

# The Unending Light

◀ *Quest of Fire* ▶

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*This book is dedicated to the glory of God without Whom there would be no hope of the King's Day nor the unending light beyond the dark.*

*It is also for my family, earthly and spiritual, who walk this journey alongside me and make it immeasurably better by being there through all I face.*

# Pre Low (24 Fyellth)





# Lowlands War (24 Daraleath 358 Modern Era)

-  Confederacy of
-  Alliance territory
-  Neutral nations



Nations

occupied by Confederacy

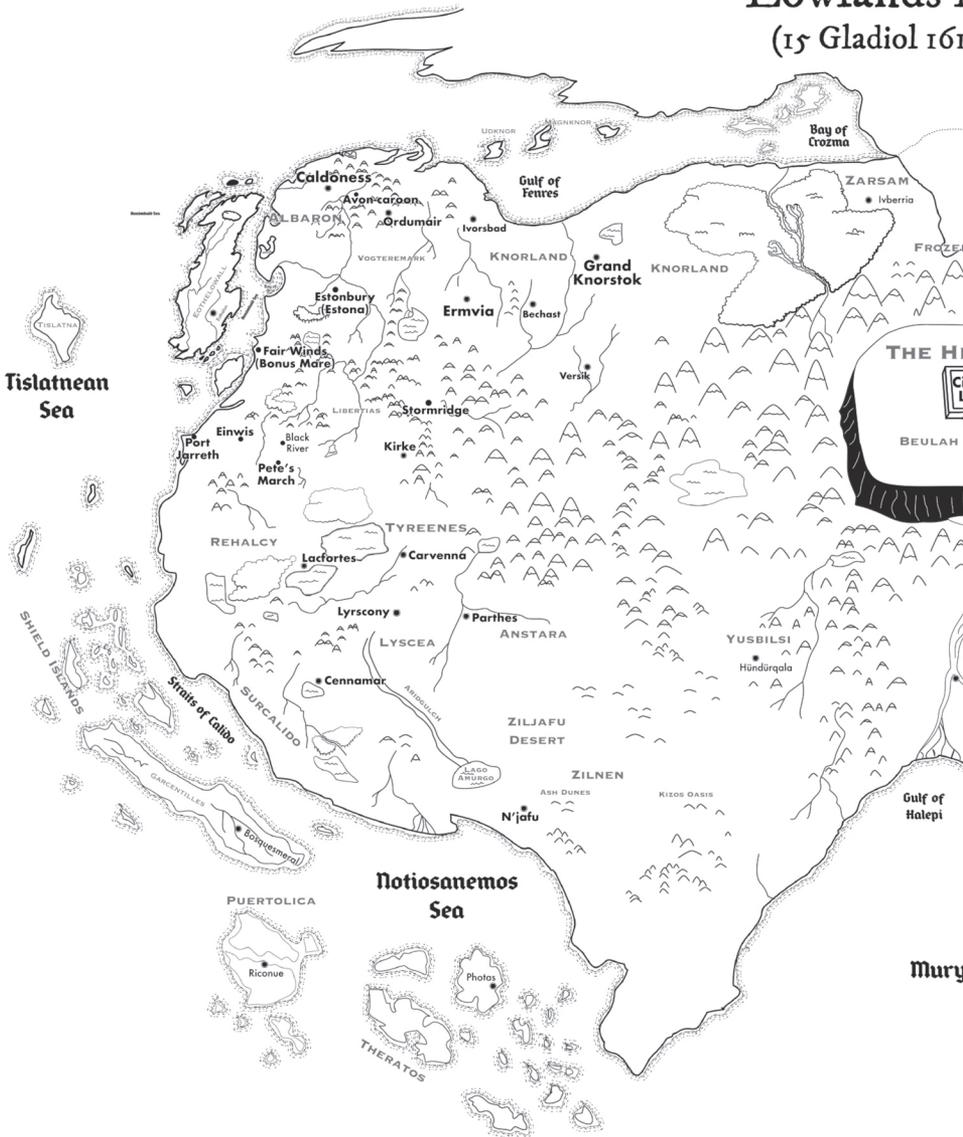
□ : Alliance of Realms

▣ : Confederacy territory occupied by Alliance



# Lowlands I

(15 Gladiol 16)



