



Prologue - "Evil's Battle"

Before me lies the grand city of Chessington. I have been away for a number of years, and I do not return to a city of joy but to one of great apprehension. You see, I am one of thousands here, all ready for battle...the battle of the ages.

My name is Cedric. Through the tales of Leinad, my mentor and noble Knight of the King, and through the tales of my own life, I have told the story of the people of Arrethtrae...our kingdom. Few are as fortunate as you or I, for most do not let the history of our land or the future of our promise penetrate their hearts with true understanding. It is not by any measure of witty writing that my story will move your heart, but it is by the sheer truth of the mercy of a King and the sacrifice of his Son. It will change you for its hearing.

Leinad saw the birth of our kingdom and the promise of a deliverer. Unfortunately, he also saw the waning of belief in this hope. I, Cedric of Chessington, saw the fulfillment of the promise that Leinad awaited. It came from across the Great Sea in the form of a man...not just any man, but the Prince himself. He came dressed in the rags of a peasant and taught of his father the King. Many believed him, but most did not. I saw the fire in his eyes, the mercy in his acts, the love in his heart, and the power in his words. He trained me and the other Knights of the Prince in the art of the sword. He was a master, and we became an extension of his mighty arm. He taught that the sword without

belief in the Code was meaningless and even detrimental to the kingdom, for it was the Code that brought allegiance to the King and love for our fellow man.

My time with the Prince was precious albeit short-lived. Those in power considered him a threat...a threat to be silenced, and so they killed him. The Prince died for me, for you...for us all. My grief was deep and my sorrow without measure. But through the majestic power of the King, the Prince arose and lives again! Yes, he lives again! I indeed say it twice lest I lose the believability of my own memory, for that day shook the very foundation of the kingdom and will bring its enemy, the Dark Knight, to his knees once and for all.

The Prince left us to return to his father across the Great Sea. We did not want him to go, but it was his way. He came to prepare us for our mission in the kingdom, telling others about him and training them for the ultimate battle that is to come. Those years that he was away seemed long and without end, but every day we rose to fill the kingdom with the good news of the Prince and his love for the people of Arrethtrae. We traveled to the far reaches of the kingdom, endured many hardships, and saw strange happenings of all sorts, but those tales are for another day. Eventually the Prince came back for us...for all of the Knights of the Prince and for those who were loyal to him. He took us across the Great Sea to be with him and the King. It was a reprieve from the persecution that was mounting in the end days, but it was not the end of our mission as his knights—it was the beginning of a new mission!

It is upon the voyage home, to the kingdom across the Great Sea that my story resumes. Upon my steed, as we await the massive evil force that comes to destroy our beloved city, there is a moment to reflect back on my away years...years that bring understanding to this impending battle.

I remember the night that Keef, a mighty Silent Warrior, awakened me from a deep, induced sleep to board the ships that would take us home. The Prince came to gather his people and take us across the Great Sea to be with the King.

My encounter with the Prince was by far the most life-changing event I have ever experienced. Seeing him alive again after witnessing his death was the most kingdom-shaking event I have ever experienced. But perhaps the *strangest* event I have ever experienced is when I met an old friend...





Chapter 1 - “The Journey Home”

I left the embrace of the Prince on the dock and boarded one of the many ships that waited to take us across the Great Sea. For a time, my mission in Arrethtrae was complete. I had yearned to reunite with the one who gave me purpose in life. I had desired to serve him with honor and faithfulness while he was away. He gave me the words that I craved: “Well done, Cedric. Well done.” Like a man on a long journey arriving home, I found rest in his words and in his embrace. He came to save the kingdom and change the hearts of the people. There is no other like him...no other that is worthy of the loyal service of all. The Son of the King came as a peasant and served us before we could serve him. His nature is pure and his heart compassionate. His words are wise and his vision sure. I will follow him to death, if need be. But I know in my heart of hearts that he will lead us only to life. The road has not and will not be easy, for he is great and his plans are grand, but I will follow.

