along with their hopes and ours,” he muttered to himself.

Aedon looked at his arms and noticed the hair seemed to be longer than it was a few moments earlier. He brushed his finger through it. All his hairs were slowly growing right before his eyes. He looked over at Rachassi and her hair had become longer too.

“Higher,” she exclaimed. “Climb higher — *yall* see how much work each day, we do.”

Aedon was eager to get a better look at what was going on inside the water-tree-trunk and he eagerly jumped at the invitation. However, the climb became more difficult and he had to use all the muscles in his body to maneuver to a better viewing point. He almost lost his grip when he looked down. Then, he realized that he was dangling on a tree branch in the sky, higher than he had ever flown in his transporter. He pulled himself up onto a more solid branch where he had a perfect view of the workings in the main column.

Inside the trunk, circling above the egg, hundreds of fairies moved in a row like a train, each with her hair brushed down over her face. Rachassi joined the line and as she came up to the egg, she swept her hair across the surface. The hairs dethatched from her head and stuck to the egg momentarily. The cloud ceiling had a big hole above the egg and as a beam of sunlight hit the hair, it melted into the golden-orb.

Aedon finally realized that these eggs were rare and unique. There was no way they could be duplicated or manufactured quickly. Poseidontel would never be able produce such a thing in one of his laboratories at the *Crib*. It took multitudes of Nawalym more than a hundred years to produce one egg, each donating a lock of hair, one at a time. How could he explain this to Poseidontel? How could he warn the Nawalym that Andromache’s armies might be upon them in less than sixty days if they didn’t

come up with a way? And, how could he insist they change the route of delivery, when even he did not know the way?

Rachassi showed Aedon down to a sleeping area where long vines twisted into hammock-like sleeping pods, each resting just above the ocean water. Scrunching into one, Aedon said his good-nights to Poeku and then closed his eyes. His thoughts about the predicament they were in morphed into his dreams.

“Oracaero is the way — We need you now in Oracaero,” a lady in white kept saying over and over in his dream.

“I know that I have but a short time to complete my mission here,” Aedon cried.

“I have seen the sands of the glass and they are few. The fate of the Nawat does not rest with you Aedon,” the lady revealed. Her voice sounded soft like Ahteana’s, but the vision was blurry. The words blurred into, “Wake up — wake up now ...”

Aedon opened his eyes.

Towering above him were more than a dozen Nawalym with stern, angry-faces. More buzzed above them, rubbing their wings together, making it sound like their numbers were greater than what they actually were.

Aedon tried to sit up, but Rachassi pushed him back down.

“What the *kokobuking* is going on?” Aedon asked, rubbing his eyes while trying to climb out of the hammock.

Rachassi had hold of his glass necklace and dangled it over his face, “*Ya* come to betray us. *Ya* traitor!”

“TRAITOR!” Poeku added with a yell.

“No, not at all. I am but a messenger ...”

“Then — what device be this?”

“What gadget?” Aedon asked, squinting to discover a tiny sliver of glass (with an even tinier wire embedded in it) attached to the bottom of his *globeaky*.

“No, he didn’t,” Aedon exclaimed in disbelief, realizing that someone had attached a *tracking-pinger* to the bottom of his

necklace. He presumed that Faeraud must have put it there, at the same time he placed the envelope around it.

“Spies captured last night, outside the waters where *Vel* and *Had* once thrived. One warned of *ya* treachery,” Rachassi explained, dangling the amulet back and forth. “While *ya* slept, Clanleader Nad sent message about a tracker they followed — here that tracking device sits.”

He tried to tell the Nawalym what had happened, but they would not listen. Aedon forced his way up thrashing his arm against a couple of the piskies as he was fuming mad.

“I am not a spy. You can believe that I came here knowing that a tracker was on me — or not — but that does not change the reason — the fact that I am here to help.”

“Help *ya* say, yet *ya* species wants to destroy our villages and steal our goods,” Rachassi accused, shaking her fist and fanning a warning with her wing.

“I have not destroyed anything,” Aedon snapped.

“Flying sky-boxes, on *Nebuer*, descended,” Poeku explained in a grievous tone. “Egg they took. Fruit stopped growing, Nawalym died.

“The sky-boxes came from another place. My village does not send sky-boxes to destroy,” Aedon tried to assure.

“The *Nebuer* were babies ... could only eat of the fruits their tree produced. ... *Ya* learn, the fruits from the tree of an older Nawalym village are poison to the young,” Rachassi explained.

“Refuge, no, in next village,” Poeku told him, “Because warriors come back. *Nomis* and then *Vel* — fell they.

“That’s three or four villages — four eggs?” Aedon was beginning to realize there was a lot more going on than he knew about. “Couldn’t you have stopped them, fought back?”

“Outer villages — newer, energy their eggs could produce be — great; but, not strong enough to destroy them that came,” Poeku cried.

Another piskie chimed into the discussion, “Another time — came they to village Nad, more cycles developed, we stronger —

devoured flying boxes. Vines came to life and licked war-machines, like frog's tongue grabs fly."

"Ignorance be brought to justice, in same manner as perpetrator," Rachassi insisted, stomping her foot down. "Exceptions not be made."

"Ignorance? Look at your people — who is the oblivious one here?" Aedon yelled back with conviction, in his own defense. "Your villages go on manufacturing fuel for a *Beam of Light* that was destroyed months ago, and will never be relit."

"Take traitor to Nimaneb," Rachassi ordered. "Your intentions will be tried by *firefalls* of great-egg herself."

The village of Nimaneb was twice the size of Rachassi. A dozen yellow-orange Nawalym flew through the air with Aedon dangling under their claws. They flew high toward the top of the village's tree trunk.

Aedon marveled at the enormous village which seemed to grow fruits of all color. The tree's water-trunk flowed backwards, from the ocean up, instead of down like in other places. Around on the backside, cut into the water-trunk, was a glow of fire. Like bubbling lava it flowed down from the egg into the ocean, twenty-hundred podes below.

They all came to rest on a plateau carved out of a thick branch, above the golden egg, near the *firefalls*. A shinny Nawalym swiftly flew in and landed in front of them. "I am Nimaneb, Clanleader of the Nimaneb."

"Greetings, Ma'am." Aedon said.

"We are all males here," he informed, clearing his throat with a slight growl. "Our sex transforms from female to male as we revolve in the Nawat spiral."

"We bring you the spy ... the one who wears the tracking device," one of the yellow-oranges told him.

"I see — and I have heard many stories. We will test your intentions and if they are pure, then you survive. If they are not, then you die."

“I assure you — my goal is peaceful and with your well-being in mind,” Aedon pleaded. “What is this test?”

“If as you say — chosen by the Asterians, we not be allowed to eliminate you, else you would not be standing — this very moment. We commit your body and spirit to the *Firefalls*. If you pure — then you live and we listen. If not, fate and renewal of your soul rests with those on other side.”

Halfway down the *Firefalls*, its ribbons of lava parted like a hungry mouth opening up. The liquid flames bubbled with a roar and Aedon shielded his face with his hand as its heat turned up a notch.

“Certainly you jest — that’s insane,” Aedon shouted as he tried to run away, but the yellow-oranges blocked them.

“Begin! Let the test commence,” Nimaneb ordered.

“No, you don’t understand. The Asterians have moved and their pyramid has been destroyed. You must take this egg to Oracaero instead. You are laying eggs that must not be hatched in Atlantis,” Aedon insisted, walking backwards, which was in the direction closer to the falls. “Come on ... That’s real fire, hotter than a bursting thunderbolt. ... No one could possibly survive.”

“Then, by your disbelief, you have already chosen your fate,” the Clanleader squelched, folding his arms with an authoritative stance.

“Stop — be reasonable! Certainly your bulging eyes perceive the evidence — that the Irminsul Pyramid was destroyed. The Asterian moon rises no more and the beam of light does not shine,” he pleaded.

Nimaneb knew all these things, but was still in denial. Sarcastically, he taunted Aedon, “You say, you are specially chosen by an Asterian — who gave you this necklace? Did she die too — hoping that you would mock her memory?”

Like a pirate walks someone down the plank, the yellow-oranges and other golden Nawalym marched, ready to push Aedon into the falls of fire.

“*Whisp whisp ...*”

Aedon thought he heard something; he staid to listen.

“Whisp whisp,” the tree branches sang.

They were made of water like the leaves at Nile Island, but these living offshoots were speaking and trying to help him. He was unsure if they were coaching him or if something else were putting ideas in his head. He had heard leaves speak before, so he listened. Following the whispering instructions, Aedon grabbed his amulet back and then leaped to a nearby vine. He pushed off from the plateau.

“Whisp, whisp,” the vine said, holding him above the top of the egg for a few moments. It *WAS* talking to him. He listened, heard their suggestions, and followed their direction. Quickly, he spun his fingers around and laid out an invisible path ahead of him, just like Poeku had done. He was about to ask the trees to catch him if he fell, but this time, he was certain of success. He leaped from the branch to the invisible steppingstone he had created. Jumping again, he somersaulted into the air and landed on top of the golden-egg. With another tuck, he rolled over its surface. Some of his long hair touched the egg, and as the sunlight hit it, a chunk of it melted into the giant gem. The Nawalym dropped their jaws in awe. They had never before seen the egg accept any other species’ living cells.

Aedon grabbed a passing vine, slid down it, jumped to another fork, then swung onto a lower branch. He was more than half way to the bottom of the tree before the Nawalym realized that he was escaping.

The Nawalym in Nimaneb had stopped believing in the Asterians and began to think, as men in Atlantis did, that King Yaswhen was long gone and would not be coming back. As their faith eroded, so did their ability to create the kind of steppingstone that Aedon used. They continued their task of producing the giant-gem by working harder, climbing the branches, and using their wings to fly. They told themselves that they existed only in a cycle-of-life that had no other purpose and they served no one but themselves.

The blatant miracle of Aedon's steppingstone reminded Nimaneb of the past, which he did not like. Believing that he was much wiser than he actually was, he perceived Aedon to be a threat. If he escaped, the other piskies in their village might begin to question his authority. Belated, he tried to organize an assault to recapture him.

Reaching the bottom of the tree, Aedon dove into the ocean and began to swim. When he resurfaced, a band of Nawalym flew toward him; he waved his arms shoing them away.

"Hurry, get on!" Miriam yelled, appearing a few hundred podes away.

Ferociously, he swam. Taking hold of her shoulders, Aedon held on with one arm and batted the piskies away with the other. After a while, they were well away from the villages.

"Miriam, what do you know about how the orbs are delivered to the Irminsul?" Aedon asked her.

"Much. There is a relay of Mermaids. Teams guide it into the *Benguela Basin Current*. Other teams fetch it out, near the Pishon River, and then guide it downstream, into underground aqueducts where it finally reaches the Irminsul Pyramid," she explained.

"So the mermaids make the delivery — not the piskies — is that what you're saying? ... We didn't even need the Nawalym's help. ... Why didn't you say so before?"

"I did tell you. Besides, you never told me why you needed to go to Nawat. ... And it isn't proper for a mermaid to pry into the affairs of men," she coyly barked. "Besides, I am not sure what you want me to do?"

"The Asterians want the egg delivered to a place near Oracaero. I need you to convince the Mermaids to change course and deliver it there," Aedon huffed, thinking he had explained all this before.

"Convince? Me?" she exclaimed. "Why don't you come with me, down there. You'll see why no creature could ever persuade them."

“I’ll need my *Deep Water Cruiser*,” he reminded.

After another long swim, they reached *Seaola*. Aedon boarded the vessel, changed into his diving toga, and opened a crate filled with gear. First, he grabbed the *MCA 301A Deep Water Cruiser*. The device was a clear mask that fitted over his face. A small tube extended down to a box about the size of a belt-buckle. There, it converted the seawater into breathable air. Next, he clipped a *Sonic Translator* over his ear. The piece would be able to translate Miriam’s high-pitched, underwater voice into Atlantian.

“Bring your spear too,” she yelped, bobbing next to the boat. “There might be a dangerous creature or two below.”

With the flip of her tail, she was underwater. Aedon snatched the spear and dove from the side of the boat into the water. SPLASH!

PAPYRUS NINE

MERMAID COLONY

BLUB! BLUB! BLUB! An array of bubbles trailed Aedon's feet as he pushed deeper into the ocean after Miriam the Mermaid. Vigorously he swam, to catch up with her. Since the underwater visibility was poor, all he could do to follow, was to watch for her flapping tail. He had hoped that she would be able to convince the other mermaids to deliver the orb-of-energy to its new destination in Oracaero. But she kept insisting the merfolk could not be convinced. Even if she couldn't talk to them, he was optimistic that he could explain it all.

A large stone tower with an archway-opening came into focus as they swam further. When they came closer, an army of defending fish encircled it, swimming around and around. There were octopuses with beady eyes daring anyone to paddle closer. Jellyfish and stingrays quickly passed by encircling at different levels. Electric-eels zigzagged about giving a feel that another one could popup almost anywhere.

“Arch — is entrance to Mermaid Colony,” Miriam yelled, waiting for Aedon to catch up.

“Blomp bla blink blit blangblurous,” Aedon blurted out, with his exhaling, air-bubbles making his words undecipherable.

He discovered that the Sonic Translator, around his ear, would allow him to understand the mermaids, but he would not be able to speak to them. Disappointed, he realized that he would need to rely on Miriam to relay the message. Miriam must have understood some of his concern because she went on to explain how they would enter.

“Creatures that swarm near entrance — allow only mermaids to pass. I — let you in through top. Swim up to roof of tower — wait there,” she explained, before swooshing through an opening between some jelly fish and eels.

Aedon did as she asked. He was surprised that no one guarded the top of the tower. Once he settled down on it, he could see that it was made of stone block with no openings. *Why did Miriam ask him to go here*, he wondered.

A moment later one of the electric-eels floated forward from the distance. The creature grinned with malice, then charged forward. Aedon quickly began pounding on the stones trying to figure out how to get inside. Just as the eel was about to shock him, he pulled out his spear and the charging fish lobbed its belly into the point. Aedon tossed the pole aside as electricity began to cover it. Below his feet, a stone block began to shake, then it popped up, presenting a hole. Miriam poked halfway out of the opening, grabbed his hand, and pulled him inside.

Lower they swam through the column of water. It became darker the further down they dived. Turning horizontal, they continued into a tunnel made from a whale’s skeleton which reinforced the opening. They passed a bone-barred window where numerous mermen were encaged and held in chains. A few of them shouted warnings out to Aedon, telling him not go further lest he end up captured like they were. The cave eventually led them

into a larger chamber that was filled with light and hundreds of mermaids dancing about.

A red-tailed mermaid pushed-off from near one of the air-falls where bubbles ascended from beneath a stone wall. She vigorously swam toward them while Aedon wished he could ask what was going on. Miriam wished that she had not agreed to bring him there.

“If it isn’t our little lost mermaid, Miriam,” Red-tail taunted. “Thought we told *ya* before — we don’t like *your* kind of fin.”

“I shouldn’t of come,” Miriam agreed, turning to Aedon. “Let’s go, there’s nothing but trouble here.”

“We’re no trouble,” a blue-tailed mermaid sang, swooshing up next to Aedon.

“I see you’ve brought a man with you this time,” Red-tail exclaimed in a sassy tone.

“A man?” another mermaid screamed.

Within a few seconds, all the mermaids were clambering around them. Some of the more bold ones pushed in, feeling Aedon up and down his torso, squeezing his behind, and exerting their examination more forward than was customarily polite. One maid even attempted undoing the *rope-tie* around his toga-skirt. Aedon made effort to speak while trying to remove some of the examining hands from his chest.

Quickly he realized that he’d have to use *Signsea Language* to communicate. It had been a few decades since he took the course back at the *educatory*, probably about his seventy-seventh sun-cycle there. He gestured two fingers from his eyes to signal the word *SEE*. Then he cupped his hand and patted his head like a crown to indicate the words *ROYAL-ONE*. ... *SEE ROYAL-ONE*, he signed again. Miriam picked up on it and reluctantly helped.

“We come to see Czarina Mermaid,” Miriam pleaded. “Please, take us to her. Aedon, a prince of Atlantis — has message to deliver.”

“Give me message, and I will take it to Czarina,” Red-tail demanded.

“*ONLY ROYAL-ONE MAY HEAR*,” Aedon signed back.

Red-tail’s face turned to anger, its color matching her tail. Then she began to giggle. All the other mermaids joined into a chorus of laughter.

“If this message truly for Czarina, then tell me, what is her name — her real name,” Red-tail huffed.

“Czarina Mermaid,” Miriam repeated, starting the choir of laughter again.

Finally, the mermaids led them inside, further where seashell-musical instruments began to play. The underwater musical-band consisted of mermen chained to an area where they played water-guitar, upside-down drums, and the bubble-organ.

Fountains of colored bubbles, underwater gasses, and glowing plants illuminated the place. Their colors changed, choreographed in a reflection of the music. Balls made from glass and tied to the floor, floated upward, reflecting light like a disco ball. A large mirror at one end confused at least one mermaid, as she kept bumping against her reflection in it.

A matrix of large columns, each with carved reliefs of sea-creatures, supported a dome ceiling, overlaid with gold. Merfolk, seahorses, and their pet fish, swam between the columns, swishing to the music. Some flipped sideways and others bounced upside-down in the water. Many different hair styles swished with the flow: long hair, braided hair, hair in a bun, beehive hair, and unkempt hair. Different females continued to randomly come up and inspect Aedon, trying to get a good look. Some of them had never seen a man before.

Blue-tail reemerged and offered to help, “For a few talents of fine *orichalcum*, I might arrange a guide to take you further in.”

“You’d take our riches and then lead us to the dungeon instead,” Miriam snapped back, slapping Blue-tail’s hands away.

“Wise maid, you be,” a green-tail commented. “It is not possible for anyone to see Czarina. She grants audience to none.”

Another mermaid passed by, offering a bowl of seaweed salad. Miriam was about to partake when Aedon pushed it away.

She grumbled before huffing that it was probably poisoned anyway.

The seashells became quiet, the drums stopped, bubbles slowed, and all the glowing colors turned to a dim white. The creatures quickly disappeared, hiding behind columns and in corners. Miriam grabbed Aedon's arm and pulled him behind a nearby bar. Settling in there, the counter shook just enough so that a number of its beverages, which were contained in pods, dislodged and began floating out, heading toward the center of the room.

A large tail swished around. It was a dark-silver color, with streaks of worn crimson. When she settled down in the center of the room, she let out a loud shriek. Aedon pulled the Sonic Translator off of his ear and the other mermaids covered theirs.

