

## **Chapter One**

“Chaos. Carnage. Calamity. All such were phrases synonymous with life on Ex’Fi,” Sairyn Althea began, offering a serious, stern expression as she spoke. “Loud screams and battle cries, trumpets bellowing and steel hitting steel, all of it was familiar and distinct to the average civilian. For the untrained, the mess of sounds blurred together, amounting to little more than madmen mayhem. The wars were always violent and this war would not break tradition.”

“The men made for their horses and the women, they accompanied them with horses of their own. The time where merely men swung the swords was long forgotten. Women wielded swords and relied on their swiftness and wits to go toe to toe with brutes. All such pleasantries and comforts had been left to die in the heat of constant battle, and the children were left alone.” She tried to add a twinge of somberness for the last line.

The children around her remained quiet and respectful, a far cry from the joyous, rambunctious behavior they usually had. No doubt their mothers and fathers had sat them down and told them to act as such. The story of The Aeonian was an important story in Acera, and in the greater Maharris, shared from generation to generation. Today, Sairyn Althea had the honor of reciting the tale to her students.

“That is, the ones who couldn’t wield a sword. Those that could faced combat on the battlefield as well. That was the life on Ex’Fi, but this, ... this was the day everything changed.”

Sairyn arched her eyebrow in dramatic fashion. Her eyes looked over the whispering, interested children. The barbarism of what once was always made her uneasy to speak about, but it was an

essential part of the story. Sadly too, it was what made the story stick in their minds, it stained it onto the cave walls of each child's mind. Personally, Sairyn didn't love the idea of traumatizing children into faith, but that was religion for you.

“Isaac Maharris called upon four colleagues, beseeching they accompany him on the Mountain of Jalint. For years, they had lurked in the shadows, trying everything they could to bring an end to the heartache and suffering that plagued the land. Livius Reid of Hardan, Alyce Hance of Urgway, Verdicine Coultio of Italina, and, of course, our own, Nalkic Marie of Acera, all of them agreed and arrived at the mountain, looking down at the destruction and cruelty as it occurred.”

“Why didn't they stop it?” One child, Barry, asked, only to be shushed shortly after by another child, a small girl named Joyce.

Sairyn smiled, then, continued: “Isaac called on the four of them with special reasons. You see, each one of them had unique abilities. All of them agreed with each other, that something needed to be done, absolutely had to be done, to stop all of the travesties committed. Isaac had something bold in mind, but desperate times called for desperate measures. Although it took some persuasion, they all came to agree with him. It was then that the Aeonians flew toward the skies, the backdrop of a full moon behind them, each glowing a special aura, and relinquished their powers, committing the ultimate sacrifice,” Sairyn Althea continued, sitting on a wooden log, carrying a smile of warmth on her face. A warm smile with a tanned frame around it, not unlike the rest of Acera. The closer you came to the Whispey Deserts you were, the browner your skin, they'd say.

This was the part of the story she liked the most. It stripped away all the heartache and destruction, and instead, offered a mesmeric whimsy, like a fairy tale from a children's storybook. Whether it was truth or not, Sairyn hadn't the faintest of ideas.

Some believed it.

Some really, really believed it.

All that mattered was the endgame, she supposed.

It was a nice day out. Still warm, but comfortable. She could hear a swishing sound as the water splashed against the rocks at the shore of the Amisoic Seas. She blew a single hair out from in front of her face, a stray hair liberated from her ponytail; a reddish brown.

“How did they release the powers, Sara?” One of the children, a young girl with big blue eyes and a small voice asked.

They sat, surrounded by the tall-grass around them. Bees went from flower to flower, and ants made their small hills. It was a simple, modest existence in Acera. The children stared up at their teacher, their eyes were filled with curiosity and wonderment.

“Well,” Sairyn began, offering a nervous smile as restitution for her apprehension. Her eyes looked down at the black book in her left hand, held open by her fingers. “Some theorists speculate that they began to glow brighter and brighter, that they used their abilities to their greatest lengths, and sort of popped like a bubble, changing into a vapor in the wind. They created a beacon of light, calling to each civilian and leading them each back to their homes. Maharris, whose namesake is what we call all the cities as one, stayed at Jalint, Marie stayed with us, Verdicine went to Italina, Livius to Hardan, and Alyce to Urgway.”

Her statement was an oversimplification. If the wrong person heard her, they’d no doubt butt in with an, “Um, actually,” clarification.

Truth was though, no one had a real, exact explanation about the Aeonians and what happened. Everyone did, however, have theory after theory, each more speculative and circumstantial than the last.

The endgame though, it mostly matched up with each story.

The child smiled, indicating he was satisfied with the answer, and Sairyn smiled back, relieved to see as much.

“How do we use the power?” Another kid from the class asked.

“Maharris explained to them that they could have somebody harness the power, but they had to make sure that it was somebody that they could trust. For he or she would serve as the king or queen of the city, using the power to protect us from enemies. I am not really sure exactly how it works, given the secrecy of it all, but from what I have read, every time the king or queen steps down or passes, the heir to the throne acquires the ability to use the power.”