The ships we boarded were gallant three-masted ships with a full rigging of sails that beckoned the wind from a dozen seas to carry them into their waters. They were sturdy yet built for speed. The main deck of each ship was over thirty paces from stem to stern with a quarter-deck and a half-deck above. There was a full lower deck that provided space for supplies and most of the passengers. All of



the ships' crews were comprised of Silent Warriors that were very experienced seamen. Conversation with the crew was very limited for they assumed their duties on board with the utmost sincerity.

On the main deck of my ship I saw the faces of many companions. I looked for William, my lifelong friend, but he had boarded another ship, as had Rob and Barrett. Commanded to be silent, for the entire kingdom was asleep and the exodus of the Knights of the Prince and his people was not complete, I smiled and nodded my greetings to my fellow workers that sat upon the decking. We were going home! It sounded strange and felt perfect, for this home was a place to which I had never been, but the King awaited us there. *What would this great kingdom be like?* I wondered.

Our ship launched into the sea, and I found a place of solitude near the bow beneath the foresail. The wind in my face and the sound of the waves breaking on the bow took me back to when I was a fisherman, before I ever knew of the Prince. As Arrethtrae faded into the horizon, I found myself lost in thoughts of wonderment at the path my life had taken. Long after the coasts of Arrethtrae had disappeared, my solitude was interrupted by a solid voice from a young man.

“Sir, I’m sorry to disturb you, but I feel I must introduce myself,” he said somewhat hesitantly.

I looked up into the bright face of a handsome young man. I rose to my feet.

“You are not disturbing me at all,” I said with a smile. “I am Cedric of Chessington,” I stated and offered my hand.

“I know who you are, sir,” he said enthusiastically as he took my hand. “For many years I have desired to meet you again.”

“Then we have met before?” I asked.

“Yes...when I was but a youth...I am Cullen of the United Cities of Cameria.”

I felt such joy to know that the words of the Prince had brought people from the distant lands of Cameria to these ships this day. I recognized his accent from that region. It was unique in that it seemed to mesh the accents of all lands into one.

“Unto this day, the people of Chessington are indebted to the great land of Cameria and her people,” I said sincerely. “These final days in Chessington were only bearable in large part because of your people and your help against her enemies.”

My words to him were not flattery. Cameria was one of the last regions in the kingdom to hear the story of the Prince, and I made one of the first journeys there. They embraced the truth of the Prince with eager hearts and quickly became a beacon of light for the entire kingdom. When much of the kingdom turned against Chessington, the five United Cities of Cameria stood firm in their support of the King’s city and his people. Supplies of food and swords were sent without request for trade. But in the final days, even they began to waver as the return of the Prince seemed to linger.

Cullen felt the compliment for his people. He smiled and momentarily looked down in respectful humility. When he lifted his eyes to mine again, I saw the spark of life in him that only a believer had.

“Sir Cedric,” he said intently. “I heard your words of the Prince that day many years ago, and my heart nearly burst within my chest!”

His eyes gleamed, and his countenance radiated with enthusiasm. I could imagine the excitement with which he shared the story of the Prince with others.

Cullen stood tall and confident. His build was average but his cheek bones and chin were sharp. His hair was common brown, but his dark eyes were not common at all.

“I wanted to believe it with all of my heart, but it seemed impossible. I gave every ounce of my being to live by the Code and learn the ways of the Prince. I guess I needed to prove that it would change my circumstances. It worked, but I was not prepared for the biggest change of all...me! I found purpose to my life and a cause much greater than any selfish venture I thought I desired.”

He smiled broadly. “Thank you, Sir Cedric...thank you!”

I placed my hand on his shoulder. “Cullen, your words have made all of my journeys worth every step. You do not need to thank me, for as you discovered, I cannot contain the hope that was given to me.”

In the midst of the Great Sea, our homecoming was already beginning.

“Have you any family on board, Cullen?”

“Yes...some,” he said with a mix of emotion.

I felt a bit foolish for asking the question since the story of the Prince often split family members’ loyalties. This voyage across the sea clarified a permanence that such a separation of hearts within a home would cause.

“My parents and my next younger sister would not accept the truth of the Prince and his promise,” he said soberly.

After a moment of awkward silence I replied, “I’m sorry.”

A smile crossed his lips again. “But glory to the King, my little sister, Keely, is here with me.” It was clearly a comfort to him.