"Bloo's Blat?" Aedon tried to ask, carefully putting the translator back into his ear.

"It's Inspector..." Miriam started, holding Aedon down so he would be hidden.

"I am Inspector DeCaliph," the silver-tail interrupted, announcing, "Here to enforce the rules of Czarina DaHut."

"DaHut, that's the Czarina Mermaid's name," Miriam whispered to Aedon.

"I've heard rumblings that unexpected and unwelcomed guests are in your midst. Who will be the brave one to show me where they hide?"

One might think that the mermaids would be eager to turn over Aedon, because it did not seem like they welcomed his intrusion either. However, they hated the Inspector more. Before DaHat became Czarina, there were few rules and no one ever inspected that they were kept. When DaHut took to the throne twelve sun-cycles earlier, things changed drastically. The peaceful comings and goings of creatures in the colony ended. Males were chained and imprisoned, and the females began drinking heavily, using their addiction to dull any sense that might suggest they were all prisoners. None of the mermaids spoke.

Just then, one of the beverage pods bumped into the back of DeCaliph's head. She turned, grabbing the pod with such force, that it burst in her hand. She tossed it aside, swimming over to the bar. There she found Aedon and Miriam.

"Guards! Seize these intruders. We will take them to Czarina DaHut to decide their fate."

Four mermen, who were chained to each other, emerged from another cave. They were bulky-muscular men, with tails a bit smaller than their female counterpart. Easily, they grabbed Miriam and Aedon and disappeared down another hole with them. DeCaliph growled at the others before following the captives into the tunnel.

"Who comes to wake me up?" a soft voice asked, swishing her scarlet tail around behind, before sitting up in a more vertical position.

The Czarina sat on a throne made from air bubbles, which rotated around each other, bound in some kind of molecular structure. Below the throne, different kinds of plants twisted into the chamber, mixed in with translucent gems. They dimmed and brightened in a balanced and choreographed manner to give an even illumination. There were two underwater harps, laid horizontal, where ascending air-bursts plucked their strings to play a soothing tune.

"This mermaid, this man ... found we, intruding," DeCaliph announced, thrusting her breast out and folding her arms in a scornful manner.

"We come without invitation," Miriam began, being cut off.

"Both we, admit to your transgression, I see," Inspector DeCaliph snarled, motioning the guards to leave them.

"Why do you trespass into our caverns?" Czarina DaHut asked, brushing her long hair away from her face.

Aedon signed the next few words and Miriam spoke them, interpreting, "To bring a message to you who is wise."

“You say with confidence that I am wise,” DaHut chuckled, before acting the part. “Indeed I am.

“You are a bud of wisdom needing only a light to blossom,” said Miriam, repeating Aedon’s sign language.

“What is this luminosity to make me flower, show me this light now,” DaHut pleaded, waving her hands about. Each of her fingernails was nearly a pody in length and Aedon moved aside hoping one wouldn’t poke him in the eye.

“New delivery coordinates come from official Asterians,” Miriam stated, swishing her spine a bit taller as her confidence increased seeing that the guards had left and the czarina was slightly shorter than herself.

“Where is this place,” ordered the crowned mermaid, extending an open hand that reached between Miriam and Aedon.

Hesitating, Miriam said, “Oracaero.”

“How is that you have obtained a man without a leash for your companion — yet I cannot keep a merman without chains,” she asked, jealous of the friendship she saw and a relationship she imagined.

“But a few moon-cycles born, he was dropped into the ocean. I came upon ... and lifted him up ... to be rescued. I was asked to watch all things under his feet,” she explained.

“I am the Czarina of the Mermaids and do not own a man,” the crimson-tail whined. “Please your Czarina ... and give me your male.”

“He is not mine to give, only to protect,” Miriam quivered.

“DeCaliph, take him to the stockade,” DaHut snapped.

Aedon yelled out a rash of objections which only sounded like blubbery under the water. DeCaliph grabbed his arm firmly. Then Miriam held out her palm, it began to glow a bright orange and it radiated heat toward DeCaliph’s arm. She yelped, letting go of Aedon before grasping her slightly burnt hand in pain.

Aedon waved at DaHut to get her attention, then lifted up the amulet he wore around his neck. It was identical to a *globeaky* she wore as a ring on one finger. DaHut screeched out a halting

sound that drew fingers over their pained ears. Everyone's attention was turned to the two *globeakys*.

Aedon placed his *globeaky* to his eye and motioned for DaHut to do the same. She hesitated and didn't want to participate in his scheme, but she felt trapped after ordering everyone to come back. Slowly she lifted the ring to her eye.

Between the two *globeakys* a light radiated. No one except Aedon and DaHut could see it, as they were the only beings whose eye fit perfectly into their piece of glass. The light swam around until it formed an image of Ahteana. Then, the image began to speak, slowly.

"Take the golden-orb ... deliver it to Oracaero. ... You must make delivery ... to the new destination... This may be our only chance ... for survival," Ahteana's image begged, fading away.

DaHut was troubled. She dropped the ring from her eye. Then she cleared her larynx and pretended not to see anything.

"Many Asterians, alive still," Miriam added. "Our help they need."

"I have seen nothing," DaHut chuckled. "Do you expect that a magician's trick ... would cause me to change and uproot the direction of our mission. For thousands of sun-cycles we deliver golden-gem ... to same location. ... A journey that I am responsible for."

"But the Asterians, no longer occupy your destination," Miriam pleaded, while Aedon nodded vigorously.

"Who am I to change route?" the czarina asked. "Asterians have ... proven traitors to be. Would you accept orders from Asterians who be dead, and only a dream of your imagination? ... Certainly you wouldn't."

"KNOW ... I ... THAT YOU ... SEE ... VISION," Aedon signed back.

"Only a glass-ball ... reflecting the glow of a fish do I see," Czarina huffed, flipping her nose in the air. "Such silly ideas you imagine, to treason they lead, to *hang-out-to-dry* they cause. Pray

now, that I turn you not in ... for attempting to rob. ... Expel them, so none will say that we have harbored traitors.”

“*Outta* here, now, all of you,” Inspector DeCaliph ordered, leading Miriam and Aedon back into the tunnel.

From the archway, Aedon turned around and lingered a few moments longer. His eyes met DaHut’s and there seemed to be a twinkle of attraction between the two for a brief moment. Then Aedon shrugged his shoulders and opened his palms, mouthing a word — *WHY?*

“Because I ... fond of you ... I set you free,” she whispered. “They promised I, to be made queen forever — but only if the delivery you seek to dsirupt, is kept on schedule. ... The new king is powerful — his roots grow deep. Beware, he has ten eyes everywhere.”

PAPYRUS TEN

SHADOWS OF SAHADA

The docks were gone; however, an occasional post poked through the water, outlining their former frame. Wooden planks littered the beach. Aedon glided his sailboat ashore and tied her off to the burnt trunk of a palm tree. Ducking, a dozen black hawks cooed as they darted past him, then, circled around and finally disappeared into a crumbling tower a ways off.

After his adventures in Nawat, the visions of Ahteana came no more. As many sundials past, the mission and the goal he was given seemed more abstract than real. It was easy to think that the task that had been asked of him, was simply a dream concocted in his own mind. First, he asked himself if the clouds he saw and voices he heard, might have been illusions — happening in his mind. Then he began to believe the rhetorical questions he thought on. It was simpler to deem that the duty assigned was an imagined misunderstanding, than to undertake the challenging appointment.

The waters in the deep South left him lonely. Knowing that Faeraud had appointed him Ambassador, he wondered what excuse he might invent to explain his absence. Longing to be with Areshia again and remembering his agreement to meet her, he forgot Ahteana's warning to stay away. He prayed Areshia would still be there instead of returning to Bashan where Yapet waited for her to accept his proposal of marriage. Because she had been away for months, Aedon hoped that she was deciding against such an arrangement with Yapet. The moment he arrived, he planned to buy her a gift — a new *sunbrella* — and give it to her as a token of his interest. Changing course, he sailed in the direction of Gianni, Sahada. With the calm waters and direct wind behind him, *Seoala* saw the shoreline in less than two days.

Stepping out of the boat, he thought he had landed in the wrong place. Even though, it's outside façade had been peeled away, its stone bricks cracked, and its tall-stance teetering on a slope, there was no mistaking the tower. The last time he was here, it was twice as tall, overlaid with precious stones and a burning torch flamed from its top. It hardly looked the same with its gems stolen and bricks crumbling. The ruins of the entire city traumatized him so, that his sandals couldn't take another step.

Blinking away the shock, he ran toward the abandoned buildings of the *educatory*. The entire campus had been stripped of anything that was larger than a mermaid's scale. Only the skeleton of its naked building, flapping in the wind, lectured in the rotunda now. Whispers in the breeze seemed to call his name — “Aedon ... Aedon ... Aedon ...”

A yellow cord caught his attention, the end of it frayed. Pulling on it, from beneath a pile of broken boards, he fished out Yenocha's *looking-scope*. A sound jerked his head right where he thought he could hear the faint voice of the instructioneer lecturing. The wind breathed, whispering a warning, “*Turn back now! He who enters will die. No one returns alive. Go back now. Do not enter these forbidden waters. There is death to those who enter. Return! Go back!*”

He had heard this warning before. He didn't listen to it then and he wasn't about to now. Tying the *looking-scope* around his waist, he stepped further into the rotunda. A broken table caught his eye and he sat down to rest on its bench. He had convened here, many times during his youth. Outside the crumbling window he faced, a piece of broken red-wood triggered a memory about how he and Faeraud used to play teeter-totter — when they were youngsters. Faeraud would get them riding up and down so fast and then he would jump off — leaving Aedon to crash to the ground on his behind. Many things had already come crashing down: the Irminsul Pyramid, the Asterian Moon, the ruling Prince Lords, and now the *Educatory*. Ever since Faeraud became king, it seemed like the whole world was on the falling-end of that teeter-totter.

He crossed the stone bridge, relieved that at least it had survived. The courtyard outside the library was in shambles. A landmark statue of a cherubim had fallen and smashed to pieces, partially blocking the entrance. Running inside, he hoped to find Areshia or anyone he might recognize. The once bustling and bright lobby was dim and piles of fallen stone littered the floor. Shadows covered the stripped walls and darkness eclipsed the broken balconies. Making his way through, a furry animal emerged from the shadows.

A growling sound announced a brown bear staggering toward him, “Murderer! Ya murdered mi breeding beauty — just as she was *fixin’ ta pop a cubbie*.”

“Honestly — I — I — had no idea,” Aedon stammered, jumping back and scanning the area for an escape route.

“*Ya* built this monstrosity of a defective cave — didn’t *ya?*” the bear barked.

Aedon’s eyes adjusted to the darkness uncovering where the mama bear must have fallen from. A piece of dangling rail, made from honeycomb, swayed from the second floor balcony.

“But I didn’t build this — this library. I was just a student here,” he pleaded.

“*Ya* humans — enticing us with *yer* ornaments made of honey — then push us to our death. Its time *ya* pay — pay for *yer killins*,” the fury monster roared, approaching with a vengeance and flailing his arms in the air.

Desperately, Aedon undid his waist-tie and tossed it up in the air toward a large column. The first attempt missed, and hit the bear, angering him more. The second attempt went better as the rope swung around the pillar. He secured it, climbed up the cord, and escaped to the second level.

The bear moaned while kicking pieces of debris that were in his way before calming down. After a while, when Aedon assumed he might be safe, a buzzing-electrical sound caught his attention. He turned and a ways off he noticed a smashed desk with a broken illumination-bulb sparking. One of its wires was held by a faun whose face was covered in dirt and dried-blood.

“You can’t — can’t take them — they mustn’t leave — can’t leave the chamber ...” a faint-shivering voice cried, each word was sharply pronounced, “The scrolls must — must be read — be read here ... no they can’t — can’t go ... you can’t — can’t have them ... You do know — you’re going to be in pyramids of trouble ...”

“Who’s there? Who are you,” Aedon shouted out, walking closer to the faun.

“Oh — it’s me. It’s me, the librarian. ... Who else did you think was here?” the thin man groggily answered, as if he had just woken from a bad dream. Half of his face flickered from the flashing sparks, the other side remained hidden in darkness.

“I’m Aedon ... was a student here — about six or seven sun-cycles ago.”

“No can’t say I’d *member* ... oh, wait, perhaps. ... The prince — you’re one of *em* princes. And you were always hanging with that *trouble-maker* — the one who sent *thems* — *thems* that stole all the scrolls.”

“I caused no trouble. Not me, most of the time. I just —”

“What do want here? What have you come back for now? There’s nothing left. *Ya* took everything already.”

“Pull your hoofs together and take a relaxing breath, there,” Aedon begged.

“Come over here — Maybe ... maybe ... I’ll tell *ya* about it all... If *ya* certify, you’re not here to make more trouble...”

He cautiously sat down, sighing, “Bears ... down in the courtyard, they’re upset too.”

“It’s the honeycomb that’s got *‘em* all scared. After the mama fell to her death, they started *blamin’* me,” the clerk explained, eager to make friends with a listening ear. “So I tore off the other rails and placed them at the end of the halls. They’re afraid that the things *‘ll* kill *‘em*. Keeps *‘em* away — at least for now.”

“Where did they come from?” Aedon racked his brain, “Haven’t ever seen many bears out in the desert areas around here.”

“The Warrior Channel released a measure of wild beasts to drive everyone out,” the librarian explained, sitting up and offering a piece of wafer from his basket.

Aedon bit into the piece, clarifying, “Warriors were here?”

“To raid the place — *Causin’* trouble, I told *ya*. ... Ordered to take every scroll in the tower — back ... back to the Irem ... for King Poseidontel to inspect.”

Remembering how the vision of Ahteana had warned him not to come, he began to realize that the things which he told himself might be made up in his mind, were not illusions — but reality.

“The master instructioneers and others, garnished what scrolls they could escape with. ... Then, they headed into the mountains — to avoid the wrath of the king, I’m guessin.”

“They’re in hiding then? In the mountains? ... Which ones?”

“I’m not supposed to tell.”

Aedon looked at him coldly.

“The mountains — the Mountains of Mauretania.”

“Mauretania! That’s half a continent North.” Aedon got up on one knee, exclaiming, “I must find them — I must find Master Instructioneer Yenocha. ... Areshia’s got to be with him.”

“Oh no .. that is way too dangerous of a place, especially for you — a prince of Atlantis.”

“Should I not be welcomed and received upon perception of my armband?”

“Oh yeah,” the librarian scoffed with disbelief before filling him in on the details. “*Ya see, Queen Merine* and her — all woman army — guard those mountains. They don’t like men.”

“Perhaps, but I’m willing to wager that they’ll talk to me.”

“They’d make you one of their breeding slaves — young and fertile, you would be useful for a couple decades, then they’d discard your body in the desert pit once you were older. ... At least stay the night here. *Travellin’* among the *beasts of defection* is not a wise thing to do in the dark hours — especially for a prince.”

Aedon nodded in agreement and then pulled his toga tightly around himself as he prepared to sleep on the floor next to the librarian. The faun offered him some additional burlap sacks and torn draperies that he had used to create a bed.

CHING-PLUNK! There was a long silence, then again: CHING-PLUNK! ... The librarian crawled out from his burlap to investigate. Beyond the pile of honeycomb, another golden coin dropped into a spot of light. CHING-PLUNK! He reached out to grab the coins. CRUNCH! A tightly tied sandal pinned his palm to the floor. Two wooden-masked beings stared down at him. The first masquerading man dangled a bag of gold while the second one revealed a sickle sharper than the Grim Reaper’s.

The faun snatched the bag of gold, pointing, “There he is, asleep.”

The shaking clerk tore out of the place, more frightened of them than of the bears. One disguised assassin pulled out a sword, following the other one who walked over to the sleeping prince.

The man with the sickle placed its sharp blade up against Aedon's neck. Then the first man lifted his sword ready to strike.

"AHCHEW! AHCHEW! I think I'm allergic to those wooden masks," Peter-the-Parrot sneezed out.

The two assassins turned around startled. The face covers disabled their peripheral vision for a brief moment as Aedon woke up and pulled himself away from the sickle. Next he yanked on the curtain which was underneath the feet of one of the intruders. The man slipped and fell into the other.

Aedon scrambled out of the library and ran toward the beach with Peter flying alongside. Their shadows blinked on the white sand, between the eerie-looking palm tree stumps, silhouetted in the moonlight.

"Peter, how did you get here?" Aedon asked, slowing up near the broken docks.

"I flew, stupid."

"I know that, how'd you know I was here?"

"Went to the Irem to find *ya*, I did. Just as I was *'bout* to ask Faeraud, Andromache comes in with a copy of your travel papyrus. I knew I had to get here quicker than a feather molts. ... Been *searchin'* for *ya* ... for days."

They stopped, crouching low, behind a pile of broken planks washed-up next to a tree. Two strangers were aboard *Seaola*. An argument ensued between the strangers and it grew louder when the two masked assassins showed up. One of the crows in the tower shouted down for them to *shut up*.

"Pete, the hawks? You think they can lend us hand ... or a claw?" Aedon asked.

"I'm PETER! And those are crazy birds! *Aint I gonna* be *talkin'* to *'em*," the bird insisted, placing the tip of his wing on his hip.

Then Aedon's eyes lit up with an idea.

As the argument on the boat began to calm down, a flock of hawks came aiming toward them. Peter had stirred them all up and

they were angrily chasing the parrot. The birds headed straight toward the arguers. Peter dived between their legs as the following hawk feathers flew everywhere, knocking the men over.

During the distracting bird-pecking and person-punching, Peter flew over with the end of Aedon's *rope-tie* in his beak. Around the men he zoomed as Aedon tumbled into sight to complete tying up the four trespassers.

"Most awesome job, Peter," Aedon congratulated, just before the bird landed on his shoulder.

"You won't get away with this!" the first man yelled.

"And why, not? I am an prince of Atlantis."

"Prince?" the second one scoffed. "We were sent here by King Poseidontel to capture you."

"Faeraud? ... Faeraud? ... Faeraud sent you?" Aedon tried to confirm, utterly surprised. "To incarcerate me?"

"No Prince Asinine, we were instructed to return with your head — before the next full moon rises," a third one confessed.

Aedon kicked the side rail on the boat. He was furious about this news. He had trusted Faeraud and thought that the king liked him. All his talk about secrets and their oaths, had all been lies. He realized this as he remembered Faeraud's own words once, when he said: *The best part about making secret alliances and secret promises is that no one else knows you made them — so you can deny that they ever existed.*

He realized that Faeraud never intended to keep any promises — including those given to himself. Then his anger turned to joy as he realized what this meant. Faeraud had broken the pact — he was free. He was no longer bound by the *finger-locking promise* the two of them once made.