In a second's notice, after the second kid plopped himself down in the dirt, a third child sprung to their feet. “What exactly is the power?” A petite girl asked softly.

“Nobody really knows, as it has been a longtime since someone has had to use it out in the open. The amount of crime committed has diminished drastically since they were implemented. I know I wouldn't want to pick a fight against Livius.”

The shy girl looked back at Sairyn, looking afraid that she may have angered her, before being reassured with Sairyn's smile. “This is good class, really! I am glad to see that all this time in my class, you were all actually awake!” Sairyn said as she tried to repress a chuckle.

“That is all I have for you today. I, of course, expect you all back, bright and early tomorrow, hopefully bringing the same inquisitive, curious minds with you.”

The children arose back to their feet before scattering freely about as Sairyn followed, walking behind them.

It was a bright day out. The class could not have gotten out sooner with how badly the mosquitoes had chowed down on her skin. Sairyn shielded her eyes from the sun's rays with her hands, continuing forth. From afar, she could see a man riding a saddled horse as it galloped her way.

“Hello there, Miss Althea!” The man hollered, swaying his hands back in forth in a waving motion. Hastily, his hands scurry, trying to once more take grasp of the leather strap fastened onto the horse's bridle, fearful of falling.

“Leonis!” Sairyn yelled back, her smile growing larger. “It has been awhile.”

The man named Leonis Happick looked back at her. He flipped his long, black hair over his shoulders, exposing a grisly-looking beard outlining his smirk.

“No rest for a man of the sword, I am afraid. King Damon appointed me to deliver an important letter to the King of Urgway,” The words escaped Leonis with an easily detectable bit of pride behind them, one that made it impossible for Althea to repress a chuckle aloud to herself.

“Tell me, Leonis, why would the King of Acera send a schmuck like you, one that can barely swing a sword, no less, for such a hefty, important task?” Sairyn asked, although jokingly, she did find herself genuinely curious about the answer.

An indignant expression formed on the face of Leonis before being replaced by a grin. “It is not like I need to, after all, now is it? This is not the times for the barbaric fighting of men, that was hundreds of years ago, so even a schmuck like me can get by well. I would be lying if I said the wolves weren’t a real pain, however.”

Sairyn nodded before picturing the spectacle of Leonis trying to fend himself off from a wolf, “I bet.”

Leonis looked at her for a moment before joining in on the laugh, “It isn’t funny! One of them nearly bit my horse’s leg clean off.”

Abruptly, Leonis’ horse began to neigh, standing up on its hind legs for a moment, startling Sairyn. She backed away instinctively, nearly tripping over the hollowed log behind her. Leonis winced, yanking and tugging at the reins until he managed to regain control of his horse.

Leonis mumbled an apology under his breath while Sairyn looked up to see a group of knights riding horses move toward them. There was a time less than a year ago that Sairyn had never seen a knight don an actual armored uniform, other than at special, official ceremonies. Now, for some reason, it was becoming more and more frequent. Their faces were covered by their helmets, with each wearing a thick armor with a small emblem attached at the chest. The emblem illustrated the letter “A” through the use of two swords leaning against one another, forming an arch while an arrow drove itself through the blades.

“Happick, King Damon requests your presence. He advises you make preparation for travel prior to,”  
One of the men called out with a staggering firmness to the way he spoke.

“But I just got back,” Leonis began to complain, the firmness in his voice nonexistent.

The knight chose not to say a word, and that action in itself, spoke volumes. With his face hidden by his helmet, it was left to Leonis’ imagination to fill in what it might have been. Leonis nodded his head with disappointment, before they nodded back at him and made their leave back to the castle.

Leonis looked down at Sairyn Althea, and she could do little except offer a weak smile as comfort.  
“Well, I best be off, you take care, Sairyn,” He said before turning and having his horse follow the men.

Sairyn Althea bid him farewell, pitying how hard King Damon worked him. After, she left her makeshift classroom, little more than the grassy terrain. For the older students, indoor accommodation was necessary, but, for the younger children, especially in the smaller Pandeic district of Acera, all you needed was someplace quiet. Soon, she found herself walking the white cobblestones leading into the city.

The days where people lived with hostility in their hearts, aroused by the opportunity to draw blood were long behind them; Leonis Happick had been right when he said that. Now, the town square was filled with a mess of people intermingling freely with one another. Whether it be discussing the happenings of their day or trying to sell their goods, Sairyn took little sight of cruelty. Unless, of course, if you were counting the alleged bargains Secrat Cope claimed to have in stock.

Sairyn Althea giggled to herself at the thought before nudging her way past some of the civilians. While walking, she could not help but overhear two children talking, she recognized them from her classroom.

*“You know, my father says that when anyone even thinks of doing something bad, King Damon sends the spirit of Marie down to deal away with them. Violently,” One child said.*

Sairyn mopped away the ridiculous thought from her mind before continuing to shove through the crowd. Everyone had their own idea for The Aeonians and how they were used. She didn't think much for their conspiracies and speculation.