“Excuse me, gentlemen, does this young lady belong to either of you?” The firm question came from a young woman that was as pretty as her voice. She was guiding a young girl toward us that looked as though she’d been caught with her hand in the cookie jar.

Cullen’s smile was replaced by a smirk as he looked down at the lass. “What have you been up to, Keely?” he asked with a bit of disdain in his voice.

I could tell in an instant that the young girl was as spunky as a tree squirrel. She couldn’t contain the broad freckled grin that spread across her face. It was the look of curiosity more than that of mischief that lit up her eyes.

“I just wanted to see,” she said as she pointed up to the crow’s nest at the top of the mainmast.

“I’m sure she would have made it if I hadn’t stopped her half-way up,” replied her chaperone with a slight grin on her face as well.

Keely turned to the young lady. “I’m sorry, miss. I’ll not try it again.”

I found it difficult not to gaze at the young lady that brought Cullen’s little sister to him. I wondered what lady would climb the rope ladder to the crow’s nest to apprehend a curious girl when there were a number of

Silent Warrior crewmen aboard to take care of the matter. She seemed to have authority of some sort on board. Her attire was not of the style you would see most Arrethtraen ladies wear. Her blouse and trousers were loose fitting but tight at the waist, ankles, and wrists. A three-quarter cape fell from her shoulders to her thighs. It was not the apparel of any I'd ever seen, but it suited her well. Her hair was long, dark brown and tied in a single braid that fell midway down her back. The beautiful sword that hung at her waist truly set her apart from most other women.

She placed a friendly hand on Keely's head. "See to it, little miss," she said firmly but kindly, "or the captain will have a word with you, and you won't find him nearly as forgiving."

"I'm sorry," said Cullen slightly embarrassed. "I'll keep a closer eye on her." He looked sternly at Keely, but she didn't seem bothered by it a bit.

I bent down slightly to Keely. "Hello, Keely. I am Cedric."

She threw out her hand. "I'm pleased to meet you, Sir Cedric. Cul says you're the best swordsman in the kingdom!"

I shook her hand. "I can hold my own, Keely, but there are many men...and women," I added as an afterthought and stole a quick glance at the young lady standing behind the girl, "that are as skilled with the sword as I."

"You mean like Talea?" she asked.

"And who is Talea?" I asked.

Keely pointed to the young lady behind her.

“Pleased to meet you, gentlemen.” She bowed her head slightly. I was thankful she didn’t offer her hand since I didn’t know whether to kiss it or shake it.

“I am Cedric of Chessington,” I said with a shallow bow, “and this is Cullen of the United Cities of Cameraia.”

Her business-like countenance did not dim her brown eyes which sparkled with life. I imagined that a younger Talea wrestled with the same spunky spirit that Keely seemed to currently possess. Although the morning sun had not yet broken the horizon, I could see that there was a noble look upon her face that was woven into every feature from her brow to her chin. She looked into my eyes without hesitation, and I was somewhat mesmerized for I seemed to gain energy from her gaze. It was not a look of affection but one of question and resolve. Then, for one brief instant, a nearly imperceptible look of embarrassment crossed her face, and I wondered why.

“Which region of Arrethtrae are you from?” I asked.

She seemed to struggle to find an answer to my question and then reached for her sword. Her face became tense and her eyes seemed to gaze clean through me and into the receding darkness beyond. The light-hearted mood of our conversation quickly transformed into a moment of uncertain stress. Something was wrong, and I naturally moved my hand closer to my sword. All within an instant, our building anxiety of the moment exploded.

Talea drew her sword and yelled, “GET DOW—!” The last of her warning was overcome by the most hideous screech I have ever heard. It was of such a

nature that our natural reaction was to drop to the deck for cover. Talea brought a powerful upward slice to bear on a winged creature that screamed past our heads from behind. She followed the slice by dropping to the deck herself, but her blade had found its mark. The screech of the attacking beast became the momentary wail of a mortally wounded monster. It hit the side rail of the ship with a solid thud and careened over the edge to the frothy waters below. It happened so quickly I scarcely got a glimpse at it. The body and wings looked dark and leathery. That was all I could see in the receding darkness of the early morning dawn.

