

Fire  
&  
Water

Matthew Christian

NOTE: If you purchased this book without a cover you should be aware that this book is stolen property. It was reported as “unsold and destroyed” to the publisher, and neither the author nor the publisher has received any payment for this “stripped book.”

This is a work of fiction. All characters and events portrayed in this book are fictitious, any resemblance to real people or events is purely coincidental.

No part of this book may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying or recording, or by any information storage and retrieval system, without written permission of Matthew Christian.

FIRE & WATER

© 2006 by Matthew Christian. All rights reserved.

For Brandon,

You followed in my footsteps until  
it was time to go off and make your  
own



I know indeed what  
evil I intend to do,  
but stronger than all my afterthoughts is my fury,  
fury that brings upon mortals the greatest evils.

**Euripides**, *Medea*, 431 B.C.  
*Greek tragic dramatist (484 BC - 406 BC)*



Part One

**Legend**



## Chapter One

“I was flying. Higher and higher I went and the higher I found myself the more I wanted to fly higher. Something inside me told me over and over to go higher when another man hit me and I started to fall. The look in his eyes told me he didn’t mean to; it told me it wasn’t intentional.”

The boy sat with his legs crossed; looking down into his hands which sat in his lap. His back was perfectly straight; the practice over the years had made it so he didn’t even notice it anymore. The grayish rock he sat on was just large enough for him to meditate on. Below the rock clear water held silver fish and grey pebbles. The water was pleasantly calm without a single wave disturbing the peace. Sometimes a fish would jump up out of the water and splash back in but the waves themselves seemed to drown against the rest of the calm. The rock stood almost four feet out from shore where it dove into the cool water.

“What does it mean master?” the boy said without lifting his eyes. He directed the question to the old man with grayish white hair

who sat near the shore where he had entered the water many hours ago.

Master Dai sat cross legged on a stump back where the shore turned into forest. For a man of almost 90 his age didn't seem to affect any aspect of his life. Though being old he still had raised Rai since he was simply a baby. Rai's father had been afraid the boy would have been in danger with him and his mother. They sought out a man from before the boy had even been conceived, Dai. The two had traveled across the island before settling down and one of their stops brought them to an old group of ruins. These ruins were grey, covered with green moss, and housed Dai though the couple hadn't known this quite yet. As they explored they noticed a man sitting on a piece of the ruins deep inside. He meditated quietly as the couple approached him to ask him what stood here before turning into ruins. They slowly walked forward but as they stepped the girl snapped a stick under her foot. Dai's eyes flew open and his hand shot forward with his palm aimed towards the girl. His arm was pushed out rigidly but his fingers were simply sitting in place with his palm open. Birds in the above trees suddenly burst out and into the sky. The girl jumped to her right and into the man's arms.

"Please. Please," the man said apologetically. "We'll leave you in peace, we're sorry to disturb you." They turned and started to walk away.

Dai's hand slowly fell. "What are your names?" The two turned back around to answer.

So the three became friends and in a desperate time their son became an orphan. Dai raised him to respect everything and to

channel what was known as bright chi. This chi flowed through every living person though only those trained in the ways of channeling it could actually use it. If Dai had simply pushed his hand out when the two approached him in the ruins that day nothing could have happened. Though what the two didn't know was that Dai was only seconds away from releasing...well, that'll come later.

Dai knew the workings of bright chi and the benefits of learning it. Not only had it saved his life and protected him much of it, it kept him in good health. Though he started channeling bright chi at an unusually young age he didn't see or experience any of the powerful strengths that came with it until he was almost into his late 50's.

Dai also knew if he didn't teach Rai the ways of respect, patience, and bright chi he could learn things that were much worse than knowing no chi at all. Although bright chi was prominent throughout the island there were those who also practiced dark chi. Dark chi wasn't as powerful but Dai had seen what it could do and many had died that day.

Dai was in desperate need of a doctor as he traveled many days to the nearest town. As he walked up to the doors of the doctor's house he turned to see many crowded around a vendor promising to show a brand new miracle to cure everything. The man and his stand were an island in a sea of people. A hush fell over the crowd as Dai looked on. The man started speaking but Dai was so far away the man was inaudible. Much of the crowd dissipated before the doctor's house because of how far away it was.

Suddenly the man floated up into the air above his stand, above the people's heads. As he floated his head aimed straight up as his arms pointed perfectly out away from his body. A yellow light suddenly started to pulsate from the man and glow off of his finger tips and from his head and feet. Some people in the crowd gasped as others softly talked to each other with smiles on their faces. People looking down on the man from windows in the house above shielded their eyes from the blinding light. The man let out a blood curdling scream as a bubble of red light exploded in all directions in a large circle engulfing all those near his stand. People inside the bubble started violently shaking and vomited blood on each other and the ground. Their eyes and ears bled and their skin bubbled. Fires sparked up as peoples hair mysteriously caught fire.

The bubble neared Dai and slowly stopped as he turned his head to avoid it. The bubble pushed up against his cheek and at first his cheek only felt warm. Then it started to burn and it felt like the heat was traveling throughout his body and branching off of his cheek. Before he knew what had happened, the bubble had vanished as had the man. The ground was seared and blood was burned into the dirt. All that remained was ashes, pieces of bone, and blood. Dai felt his face and found it to be burnt and badly deformed. His face had never recovered.

Master Dai's face looked up at Rai who was still silently looking into his lap on the rock. "Do not think about what troubles you now young learner. Clear your mind and simply relax. Remember, those who worry about the past will soon worry about the present."

Rai had hoped for relief only to come out of the talk with yet another riddle. That's how Master Dai had always talked to him. When he was younger he would ask what it meant when his master spoke to him in riddles but he soon learned to stop as Master Dai would simply turn and walk away. In fact, Rai had never understood anything Dai had said to him. He knew Dai thought he could transform him into the bright chi user he had never been but Rai knew early on he wasn't.

“Rai,” Master Dai said. “Have you finished?”

*Finally*, Rai thought, *I've been waiting for him to say that for hours*. “Yes master,” Rai replied.

They sat quietly eating white rice from bowls with chopsticks. Master Dai had made everything they ate naturally from what he gathered in the wilderness. He had even harvested the rice. Of course when Rai had joined him he hadn't found it an inconvenience simply because everything Rai ate with he had also created himself; guided by his master. He even ate rice he himself harvested against his will.

“Be ready tomorrow,” Master Dai said. His voice cut through the quiet like a knife through butter.

Rai looked up surprisingly. He hadn't expected his Master to speak the rest of the night, especially not during dinner. “What for?” Rai replied.

Silence. Dai didn't say another word for the rest of the night. After a few more tries Rai eventually gave up and went back to his bowl of rice. After dinner they went to their rooms in the desolate

ruins and slept on bamboo rollouts lying upon the ground. Two words echoed throughout Rai's mind before sleep engulfed him; *be ready*.

That night Rai couldn't sleep. He anticipated the next day so much he had almost driven himself crazy by the time he fell asleep. A night without dreams passed and Rai awoke the next morning to the sound of the birds chirping as he had done since he had been little. He waited silently in the room they had eaten in the previous night until Master Dai awoke. This morning, unlike the others, they had wandered into a deep forest instead of the meditation rock. Though the only color surrounding the two was dark green the surroundings were actually quite dismal and depressing even though the sun had been shining brightly as they had entered.

Master Dai held his hand up as he stopped as if silently telling Rai to stop behind him. As Rai came to a halt Dai continued on and stopped only a few paces ahead. Turning back and looking at Rai, Dai only muttered a few words, "Watch, don't speak."

By this time Rai had a puzzled expression on his face. Why had the old man asked him out here? Was he going to tell him to leave him alone? Was he going to kill him?

Master Dai picked up a fist sized stone that sat near a larger pointed stone. He knelt down to the black stone on the ground with the fist sized one in his hand. He rested his empty hand palm down on the pointed edge of the black rock and lifted his other high above his head.

*Surely he can't be thinking of...*

Silence.

*GASP!*

*SMUSH, CRACK, TAP!*

Master Dai screamed louder than Rai had ever heard before. The scene had happened in an instant but had happened none the less. Master Dai had brought the smaller rock down upon his hand which on contact with the rock below had pierced the skin on his palm and cracked many of the bones inside which now jutted out of Master Dai's hand. Blood shot out from his palm and from the large scar on top of his hand. Blood shot onto the green forest ground and lit the scene ablaze with color.

Master Dai had now stood up and was grasping his hand. With one large inhale he quieted down and stopped screaming and moaning though his hand and arm still convulsed randomly. He held the wrist of the damaged limb and slowly stared deep into his hand.

Blood slowly stopped trickling down his hand; the crunching of bones almost made Rai sick to his stomach. The snapping sounded like chicken bones being snapped apart by a fox as it devoured its prey. Soon Master Dai had released his palm and rubbed the blood off on a piece of cloth he had brought along. His hand had no sign of any harm done to it.

Master Dai threw down the cloth and continued to look into Rai's eyes as if saying '*Do not speak*'. Rai knew what to do.

As Dai's hands raised so did his blood that stained the ground. Thousands of small bubbles of blood swirled around and around at speeds Rai had never seen. While they spun Dai held one of his hands up and signaled by lowering his hand. Suddenly around Master Dai and his young learner it rained blood from the sky though instead of

falling to the ground they joined with their brethren and spun around the two men. A bright light flashed and Rai had to shield his eyes.

When he looked up a small rabbit had appeared out of nowhere and now grazed in the grass. There was no sign of blood anywhere. Master Dai's hand was fine. But most of all, the test was over, and Rai had failed.

“What do you mean I've failed Master?” Rai asked angrily.

Master Dai opened his eyes as he meditated and looked at the young boy looking over him. “Have you learned nothing?” he said calmly. “Have you not yet realized anger is a trait of dark chi? I can sense it in you my son, can you not feel it yourself? I don't understand how through so many years of work with bright chi you still act as if you had no training.”

“Please Master,” Rai now begged, “if you test me and never teach me what to do, how will I know what I've done wrong. How would I learn from my mistakes if I don't know what they are?” Rai eased up now, he knew he had cornered the Master, or so he thought.

“You have never imagined the thought of fighting a dark chi user have you Rai?” asked Dai curiously. Rai shook his head slightly. “Some day a battle may occur between you and another easily as powerful as you, what do you do when you're hit? Will the man stop and simply tell you what you've done wrong or will he continue to fight?”

Rai looked down, he had lost again. Finally the man he called Master spoke in riddle and he understood. He was right and once again Rai was wrong. “...”

“What was that?” asked Master Dai suspiciously.

“I’ll be better then, better than the other guy. Not even you could contend with me. You’ll see.” With that Rai turned and walked away.

His mind raced and his chest pounded but Rai didn’t care, in a strange way Rai thought it felt good at first. The burning lit inside everywhere and soon it felt as if he would explode but the feeling continued to be a good one. Sweat dripping down his arms felt like molten lava pouring down the side of a volcano.

He screamed as loud as he could. His voice crackled and finally snapped from the strain. He quickly coughed after stopping, drips of blood falling to the ground when suddenly the sound of snapping twigs was heard ahead in the ruins. As Rai looked up he cleared his mind in case he needed to defend himself with the power of bright chi that Dai had taught him.

*Crunch, crunch, crunch.*

Leaves crunched and twigs snapped as the shadow inside the ruins moved closer to the door, closer to Rai. Rai pushed his hand forward slightly and sent out a shockwave of air so strong it blew leaves off twigs and large chunks of boulder from the ruins, though the figure itself hadn’t moved. Not back, not forward, just didn’t move.

Seconds after the blast as Rai continued to hold his hands up the figure finally stepped forward out of the darkness and into the light. A large cloaked figure stood only a few feet in front of Rai. The figure wore a black silk like cloak that shined though the only light

was blocked by the trees above and the rest was omnipotent. A shine glared off the robe like none Rai had seen before.

“Rai, apprentice to Master Dai, I have come to you out of great desperation. Do not think that I despair though, for I have come in a time that you yourself despair.” The voice echoed throughout the area with a deep tone no single person could have obtained. It chilled Rai deep inside and though he wasn’t sure of what ‘it’ spoke of, he knew whatever it said was correct. “I have seen your dreams Rai, I have watched you. This Master Dai has made you out to become greater than even he has become by teaching you bright chi.” *How does he know this?* Rai wondered. *He is right though...* “Though what Master Dai hasn’t realized that some of...’us’...” The hooded figure laughed deeply. “...some of us can’t handle the absurd amount of pressure that the bright chi masters put on us.” *Yeah...* “But there is hope, a hope that leaves limitless possibilities to those of us ‘not qualified’ enough to learn bright chi and I can show you that power Rai. I can teach you to be more powerful than your master. More powerful than any man has ever imagined.”

“You promise me power beyond anything I’ve ever imagined and yet you won’t show me your face,” said Rai suspiciously, “show me proof of this so-called power and take off the hood. Show me you aren’t lying to me.”

The figure laughed again with its dark laugh and slowly raised the arm of the robe towards Rai. Several minutes passed before Rai started to see, or rather feel anything. The first thing Rai noticed was the loud pop that echoed in his head and instantly stopped the sound of the chirping birds. Then a soft thumping noise started to come out of

no where and gradually got louder until the thumping pained his whole head. His ears felt as if they were bubbling and bleeding. A sharp pain twisted in his stomach and inside his chest each time the thumping screamed in his head and each time the pain inside echoed throughout his bones until the next shot of pain. Soon he was crippled to the ground, grasping his stomach with one hand and his head with the other.

*THUMP...THUMP...THUMP...*

The pain stopped. Rai looked up and saw the cloaked figure with his arms to his side. Rai stood up and gently held his stomach with both hands. "Show me your face," was all he said.

The arms of the cloak reached toward the middle of the figure and pulled away the robes flaps. A stench overwhelmed Rai as it filled the air. It smelled like burning hair and seared flesh. The robe's flap was pulled far enough away from the body that what was hidden underneath was finally becoming visible to Rai. Bones from a rib cage still held chunky pieces of flesh and many of the ribs were broken off; those that weren't wrapped around the body and behind the creature. Visible through the ribs was a face that if Rai was asked about again he wouldn't be able to describe. The skull had two horns protruding from its skull though one was broken off and the other twisted into the flesh of the being it was attached to. Blood dripped from broken bones that pierced through the skin and chunks of flesh fell to the ground and instantly burst into flames. The flames lit the numerous twigs and leaves below the two and formed a ring around them. Screaming faces blew the tails of the robe this way and that. As the robe fell to the ground the creature started to straighten out and stand up. The bones

around the rib cage slithered around the body and dove deep into the carcass leaving the face that was barely visible now in full view.

