

Resurgence of Dawn

◀ *Quest of Fire* ▶

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This book is dedicated to the glory of God without Whom there are no words worthy of writing and to my son who tells fantastic stories of his own and whom I hope to inspire to dream boldly and follow God passionately.

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QUEST OF FIRE—THE STORY SO FAR

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Jason returns to Brackenburgh after living on the run. He stops at an inn to escape the rain and there is captivated by the innkeeper's daughter, Aria, and the innkeeper's story of another teen from centuries past, Anargen.

Anargen lives in Black River a small village of Libertias, and has just joined the ancient order Palatini Lucis Aeternae, or Knights of Light, who serve the divine High King of All Realms. Few in the Lowlands outside the Order still obey the High King's laws or submit to his rule. Soon after joining the Order, Anargen's friend, Caeserus, tells him he had a vision of four Knights defending a Tower of Light from an attack that would topple the tower and leave everything in darkness and ruin. He believes he and Anargen are part of the four and enlisted their mentor Sir Cinaed's help in determining how to fulfill their part in the quest. This is heartbreaking for Anargen, who has just started a courtship with the girl he loves, Seren. Following his oaths, Anargen, Caeserus, Sir Cinaed, and two other teens from the village—Bertinand and Terrillian— all

leave for a location Sir Cinaed vaguely hints at being of importance.

As they travel, the group is assaulted by a centuries-old monster, the Grey Scourge, and Sir Cinaed reveals they are traveling far north to Ordumair, the homeland of the Ords, a group of dwarfs who are coming to a historic peace treaty with the men of the powerful Commonwealth of Ecthelowall. Cinaed has been summoned to witness the historic moment and believes it to be key to the tower quest.

However, on arriving, Anargen and the others find the Ords hate Knights almost as much as the Ecthels, and when the peace talks falter are caught between the two sides as a battle breaks out. Very quickly, it becomes clear that the Grey Scourge was orchestrating the false accord and uses his dark powers to transform parts of the Ecthel army into werebeasts like himself. With the combination of evil sorcery and the latest siege weapons, the Ords are overwhelmed, and all seems lost. Rallying the battered Ords, Cinaed reveals he is actually Meredoch MacCowell, Defender of the Northern Realm, and has rescued the true leader of Ecthelowall, Viceroy Ecthelion, who the Grey Scourge tried to execute. The Scourge wants something in Ordumair, a lost treasure that had at one time been shared jointly by the Ecthels and Ords.

As the defenses start crumbling, the Grey Scourge breaks in and is confronted by the Knights, who defeat the Scourge and discover an oracle from a past ruler of Ordumair that is remarkably similar to Caeserus's vision.

Outside the fortress walls, the battle for Ordumair takes a turn as the dark powers of the Scourge have been broken, and aid arrives in the form of Knights from Albaron and the Vogteremark, sent for at Sir Cinaed's request.

Back in Jason's time, the Storyteller is interrupted by a city councilman who places him under arrest along with Jason, who

is charged with conspiring with the old man. Outside the inn, however, the councilman reveals himself to be a doppelgänger, a changling, who posed as the councilman to get the Storyteller alone and murder him. The Storyteller, also named Cinaed, reveals himself as a Knight of Light and defeats the councilman. He then invites Jason to come with him as he goes back to the inn to get Aria and promises to explain more once there.

Upon arriving back in the inn, the pair splits up to find Aria. Jason succeeds but is forced to run with Aria from the inn as her grandfather defends them against an attack by werebeasts serving the same mysterious master as the doppelgänger.

Aria, also a Knight of Light, is soon after forced to defend them both from a Sombra, mystic assassins who can merge in and out of shadows at will. The Sombra, once defeated, reveals he was actually after Jason.

The pair flees Brackenburgh and hides out at an inn in the nearby town, Windward, to wait for Cinaed the Storyteller to rejoin them. While there, Aria begins to reveal more of Anargen's story.