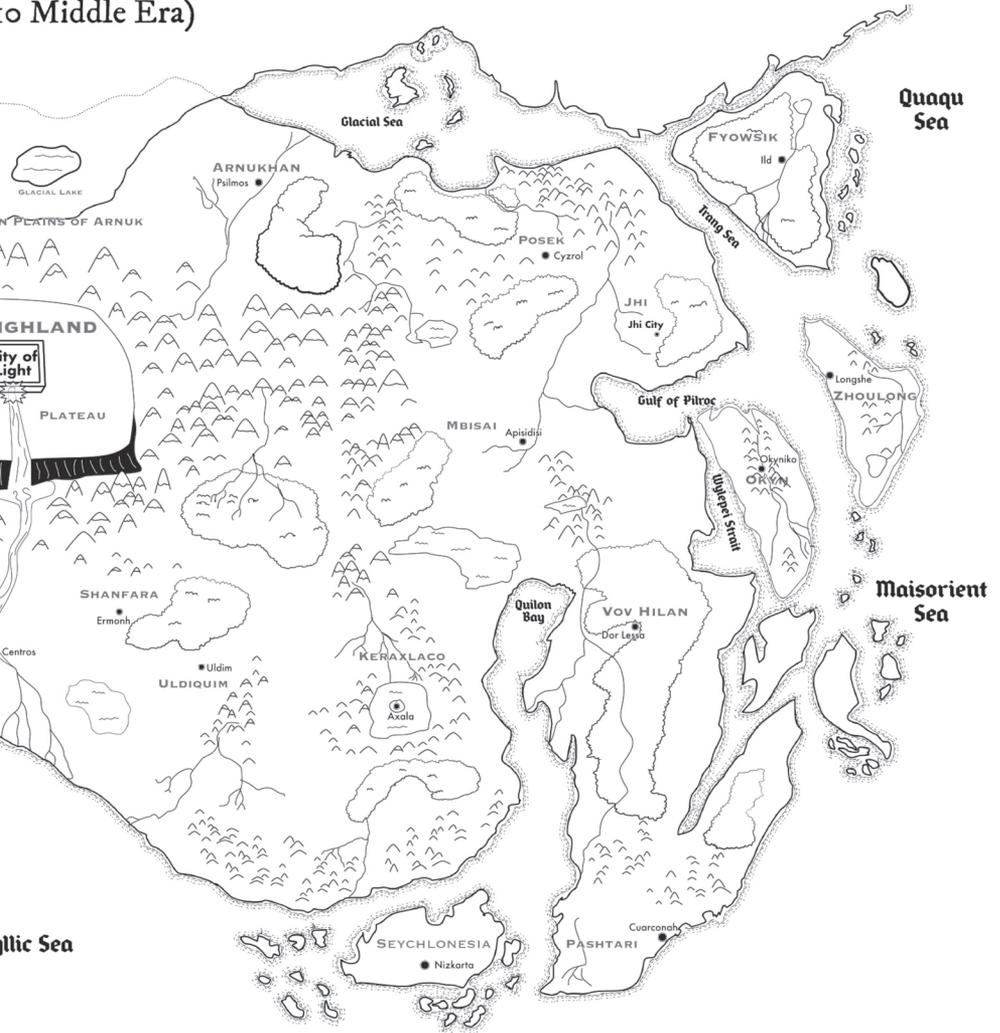
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# Middle Era (to Middle Era)





## **LINK TO FULL-COLOR MAPS**

<https://brettarmstrong.net/quest-of-fire-maps/>



## DRAMATIS PERSONAE

### MIDDLE ERA (Anargen's Era)

- **Anargen:** Twenty-year-old Knight of Light from 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 of Black River helped rescue Anargen and the others in Stormridge.
- **Sir Cinaed of Black River:** Anargen's mentor, 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, but abandoned the Quest after the events in Stormridge.

- **Bertinand:** Anargen and Seren's friend and another Knight of Light on the Quest who kept up the group's spirits with his humor. He, like Caeserus, abandoned the Quest after the losses at Stormridge.
- **Terrillian:** Anargen's friend and Knight of Light who opted to aid Echelowall in the early days of the War of Restoration during the events in Stormridge.
- **Count Eidolon:** The ruler of Stormridge and wielder of dark powers from Tislatna. He was defeated and destroyed with Stormridge after attempting to create a dragon.
- **Maldes Ilyron:** Usurping Monarch of Echelowall and son of Echelion. Leader of the Monarchists and wielder of dark powers like his mentor Count Eidolon.
- **Viceroy Echelion Halifax:** Deposed rightful ruler of Echelowall and leader of the Loyalists in the War of Restoration. Adoptive father to Thomas.
- **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) Halifax:** Ecthel teen who joined the Knights of Light while rescuing Mia and Gregor from the collapse of Loyalist defenses in Ecthelowall. Later adopted by Viceroy Ecthelion and succeeded him as Baron of Halifax.
- **Mia Sornfold:** Daughter of the murdered Baron Sornfold, and heir to his lands. Sister to Delia Sornfold the bride of Monarch Ilyron. Thomas's fiancée and new Knight of Light.
- **Gregor Fenwrest:** Thomas's cousin and the last remaining legitimate rival claimant to the Monarch's throne. A new member of the Knight Order though crippled during Delia Sornfold's attacks on Albaron.
- **Captain Strathmore:** Loyal soldier of the Restoration who assisted Thomas in the battle at Dirkforge and in rescuing Mia from Wyvares.
- **Monarchists:** Those belonging to the Ecthelowall faction that supports Maldes Ilyron's claim to the historic Ecthelish Monarch throne.
- **Restoration:** The allied groups from Ecthelowall, Ordumair, Albaron, and Libertias who oppose the Monarchists and actively fight to restore Viceroy Ecthelion Halifax back to rule over Ecthelowall and its Commonwealth.