Bones left extreme holes in the body which were pulsating as flesh was ripped apart around them. The creature spread three wings from its back as it stood. Two wings shot out from each side and one split out right where the spine would have been if this 'thing' was human. Gallons of blood flew out each part as this happened as if it was shot out of a cannon. Each wing seemed to almost be carefully crafted out of bone and the inside of the wings poured blood from the stretched flesh. Cracking, snapping, ripping, and sloshing screamed out as bones snapped, skin tore, and meat fell off the beast. Four legs made of nothing but bones littered with hunks of flesh sprouted from the base of the beast and two meaty legs that had held the creature up now hung limply and swung around as the creature swayed from side to side. Blood trickled down the meat legs and ran throughout those made of bone as if gravity didn't exist. Two arms popped out of the meaty body and spew blood. Unlike the sprouted legs the arms were made of blood red flesh. Both arms split as they grew and formed two more arms. Each arm created a hand made up of three fingers that in turn each grew claws almost the length of Rai's forearm. Four arms, four legs, twelve hands, twelve black claws, three wings, and the twisted face of a demon yearning for blood and souls stood in front of Rai. His fate was sealed.

## Chapter Two

The fires burning brightly around them grew high overhead and enclosed the two in a large bubble. By the time Master Dai had returned from his activities near the water the bubble had disappeared; taking both down into the depths of hell. Master Dai, though experienced in tracking, had simply thought Rai was somewhere off in the woods since there was no sign of any beast, any fire or blood, or any sign of Rai.

As the fires around the two dissipated Rai realized they were falling, no, not falling, floating downwards. He was in a cavern that forced itself miles and miles as far as the eye could see. The cave burned an ember glow upon the walls, ceiling, and even floor as they drifted down. Heat radiated from the floor and the temperature rose as they descended. Above, Rai saw no sign of a hole or anything he would have gone through to reach this cavern; simply stalagmites and rocks carrying the burden of holding the ceiling above them from crashing down. The walls and floor were also composed of rocks that all seemed to carry a burden. All of the walls were cracked and looked

as though they were strained to hold the ceiling up while the floor looked cracked from the intense heat and pressed down from eternities of people walking upon them. A large crack echoed throughout the cavern and spit an enormous ball of fire up through the people walking below and dissolved in the empty air from the ceiling to the floor.

As they reached the ground Rai noticed all of the people walking around had stigmas about them. Some were gruesome while others were unbelievable. Acts obviously committed to those who lived down here where unheard of to Rai. Fire cracks continued echoing noises and spitting fire as Rai looked to the beast that had brought him down here. The beast was gone and was now in the shape of the cloaked man once again.

“Follow,” bellowed the voice.

The two began their trek against the horde of those destined to forever walk this cave. They were the only two walking against the horde and it was apparent. The stigmas hadn't helped Rai as he walked against the current. Rai hadn't seen a man or woman he would even have touched had they been family.

“Rai you have pledged your life to serving me. There is no turning back.”

A man walked slowly past Rai's left side. His hair was scarce; where it was it was brown but where it hadn't been showed evidence of being pulled out forcefully with chunks of skin missing and bone showing. His right arm had slits running up and down it that streaked with blood. His left arm looked as if it had the skin cut down to the bone near the wrist and yanked back leaving flaps of flesh clinging to the bone. Near the elbow the skin and meat had been apparently

ripped off as skin hung down dripping blood from the fine hairs that still protruded from the bloody flesh.

“Before you could scream and your master came to you; before you were safe. Here you are not; here nothing is what it seems.”

A figure bumped into Rai and he turned to apologize for the mishap but upon glancing at what he thought was a woman he held his tongue. The figure was black from head to foot. Charred bone crumbled and peeling flesh still seared. Smells of burning hair and skin wafted into Rai’s nostrils; the smell stayed with him so long he thought it was forever burned into his nose. Her mouth moaned and groaned as she passed. She took a breath in as if to yell but when she opened her mouth wider the corners split open and cracked the skin and bone all the way to the back of her head.

“Here, you are your own savior. You will either learn and be the greatest or die a horrifying death and continue to walk through hell like the rest of these poor beings.”

They suddenly stopped in the middle of the crowd as the rest continued to push on. A man with wire wrapped around his body walked towards them. The wire wrapped its way around the man’s arms and dug deep into his shoulders. Behind the man’s bald head the wire protruded out and above until it dug deep into the top of the fleshy skull. Skin bulged where the coil of wire continued under the man’s skin and wrapped down past his left eye; making the eye recede into the back of his head. Wire followed his body down his chest and into his legs, every now and then piercing the skin and digging back in like a dolphin jumping in and out of water.

As the man approached the dark figure that had brought him to hell, a flash of light exploded from the figure and made Rai look away. As he slowly went to shield his eyes Rai noticed the top of the cave where the wall met the ceiling. The cave walls had shed their rock exterior and now weren't made out of rock at all but of people. The people on the walls screamed and moaned as they held up the ceiling which contained people who held up the rock above them. Rai didn't like the idea but he knew he was right; the cave fed on the pain, fear, and perversion of the recently and not so recently dead. The walls, ceiling, and people around them had all been sentenced here when they died; they were the dark chi users, they were what he would be. This place was where he would eventually end up wandering aimlessly as if he was blind but without a soul.

As he turned back he noticed the figure leading him through the stream of lost souls had now transformed once again from a hooded figure to a giant, terrifying, 3-winged beast. The beast's nostrils now flared as shots of fire escaped them and added to the heat surrounding them. An orange glare lit up the beast and made it even more terrifying than the first time Rai had seen him. A blend of orange fading quickly into darkness seemed to hold fear itself for Rai had no idea what could possibly be near the creature.

It lifted the wire-torn human with its lower left arm and turned to look at Rai who stood behind him. The man's legs and arms dangled as if they were lifeless. Finally looking towards him, the creature spoke to Rai.

“Do not choose to run. You have made wise decisions up until now. If you choose to make an unwise decision...”

The beast trailed off while he lifted the body to the height of his torso. Then his upper right arm grasped onto the thick wire weaving above the man's head and started to pull. This animal hardly had to strain before the skin started to tear away and drip blood. Wiring snapped and twanged as it pulled up from the very tip of the man's toe through his leg, into his inner thigh, through his groin, up his chest, and out from behind his head; all the while tearing skin and leaving blood-stained bone. The body fell lifeless as the beast held the wiring and dropped the rest of the man. Not much more than a puddle filled with bones hit the ground. Wire dripped blood and slowly began tangling itself around the creature's arm and out into the largest sword Rai had ever laid his eyes upon.

Looking deep into Rai's eyes as if glaring at his soul he said, "Come with me, I will show you where you shall learn many things."

Finally after about a half hours time of walking they came upon an opening that resembled a field. Nothing was in this field though the ground gave Rai a foreboding feeling that it had some strange power in itself. As they walked onto the surface Rai noticed it sunk a bit under his feet, barely noticeable but enough to seem like Rai had been standing on tall grass and had pushed it down under his foot. The beast turned towards Rai though now the sword had vanished but Rai knew where it went when he noticed shining metal embedded in the beasts arm.

"Here you will learn powers and become stronger than any other living mortal. This, Rai, is your training ground." The creature smiled at Rai suddenly with its jagged yellow teeth protruding from its lips. "Another good decision Rai, do not ask for all will be shown to

you. I know you question how you shall learn anything in this very empty space. Lesson one!” bellowed the beast. “Not all is as it seems.”

With that he lifted an arm and a large piece of the ground flew up to the height of Rai’s neck. Its shape was a perfect resemblance of the rock Rai had meditated on with Master Dai. The rock looked perfect until the bottom where the grey rock slowly faded into the color of red that stained the ground below them. Ground near the rock punched up and formed into a human body; it was Master Dai’s tough where Master Dai’s legs reached the ground they also turned red and stretched out. After a few moments of taking this in the body of Master Dai dropped back into the spongy ground and Rai looked back at the beast.

The rest of that afternoon Rai learned much from the beast. From meditating to performing acts of dark chi Rai had done all he thought he possibly could. This all seemed like a dream but he could feel everything. Tomorrow he would push himself harder, faster, more, until he reached a time where the creature would approve of what he had become. Every day went on like this for five years, each day Rai would learn more and more, become completely drained, and that night as he fell asleep upon a bed made of stones to harden his body he would wake completely refreshed and ready to train more.

Finally the day had come and Rai had left. Now on the surface again he would hunt and kill. Not for the sake of hunting and not for the sake of killing but for pleasure. He would become the greatest chi user ever known and everyone would hear of him far and wide. But

one thing had to be done first; he would kill the foolish man who once deceived him.

## Chapter Three

Master Dai had aged more than Rai had expected. The man's face now sagged and his beard grew so long it almost reached the ground below him. His eyes were closed now though Rai knew if he had them open they would show pain from long nights of crying over the death of his student. By the time the old man would die, Rai swore, he would make those eyes show fear.

Both eyes opened upon Rai as Master Dai slowly came out of a deep meditation. No show of compassion or love was shown through his eyes. As the men stood, the rock made slight lapping noises in the water behind him and birds chirped far off in the distance but other than that not a sound was made between the two men. The birds in the closest trees seemed to be hushed in fear. Their small throats would have been better suited for croaking than chirping.

“On the rock,” Master Dai told his student.

Rai slowly moved his gaze from the man to the rock. A slight smirk came upon his face as he began to walk to the rock. Master Dai finally realized what had happened to his one time learner as Rai

glided through the air to the rock, his feet not touching the ground. As the ground lowered Rai remained the same height in the air. He gently floated above the water and slowly came to a stop halfway between the water and the rock.

“Now I have seen what you have become. Your soul is gone,” Master Dai yelled. “The powers of dark chi shall never get to me, you have been corrupted Rai!”

Rai turned to look at the old pathetic man sitting on the beach. “You say you’ve seen what I’ve become and yet all I’ve done is gone to the rock like you asked of me. I’ve done as you say.”

“But you haven’t done it...” Master Dai’s voice suddenly cut out. Rai now smiled a wicked grin as both he and his Master knew what he was going to say; he hadn’t done it the way Master Dai would have done it and it aggravated the man. Dai wanted to make Rai think he was in control; Rai knew otherwise.

“You want to see my power you feeble man?” Rai’s left arm shot straight out and slowly he turned his palm until it aimed up. Never breaking eye contact or wavering with his gloomy smile his hand began to create a small glow of light only a few inches above his hand. Larger grew the ball of light until Master Dai saw it was a ball of fire, not a ball of light. The ball grew and grew and once Rai had reached an appropriate size, flung it at the rock with a simple flick of the wrist. It exploded upon contact and instantly shattered the rock, pieces of which went flying everywhere. A large hunk of the rock slammed against Master Dai and pinned him to the ground from his chest down past his still crossed legs.

Rai glided over to the man as pieces of fire and chunks of rock rained from the sky. Upon reaching his past master he started to laugh. He glanced around and noticed large pieces of the rock lying around him.

*On his back like a little turtle  
 Never ever saw this coming  
 Master Dai, his power's like a girls  
 Not going to help him through some things*

Rai lifted his right palm and red glow appeared around a rock on his left. Carefully and slowly the rock flew through the air and set upon the rock already pinning down Master Dai's body. Rai laughed insanely and continued singing.

*Many days he trained me well  
 Always teaching me bright chi  
 Always thought it would help  
 Him in his times of dire need*

Another rock dropped on top of Master Dai, there now were three of them holding him against the earth. Tears escaped his eyes and blood ran from his mouth to the ground behind him. His legs were being crushed and broken in multiple spots as each rock was added.

*This time it's done and over  
 Master Dai shall pass*

Fire & Water  
*Never found himself a lover*  
*Master Dai shall die at last*

Rai continued to chant this last verse over and over as he brought the last rock near him closer and closer slower than the others that came before it. This last one though came and floated in the air near Rai. “All will fear me,” Rai said as he looked into Master Dai’s eyes. “I can see the fear in your eye’s Dai. Speak your last words old man.”

“I loved you but you have failed me. You have caused me more pain by learning this chi than by setting rock after rock upon my body.”

*CRACK.* Master Dai’s neck snapped as the rock slammed against his head, bounced off and landed a few feet away. Rai had killed yet felt nothing for the dead man. He floated to the ground and walked away. Dai’s body randomly twitched underneath the boulder that would claim his life.

The sun had finally gone under the horizon and Rai continued to walk. His true master taught him sleep had been for the weak minded. Those who slept, Rai had been taught, gave their enemies the greatest advantage; long periods of complete weakness. Each night Rai had slept less and less until the pain that seared in his eyes turned slowly from pain into pleasure. The burning wells of water near each eye that dripped from lack of sleep soon dried up and never had dripped again.

He walked for hours on end and never suffered so much as a blister or a callous. Master had him walk with bare feet many days without rest until the cracks and blisters that bled and oozed puss closed up and went away. Though he had been able to glide about in the air he was trained just as much on foot. Those lessons Master had told him if he had only flew he would be weak on his feet and if he stayed on his feet he would be a grounded target.

Night loomed on and as the dawn approached he began to glide through the air though his body instead of standing in the air like it had been when he attacked Master Dai was now as if he was lying in mid-air though flying forward. Finally the sun peaked over the horizon in a massive orange ball and lit the ground and Rai, who continued on. As Rai became more determined to reach his target his kimono slid off his shoulders and flew back but only fluttered in the wind as it was held by the piece of cloth tied around his waist.

“Rai have I ever lied to you?” questioned his master in his evil tone.

“No, master.”

“Explain to me three things you’ve learned from me.”

“Well,” Rai paused and thought for a moment. “You’ve taught me how the users of bright chi try to poison those around them by spreading false rumors far and wide of the greatness of bright chi and the uselessness of dark chi. You’ve taught me to be true to myself by looking out for only myself. To become strong and be my own and only help my cause.” Rai paused as he thought of a third and realized his master was right, he had learned so much in these first few months.

“I also know now the plan of bright chi to take over the towns and corrupt the island which is why you’re sending me back.”

“To learn is one venture Rai,” the hooded figure spoke. “To experience is another. Yesterday you’ve heard of immense pain and today you shall experience it. Dispel your clothing Rai and prepare for today you will feel one of the most immense pains you shall ever feel.”

Rai slipped off his kimono which was all he had on. Had his master told him this the first few nights he would have surely fled but now he trusted him and knew the pain was what he deserved; it was what he was ready for.

“Come,” beckoned his master and with a wave a large box grew up out of the ground. “Lye upon this and be still. This process will take our whole time together today and you will be only allowed to move once.”

Rai followed and leaned down on the table but as he placed the back of his head down his master told him to turn around and that he would start with Rai’s back. When he finally rested on his belly a large flash came from behind him and he knew the hooded figure was now the beast that had also accompanied him on his journey into dark chi. The creature held up his arm, the metal that had been inside its arm now formed out into a large design as if it signified a tribe of some sort. Without warning the metal grew an orange red and was pressed hard against Rai’s back, searing the flesh as it pressed on. Tears escaped Rai’s eyes but he made no sound or motion. The smell of burning skin wafted through the air and into Rai’s nose. His skin blackened and continued to burn for five hours as the metal held firm.

“Turn around,” barked the beast as he pulled off the large metal design.