With Ordumair delivered, it is decided that Anargen, his friends, Viceroy Ecthelion, and a group of Ords will travel to the ruins of the Ord city Glastonae to search the archive there for more about the Tower of Light. There they find an oracle from the Ord ruler that is almost identical to Caeserus's vision. The group however must defer completing the quest as it becomes clear Ecthelion's son orchestrated the Grey Scourge's coup and has taken control of Ecthelowall. The group pledges to help retake Ecthelowall but must sneak back into the country to rally restoration forces for the Viceroy. To do so Cinaed recalls the kindness he and Anargen's father showed to a secretive man who arrived in Black River some time ago,

Arnauld Nerebold, who is actually a famed Ecthel privateer fallen on hard times. Trusting Captain Nerebold can guide them secretly back into Ecthelowall the group heads for Black River and stops at Falconcleft where the Count of Stormridge, Eidolon, takes interest in them. Shortly after that meeting, they are attacked by a group of Sombra, intent on assassinating the Viceroy. Barely escaping, to better mask their plans the group splits with Anargen, Caeserus, and Bertinand heading to Black River to send Anargen's father, Glewdyn, with Captain Nerebold, to meet the Viceroy, Sir Cinaed, and Terrillian at West Haven.

Anargen reunites with Seren, who reveals she pledged loyalty to the High King and has become a Knight of Light as well. Their blissful reunion is interrupted when mercenaries raid Black River. Anargen and his friends lay down their arms rather than risk harm coming to the villagers.

Taken captive to a secret location to labor on an enormous construction project, Anargen and Caeserus have a chance to escape, but when Anargen realizes he would have to leave Seren behind and the potential danger she would be in he again surrenders.

Months pass with Anargen and his friends released to live in Stormridge under watch to ensure they don't speak of what has happened. Anargen forgets his oaths to the High King during the time and lives a normal life until one night he sees something that stirs his memories—the Grey Scourge has been watching him and that very night, Anargen discovers a package that contains his spiritword. Holding the divinely blessed blade reignites his zeal for the High King.

Soon after he is brought to a Knight Hall in Stormridge where Glewdyn and Sir Cinaed have already rescued Caeserus. They travel to get Seren back while Caeserus and Anargen go to retrieve Bertinand. They find him beset by a

direnoir. A monstrous parasitic creature that feeds on the fears of its host. After defeating it, the Grey Scourge attacks, intending to keep them from returning to the Quest of Fire. They defeat the Scourge and bring him prisoner back to the Knight Hall. He reveals that he has been working for Count Eidolon and that the Count's plans for conquering the Western Lowlands are almost complete. Confronting Eidolon, the evil ruler does not hide his dabbling in dark sorceries from the cursed land of Tislatna, long ago destroyed by the High King for its wickedness.

Escaping the encounter with their lives, the Knights try to rally the few members of their Order in Stormridge they can trust, only to find they're too late. Eidolon has used the sorceries of Tislatna and an enchanted fruit that grows in the region to take control of the entire city's population. Mindless servants of his will, called carrion, they overwhelm the Knights with only a handful escaping. Sir Cinaed, Glewdyn, Anargen, Seren, Caeserus, and Bertinand along with a Sir Kyreneas, Lady Lyncia, and five other Knights make it atop the enormous reservoir that holds a secret escape tunnel from the city. There they find Eidolon waiting for them. He intends to sacrifice them in a ritual that will allow him to summon a wyvern long dormant in the mountains of the region and fuse it with a goblin to create a dragon, the first of an army of such creatures he wants to use to conquer the Lowlands and the very forbidden sorcery for which Tislatna was destroyed.

A battle ensues as a storm threatens to overflow the reservoir. The Knights attempt to escape, but Sir Cinaed, Glewdyn, and Anargen are still on the artificial lake's retaining wall finishing off Eidolon when the wyvern he summoned arrives. The creature rejects the weakened Eidolon, destroying him, and then sets out to do the same to the Knights and everything in its path. Sir Cinaed sacrifices himself, leaping

onto the wyvern and slaying it as the reservoir gives and the water and stones plummet with the Defender Knight and the wyvern to the valley below. Anargen and the others escape, heartbroken.