Talea was immediately to her feet shouting a warning to all crew and passengers to get below deck. One of the larger crewmen came toward us with his sword drawn and a concerned look on his face.

“Are you hurt, Lady Talea?” he asked.

“No, Yutan, I am unharmed,” she replied. The large warrior seemed satisfied and left. The captain ordered a trumpet blast to warn the other ships—it spread through the armada rapidly. Cullen grabbed Keely and took her below. I helped Talea and the crew get the remaining passengers to safety, and then we followed and closed the hatch behind us. I could hear an occasional screech in the distance but nothing quite as close as our first encounter.

After a short time, the captain and another Silent Warrior returned to the main deck to ensure we stayed on course. Everyone else was ordered to remain below for a time. I found a place to sit near the hatch, and Talea sat a few feet away facing me.

“What in the Kingdom was that?” I asked.

She paused. "It was a Scynth," she replied.

I thought for a moment. "I have never heard nor seen such a thing. Where do they come from?"

Talea looked at the floor and was very sober. "They come from the caverns on the Isle of Sedah. Their presence can only mean one thing...all of the evil power of Lucius has been unleashed upon Arrethtrae."

The last few years in Arrethtrae were tremendously difficult for the Knights of the Prince, but Talea seemed to indicate that it was only the beginning.

"The years ahead will be the darkest the kingdom has ever seen." Talea looked up at me. "We can be grateful to the King and the Prince that we are not there."

Bewildered, I looked at Talea. I did not like a mystery, and she most certainly was one. "Who are you, my lady?" I asked rather abruptly.

"I am Talea...who are you, sir?" she replied tersely.

"I am sorry for the frankness of my question, my lady," I said apologetically. "But your skill, your understanding, and your attire are uncommon."

"Is that an insult or an observation, sir?"

"Above all, my lady, it is not an insult. It is an observation and a compliment to one that has stirred my curiosity, dare I say, beyond the bounds of appropriate questioning. Please forgive me."

Talea raised an eyebrow and overwhelmed me once again with her delightful eyes. I felt my cheeks flush slightly and wanted to go but wanted to stay. Were it not for the mystery of her presence, I should have departed to spare the strangeness I felt within.

“What do you want to know, Sir Cedric?” she said with a bit more grace.

“It would be selfish and unfair of me should I not offer answers to your questions first...if you have any.”

“I have none,” she replied matter-of-factly.

I was oddly offended since either I was not worthy of asking or she knew much more than I imagined. I chose to believe the latter.

“Very well, Lady Talea...which region of Arrethtrae are you from?”

“I am not,” she said, rather seeming to enjoy the fullness of my perplexed look.

“You are not?” I repeated.

“I am not from any region in Arrethtrae,” she said.

“Then you are from many regions?”

She thought for a moment. “I am not,” she said with a slight smile.

I found myself quickly becoming frustrated with this pretty and uncommon lady. I was not used to being played. With any other lady I might think she was flirting, but there was enough mystery and genuine hesitation in her willingness to give answers that this was not the case.

“Then you cannot be from Arrethtrae. But all men and women are from Arrethtrae,” I said trying to reason this through. A strange thought entered my mind. “Are you a...” I paused and almost could not say it, “...Silent Warrior?” If she was a Silent Warrior, she would be unique indeed.

She paused and gazed into my bewildered eyes. “I am not.”

“Lady Talea, you say you are not from Arrethtrae. You say you are not a Silent Warrior. You know of things of which I have not heard. You are obviously very skilled with the use of a sword. I am afraid you are more of a mystery to me now than before,” I said rather exasperated.

“All clear!” came a shout from the main deck.

Talea began to rise to her feet. I quickly stood and offered my hand to help, but she pretended not to see it.

“Will you tell me who you are, Lady Talea?” I asked.

She positioned her sword and straightened her cape. “Perhaps,” she said with a slight smile and moved past me to the hatch that led to the main deck.