Rai pushed past what he thought was possible as he turned belly up and lied down on his back. As he looked at the creature he noticed there was no blood and when the metal was pulled off didn't stick. Whatever kind of metal the animal wielded wasn't easily destroyed. Five more hours passed as his front was branded with a different design. The front was worse because more of the smell was apparent and one of the metal wires ran right above his nipple, searing it right off.

Cool air felt amazing to Rai as he sped on. The sun shone off the black design on his back as he came upon his destination. He slowed in the air and came to the stand position as he hovered into Rumak.

## Chapter Four

The people of Rumak sat on chairs outside their homes admiring the morning. They waited until late in the day for work and if anyone had tried to push them into work in the morning, they would have fought them. The morning was so hot they waited until it cooled down before doing any labor; *lazy, pathetic humans* thought Rai as he lowered himself, he now floated between two homes, the main street below him.

“What do you want creature?” barked a man to Rai’s right.

Rai laughed; the simple trick of floating made them already fear him, why else would they call him creature? “I look for those seeking to join my cause.”

“What cause is that?” questioned the man.

“The towns will all be mine. Those who will join me shall reap benefit upon benefit. Those that do not follow me will be slain,” Rai said as a red glow came into his eyes.

“If you were to rule the towns and the island what would be changed?” The man wavered when he asked this. Rai had already seen the weakness to this man, he already contemplated joining Rai.

“Every town will prosper and grow ten times the size they are now. Everyone will learn dark chi starting with the children and thus making every town live in harmony.”

The man stood dumbfounded at what Rai had just said as if he hadn't heard him correctly. His mouth gaped open and his eyes bulged. “Never! Why would any be so foolhardy to join your cause?!” screamed the man.

“As I said, I will kill all who don't. The bodies will pile from the ground to the sky if they have to. I will ask one more question. Will you join me?”

By now two other men had been standing near long enough to hear most of the conversation. They too stood back as they learned why the creature was there.

“NEVER!” screamed back the man who he had been talking to, as he screamed he turned to run away. Rai held out a single hand and on the man's next step his left leg snapped as if holding up a thousand pounds. He dropped to the ground and cried out. “Help me you fools!” he barked to the two men near him. One threw a small blade which stuck deep into Rai's chest as the other still continued to stare in fear.

Tearing the dagger out Rai aimed his palm at the man who stood in fear. A red aura arched in the air and settled above the man's head. Rai held the arm out as the redness pulsated and started flowing towards Rai. As the man started to convulse, Rai held out his other

hand and struck the other man who threw the dagger at him with another arching aura but this one was a sickly, pea green color. Instantaneously the man started screaming and scratching at his skin as if something were crawling under it. Large lumps crawled up and down his arms, legs, and chest. He scratched and scratched at them until the skin was ripped apart and bone was showing. Though this happened in many places he continued to claw at his body. By now the man with the red aura had collapsed as the aura retracted. The scar had easily healed itself from what it drained out of the man. His face had stuck in a horrified scream as he died in front of Rai. Rai's branding started to glow a bright red as the man passed and continued to glow long after he died.

This red glow continued for a long time as Rai killed many in the village. All had run and hid after he attacked in their homes and though he searched every home many still survived. Piles of bodies filled the streets but many were men's bodies. The fight, or genocide rather, wasn't without profit to Rai. Many he found were either frightened into joining him or truly accepted they had believed in the ways of dark chi. Rai had almost 30 followers from this one town. Others would prove just as useful as Rai and his men went from town to town slaughtering and strengthening their ranks.

After each town had been attacked they took over Rumak and Akabu. They kept what Rai called 'Users' (proudly displaying their use of dark chi) in both these cities and kept watch to make sure nothing suspicious had happened. The other towns were complete victories. Attacking all, he continued to travel with his group from town to town, each time pillaging more and more he had missed the

last time. Users began to train in dark chi every night; none showed much promise though they could do the simple tricks such as flame balls and dark healing. Rai and the Users soon named themselves ‘The Supremacy’ and had quickly, as Rai had planned, become feared in every town.

The Supremacy knew the time to grow was upon them and knew they could not simply roam forever; it was the time to build. They constructed a massive wooden city on a platform built over a cliff that led out over the ocean. Black rocks were housed below the large wooden platform and dark chi kept the wood preserved. The water sprayed wood was perfect in case any enemies would try to burn it down. Wood would creak loudly each and every day and night that many that passed by (on accident of course) would hear the noise, mistake them for screams, and run away. And so it was like this for decades. Every month the Supremacy made their rounds; ranks were strengthened, people died, people hid, and cities were left in devastation. Soon Rai would have complete control and everyone who opposed him would be dead. The Supremacy held a legend and in time this legend would be the most feared man imaginable. The Final Age had begun, as had the Supremacy.

Part Two

**Beginning to an Ending**



## Chapter Five

Kenji's eyes slowly opened to the bright yellow sun that barely stretched over the horizon. A window near him let in a slight warm breeze as Kenji rubbed his eyes and looked outside. The breeze almost seemed as if it was forced; as if the air was short on breath and barely puffed out the breeze it did. Outside the sun shone off the green grass and reflected off the dew towards Kenji. The sun slowly rose and the orange turned darker; finally turning into a blood red as it turned Kenji's room red. His window slammed shut and his room slowly filled with real blood as it went from floorboard to floorboard and eventually covering his whole floor. The blood continued to rise until his room was filled from floor to ceiling with blood. As he swam around in the warm blood he opened his eyes. Through the red all he saw was his window shining the now orange sun through. His eyes hurt from the blood and his lungs burned with pain from holding his breath so long but the light from the window was fading away...away.....away.....

“Kenji!” barked his father and Kenji sat straight up. The sun shone in but now was closer to midmorning as his father walked out of the room. He had dosed off after waking earlier, his head pounded now though. Kenji got up, dressed himself, and walked through the home and out the front door.

His mom washed clothing in the outside bin as his younger sister ran around playing with the other girls that lived near them in the city of Nayano. The quiet city was peaceful all throughout the day and the only disturbances that ever happened were when a stray tiger wandered in the village or...

A scream echoed throughout the village and the sound of hooves rang out as a group of large men clad in black armor came galloping in the town on horses; running past people and cutting them open from atop their horses with knives and swords. The woman who had first screamed was now dead and lied in the dirt which had begun to collect her blood as it alternated a couple drips followed by a steady stream from her neck. Several others had also now been cut open and died as the men jumped down from their horses. Of all the men the most massive of them, whose pasty colored arms bulged in the sunlight, now stepped forward from the middle of the group. Turning to the right he shot a ball of flame from his hand and the house exploded, sending wood, rock, flame, and two bodies to rain from the sky.

“Get inside now,” ordered Kenji’s dad just after his mom had let out a blood curdling scream. His sister ran inside quickly followed by his mother, Kenji, and his father. After getting safely inside his father slammed the door shut and reached a finger in between two

floor boards near the front door. He lifted up a large wooden trap door that led into a damp hole where the walls were made of a mixture between rock and dirt. The cellar contained items like aging food and many random things like unused baskets and family heirlooms. As they all piled down into the cellar their father closed the trap door above them and looked left towards a wall. He reached towards the base of the wall and found a rock where his fingers could fit up in and pull up as if it were a handle. The wall creaked as he lifted the bottom and the top tilted back above where large bamboo hinges held it together. Every family member crawled into the small pitch black room and set the wall down as their front door opened.

The largest man who had entered their town stepped over the threshold and into the home. One step more and he was standing on the top of the trap door. He looked around as though looking for something quite important. His chest glowed red where a large symbol was burned on from long ago.

*Thock...creak.*

*Thock...creak.*

*Thud.*

The man stopped and realized what none other had; where he had been standing was hollow underneath. As he turned around and looked closer he noticed one of the floorboards had its corner rubbed smooth. He grabbed onto the boards and threw the door upwards with such a force the door cracked off, hit the ceiling, and broke into two pieces on the floor of the home. Climbing down into the cellar he simply glared around, not focusing on the items he now saw. His arm moved slowly over to the wall and he set two fingers upon it. He

walked around the room as he slid his fingers across the walls. The scraping got louder until it scraped over the wall which hid the family of four.

Kenji's father looked out from a crevice between a large rock and the rest of the wall. The man had the same terrifying type of symbol on his back. His father had to hold his legs from collapsing as the man turned and looked right at him. A hand flew up to his mouth as father stopped himself from making any sort of noise. Outside, the intruder held out his hand and a large fireball grew above his palm. Even from behind the wall the family could feel the heat but didn't dare move away in case the foot scrape was loud enough for the man to hear. He neared the wall until his nose was only a few inches from it. He smiled. Fear.

It had been almost an hour since the man was inside their home and yet Kenji's family was still cowering in their cellar. They had started to talk as soon as the screaming from outside their home had begun to quiet down. Back against the wall Kenji looked at the other three as if they thought him an outcast; them in their perfect little circle and he alone. It had always been like this though he had nothing but love for his family and they had the exact same for him. Knowing that the man had by now left the town, Kenji held out his hand.

A bright light blazed upon the walls and the people contained within them. The three in a circle sat stupefied as they gazed at Kenji who now had his hand held out and began moving it about in the air around a glowing ball of pure white. Smiling, Kenji looked up

towards his family and saw them staring at him as if he had some kind of disease.

“Who taught you those devil tricks?” his dad barked.

Kenji only looked at him, his smile was gone as well as his white ball and hand motions. “I learned it myself. You are away much of the time, mother is always busy with work around our home, and Suki,” Kenji motioned towards his sister, “is always with the other small children around Nayano.”

“Do not let anyone else see you do that do you understand me Kenji?” his father commanded.

Kenji looked down into his hands. “Yes father.”

“Good let’s get...” his father began as he stood up and brushed off but Kenji didn’t pay attention to what he had gone on to say. He was moving his hands around in the air again by himself as he started to practice alone.

As they left his mother turned back and looked at him, a sad look was strewn across her face. “Leave him,” snapped his father and his mother turned and hurried up the stairs. The large wall dropped shut and Kenji heard the others reach the top of the cellar and walk around on the main floor of their home. Kenji continued practicing for the rest of the day, only coming up for dinner and to sleep. Their house only contained love, no hate, no bitterness, and no evil emotions. The love didn’t help the fights they had though and Kenji wondered, as he lay drifting asleep, if his parents forgot about their love of him sometimes.

*Kenji, you shall see again. Do not fear, darkness is swallowed by the light.*

“Kenji wake up,” his father said yet again.

Kenji awoke and looked at his father. He was dressed in his kimono. There was no sun outside and rain clouds covered the sky. A dull grey lit his room and made it seem dull and drab.

“Get ready. Today we are hunting.”

His father walked away from Kenji’s room and back down the hall. Kenji knew after the fight yesterday this was his way to make everything right again. It wasn’t his fault but he didn’t care, he’d take the blame to make things right again. He jumped up and threw on his kimono. Only a few minutes after his father had left his room, Kenji had followed the same way. His mother and sister were once again outside, his mother working and his sister playing.

He finally caught up to his father who now passed outside of the town’s main gate. Kenji was in such a hurry he hadn’t said goodbye to either of the other family members, though he now wished he had, he was glad he had caught up here instead of in the plains. By hunt of course his father meant check the numerous traps he had set up when he and Kenji’s mother had first moved to Nayano. His father carried nothing now but a simple walking stick and a small knife which Kenji knew he had hidden inside his kimono. Both legs had been weakened by the man’s old age and soon wouldn’t be able to move at all. Then it would be up to Kenji to provide the food for his family.

As they continued Kenji turned back to look, only to notice the city had disappeared in the distance, now the only visible thing around them was mountains and plains. The sight chilled Kenji though now the sun almost reached its peak in the sky. If they wouldn't find the traps soon they...

Hoof beats. Kenji knew it as soon as he heard it. He turned back around and saw his father gripping onto the stick with his left hand and held the knife inside his kimono. The riders approached quickly on black horses. Kenji wondered if from the side, instead of the riders approaching them, it looked like they were being sucked towards the riders. And then it happened, Kenji saw him, the man who had terrorized his home only a night before. He had heard an old man talking in the village a while back about the man.

“His name was Rai...well was Rai back when he was a man. Many say he's some kind of creature now,” the man told Kenji. “They say he killed his master.”

“That's silly,” a very young Kenji said to the man. “How could he learn so much if his master was dead?”

“Ah, you are a smart one,” the man said as he studied Kenji. “No one knows. Myself and many with me think he had some kind of disease that made him learn everything about dark chi. That or he was born with the knowledge. Others say he was taken in by another but they are fools for the old man and Rai lived in the ruins south of here.”

“Rai,” Kenji muttered under his breath as the rider slowed up to them high upon his horse.

“So the trapper and his boy finally come out of the town, and so near the day we attack their village,” Rai said aloud. A smirk lay

upon his face and his voice chilled Kenji to the bone. “You must be the town jackasses.” All the men upon their horses began to laugh their deep, scruff laughs.

As they laughed Kenji’s father began to pull out the knife but Rai retaliated instantaneously and broke the man’s arm, the metal knife falling to the ground. His father fell onto his hands and knees as Kenji screamed out. Rai turned quickly and smiled before placing his hand out in front of him. Two sparks popped directly in front of Kenji’s eyes and knocked him almost three horse lengths away from the rest of them. He struggled back up until he sat on the ground looking towards the others as if he were going to jump until he noticed a drip of blood fall to the ground. The blood started dripping faster and faster until he noticed it became a stream. His hand wiped down below his nose to clear the blood but realized it hadn’t been coming from his nose. Both of his eyes now poured blood down his cheeks as if he were crying seas of red. He saw his father standing below Rai as he leaped down from his horse. Standing up Kenji noticed the edges of where he now looked began to fade to black. Rai slowly began to draw a large curved blade that resembled fire on the top portion but was sharpened perfectly on the bottom. Kenji looked around hoping the fading vision would disappear. He blinked and rubbed his eyes but nothing helped. Rai looked up at Kenji one last time before he plunged the sword into the old man’s back. Kenji’s father fell to the ground as blood shot outwards. Starting as fast as he could, he ran towards his father but as he did Kenji’s vision completely faded and he tripped over his father’s dead body while the riders rode off. Kenji

was left alone, in the darkness he had once dreamed of, cuddling his father's bloodied corpse to his chest as he cried for hours.

## Chapter Six

Kenji heard the crackling of fires, screaming of women, and yells of men as he dragged himself back into Nayano. Weak from crying he hadn't been able to stand since he fell over his father, plus he had violently twisted his ankle as he had fallen. His side burned as he dragged on and covered his worn skin with dirt and dust. The sounds of people ran from the left to the right and from the right to the left in front of him. All he had to go by now was the sounds of the people, the feel of the fires near him, and the smell of burning homes.