## MODERN ERA (Jason's Era)

- **Jason (Wernstrum) Landsby:** Twenty-year-old who stumbled upon the Quest of Fire while trying to rescue his brother from their sordid

family. Knight of Light and student of Cinaed Black.

- **Dorian Wernstrum:** Jason's younger brother who embraced the dark powers offered him and tried to imprison and execute Jason. Secret leader of the Rehalcyon Empire and thereby the Confederacy of Nations.
- **Aria Black:** Jason's fiancée and a wise and skilled Knight of Light who has lived in hiding with her grandfather since childhood.
- **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, but resurfaced in service to Dorian and possessing powers from witchcraft.
- **Dr. Gregorio Antoni:** A Knight of Light from the Lyscea province of the Rehalcyon Empire who secretly supported Cinaed Black's efforts and saved Jason by sacrificing himself.
- **Yúzé Guo:** Jhi'ish Knight of Light and Defender of the Northeastern Realm. The last Defender needed to hold the Council who had to be assisted in escaping his homeland.
- **Tirzah Kharoum:** Sadiq's middle daughter and Knight of Light. Shares a sisterly bond with Aria.
- **Kaveed Amine:** Tirzah's husband and former heir to the throne of Zilnen. Current Defender of the Southwestern Realm.

- **Sadiq Kharoum:** Former Defender of the Southwestern Realm and father to Tirzah. Executed during Mesnara's betrayal.
- **Mesnara:** Ex-wife of Sadiq and noblewoman of Zilnen who bargained for rule of Zilnen as a client kingdom of Rehalcyon.
- **Kazim Cuzibaum:** Current Defender of the West Central Realm.
- **Yohanan ben Davidiah:** Knight of Light from Centros and Defender of the Central and Lower Highlands Realm. Young, uneasy in his prominent role amongst the Defenders at the historic Council.
- **Boris Toadama:** Knorish Knight of Light and Defender of the North-Central Realm. Almost deposed and executed by Dorian's forces, after which he became a staunch ally of Defender Cinaed Black.
- **Rindo del Miguelso:** Vov Hilanese Knight of Light and Defender of the Southeastern Realm. A level-headed Knight and key supporter of Defender Black.
- **General Cywjzi Gorsk:** commander of all Poseki armed forces. A gruff, stubborn and ruthlessly efficient leader. Fascinated and intimidated by the fiery implements Knights of Light wield.
- **Professor Theodore Goulder:** Eccentric Ecthel academic, old friend of Defender Black, and Aria's godfather. A key resource in arranging and coordinating all the parties needed for the Council of Defenders.
- **Dr. Hua Jing:** Jhi'ish physician and secret Knight

of Light who has become mutually taken with and involved in assisting Professor Goulder's efforts.

- **Alliance of Realms:** Collection of countries fighting to thwart the Confederacy of Nations and their brutal conquest of the Lowlands. Initial members include the Commonwealth of Ecthelowall, Surcalido, Theratos, Arnuk, Posek, Mbisai, Keraxlaco, Vov Hilan, and Fyowsik. Later joined by the breakaway Sykonos Republic.
- **Confederacy of Nations:** Group of countries seeking to conquer the rest of the Lowlands and impose a new order. Led by Dorian Wernstrum and deeply influenced by darker forces. Initial members include the Rehalcyon Empire, Knorland, Jhi, Tikabok, Uldiquim, and Pashtari. Also controls a puppet state in Yusbils.

## CREATURES/BEINGS OF BOTH ERAS

- **Werebeast:** Massive monster that transforms from a human to werewolf/bear-like creature in dark and at night.
- **Sombra:** League of assassins who use dark Tislatnean sorcery to merge in and out of shadows. They can also form tools and weapons of shadows at will. Their enchanted hoods allow for their sorcery.
- **Carrion:** Ordinary individuals controlled by Tislatnean sorcery such that they cannot feel pain and single-mindedly follow the bidding of whomever cast the spell.

- **Doppelgangers:** Creatures capable of changing their appearance to that of another person's in order to replace that person. They serve Dorian and others wielding the dark powers. When lacking a suitable replacement choice their faces revert to a blank void.
- **Direnoir:** Hideous parasitic monsters that feed off their victim's fears until they've destroyed their host. They serve Dorian and those like him.
- **Boggart/Troll:** A massive beastly creature of decidedly evil nature. At least fifteen feet tall and covered in stoney plates. Boggarts are cruel and arrogant but not as bright as they imagine, and in spite of their slovenliness are very strong and dangerous.
- **Wyvern:** Enormous flying reptilian beast with an incredibly tough hide and breathes fire. They have largely gone extinct from the Lowlands and are regarded as a myth in the Modern Era.
- **Dragon:** A wyvern that has been bonded with a goblin through a forbidden Tislatnean ritual to create an even more deadly creature that has heightened powers of a wyvern and the calculating and malevolent mind of the goblin.
- **Goblin:** Also called dark elves, they are elves that rebelled against the High King with the Dark Prince before the foundation of the Lowlands.
- **Elves:** The first servants of the High King and beings of flame and light and have remained loyal to the High King. Aid the Knights of Light as directed by the High King.
- **Vif:** A high elf who aided both Thomas and Jason

during some of their most trying moments in the Quest.