In the Modern Era, Jason and Aria receive a message that her grandfather has had to slip out of Rehalycon to the Ecthel island, Geisle, and wants Aria to meet him there. Before Aria and Jason part ways, however, Jason is attacked by a group of mobster thugs who work for his family. The Wernstrums are the preeminent crime family of the Lowlands. They almost beat Jason to death when Aria steps in and rescues him. Jason confesses to Aria he had been running from being a part of his loathsome family till he received a letter giving him an ultimatum to either rejoin the family or his younger brother, Dorian, would be forced to take his place in the gang. Aria convinces him to come with her and they will figure out what to do next.

They arrive on Geisle and meet up with Cinaed the Storyteller. He leads them to the mansion of Professor Goulder, an old friend and fellow Knight of Light. Along the way, Jason and Aria acknowledge the romance between them and decide to formally begin dating, such as they can. Arriving at the eccentric professor's home, he shares his secret communications and seconds a plan Cinaed proposed to have all the Lowlands' Defenders of the Realms assemble to address the disturbing signs and growing darkness they've observed and endured. While discussing their next steps, the mansion is attacked by werebeasts and again Jason and Aria flee while Cinaed defends them.

The couple almost escapes when Sombra ambush and overwhelm them, taking Jason captive. Jason is brought to the Gerisk Ruins in the Southwestern desert nation Zilnen. There

the Sombra hold him in wait of word from their client on whether to bring him in or finish him off.

Jason escapes with some aid from the High King and after encountering the horrifying powers of Tislatna buried in the ruins, makes his way to a small desert ksar where he's caught by the Sombra but liberated by Cinaed and Aria. The Sombra vow revenge.

From there, the group travels north to I'jon where Sadiq Kharoum, Defender of the Southwestern Realm resides. Zilnen is hostile to Knights of Light, so they meet in a secret library. There Jason is introduced to Aria's close friend, Tirzah, and encounters some books that cast doubt on whether what he had experienced was truly marvelous or rather the whole Quest of Fire was a sham. While gripped in doubt and uncertainty, Sadiq flies into a rage, having learned Jason is a Wernstrum. The Wernstrums had been helping the Rehalcyon Empire with a secret project on the southern shores of the Notioanemos Sea and Sadiq as a loyal Zilnian noble accuses Jason of treachery and espionage.

Cinaed, Jason, and Aria leave in a rush, and on the train ride, Cinaed confirms he is not the Sir Cinaed from the stories Jason has been told. Torn by not having helped his brother and convinced he'd been conned into believing a fairy tale, Jason jumps off the train and abandons Aria and Cinaed. He heads home to Brackenburgh and turns himself over to his family. It was a ruse and a trap all along. Dorian isn't in danger at all, he is now the head of the family and behind the attacks on Jason. He reveals that he has embraced the dark powers used by Count Eidolon and others and chains Jason up to endure a slow and painful death.

While chained, Jason cries out to the High King, broken and penitent, realizing once and for all the Quest of Fire is real.

In a blaze of glorious fire and light, the High King frees Jason from his bonds.

Meanwhile, Aria and Cinaed visit Dr. Gregorio Antoni to further their work in uniting the Defenders of the Realms. Aria is wistful and misses Jason. But they can't lament long as Sombra attack forcing them to move on. Cinaed instructs Dr. Antoni to help Jason find them, because he is certain they haven't seen the last of the teen.

During the events in Stormridge of the Middle Era, Thomas Fenwrest is a squire serving his uncle Baron Fenwrest under the captain of his guard, Sir Hurstwell. Thomas and Hurstwell are tasked with delivering the Baron's young son, Gregor, to Yerst Castle along with his betrothed, Lady Delia Sornfold and her sister Mia. The war to restore the Viceroy has been underway for months and things seem hopeful when the group stumbles upon the ravaged field of a battle that dealt a decisive blow to the Restoration Army. Having lost his own family, Thomas comforts Mia who believes her father, Baron Sornfold, died in the battle. The group also finds a survivor, the foreign Knight and friend of Anargen, Terrillian.

Sir Hurstwell advises that they all retreat to Port Valence, a fortified position on the coast. They arrive along with a steady stream of refugees from the collapsing Restoration front lines just as the Monarchists launch a surprise attack on Port Valence. Fleeing inside the city, they only just catch their breath before it becomes clear Valence too will fall and they make a narrow escape from its docks onboard a ship bound for the island of New Ecthelowall, known to its residents as Emeral.