The men had come back and raided, this time leaving very little after they left. Homes had been burnt to the ground and many people had been slaughtered and left in large piles that smoked while refusing to burn brightly. Kenji dragged himself on through the town until he heard screaming to the left. The woman had been the one Kenji had known since he was only a small child, they had been neighbors all his life.

He dragged himself on to a stump he remembered and sat at a distance in front of his house. Though there weren't any screams in

the direction of his home a heat emanated towards Kenji that told him the house had burnt down. The stump sat nearer than he had thought and when he reached it he set his hand upon it and accidentally right into a man's lap.

"I'm sorry," Kenji quickly said as he drew his hand back and as his face began to glow red. "I couldn't hear you there."

"He attacked you and your father out there didn't he Kenji?" the old man asked. Kenji knew by his voice it was the man he talked to when he was little, the man everyone called crazy.

"Can you tell me what it looks like? Can you tell me what my home looks like?" Kenji pointed out into the darkness and signaled toward where he thought his home was.

The man sighed and slowly began, "Your home is gone, Kenji. All that remains is black rubble and burnt logs. I'm...I'm...sorry," the man said sincerely.

"What else, any people nearby?" Kenji questioned.

"Yes, one," the man said quietly.

"Who?" Kenji asked quickly.

"Your mother; your mother is right over there," the man answered.

"Mom! Mom!"

"Kenji. Kenji please!" the man said to him loudly. "Please stop yelling for her. She's...she's dead; she's lying on the ground over there, over by where the door to your house was. I saw them slay her as they left; they took your sister too Kenji." He tried to crawl to his mother but the old man was one step ahead of him and grabbed him, holding him back.

Kenji stopped moving instantly and sat still. His fingers tingled as he remembered the feeling of digging a hole in the ground with his bare hands and then laying his father to rest there outside Nayano. "Please tell me old man, who did this to us? Who did this to my family? Who did this to me?" Kenji begged.

"You remember the one called Rai I spoke of so many times when you were little?"

Kenji only nodded, he remembered.

"It was him, him and those that follow him. The Supremacy is a terrible group, all of them practice dark chi though none have been anywhere near the skill Rai is at."

"How do I kill him? How do I show him how it feels?" Kenji asked viciously.

"Ah," the man said. "That I do not know Kenji. I believe the only man who knew that died long ago, his poor Master Dai."

"He lives, I know he does, the bright chi tells me he lives," Kenji said a few moments after the old man had finished speaking. "I will find this man and learn from him. Old man please listen to me, go near those trees over there," Kenji motioned towards a small grove of three trees. "Inside under some leaves lays a robe, bring it to me."

The old man got up and walked to the tree. As he bent down he noticed a small white piece of cloth escaping from under the leaves. He lifted up the bright white kimono and gave it to Kenji who then put it on swiftly. No one had noticed in all the commotion around him though the clatter of people seemed much less than before.

"Goodbye old friend, I thank you," Kenji told the crazy old man.

“Wait, wait!” said the man as if he had forgotten something. Kenji heard the man’s footsteps softly fade out and then return as he came back. “Take this,” the man said as he handed Kenji a long staff of carved wood. “Use it instead of your eyes. Good luck.”

As he walked towards the town gate he heard the old man whisper to many others and in turn they told others and yet again those people had told others. By the time he reached the entrance to the town he heard a large crowd gathered behind him. Many screamed out at him with good wishes and offered to give him the last of their possessions. Accepting none of them he set off, in search of master Dai.

Walking in the warm sun lit field Kenji could only think of the man they called Rai. Long ago that crazy old man had told him a story that was passed down since Rai had become powerful. The story found a party of 15 men circling Rai one night as he ate dinner near a camp. As he lifted his chopsticks to bring a single grain of rice to his mouth the men attacked from all sides. One by one Rai quickly killed them with only one free hand and one free arm; never dropping the grain of rice. He finished his meal by the light of the fire near 15 newly deceased bodies. Kenji suddenly felt sick; he was much too young to die. One thing remained in his head; if he was going to die at least he wouldn’t see it coming.

## Chapter Seven

*Chirp. Chirp chirp. Squeak. Chirp.*

This was where Rai had once been the student to Master Dai. The birds chirped in the trees above and chipmunks squeaked as they ran past Kenji's feet. He held the rod as he walked on in his white kimono. A steady breeze blew against his left cheek. He breathed in and could smell the fresh grass and green leaves as he passed them. His cheeks would turn warm and suddenly cool again as the sun shone down through the branches of the trees above.

*Thud, thud, thud, click, clack.*

His walking stick suddenly hit solid stone instead of the soft ground he had been walking on for almost two days, if not more. He reached out his foot to feel the stone in front of him. The stone wasn't simply set into the ground by nature; the stone was there for walking on. Finally, he had made it; he was in the ruins Master Dai lived in once long ago.

"Tread no further young one," a voice softly said.

Kenji stopped startled and looked all around only to find the darkness he had seen since his father died. The stick in his hands slightly trembled; he had planned on finding Master Dai and then fighting, not the other way around. He had no idea what was going to happen, if he was attacked he was as good as dead; fear welled within him.

“Do not fret I will not hurt you, though I ask why you find yourself way out here in these old ruins.”

“Master Dai?” Kenji blurted out.

The man laughed, “You must be blind. Son, I’m not nearly as old as Dai is.”

“Oh,” Kenji said disappointed pointing his head down as if he was looking at his feet. “So,” he paused long before continuing. “Is Dai...alive?”

The man laughed yet again. “So is that what they’ve told all of you? No, no, Dai is not dead; near enough when I found him though. Found him half under a rock and not breathing; thankfully Dai had taught me in bright chi long before he came to live out in these drafty old ruins.”

“You are a friend of Dai’s then? How did you know he was out here?” Kenji asked.

“Dai and I grew up together. Our families lived out in the plains and to pass the time we studied bright chi. After enough time passed we even began to teach each other and practice on each other though Dai was always much better than I was. Eventually when our families perished I began to study under him but remained his equal. One day we parted ways; he came out here to live in these ruins and I

went and lived in a home just outside these forests. I heard a loud noise one day and hid in my home and noticed a young man walking out of the forests; checking on Dai I found him under that rock and brought him back.”

“May I meet Dai? Oh, sorry, I mean Master Dai?”

The man remained silent and Kenji feared the worst. Without a sound the man was suddenly near him and grabbed him by the wrist as if in a hurry. His hand was colder and felt rough as if he had worked with the ground for many years. They walked for what seemed like many miles until they both came to a halt in a chilly room. Softly, the wheezing of a man came from across the room. “Wait here,” the man said quietly to Kenji.

“Who have you brought to me?” a raspy voiced called out from where the breathing came from.

“A young boy, Dai; found him in the ruins looking for you. I forgot to ask him what it was he wanted do not fear though for he is as you are, he sees only darkness also.”

“Why do you seek out an old man close to the end of his days?” rasped Dai.

“A man came to my home, he killed my mother and father, burned our home, and has taken my sister. Rumor has told our town that man is the one you used to call Rai.”

“Mikio, leave us for a moment; I must talk to him alone.”

Kenji heard the man that led him here brush past him and step off into the late afternoon.

“I seek revenge Master Dai. I’ve practiced bright chi every day since I can remember though need training.”

“Who has trained you in the past?” asked Dai.

“No one; I’ve trained myself since birth. Born with some of it I suppose,” Kenji replied.

“Why seek me out? I’m only a feeble old man, barely enough left in me to live let alone teach you.”

“You were to teach Rai until...well until he learned the dark chi feats. I believe in your teachings and believe if you teach me I can stop his rampages on all the island’s towns. We must stop him; he kills almost every day all the while smiling. Please help me.”

“You will live here, train here, and grow powerful here. Though the temptations for dark chi are great you must resist. You promise me these things and I’ll train you.” This was it, here was Dai’s chance to create the bright chi user he had wished to make Rai into.

Kenji warmed inside; he could’ve cried he was so happy. How hard would it be to use bright chi in complete darkness though? He jumped as Dai yelled, “Mikio! Mikio, get in here, we have much to do!”



Part Three

**The Journey**



## Chapter Eight

The dark night that engulfed the ruins where Kenji, his master Dai, and his helper Mikio all stayed not only brought an unimaginable fear but it also screamed out something had happened that day. Stars were covered by large pitch black clouds but no rain fell. This night though was special; something had happened that day and the mysterious weather came in as soon as that had happened.

“Again!” barked Master Dai as he sat on moist, grassy, knoll. He watched on as Kenji turned and ran back towards the other tree in his bare, calloused feet. Touching the tree Dai barked out, “Again!”

Kenji had been enduring training like this month after month now. He no longer needed assistance from the walking stick the old man in his hometown had given him. Now he could run, walk, and fight simply with his ears. The forest get quieter as the large trees came nearer and blocked the sound of birds and other animals behind it. When he fought he heard the ruffling of the enemy’s kimono and feet and could almost see in his mind where the punch or kick was coming from. During those moments when the enemy began to use

chi everything seemed to slow down in Kenji's mind and he could feel his neck hair stand up as the energy for the chi grew in front of him, then he would hear himself say something and feel the chi shoot, and he always had produced the perfect counter-chi. Kenji learned when two different variations of chi connected two things would happen; either the dominant chi would blow throw the other, simply breaking apart the other chi and having the dominant fly through, or they would produce a chi reaction. He never saw a chi reaction with Dai, but he knew why. A chi reaction was when two chi powers combined to form one though being highly unstable itself, each chi power would start to slam against the other and eventually produce a massive blast that would clear an area almost as large as his old hometown of Nayano.

“Again!” rang out Dai's voice as Kenji tapped the tree near Dai and turned around and ran to the other tree. Just before reaching the tree Kenji heard a thud from further behind him and the scurrying of feet. He reached the tree and tapped it though this time Dai's voice didn't ring out; Kenji turned and ran towards where the noise had been coming from. Mikio, Dai's friend and helper, was bent over Dai who was now lying on the ground clutching his side.

Together Mikio and Kenji picked up Dai's limp body and carried it back to the ruins where they had made their home. As they walked Kenji felt Dai's bones rubbing together sternly. His body shook slightly as they carried him but guided by Mikio's eyes and Kenji's ears they made the trip back to the ruins safely and in less time than it took them earlier in the morning.

Kenji stood back simply listening as Mikio looked over Dai's still limp body as it rested inside the ruins. Though he used multiple versions of the heal chi he couldn't get Dai to awaken, whatever was inside him had taken over and was turning him towards death faster than anything else Mikio had seen. Kenji feared the worst because he knew if Mikio couldn't save Dai, there wasn't much else left to do. Mikio turned and walked out the door in frustration and Kenji followed quietly as if not to disturb his unconscious master.

"Kenji we need to talk," Mikio said to him softly. "There is one other way to heal Master Dai, there is one other solution to this grave problem we have."

Kenji simply nodded; he knew it would be bad.

"There is a mountain on an island to the West of the one we stand on now. Many have gone there though very little have been known to come back. I do not know what lives on that island and I fear that if I could I would lose my mind. The mountain on this island is said to contain a field high upon its peak that grows pure white iris. This is the only place anyone's ever found them and though no one has ever brought one back it has been said they possess a healing power that could wake the dead."

"But Mikio isn't my place here? Isn't my place beside my master?"

"I have known Dai for long now; I know if he were able to speak he would have you do this. He'll see this as your final test of power and if you pass he lives and if not you both..." Mikio trailed off.

Kenji thought hard about what was happening though he knew he only had one choice; “I’ll go to this mountain, I’ll save Master Dai.”

“I have something Dai would have given you, wait here,” Mikio said as he left for a moment and then came back with a large white sheet that he held gently. Opening it up Kenji couldn’t understand, all he had heard was Mikio leave and return though what he didn’t know was Mikio was taking his time undoing the sheet. “Kenji, hold your hands out palms up,” Mikio said and laid the object upon Kenji’s hands.

Cold steel set upon Kenji’s hands as he held a sword though he couldn’t see how it slightly glistened in the dark room. Though large dings and dents in the sword gave it a rugged old look, it still was as sharp as ever and it was proven by the slits cut in the fabric Mikio now held. As he held it Kenji could feel the blade living between his hands; it was almost as if the sword had become a part of his body.

“This was Lord Hayatoro’s sword,” Mikio said to Kenji softly.

Kenji’s hands almost gave out and he nearly dropped the sword. This was *the* Hayatoro sword and he knew Mikio wasn’t lying. Legend had it that all Hayatoro artifacts were lost long ago when the aged Hayatoro died near water and was washed out into the vast expanse. Somehow, this sword remained.

All five of the towns founded had a name given to the people based on the characteristics of the people and how they acted towards others. There were five towns; Hakodo in the East, Akabu to the North-East, Rumak far West, Nayano in the North, and Ebete to the

South-West. To each town lived a clan of people; in Hakodo it was the Tora, in Akabu the Shika, in Rumak the Hebi, in Nayano the Washi, and in Ebete the Unagi. Every clan acted a different way to their people and to visitors.

The people of the Shika tribe in Akabu were more passionate about ideas such as living well, love, and peacefulness. Only if the clan was in direct danger would the Shika attack, otherwise the tribe would flee from any dangerous situation. On the other hand, the Tora clan of Hakodo were the complete opposite. They were extremely proud of their name though they were all feared. Every child that grew up in Hakodo was taught to attack anyone invading their territory and to not take mercy on them when fighting.

All of the other clans were still quite mysterious to even those within them. Men and women of the Hebi clan in Rumak would strike without warning, leaving their prey viciously accosted. In Ebete the Unagi clan found their home near and in the water, also finding that they would strike the hardest and fiercest within the murky depths. Finally the Washi of Nayano, these people, like the Shika, were non-aggressive but took honor in protecting their family and followed through any means necessary to hunt food.

The Naming Ceremony had taken place when the island of Hayatoro was first discovered. Manusan Hayatoro led the courageous men and women to the island. He landed on the then unnamed island with 29 others, 15 men and 15 women. After unpacking the ship and living together for almost a decade Hayatoro, as leader, ordered five cities to be built to expand where the settlers were living. Each group was sent away with a name for those in that group and this was known

as the Naming Ceremony. Hayatoro then named the island after himself calling it Hayatoro Island, joined one of the groups, and set off. For days, five groups composed of 3 men and 3 women traveled in separate directions until each found an approving living area. Each group then set up what was eventually to be the foundation of a city. Such began the great Hayatoro Island.

The boat ride to the island wasn't pleasant. Storms tossed the small boat from wave to wave and each time a loud crash echoed throughout the boat along with the creaking of boards as water drizzled inside. Finding a boat wasn't hard seeing Mikio knew some men who went to this island often. Though they rarely left the boat, they were paid much for simply bringing back sand from the island's beaches. It wouldn't be for a few more years that the men would then realize they would get just as much for sand from Hayatoro Island but simply needed to claim it was from the 'unnamed island' as the locals called it. They made the trip to the island almost every night and planned on picking up Kenji again in two days. As the ship sat lodged in sand on the shore Kenji slipped on his pack and grabbed his sword. The Unnamed Island waited.