## THE STORY THUS FAR

(Covers critical events from *The Gathering Dark*, *Shadows at Nightfall*, *Desperation*, *Resurgence of Dawn*, and *Devastation* in brief)

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 heart-breaking 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 signing a 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, they 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, whom 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 for conspiring with the old man. Outside the inn, however, the councilman reveals himself to be a doppelganger, a changeling, who posed as the councilman to get the Storyteller alone and murder him. The Storyteller, also named Cinaed, reveals himself to be 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 doppelganger.

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, Arnould 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 became 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 the 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.

Once 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 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 everyone 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 then 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 Echelowall'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. 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.

Meanwhile, Anargen and the other survivors of Stormridge's destruction escape to a small town to grieve those they've lost, including Anargen's mentor and Defender of the Northern Realm, Sir Cinaed. There they are betrayed into the hands of Sombra intent on revenge for the embarrassing defeat the

shadow assassins had suffered months earlier. Anargen and the others escape captivity and defeat the Sombra, but not before being taunted with the revelation that the Sombra would soon be eliminating an important target in Libertias's capital of Kirke on behalf of the evil Ecthel ruler, Monarch Ilyron.

Anargen and his father, Glewdyn, are eager to act on this information. However, Caeserus, Bertinand, and the others survivors of Stormridge are no longer convinced the Quest is real, matters, or is for them to pursue. All of them depart leaving Anargen devastated by the loss of his dearest friends and with little aid now to stop the Sombra from carrying out Monarch Ilyron's plot.

With just his fiancée, Seren, and his father to aid him, they seek allies in Estonbury. The Knights there refuse to aid them as the War for Restoration is causing political pressure and they aren't convinced the Sombra threat is real.

Dejected they travel to Kirke only to find it under a secret blockade by werebeasts. In a forest just outside the great city they meet up with Thomas, Gregor, and Mia who likewise need to reach Viceroy Ecthelion in the city with a warning and can't.

Together they break through the blockade and sneak into Kirke's palace only to find out a Sombra is already there preparing for his assassination attempt. They rush to find Ecthelion expecting the assassin is after him only to discover that he was really sent to murder the leader of Libertias, Viscount Gerialian. His goal is to pin the blame for the assassination on Ecthelion and the Restoration. With the Sombra felled, Gerialian pledges Libertias will support Ecthelion and the Restoration. The first rays of hope to break through the gloom since the tragedy at Stormridge.

In the Modern Era, Jason is freed from the chains of his brother, Dorian, by the High King, to whom he pledges himself as a Knight of Light. Escaping the Ministry of Justice's dungeon, he encounters Vif the elf. One of the High King's original and most powerful servants, he guides Jason to armor and spiritword and instructs him to go to Windward seeking Jerome to learn where Aria and Cinaed Black are as he must rejoin them to help gather the Council of Defenders. The ancient council being the best hope for rallying enough Knights to counter the dark forces Dorian is leading.

In Windward, Jason receives Anargen's journal and reads of his struggles, encouraging and guiding him as he travels to the capital of the Rehalcyon Empire and former capital of the long ended Libertias, Falkirke. Falkirke marks the first step in reaching Aria and Cinaed.

While in Falkirke, Jason is approached by Melania, an old girlfriend from a gangster family that rivaled his own family. She has fallen in with Dorian and tries to capture Jason, but he escapes, horrified by the dark powers she now wields.

He travels south to Lyrsony where he meets with the cowardly Dr. Antoni who was planning to aid Cinaed in gathering the Council of Defenders, so long as he could do so in secret. He agrees to get Jason to I'jon in Zilnen where Cinaed and Aria are working with Sadiq Kharoum again.

During a train stop in Yuldistan, Jason and Dr. Antoni are attacked by Sombra. Jason's courage and zeal for the High King inspires Dr. Antoni and he sacrifices himself to make sure Jason is on the train south to continue the Quest.

In I'jon, Jason meets up with Kaveed Amine, a Knight of Light who secretly married Aria's best friend and daughter of Defender Kharoum, Tirzah.

Aria is icy towards Jason for having abandoned her and the Quest, refusing to believe the High King's rescue of him from

Dorian changed him. While Aria, Jason, and Cinaed are preparing to leave to begin gathering support for the Council of Defenders, Defender Kharoum returns and is furious having discovered Tirzah's secret marriage to Kaveed. He puts Kaveed in Lago Amurgo on the frontlines of the simmering conflict between Rehalcyon and Zilnen.

Tirzah begs Cinaed and Aria to rescue Kaveed. They agree and Jason, in a bid to prove he has changed, volunteers to be captured to relay Tirzah's plea to her father for Kaveed's release from the army. Jason also seeks to convince Defender Kharoum that the Council of Defenders is the only hope for victory.

Defender Kharoum rejects both premises and has Jason beaten, towing him to the frontlines to witness what he expects to be Zilnen's military victory. Except Defender Kharoum's ex-wife Mesnara has betrayed him and his army and pledged her loyalty to Rehalcyon in exchange for the governorship over Zilnen. Jason manages to escape while Kharoum is executed.