The heat raged on. She wiped the sweat of her brow and felt the dampness on her clothes. She yearned more than anything else to leave the heat behind. Sairyn's home was quaint and cozy. She lived alone in her little one bedroom abode, but found herself always met by company. All in all, she coveted the life she had in Acera and wouldn't have traded it for anything, but that didn't mean she didn't meet day's end weary and exhausted, or that she didn't, at times, grow tired of teaching the students like she did.

"Hurry, hurry, one and all," An ecstatic voice came from a short distance. "I can't stress it enough – you can't afford to be absent these items from your life. All the way from the Trade networks at the Whispey Deserts, where even there they were held in high regard!" The voice was enthusiastic and filled with energy, and belonged to Secrat Cope, she had no doubt.

Secrat could always be found bragging about some precious item he discovered from his journeys. That's what he did, she supposed. Either that, or be used as a messenger, traveling from one to the next, and much like Leonis Happick, he was held dearly for his capability to get from one spot to the other, not so much his strength or integrity, however.

Sairyn Althea joined the gathering, intrigued about whatever nonsensical, outrageous item he would be advertising for the day.

"Is this all? Come now, surely all of you will be left founded dumb and gasted with flabber once you behold what I have prepared for the occasion. Hurry, hurry, make haste, make haste!" He continued.

Several came by with the same eagerness as Sairyn had as to what he had found. She wondered exactly what they may have thought about the man's goods. Hopefully, no one in the crowd would take it as anything more than a joke, or worse yet, actually consider buying any of it.

The gathering of people circled around Secrat Cope, not unlike the small children who'd listened in on Sairyn's teachings only moments earlier. For Secrat, a thief by her definition, Sairyn imagined he hoped they'd be susceptible and persuasive to what he said. He welcomed them with a dimwitted expression.

In front of Cope rested a wooden table with a white cloth draped over it. On top, rested a sword, sheathed, keeping the blade hidden from view, and where the handle began, a spherical totem ended. "The item I have for you is a sword formerly yielded by one of the first knights during the reign of the first king of Urgway, King Lapool," Secrat began, donning an over-the-top, exaggerated expression.

When 'The Thief' realized the crowd around him was not as receptive as he desired, he started up again: "A history lesson for you then, my friends. Yes, I can see by your faces that it is needed. When Alyce Hance, one of the five Aeonians, supposedly dispatched of himself for what he thinks, for whatever reason, to be the greater good, he selected Mathew Lapool to be the sole individual to harness his strengths. Mathew Lapool accepted the offer graciously. After all, what kind of fool wouldn't accept an absolute power that could never be challenged!? He claimed the title as King of Urgway. He named various men to stand below him. He had not been married and seemed adamant to stay that way, and because of this stubbornness, he desired for one of these men to be the heir to his throne."

"Each man accomplished hefty tasks to the benefit of the king, his intentions, however, were unbeknownst to them. He, looking to find a man or woman that would be unconditionally loyal, neglected to inform them that they were contesting themselves as potential candidates for the throne and the power of one of the Aeonians. Years later, the king began growing sickly, yes, quite sickly, very sickly, and he named Charles Tertius as the heir to the throne. Charles, of course, became married, and his family has held leadership over the city ever since."

Secrat stopped for a moment. He looked around them, catching his breath, as well as letting his swiftly spoken words sink in. He brought wind into his vessel and set forth again: "Anyways, it is said

that this very sword was the sword held by Charles Tertius himself. We will start the bidding at forty coin and make our way up from there!” The crowd laughed, humoring Secrat.

Their faces showed their amusement with Secrat’s shtick. Maybe some of them believed he was sincere in his goods and they were authentic. Maybe some of them were charmed by him and happy to see some excitement, faux or not, brought into the small, tired district.

“Why, yes, I bid a hundred coin!” A voice exclaimed before bursting into laughter, much like the rest of them.

“Fine, yes, good. There are no withdrawing of bids. Anyone else?” Secrat blurted nervously. “As always, I offer my official seal of approval that the item you are purchasing is completely authentic,” and that was all it took to raise the laughter to a higher level. The man could not be trusted as far as he could be thrown.

There had once been a time in Maharris’ history that a salesman with such audacity would be stoned without remorse, but those times had long since been forgotten. Instead, now, people tolerated Secrat.

Sairyn wasn’t even for certain if Secrat was in on the joke. Sometimes, it seemed like he may have, other times, it seemed less likely.

There were times, on a rare occasion, that Secrat was able to swindle someone, but, thus far, it had not resulted in anything more than a raised voice against him. Seldom, other than the very rare occasion, would Secrat leave with pockets filled with anything except the same merchandise he had been attempting to sell. That was the Secrat Cope that Sairyn Althea knew. He may have been a habitual liar. As a matter of fact, Sairyn Althea knew him to be one. However, that didn’t stop him from being entertaining to watch.

In time, as they always did, the crowd started to break away and diminish. Once everyone had their fill of Secrat’s dance, they walked away. Secrat Cope swayed his hands back in forth, trying anything he could to regain their attention. “Wait, ... wait, ... I have more I can show you!”