Afternoon on the first day had come and Kenji was exhausted. The sun beat down on him like the flame to the wax of a candle. On the way to the island Kenji had imagined a lush green tropic filled with animals; this island was anything but that. The sand from the beach eventually gave way to cracked dry earth as he trudged through a barren wasteland. Far ahead the mountain waved to him tauntingly as

the heat rose from the ground. Beads of sweat glistened off Kenji's face and body as he continued to walk; thoroughly dedicated to reach the mountain.

The ground began to rumble uncontrollably and not far away dust was circulating. A large crack echoed as the ground split and a humongous animal crawled out. Kenji ran around the hole in hopes to get away; navigating himself by the sound of the creature. Soon though he heard the beast run up behind him and he spun around. He was lucky his eyesight had failed long before for what stood in front of him would have scared the skin off even Rai himself. Kenji stood tall with his sword drawn and only reached the creature's waist. The lower part of the creature was long and extended far back like an overgrown centipede with hundreds of legs. As the legs started to end and the body began it aimed upwards and turned into a woman's body though her eyes were six red slits. Her long arms stretched far out in front of her and each finger was tipped with a large point that resembled a tail of a scorpion, each one dripping venom as the woman screeched a mix between a hiss and a scream. The sound made Kenji think the woman's throat had a filter built right in that formed the hellish sound. Long black hair grew in spots on the large yellow skull and swayed as the woman came upon Kenji. He had found himself face to face with a Centepion.

Kenji dashed to the right as the woman slapped though unknowingly jumping right into her swipe. A single tail ripped across Kenji's face and as it left it scarred and instantly bruised it also left behind a large green trail of sticky venom. He grasped his face and screamed as his cheek sizzled and burnt while the venom sunk down

inside the wound. Blood and venom drizzled down his cheek and dripped onto the ground. The creature let out yet another terrible hiss.

Grasping his sword tightly he listened intently. Any sound the Centepion would make would help Kenji eventually slay the beast. Kenji heard the creature shift to the right as it brought its right arm back to swing though this time he was prepared. The large arm missed as Kenji rolled forward under it. A light click to his left showed him where one of the centipede legs was and with a hefty blow he sliced through the leg without any problem. The Centepion screamed in agony as a steady trickle of dark red blood flowed from the severed limb. It's fury grew with every swing though so did it's movements and soon Kenji had blocked every swing thrown at him. Finally he knew what to do; the Centepion swung and Kenji once again rolled forward though instead of slicing off a leg he pointed his blade upwards and stuck the warm blade in the beast's belly. She howled once again though slowly began to fall to its right. Kenji stood back as he heard the creature fall, though the landing was mixed both with expected and unexpected sounds.

A large thud echoed as the beast hit the ground; instantaneously a crack shot out and a crumbling noise was heard as Kenji was pulled forward. The ground had collapsed into an underground cavern that held a river. Rocks from the ceiling crashed into the waves as well as the Centepion body and Kenji. His feet felt weeds reaching up from the bottom of the river though instead of brush him and go on their way they all seemed to grasp for him, desperately trying to drag his body under and suck the life out of him. A quick slice with Hayatoro's sword and the weeds were cut; Kenji

found himself climbing onto the Centepion body like a large raft as it slowly flowed down the river.

*Squeak.*

Kenji heard a sound.

*Squeak.*

He was positive he heard a...there it was again.

*Squeak, squeak, squeak- sq- sque- squeak.*

The ceiling filled with chatter as thousands of enormous black bats awoke and noticed Kenji. They were hungry and even though the creature under him was dead, still probably held plenty of blood. Hordes of black bats began swooping down at Kenji one by one, some so close together they seemed to be in groups. As he hopped back from a low flying *screech* he landed on his back right on one of the Centepion's claws. His back soon felt the pain his face had before when the Centepion had scratched him. Again a mixture of blood and green slime oozed out of his back as he jumped back up; laying there would leave him prey to the blood-thirsting bats. Quickly shuffling his feet and kicking around to feel he noticed the stingers were well spaced out, he would have to place his feet carefully so he wouldn't fall and have a stinger stab him in the neck.

Kenji swung his sword continuously as the bats came down in droves. Irony hit Kenji hard suddenly as he remembered a warm day when his father yelled at him. He had been lying in the crisp grass gazing into the light blue sky when his father barked at him to stop and go help his mother. Kenji wondered if his father would have yelled at him then if he had known his son would be battling these creatures in complete darkness.

The moment he thought this he tripped and fell. His leg landed on a stinger larger than the others which had been just dripping with the green ooze and before he could recover he slid off the rounded belly of the Centepion and into the cool water. Hayatoro's sword left his hand and slowly began to sink. He splashed around in the water trying to cough out the water he had swallowed and breathe in the damp air in the cavern. Underground the water tasted bitter and gritty like blood mixed with dirt. Quickly realizing he had dropped the sword Kenji plunged into the water as the Centepion body floated on. Under the surface Kenji heard nothing but silence. As he listened his lungs began to burn and screamed to the rest of his body to surface and breathe but Kenji stayed under until he heard the noise. A dull thud far below was barely noticeable though Kenji needed his ears more than anything else and they developed more than his other remaining senses. Kenji quickly surfaced and heard the clutter of bats down the river where the Centepion must've been. Diving down again Kenji pushed as hard as he could until he felt the grasp of the weeds below wrap around him and begin to pull him down.

He reached the bottom and the weeds pulled him close to the spiked floor. Four of the spikes pierced his back as he laid reaching out for his sword but not finding it. Small streams of blood poured into the water sending off a signal in a mind though not Kenji's. The bottom of the river Kenji once thought to be covered in weeds shook slightly as a large crevice filled with thousands of horribly jagged teeth ripped open. He felt the heat emanate from the crack below as if it hadn't been opened in a long time and the water inside had been warmed up. Other than the heat from the crack at that moment, the

only thing warmer was the burning sensation deep within Kenji's chest. A few more moments and he knew he would pass out. That's when it happened; Kenji grasped onto the hilt of his sword and by instinct swung at the tentacles holding him, instantly severing them on contact. He pushed as hard as he could manage until he broke the surface of the water. Swimming to the left of the river he crawled up on a small island covered in bat droppings and bones but the creature wasn't going to let its only meal for many years to just walk away. The ground shook and the massive beast rose above the water. Its body was bloated out and covered in tentacles like a massive blowfish. Now out of the water the tentacles made flapping noises like fish out of water as they smacked against the body of the beast.

As the creature brought a tentacle back to hit Kenji the water on it flew off and onto Kenji's face and arms. He ducked and the tentacle just barely missed him. The cycle continued until Kenji began to use his sword to slice off tentacles as they began to fly at him from all directions. Soon the creature began to make a choking noise that Kenji understood perfectly. Instead of drowning under water this beast drowned out of water and soon had retreated. Bowing to one knee Kenji began to breathe in, he had never been happier to be on dry land when suddenly a massive tentacle shot out of the water, grabbed him, and threw him down the cave the way he and the Centepion corpse had been traveling. He flew through the air in a ball as the sound of the bats drew nearer, nearer, and nearer until they passed him and he slammed through a cracked rock wall. The wall shattered and Kenji flew out of the cave and into the sunlight at the base of the mountain. He smiled as he realized where he was; then passed out.

## Chapter Nine

Darkness consumed his thoughts as he dreamed during his state of unconsciousness. Thoughts of his dead mother and sister pounded his mind. He was running through a dry, cracked field but he was surrounded by Rai and his followers. Again the circle of killers surrounded him, though one of them was different. As he looked at one he realized it was his mother. Without warning her clothes and skin pushed out as they molded into hellish armor that the rest of the band wore. Her eyes went red and her mouth popped open baring long white teeth and a lengthy blood red tongue. She smiled before her and the rest of the bandits all piled onto Kenji.

Violently he shook and awoke. Kenji brushed an arm across his face to wipe off the sweat. He had slept through the rest of the day and now had awakened on the brink of a new day. His mind lost count of the days ever since his eyes had stopped seeing, the caves below the Centepion had seemed to go on for days themselves though he was so busy fighting bats, the Centepion's own dead claws, and the creature beneath the underground river he probably wouldn't have known how long he had actually been down there.

He stood shaking and felt the lumps, bumps, and bruises that had appeared on him since crashing through the stone wall. Kenji had lost nothing; thankfully he had saved his sword from the treacherous beast trying to steal it from him. His body ached and pained with every step though he started his trek up the mountain. Dai needed his help and he was going to get it; especially if Kenji needed to give his last breath he would.

The sun now was around mid sky and Kenji's brow glistened with beads of sweat as he continued to climb the rocky slope in front of him. As he climbed he realized the mountain was as bare as the desert below him. Particles of sand gathered under his fingernails as he grasped onto rock after rock.

No, this couldn't happen.

That couldn't have been...was it?

He barely noticed it at first though now Kenji was positive he could see light. Though none of his vision had been fixed he thought he saw a faint white glow. It was as if he was looking at a small white sheet but it seemed miles and miles away in Kenji's mind and was blurred almost to the point of not recognizing any color at all. One moment with Dai stuck out in his mind. The night he had been accepted to train under Dai and Mikio. Mikio had gone to bed for the night though Kenji stayed up and talked to Dai about their common ailment. Dai had told him if he began seeing these lights he was getting very close to perfecting bright chi. Though he had not practiced chi since getting to the island he knew the conditioning was what produced the chi. What Kenji realized that Rai had not was that

chi was about learning to live as bright chi; simply learning the simple chi 'tricks' were not enough and Kenji knew this. He also knew that was the only way dark chi had grasped so many bright souls; soulless tricks.

Kenji's arm stretched out and grasped rock in the blackness. Before putting all his weight on the rock he pulled down to check its strength and without hesitation it crumbled and fell to the ground. So that's what it was, the chi guided Kenji by not showing him harmful things. Trusting the chi completely he grasped a white light above him and without thinking pulled himself up, the whole while the rock holding strong. As he ascended he grasped white light by white light until he came to a small terrace. His calloused hands pulled himself onto the ledge and followed him as he stood up. Kenji shivered and knew he was near the top; the men on the boat had talked to him about the dangers of the mountain. One of the last being the icy cap that housed a beast they've only heard of by legend. He pulled his kimono up and began to climb; he would reach the peak by midnight.

The lonely wind whistled as it flew by the peak of the mountain, blowing snow around into a whirlwind of white. Ten fingers set firmly into the deep snow as the man scaling the mountainside finally reached his destination. White snow gleamed in the late night's moon as a shadow flew over the snowy peak like a fish swimming under water. Kenji stood as the black shadow glided above, blocking him from the moon. Dying down, the wind and snow settled as Kenji pulled out Hayatoro's sword. His fingers ached inside though outside he couldn't feel anything as the hilt settled into his

palm. Water dripped slowly off his hands as the snow melted. He began to walk forward through the snow; the only noise being the thud as he pushed down more and more snow with his feet. Through his eyes he saw a gleaming field of white, white everywhere but one small speck of black far ahead of him. The black spot grew as the creature approached Kenji at an incredible speed.

Bracing himself, Kenji watched the black spot near him. With a loud smack a fist slammed into Kenji's face, sending him reeling back as his lip cracked open and spat blood out into the crystalline snow. Spinning in the air, the creature looked down upon its prey. Massive white wings sprouted from a creature resembling a tall muscular man covered in fur. Large ape like teeth, sharpened from chewing on rocks found on the mountain protruded from its foaming mouth. Its four arms each contained clenched fists and muscles bigger than either of Kenji's legs. White fur on the creature was patched in areas with grey and in the moonlight looked as if the creature was filled with holes. Kenji hadn't known about the creature's appearance or name though legend called it and its kind the Aomin.

Kenji stood only to be greeted with a different fist from the Aomin as it bruised the side of his head instantly to an unknown shade of purple. He could see the creature was able to fly and knew if it lifted him there would be no stopping it from throwing him off the edge. Kenji pushed himself up as he lay on his stomach just as the Aomin passed again though this time had the same thought Kenji had only a second ago. The large furred hands of the Aomin grasped onto Kenji's back as it grabbed not only clothes but skin, leaving a massive scar. Hayatoro's sword sliced through one of the Aomin's hand as

Kenji reared around and swung. He and the fist of the creature plummeted to the ground and as he landed he felt the severed limb ooze blood out from under him and onto his chest. Kenji jumped up and swung around to see the black shadow of the creature shaking in the air as it tried to understand what had just happened. It screeched and screamed as it looked at Kenji with rage filled eyes and knew it had found this night's feast.

The beast swooped toward him and punched him twice, once in the nose and once in the stomach. Kenji flew back into a snow-covered rock as the Aomin returned to the skies. His nose was pouring blood as well as his lip while the back of his kimono was soaked and beginning to drip red. The snowy landscape that had once been pristine now was littered with large clumps and puddles of deep red blood. Snow clumped around him and padded him in a frozen seat; all he could see was the bright light, bright lights everywhere. Kenji shuddered as he sat bleeding against the frozen rock. Tears dripped slowly from each of his eyes though froze halfway down his cheek. He had failed and was going to die; he let down his family, Master Dai, and the countless that had been tortured by Rai. No, he thought to himself, he wasn't going to let those people down; he wasn't dead yet.

Snow exploded into the sky as well as large pieces of ice and rock as Kenji jumped up with the help of the bright chi guarding him. A jagged piece of ice slashed past the Aomin's chest and created a slit that slowly began to ooze red blood onto the once white creature. With a snarl the Aomin rushed toward Kenji, its wings pounding harder than ever to push its massive body through the cold night air. Kenji grasped his sword and awaited the beast as the black outline in

his mind grew bigger. His fingers were as good as useless since the cold numbed them; his blue lips spat his breath which came out in a white puff each time he breathed out. His whole body shuddered almost in time with his rapidly slowing heart beat; the cold had been getting to him during this fight and he hadn't even noticed it until now.

“HAI!” screamed Kenji as he leaped into the air just before the Aomin reached him. He spun in the air doing a backwards flip and dug the blade deep into the back of the creature until he felt the metal tip poke through the front of its body. Landing on his feet he brought the creature around on his sword and slammed him into the ground as if slamming a giant hammer down. As the Aomin lie arching its back and screeching Kenji held one foot on it to hold it down and with one quick slice spread enough blood from the creature's neck to fill one of the water jugs he had to fill as part of his training for Master Dai.

Battered and bruised Kenji turned and saw a glow which he hadn't noticed before. Towards the edge opposite of the now exposed rock sat the brightest white light he'd ever seen so far. The bed of white iris lie waiting for him. Simply walking near them made Kenji feel like he had been cured of all the injuries the island had given him. He picked almost ten of them and packed them gently into his small pack. Turning, he began to walk down the red and white mountain.

## Chapter Ten

His footsteps crunched leaves and snapped sticks as he walked into where Master Dai had been set. Kenji looked around and found Mikio nowhere. Grabbing a mortar and pestle Kenji began crushing up three of the flowers he had. He had to be careful on what he used because he had an altercation with the boaters trying to get off the island.