Hurrying to Port Amurgo, he warns Kaveed and his men to retreat to avoid being captured by Mesnara's traitorous forces. As they flee, they're bombed by Rehalcyon's airplanes and carrion created by Dorian signaling that, as in the past, the newest weapons of war were being mixed with ancient, evil sorceries.

Fleeing along a dangerous desert path known as The Lion's Back, Jason and Kaveed face dehydration and are nearly the only survivors left. Jason thinks he sees others following them but worries they're a mirage. Passing by the Ash Dunes they're attacked by a sand scourge and narrowly defeat the beast with some last-minute assistance by those who had followed them—Cinaed, Aria, and Tirzah. After catching everyone up on what has happened to Zilnen, the group flees to Yusbils, a neutral nation.

Yusbils's neutrality was tenuous, however, as thugs break

in and kidnap Cinaed, Kaveed, and Tirzah. Faced with being the only ones left to proceed with the Quest or rescue the others, Jason and Aria finally reconcile. Together they set out on a rescue mission but are intercepted on their way southeast. They're taken to the secret stronghold of Sigmacaq Yeri where Defender Kazim Cuzibaum informs them that Uldiquim slavers regularly kidnap Knights in Yusbilsi and sell them at auction in Varliliman.

Defender Cuzibaum helps them launch a rescue attempt. However, once again a betrayal overturns their efforts. Only Aria, Jason, and a former slaver named Efram escape. Efram offers to lead them to the location he believes everyone is really being held.

The location is Uthtar, an enormous mansion that once served as a manor house overlooking the lands. It is filled with terrible, vicious secrets. Not the least of which being that Jason remembers having been to this place before as a child. After freeing Tirzah, Kaveed, and Defender Cuzibaum; Jason and Aria head into the mansion to find her grandfather. They are attacked by werebeasts and get separated. After Jason bests his beastly foes, he finds his way down into the basement where he finds Aria battling Melania. Cinaed is there, weak from torture. Jason fights through some of Melania's direnoir minions, requiring him to conquer his most potent fears to do so, though one remains: that he cannot save his brother from what he has become.

Melania, defeated, escapes using dark sorcery akin to a Sombra's but not before teasing that Monarch Ilyron would soon be returning.

Escaping with Cinaed and the other Knights, they set their sights and hearts to the task of finishing gathering the Council of Defenders.

Back in the Middle Era, more than a year after rescuing Viscount Gerialian, the War of Restoration is deadlocked. Though the addition of Libertias gave the advantage to the Restoration and helped bolster their efforts, a terrible disease known as the Devastation, or Ilyron's Hammer, has beset the Restoration armies and is threatening to shift the balance back to the Monarchists.

Sir Thomas Fenwrest is now Mia and Gregor's personal body guard as each have assumed their titles, Baronness and Heir-Apparent respectively. To keep them safe he has taken them to fortified area of Albaron, Kilkern's Redoubt, where Devastation patients receive what treatment and care as can be given. They stay under the protection of an Albaron noble, William Kilkern.

While there, they are surprised by an attack from Mia's sister, Delia, who has wed Monarch Ilyron and declared herself Queen of Emeral. Kilkern betrays them into her hands in exchange for sparing his lands. Delia takes Thomas, Mia, Gregor, and Mia's handmaid, Ilsa, prisoner. Marching them northeast for an unknown purpose.

Delia makes camp and summons Thomas and Ilsa offering one of them a favor if they reveal the location of Viceroy Ecthelion to her. Aided by her witchcraft, she tempts Thomas with the offer of a title, which he needs if he ever hopes to have a public, official relationship with Mia. Delia needs Ecthelion's location, because she wants to unleash upon him the arcane power of Wyvares. Thomas resists, relying on the High King's aid and refuses Delia's request.

Delia is forced to attend to a surprise attack on her camp and while away, Thomas frees everyone, though they can't escape,

because Gregor was brutally injured in his leg and can barely walk. They are again captured, this time by Albaron soldiers led by Kilkern. He informs them he duped Delia into trusting him and would deliver them safely to Albaron's capital, Caldoness.

The group cautiously reveals that Delia, now Kilkern's captive, had wanted Wyvares's power. This terrifies Kilkern who reveals that Wyvares is a region of Albaron long associated with legends of wyvern and witches. Having seen Melania's dark powers, he believes that she intended to try to find and bend a wyvern to her will.

After reporting in Caldoness, the group is sent south to Dirkforge, the primary source of arms and armaments for Albaron. Viceroy Ecthelion has been keeping hidden there, directing the war effort for Ecthelowall's Restoration forces. While there, it becomes apparent that Queen Delia's army of Emeralans is on the move and preparing to attack Dirkforge. Thomas must join the defense but Ilsa comes to speak to him on the parapets.

At first, she tries to convince him they should both accept their common lot, she even hints that perhaps he is better off with her than Mia. When he rebuffs her, she informs him he has been summoned to see Mia before the battle starts. He had been avoiding Mia, accepting he could never be with her, because of her noble status and himself being a commoner.

