

Asiel walked into the cool dark chamber his eyes skittering around looking at the wraith-like surroundings. His eyes took in the onyx walls rising far above his tall frame. Tall and dark the walls ascended, flawlessly mirroring the walls of his own wildly beating heart. He saw how smooth the walls were almost mocking in their perfection. However as he looked closer he noticed pock marks marring the sleek walls and he could only imagine what power could have created those marks on such hard stone. He became so entranced by his surroundings that he almost forgot the reason he had entered his master's lair. He paced forward his mind gingerly reviewing what he was about to report to his master. He knew he placed himself in a delicate situation and wanted to make sure the meeting went according to plan which meant no repercussions meted out by his master. This was Asiel's first time entering his masters temple and he hoped never to enter again. Even though he sought the promotion that came from his dealings he desired never to have to come this close to his masters presence. His eyes caught a shadow gliding past the outer edges of his vision. He sprawled himself in the middle of the room for he remembered the recitation of the Book of the Dead. "All who seek the shadow will enter the shadow and before him we will worship." He waited, his forehead pressed to the cold floor, for what seemed like forever when a deep sinister voice entered his mind.

"Who dares enter my presence? What insect are you to disturb my thoughts?"

Stammering in fear Asiel called out, "It is I master, your humble and obedient servant, Asiel."

"I highly doubt your obedience my servant but I will play along for now," the Master said in a mocking tone, "Why do you come to disturb me?"

Mustering up courage and refusing to give into the temptation to respond in like manner, Asiel patiently stated with mock temerity, "I have come with news of dire importance."

"What dire importance would that be?"

With all the self importance he could find Asiel stated, "The Hero of the Ages has arisen." "He will be born a fortnight from now in a small hamlet of Polstat." "He will ..."

Before Asiel could finish his sentence and continue with the plan he had formed before entering the temple he felt the ground beneath him begin to shake. He almost lost his footing in the tremors that he continued to feel all the way deep into his very soul even after the tremors finally stopped. The shadow in front of him began to gather together and take shape before him. It was like looking into nothing, a vast emptiness that seemed to desire to suck him under. He barely could keep his eyes on the face that began to form in front of him. The face was that of the most beautiful creature that he had ever beheld before. It was a beauty of both aged wisdom and of unearthly echoes. However the beauty displayed before him was literally only skin deep. He could see under the voluminous skin of the face before him and found a hideous beast lurking behind. It was the very nature of the temple he was in. Beautiful in it's construction but hideous in it's portrayal. Finally the face came together in a snarl of something far more evil then any carnivorous beast. Within that face he saw not the shadow of his master but that of his underling Barkus.

"What say you?" "You dare bring to the master such news," Barkus shouted

"I thought the master would want to know your greatness," Asiel stammered not knowing what to say.

Immediately regretting it Asiel let out, "Where is the master?"

"You dare ask what the Master is doing," Barkus shouted.

"No, I just meant for this information to be delivered to him personally," Asiel quickly stated.

Barkus shook with mock laughter. Looking far more malevolent in this seemingly comical moment.

"You are brave I will give you that, insect." "Rest assured the master knew of this information far before you entered this room. He is now too busy to deal with such minor inconvenience."

"The Hero of the Ages an inconvenience?," Asiel asked.

"Do you not believe the master able to handle a human insect?," Barkus stated with mock incredulity.

"I ah... yea.... uhm..." Asiel stammered finally working up the courage to state, "I believe the master fully capable of bringing any human low.

"You had better insect. The master does not take kindly to any questions of his power," said Barkus.

"If the master feels this issue is not worthy of his intervention how might this situation be dealt with," Asiel hesitantly asked.

"Well then aren't you a brave insect," the face mocked Asiel. "Well then brave one he has placed this lowly assignment in your hands. Destroy this so called Hero before he becomes a nuisance."

"I am honored," Asiel said.

"Do not be honored. He only allows you this favor because it would lessen him. He expects this duty to be cleared up as soon as possible. If he hears different or has to intervene in this affair you will wish for an easy death." Barkus said.

"My masters wish is my command," Asiel responded.

Asiel knew the meeting was over without any need for Barkus to tell him. He slowly rose from his kneeling position and walked backwards to the door. Not because he felt he needed to honor the creature before him but because to turn ones back to one so malevolent would be tantamount to idiocy. As he finally turned around to open the door he felt more than heard the power of the darkness returning to where it had come. Sighing in relief, he walked into the night beginning the process of formulating the plans he needed to set in motion in order to please his master. In the back of his mind he was also figuring out the best way to destroy Barkus.