“What do you mean I’ve been gone for over a week?!” Kenji barked back at the man.

“It’s been a week since we dropped you off. We said two days and when you weren’t here we figured you were dead in the desert somewhere. Now if we had been paid for a week...” The man trailed off and began to snicker.

“If I have something of value to you would you let me aboard?” Kenji asked.

The man laughed heartily. “All you could bring me that would have value would be sand or rocks from the mountain here. Do you have either of those?” the man said jokingly.

“No,” Kenji simply replied. “But I do have this...”

And so Kenji bartered a few of the white iris to get a ride back home. Something inside him struck it odd at first that he had been gone for over a week though after much thought realized he had been walking in the desert and traveling in the underground cave more than he had noticed.

His finger spooned out some of the crushed iris and brushed it gently upon Dai’s tongue. A few times of this and Kenji had to jump at the quickness Dai had awoken at.

“Master Dai!” Kenji said amazed as he hugged the old man who had only just moaned.

“Kenji?” Dai replied.

“Yes Master Dai, it’s me Kenji! I’ve traveled back from the Unnamed Island with white iris for you!”

“Kenji, I can’t move any part of my body,” the old man said.

“But Master D....”

“Kenji,” Master Dai said, cutting him off. “You must listen to me now. Kenji, you’ve been a great student to me; much better than Rai himself, and I know it is he who you seek. Kenji; I’m going to die; your iris won’t be able to help me. Bright chi wouldn’t even be able to help me now.”

Tears streaked down Kenji’s face as he listened to Dai speak to him on his death bed. “You are much stronger than I’ve ever wished to teach you though you’ve proven you can handle the power. I ask you one final thing Kenji. Mikio, seek out Mikio and kill the fool.”

“But why!?” blurted out Kenji.

“Don’t be a fool Kenji!” yelled Master Dai. “Mikio knows you’re blind but don’t let him take you for a fool. He’s been poisoning me since the day he’s returned to me. Every meal he’s cursed by dark chi and it’s finally killing me. Kill him Kenji and seek out revenge for all of us.”

Kenji had created a small boat out of a tree near the water and floated Master Dai’s body out onto the calm lake; past the destroyed rock. The boat slowly floated on until Kenji couldn’t see it anymore. He turned and began to walk away; the Hayatoro sword swaying at his side. The time was near; Kenji was going for Rai and the Supremacy and there was no where they could go that he wouldn’t find them.

Part Four

**The  
Third Prophecy**



## Chapter Eleven

The towers of the massive wooden city creaked in front of him as Kenji sat alone in the pounding rain. Drops had begun earlier in the day as a soft drip and had turned into one of the worst storms in the history of Hayatoro Island. Each rain droplet pelted Kenji's face, bare chest, and scars which now had stopped bleeding though the pain still lingered. Though Centepion and the rest of the beasts on his journey to save Master Dai had done their fair share of harm to him, what for? He had come home to find his master tragically poisoned by Mikio, one of his master's friends, a man he had once trusted. Mikio wasn't his friend anymore; he didn't trust the man as long as he would live. One thought had puzzled Kenji since he left Dai to come to this belly of the beast; leaving Dai alone had let Mikio kill him though if he hadn't left would Dai have passed anyways? Had Mikio sent him to the island or had Dai truly wished Kenji to go and if Dai had, did he know Kenji would once again see if only it were the bright chi? If Mikio had sent him did he wish to have him killed or did he expect

Kenji to live; in which case did he think Kenji would again see one day?

Kenji shook his head; these thoughts wouldn't help him tonight, tonight when he would be going for Rai and coming out with nothing less. His steps seemed to take forever to go forward as raindrops took eons to fall from the sky. For a moment in time Kenji was in complete peace; with himself, with the island, with everything. The moon above shone down through the glistening rain and split its rays into a million tiny directions, only to be too dark by themselves and to fade away into the powerful blackness that engulfed the night. Every drop that fell from the night sky Kenji could feel; miles upon miles away he could feel the drops there but unlike the drops here that he felt hit his body, those far away he felt inside. All these drops were part of him; created for Kenji himself. Inside his head Kenji heard a woman's voice, purer than any he had heard before. Simply hearing her voice made him shudder and he knew as she sweetly caressed each note that she was the most beautiful and pure woman to ever be. Each word gently lifted off the tip of her tongue and edge of her mouth to softly guide Kenji. His heart warmed as her voice faded and knew he would need her strength as well as his own to last the night.

He stepped through the thin layer of mud atop the dry dirt that had plagued this land for so long. Kenji could almost hear the ground soak up each of his rain drops as they saturated the trees, plants, and ground. Each step was barely heard save the small *squish* the mud made under his feet. As he walked he listened intently to the sound of the waves crashing upon the shore under the massive wooden town built by Rai and his followers, the Supremacy. The creaking of

swaying wood and crack of occasional thunder accompanied the *squishes* and *crashes*.

Lightning flashed and lit the city for only an instant before sending it back into darkness; thunder cracked and rang in Kenji's head. As Kenji looked upon the wooden city it held a dull red glow and Kenji knew why. During his journey he noticed he could see the faint white outlines of certain rocks while scaling a mountain side. These rocks were shown to Kenji by the chi and guided him. He practiced bright chi so the rocks glowed white; Kenji assumed if he had practiced dark chi the rocks would have been red since they were guiding the path of a dark chi user. On the mountain peak, the Aomin he had fought had battled him to the death, not because it had been using dark chi but because it was defending its home; simple instinct was just that and nothing more. This was why the creature hadn't been shown to Kenji; the creature wasn't evil, it was protective.

Wooden spires loomed above Kenji's head as he stood near the main entrance. There were only two ways out of the city, one was the front gate and the other was the rocks and sea far below though the latter would require whomever was escaping to scale a massive wall surrounding the city. The waves crashing below seemed to be as loud as if Kenji were sitting on the wave itself. He took two more steps and passed through the large double doors into the base of the Supremacy and Rai, the most feared man on Hayatoro Island.

The second he stepped through he noticed the calm. His hearing changed and the waves that had been ravaging the rocks below had turned into almost no sound at all. Faintly in the distance Kenji could hear the waves crashing below but here in this city where evil

found its self at home they were barely noticeable. Kenji hadn't noticed anything outside but could feel how this place was encapsulated within dark chi. The first clue was the sound but his second clue was the feeling inside this aura of chi. Inside this darkened domain the air felt heavy and thick as if it were carrying death itself on its back. The wet air outside had subsided and turned into a very warm musty smell though the rain still poured down in here; in fact the drops of rain inside here never made a sound as they dowsed everything in water. Kenji's nose caught smell of the rot eating away at the bodies that lay upon the ground all around the city. Their bodies were blackened from diseases Kenji couldn't begin to imagine and the weather hadn't been kind to their decaying corpses.

Not only had the bodies been disease ridden but they had also been scarred, bruised, and cut. A young man lay in the corner with a horrified look upon his face; forever destined to stare into the quiet abyss affront his cold dead eyes. His neck was black from the dark curdled blood that stained him. Tears ripped from his chin to his chest where only teeth marks were left. Though his neck was prey to ravenous possessors of dark chi his left leg was not. Here a mangy dog with wet hair pulled the leg away from the dead man where only a yellow bone and dark red blood began to show themselves to the chilled night air. All around bodies with bite marks lay in deathly positions until Kenji heard the splash as a man to his left vomited upon one of the unfortunate souls.

“Ugh,” the man grunted as he spit to get the bitter taste of stomach acids and decayed skin out of his mouth. Kenji drew his

sword as the man looked up and with jagged black teeth screamed out into the night, “BROTHERS ATTACK!”

Kenji noticed the large softly glowing red pile in front of him. Unable to see what the pile was composed of was for Kenji’s benefit for in the middle of the town sat the pile composed of thousands upon thousands of dead bodies. All blackened, bruised, broken, and cut like their brethren. From this pile rose those who worshipped only Lord Rai and the gods that benefited from dark chi. The dark users hadn’t been hiding from Kenji, they had simply been feeding out of his chi sight. Brighter bodies of red lifted from the pile and gathered towards him with weapons drawn. Just as the men began to near Kenji a voice screamed out yet again from all the grunts and groans that had begun to echo throughout the town.

“Brothers, here! Atop this pile of meat!” a man in a purple robe barked from high above Kenji on the pile of bodies. “Weary though you may be, bear this in mind as we fight the bright chi fool. After we dispose of his bright body we can consume all of him and turn every bright bone dark!” And with that the man dropped the torch he held above his head into the pile below and ignited the bodies.

“ATTACK!”

The men came yelling at Kenji as the blazing fire raged from body to body in the massive pile. Thoughts raced through his mind as the smell of the fire wafted into his nostrils. Kenji knew from when his village was attacked but could again smell the sweet smell of burning flesh; it was a smell so sweet it sickened even the toughest of stomachs. Side by side the sweet smell of burning flesh and bitter

smell of burning hair came to him and suddenly the first wave of men was upon him.

Unable to control himself Kenji instinctively swung Hayatoro's sword and within minutes disposed of half the men that had attacked him. The sword seemed to have a mind of its own and sought blood only from those trying to harm Kenji. Finally cutting through enough men he found himself fighting the man in the purple robe. Blow by blow each man attacked the other until they found themselves sword against sword and the one who would fall would be the one with the strongest muscles. Kenji had known this from day one and had trained hard to improve his physical being. Dai had trained him hard day by day with water jugs and wood though one thing Dai had told him about but let him find out was that strength wasn't the only friend to a man on the battlefield. A smart man had a better chance at winning a battle simply by using his wits. Knowing when to back down could save a man's life while attempting the impossible would only end it sooner. With that Kenji slid the man past his right shoulder so he fell behind Kenji and face first into the blazing pile of bodies. He screamed and squirmed until his body lit too and his flesh blackened and then grayed to the color of ash.

Kenji walked around to the backside of the bonfire and looked on as he saw a large red building far ahead of him. Between him and the building sat numerous other bonfires; all were the same size as the first if not bigger and all signaled to Kenji not by chi power but by heat. Though he was sure many more men resided in the building he met little resistance on the way to the building. A few groups of five to ten men here or there but each group easily dissipated until none

were left. Soon he stood inside the building and finally reached his goal. Here would be the twisted palace Rai called home and his followers called 'temple'. The building was a dull red glow though in reality was quite bright from numerous lamps all around. Under his feet the floor shined as it was made of solid rock as were the stairs leading up. Red wooden doors like the ones he passed through to enter lead off in multiple directions. Kenji had found himself in a large foyer with stairs to the second level ahead, open hallways on either side of him, and a small stairway on the right of the main stairs.

Without warning he heard the voices of many echoing from the second floor and quickly ducked through the small odd door leading downwards. Inside was complete darkness though to Kenji nothing had changed except where he was. The dull red glow now found walls on either side of him and stairs that led down. Soon Kenji found himself in a musty cellar. From a barred window to his left the moons light shone through; Kenji did not see it but one large mass in the corner did catch his eye almost as quickly as he set foot on the bottom step. A mass in the corner shone more brightly red than anything he had ever seen before. Whatever was there was almost four times Kenji's size and was extremely round.

The man stood and turned to face Kenji in the dark room. His pale white skin glowed in the darkness with spots covered in black dark blood; blood left for so long it had stained his very skin. All he wore was a large loin cloth which also was stained with fresh blood. On the massive round stomach the man had he was covered with scars and slashes that had long since healed though still left irremovable scars. One large noticeable scar ran from the middle of his chest down

and around the left side of his enormous belly. His hide was more than skin; being neglected and tossed in this dark dungeon had obviously skewed the man's normal skin. It peeled off in large parts and left a blood red layer of new skin looking for daylight but only finding the glaring moon and darkened room. Below his waist the large legs that held him were much like the rest of his body though less scarred and more dirtied by dust and pebbles that drifted from the ground under his massive legs. Not only were his legs darkened but his feet were almost black from dirt and dust gathering upon dirt and dust that had been stepped upon.

*Clink, clink, clank...*

A rusty chain scraped across the ground as it hung in the fat man's hand yet it wasn't his arm that was moving the chain. The chain found one end in the man's hand and the other end wrapped around another glowing figure. Kenji barely recognized the smaller figure as another man much smaller than the first; in fact this one was only about the size of the large man's thigh but only stood up to his knee. Though he was smaller he was still fat for his size. His hands grasped anxiously at the weapons he now held. Each clenched fist held onto a wooden hilt and out of both ends of that hilt ran a jagged piece of rusted metal into the opposite end of the hilt on the same hand. He snarled as he eyed Kenji, ready to pounce at any moment.

Kenji was confused, he had fought man after man outside that were in perfect physical condition, their only weakness being too inexperienced in battle and mentally unable to use chi, how were these two overweight men supposed to challenge him? As Kenji thought this the large man grabbed the back end of the chain with his left hand

and snatched further up with his right. With one quick motion the small man was sent flying, only restricted by the chain.

*Clang, bing...*

The Hayatoro sword bounced off each of the blades as the short man flew past him. He was surprised how strong the first blow was but even more surprised when the second blow knocked Kenji right off his feet. A second pass of the small man happened instantaneously and Kenji had to roll out of the way, even then only dodging the blow by less than a finger's length. Kenji looked at the fat man heaving and ran towards him to deliver the fatal blow.

*Chink, thwap, thud...*

Blood dripped from Kenji's cut and instantly bruised face. Putting his left hand down the fat man regained control of the chain he had whipped at his foe. Kenji lay in a puddle of his own blood; the cut on his cheek had bled so profusely he was slightly dizzy already, part from losing blood in a large amount and part from being hit. As he rolled around on the floor clutching his face the small man dropped to the ground as he came up again and ran towards Kenji. Just before cutting him open with the right handed blade Kenji crawled off towards the wall with the window in it. His sword had dropped out of his hands when he was hit and flew near the large man's left leg. Looking up Kenji could barely see the two men as his chi vision had now blurred; the blow to his head must've done more than he thought. He knew he was right when he felt his head slowly start to throb and felt the trickle of warm blood down the side of his face where he was hit. Kenji knew this couldn't be the end, he had endured worse and prevailed, he would make it through this.

Up on his feet Kenji ran forward and jumped as high as he could right over the blade wielding man and running for the fat man. As his feet touched the ground on the other side of him the short man was lifted into the air and swung around; Kenji quickly ducked to avoid the chain that was approaching behind him and jumped back up and after the fat man. He grasped his sword and with two hands on the Hayatoro hilt stabbed straight at the fat man.

*Clack, ching, ching, ching...*

Horrified Kenji froze in fear at the Hayatoro sword which now was split in half, half in his hand and half on the floor; his half was mainly hilt with a short, pointed, broken blade protruding from the end. The beast's skin wasn't even bleeding as he backhanded Kenji across the room and through the wall, destroying the one window in the room and sending Kenji out into the cold night air as the rain had now stopped.