"You cannot resist the power of the new king ..." one of the captives began.

Aedon snapped back, "Shut *'em* up, shut *'em* all up — will *ya*, Peter."

Peter darted over with an apple in his beak, laid a sharp claw deep into the man's shoulder and when he opened his mouth to scream, the bird gave the fruit a hefty push into the cavity.

Aedon released *Skyola* (the flying vehicle docked to his boat) and parked it on the beach, tossing Yenocho's *looking-scope* inside it. Then he set the course of *Seaola* west, toward Atlantis.

"Peter, can you navigate her in — to the Irem ... and deliver the message," he asked the bird.

"Cer-tain-ly!" Peter cooed. "I'll tell that lying king exactly what to do with these men."

"Just tell him what I dictated and then get *outta* there."

Peter nodded, then flew up on top of the helm as Aedon shoved the boat off.

"Bye, bye *Seaola*. You have been a solid and noble base for me ... a life saver. You have navigated my past with brilliance. I can only hope your future will be better than mine," Aedon exclaimed, giving a eulogy. "And, Areshia, I hope you'll forgive me, for losing that astonishing *rope-tie* you gifted me long ago. It has rescued me from many a precarious situation, and I fear, that I may not fair so fortunate without her."

PAPYRUS ELEVEN

ARIANRHOD

SPUT! SPUT! SPUT! Half-a-day's journey North, near the mountains that bordered Sahada and Mauretania, Aedon brought down *Skyola* to a rest. The energy shortage had reached Sahada too and he thought it unwise to use his emergency supply of fuel because he would need it when he returned. Parked on a plateau half way up the mountain range, he could see that the valley was far off. He would have to travel the remaining three day hike by foot.

A satchel of food and a canteen of water were all that accompanied him this time. Not a single beast, animal or bird was there for help or companionship; he was alone. While climbing the mountain, he thought about many things: how Faeraud had betrayed him, how Areshia was missing, how the Asterians had been annihilated, and how everyone and everything in the world seemed to be against him. His worst nightmare would have been more comforting than this reality.

Steep mountain peaks poked through the valley floor beyond, looking as friendly as a shark's jaw full of teeth. Only a tiny voice inside reminded him of the spiritual renewal he experienced on his voyage to Nawat and how he promised himself and Ahteana that he would stay on course — no matter what. There was some force, some kind of fate that was driving him over this difficult mountain and up the next.

Trying to make a path through the winding rocky steeps, the sun toiled, sucking every molecule of moisture from his body. A mirage of a cool pond with a large egg in it, teased his vision — coming and going until it blurred into the side of a rock. Closer he staggered along the rugged path, propping himself up under the shade of its slanted formations. Their jagged edges marred his hands, but he hardly noticed as the thirst of his dry tongue screamed louder. Yet, he made himself conserve the food and water he carried, for he knew not how many more mountains he would have to cross.

From behind a boulder, a skinny leg with a webbed foot nearly tripped him. He jumped back before kneeling down to examine the body part. A wrinkled Nawalym quivered a lip with barely enough strength to move. Aedon ripped open his satchel and grabbed the canteen, pouring a few drops of water into the pixie's mouth. Soon the creature was drinking more and an hour or two later it ate a few morsels of food.

“What is your name,” Aedon asked, forgetting their language. Then he asked again in its own tongue:

“Yayr nemi os nuet?”

“Nemi Poeku,” the Nawalym answered.

“Poeku? It is — it is you,” Aedon exclaimed with joy, as if he had found his father. “I don't understand. How did you get all the way here?”

Poeku explained, “Inner village, of Nimaneb preparing to hatch egg. Village started regenerating and egg dropping.

Mermaids lined up to relay it to the Irminsul and Poeku know that if Poeku stay, me regenerate with them too.”

“You knew what would come of the last village?”

“Poeku born into the Nad clan, and return back to home village. ... Flying near home, Poeku sees thousands of Nawalym fleeing. ... Gathered I, hundreds of orphaned Nawalym — we go to take refuge in next village. ... So many, already had come — that they trained tree branches to swat us away like flies.”

“I am so sorry, so very sorry,” Aedon said, holding the sickly creature in his lap.

“Poeku learn that me village — destroyed. ... Golden-orb stolen.”

“Robbed — And I bet I can guess by whom.”

“There is another ... another Nawalym village ... in northern desert. No one knows exactly, all we are learned, recently, that there — a refuge called *Arianrhod of the North*. Poeku fly North at night toward the star. Teaching say that Poeku have slight chance of finding. Many drown, by sea monsters eaten, or dry up along the way.”

“Then you will come with me. I am travelling North.”

“Find Arianrhod, must I, else Poeku die.”

“I know of a very wise man. He was my *instructioneer* at the *educatory*. I bet he can point us in the right direction to find your Arianrhod.”

Aedon found some twigs and made them a fire to keep warm as the evening stars came out. An occasional wild beast could be heard in the distance which kept them from dozing-off much. They decided to rest in the shade at day and cross the desert at night where they could travel directly toward the bright star. The next evening a sand storm began to violently blow. Its fierce wind tugged at his toga.

“I’ve never seen one of these at night. They can be pretty malicious, we’ll have to go around,” Aedon suggested.

“Noooo Noooo,” Poeku cried, pulling Aedon back toward the dust storm. “Must not, must never step from path of Bright North.”

“We won’t, we’re just going to take a detour around it. We’ll count off the steps so we know exactly how far to correct back. Besides, I’m an expert navigator by star fields,” Aedon explained.

“Nooooo — must go into storm,” Poeku insisted, yanking at Aedon’s arm and refusing to deviate a single step off-course.

“We’ll certainly get lost ... maybe even die in the storm. ... Can we at least wait it out?”

“Noooo! Path set before — you must follow. Never step off.”

Aedon wanted to dismiss the creatures pleading, but he had done that before, opting to take an easier road. Once when he did, he ended up in a valley of Pythons which almost cost him and his comrades their lives. With a grumble he realized that there was no easy path to the destination ahead.

The vision of the oasis he had seen earlier, was still dancing in his mind. He could almost taste the freshwater on his dry lips he wanted it so bad. It all seemed like a grave dream as Poeku led him into the dust.

Grains pelted their faces so hard that they could barely see. They held hands tightly. Then all of a sudden they lost their footing, their gripping, and each other. Separately, they tumbled down a steep sand dune. Further they rolled until they both came to a stop in a valley.

The basin was surrounded, on all sides, by the tall dunes; a dust cloud circled its parameter like the sides of a bowl. Yet, the storm made no noise inside its eye. It was many stadia to the other side of the crater and the center was illuminated by a hole in the top of the dust storm where its star shinned down. In the middle of the valley was a cool lake of water and in its center floated one of the golden-orbs spun by the Nawalym. This egg was smaller and dimmer than the others seen before. From under the egg protruded dozens of long cactus like branches which slowly rotated around

the shell. Perianth-like pouches hung at the end of each arm and you could guess that Nawalym were asleep in the hammocks. The surreal shadows cast by the glowing gem seemed to suspend time into a quiet slowness. It made Aedon groggy like a snoozing-drug might.

“We’ve made it — we’ve made it to Arianrhod,” Poeku exclaimed, falling down on her knees and drinking from the pond with exasperated delight.

A branch reached downward and its leaf-pod (shaped like the shell of a clam) opened up. Aedon opened his mouth to object, but Poeku was already inside its nest, in a comatose state. Before he could spit out a syllable, the flower closed up and moved away. Another branch flung its pod open. He hesitated a moment while looking at the dust bowl that surrounded him and the comfortable emptiness inside. He was too tired to figure it out now, all he wanted was to sleep. He fell into its grip, the bud closed around him and danced away.

Branches slowly raised and lowered, revolving the sleeping hammocks like a cradle rocks a baby. Occasionally a pod would flash with a sparking sound as if some electrical ghost were inspecting each. Soon, Aedon’s pouch sparked and lit up momentarily; the glow repeated again.

Inside the pod, thin strands of flower like stamen surrounded him. As he lay there, he could see the star twinkling between its strands as it slowly moved around the central egg. Resting on his chest, his *globeaky* began to flash in unison with the strands of his pod like a *transglaust* projector. Slowly images from his recent past began to project from the *globeaky* onto the cover of his capsule. He wasn’t sure if he were awake or if he were dreaming.

Again he began to doubt if the things that were shown to him were real or just his imagination. He wondered why he hadn’t seen an image of Athena in weeks. At first she was so close to him and her image or her voice was present with him every day, but

now she hadn't appeared in so long. Was her spirit still with him, he wondered.

"You may not always see me, but I am always with you," her voice whispered. "You have been shown many things, because you have believed and have overcome. ... So many others, so willingly gave up their small blessings. And now, a new master has amassed them into a collection, giving him power over each of their spirits."

The *transglaustr* flashed an image of Nile Island, of the windmill, the net full of trinkets in the lobby, then the shadow of a man gathering the net together. The man got onto his red horse and galloped away. Aedon was certain this was Faeraud even though he couldn't tell for sure. The horse trotted onto a raft and it sailed away from the island into the darkness of night dragging the net behind.

"You know who to trust and who you can depend on. Find us you will, seventy South, fifty to the sun. You are the only chosen one, that will bring, to safety — all others, while saving us from the king," Ahteana's voice slowly proclaimed in rhyme.

The morning sunshine opened each pod which was arched on a branch, stretching from the inner egg to the lake's edge. Poeku jumped out of her nest, fluttered her wings and landed on the sandy beach. Aedon attempted to do the same, except he forgot he didn't have any wings and ended up knee deep in the water, splashing his flailing arms to keep his balance.

"You all wet," Poeku laughed, pointing at him as he drudged ashore, ducking out of the way of another cacti branch swinging by.

"So you think that's funny; do you?" Aedon sarcastically asked, grabbing Poeku and dragging her to the edge of the water. She kicked her feet and flapped her wings, which only splashed Aedon in the face. He let go and the two of them sat at the water's edge catching their breath.

"More weird dreams — I had last night. ... I'm beginning to believe that a dead Asterian is more powerful than the living."

“If in vision of the hammock you saw, then much alive is your Asterian.”

“How can that be? The Asterians ... they are mostly dead.”

A funny bouncy looking Nawat overheard the statement and interrupted as she passed by, “Not true, not true at all. Rumors many, of survivors from tunnels.”

“But certainly Ahteana entered the other realm — either when her moon was blown to bits or her transporter crashed,” Aedon cried.

“Rumors of a hidden *Valix* with other survivors are parroting-rampant.”

“Other survivors? What other survivors?” Aedon eagerly questioned. “Wait, no wait! Where — where is the crash site?”

“Oracaero. It crashed in the glacier mountains of Oracaero,” the Nawalym detailed, flying off toward the lighted gem.

“Oracaero ...” Aedon thought out loud, “Of course, the same location she wanted the Nawatian orb delivered to.”

“Know of it, you do?” Poeku asked.

“Just south of Bashan ... southwest of my father’s abode,” Aedon said, realizing the close proximity of the two. “She kept suggesting that I somehow change the route of your golden-gems — to deliver them there instead. But the land of Oracaero stretches as wide as Atlantis. ... How will we ever find them?”

SPLASH!

“I was still sleeping — you didn’t have to do that,” a voice screamed. Picking herself up from the lake, she swiped a slap at the cacti’s branch which only prodded her back.

“Areshia!” Aedon called-out, running over to help her from the pond.

“Break of dawn, every morning! Don’t these temperamental *cactoideae* realize that not everyone wakes up when they do?” she

shouted back, sponging water from her toga. “And where are my arrows?”

The pod tossed the bag ashore and all the piskies ran away, taking cover.

“Is it you — or your arrows they’re frightened of?” Aedon asked.

“They’re not scared of the arrows, but of their gem,” she snapped, pointing to where they hovered, wings spread to protect it.

Poeku added, “Takes just one sharp point to tap the egg and it’ll break into a collection of pieces.”

She threw the bag over her shoulder and Aedon followed her into a cave where its entrance could barely be seen at the base of the dust bowl. Inside it was cooler, but not by much. A stone table rose in the center and sitting next to it was an old man, his face hidden under a baggy hood. He drank water from a small cup and ate the inside of a chopped off piece of cacti branch.

“Eat something boy,” he snapped, offering a piece of the plant. “You’ll get used to it ... little by little.”

“Tell me your tales of gloom that hold you all captive in this place?” Aedon asked, accepting a piece of the greenery.

“Few Asterians remain and there are even fewer places their allies can hide,” Areshia exclaimed.

“You’d wager so,” said Aedon with a bit of sarcasm.

“King Poseidontel has all the continents of the world locked up into serving him,” she explained further.

“When King Yaswhen returns, there will be a battle like none before seen,” the man revealed. “King Poseidontel — he is the *Uprooter* foretold and warned about in over a hundred scrolls, many written a millennia before our time,” the man said.

“What makes you so certain that Yaswhen IS still coming back?”

“His *Scrolls* foretold that the Asterians could be crushed, they foretold that the *Uprooter* might come to power, and they foretold that King Yaswhen would without doubt return. My dear

boy, you saw the first two prophecies, the two most unlikely-to-happen predictions, come to pass right before your eyes. Why would you not believe a third simple one?" the man stood up looking through his eye-glass trying to focus on the former student.

"Yenocha!" Aedon gasped, recognizing the man.

"The once balanced world is now tilted on its axis. Sayer and Faeraud have control of everything and soon — everyone. Those who have not been tricked into pledging loyalty are now their enemies. He is possessed by *Say and Teller*," Yenocha declared, slamming his hand on the table.

"*Seaweed*, of course he is," Aedon huffed, disbelieving.

Walking up to him, Areshia pointed out, "You've touched the *Everlasting Tree* itself, yet you still straddle the widening river. It's time to ..."

"I've already decided — weeks ago, I'll have you know, that I was bound to an oath previously. Those bounds have been broken. I decided that I was not going to sit by and let things just happen to the Nawalym or the Asterians," Aedon pledged, standing to his feet and firmly grabbing Areshia's shoulders. Then he turned around with frustration and kicked a rock out into the sand storm beyond.

Yenocha solemnly sat back down at the table, then folding his hands, he explained, "This is not a choice about taking sides with the Nawalym, the Asterians, the Atlantians or Faeraud,"

"I know — this is a choice of committing to *King Yaswhen* or to the influences of *Say and Teller*," Aedon exhaled, realizing, "But I am afraid that I have figured this out too late."

Yenocha removed his hood, saying, "When the path before you is a tunnel full of darkness, look for that spec of light. It will lead you to where you ought to be, if you don't lose its sight."

Night visited again and the Nawalym fluttered into their pods for sleep. Aedon was sizing up how he was going to stay dry (while climbing into one for the night) when Areshia surprised him from behind.

“Sneak-up any quieter and you’d startle even a Nawalym into the water ...” Aedon griped, turning around and stopping at the sparkle in her eye. It reflected glints of light from the glowing gem. “You are so pretty — so very beautiful.”

“I’ve noticed that a certain gift I gave you has been lost. ... I made you this new one, it’s still kind of green,” she said, handing him a new tie-belt made from cacti-flower strands woven together. “I grouped the knots — in units of seven, one for each *sun-cycle* we’ve been intertwined.”

“*Apa’hei* — I didn’t think you’d notice.”

“I’ve been advised that should I — we — become emotionally — or otherwise entwined It could endanger the mission.”

Aedon looked at the gift confused. He hoped it was a token to signal her desire to rekindle their relationship.

Then she chuckled, “When have I ever listened to a warning to avoid an adventure with someone — who is in love with me?”

“Then you’re not going back to Yapet — for sure?”

“Nothing is for sure.”

“Now, who’s straddling the river?” he taunted, wrapping the belt around his waist.

With a laugh they hugged. The light from the center of the lake cast a hue like a setting sun. He kissed her on the forehead and held her tightly in his arms.

“Tomorrow I have to go.”

“Go? You just got here,” Areshia objected, holding him tighter and refusing his escape.

“Ahteana — she’s still alive. She’s calling me. She’s been calling me.”

“I know ... But no one knows where she hides,” she admitted, easing her grip.

“I do,” Aedon blurted out. “She was on the same *Valix* as Zualpha. She waits at its crash site in the glaciers down North.”

“Then, you will need a guide that knows those parts. ... I think I know of one — one who wouldn’t leave you alone for a second.”

“Certainly I was, to admit the truth, hoping you were ready for another adventure. This one promises to freeze the toga off of you,” he said, smiling and turning her around in his arms so they both looked toward the golden gem, as if it were a setting sun.

“Poeku come too,” the blue-green pixie announced, presenting a fist-sized, golden-gem which she might use to spin up a new village somewhere along the journey.

The stars over Atlantis reflected on the waters of the inner moat. Encircling the Royal Irem, they weren’t nearly as bright as they once shined. An ominous reddish chunk of rock, floating in a sea of dust and debris, was all that remained of Asteria. It hung over the city appearing like an angry skull. The light of a dim illumination-bulb glinted off *Seaola* as she came into harbor and smashed into the side of a dock. Faeraud was summoned to the scene where he found the masked men he had sent to capture Aedon, tied together.

Peter-the-Parrot delivered a rhyme, sounding just like Aedon:

“Dearest uncle you meant more to me
 more than a brother or even a lover.
 You always had my back and took me
 under your wing of cover.
 What evil has turned you into this psychotic traitor?
 And cause you to send a squad to be my eliminator?
 I am alive, unharmed, and certainly know
 of the things that I shall do.
 But this I vow, to open my eyes and never again
 to follow you.”

Peter squawked and then quickly flew away.

“After that bird,” Faeraud yelled, snapping his fingers.

With superhuman strength, Faeraud broke off a wooden piece of the pier. Aiming its sharp end, he thrust it into one man’s abdomen.

“Useless parasites. You take my talents of gold and then deliver me grief.”

Then the Sayer within argued, “I told you that Aedon would betray us.”

“Of course you’re always right ... hardly so. Perhaps if you had given me a chance, I could have used the *Scrolls* to persuade him. Now you’ve frightened him away,” Faeraud snapped back.

“There’s no time for denigration. ... You know what has to be done,” Sayer commanded.

“I did give him a chance, more than one. I nurtured him and favored him and this is how he shows appreciation? You are right, he should be eliminated.”

Faeraud really did not want to get rid of Aedon. That would mean that the only person he could confide in would be gone. Each day Sayer consumed more and more of his body and while he had no hope of ever becoming himself again, holding onto Aedon gave him some kind of false belief that he could always call out to him and then be free of Sayer whenever he wanted. If Aedon were destroyed, then his only plan for escape would be gone too.