Before he can go to her though, a messenger for the Viceroy summons him to make an offer. Ecthelion knows he needs an heir. His usurping son Ilyron once defeated won't be able to receive their family's title and he doesn't want the fragile Commonwealth that will emerge from the war torn up over a fight about his lands' succession rights. So, he offers to adopt Thomas.

Thomas accepts and rushes to tell Mia, intent on proposing to her immediately. He finds her in her room, cool and

combative. She thinks he is having an affair with Ilsa because of things Ilsa had said since their captivity.

Thomas reassures her he has been faithful and presents the paperwork signed by the Viceroy that could allow them to be married. She refuses to give Thomas a direct answer, not wanting him distracted one way or another in the battle ahead.

A short battle ensues soon after he arrives to take his place. The Queen's forces are routed and flee. Thomas is concerned something is amiss but the other commanders of Dirkforge's defense disregard his worries and ride out after the fleeing Monarchists. As they do, Thomas spots werebeasts and another mysterious rider heading for the city.

Thomas follows the werebeasts and defeats two of them. The third he finds in a plaza as it battles Ecthelion and nobles of Albaron. He thinks he spots Kilkern tending to those injured. Ecthelion is seriously wounded in the fight before Thomas defeats the werebeast. One of the Albaron nobles cries out in pain, pulling Thomas from tending to Ecthelion. Kilkern had been replaced by a doppelganger and instead of tending to the injured he was finishing them off.

A new battle begins and Thomas defeats the doppelganger. Before it ceases to be, the shape-stealing monster taunts him that Queen Delia's capture was planned. She wanted to be in striking distance of Ecthelion, Gregor, Mia, and Albaron's bravest nobles. Thomas rushes to Mia's quarters and finds the mysterious rider with Delia, cornering Mia.

The mysterious rider is revealed to be Ilsa who had been planted by Delia in her sister's service. Ilsa is schooled in the dark arts like Delia and as Delia flees, with Mia as her prisoner, Ilsa battles Thomas.

For all her dark powers and prowess, Thomas is still able to best Ilsa and has the regrettable burden of informing all remaining that Mia was taken. Matters darken further as he

discovers that Gregor has contracted the Devastation through his leg wound and though he's endured an amputation to halt its spread, he hasn't much time left to live.

Even as he struggles to comfort a fading Gregor, Viceroy Ecthelion is brought in, his prognosis just as dire.

A soldier arrives and informs Thomas the battle for Dirkforge has ended. It looked as though he had been correct about the retreat being a ploy, but what would've been a devastating loss as an army of carrion swarmed Albaron's forces, turned into a victory as they all suddenly collapsed inexplicably. Though since all of them were ill with the Devastation plague it was harder to figure out how the carrion hadn't fallen sooner.

Thomas realizes that the Devastation plague is being used in conjunction with dark sorcery and uses the flat of his spiritsword on Gregor's leg. It works, burning away the arcane infection. Gregor has the vision of the High King and pledges himself to the High King as a Knight of Light. He also informs Thomas that the High King has revealed to him that Queen Delia is on her way to Wyvares to summon a dragon.

Assembling a small party of soldiers, Thomas sneaks to Wyvares with the group and prepares to face Delia and her army. Within the snowy valley surrounded by jagged mountains, Delia only has a handful of soldiers with her.

Entering an enormous ice monument, Thomas watches as Delia prepares to sacrifice her sister to transform a wyvern freed from the ice into a dreaded dragon. The ritual is disrupted by a sudden blinding light and Thomas finds himself next to the high elf, Vif, who has brought Mia to him. He warns they must fight the wyvern but he was permitted to prevent the summoning of the dragon for the moment.

Thomas and Mia rush outside into the snowy valley around Wyvares. Mia, armed with a spiritsword provided by Thomas,

faces off against her sister while Thomas must stand against the wyvern. The soldiers Thomas brought help ensure none of Delia's troops interfere nor escape.

The battles rage and Thomas is able to triumph over the wyvern. He hears a woman's shriek and rushes over to find Mia, standing over her slain sister. Thomas comforts her as they return to Caldoness to report what had transpired.

There they hold a funeral for Viceroy Ecthelion and Thomas assumes his new baronic title and name, a name he will share with Mia as she had said yes to his marriage proposal all along. Bittersweetness deepens in sharpness as a letter from Monarch Ilyron arrives. He is annoyed at their felling his Queen, but undeterred. So much so he informs them of his imminent plans to march to Ordumair and claim from it the wyvern he knows to be hidden there. A revelation which forces Thomas, Mia, and Gregor to move swiftly to aid Ordumair or await the same grisly end they thought they had just averted.





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INTERLOQUE  
THE LOWLANDS WAR

*24 Daraleath 358 Modern Era*

**B**lack smoke rolling off the ruined landscape seared the sky. A hundred yards ahead, a shell whistled from the darkness and crashed into what had once been a verdant plain of long swaying grasses on gently rolling hills.

“Whatever happens next—no fear,” Jason vowed.