On Emeral, Mia discovers her father is alive, and as Baron of Emeral welcomes the group, and Viceroy Ecthelion who also arrives at the same time, promising safety. Things are quiet long enough for Thomas to think on the lessons Terrillian has been

giving him about Knights of Light and for Thomas to begin to see he and Mia have feelings for one another. A celebratory ball is thrown by Baron Sornfold and Thomas is invited to attend as Lady Mia's guest. However, Gregor has fallen ill since their escape from Valence and must be tended to. Shortly before the ball begins, Thomas has a vision of the Tower of Light under siege. He doesn't know it at the time, but it is eerily similar to Caeserus's vision almost a year earlier. He pledges himself to the High King and is at once aware that there is something unnatural about Gregor's illness. A dark force seems to be binding him.

Thomas delivers Gregor from the enchanted illness and is warned by Gregor that he had been poisoned by Lady Delia. The pair dash to the site of the celebration and reach it just in time to see Delia murder her father and proclaim her loyalty to Monarch Ilyron. Thomas, Terrillian, Sir Hurstwell, Mia, Gregor, Viceroy Ecthelion, and the Viceroy's guards fight their way out and make a desperate escape into the Emerald countryside. Their plan is to reach the other side of the island before word that they weren't captured reaches there and sail to Libertias to plead for aid from the Viscount of Libertias.

The attempt fails and they are forced to turn back where they are intercepted by Captain Nerebold. The captain takes the Viceroy and Terrillian to Libertias to petition the Viscount as planned, but Gregor and Mia are deemed too valuable to risk keeping with the Viceroy, as they each now represent the most powerful noble houses in Ecthelowall's Restoration forces. They travel with Thomas and Sir Hurstwell to the Isle of Geists (later called Geisle) to hide until a safer passage north can be arranged. While hiding deep in the foreboding interior of the island, they discover a darkling creature that reveals an evil far greater than Monarch Ilyron is orchestrating the events unfolding.

The monster mortally wounds Sir Hurstwell, before he and Thomas are able to defeat it. In a frantic bid to save Sir Hurstwell and get needed supplies for Mia and Gregor, Thomas seeks help from the residents of the island only to find they've been slain by Monarchist forces after they failed to find Gregor and Mia. The trio remains on the island until Captain Nerebold returns, and they sail with him, determined now to seize the hope that their most desperate hour was past and to warn the Viceroy about what they've learned.

DRAMATIS PERSONAE

MIDDLE ERA

- Anargen: Eighteen-year-old Knight of Light from the small town of Black River and part of the Quest to defend the mysterious Tower of Light.
- Seren: Anargen's fiancée and Knight of Light originally from Stormridge and swept into the Quest during an attack on Black River.
- Glewdyn: Anargen's father and elder Knight of Light. He and Sir Cinaed helped rescue Anargen and the others in Stormridge.
- Sir Cinaed: Anargen's mentor, also known as Meredith MacCowell, Defender of the Northern Realm. He sacrificed himself in Stormridge to save everyone.
- Caeserus: Anargen's best friend who had the initial vision of the Tower of Light that pulled them all into the Quest of Fire.

- Bertinand: Anargen and Seren's friend and another Knight of Light on the Quest who has been through all the triumphs and trials thus far.
- Sir Kyreneas: An elder Knight from Stormridge. One of its few survivors.
- Lady Lyncia: An insightful elder Knight from Stormridge who foresaw Sir Cinaed's heroic death.
- Sombra: League of assassins who use dark Tislatnean sorcery to merge in and out of shadows at will.
- Count Eidolon: The ruler of Stormridge and wielder of dark powers who was defeated and destroyed with Stormridge.
- Maldes Ilyron: Usurping Monarch of Echelowall and son of Echelion.
- Viceroy Echelion: Deposed rightful ruler of Echelowall and leader of the Loyalists in the War of Restoration.
- Ords: Race of northern dwarfs who were delivered from destruction in large part thanks to Sir Cinaed, Anargen, Caeserus, Bertinand, and Terrillian's efforts.
- Dag Votere: Citizens of the Vogteremark, a northern nation that sent Knights to aid Anargen and the others in liberating the Ords.
- Viscount Gerialian: Ruler of Libertias, Anargen's home nation.
- Thomas Fenwrest: Echel teen who joined the Knights of Light while rescuing Mia and Gregor from the collapse of Loyalist defenses in Echelowall.
- Mia Sornfold: Daughter of the murdered Baron Sornfold, and heir to his lands. Sister to the bride of

Monarch Ilyron.