Swollen with worry, he paced back and forth until he walked over to where the old enchanted mirror sat, again covered. Faeraud kept telling himself that he wasn’t possessed by Sayer or anyone else. He even tried talking himself into believing that possession was an impossible myth, that he only had a split-personality disorder and was really just talking to himself.

“Possessed — Huh! ... Sounds like one of those myths made up by the Asterians. I’ll show you — I’ll prove to you,” he said to himself, yanking the cover off of the mirror and defiantly standing in front of it.

More than ever he wanted out of his contract with Sayer, he wanted to be his own person again. He thought that pretending that Sayer didn't exist would make him go away. After all, didn't Sayer really want to be invisible? Hadn't he worked hard enough to tell people he really was only a made-up fable?

"See it's just me. We are really all just fine and together here." Faeraud said to himself in the mirror. "We are not insane."

Then he decided to test the mirror a little further, "Those men, its ashamed they missed killing Aedon, but we *kinda* like Aedon. He's a good-looking stable kind of guy ... handsome ... and so valuable."

The image of himself had stopped moving its lips. The reflection then began to pace back and forth in the mirror. Faeraud stepped back. He was startled even though he had seen this behavior before. The mirror apparition stopped and turned toward him.

"So are you in love with that half-prince scalawag who betrayed you? Would you really break your oath to me, to save a *troublemaker* who is worth less than a unicorn's toenail? ... I thought you liked me ... liked us ... what about us?" the mirror yelled, cracking in two from top to bottom. Then the mirror-image stepped out of the glass through the crack.

"I have eaten the fruit from the *Everlasting Tree*, which is why you are after me. I will live for fifty-hundred sun-cycles and I will not let you possess me any longer," Faeraud shouted, trembling as he threw a powerless fist at the image. "Find someone else to be your shell."

The image turned into a gust of wind, which threw Faeraud across the room. He slid over the floor to the end of his bed where Sayer rematerialized before huffing back at him.

"You may live for fifty-hundred sun-cycles, but I will live forever. Your years will be but a short holiday for me, and you will be my body and execute my every wish during that time. You will find a way to handle this coexistence or I will certainly make it a torturous one for you," the spirit hollered, flying around the room

and then diving inside Faeraud's body. He shook with convulsions until Sayer overcame him. An evil grin wiped across his face as he let out a sigh of satisfaction. The evil one was now fully manifested inside the man.

PAPYRUS TWELVE

THE MECHANIC

Flowers and vegetation, which were once bountiful in color, turned pale or suffocated with the growing lack of sunlight. With a chill of concern, together, Aedon, Areshia and Poeku loaded up the delta-transporter, *Skyola*, with supplies, tools and extra *orichalcum* for the flight. They took for the sky, blazing through the clouds for a day and half until the lower region of Bashan began to show. The afternoon dragged on as they passed over endless ripples of glacier ice. It's repetitive formation dizzied the eye like a hypnotic pattern.

“Not to put a damper on this journey, but I marvel that this may have been a rather hasty idea,” Areshia confessed, looking out the window at the seasonal *Northerners* that had started to blow. “There are millions of square stadia down here. The chance of

anyone finding the remnants of a crash site are ... well, they're just reasonably impossible."

"Areshia, aren't you the one always telling me that I have to believe — and now you're having doubts?" Aedon responded, trying not to let on about his own fears and reservations.

"How is it that you know the way — and I don't?" she huffed.

"Each of us are given special gifts. None of us are given all of them. ... You know I'm a great navigator, maybe the best. So, relax," Aedon snapped, steering the ship around a growing mountain of ice. "Besides, Ahteana spoke to me. I heard her voice and it said, 'Find us you will, seventy South, fifty to the sun.'"

"Seventy and fifty — those are coordinates?"

"Longitude and latitude, no doubt," he agreed, bolstering their confidence.

"And you of course know how to read these by the position of the stars, I presume? ... Wait a sandglass pebble here — it's daytime and the stars can't be seen," Areshia blurted out.

Aedon had an idea that he was being led by a force in his *globeaky*, but wasn't entirely sure just yet. He tapped the necklace he was wearing; then, demonstrated by turning the steering gear so that the transporter changed course. The *globeaky* began to dim as he turned away. When he turned the flight back toward the glacier before them, the globe brightened again along with his eyes.

"Well I'll be a changing fruit tree," she exclaimed, examining the amulet closer. "So, our Asterian is using it ... like a homing beacon."

"Ahteana, herself, gave it to me," Aedon revealed. "It has been like a illumination-bulb for my sandals through many a journey."

"Its elegant flicker fades again, as we circle this vacant land of ice castles and nowhere to land," Areshia muttered, straining toward the window for a glimpse of any sign of life.

A sea of mountainous ice-horns protruded from below, while a mammoth glacier-wall moved closer in front of them.

“We crash! Die — going to die!” Poeku squawked, fanning his wings in defense.

“Aedon, turn around!” Areshia echoed, pointing to the wall of snow they were about to collide into.

When Aedon moved the steering-stick up to go over the mountain, the *globeaky* dimmed and pulled in a direction downward, yanking on his neck. He changed course back, heading directly toward the white cliff ahead.

“This isn’t supposed to be a suicide mission,” Areshia yelled, grabbing the steering-lever.”

“We are perfectly safe,” Aedon confidently said, brushing her hand away. “We’re staying on the path — on course.”

A smile tugged at Poeku’s chin as she realized that Aedon had learned one of the lessons she helped to teach — and now she was passing that faith onto someone else.

The transporter’s *crystal-capacitor* stopped, the *globeaky* brightened and they floated, almost suspended in time toward the icy wall before them.

WHOOSH! A hole opened from the center of the glacier and snow blew past them like a breath that exhales when a bottle of wine is uncorked. There was a shake, a rumble, and then a tremor like an earthquake. Next, a small avalanche of snow-chunks tobogganed down the outside slope, piling on top of each other until they completely covered the opening. Aedon, Areshia, and Poeku were inside the glacier, buried in darkness and quietness.

“You have arrived! Later than I wished, but sooner than I expected,” a soft, slow-spoken voice greeted them.

A yellow light faded up from the end of the cave. It was very far away. As a thin layer of snow covering the windshield melted away, the large cavern revealed its entirety. A few podes from them sat an enormous *Valix*. Though covered in scratches and embedded dents, it had been restored to a reusable condition. Dozens of Asterians worked on the vehicle. Some welded the shell, others labored inside. Ahteana motioned for the humans to follow her.

Aedon popped open the top of his transporter and the passengers climbed out, brushing away the snow that fell on them. Poeku screeched and fanned her wings at the wet powdery flakes she had never before seen.

“Ahteana!” Aedon gasped, recognizing her, he ran over with an embrace. “I knew you were alive! I just ... always knew it.”

“Nice vehicle. A bit bent out of perfection I’d mention,” Areshia started, as if she’d been appointed the status of a critic.

“It has been selected to return us to the moon. The time is right and we will depart this Earth soon,” Ahteana stated, leading them next to a wall of scaffolding.

“The Asterian ...” Aedon hesitated, “The Asterian moon — it’s been crushed into a million pieces. A comet or something hit it months ago. And Zualpha ... Zualpha is dead.”

“We all mourn the loss of many a body or cocoon. Our spirits damaged, yet alive, they do not swoon,” she explained, stopping for a moment, “Except for Zualpha whose soul has been imprisoned. His spirit begs to be set free before the Return of King Yaswhen is christened.”

“Then why the *Valix*? The Asterian moon is no longer ...”

She led them inside the vehicle toward the navigation room.

“A selected group of survivors will depart and set up a base on the far side of the bald moon, the side that never turns toward Earth. There we will revitalize and renew our species until the return of King Yaswhen,” Ahteana revealed, floating out a scroll in front of them which animated her plan as she spoke.

“Is that what I think it is?” Aedon asked, looking at the scroll floating before his eyes.

“She snapped, “If this were one of the *those scrolls*, we could feel it, breath it in our very souls.”

“Certainly,” he sighed, agreeing.

“You have all been brought here as part of my plan — for our journey beyond,” Ahteana stated. “Poeku, you bring us a gem that will grow into a golden future. You will travel with us and help create an atmospheric dome over a crater on the new moon ...

just like the one you witnessed in the wilderness — weaved by the desert Nawalym.”

“What will I be doing?” Aedon asked.

He was interrupted when a thin man wearing a toga that looked like a caveman’s dress covered in grease, held up a rusty looking ball. He walked over to a table and plopped it down.

“We still can’t get it to turn full power. The latest attempt, only damaged this *crystal-capacitor* beyond repair, or at least beyond my *fixin’* capabilities,” the mechanic huffed. “*Fraid* that without a new one, it won’t be flying anywhere.”

Areshia recognized the man, blurting out his name, “Yapet?”

“Areshia?” Yapet responded with anger-driven surprise, having never heard a response regarding his marriage proposal. “I waited weeks for you to return. A simple ‘Not Interested’ would’ve been more adequate than your absence without a single parrot or message coming.”

“I’m still thinking, pondering, considering,” she replied.

“You jest when your lack of commitment screams otherwise,” he snapped.

“The capacitor thing is missing — someone’s stolen it,” Seskef yelled, running into the room with a bag of tools, then stopping when he saw it sitting on the table. “What’s it doing here? ... How am I suppose to be unbending its rings when it’s not where it’s supposed to be?”

Seskef was Yapet’s brother, the second of three triplets. When he saw the mangled condition of the rings around the capacitor, he dropped the tool bag to the floor, realizing that it was beyond the repair of any skills they had.

“You’ve interrupted Ahteana, she was just about to tell us why Aedon was important to the mission,” Areshia huffed, avoiding the previous question.

Pounding the top of the mangled machine, Yapet impatiently repeated, “I know what my mission is, and I can’t do it

with this piece of junk. We won't be *departin'* for any mission without a new capacitor."

"We could go buy a new one, couldn't we?" Seskef suggested in his usual jittery manner. "They do sell them ... I know they sell them ... we had one replaced once, I remember ... I think I remember ... though it wasn't for a *Valix*. ... Where does one get a *Valix* capacitor now? ... They don't make these things anymore ... not since their moon crumbled ... I think ..."

"They've got a few, maybe even dozens, in Ablach," Aedon remembered, swishing his hand over the floating scroll to clear it before commanding a new option. "Relief map — Ablach — Show."

The scroll obeyed producing a dimensional model of the area.

"Right here! Here's the old factory. They've scaled the *Valix* down and are producing hundreds of new hybrid-ones, but I'd gamble there'd still be a couple of the older ones, like this model, in the area. Even if not, there's bound to be left-over parts," Aedon eagerly suggested.

"Well, no Asterian is safe to leave this cave," Yaped reminded.

"Yeah, they're turning them all into crystal skulls," Seskef added.

"We can't go on a shopping excursion when Ahteana has plans for each of us now," Areshia snapped. "What was Aedon's?"

When they looked back at Ahteana, she tilted her head and lifted her chin without a sound; yet, the gesture itself confirmed that Aedon had been included in the mission for the purpose of getting the needed capacitor. Everyone realized this at the same time.

"What about me. What's my part?" Areshia cried.

"Just as Aedon did not learn his mission until its time, you may not see your purpose until you start the climb," Ahteana declared, looking down at the satchel of arrows Areshia continued to carry with her.

“I will go investigate, see if the needed parts exist. This is why I was called to journey here,” Aedon volunteered, standing up tall, so tall that he almost hit his head on the doorway.

“I am going with you,” Areshia announced.

Aedon objected, “I must go alone. The village has no doubt become dangerous since the fireballs of doom rained down their streets. Their people have certainly become suspicious, aggressive and crazier than the mad *Enkidu*.”

“If I go not, but stay here, who’s going to rescue you when you get caught?” she responded, yanking on his *belt-tie*.

“When have I needed rescuing? It’s mostly been the other way around,” Aedon boasted.

“Areshia, you should stay here where it is safe,” Yapet added.

“I’d gamble that the avalanches that occur in these parts are more perilous than Ablach,” she snapped. “That *rope-tie* won’t be the only thing travelling with you, Aedon — I’m your companion this jaunt.”

“Seskef, get the shield for these imprudent travelers,” Yapet commanded.

“The shield? — Og’s shield?”

“Ablach is no longer the safe haven you remember it to be,” Yapet explained. “Trust not those who confide in you. If you arrive with the shield of a foreign land, there will be less suspicion that you have anything to do with an Asterian.”

Yapet snatched the shield from Seskef’s grip and handed it to Aedon. Its wooden construction was sturdy and even though the paint was worn, one could easily tell it was from Bashan and not Atlantis.

Ahteana cautioned, “If we sense any danger, we will not risk opening the hole again. But, there are other ways you may enter in. Find the ice tunnels along the river, when you return, and I will send a guide to show you the way, to learn.”

“Then we will be on our way,” Aedon agreed, stepping out of the *Valix* and back into the cavern.

“You’ve forgotten two things, already. Me — and this,” Areshia huffed, thrusting the shield he had left inside the *Valix* into his gut.

“Wonder how they’re *gonna* power this thing even if Aedon does get them their capacitor,” Seskef questioned, yawning as if it weren’t important.

Aedon knew he had failed (in his request to the mermaids) to deliver the fuel needed. He turned toward Ahteana to apologize, but before he could speak, she explained, “The things which you may doubt, are many times arranged by more than one route.”

Aedon and Areshia returned to their transporter, took-off, blasted through the snow-covered hole, and disappeared into the thickening horizon.

Yapet walked over to the opening prepared to sound the boomerang which would cause another avalanche to close up the gap.

“Keep it open a moment longer,” Ahteana requested, stopping him and summoning a white cockatoo which was her *copy-parrot*. “Chasey, I need you to deliver a message. Take flight to Ambassador Telopps with this verbiage.”

“Telopps?” the bird questioned.

“Yes, Ambassador Rheaf Telopps at the Irminsul — though, I expect you’ll find him at the console — since the pyramid has fallen.”

“Ready to record. Begin message,” Chasey squawked.

“Ambassador Telopps, I bring encouraging tidings. Many of us remain alive in soul, in body and in housings. I have survived the accident and crash. Please keep this confidential as we plan a secret dash. Your aid, in a manner like we previously rehearsed, is required. Someone will signal, when it is time and help is desired,” Ahteana spoke, talking to the bird like it was a microphone.

“Got it, got it,” the cockatoo crowed. “Cookies for *birdie* when I return — that aren’t stale, please.”

THE MECHANIC

Neither the bird nor Ahteana were aware of Telopps wavering loyalty as Aedon hadn't had time to reveal what he had seen previously. The cockatoo shot out through the hole, onward, toward the Irem. Yapet launched the boomerang and once again the snow fell, sealing in the cave along with their fate.

PAPYRUS THIRTEEN

MISSING DELIVERY

The cavity, where the Irminsul Pyramid once stood, was filled with the tall beams that created a steep frame stretching into the sky. Poseidontel was reconstructing the building and hundreds of humans and thousands of animals worked day and night on the fortress. Deep below, in its depth, remained much of the infrastructure that was originally built by the Asterians. Poseidontel, Telopps, and Andromache gathered there for a special occasion. It was the night that occurred once every twelve years — the night in which a new golden-gem, spun with pure *orichalcum*, was delivered. But the area had changed drastically. Deep in the cavity where the underground stream ran, rose an altar made of stone. The carcass of a sacrificial bull was splattered across it in a pagan-like ceremony which was coming to a conclusion.

“While we wait for delivery of our *orichalcum-gem*, I will present a token to Ambassador Telopps. ... For your enduring loyalty, I present you with the King Poseidontel Fork,” the king

announced, handing over a large scepter with three prongs to Telopps.

It resembled the same scepter which Poseidontel held, but it was not decorated with as many jewels, gold, and *orichalcum*. The Ambassador knelt on one knee and bowed his head as he graciously accepted the award. There was a round of applause from a few other warriors who were gathered in the deep pit far beneath the earth where the Irminsul Pyramid once stood.

“You are sure this is where it will be delivered?” Poseidontel whispered to Telopps, hoping he wouldn’t be embarrassed should it fail to show up.

“For tens of hundreds of sun-cycles, each decade the mermaids guide the egg of gestation right here to splash over the falls and into the others, that once resided below,” Telopps assured him.

“Indeed, news of the egg-dropping reached here last month,” Andromache assured him. “We have dozens of spying mermen that have confirmed it was transferred, in the relay, from the *Mesapian Current* into the *Pishon Flow*. It will arrive on schedule.”

Previously, the underground area flowed with dozens of vigorous water falls. Now only one remained, and its water barely trickled out. The group waited in anticipation. In the opening below, they had rigged up a gigantic net with all kinds of pulleys, ropes, and wires to catch the gem.

“This is golden, I only wish Ahteana was here to see this,” Poseidontel remarked, smirking with revenge.

“This will solve all our energy needs for the next sun-cycle,” Andromache gleamed, grinning to her left ear. The right side of her smile never did want to cooperate.

“Maybe even the next decade,” Telopps piously, yet a nonchalantly, reiterated with his nasal tone. “An egg at full gestation is the most powerful that we could ever hope to harvest.”

They waited.

More time passed.

Faeraud began pacing back and forth as he was getting impatient.

Grains emptied an hourglass, and another, then a third.

SCREAM! SPLASH! A mermaid appeared at the top of the falls. In her two hands she held a small gem. It had a crusty shell and looked more like a rock than an egg. It certainly wasn't the gigantic glowing one they were expecting.

"What's that! Who are you?" Andromache demanded, rushing to the edge of the canyon that stood between the falls and the channel of warriors.

"This egg has been relayed through underground rivers by hundreds of mermaids. It comes to you from Nawat. Do you wish to accept your gem?" Miriam the Mermaid asked in an almost mocking tone.

"Give it here!" Poseidontel shouted.

The mermaid took the egg, swam back away from the falls, then on her tail-fin she danced forward and tossed it across the canyon toward them like an Olympian athlete throws the javelin.

The orb seemed to have a mind of its own. First it flew to the right and everyone rushed to the edge of the canyon to catch it. Then, it changed directions and went left. Everyone rushed that way, tripping over each other, as they were all looking at the egg instead of where they were running. Next, it flew right again. There was more shoving and a couple warriors even fell over the cliff. Finally, Andromache yanked the object from the air.

Regaining composure, everyone made their way back to their posts. Andromache proudly presented the gem to the king. "Here you are — King Poseidontel, your majesty," she said, bowing as she ceremonially presented the egg.