I had never felt quite so ignored in all my life. I often found it uncomfortable to be in the presence of a lady where polite conversation was required, but this was different. Talea was more warrior than lady, and yet she vacillated between both roles so gracefully that I found myself in a social quandary. I intended to avoid much further interaction simply to spare myself the feelings of awkwardness that comes with an inadequate repertoire of social graces. I almost believed it possible to do so, but the corner of my mind would not rest with the mystery of Talea so brazenly unsolved.





Chapter 2 - “The Welcome”

The remainder of the voyage was largely uneventful. The Scynths did not return, and I learned that our encounter with them was unusual. Most of the Silent Warriors, in fact, had never seen them before.

Cullen and I became instant friends and enjoyed many long hours of discourse. He was easy and refreshing to talk to. I learned much more about Cameria and hoped to one day spend more time there. Keely was a spry lass that filled the air with exuberance wherever she went. She coerced me into giving her a few fencing lessons. She was a quick study.

As for Talea, she was preoccupied with ship duties for most of the voyage, and our encounters had indeed been limited and casual at best. Our journey ended with as much mystery about her as when it began.

After many days at sea, the armada of gallant ships finally arrived at the coasts of the kingdom across the Great Sea. The land was truly magnificent.

At the docks, the ships cycled through to unload their precious cargo from Arrethtrae—loyal followers of the King and the Prince. It was a lengthy process for there were so many. We disembarked, and I thanked the crew of Silent Warriors for their labor. I bowed to Talea and bid her farewell. She responded politely in like manner, and I supposed I would not see her again nor ever know who she truly was. I was

disappointed but did not wish to look the fool and press the matter where it was not my place to do so.

We boarded charming carriages that followed a roadway for some distance. Cullen, Keely, and I managed to share the same carriage with five others. The caravan of carriages stretched on for as far as the eye could see both fore and aft of our own. I could only assume that the Prince himself was at the head of our procession.

The scenery was breathtaking. Tall green trees and lush grass covered the valleys and hills. The wild flowers were fragrant and beautiful. Mingled within the fragrance of the flowers was a familiar but distant sweet odor that took me back to my first encounter with the Silent Warriors when I first met my dear friend Keef. The healing salve that was applied to William's wound had a much stronger scent than what I smelled here, but it was the same, I was sure. It was pleasant. One particular wildflower that I had never seen before was more prevalent than all of the others. I did not know its name. Its greenery grew low to the ground like clover, and the small green leaves gave way to a tender rose-colored flower every so often.



I was taken away with the beauty of a landscape that seemed only possible in the mind of a skilled artist. I felt as though I could reach out and touch the canvas upon which it was painted, but I could not for it was as real as the delicious air I was breathing. The carriage gently swayed back and forth. My fellow companions were as taken with the country as I, and very little conversation ensued.

We traveled through a break in the mountainous terrain and entered the sanctuary of the kingdom. What opened before us was as magnificent as anything I have ever seen before. The King's grand city gleamed in the sunlight and sat cradled in the arms of majestic snow-peaked mountains to the north. A portion of the city was bordered by a crystal-blue sea. The city spread across the lush hilly countryside of the foothills of the mountains and meshed with a rugged granite base that framed the city's edge nearest the sea to the south. A sparkling river flowed from the mountains and in through the city. On the side nearest our approach, the river exited the city and spilled over the granite cliffs into the sea below. A mist rose from the frothy waters of the waterfall to blanket the granite base upon which the city was built. Toward the western edge, granite outcroppings isolated the frothy waters of the fall from the rest of the sea. The waters became so calm and clear beyond that it looked as crystal-blue glass. I could not absorb the powerful beauty that surrounded me, and I fear my words are wholly inadequate to describe it all.

As we approached, I slowly became aware of how vast the city truly was. I had heard from Leinad that Daydelon, in its days of glory, was a wonder to behold, but this City of the King was one thousand times and more beyond that ancient city both in size and beauty. I could hardly make myself believe in its existence.

The spires of many palaces rose to the sky from the city's landscape. In the midst of this grand city rose the majestic towers of the King's palace.