It screamed in his mind, no, not a scream, the perfect voice, so perfect it carried every tone of voice in one perfect blend. Her voice had returned and burned a hole in his mind and for that moment he was gone.

Around him white flower petals drifted from the skies. The green grass had never looked better and had never smelled so fresh; the same was true with the lake further in front of him. A smell of weeds, mud, and water wafted into his nostrils and put a smile upon his face. Though the smells were perfect and the feeling was perfect something was still amiss. Kenji knew what it was before he noticed the smells but didn't know what about it until after he appreciated his

surroundings. Here he could see, he wasn't blind anymore and the sight in front of him brought a tear to his eye. As if on cue a group of white birds flew out of the marsh ahead of him and across the green landscape.

He fell to his knees and cried, his hands covering his face.

"Why do you weep child?" a voice said softly.

Kenji jumped to his feet and looked toward the woman speaking to him. She was dressed in white and seemed to have an aura about her. He stared at her and wondered if he'd met her somewhere before. Something was in this place, something here made him question everything he thought.

"I sit here and weep for reasons all but I find mad," he said to her calmly with tears held in.

"Child, for one with such a wearied life you still have much to learn. Something inside pains you, something inside is a burden upon you and you say the reason is mad? How can you say such a thing when you know deep inside you hurt for this idea, this simple reason has not only made you weep but has torn you in two."

Thinking inside, Kenji wondered if what she said was true.

"This place, it is not where I go after I leave the world, I know. I have heard after I die I will go to a place of peace, a place where I can rest my wearied soul and where I can watch others rest and be with friends. In this place I've heard everyone will see it differently, one man may see himself upon a wooden chair while another will see both himself and the other man upon giant mushrooms. This place isn't where I want to go and isn't where I would hope to end up."

“You weep because you are not where you want to be?” the woman asked, for the first time since being here she had now first asked a question.

“No, I weep because I am not where I am going. If I am not there and not in Hell I am not dead which means I must go back.”

“How do you know this isn’t Hell?” the woman in white asked.

“I have heard stories of the dark Lord Rai’s descent and return from that place and what he saw there. Unless this is a grand illusion this place is not the same.” Kenji now broke down and began to cry into his hands once again.

The woman replied, “Why do you dread living child?”

“Living I do not dread, my life and everything in it are what I dread. I hate being unable to see, I hate Rai, I hate...” he began to cry uncontrollably, “...everything...” he said as his voice cracked.

He felt the woman’s warm hands wrap around him as she embraced Kenji and he cried into her white robe. She placed her hands upon his cheeks after a few minutes and looked him straight in the eyes as she wiped away the tears, “Kenji you are an amazing human being but do not deny yourself that you are simply a being upon the island. You are not alone in this feeling, though desperate times may bring out the worst feelings in us all we must stick it through and walk on when the worst has knocked us down. Now Kenji you must awaken.”

She gently kissed him on the forehead and just like that she was gone.

Back in the battle Kenji heard the fat man stomping towards the hole in the wall and with one swipe took out one end of the wall, sending rock and wood flying into Kenji's now covered face. The cool night air made the blood on Kenji's face sticky and the night moon turned the two men into ghostly figures as they approached Kenji. Nearing him the small man looked down at Kenji from atop the larger mans shoulder.

A flame burst out of Kenji's hand and engulfed fat man's right leg. Kenji instantly stood, ran away from the beastly man a bit, and turned with hands out. He heard the fat man rubbing his eyes now with his hand and began swinging the smaller with his right again though the flame had been so bright and his eyes had spent so long in the dungeon that the smaller man was sent flying high above Kenji's head and when he came back to the fat man he hit the ground with a thud.

Finally the fat man had regained sight and began to swing his partner around yet again. Rolling to the right and jumping to avoid the man and the chain he reached the fat man for the second time and with one quick thought a pure white circle bubble shot out around Kenji sending the small man flying in even a more odd direction, throwing Kenji back, and blinding the fat man.

He continued to dodge and duck from the swings thrown at him but after two sets of dodges Kenji tried his idea. As the chain came around again Kenji grasped onto the chain, his weight just bringing it down a few inches but enough that the chain began to wrap around the fat mans throat. Within seconds his face was even more ghastly than before as it turned from pure white to a cold blue. After

four swings Kenji dropped off and heard the bundle of chain tightly wrapped around the beast's neck.

The small man noticed what was happening to his long time companion and ran to him to unravel the chain but his short stature wasn't enough to reach the larger mans neck. As he jumped and tried to grab his neck he inadvertently began cutting into the man with his long blades. Each jump brought upon the man a new scar until one fateful slice finally sliced open half the large cut from his chest to his stomach, pulsing blood out and spraying it everywhere. Jumping away the small man tried to escape the pouring blood but was quickly slammed against the fat man's huge legs as the fat man reared and brought the chain back. Against the ground lay the unconscious small man as the fatter took a step forward and crushed much of the man until his foot was deeply pierced by the two blades the smaller had once held. He fell backwards onto his back and squirmed until he was dead. Blood oozed out as air flew in his lifeless corpse.

It creaked as he passed through though the door wasn't open long and Kenji was back in the main hall inside the building which held his main goal, Rai. He hadn't noticed it at first but inside the building was very quiet. The large interior had been carefully crafted, or carefully enchanted Kenji thought, because any sound made in the hall would echo throughout the connected rooms and bounce back into the hall to make the echo last just a bit longer than it should have. As he fought the two men in the dungeon he hadn't noticed though here it seemed even the slightest sound would echo forever and he thought how much noise he had probably made when he was sent crashing through the wall below.

He remembered the woman whom he had talked to and what they spoke of. Most odd about it all was that he remembered every word, every thing that happened, every perfect sight and yet couldn't remember crying. Though he knew he had he couldn't think of the feel of it, the last he had cried was for Dai but the cry with the woman in white had been for himself. Man after man Kenji had killed only to get to one more and kill him, was he any better than the dark chi users he and the rest of the island despised? In his vision he wept because he wasn't where he was going, now outside of the vision he wondered if where he was going would be the same place as all these dark chi users, the same place as Rai. Going there would mean he would never see Dai, his family, he would never see any of them again if he followed this path he was on. But if he chose another who would defeat Rai, would anyone? What would happen if he turned back at this moment; turned right around now and went to live in the ruins? The smell of fresh mornings in the sun would once again rise into his nose and fill his mind with thoughts of a pleasant day of relaxation. All this would last until that day Rai would come back and slaughter him like he did his family in which case he would again see them. Is it more for a man to do what is right or to do what makes him that man? Kenji had always done what made him Kenji, the uniqueness of his being had made him into a man who had killed and without that he wouldn't be anything but with it he was a man he couldn't be, he wanted to be that man but couldn't because of everything he wanted to be after he got to where he was going. After he got to a place where he wouldn't weep any more, this simple idea of living had drained

him. It wasn't the fighting or the use of chi that drained his mind; it was the thoughts that ran through him about what would happen next.

Kenji looked around and saw a red glowing door on each side and a stairway leading up that broke off in two directions. Each door held thousands of possibilities and each carried a fate Kenji was afraid of simply because the doorways held the unknown. Choosing the one on the left could yield a wondrous feast prepared solely for Rai but eaten by Kenji while the door on the right could send him to his final resting place; the choice was his to make and that choice was what Kenji feared the most. Thousands upon thousands of decisions taken each day without a thought to which ones would send the traveler down a path of darkness or even a path taken by none before but no matter the choice the road would go on if the man were living or dead. Kenji and the two men in the dungeon both ran separate paths until they met, followed the same path, and split ways to continue their everlasting journey.

“So again we meet,” the clear voice rang out throughout the hall.

Listening, Kenji heard the man and knew it was he whom he had never expected to ever meet again though Kenji unable to see his now scarred face. “Mikio,” Kenji sputtered.

“Now I face you man to man with the truth finally known to us both and that fool of a man Dai finally gone. Now my Master will finally praise my name.”

“Your voice wavers and speech is slurred, what has happened to you?” Kenji questioned.

“I forget you are blind boy. After killing Dai my Master was displeased that I had killed only that old man and not you also. Your pitiful Master Dai never taught you how to take pain as my Master has taught me.” Mikio felt the scars on his face, “He cut my face and disfigured my mouth...”

“...to harm you?” Kenji finished for Mikio.

“NO!” barked Mikio, “To teach me, it is a pain you shall never feel. For the rest of my days on this forsaken island I shall wear my Master’s displeasure like an unpleasant veil!” Mikio had now started to yell and spat as he continued to do so. “Soon though this veil shall be lifted and my face will shine upon everyone once again. Can you imagine walking around like this all day and all night? I cannot take this off like some simple sandal that is uncomfortable, no, I must live with the look and must constantly feel the burn of the blade I felt that day I had returned.”

Calmly Kenji replied, “Understand Mikio I cannot see the harm he has done to you though I can feel it in your voice. The scars are simply blackness to me and through your voice I can tell your soul holds the same blackness your scars do.”

The man screamed and took hold of the metal tipped staff he harbored upon his back. Leaping down the steps to where Kenji stood he tried to push though Kenji grabbed onto the staff and they fought, pushing towards the other, forming a simple triangle with the ground below them as the base. Back and forth the staff went finding itself closest to Mikio’s neck, then Kenji’s, then back to Mikio’s.

As the struggle raged Kenji found himself overwhelming Mikio and finally throwing him down against the banister on the stairs

like a ragged doll his sister had. He hit the railing with a sickening twist and slowly groaned as he turned to look at Kenji, only his head, neck, and eyes moving.

“You have finally done it Kenji,” Mikio managed to spit out with voice thick with outward breath. “Killing Master Dai’s killer; funny how Dai’s only friend joined his first student but killed by his second.”

Kenji’s foot found its way to the raspy voice and nestled itself upon the shaking man’s neck. “I should leave you to die alone as you left my master but would such a death be fitting for such a disease as yourself? No, I shall kill you here and now so not only will you experience me taking your life but experience what it feels like to die alone. I shall be here with my foot upon your lifeless neck but without my eyes to bear down on you no one shall see you die. You will have lived alone and died alone, just as you would have with that face so disfigured.”

Enraged Mikio began to shout, “You will never pass the room before Lord Rai’s! Never, you will go mad before you are allowed through! You...will....”

The last breath drained from Mikio’s body and the neck under Kenji’s foot went from stiff and shaking to soft and calm and yet he had not avenged anyone. Most disturbed by what he had done Kenji knew killing Rai wouldn’t avenge anyone he had lost along the way. Killing Rai wouldn’t promise him closure for his family, his teacher, or his eyesight. This feeling he desperately strived for would never come and that left a hole in Kenji, a pitch black hole running from his mind through his heart where every memory, every thought of what he

had lost would fall through for eternity, starting as a simple thought in his mind and ripping at his heart as it fell into the darkness that engulfed it. His heart ached from thoughts past as simple mentions of the littlest thing sparked an idea of his sister and from there proceeded down the hole and many times before it even got to the heart another thought of her followed. In fact much of the time the hole wasn't a hole at all but a string of continuous dreams slowly eating away at his mind and soul.

Back upon the steps both feet began to engage step after step until he reached the top of the stairs quickly and quietly. The sword that had once constantly made sound upon his back had now stopped as the half he still had ended near the middle of his back. His chest was dirty from lying upon the ground outside and his hair was still wet from the rain before. Cuts jabbed him everywhere though all had stopped bleeding now and were dried red remnants upon his skin.

He turned to the left and followed the stairs as it branched out to the left, followed the landing back to the wall that held the front door, and up a set of stairs where the two that had eventually split came back and formed one staircase. The two large double doors were silent as they opened into a large room with huge stone pillars on either side leading back to yet another set of double doors. Inside the room was bright and inside Kenji's mind showed the dull red he had become used to seeing of the fortress. Six massive chandeliers hung from the ceiling, each holding six golden pans on golden arms. On the pans though sat fire though no wood or candle to sustain the flame could be found.

Kenji left the doors open as he walked into the room and past pillar after pillar, chandelier after chandelier. As he approached the opposing double doors he noticed a man sitting near them with his back up against the wall and his head resting back. He was dressed in grey rags and softly mumbled to himself.

*...still...still alive...yes...*

Six chandeliers with six long golden arms, each holding a pan of fire and yet this man against the wall was covered in shadow. Slowly he was moving as if he was in pain though he never let out much more than a quiet mumble.

*...he's kept her...his plan...*

Kenji eyed the man who had caught his attention. He looked upon the man who had been glowing red, no, not red, but both colors. The man's top half was red and his bottom half was white until slowly as Kenji began nearing the colors seemed to melt away into each other, red blurring into the white and white blurring into the red. It was as if the two colors had been thrown together slowly as each began to choke the other in turn and finally becoming a swirling mixture of the two.

*...she doesn't know...his plan has...can fail...*

"What?!" barked the man at Kenji as he reached to touch the door.

"I am here to see Rai," Kenji replied in turn.

The old man chuckled though quickly turned it into a cough. This man was aged and his posture, voice, and cough showed it. "I have seen your mind; your aim is to kill him, no?"

Kenji brought his hand down and slowly turned to aim toward the man, "Who has told you of my thoughts?"

“No one young Kenji, no one has told me of your thoughts for I can see them and into mine you can see for yourself.” The man chuckled again but this time without a cough, “Though not all mine you can see.”

As he stood, frozen, Kenji wondered how the man had known his name and if he knew he was here and wasn't afraid, then did Rai know he was here this very night? If Rai had known then Kenji knew he'd be up for a tougher battle than he expected. Not only had he planned to catch Rai off guard but he had planned it to be a short battle leaving one victor and one dead. Kenji knew though if he had the chance to sneak up behind Rai and catch him off guard that way, he wouldn't attack because he wasn't like Rai. Rai would have stabbed his best friend in the back if he had the chance, Kenji wouldn't even do that to his worst of enemies.

“How do you know my name old man?”

“I told you, we can see into each others minds though your view may be more obstructed than mine. Listen to me now Kenji for my next words will only come once and will greatly benefit you in your battle with Rai. Rai suspects you to be strong though he doesn't know quite how strong you are. Though his servant Mikio returned he knows nothing of the fabled beasts of the island you have defeated. Only you know that you've beating the Centepion, the Aomin, and the rest; no one on this island knows. And though he doubts your strength he still has the power to beat you unless you realize the power you hold inside; the power of the chi.”

“I have seen the power of the chi old man,” Kenji said condescendingly, “I know what I am capable of.”

“With that attitude so does he!” barked the old man as he motioned towards the unopened door. “Sit here with me and listen to a story from an old man who has spent his fair share of years on this damned island.”

Kenji moved in front of the man cautiously and sensing no trouble slowly sat with his legs crossed and his back straight up against a pillar. Though the halls under him had been wood in the lower floors, this floor had been crafted of the same stone used to make the pillars. The floor was warm and glowed slightly more than the rest of the building meaning it had been held there by the force of dark chi.