Anger built up in the king's entire body. His countenance and skin became redder than the royal robe he wore. He took his trident and swung it at the gem, slicing the top off of it.

"How dare they! Who did this?"

The top of the egg flew towards Telopps with a mighty force. He ducked and it egged another warrior knocking him into

the ravine. Then, a small scroll popped up from inside the shell. Everyone froze with their jaws wide open. Poseidontel slowly extended his arm while looking side to side to make sure there were no other unexpected surprises waiting. Then he plucked the papyrus out, unrolled it and began to read it aloud:

*Ah hurlueursedo khunkzeveng taetutch
taeahog deko et nad futa bueuyun,
Ez khut gun avaeto taeslofyzoz taeseco
ahvyuna khut meivysha vun.
Avaoluechuer sep ez to slohourzo tez khozo
eveluedwend epuluew futan,
Evethdruw khut ond blauyd to eveluedwend
ah epuulue ketz elue ketz ahvun.
Khut guthor ahlueon tor vowolueryun
yomleclueuem tuzum,
Fu blaemetevu kuelue eveluedwend avaula
futa ketz temum.*

“What does it mean? Where is Aedon when we need him most? Who can read Asterian?” Faeraud demanded, beginning to throw a tantrum.

“Certainly I may make an attempt,” Ambassador Telopps volunteered stepping forward to have a look.

“No, we can read it just fine,” King Poseidontel decided, snapping the scroll back. His face turned even redder and it morphed into a beastly, almost dragon-like, form. Then he interpreted the writing:

*Like a partridge that hatches eggs it did not lay,
Is the man who gains riches by the unjust way.
When he is ripe, they will not follow his rule,
In the end he will prove to all to be a fool.
The mother Asterian has reclaimed her gem,
No prince will take what belongs not to him.*

“No PRINCE ...?” Poseidontel shouted. “I am not a prince. I am king — King Poseidontel! I will show them who the fool is. Find that mermaid and fetch me the real egg.”

“I will organize a search force at once,” Andromache offered, starting to get up off her knee.

“A search won’t be necessary. I already know where my little gem went,” Poseidontel huffed. “Like Zualpha, Ahteana was a passenger on the *Valix* that crashed — somewhere in the Bashan Glaciers. Find Ahteana and there you will find my jewel. But you will need more than a *looking-scope* to see where she has hidden this, and more than a poisonous arrow to pry it from her grip.”

“Our best warriors will be put to the task,” Andromache gleefully volunteered with a sinister sparkle in her eye.

“The world is mine, all mine!” Faeraud growled, swinging his scepter at the bottom-half of the fake-egg and knocking it across the canyon like a baseball.

Telopps was walking home and admiring the new ornamental-fork the king had given him when a spurt of white dodo rained from the sky and landed on top of the left-pronged jewel. Telopps grunted with disgust and looked up just as Ahteana’s cockatoo came to a screeching-stop on top of the right spike of the fork.

“Ambassador Telopps, honored to have found you, finally. Vital message for you, *birdie* comes to deliver,” Chasey announced, panting out of breath.

“Shoo! Get off my fork you dirty fowl,” the ambassador scowled, swatting at the bird.

“Must deliver message from Asterian.”

“And I must clean my new prized scepter,” Telopps snarled.

“Message from Ahteana, have I,” the bird continued.

Telopps stopped, his interest perked up, “Do go on. What is this message that comes from the dead?”

Mimicking Ahteana, the feathered messenger delivered the message which revealed that Ahteana and other Asterians were alive and hiding.

“Alive ... This is very good news, indeed,” Telopps sighed with relief and ingenuity, thinking up dozens of conniving plans that rushed through his head all at once, each of them ending in a reward of untold riches for himself.

Chasey continued, “Lead the other Asterians, you have saved and hidden, toward Ablach and send this bird back with your oath laden. This is a troubling time and our escape nears the sublime.”

“Ablach? Indeed, we’ve always known trouble brew ... ah — er ... I mean loyalty grew in Ablach. Where exactly *is* Ahteana and the others, my friend?” he inquired further.

“North, down North of Ablach. Hidden beyond the Talae Glacier,” the bird responded.

Then Telopps grabbed the cockatoo by his two legs, “You my little friend are going to tell me exactly where Ahteana and her outlawed Asterians are residing. Indeed, you will tell me. Because, if you don’t, I am going to pluck out every one of your feathers starting with this one — and then eat you for dinner.”

There was a yelp as the first feather was plucked. The cockatoo squirmed and tried to bite Telopps, but she was overcome as the ambassador held her down against the ornamental fork, then took his belt-tie and tied the bird to it.

“I know someone who is just waiting to hear from you,” Telopps said, picking up the fork. He marched back to the Irem with the bird tied to the top of it. Chasey objected with squawks and other sounds that a proper bird would rarely verse.

A sheet of ominous purple haze sliced through the tall chimneys of the stone ruins of Ablach. Only buildings made from stone had survived. Ashes remained where other wooden structures had burned. Not a single tree, bush or blade of grass could be found. The silence of the village was contrasted against the noise of

a large factory in the distance. The mill was tall like a pyramid and had a matching triangular floor-plan. Hundreds of orange and purple smoke-puffs poured from short stacks that protruded from its roof. Their heavy weight enveloped the town with a musty-charcoal-sulfuric odor. Though it was afternoon, it was dark as night.

Aedon and Areshia parked their transporter at the outskirts of town and hiked in. Walking through the abandoned village, they came upon the well in the center of the town square. It was disheveled with missing stones and a broken crank. Aedon almost trembled, remembering what he had seen happen there before. A memorial stone had been placed next to it with the names of the victims; but, that too had been vandalized, smashed, and broken into pieces.

“Amphictyonies should not search in broaden day, for those who seek are taken captive away,” a man sang out, hiding behind a hooded robe, sitting within one of the charred-out structures.

“We know not your accusation as we travel from lands distant,” Aedon answered, staggering toward the structure’s shadows with the armor, whose weight began to make him tire.

“You march with a shield from Bashan ... obviously made for someone else — whose stature might be quite larger than yours. I’ve been in these parts long enough and know who you are.”

Then Aedon questioned with a whisper, “Who is the man behind the mask that asks, or are you but a deceptive trick we should hesitate to trust?”

“Confirm your name and I will reveal mine.”

“A prince of afar, whose authenticity has been questioned much, begs a hood of protection like that which covers you in secrecy in the shadows of this place.”

“I am a former Etruscan ... Evaemon,” the man revealed, pulling back his veil, standing and greeting them.

“Apa’hei,” Aedon hugged with relief. “Are we ever so glad to see a friendly face.”

“Apa’hei,” Areshia echoed. “You are a welcomed robe.”

“King Poseidontel’s fingers now close in around the entire globe. This is the only place the few remaining *Amphictyonies* come for refuge — and even then, dozens mysteriously disappear every day.”

“There is still a following ... alive ... here in Ablach?”

“Why yes my boy. They still hide in the well over there,” Evaemon pointed out. “No one would expect them down there. Not after the fireball of destruction that came.”

“We’re not here to join any more secret organizations,” Aedon interrupted.

“Then what did *ya* come all the way down here for? Certainly not to work in the factory ... voluntarily?”

“We *sorta* did come looking for a part, something that might be found at a factory?” Areshia confessed.

Evaemon scolded, “You could’ve purchased any part which is manufactured here —”

Aedon cut him off, “We need a *crystal-capacitor* — for a *Valix*.”

“Ah ... oh ... I see,” Evaemon pondered, almost shocked. “An original *Valix*? Where do you think you need to take flight to? There’s no place to travel to — outside our own world now?”

“Why do you make me turn evidence with more questions? It is for a *Valix* to help some of the Asterians, ones whom you helped to set free once before,” Aedon explained, hoping that he had not said too much, but after all, Evaemon was a trusted friend and one of the few who had influence him to commit to the Asterian side.

“I suppose there may be half a dozen mechanisms of that size in the old Paddle Wheel Factories ... up the mountain side,” Evaemon suggested.

“Will you show us the way, come along with us?” Areshia asked.

“I wouldn’t step a heel in that place for all the *orichalcum* in Atlantis. Anyone caught up in these parts, especially the old *Paddle Wheels*, would be sentenced to hard labor in the *Iron Wheel*

— the factory over there,” Evaemon told them, shivering as he pointed to a shinny-iron plant spewing out pollution. “My son tolerates my existence, but only as I stay in the shadows.”

“We can’t get the part we need by ourselves and it would take too long to search all the buildings up there,” Areshia complained with disappointment.

“The search is not the only challenge you face. After you have your precious crystal, where on earth do you think you’ll get the energy it requires?”

“We never thought of that, did we Aedon?” Areshia realized, slapping his shoulder as if the whole idea were stupid.

“They said the fuel was on its way — remember,” Aedon recapped, tugging her hand to start the journey.

“It would do the two of you some good to remember that my son, Prince Evad, has taken over as Etruscan. I no longer have any influence in this place. I know he is a good man. *Good* is still there — deep down inside him, somewhere,” Evaemon rambled, referring more to himself than his son. “He can’t help what he does or doesn’t do. No one can fight the power of this thick darkness that infects the planet now.”

Areshia tried to comfort him, “Do not lose faith, my Etruscan. For if we do live in days of darkness, then there is hope. The prophets do tell that this would be the time when King Yaswhen would return. Is this not a good sign?”

“King Yaswhen is surely dead by now. But I do admire your courage. ... You may discover it profitable to locate your prize in the waterwheel constructed with rock. But I must warn, they are guarded by beasts in the summer and owls in the winter.”

Areshia shivered at the mention of *owls*. When owls (especially *Witness-wise Owls*) are guarding a place, it is easier to sneak by them during the day when they sleep. They waited for dawn, then bid farewell, and hiked into the hills.

Water cascaded down the hillside mobilizing many of the turning wheels before it spilled out into the *Athabasca River*. Aedon

and Areshia crawled low through the maze of factories. Each building had a waterwheel attached and each was made from different material: straw, wood, glass, sand, logs, bricks, honeycomb, and many other materials. Areshia kept low, ducking down further at the sound of every bird. They finally found the structure made from cut-rock.

“This can’t be it. Its wheel is jammed into the side of the hill,” Areshia protested, watching water splash over it.

Atop a trellis leading from the waterwheel to the factory, sat six *Derbyan Parakeets*. Accustomed to the cold climate, only their sinister gray-heads and beady-eyes cocked to follow them to the stone building. It was absent of a door, but an opening where a window once lived, presented hope for entry. Aedon approached first, poked his head inside, and then motioned to Areshia that it was clear. The two of them climbed through the opening into the place as one of the parakeets yelped as if to object.

“Perhaps you’re right,” Aedon debated, seeing that the stoned factory was larger than it looked from the outside. It went back into the hillside for quite a distance.

“Careful the floor is all ice,” Areshia yelped, balancing herself as she climbed in.

“This looks like it. I think this might be one ...” Aedon said, picking up a small *crystal-capacitor* about the size of a basket.

“It’s awfully small. Is that all that’s here?” Areshia moaned, disappointed.

There were all kinds of tools littered about the area. Heists, pulleys, and tables were drenched in cobwebs. The musty place was dimly lit by only the opening from where they came.

“Thank-you chumps,” Prince Evad said, walking into the light and snatching the capacitor from Aedon. “There really is no place for thieves and rebels to hide in my province.”

“I am here as an ambassador, Evad. ... I need to ask a favor,” Aedon began.

“No more favors! You contaminate this crystal simply by looking at it,” Evad snarled. “What would you want with one of these engines anyway?”

They didn’t answer.

“My dear *educatory-mates*, doesn’t matter why you came — because you will be slaving for twenty-sandglasses a day in the *Iron Wheel* below.”

“Your royal *pain-in-the-armband* highness, Faeraud appointed me an ambassador. Don’t you think an ambassador, one who is also a prince, might just be missed?” Aedon retorted back.

“You’re cavorting around with a fugitive and you think you can bargain? No more deals for you. The only deal I’m going to make — is for your reward. I’ll keep you here just long enough for its value to peak,” Evad gloated, laughing in his high-pitched tone, “Heh, heh, heh!”

Breaking in a door which was further away, two grizzly bears stomped into the room with ropes and grabbed Aedon and Areshia.

“Once you promised me that your adventures would freeze the toga off of me,” Areshia reminisced. “This wasn’t what I had in mind.”

“Perhaps you know something about where your father’s key is kept,” Evad asked, fingering Areshia’s chin. “If such a key were to come to me, I would not only set you free, but might also harbor you freely in my land.”

“She doesn’t have any key,” Aedon shouted. “What is so drowning important about her father’s key, anyway?”

“Really, Aedon,” Evad exclaimed in disbelief. “You pretend not to know — and so well. ... That key — it unlocks the *Third Scroll — the Scroll of Air*.”

There was gasp as Aedon and Areshia looked at each other. Certainly they should’ve guessed. It all made sense now.

Evad ordered the bears, “Tie them to the mill-table and keep watch until I find out how much the king is willing to pay for them.”

MISSING DELIVERY

“I thought you and Faeraud were competitive? When did you start slaving to his call?” Aedon snapped. “I warn you, Evad — he will betray you.”

Before jumping out the window, Evad naively chuckled, “No he won’t. We have a *finger-locking promise*.”

PAPYRUS FOURTEEN

MAD ENKIDU

The wind howled as it leapt inside the stone factory where Aedon and Areshia had given up on trying to maneuver themselves free. Icicles hanging from giraffe-size pistons, which were mechanical extensions of the waterwheel, grew with the dribble of water trickling over them. Frustrated, Aedon leaned back against the mill-table, where they were tied, and banged his head against it, repeatedly. Areshia shuffled her sandals together, back and forth, trying to keep her feet warm.

“*Seaweed!* If I had come alone, we wouldn’t be in this predicament. Evad would’ve let me go,” Aedon huffed, thinking that he may have been more free to speak openly to Evad about Faeraud had Areshia not been there.

“Because, you’re not a fugitive, I suppose?” Areshia snapped back. “Evad says he has a *finger-locking promise* with the king.”

“Faeraud has made more illusionary promises than he has fingers that can lock.”

Aedon wanted to forget about some of the promises he made. It didn’t matter anyway, they had all been shattered. His thoughts voiced into mumbles, “When we get out of here, we ought to just deliver what Ahteana needs and then settle down some place quiet — where no one will bother us.”

“Once-ago, we were going to do that — back at the Mestor abode,” Areshia replied.

“Yeah. ... That’d be the first place they’d look for us now.”

“No telling where we could go, that would be safe. Maybe Methouslan would let us stay at the vineyard for a while,” she suggested.

“I really wanted to live at the Irem, and was hoping that someday we would ... maybe ... have a big wedding there. ... Not to rush things, of course, just fantasizing here,” said Aedon, apprehensive that he had blurted out his deepest desire too suddenly.

“Don’t think they’d take too kindly to binding a couple of fugitives, like us, into wedlock,” she chuckled, almost giddy, surprised that his fantasy was similar to her own.

“We could visit my father, Gilgamoeh. Maybe we could find the abode he is building and take a room there,” eagerly Aedon suggested. “You’ve been there already — I’m *supposin’?*”

“I’ve never seen past the village where the supplies are dropped. ... Heard it’s a three day hike up the treacherous glacier mount to the place.”

“We’ve travelled on adventures through terrain rougher than that,” Aedon reminded, chuckling.

“Do you think that he — your father — is ready to receive you?” she asked.

After a moment of frowning, he said, “The vineyard is warmer. I wouldn’t want your feet to freeze like they are now.”

Soon the bears that watched over them succumbed to a hibernating sleep. Dark shadows further inside played tricks on

their mind and many times they were certain there was another being or beast at the far end of the room. The growing sound of scuffling sandals only made them more certain. Closer the noise crept; then, suddenly a man raced toward them, leaped through the air, and cut the ropes that held them hostage. Aedon immediately bounced to his feet, grabbed the mystery man, and dragged him into the light. It was one of the Etruscans.

“Ampheres! Why have you cut our ropes? Is this some kind of a trick?” Aedon asked.

“Why are the Paddle Wheel Factories empty? Do you know why no one works here anymore?” Ampheres riddled, catching his breath. “Why did commerce just suddenly stop flowing here one day?”

Aedon tried to say something. He opened his mouth to start, but he was cut off as the old man continued his spiel.

“My province has a boundary that runs right up to the river there. On the other side of the stream, the factories of Evaemon thrive. Commerce on my bank has been desolate since the equinox sun set. ... Used to be — that this was the most productive village in all of Atlantis. ... Recently, King Poseidontel happened along and shut it down, replacing us with his slave labor camp across the river — where Evad rules. The *Valixes* that were once built for the Asterians, were fashioned with loving-care by animals and humans. These handmade factories have been abandoned and lay in ruin. Now he builds replacements for the *Valixes* — calls them *Pauwvotas*, each with their own sun-cell for recharging the *orichalcum*. Keeps ordering more and more ... for some imaginary war he believes will take place in the sky.”

“Certainly there is history here, but what does that have to do with us?” Aedon asked, helping Areshia stand up.

“I could turn you in myself, and I should. I would receive such a bountiful reward. But it would come to light that Prince Evad was your true captor. He is no doubt, down there right now, trumpeting about how he’s caught you. ... Your escape would be an embarrassment to him, and I delight in humiliating the

youngster,” Ampheres explained, helping Areshia out of her ropes. “Now go, before he returns!”

Aedon grabbed his satchel and just as he was about to leave a glint of light reflected off of one of the *crystal-capacitors*. There was the prize, the very thing they had come all this way to obtain. Grabbing it, he stuck it in the bag. Then, he grabbed Areshia’s hand, shooed the parakeets away, led her out the window, back down the hill, and through the maze of paddlewheels.

Awhile later, just before dawn, Prince Evad returned to the stone factory. This time he brought an illumination-bulb and fixed it on as soon as he was inside. As the light faded up, Evad’s greedy-grin slumped down. A pile of cut ropes greeted him.

Ampheres stepped into the light, dangling a piece of rope in Evad’s face, “They’re gone. I saw him cut the chains with his own mind. Perhaps his *enchanted poems* are stronger than yours.”

“That’s impossible. Who did this sneaky deed?” Evad demanded, stomping his feet like he were about to throw a temper-tantrum. He cooled down a little when he almost lost balance and slipped on the icy floor.

“Are you forgetting whose land you’re standing on? You are in my Etruscan,” Ampheres emphasized, dropping the rope to the floor.

“Foolish old man, you’ve written the end to the battle over this territory. Once Andromache and Faeraud hear what you’ve done, they will give me your entire province and hopefully even more,” Evad snottily shouted out, snipping his nose in the air.