- Gregor Fenwrest: Thomas's cousin and the last remaining legitimate rival claimant to the Monarch's throne.

MODERN ERA

- Jason Landsby (Wernstrum): Eighteen-year-old who stumbled upon the Quest of Fire while trying to rescue his brother from their sordid family.
- Dorian Wernstrum: Jason's younger brother who embraced the dark powers offered to him and tried to imprison and execute Jason.
- Jerome and Glinda Chesterton: Kindly innkeepers in the small Rehalcyon town of Windward. Old friends and allies of Cinaed Black.
- Werebeasts: Savage werewolf-like monsters who retain the reasoning of a man and are servants of Dorian and those wielding the dark powers of Tislatna.
- Aria Black: Jason's estranged girlfriend and Knight of Light whom he abandoned after being deceived into believing the Quest was a lie.
- Cinaed "The Storyteller" Black: Aria's grandfather and current Defender of the Northern Realm. His stories about Anargen's adventures drew Jason into the Quest of Fire initially. Plans to unite all the Defenders of the Realms to stop the coming darkness.
- Melania Tsyket: Jason's childhood sweetheart and heir to a rival gang. Believed to have died years ago.

- Verdun Tsyket: Melania's uncle and head of the family's gang. One of the foremost criminals of the Lowlands.
- Direnoir: Hideous parasitic monsters that feed off their victim's fears until they've destroyed their host. They serve Dorian and those like him.
- Doppelgänger: Creatures capable of changing their appearance to that of another person in order to replace that person. They serve Dorian and others wielding the dark powers.
- Dr. Gregorio Antoni: A Knight of Light from the Lyscea province of the Rehalcyon Empire who secretly supports Cinaed Black's efforts.
- Sadiq Kharoum: Current Defender of the Southwestern Realm and ardent patron of Zilnen. Hates and blames Jason for Zilnen's troubles.
- Tirzah Kharoum: Sadiq's middle daughter and Knight of Light. Shares a sisterly bond with Aria.
- Kaveed Amine: Tirzah's beloved and expected successor to Sadiq and the throne of Zilnen. Pledged by force to Sadiq's older daughter to appease Mesnara.
- Mesnara: Ex-wife of Sadiq and noblewoman of Zilnen who wields considerable influence in the patriarchal Zilnian society.
- Farzhad: Cousin of Kaveed and middling ranked officer in Zilnen's army.
- Carrion: Ordinary individuals controlled by Tislatnean sorcery such that they cannot feel pain and single-mindedly follow the bidding of whoever cast the spell.
- Kazim Cuzibaum: Current Defender of the West Central Realm.

TWENTY-THIRD INTERLOGUE: ON THE RUN



The frantic thrum of Jason's heartbeat drowned out everything. His heart raced as if it could batter its way past his breastbone. They were coming for him.

A flash of lightning lit the darkened stone streets outside his alley. Standing across the way in the pounding rain were two of his family's enforcers. They beamed their torchlights into a flivver parked beside the road.

Jason slunk back deeper into the alley as one yelled an obscenity and smashed in the windshield glass of the automobile. The second gripped the other by the arm roughly and uttered hushed words to him. Jason couldn't hear them from here, but he knew what was being said. It was a reminder that if they failed to find Jason and kill him, then Jason's younger brother Dorian would kill them.

A shudder ran through Jason that had nothing to do with the chilly winter rain. He all too vividly remembered the dark creature that looked and sounded like his brother as he mocked him and left him to die in the dungeon beneath his family's mob headquarters. Jason had been there to rescue his brother

from his family's wicked heritage. He never saw the betrayal coming.

Both bruisers took off down the street, heading to the city's northern districts. Jason settled back within his alley haven and leaned against the wet bricks. Taking in a shaky breath, he forced himself to breathe normally. He shouldn't be so scared. This wasn't the closest he had been to death tonight. And it wasn't by his skill he had escaped it.