The wind howled outside, the rain pouring down in sheets of cold piercing needles. The effect of both rain and temperature kept most of the city locked up tight. Shutters were closed and the only light illuminating the stone paths was from the occasional flash of lightning. This weather was highly unusual for the fall season for this weather was usually reserved for the spring days that followed winters departure. This made some in the city even more fearful of the omens that this evil night brought. The streets were mostly empty except for the occasional lunatic or homeless vagrant that walked the streets. Most people were locked up tight within their protective abodes. However, if one were paying attention to the events of this night one would have seen an individual lurking the streets who was neither a lunatic or vagrant. His clothes, though well worn, were of good quality and looked very similar to something a ranger would have worn on patrol in the northern reaches. Even though slightly hunched one could tell it was unnatural for him to be so. If one looked closely one could see that he was a man of healthy stature and strong frame. One could also see the reason for his slight bent was his desire to hide a bundle of cloth underneath his body. Carefully trying to protect the small package he was carrying he started walking aimlessly through the city. You could almost hear the thoughts rattling around his head. The thoughts almost tangible with the sound of battle. The battle raging inside him was over the events that happened a few minutes ago. Almost as if in a dream-like state he slowly remembered the events of this night. He remembered a hooded individual handing him this bundle and telling him the King desired for this bundle to be disposed of. He remembered carefully inspecting the bundle and seeing a newborns face before him. He almost lost a grip on the bundle in his surprise. He remembered the feeling of utter confusion over this order and couldn't believe his King would order him to do such an vile thing. He had been protecting the king for over 15 years as both ranger and then royal guard. Serving faithfully as guardian of the King and Aravia. Since the beginning of his service to the King he had never questioned the word of the King. Yet this order almost made

him trade in his loyalty in order to keep his sanity. The utter incomprehension he felt weighed even more when he felt the bundle wiggle beneath his calloused hands. He almost went to the door and requested an immediate audience with the King. However because of his somewhat befuddled state, due to his having taken a few too many cups of mead at the local tavern, he dismissed the idea and decided to carry out his King's wish. He had no desire to end the life in his hands but he had heard the stories of old and knew of other King's before him that had disposed of children that were unacceptable. He saw the defect of the infant in his hands and understood the reason for his King's mandate. How could he refuse his King? So he released all of his own inhibitions about the task and gave into his loyalty to the King. He plodded along weighed down by his thoughts and the weather that mirrored the grim task he was committing himself to. However as he continued he knew that in his heart he could not fulfill the King's wish of complete murder. Even though he had no affiliation to any set religion his nature was still bent on justice and somewhat desired to uphold the standard his King had mandated several years ago. Even though he did what was right sometimes his desire for wine was strong and he gave into that instead. The mead released him from the burden of images still sharp in his memory. He felt it's sharp stab as if it happened yesterday but the event that he tried desperately to drown out happened over 7 years ago in the last confrontation with the Urudi. His village had been overrun with no one left alive. He could almost remember the feelings of hopelessness and rage that overwhelmed him when his troop commander came to him with the news. His wife and children had been brutally murdered by a band of deserting Urudi. He wanted to hunt them down and destroy him but his loyalty to his king and the wisdom of his commander kept him from that rash deed. However he felt as if in that moment he had betrayed his family for the loyalty of his King. It weighed on him constantly and the only way to drown it out was as much wine as he could drink. He in that moment vowed retribution on all Urudi as soon as he was able. Until that time he had burdened himself with assignments and wine. Even though he buried himself in bitterness and wine he knew there was a better way. In the short time after what was known as the "Massacre of the Seven Sons" he had seen his King's conversion to the religion called The Way and had seen the after affects of that decision. It had changed the realm in many ways bringing about peace and prosperity. Even though there were pockets of evil still residing in the corners of Aravia, mainly the Urudi infestation, the King had provided justice and a merciful rule throughout the kingdom since his conversion. This was the reason that this order made no sense to him. Yet what continued to drive him forward was his loyalty to his King. He finally devised a plan that he felt allowed him to keep his conscience intact but also keep his loyalty to the King unmarred. He went down to the river Eldon that wound itself lazily within the city walls. It was the lifeblood of the Kingdom and for now would be the current that would carry the life in his hands. He saw a small basket outside one of the many buildings that dotted the banks of the river. He made sure that it would keep the child safe and not allow a drop to penetrate the cloth that wrapped the child. He then set the basket and the life in the river and gave it a gentle nudge into the waters. The basket slowly moved down the river and out into the vast unknown. The man left standing along the shore could feel the imperceptible change this action had created and for the first time in his life prayed to the God of the Way that this unknown change would bring about blessings instead of the curses he felt were sure to follow. Slowly he proceeded back to the stables in order to do what he had long waited for. This action diminished his view of the King and he jumped on the chance to finally rid himself of this burdensome loyalty to the King. He breathed a sigh of relief as he finally could bring his justice to the Urudi.

Chapter: Chapter 1 The Beginning

One-Eye looked from corner to corner carefully studying the movements of the baker. He measured

how long the bakers eyes were on the customers and how long they were on his newly baked loaves. One-Eye was the nickname given to him by the street orphans that ran throughout the city of Juvan. The reason for his name was that he was blind in one eye, a cause of his birth. At an early age he was left on the street of Juvan and with the help of another orphan named Jaws was able to survive the streets of Juvan. Jaws was very much an older brother to him and taught him the nature of being an orphan. The one thing Jaws always said was "Survival first, One Eye. Don't care for no one but yourself." He kept that in mind even after Jaws unfortunate death at the hands of the small pox outbreak earlier this spring. Now One-Eye was on his own and he took what Jaws had said to heart which was the purpose to his business this morning. Finally after a few minutes of calculation One Eye slowly moved from the shadows and moved towards the mound of loaves sitting in the bustling marketplace. With years of experience One-Eye navigate through the people at market this early morning. It was exceedingly busy this morning due to the arrival of the Emperor to the city. This was the annual festival season that Juvan hosted every year to honor the coming season of harvest. The Emperor coming to enjoy the festivities was slightly unusual for the city of Juvan which was the reason for the slightly packed market this morning.