“The path they journey down now, is one that I have set — a trap that will lead them to King Poseidontel. And who would doubt my six *Derbyan Parakeet* witnesses?”

“So misinformed, you are. I’ll let you in on a secret, one that no one else knows. I have found favor with the king. We go way back, to the days of our youth at the *educatory*. Soon I will be named next in-line for the throne. King Poseidontel and I have made a *finger-locking promise*,” Evad bragged with a tone that would suggest Ampheres should be apologizing instead of gloating.

“You tell of your secrets so easily,” Ampheres chuckled, “And you have sealed this with an *enchantment*, as well, I am certain. ... Like the other nine foolish Etruscans, you are deceived. Faeraud has made the same *finger-locking promise* with all of us too.”

“You are an evil, bitter old-man. I don’t believe you,” Evad cried, kicking at the ice-covered piston.

“Do you really think he would name you his successor — over Mestor? Come on foolish one,” Ampheres condescendingly snarled. Then he whistled and the *Derbyan Parakeets* flew in and landed on his arm, “Go now, my little friends and deliver the messages you hold in your beaks.”

There were a few chirps and then the half-dozen parakeets flew out and away on their mission. The flock journeyed many stadia. Soon they were over the area where Andromache was advancing. Just as they were about to spread out in different directions, a large net extended from below and caught one of them.

Like a moving city of warehouses, hundreds of vehicles trucked over the rough-icy terrain located north of the Agglomeration Forest. Each black-box was propelled forward by tractor-like tracks that were ten-podes wide, ten-podes high and two-hundred long. The moving vehicles were known as Astonishing Battle Crates, or simply, ABCs. All ABCs looked the same from the outside; however, each one contained its own unique battle element. They moved swiftly and effortlessly like a herd of unicorns stampeding across a prairie.

The topography morphed from brail-like bumps into cone-shaped stalagmites which brought the ABC-tractors to a halt. Each stalagmite looked like an upside down icicle sticking up from the ground. They stretched across the horizon for hundreds of stadia increasing in size as they approached the glacier.

A short man, with his black framed looking-glass, paced back and forth. He looked at the pointed mountains of ice that

stood in their way. He wasn't sure what to do and when he saw General Andromache approaching from beyond, he did what any Captain would have done: he barked out orders and pretended to have everything under control.

“All Warriors exit cabin! ... Present shovels! ... Dig!” Captain Tuzun commanded.

The icicles moaned with objections at the indentation of each shovel as the men hastily followed orders. A black-marble vehicle pushed its way to the frontline. Quickly it braked, zigzagging across the ice before stopping. A heavy-door groaned open exhaling a warm breath of air like a boiling pot does when its cover is removed.

The ground shook as Andromache stepped out to access the situation, “We are going to need four channels, set them up higher on the mountain top beyond. And two-hundred OPICOR operators should be sent to set lines at the glacier beyond them. This ground assault WILL move!”

She stopped in disbelief, noticing the *shovelers* for the first time, “Captain, how long do you suppose it will take your warriors to dig through these ice-cones which seem to have stopped their progress? ... Do you really expect that your little picks and shovels are going to pave the way through fifty stadia of ice? ... Amateurs! ... Where have the days of the real Warriors gone? ... I want these protruding stalagmites turned into *stalag-plains* by morning! ... Ice Saws forward!”

Dwarfed and almost hidden by the large tractors, were hundreds of smaller vehicles. A dozen of them zipped to the frontline extending a cannon with a fast rotating saw blade at the end. These ice-saws quickly cut into the frozen stalagmites causing them to shatter. A path began to emerge leading them into the nighttime. The hidden sun did not stop them nor the noisy-saws that cut and chopped away. Other vehicles ground up ice and mixed it with dirt laying out a firm road that could be used to advance forward.

The next afternoon, Aedon and Areshia found their *delta-transporter* when it peaked out at them from around a snowy hill. Aedon opened the hatch and tried starting it, before Areshia even caught up. CURCHUNK! WHIRRRRRZONK! Blip.

“The capacitor — it’s been stolen,” Aedon snapped.

“What about the one in the bag? Rig-up the one you have, already,” Areshia shouted back.

“Oh — yeah — maybe ... maybe not” Aedon thought, before seeing that the other capacitor was not only the wrong size, but would be way too powerful for his small *delta* — it would melt the thing in minutes.

When they stepped out of the vehicle they were greeted by a tall-beastly, stooped-over man. Long-tangled hair made him appear like an ape and he growled and bounced side-to-side like a gorilla. He swiped a large paw-like hand at Aedon and would have knocked him across the way had he not ducked. Areshia’s scream startled him, causing him to jump back.

“It’s Enkidu!” Aedon gasped.

“A little *birdie* told me ‘bout you two,” Enkidu responded, opening a bag and dropping a dead parakeet to the ground.

“Amperes’ parakeets! They tweeted on us,” Aedon growled.

Realizing they had few options left, he reached into the vehicle and pulled out two large fur coats and the shield. No one was sure if he was gathering these things together for a surrender or an escape.

“Relinquish now!” Enkidu ordered, raising a bow and loading an arrow in it.

“Get ready to do what I do and quickly,” Aedon whispered to Areshia.

SWOOSH! Arrows flew across the plain, repelling off of the shield as Aedon turned around with it. Then, he flipped the piece of armor over on its belly and threw it to the ground. He grabbed Areshia and jumped onto it with her.

Between the mounds of snow was a winding valley filled with ice. With a slight push, the two of them riding on the shield were on their way, tobogganing down the slope.

Enkidu followed Aedon's example, turning his shield into a sled and sliding down the hill after him. "WHOA!" he screamed out, hanging on and trying to stabilize the toboggan-shield. The chase down the slope went on for hours as they occasionally were stopped in rocky areas and had to run by foot. Just in time, Aedon and Areshia stopped at the edge of a steep icy formation that zigzagged into a deep valley.

"This is crazy! Just give him the whirly thing. I can't go on any longer," Areshia panted.

"Then we'll really be stuck out here," Aedon shouted back.

"Why do I always go on these adventures with you? You almost got me killed the last time," she scowled, reminding him.

"You insisted on coming this time. I told you to stay back."

"Your mouth may have worded polite utterances, but your eyes were begging for me to come."

"Were they ...?" Aedon snapped, starting to climb down the steep ravine and offering a hand to Areshia.

"Should I have stayed, gone back to Yapet, and my engagement with him?"

"You were never engaged. You were always *just thinking* about it," he responded, slipping on some of the ice and letting go of her hand for a moment.

"Careful!" she shouted, clinging to a knob-like piece of ice as they rushed further down the snow plains.

By the time they reached the bottom of the valley, the stars had come out to greet them and they were certain that Enkidu had not followed. The bald moon cycled to its full state and as it rose toward the stars, it reflected glowing pallets of ice around them like illumination-bulbs covered in a blue hue.

The valley was filled with multitudes of ice-sculptures. Many were naturally made. But as they journeyed, the monuments

became more artistically forced. They were in the *Valley of Cats*. The area was mostly inhabited by the *Sibussian Tiger*, who had over-populated and moved west of their homeland. Just as many cats have always (and will always) paint. This breed of tiger had a different artistic ability: sculpturing — ice-sculpturing, that is.

There were statues of various forms: tigers, cats, other animals too. Then there were monuments like towers with figurines engraved in them. The topography sported ice figures of the Etruscans and Prince Lords which absorbed the moonlight, splashing the desolate area with a cold glow.

“Maybe we can hide in here until daybreak,” Areshia suggested, setting her gear down in a carved-out borrow behind some of the figures.

The next day, it was almost noon when the sun peaked into the valleys of the glacier. Its ice and snow began to melt. They were slow in gathering their things together and before they could organize, Enkidu returned and snatched Aedon’s satchel with the capacitor.

“Give it back!” Areshia screamed, diving at Enkidu and just missing him.

The mad beast headed toward a vigorous river where three small boats were tied to shore. Sprinting, they ran after him. There were still a few ice-statues to maneuver around, but soon they were out into an open plain with the boats only stadia away.

The ice moaned and cracked as if it were objecting to their feet running atop of them. Then, all of the sudden an ice-hole opened up sucking in everything in its path like a whirlpool. Areshia lost her footing, slipped toward hole, and grabbed hold of an extended arm attached to one of the sculptures near the edge. She kicked and screamed knocking ice chunks off which fell far below into the hole.

Aedon grabbed onto her, keeping her from tumbling down. More ice fell and the hole seemed to be opening up wider. With all of his might he pulled her toward the edge. She helped by walking

her feet up the side of the hole even though they kept slipping. Finally, they were out of its reach.

From ahead, a flow of ice had started down the mountainside and was inches away from them. They ran toward the river. Enkidu jumped into the first boat and launched it. The ice flow began to cover Aedon and Areshia and they could barely keep their heads above it. As they scrambled on top of the ice, it looked like they would be able to jump into one of the remaining boats. But that idea was drowned when the fishermen who owned the boats, scrambled into them to escape the fury. The ice quickly crushed one of the wooden vessels as it was overtaken. Then, it pushed out toward the river where it dropped everyone into the frigid waters. Sweeping downstream, they managed to stay afloat on a chunk of ice which they rode on top of for awhile.

Pine trees on the horizon, gave them hope. They could easily imagine dry land where they could make a fire and warm their frozen limbs. The trees grew in size but not in number. Approaching, they saw that the pine trees were situated on a small island of rock in the middle of the river. They got off there, rested, and tried to dry off in the afternoon sun.

“We’ve lost the capacitor. Yapet and Seskef are just going to have to fix the broken one,” Areshia discouragingly whined, ringing water out of her fur coat.

“*Seaweed!* We’ll get it back. I am not going to let Ahteana down this time,” Aedon assured her, hiding the fact that he was unsure where they were. “Maybe we can use one of these trees to make a boat or something.”

Wandering the island, they discovered that someone had cut a couple of trees down. It looked like they had started to build a cabin but had given up.

“We’ll use this to float us back,” Aedon suggested, bending over and rolling one of the shorter logs forward.

“Float us back to where? I’m staying right here,” she replied, sitting down on another log.

“Until you starve to death or until you freeze to death?” Aedon sarcastically asked.

They turned their heads toward the river where hundreds of tigers were swimming in the current away from the place they had come from earlier.

“This doesn’t look good. Something bad is coming this way,” Areshia remarked.

“Perhaps we should follow them.”

“My idea exactly,” she responded, helping him move the log over to the river bank.

SPLASH! They were in the water again, this time sitting on top of the log as they floated downstream behind a tiger.

“I hate the freezing water,” Areshia shivered with her jaw.

“I’m not particularly fond of it myself, either,” the tiger ahead of them roared.

The current took them past numerous ice-caves and inlets. Shortly after that, there was a rumble and from the opposite side of the ravine, an avalanche of ice poured down. It spilled into the river, helping their log pick up pace.

“If only we had a map. There’s no way we could ever guess which one of these caves, if any, will lead us back to Ahteana,” Areshia complained.

Aedon opened his fur coat a little and pulled his *globeaky* out. It had begun to glow again, “We’ve got something better than a map.”

“I don’t know ...” Areshia contemplated, doubting that the trinket would yield similar results a second time.

“Follow that tiger,” Aedon shouted, pointing to the big cat that had just swum into a large ice cave where a split in the water flow ran.

The water in the cave was still and the ceiling groaned like it was thinking about collapsing on top of them. They lost sight of the tiger as Enkidu reappeared. The mad man cackled and laughed at them as he paddled his boat away from their log.

“Stop it!” Areshia shouted at the man, plucking an arrow from her satchel, loading it in her bow, and aiming it at him.

Enkidu froze with the oar in his hand. Then the big man began to cry. He set the paddle down and fidgeted with his hair as he sobbed.

“I didn’t mean anything by it. I was going to give it back,” Enkidu cried out, picking the bag up again. “It’s lonely in these parts. I wanted someone to pay some respect, a little company for once. ... Please, will you be Enkidu’s friend? ... Enkidu wants to give you — your bag back ...”

“Throw it here, then we’ll think about being friends,” Aedon shouted.

Enkidu spun his arm around and threw it toward them. Aedon almost tipped the log over, trying to catch it, but somehow he snagged it without losing balance. Then the water began to pick up speed. Soon they heard a rushing sound and it appeared as if they were going to plunge over a waterfall.

“Watch out — for the waterfall ahead,” Enkidu called out, turning his boat around and rowing the other way even though it was too late for the others to change direction.

“It can’t be that deep, probably just a *pode* or two,” Aedon assured Areshia, floating toward its bend as the sound of its dropping spray picked up. Closer to the edge, it was obvious that it was going to be a very long drop.

From an icy-wall in the cave, across from the falls, a door opened up a tunnel and a large glass icicle hinged down toward them like a drawbridge. Its edge reached the top of the falls nearly the same time their tree did. The log bounced over the falls, onto the ice-stick, slid into the cave, and dumped them further inside.

Looking back, Enkidu’s jaw dropped when he saw the hidden door swallow them in and then close up, vanishing.

Beyond the veiled door, they walked into an icy tunnel that curved to the right, then to the left. After a long while there was a fork where the tunnel split-off into two different directions. From around the bend the tiger reappeared.

PAPYRUS FOURTEEN

“*Ya gonna* stand there all day like a lost termite?” the tiger purred. “Keep up, we’ve got a long way to go.”

The two adventurers sighed relief as they hurried to follow the cat deeper into the frigid caverns.

PAPYRUS FIFTEEN

ANDROMACHE'S

ADVANCE

Across the *Athabasca River* two ABC boxes opened up, one to the far right and the other furthest to the left of the warriors. From within the vehicles, two giant towers assembled, mechanically clicking its parts into place as they rose higher and higher. General Andromache was dressed in a rather new contraption, called a Dragonfly Suit. It was a tight toga with silk-like wings that flapped and flew her around the area like a bird. She landed on top of the left-most tower.

“Prepare the *transglaust-shield!* Hold its activation until we are closer,” Andromache ordered, adjusting her Dragonfly Suit so she could walk about more comfortably.

“But there is no enemy present,” Tuzun remarked, puzzled.

“Where there is a golden-orb there is a traitor and where there is a traitor there is our gem,” she responded, looking through a heat-seeking *looking-scope* which glowed with the under-ice movement of the warm object.

“I didn’t know mermen could survive the frigid waters up here?” Tuzun remarked.

“The egg warms everything around it,” Andromache snapped, grabbing a speaking trumpet and shouting orders. “Engage water-borne vessels!”

Hundreds of ABC boxes rolled forward to the edge of the river. They opened their front flap and a boisterous navel-ship slid down the panel into the water. Andromache and Tuzun boarded the leading vessel. Fully loaded with canons, ammunition and a crew, the protruding bow (which looked like a dragon) charged down the river, silently, yet ready to strike. Break-away ice flows occasionally disturbed their concentration, startling them, as they dove into the water for a swim. The dragon-boat easily crushed any ice that swam too close.

The river was calmer where it flowed near the glacier-cliffs as hundreds of waterfalls spilled into its reservoir. A light from the egg, under the water, grew in size as the boat approached. It moved past a dozen openings into the ice before coming to a stop. The light changed direction, went back one cavern, and swooshed into its chamber, the same one where Aedon and Areshia had been earlier.

“Into the Fissure!” Andromache commanded, bumping Captain Tuzun aside and taking hold of the vessel’s steering wheel. The other ships followed. Further inside, they reeled in their sails and masts as the grotto grew smaller. They chased after the glowing gem, until — BUMP! The ships’ masts hit the ceiling and could go no further.

With the release of a crank, rowboats were dropped from the main ship and warriors organized them into a V-formation with Tuzun in the lead cruiser. Crystal-capacitors from the rear, sputtered the rowboats forward while oars were used for steering.

Through the long winding cave they pursued the egg. The ceiling of the cave continued to climb lower until they were almost hitting their heads on it.

“TURN BACK! QUICKLY REVERSE!” someone screamed, pointing to the edge of the water where they were headed to go over the falls.

The glowing egg swam further without hesitation.

“STEADY NOW.” Tuzun ordered, clapping his hands. “Anchor the boats and pull us close to the edge — CAREFULLY!”

“The water is deep, the anchors aren’t reaching anywhere,” a Warrior cried, nodding toward the lowered rope in his hand.

“Then use the ceiling, Sleeping-brain,” the captain shouted back, taking an oar and moving them closer to the egg and the water’s edge.

Within seconds the boat jerked back as the anchor took hold in the icy ceiling, and just in time, or else they would’ve gone over the falls. The egg did not stop. It tumbled into the ravine below, the mermen following it down into an underground tunnel system that took the water away. Below, the mermen resurfaced, keeping the orb afloat on top of the water. It was heavy, but they were strong.

All of the rowboats teetered on the edge of the waterfall and carefully the men and women strained to see through the foamy mist below. Slowly the glowing gem calmed the water. Its warmth caused the ice on the walls around it to begin to melt.

Before the Warriors could come up with a plan for retrieving the egg, a loud sliding noise was heard above them. In the ceiling above the falls was another hole. It was almost as deep as the one the egg fell into, except this one went up into the glacier. At the top of the hole an enormous block of ice slid back. There was a thunderous sucking sound. Then, faster than a unicorn snorts, the egg shot up into the opening.

“NOOOOO!” Andromache yelled, standing up and screaming. “How dare you steal my energy! Go back! We will capture these conspirators from the outside.”

The anchor was torn from the ceiling, the boat turned about, and the crew returned to their ship. A few of the other rowboats weren't so lucky. The heat from the energy-stream was causing the ice to melt and their anchors gave way, releasing them into the steep water.

Retreating, the ships exited the glacier's toes and crawled back behind the front lines. Andromache threw a switch, igniting a series of illumination-bulb-like globes. They were stacked on top of each other, running up the entire side of each tower. As they grew brighter, a shield of light spread between the two towers and a *transglaust*-shield of protection commenced.

"Access the repelling light," Tuzun shouted, aiming his funnel shaped trumpet below.

Archers shot arrows at the light. When they bounced off the energy-field, the shooters quickly ducked and jumped out of their returning path. It's a good thing that they did too, else they would've been hit by the very arrows they had flung.

"Adjust the bases outward and turn up the osmosis," Andromache ordered, speaking down an opening in the floor that looked into the tower's control chamber. The technicians below quickly followed orders by cranking wheels and knobs around and pulling on levers and pulleys.

The archers tested the area again (this time ducking behind boxes and shields). The arrows made it through. The *transglaust-shield* was set so that their ammunition could fire outward, but nothing else could get in. Next, there seemed to be some dispute within the ranking archers and Tuzun raced up the stairs to brief Andromache.