A warmth enwrapped him as he remembered the flames burning through his chains. The brilliance of the light emanating from the throne, the splendor of the High King's visage as he looked down on him through fire that consumed Jason without destroying him. The music and majesty of the Sovereign of All Realm's voice alone would be with Jason to the end of his days. Never mind the unbelievable sequence of events that transported him from that dismal dungeon to this street.

A whisper of the magnificent voice came to Jason again. He winced at the instructions he received.

"It looks like I'm going to be walking an awfully long way unarmed on foot. I could easily fashion a makeshift crankshaft to take one of the flivvers down the street."

The heat around him intensified, and the voice of instruction took on a tone of rebuke.

"I'm sorry, my King. You're right. My allegiance, my life is pledged to you. You know best."

Steeling himself, Jason dashed out from the alley and wound through the lamplight-dotted streets of Brackenburgh. With every step, marveling at how readily he'd just said those words. As recently as the previous morning, he had been certain the legendary High King of All Realms and his *Palatini Lucis Aeternae*—Knights of Light—were fables. Myths he had

rejected as powerless to help him. If only Aria could see him now.

A pang of regret and longing gripped his chest, and he rounded the next street corner and stopped. He breathed in and out, the ache building as he recalled their last minutes together.

Everything seemed to point to him being misled by her grandfather's stories about the Knights. At the time, Cinaed's fiery quest to hold back the darkness seemed like a foolish distraction from Jason's goal of rescuing Dorian from his grandmother. He had been so callous in that moment when Aria asked him to stay. Even now he could see the pleading in her emerald eyes as he flung himself off the train and dashed away. With that, he had broken both their hearts. Jason was only eighteen, but he was pretty sure he had razed his haven of true love.

Hot tears mingled with the frigid drops of rain pelting his face as he took off again, heading for the western road out of the city. He wiped them away.

What is wrong with me? My brother is a vessel for dark sorcery, and I'm crying over a girl? Did becoming a Knight suddenly make me fragile as glass?

Though he couldn't strictly say how, he knew that wasn't it. When he left her, the only thing that made it bearable had been his conviction that the whole Knight Order was a false myth and that he could save his brother by his sacrifice. But he had been wrong on both counts. Added atop his stack of guilt and regret, his foolishness left him with the immense weight of knowing he'd hurt her. Not to mention the question of how many more of the mystical assassins who merge with shadows, the Sombra, had attacked her after he left? She was in greater danger because of him.

Honk!

The goofy tinny sound of a flivver honking its horn gave him just enough time to realize he was running in front of the clunky car. Diving away from it, he landed on the slick hard cobblestones with a groan and watched as the flivver pattered out of sight.

That was close.

Getting to his feet, he nursed his sore arm, unsure whether it was a new contusion that hurt or an old one. Probably both. Standing under a street lamp, he could see he had a little red stain at the epicenter of a damp splotch on his sleeve.

As he looked up from his injury, he froze. The two goons pursuing him were down the street by two blocks. There wasn't anything between him and them.

Maybe they won't notice me.

A second later, he saw one of them cock his head and then point and exclaim, "It's him!"

Jason took off running across the street, not even trying to sort out a route. He needed more distance and a place to hide out, especially through the night.

Rounding the corner, his heart sank. He was in a section of town filled with stores shuttered for the night. Where could he go?

Jason looked up and down the street. He blinked, eyes wide with surprise. Was that light shyly shining out of a shop window about halfway down the row?

"Stop there you little blighter!" the closer of the thugs bellowed.

Jason didn't hesitate. Sprinting as fast as he could down the street, he made for the lit shop. Sliding the last five feet along the rain-slicked sidewalk stones, he used the iron railing on its stairs to swing up and land on the shop's stoop. The lettering on the large glass window beside the door was faded but looked like it said, "Lowland Antique Treasures."

Resurgence of Dawn

Hope they don't mind me passing through.

Jason pulled on the handle and found it was stuck. He tugged again and again, each time more frantically. Sparing a glance over his shoulder, he saw the mobsters were rounding the corner onto this street.

Help me, my King!

Jason yanked, and the door gave. He leaped through the opening and tumbled down. As he crashed onto the floor, the expansive room went dark.