Tremors raced through the ground, reaching all the way to him. Or perhaps he was only imagining that, much the way he imagined that the explosion’s despicable sound was the land crying out in anger and agony.

Jason lifted the face plate of his helmet and wiped the sweat from his brow. About the best that could be said for the cold sweat and the increasing tempo of chilly raindrops pelting the landscape was that they cut the layer of grime on his face. Steam curled from his mouth. His nose wrinkled at the stench of fires started by the bombs and artillery shells.

He gagged and spat, wiping at his mouth, which only smeared his face with the mixture of mud and ash. Just beyond the earthen rampart concealing Jason, bullets whizzed and charred dirt erupted in all directions.

The sea and the crumbling ruins of once-vibrant Novoknorstok stretched behind him. His arrival yesterday had discovered only the village’s smoking corpse, littered with the bodies of those trapped by the merciless bombardment. The attack leveled the city before aid could arrive, forcing a

stalemate between the Alliance of Realms, led by the Commonwealth of Ecthelowall, and the Confederacy of Nations, controlled by the Rehalcyon Empire. Never mind that here in the northeasternmost stretches of Arnuk, the armies of both sides were thousands of miles from Ecthelowall and Rehalcyon's heartlands. The sad truth was that this was only a tiny blip in the war that had engulfed the entirety of the Lowlands. But the terror and despair were tragic enough.

Enough to convince Jason that, whatever the cost, Rehalcyon must be stopped.

A fresh whistling quickly became a scream. Jason threw himself down, instinctively covering his head. The shell impacted a few feet away, pelting him with a cascade of dirt and stone shards. His ears rang from the sound, and he felt the reverberations in his arms. Most of his precious concealment had been obliterated.

*Keep it together. The motorcycle isn't too far from here.*

Jason closed his eyes and drew in a breath. Silently, he thanked the High King that the guns hadn't aimed slightly farther back. Eyes open again, he raised from his prone position as much as he dared and dashed along the trench. It had been carved out days ago for an advance by the Alliance forces from the bordering nation of Posek. He was the only one still this far forward.

He gripped his satchel strap tightly. These risks weren't for nothing. He had received vital correspondence from the contact he met amidst the rubble of Novoknorstok—a message from Psilmas, the capital of neighboring Arnuk, which was currently under a Confederacy siege. But one did not simply walk into the middle of No Man's Land.

Staggering over the remnants of a soldier's pack, Jason stiffened. Dirt exploded into dust just above his head. The sniper's bullet didn't have his name on it.

## *The Unending Light*

No, he could not think that way.

Everything happens as the High King permits, not by fate or circumstance.

He clambered over the sodden debris until, in the dark, his hands found the thing he desperately needed. For just a moment, he felt the gentle touch of relief. His motorcycle.

More shells joined in a symphony of bombastic fury. Jason lifted the bike off the permafrost exposed by the trench diggers. He threw his leg over the seat, securing the precious satchel he carried to his chest, the straps pulled so snug they would leave bruises.

One more deep breath as he revved the motorbike's engine. Its little combustion motor growled like an ocelot staring down an elephant. Until recently, Jason had only seen either in a zoo. One of the great tragedies of the war was that he'd visited much of the Lowlands in those two years. So much beauty and wonder to discover, marred by so much death and malevolence.

A final shell's explosion rang through the broad clearing. Minutes later, all was silent, except for Jason's own heartbeat. He double-checked his watch. The Alliance had paused its firing as promised. In the dark, the Confederacy couldn't know where to shell without the flares of light from the cannons firing on the Alliance side. Jason had less than fifteen minutes to make it across No Man's Land to his destination before the Alliance resumed its bombardment, and the Confederacy followed suit.

*This is it, my King. Either I make it across, or I join you in the City of Light.*

Popping the clutch, Jason squeezed the accelerator, and the motorcycle shot forward. It bumped along the uneven soil, careening through the trench. Several yards ahead, dirt sprayed from bullet impacts, and he could faintly hear the crack of sniper rifles firing. He took it as a good sign. They knew

someone was in this trench, but they didn't know where, or they would've completely obliterated the area he was in. His younger brother, Dorian, had ensured he was a primary target for all Confederacy forces—those of a conventional sort and those servants of darker powers.

The trench ended in a slope upward, and Jason popped up into No Man's Land, completely exposed. He kept the bike's light off to prevent tipping off the Confederacy gunners. Dark and long, the trench coat he wore kept the gleaming armor of the Knights of Light from alerting the darker foes he was there.

Cutting back toward the stable Posek front line, Jason poured on speed, not caring that the motorcycle's engine growled twice as loud. He was past the point where complete stealth would aid him. Now he needed to move fast. A bullet whizzed past him as if to confirm that fact.

Dodging a bomb crater, Jason swung the bike left and right, trying to find a level path to return him to headquarters in one piece. He came up on a crater too fast and soared over it, briefly in the air. As he landed with a jarring thud, he glimpsed ochre eyes gleaming with malice in the night.