"A few of the archers are refusing to participate as they think this battle will transpire like a prophecy once reported in them *Scrolls of Yaswhen* — in a story about the *Uprooter*," he explained.

"Yaswhen? Isn't he dead?" Andromache scoffed. "How is it that dead men can breathe fear into a living army and I can't even get a morsel of gratification from these low-bands who would've

served in the *orichalcum* mines if we had any left? I'll take care of 'em."

She marched to the edge of her tower and with a horn, she grabbed their attention and yelled down, "We are not here on a vendetta for an ornamental prize to add to our collection. We are here because the survival of our civilization depends on energy. ... Contained within this glacier shell is that energy. It was and is ours. It was stolen from us and we will now take it back. ... Indeed, you do not wish to retreat in fear of abstract fables? Would you wish to return home, to a land where the *orichalcum* stream dies? What kind of a welcome do you expect when you return to a place where your mothers, sisters, wives, and children must travel days by unicorn to shop for a loaf of bread?"

"Enough of these tales! We have a mission to accomplish," Tuzun snapped.

Each warrior took position and stood poised with full attention anticipating the order that would send them forward to conquer. Some of them remembered how this day had been predicted by their grandfather's-grandfathers; yet, no one did anything to reduce the dependence on *orichalcum* or search for other energy alternatives. Now they were fighting Asterians and foreigners (whom they knew very little about) for a resource they had known for centuries was in short supply. Like an addict or alcoholic, they couldn't bother about what would happen next sun-cycle, all they knew was their way-of-life could not go on today without one more supply of the gel-like mineral.

As if nature itself were objecting to their invasion, dark white and gray clouds gathered over the mountain top. Slowly they grew in size and stretched out over the land. A plenteous wind blustered down the slope slapping pieces of machinery around like leaves from an autumn branch. Struggling with a fuss, grizzly bears in chains were sent to anchor the structures and apparatuses into the frosty ground.

"Begin the excavation!" Andromache ordered.

Four more ABCs drove forward and revealed large fan-like blades that slowly began to spin around; they made a terrible grinding-noise when they started up. Once they reached a comfortable speed, foxes, pushed them forward into the lake. They moved across the river to the edge of the glacier. Upon reaching the wall of ice, the fan blades sped up like a jet engine takes off. They chewed into the ice like a hungry termite, devouring it, and creating four direct tunnels leading toward the target destination. Further inside they burrowed.

“Run! Run!,” Areshia yelled, pointing to one of the tunneling contraptions that intersected their path and chased after them.

“I’ll stop it!” Aedon volunteered, undoing his belt-tie.

“No, you youngling fool. It will chew you up and spit you out its hole,” the tiger yelled back, taking off after Areshia.

Aedon swung the belt-tie around and with a lassoing maneuver he tossed the rope at the instrument. The powerful blades whipped the belt around. Aedon ducked as it barely missed him. Then the machine began to swallow the rope — GULP — WHIRL — GULP — WHIRL — GULP ... The whirling noise stopped. There was a whine, a grunting pulse, then smoke began to spout from the center of the blades before it fell over with a whimper, followed by a small explosion. Further into the mountain of ice Aedon and the others scurried. Apparently other Asterians, voles, or creatures within the ice did similar acts, because, from outside, Andromache noticed that the flurry of snow that was being churned out had stopped. Even the wind paused for a moment in anticipation. The glacier shook and then all the sudden it took one of the tunneling machines and spewed it out. The contraption flew through the air, hit the *transglaust-shield* and blew up into a million pieces.

The clouds above billowed in excitement as Tuzun became frightened, “Shut down the *transglaust-shield!*” he ordered.

“Don’t you dare! That’s the only protection we have against this insulting force!” Andromache howled.

PASCHEW! Another machine was ejected back, then the other two. All of them met with similar demise, destroyed by the very *transglaust-shield* set up to be their protection.

“FORWARD! All bases forward!” Andromache roared.

Like a rehearsed marching band in unison, the warrior channels began their march. First they crossed over floating barges on the river and then up the side of the glacier mount. If a tunneling-assault into the steep cliff could not be accomplished, they were determined to climb the fortress and take their prize.

The ABCs rolled forward as far up the mount as they could. The *transglaust-shield* was offloaded from the ABC and was carried in front of the army by large mammoths bearing its burden on their backs. Troops continued climbing upward toward the hidden opening where Ahteana’s *Valix* rested. The ground continued to shake again, but the warriors kept on, knowing they would face Andromache’s rod if they stopped.

The darkened sky picked up momentum and whirled a hurricane-strength wind at them. The force made it impossible for any beast or man to move another step. Bewildered, yet with determination to press on, they paused and watched as the storm began to brew like soup boiling in a caldron.

With a jerk, a deathly funnel-cloud dropped from the sky above the glacier’s peak. Then it danced its white tail down the hill toward the legions. Within minutes it had reached the front of the force-field. The tornado paced back and forth as if it were sizing them up. Then, it paused. It was hoping they would leave, give-up, or at least retreat somewhat. The host of warriors stood frozen: most of them in fear, the rest obeying protocol.

The billowing sky became irritated at their lack of a response. Slowly two arms with five fingers each, sprouted out of the main funnel cloud. Each hand picked up one of the towers and in unison smashed them to the ground. The *transglaust-shield* was

no more. The funnel smiled and then retreated back up into the sky.

“It’s an old Asterian weather trick, they won’t be able to produce it a second time in the same day,” Andromache scoffed, explaining away its mysticism. “With the cumbersome thing gone, we ought to be able to march up the mountain more rapidly.”

“Then they did us a favor,” Tuzun pointed out, poking his head through the hole to the upper outside-deck.

“Order the Channels to resume!” Andromache insisted, following him back down into the tower’s command level.

Again the mountain came to life. Large snowballs, bigger than a *transglaust* stage, came tumbling down the slopes — hundreds of them.

“They’re sending snow balls?” Andromache scoffed. “Isn’t this a bit childish for an Asterian?”

“Guess, after a failed wind illusion, they’ve run out of tricks,” Tuzun retorted, waving a blue flag out the window as a signal.

Two ABC vehicles zoomed forward with bayonets protruding from their fore-panels. Moments before the first snowball was to be pierced, it exploded into a multitude of white bunny rabbits, each armed with white pelting pipes. The rabbits blew pellets at the warrior’s legs, hitting them in the shin right between their boots and leg armor. Some fell while others retreated in bloody pain.

The next snowball burst open and it contained rabbits with small bows that shot miniature arrows at the troops. Then there was a rabbit-ball of spear throwers, one with ice ball shooters, and another with icicle-javelin jostlers. There was a ball of rabbits that launched bee-hives, like miniature bombs, each exploding into a swarm and stinging its victim.

The ABCs began to spear the snowballs and they began to gain ground as they stabbed and ran over the rabbits that were making an annoying assault. The little creatures were discarded aside like insects swatted out of a small swarm.

Above hundreds of dragonfly-suited warriors landed on a ridge half way up the glacier. They were far above the secret opening that was halfway between them and the river below. They could barely see the orange flag waving from the tower, but they knew it was their signal. Each of them carried a ball-like machine. One of the warriors flipped up a lid on his bobble and pulled out a strap. The sphere began to fizz and smoke began pouring out of it. He quickly rolled his fizz-ball over the icy ledge. Then, the next warrior did the same and others followed. Each jig glowed bright before igniting into an explosion that ate away at the glacier's exterior. The warriors above cheered with every bite taken out of the hill.

Inside, tremors made it difficult for Aedon and Areshia to climb through the tunnels. With a roar, the tiger decided that he wanted to lead the way.

"This is the wrong way! Have you no instinct," the tiger complained, following them over an ice wall and through a hole that led into another part of the cave.

"We'll be safe once we get to the main hanger," Areshia snarled, kicking a bit of ice shavings in his direction.

Outside, another shake triggered the exterior midway-ledge to crumble, flinging its infestation of warriors down the snowy slope. A few of them remained and a few others had not taken off their Dragonfly Suits so they were able to fly down to safety — only to be scolded for retreating. An avalanche fell, burying more of the warriors.

Inside, the inundation tore away a good part of the cover over the hidden cavern, exposing part of the Asterian's secret camp.

Ahteana turned toward the light and then she calmly announced, "Departure time has arrived. Prepare all for the exit derived."

“But we haven’t a proper capacitor for the journey yet,” Yapet insisted, pointing to the bent rusty one they did have.

“Have faith and it will come. I have belief in everyone,” she answered.

“Certainly you do — but some of us here ... some of us realistically, have doubts. Your devotion has produced no results,” Seskef complained, throwing a wrenching tool to the ground.

“Loyalty, dedication and belief are but words of caption, especially when they lack facility, and concrete action,” Ahteana explained, picking up the wrenching device and holding it out.

“What choice do we have,” Seskef grumbled, grabbing hold of it and returning to his task of preparing the *Valix* for flight.

“The energy you desire and wish to be — has arrived, and still you do not see,” Ahteana proclaimed.

With a gesture of her hand, part of the floor opened up. The orb they had been trying to obtain for so long, floated up and presented itself. Seskef and Yapet ran over and quickly helped guide it toward the *Valix*. As soon as they reached the cargo loading area they discovered that the egg was too big to fit inside.

“What good is it now? ... You can’t use a power source if *ain’t gonna* fit in the vehicle,” Seskef complained, sitting down and crossing his legs like he was giving up.

“Ahteana, this really doesn’t look good,” Yapet reprimanded.

Ahteana walked into the doorway of the glacier and looked out toward the tens of thousands of warriors which had assembled for their assault. The glacier was breaking apart. Pieces of ice continued to break off and rain down into the river below. When the opening to their cave increased in size, keeping the warriors out seemed hopeless. However, she had the utmost vision that Aedon and Areshia would arrive with the capacitor which would allow them to escape before Andromache and her warriors advanced too close. But, the question remained — how would they get the fuel on board?

Aedon and Areshia continued their struggle in the tunnel system. It had been badly damaged from the quakes and assaults inflicted upon it during the battle. The illumination-bulbs had mostly gone dark and luminous-gems placed periodically were beginning to fade. Voices of Asterian spirits were all that remained to guide them through the maze and toward the hanger which was no longer hidden from the advancing warriors outside.

In the valley below, four ABCs merged together and another gigantic tower built itself so tall that it raised almost level with the opening into the glacier where Ahteana and crew prepared for their departure. Turning around and adding more mechanisms to its height, it resembled a black steel tower with iron tree roots wrapped around its base.

A buzzing-whirly sound came from the clouds and a moment later an onyx basket (with a single spinning propeller on top) descended into the valley until its base met the top of the tower.

A tall man wrapped in a charcoal-colored coat stepped from the propeller-basket onto the tower's platform. Pulling back the top of the fur coat, a few strands of his long dark hair dangled in the wind. King Poseidontel stood tall, ready to complete the battle and seize the *Valix* which now stored the energy they had set out to harvest.

"I see you have fallen prey to an archaic *Asterian enchantment* or two," Poseidontel scoffed, directing his words across the valley toward the warriors, his voice so powerful and full of body that had he used a voice-trumpet, it may have caused another earthquake.

"We have held them at bay, awaiting your arrival," General Andromache offered as an excuse.

Then the king briskly turned around and shouted up to the sky with an *enchantment*:

*Vouzolue meifutyrule khunkzeveng taelechungo
ahvyuna taegugec ahuvuvo,
Taeopouthor kyrkoyun entu khomzoluevoz
eplueyun huwuyun deko ah nuvo!*

*Weather unnatural, that lingers by enchantments above,
Turn into feathers, then fly away like a dove!*

The clouds rolled into feathers and then they parted, turning into flocks of doves that flew away, and brought back the afternoon light. Andromache had to shield her face from the glinting sun that reflected off the icy mountain where it was just beginning to set. At the gesture of Faeraud's hand, dozens of new ABCs rushed forward. These boxes contained large cannons which aimed toward the glacier-mount.

Two Warriors were preparing one of the cannons as one of them turned to the other with an insight, "Seems to me that this battle is using up more fuel than the energy to be harvested."

"Warriors are not paid to be mathematicians," Tuzun replied back.

Faeraud's attention turned downward at the conversation where he ordered, "MELT THE ICY FORTRESS!"

PAPYRUS SIXTEEN

MIGHTY AN ICY FORTRESS

Dozens of cannons shot out streams of fire which turned sections of the icy glacier into water. As the base of the slope melted away, the top portion seemed to extend out and teeter. Inside the hollowed cavern, the Asterians had to move back in, deeper, as the heat was too intense. Chunks of the floor began to melt and fall in front of their sandals.

“Move the *Valix* back inside further,” Ahteana ordered, stretching her arms out while walking backwards.

Yapet put the *Valix* in motion and glided it back, stopping as far in as he could drive it.

Seskef poked his head out of the door, “This thing’s not *gonna* fly further than the bottom of this hill if we don’t get

another capacitor for it. And what about that gem sitting there? ... That fuel is never going to fit inside here.”

“We have completed all that we must, I reiterate. It is now time to wait and meditate,” Ahteana said, lowering her hands to her side.

“Are you crazy lady? They’re at our door, melting away the floor!” Seskef huffed.

“When urgency calls, take a step back, sit and wait. Quiet meditation may determine our fate,” she softly spoke, sitting down and crossing her legs.

Some of the others followed as they held out their hands and began to hum. Slowly they rocked back and forth side-to-side their shoulders in unison. As if someone had heard their singing, the fire disappeared. The blasts became fewer and less, until all was silent. Yapet, who only moments earlier thought Ahteana had lost her mind, slowly walked over to the opening and looked out. Down in the valley below things had become quite a mess.

“Look!” he shouted, “The ice which their cannons melted, has turned into water. Its enormous volume has flooded the valley.”

The water rose so high, that it covered the machines dousing their flames. The other ABCs and even the towers were floating and bobbing about in the newly created sea. Poseidontel wiped the water off of his face, droplets left there by an overzealous wave that crashed against his tower. With resilience, he thrust his hand forward and another bolt-of-fire leveled two icy mounds beside the river. This created a large opening where the water quickly drained from the valley. With a nod, the tower sent out a microburst that blow-dried the battle company below.

Before Yapet and Seskef could faint in discouragement again, Ahteana walked up behind them and said, “While we wait, I will place a hedge, a ring of protection around us.”

She stood in the middle of the doorway while reciting beautiful poetry, like a goddess making an announcement from heaven, she called:

*Sloshalueoz antelue arn ah taeahvyzigo,
Dot arn futa ahvo yomahovahaweyungo.
Ahvyelued ah vuluek ahuruynd khertyun daymgo,
Blaushaetyto arn anteo vuyune ahuro yimahurungo.*

*Restore unto us a hedge,
Let us not be destroyed.
Build a wall around this ledge,
Protect us until we are deployed.*

As the waters in the river began to recede they revealed dark-green roots popping up from beneath the melted ice. The roots multiplied before everyone's eyes as they quickly spread across the front of the glacier and crawled up its side like a net of vines. An enormous hedge of greenery encircled the mountain. Intertwined in its growth were flowering *umeshu plums*, *umeboshi berries* and *maesil tera*. It was so green, so wet, and so constantly cool, that no matter what instrument of fire was turned against it, it stood firm. Men rushed forward to climb up her, and she sprung out sharp needles that poked them. When warriors tried to pole-vault over, her vines snagged them off their post.

"I hate hedge plants," Poseidontel grumbled, then ordered, "Alert the Speciation Crib to send in the special beasts!"

"Are you sure you want to deploy them — now?" Andromache tried to confirm.

"Just the small creatures!" the king restated, placing two fingers on his chin as he pondered if this was a good move or not.

The next day, around noon time, a dark cloud started in the south horizon, and then it moved slowly northward until it was almost upon them. As the fog lowered over them, they could see that it was really billions of black locust charging toward the hedge. These had been genetically engineered so that they had bigger mouths and sharper teeth. Their eyeballs bulged out and

their wings buzzed an awful sound of resonance. They devilishly grinned, taking pleasure in devouring anything in their way.

A battle began as the branches of the barricade fought the locust. In some places there were two or three locust for each little twig of the fence. Just as the bush was beginning to hold its own, another cloud came. This one covered the white mountain peaks to the south, and when it showed its face, millions of frogs leaped from it. They were like bullfrogs, but brown in color. They had long tongues that shot out of their mouths. Their fleshly organs were sharp like miniature saws which sliced through the smaller branches in the hedge. The frogs worked in groups, clearing doorways through the vinery. The shrubbery was tall and thick and whenever a doorway was opened up, new vines began to grow, attempting to close it shut.

Eventually enough holes penetrated so that Faeraud's next Channel of Warriors could breach the enclosure. These warriors were not men, but leopards. They shot through openings in the bushes wherever they could, setting off to roam the tunnels and seek anyone that they could destroy.

Ahteana attempted to stop the cats with another *enchantment*, one that would cause them to run around in circles confused and chasing after their tails.

*Taemeideun meiduk epur gurod koxt ipynur,
lechuzo khoft taekug avaoeluechuer khozo symur.*

*Leopards looking for more than fun,
Chase their tails when they run.*

The few Asterians remaining were outnumbered a *hundred-hundred* to one as men, animals, and beasts of all kind, charged after them. It was clear that this was not just a battle over *orichalcum*, but also a war of forces unseen. With the exchange of

poems and *enchancements*, they appeared invisible, yet were very real.

Hope of an escape seemed to be crushed as a conglomerate of wooden war-balloons gathered over the area. They were shooting balls of exploding fire and streams of flames toward the cave. An army of polar bears charged forward, throwing pointed icicles like deadly spears. The hedge eroded away and the armies of Atlantis forged up the hill toward their destination once more.

“It’s over Ahteana. The hedge is gone, the *enchancements* have stopped working,” Seskef informed her, hanging his head low and sitting down in the doorway of the *Valix*.

“You have seen the miracles and poems that I have recited today. These were written in the *Rataka Scrolls* of King Yaswhen. Do you not see that our salvation is shown in this prediction? It is our destiny to deliver this payload to its destination,” Ahteana announced, turning and holding her hands high, as if the war was over and they had won. “Quickly now, board the ship!”

The others moseyed on in, believing that they would soon be entombed in the *Valix* itself. The cavern shook and more ice fell from the ceiling, and when the floor beneath them cracked and began to open up, those lagging behind, ran inside the *Valix*.

“I guess there’s nothing to do but fire up this thing and shoot it out the door. You do know they’ll have us shot down in two seconds time,” Yapet warned, as he spun up its half-broken capacitor.