The caravan skirted the sea to the left a short distance and then entered the city across a large granite bridge that arched over the waters below. Beyond the bridge there was an enormous courtyard that lay before the city gate. Here we left our carriage and joined the growing host of loyal followers that were gathering at the gate of the city. Fifty massive Silent Warriors stood guard at the gate and wall that offered entrance to the city. They were in full battle dress which included gold trimmings on their armor. Each held a sword in one hand and a golden trumpet in the other. They stood silent and still...waiting. As the carriages continued to arrive, we found friends to talk to and shared our wonderment.

“Cedric! Cedric!” I heard my name called and turned to see my lifelong friend, William.

“William!” I exclaimed and ran to meet him.

We embraced with the love of brotherhood. It had been many days since I’d seen him, and I was delighted to hear his voice and see him again.

“William! It is good to see you!” I said with excitement.

“And you, my brother!” He replied. “Isn’t this amazing?” he said sweeping his arm across the dreamy scene.

“Indeed, my friend,” I said with a silly grin on my face. “As a dreamer, did you ever dream of such a place as this?”

He laughed and shook his head.

“Have you seen Rob or Barrett?” I asked.

“Yes, we traveled on the same ship together. I left them just there,” he said pointing to a group of people.

We approached, and I was once again reunited with my friends and fellow warriors of many years. I introduced Cullen to William, Rob, and Barrett. Rob's smile was as big as ever I'd seen, and Barrett was more peaceful than the crystal sea beyond the city. Something unusual was taking place, and I did not know what it was. Each of my friends somehow appeared greater than I'd ever remembered them before. I attributed it to the majestic surroundings and excitement of the moment, but even I felt quite different. I took a deep breath and felt all the more invigorated.

"What now, my dear fellow companions?" I asked them.

"We wait, I guess, for the rest of the carriages," replied Barrett.

The last of the carriages finally arrived, and the massive courtyard was filled with thousands of people. Shortly thereafter, all of the Silent Warriors came to a position of readiness, raised their trumpets, and sounded three brilliant notes in unison. One noble Silent Warrior stepped forward and stood before the people. Our congregation became intently silent to listen for whatever message was to come.

"I am Micaem—keeper of the City of the King. Who is worthy to enter?" he questioned with authority.

A second Silent Warrior came forward to stand beside the first. "What deems a man worthy?" he asked for all to hear.

Micaem responded with a shout. "He is worthy who has followed the Code without fault. He is worthy who has honored the King with his life and sworn allegiance to him and to him only. He is worthy who

has served the King in truth, justice, and honor. He is worthy who has offered compassion to the weak, the destitute, the widowed, and the poor. He is worthy who has lived for the King, and served others without cause for personal gain. He is worthy who has never abandoned a fellow knight in battle or in peril. He is worthy who has equipped, trained, and prepared for battle against the forces of the Dark Knight. He is worthy who has served the King and fainted not in the day of battle. He is worthy who has not used the sword to seek selfish gain but executed justice and the will of the King. He is worthy who has been merciful, loyal, courageous, faithful, and noble, but above all, who has been humble before the King and before men. He is worthy whose words have always been spoken in truth.”

He paused and looked over the people in the courtyard. No one uttered a sound.

“Who here has fulfilled every article of the Code and is worthy to enter the gate of the City of the King?” he asked again.

No one dared move for we all had failed in some way and were not worthy. It was a solemn moment broken only by a stirring at the back of the courtyard furthest from the gate. Soon all eyes turned to behold what manner of man would dare come forward to such a challenge. The throng of people parted to give way for his approach to the gate. As he passed by, people began to kneel until he was before all and all were kneeling. He stood before the massive Silent Warrior who did not look quite as noble with this man near him.

The Silent Warrior named Micaem opened his hands and spread them low before the Prince. “Only you are worthy, my Prince!” he exclaimed and knelt before the Prince.

The remaining Silent Warriors also knelt before the Prince and exclaimed in unison, “Only he is worthy!”

The Prince, dressed in royal robes, turned to face us, and lifted his hands into the air as if to enclose us in his embrace.

“These are worthy for I died for them, and they believed in me! Open the gates and welcome them home!” the Prince exclaimed.

The Silent Warriors stood, opened the gates, and blasted forth a song of triumph on their golden trumpets. The people all stood and cheered, for our joy was full, and our hearts were home. We were delivered and redeemed, for the Prince had brought us home!