*Werebeast.*

Sleek and black as midnight, the creature—wolf-like but with an arched back akin to a bison and a build closer to a bear—must have spotted him. Its eyes, filled with the cunning of a man, were trained on him. At once, it loped swiftly in his direction.

There was no outrunning the thing, especially not through this pockmarked ruin of a plain. The best Jason could hope for was to get as close to his destination as he could before the monster overtook him.



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INTERLOQUE  
CONVICTIONS

Jason revved the engine on his motorcycle, fighting to coax more speed out of the spindly bike. To his left, the creature was gaining on him, its muscled limbs bounding with all the grace of a wolf, yet so much faster than any natural beast could. The Posek town he sought, Kezmarepos, was two miles away. Jason realized he'd have to face the beast, and the important message the informant needed delivered was on the line.

A familiar growl came from behind. He had seconds before it caught him. Peering ahead in the gloom, he spotted a ridge—his best shot.

Jerking the bike onto its slightly adjusted course, Jason's muscles tensed. Inches away, the beast's jaws snapped shut. Sparing precious seconds of attention, Jason watched the beast skitter through the muddy soil. Its attempt to leap and snag him off the motorcycle had just missed.

*Thank you, my King!*

The werebeast recovered and continued its pursuit with an unfair speed advantage. Its claws barely slipped amid the mire. The ridge Jason sought loomed about two hundred yards ahead.

Beside him, the beast surged past, blocking him. He veered off his intended path, and a shudder ran through his arms that nearly ripped his hands off the bars.

Cutting back onto the line he needed to hold, he ducked as

the beast swiped at him. He felt a tug along his back and, over the bike's whining engine, heard the shredding of his coat.

The howl loosed into the storm told him the hidden armor had held. He had expected the beast to be frustrated. The claws couldn't overcome his righteous cuirass—*Thorax Dikaiosyne* in the ancient tongue—but it couldn't deliver him from the fearsome jaws.

When they were about fifty yards from the ridge, Jason swallowed back his anxiety. He must be crazed, or else supremely confident in the High King's favor resting on him.

"Help me, Great King. The Alliance is depending on me!" he mumbled.

Forty.

Thirty.

The beast was closing in.

Twenty.

*Good.*

He shifted his position as much as he dared. The bike shuddered.

Ten.

A feral growl sounded just behind him.

*Too late.*

He reached the ridge, and the bike soared off as intended. Liquid as quicksilver, Jason spun around in the seat and kicked off it, reaching for the hilt of his spiritsword. The werebeast was there, jaws open wide and terrible claws reaching for him.

Drawing his spiritsword in an arc of fire, he felt the blade connect with the monster's furry side. The impact twisted him around and away from his attacker. And he found his sight filled with the ground as he plummeted toward it.

Jason landed with a roll and tumbled several feet away as his momentum bled off, skidding in the mud, aching in every

part of his body. Taking a shaky breath, he forced himself to his feet. He couldn't lose time.

The werebeast lurked ahead on the road, about thirty feet away, where his bike had crashed. Its massive frame heaved as the beast drew itself up to its full height on its back legs.

Gripping his spiritsword tightly, Jason advanced. The beast stood there, baleful eyes tracking his approach.

Jason closed the distance and took up a guard stance. His foe snarled, its lupine lips pulling back over wicked fangs. It took one step toward him and then stumbled.

A lump formed in his throat. This was the moment. The one in which Defender Black had taught him to reach out to the beasts, to warn them they could be free of their curse. But he couldn't do it. He couldn't say it. Not after everything he'd seen in this war. Not with the carnage he knew these creatures inflicted everywhere they went. His skin prickled with a flush of heat as he resisted the urge, the need to call out to his foe with hope of deliverance. Had the familiar whisper of guidance from the High King come to him? It couldn't have, not this time.

With a heavy, wet *thwump*, the beast collapsed. A whimper issued from it, and a twitch seized its body before going still.

Moving closer, Jason could see the still-sizzling wound he'd inflicted, a glowing slash across its chest.

He released his tension with a shuddering breath. It had been enough. His crazy plan had worked. Thankfully, because he wasn't sure he could have faced down the thing.

A couple of years ago, standing against such a monster would've terrified him. How many had he overcome since?

Too many. He felt a stirring in his chest. He could almost hear Defender Black reminding him that every one of them had been a person once, consumed by the dark sorceries wielded by

those overseeing Rehalcyon's campaign. People who had become monsters.

"Dorian," he murmured, the familiar white-hot pain that thoughts of his little brother always induced seared his chest. His dear Dorian, who was chief among those practicing such vile arts, would be much satisfied by Jason's demise at the claws of his craven creatures.

A sound reached Jason's ears—shrill, cutting through the bluster of resumed artillery and munitions firing. Another of the beasts.

It had perhaps caught his scent or witnessed his kill, or it might simply be on the hunt. Whatever the case, Jason wasn't in the clear yet.

Gritting his teeth, he dashed to his motorcycle and verified that the bike was damaged beyond use. Too bad. Securing his leather satchel, Jason pushed back his body's protests and set off at a jog toward the town of Kezmarepos, just across the Arnukan border with Posek.