With another shake, a hundred white tundra voles tumbled from the wall next to the ship. They opened up a hole where Aedon, Areshia and the tiger climbed out. Cheers of joy exhaled from the *Valix* as everyone breathed an enormous sigh of relief, a breath that was echoed by another shake of the mountain-side and another avalanche that passed in front of their doorway.

“We couldn’t get a capacitor the same size. However, they tell me ...” Aedon was interrupted.

“The smaller ones are more intricate and powerful,” Yapet interrupted, finishing the explanation.

Then he took Aedon's satchel, opened it up and held the *crystal-capacitor*, staring into it almost like it was hypnotizing him. He took it inside and made the switch-out.

"You would not believe what we've been through to get you that little charm," Areshia huffed.

"Your help is appreciated," Ahteana acknowledged, guiding Aedon over to a space where they could talk more privately.

"We have both talked it over and we are ready to go with you — to the new moon," Aedon revealed.

Ahteana held her hand to his cheek and said, "*Crautyz toro.*"

"But ..." Aedon objected. He knew she was telling him he couldn't go.

"*Toro.* Men cannot live nor breathe the atmosphere up there, and you are not immune. Our base will be hidden — on the back side of the bald moon — until King Yaswhen returns."

"But, please ..."

"I will keep a watch over you, over others, over this planet, and I will send a force to guide you in your hours of difficulty," she assured him, picking up the *globeaky* that hung around his neck. She held the object tightly in her hand and commanded, "*Crautyz toro.*"

Areshia came over next to him, "We are not going are we?"

"And waste away ... on some hostile planet? ... Certainly not," Seskef huffed, breathing a sigh of relief. The last thing he wanted was to be away from his comfort zone.

"Take the third cave over, it is an escape slide. It will lead you safely to the other side," Ahteana told them, before returning to the *Valix*.

"Bashan — Bashan is on the other side of this mountain. I will certainly find my father there," Aedon eagerly realized, his disappointment replaced with a burst of hopeful energy.

Seskef heard him and came over with a sharp tongue, "Aedon, I really must tell you what happened ... on the night ... the night your mother was attacked. ... Our father, Gilgamoeh was

not the attacker. ... He wasn't. ... He was set up. ... In the evening, Gilgamoeh dressed in his brown toga before departing to meditate at the Irminsul Pyramid. Within grains of the sandglass, after he departed, a warrior appeared at the abode and told his chambermaid to start packing his things, because he had been banished from the kingdom. ... This occurred a full hourglass before he even arrived at the pyramid. ... Then the maid — his chambermaid, told us that she saw the warrior snatch his orange toga ... while she was packing his things. ... When your mother, Cleacious, was attacked, she managed to tear ... she tore off ... a piece of the attackers garment. The piece she ripped-off, was from the orange toga — not the brown one. ... Later, father was taken by order of a *Courtship Demanding* and he told me, that a warrior brought him a fresh change of clothes to wear — the orange toga. Right after he put it on, the interrogators came in and found him wearing the very garment that Cleacious attacker had worn. ... Don't you see — it was the warrior who attacked your mother — not our father.”

“Then that is great news. We can take this story to the people and my father's rightful place can be restored upon the throne.”

“Your father? ... There is more to this story, Aedon. You see, this was not the first time that such an attack had been perpetrated. The same thing happened a hundred sun-cycles ago, right before you were born. You were a child from this same forced attack, but the attacker was not our father Gilgamoeh. ... It was that other man — a devious warrior who set out to discredit him.”

“But the replica, on the *Day of Apaturia*, proved that I am his son,” Aedon pleaded, “They even took another sample of my blood on that day and all showed to be true.”

“The replica, which revealed that Gilgamoeh was your father, was a lie. ... Just as they had already pre-arranged our father's banishment from the kingdom, they pre-arranged a replica that would match the pattern of your blood. ... That's what they did I tell you,” Seskef snarled.

Aedon wondered how they would've gotten a sampling of his blood to make up such a replica. The only thing that came to mind was the fact that he had cut his finger when he, Faeraud and Auseten had made a *finger-locking promise*. Could Faeraud have taken a drop of his blood from that? Faeraud did seem awfully over-confident about the outcome of the replica.

"You've been staying up too late in the glaciers at night to build such a detailed story in your mind. I refuse to believe such nonsense," Aedon huffed.

The story cast some doubt in his mind, causing him to question the facts surrounding who his real father was. But he had to believe that Gilgamoeh was the man. His mother had insisted so since his birth and that was the only truth he knew. There could be no questions on the matter, as far as he was concerned. Gilgamoeh, and only Gilgamoeh, was his father.

"The capacitor, you brought Aedon, won't do no good without that power source *fittin'* in here," Yapet called out to them. "And even if we were to somehow push it through the cargo door, there's too much weight on board. We'd crash right back where we started from."

"Yapet, you and Seskef, see what weight can be unloaded. The rest of us will meditate on finding a way to get the gem inside and bedded," instructed Ahteana.

Seskef grumbled about having to do manual labor, Yapet grunted while pulling crates out, and Aedon went over to help them out. When Yapet and Seskef could hardly move off the angel-art sculpture, Aedon aided.

"No wonder why you crashed, this thing weighs a ton, I thought they were hollow inside," Aedon remarked, breathlessly helping them drag it to a clearing.

Stopping to rest they noticed Areshia, Ahteana, and others were sitting along the sidelines meditating. Yapet scoffed at their seemingly foolish act in their moment of crisis. Aedon paced back and forth mumbling useless ideas about how they might attempt to bring the orb on board.

Then, all of a sudden, Areshia stood up and announced, "I've got it. I know how to get the gem inside."

Everyone turned toward her as if they all believed that she alone held an answer which was the right one. She motioned for everyone to move away from the egg. Then she pulled out her bow and arrow and aimed at it.

"What are you doing?" Seskef shouted, fearful that her action might blow-up the entire cave.

"Not to worry. While I was at Arianrhod, one of the piskies scolded me for waving my arrows about. He said that if one struck the egg it would break into a hundred pieces," she explained, pulling the strung arrow back to her cheek.

SWISH! The arrow flew through the air, hit the top of the egg, and bounced off of it. Everyone's faces, which were filled with anticipation, turned into disappointment. Then, Areshia pulled out three more arrows and carefully centered her aim. The projectiles hit dead-center. There was a small crack in the egg at first. Then, it spread across its face, fragmenting into dozens of zigzagged crevasses. There was a loud pop and the gem splintered into hundreds of smaller orbs.

Cheers were suddenly heard from another tunnel that had blended into the background and was mostly unnoticed until this moment. Aedon and Areshia seemed puzzled, though the others knew what it was.

"I promised to take some of the other Asterians with me, if we could find a way to fuel their *Valixes*," Ahteana explained.

"How did you ever get more *Valixes*," Aedon asked.

"I provided them," Etruscan Evaemon announced, stepping in from the tunnel.

Areshia who had question whether or not she had a purpose, had just seen her objective achieved, with the splitting of the egg. Ahteana was very wise when she insisted that each person was there for a special purpose, and that whether great or small, the mission could not succeed without them.

“What next, Ahteana? What are we, who are left here, to do?” Aedon asked.

“Yeah ... what do we do now,” Seskef grumbled. “Prince Faeraud has made ... he has made himself king. ... And those tablets ... he has those *Scrolls* ... well at least he has two of them ... I think ... I’m pretty sure he does.”

“And he must not obtain the third. ... He will not get the third,” Ahteana stated. “But this is a task that I will not ask of you nor of Aedon.”

A lump swelled up in Areshia’s throat. She knew that her father’s key, the missing one that different persons sought, had something to do with unlocking that *Third Scroll*. She wondered what, if any, role she would play in the race toward finding the one remaining *Scroll* that seemed to elude everyone, including the Asterians.

“Someday soon the question will be posed to us then, ‘Should we save the planet or shall we save man?’” Ahteana said. “If the sky begins to fall, then that time doth arrive. Hurry to the mountain tops below, for there, and only there, will you survive. When hope seems to escape you, and it will, remember I am always with you still. Be not afraid but instead show boldly your confidence, because you know that the power that is in you, is greater than that which is in this earthly instance.”

“Will I ever see you again,” Aedon begged, absorbing nothing which Ahteana was saying.

Ahteana disappeared into the *Valix*, its doors lowered closed, and with the sound of a vacuum she was sealed inside. The vessel raised upward and floated just below the cavern ceiling as it slowly moved toward the cave’s opening. A hundred other, smaller-machines floated behind. They hovered, ready for the journey, waiting for a signal to trigger their departure.

PAPYRUS SEVENTEEN

AN ANGEL WAITS

From the tower below, King Poseidontel could see the flying vehicle positioning itself at the opening and he ordered, “FOCUS ALL INTENSITY ON THE CULPRITS! ... BRING DOWN THAT *VALIX!*”

The sortie of balloons, which Faeraud had once captured from Auseten, appeared from over the ice peaks where they turned toward the mountain-cave. The polar bears, leopards, warriors, flame throwers, cannons, and every other mechanism available, changed direction to focus on the one prize that stood in the doorway before them. Every soldier knew that if they were the one responsible for bringing down the *Asterian Valix*, they would indeed be rewarded with more talents than Andromache would ever make in her lifetime.

Before the order could be given to fire, from behind the top ledge of the glacier, ninety-hundred rock-hopper penguins

appeared. Some skied down the slope, some ran, and some tumbled in a roll. Others took flight into the air charging at the balloons and wrecking havoc in the sky.

“I didn’t think penguins could fly,” Areshia remarked, peeking out of the cave.

“They’re *Rockhoppers* and do they ever know how to hop,” said Aedon, observing the way they leaped into the air and caused dozens of balloons to crash into each other.

“There is no way the *Valix* will get through all of that!” Seskef exclaimed, ducking from a length of flame that was shot from a fire-thrower aboard one of the balloons.

In the window of the *Valix*, Ahteana could be seen meditating while holding her hands in a pyramidal shape. A path began to part amongst the balloons. Looking more carefully, everyone noticed a translucent ghost-like woman pushing the balloons away. Korsheipa had flown into the battle to help. Because her figure also appeared human-like, the balloon operators thought they would turn their flame-throwers on her. The blasts of fire went right through her and instead hit other balloons nearby. Within minutes, all the balloons that were blocking the escape route, disintegrated.

The *Valix* fired up and shot out of the hole with a tail of smaller disc-shaped vehicles following. The blast left Aedon, Areshia and Ampheres blown to the ground. When they sat up, they could see it had made it through. A moment later, with a flash, the *Valix* and its babies took off heading toward outer space and the bald moon.

“*Vee! Vee!*” the voles excitedly cheered, then quickly turned around and ran for the escape tunnel. Evaemon was first to jump in.

Aedon, Yapet and Seskef arrived at the tunnel and all agreed that Areshia should go into it next. She positioned her half empty bag of arrows, so she could ride on it like a toboggan and then took off into the slide-like tunnel with a push from the boys. Seskef

followed next, without waiting for anyone to discuss who should go next. Yaped quickly followed.

Just as Aedon was about to step in, a rope lassoed his torso and threw him to the ground. Holding the other end of the binding cable was Prince Evad. Appearing with his usual evil grin and high pitched shriek, he slithered closer.

“Doubtful that your traitor friends will fork over enough talents to save your hide this time,” Evad smirked, as he quickly snapped manacles on Aedon’s wrists and ankles. “The king has tripled the reward for you. Given that I’ve caught you helping the Asterians escape, I might bargain for even more.”

Cackling, he stumbled on a chunk of *orichalcum* which brightened when his foot hit it. He bent down examining the piece that had once been part of the Nawalym-gem and then put it in his pocket. Then, the greedy prince escorted Aedon away, down the tunnel which lead back to Ablach.

Watching the Asterians escape in the sky above was equal to a thunderbolt dropping on the confidence of the warriors. They could see the energy source, which they were fighting for, vanish in front of their war-masks. Remnants of the battle caused a thick dark layer of smog to crawl over the area and this resulted in equipment failures and machinery not working.

“The sun is hidden. How are the men to recharge the *orichalcum*?” Tuzun asked Andromache.

“The sun will be back tomorrow, Fool,” she snapped back, looking across to the center tower where the king stood.

Poseidontel looked toward the sky with severe anger. He didn’t care about the energy shortage. Why he had used it simply as a tool so the troops would rally their morale behind him. Sure, he wanted the egg, but there were still others, left near the South Pole in Nawat. What he really wanted was the death of all the Asterians. Now that some of them had escaped, he feared that one day they might come back and try to take away everything that he

had conquered. He put on a Dragon Fly suit and zipped over to Andromache's tower.

"Do you know what I wanted? You know what I wanted more than anything out of this battle?" he asked her, unzipping the upper part of the flying suit.

"The Nawalym egg?" she softly whispered, not sure what he was getting at.

"I wanted to come home with a new crystal skull — for my collection. One made from — Ahteana."

"Deepest apologies, my mast —" she began.

"Everything was going according to plan. ... How did I not foresee this one? I want a spy ship — no make it two — to follow them. I have a feeling that wherever they land, it will be the end of civilization for that part of the world."

"But they appear to have left our world," Andromache reminded, restating the obvious.

"Left our world — to go where? Their moon is gone. They are coming back; maybe not right here, but somewhere — somewhere on this planet — and I want to know where."

"Indeed. We will crush anyone who takes them in. It is obvious that the universe has already selected their demise," Andromache eagerly volunteered.

"Not just the universe," Poseidontel boasted, revealing to her a secret plot he had manipulated, "You see, the Asterian moon was not pelted into oblivion by comets — no — I destroyed it. When the convoy of *Valixes* left with the Prince Lords of each continent, each one of them agreed to take a statue to the meeting, as a symbol of peace. Each one of those sculptures contained, in its core, a quadruple-thunderbolt. From the outside they looked like angels of mercy, but on the inside, resided a small box. Each contained the energy of a Nawalym jewel which fueled a hidden thunderbolt. Each ship was triggered to crash land when hitting the atmosphere and when they did — BOOM! ... The Asterian moon was turned into dust."

“Most excellent scheme you have produced. There is no wonder why you are the king, my lord.”

“But, one *Valix* did not make it to Asteria. Instead it crashed and landed here. The piece of art is no doubt still on board and when they come down to land, the sudden descent will trigger it — KABOOM. Ahteana and her crew will be pulverized like the others. However, we must make certain that it does not return to our side of the planet.”

“Phenomenal, perhaps she’ll do us a favor and land in Aszea,” Andromache marveled, before sending the warriors back home.

The damage that had been inflicted inside the glacier’s mouth spread like a canker sore. There were many hundreds of burned and injured tundra voles. Injured bunnies limped back to their burrows. Many penguins and other animals that had helped were captured and caged. The internal structure of the glacier imploded, filling in most of the tunnels, and Evad barely escaped with his chained prisoner, Aedon.

The angel sculpture, containing a quadruple-thunderbolt, was not on the *Valix* as Faeraud believed, but instead, had been off-loaded just before its departure. On the floor, resting by itself, it began to slide across the ice, heading for the open pit that led down to the underground part of the river. Its face grinned big, as if it would take pleasure in executing a final blow to Poseidontel and his warriors. The molded face looked over the edge and down into the steep hole. It was ready to fall in, knowing that in a burst of a second, the evil king would be consumed with fire along with all those who followed him. The angel slid further over the edge, but justice was placed on hold. An avalanche of ice from above fell onto its legs, anchoring it in place. It teetered on the edge waiting for another day when fate might decide if it should fall or not.

In the river below, a boat waited for Evad. He marched Aedon ahead, pushing him onto the deck while continuing his screeching laughter. He shoved Aedon down onto the deck and chained him to the mast.

Aedon thought about reminding Evad about the *Foreverlasting Tree* and how he was the only person who had ever brought back a piece of its fruit. He thought about suggesting that Evad take him to Methouslan, where he might be persuaded to sign over the vineyard as penance for his release. Dozens of ideas sparked in his mind, but each one had consequences that would be greater than whatever punishment Faeraud had waiting for him. Thinking back on all the adventures he had, he began to become depressed. This was not how things were supposed to end. He lifted his head for a brief second, and at the end of the bow, he thought he saw a glimpse of a silver ghost peeking over its edge. He remembered that Ahteana had promised she would send a force to look after him. If this was that strength or not, it restored his hope.

Soon they reached the mouth of the Athabasca River and Aedon strained to see the stars or even the moon; yet, only darkness billowed in the sky. Just hours earlier, he had been within footsteps of jumping into a tunnel that would've taken him straight to the land where his father resided. Now he was certain that Areshia, Yapet and Seskef were safely on their way to reunite with Gilgamoeh while he was on a journey in the opposite direction. Sailing into the deep darkness, he was determined to regain his freedom. He vowed to himself that he would find his father, Gilgamoeh, before the water rose another poded in either the Athabasca or the Nile Rivers.

THE STORY CONTINUES

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. Perhaps, Atlantis sinks, but only the last chapters will reveal if Aedon can find the scroll, deliver it, and finally connect with his father.

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TERMS

DICIONARY

This list includes unique Atlantian words and phrases that appear from this and other books in the *ATLANTIS* series. The definitions below indicate how the word is used in this fictional account. Some artistic liberties have been taken to weave history, legend, and fiction together. A serious student of *Atlantis* might find it valuable to research some of these terms further.

Official website: www.atlantisnovels.com

- Ablagy Pyramid** Pyramid of orichalcum at the Bashan border.
- Akasha** A fog over Gadeirus believed to contain spirits of Asterians who died during the *Territorial Quarrels*.
- 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.

TERMS DICTIONARY

Athabasca Gush	A large river made from melting glacier debris between Bashan and Ablach.
Athabasca River	A river that flows through Ablach.
beaking	When a bird complains, objects, lunges, or hits with his beak.
Bema	About 14-18 inches in height.
beavering	Same as weaseling.
Benguela Basin Current	Underwater ocean current.
cactoideae	A large, almost city-sized cactus that revolves around in the middle of a desert sandstorm aiding Nawalym 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.
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.
Globeaky	Globe-shape key with three thin rings that revolve to open a lock. They are many times worn as an ornament, ring, or necklace.
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.
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.

TERMS DICTIONARY

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 Mesapian Sea	Underwater ocean current. 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.
Nomis	Violet Nawat village.
omni- transglaust	A holographic machine that receives a live transglaust transmission.
Pauwvota	A flying vehicle powered by sunlight.

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.
sunbrella	A three tier umbrella used for protection from the sun.

TERMS DICTIONARY

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.
Tuoai Stone	A large crystal which many believe can project images of the future or cause one to be healed.
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.

ATLANTIS NOVELS

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