“Many years ago,” the old man began, “long before the first settlers appeared here on Hayatoro Island, long before they appeared anywhere, the gods ruled the land. Four gods watched over the land from its blue water to its green land and crafted each grain of sand with care. These four gods were Deitros, Archos, Grimereon, and Pelarch.

“Deitros had been the god of death and as the land was placed he upon it put a curse to age whatever stood near it. Even upon the sky Deitros had placed his evil to make day turn to night and night into day and slowly each living being upon the land would live and perish and the cycle would continue as each and everything found its way to an unfortunate end. As god of death it was upon him to decide the fate of each soul after death and his decision is what we live with today.

“Archos was the god of life. She began each and every life, breathing in it the ability to live though each life she breathed eventually ended under the curse of Deitros. As the only female god

she was breathtakingly beautiful and not only blessed the land with life but also gave the ground it wonderful green grass and the skies their amazing soft blue glow.

“Grimereon, now, was deemed god of physical strength for he was the embodiment of perfect strength. He blessed the land with the hard ground below us and created the mighty stone we use today.

Watch this Kenji,” the man said and paused from his tale to pull out a small stone. Holding his hand out he dropped the stone and it fell to the ground quickly and made scrapping noises as it bounced around.

“See how the stone falls from my hand Kenji? That is another of the things Grimereon created. Without him we would all float away, with him we stick to the ground. Without him we live forever, with him we are attached to the curse of Deitros.

“And finally there was Pelarch, god of mental prowess. Pelarch was quite different from the others. Instead of being bold and brash like Deitros, beautiful like Archos, or strong and muscular like Grimereon, Pelarch was small and hunched far over himself. Without him though we would all fall apart for he gave us the ability to think, he crafted for us the greatest tool of all, the mind. Every animal and human upon this island has a mind capable each of thinking for themselves, each is unique and for that we thank Pelarch.”

“I have never heard of these beings before old man,” Kenji interrupted.

“They are not ones spoke of much and as I continue you shall see why.” The old man coughed a few more times before continuing on. “Upon the completion of the world we live upon the gods retired to a massive white and gold temple on the clouds where they sat and

watched over the land; Deitros on the far left, Archos to his left, Grimereon to Archos's left, and finally Pelarch on the far right. It is believed there were only four because five would have put a god directly in the middle and therefore making him the chief god, that's also why there aren't three," the man said as if he had solved a puzzle.

"Inside this massive structure only the four lived as the first plants and animals came into being and each had a massive room crafted of stone, wood, and gold. Each room was blessed by the gods so every morning the sun would shine brightly and every night it would be dark in the room thanks to Deitros. Upon this, Archos blessed the room to grant us comfort whenever we found ourselves inside. Grimereon created the rooms out of the precious materials they were crafted of. And Pelarch blessed it so living inside the room would never drive us mad but instead ease our wearied minds.

"Night after night each god returned to their room and slept upon large beds made of the finest cloth until the bright sun shone in the next morn. For generations this continued to happen until one day Archos couldn't hide it much longer and explained to the gods she was carrying a child. That night Pelarch sought out Deitros and told him he was not the father and Deitros told Pelarch the same leaving only Grimereon to be the true father. Raging with jealousy Deitros began throwing anything he could find and screaming though the scream was muffled by the thick stone walls. As he walked to the door to go catch Grimereon and Archos, Pelarch stopped him and explained a plan to him that they would spy upon the others until the day came when they would strike.

“Day by day Deitros secretly watched the two and took every motion they made as a sign to the other of their secret and forbidden love. Finally inside the temple a child was born to Archos. The child was very beautiful and was unnaturally lean and muscular, Archos named him Archein. They announced him as a god though instead of watching over that land like his parents he simply went around playing from cloud to cloud.”

This time Kenji coughed, the cool night air must've gotten him sick. Though he felt fine the cough gave him a sense that the illness would become greater but would be nothing life threatening. All he needed was to get through the night; that was all.

“Years passed and once again Archos found that she was carrying a child of Grimereon's though this time a surprise was in store for the gods. Archein wouldn't gain one but two brothers. They were named Darmelle and Ryr. Darmelle was born first, followed within a breath or two by Ryr. The children began to grow and found them selves celebrating many happy birthdays. During the thirteenth year of both Darmelle and Ryr, Deitros gave the boys each one of his newest creations, the sword. Both were smaller than average but each perfected for its owner. Both Ryr and Darmelle loved their new gifts and many days were found on clouds fighting each other with their older, seventeen year old brother Archein, watching. Archein sat with a smile upon his face for he loved both his brothers and was neither jealous nor envious of either.

One day another of their battles raged as their brother watched. The cloud they sat upon on this specific day had an eerie wisp about it and Archein finally stood when the white wisp began to block what he

saw. Standing he saw each brother's head ducking and dodging as they blocked the blows from the other.

Now as Archein stood both Ryir and Darmelle saw him out of the corner of their eyes and soon began fighting each other to gain their brothers favor. Metal clashed and the boys grunted as they fought harder than ever before, each breaking out in sweat. In Darmelle's mind a fire suddenly raged as he swung and at the exact same moment Ryir's mind found itself in a calm field filled with green grass and roaming animals. The blades connected and stopped, pressed against each other, it was now a battle of strength. As each brother pushed the other pushed harder and made the other push just a bit harder. A voice in Ryir's mind told him to push his brother's blade to the left and the same voice in Darmelle's though telling him to push the blade to the right. Each blade made a scraping noise as it slid off the other and toward Archein who, by way of the wisp, didn't know what had happened until he felt the two blades pierce his stomach."

Kenji's faced suddenly grimaced and by now the old man's voice had turned grave. Though he began the story wary, Kenji knew this story was true. All of it had happened; the gods had lived and created the island. Why had no one told him about this before?

"Both boys froze as the white they were staring at began to bleed a deep red, staining the very cloud they were standing upon. One by one Ryir and Darmelle slowly removed their swords as their brother began to fall to the ground. They heard screaming and yelling through the blood red cloud as Archos and the rest of the gods ran to the injured boy, only to find him dead by the time they reached him. Grimereon grasped Archos while she tried to get to her son, letting her

scream and cry. Finally reaching the cloud and deciding what to do, Deitros lifted the body and began to walk away with it while Archos begged and pleaded to him that he leave the boy lay.”

“You still with me boy?” the old man finally said directly to Kenji.

“Yes,” Kenji replied quietly as if a member of his own family had died.

“Good. Well after that the gods were never the same. They had a funeral for Archein in a massive hall inside the building. In that room lye Archein’s body, on the left side stood Darmelle with his head down and back to his older brother. On the right side stood Ryrir just like his brother, though unlike Darmelle had the same fields in his mind as before, not the fire like Darmelle had. Time went on and each brother grew older and passed while their parent gods stayed the same age. Deitros and Pelarch both forgave Grimereon and Archos after seeing their first born child die. And though both Darmelle and Ryrir died their souls were found to each get pieces passed on to every living being on the planet. That is how we use chi Kenji; this is the story of how chi came into being.”

“Why haven’t I heard this story before?” Kenji questioned.

The man breathed deeply, “People do not like worshipping gods that are not perfect. Gods who consummate outside of marriage and children dying is not a story parents want to tell children, let alone have told to them.”

“How does this story help my quest?”

“You practice the chi of Ryir while Lord Rai practices the chi of Darmelle, you play opposites in this Kenji though Rai, in a sense, is your brother.”

Kenji laughed to himself, that man would never be a member of his family.

“Learn to use chi as Ryir would and you will defeat the Lord in the next room.”

## Chapter Twelve

The door swung open and Rai looked up with a devilish look upon his face. He sat slumped in a chair with dirt on his skin. His hair was the darkest of black and stuck out only an inch or so. Smiling, he showed a bit of his teeth which were all jagged, pointed, and black and dark green. Nails on each hand were cracked and broken so close to the root that they showed the red skin and dried blood beneath them.

On Rai's right sat a woman who had been as dirty as he had though she sat up with her back straight. She wore a long robe, hiding the curves of her body. Her hair calmly sat upon her shoulders, reaching in length near her mid back and so blonde it was almost white though it was barely noticeable since the hair was stained with dirt and grime.

To Rai's left sat countless women, all completely naked, slowly moving around on each other as if in slow motion. Each one moved so that they were a perfect mix of skin, the pile of women was almost unrecognizable to the normal eye. Though slumped, Rai had

held one hand to his right in the single woman's and one hand to the left in the pile of women, slowly being kissed and groped.

Kenji now stood in the room since breaking open the doors and looked at the man. The sight was amazing, even to Kenji, redness of Darmelle's chi glowed bright from Rai and emanating from him were deep red tentacles that reached far into the room, one directly to the woman on his right, one to the pile of women to his left, and the others branching out throughout the room and undoubtedly throughout the massive structure. Every tentacle slowly moved back and forth, as if waving to Kenji.

"You killed my family!" Kenji screamed at him, at this time tears were the last thing on his mind yet came anyways. The warm water flowed from his battered eyes.

Rai's devilish smile became perverse with evil thoughts, "And enjoyed every minute of it you pitiful child. I'm always amazed by learning; you can never stop learning really. I thought blinding you was gratifying but then I *learned*," Rai put extra emphasis on the word 'learned' as he drug it out longer than necessary, "that hearing your mother's whorish mouth scream as she burned to ash was gratification in itself."

Kenji thought he could see the red body in front of him twitch its head to the left slightly and without warning the rug under Kenji folded and he found himself slamming hard onto the ground made of wood like the rest of the building. The hole above Kenji's head closed up and retracted all the light from the dirty, musty room. He raised his hands as he heard thousands of grunting and groaning from all around him.

I sat eating my beef on rice and listening to the fools in front of me talk. We were lucky enough to find roaming cattle and caught one; finally we got some beef and steak in our diet, not the same old bamboo shoots and sticky rice. I had just started this job working on this large grain farm and already on my first night I was sick of my 'co-workers', I do most of the work though. Damn, they could cook though.

"I hear he keeps them trapped in a room in that city of his," the wrinkled man said.

"What are you old fools talking about?" I said, annoyed. The bright eyed one looked at me as if I was being disrespectful but I didn't care.

"My son came here the other night and told me he had been to the Dark Lord Rai's city and gotten out to talk about it!" the wrinkled one said proudly.

"And who does he keep locked up?" I questioned, slightly intrigued but more interested in my beef and rice.

Finally the bright eyed man spoke, "He said Rai keeps one thousand men in a dark room where no one can find them. They all betrayed him and one by one he hunted them down and put them in the room, like pets. I hear they are fed human remains," he said.

"How could your son know that? The only people that live through his city are those that practice the dark arts."

Silence. I looked up at the wrinkly old man as he dug around in his bowl, obviously knowing what his son had done. It was then I

noticed the young man standing a bit away from us, his eyes shut yet his head still moved perfectly.

“Hey would you like some rice?” I yelled to the man.

So it was true, and Kenji was here, in the room that held the thousand traitors. Noises along the walls began to get louder as they neared him, hungry for a meal long overdue. The traitors had reformed, going from Darmelle’s chi to Ryrir’s and had revoked their color; in Kenji’s mind they were invisible. He felt the hands ripping and tearing at him. Dirty, unkempt men scratched at his skin and ripped at him. It was an uncomfortable feeling, the feeling of pain but unable to see what was happening to you or what would happen next. Kenji raised his head to look upwards and let out a blood-curdling scream.

“My Lord, it is time.”

“Yes, yes it is.” Without looking away from his loyal follower he bellowed, “Leave us now.” Another word wasn’t needed as the women in the pile and the woman sitting alone stood and walked out of the throne room; each walked over the carpet that had once dropped Kenji to his doom. The large doors slowly closed shut without a sound as all that was left in the room were Rai and his follower.

Rai finally stood and walked to a cabinet leaning against the wall on the right side of the room. He drew open the doors and inside the follower saw the sparkle as light gleamed off two blades. Unlike Rai they both were clean and neither had a spot of grime on it though both blades had taken many lives. Grasping the hilts of both he pulled

them out of the closet and without so much as a wink the wooden doors to the closet snapped shut leaving a loud *crack* echo throughout the room.

The *crack* was broken by the sound of metal scraping across the floor as Rai slid his follower one of the blades. “They tell me you are quite skilled with a blade.”

“Yes Lord Rai, my father had me learn as a child and I have been using one ever since.”

“Well, we shall see then won’t we?” Rai asked rhetorically. He began to slowly walk toward the man, dragging the tip of the blade on the ground and staring at the slight sparks made. “Why do you swear me as your Lord follower?” It was pitiful, Rai didn’t even know the name of the boy he was about to fight and the boy had followed him so closely, what had to be done had to be done.

“You are powerful my Lord, you command many with the move of a brow,” the man chose his words carefully. One wrong word could cost him his life, “Not only powerful as a commander, but powerful as a man skilled in the arts of chi.”

“I enjoy how you speak to me,” the sick smile peaked upon Rai’s face again. “You act almost like a sword fighter, blocking attacks as they come.”

*Clang*, the swords met in the air as the two men began the fight. Rai had tried to quickly hit him but failed and had been blocked, this would be fun. “Please, don’t hold back,” Rai taunted.

*Clink, clang, chink*. Each sword carefully placed against the other as the follower continued to block. He was in a situation he did not like, he was unable to strike the man for fear if he killed him he

would have no leader; if he didn't strike he would be killed by the constant attacks of his foe. Was Rai that, was Rai his foe? No, don't think like that, that's treason. I'm better than the scum that...

*Shink, clack, clack, clack, clack.* The follower stopped all his thoughts and focused at the battle at hand. Thinking about useless ideas right now would only get him killed. Would his Lord do that? Would he kill such a devoted follower that...

*Thud.* The follower screamed as his hand fell to the ground, still gripping the sword that he had once been fighting *the* Lord Rai with. He cursed in his mind at himself knowing that his distracted thoughts had cost him the battle; he knew he would never wield a blade again. His thoughts now hit him hard, all through his life he had been taught to use a blade and now he couldn't, was his life all for naught? What did Rai have planned for him?

Rai's sword hit the ground and he reached out his hand to lift the boy who now was bleeding from the wound. The boy accepted and was lifted off the floor by his remaining hand. He was like a newborn child to the world; he was completely defenseless and needed care just like a newborn baby to its mother.

"Let's take a short walk, you fought well enough to learn of my thoughts." The men left the room, Rai partially helping the follower through the halls. "Have you heard of the Third Prophecy?" Rai asked.

"No," the boy whimpered.

"It is said the gods created a prophecy for each of the bastard children Archos bore. One for Archein, one for Ryrir, and one for Darmelle, you do know the story of the gods do you not?"

“Of course, it is what we dark chi users believe in.”

Rai laughed, “Smart boy. The Third Prophecy is Darmelle’s prophecy and says ‘Upon a bright day in this world darkness would spread and at the center of that darkness, love would flourish; the love of another so tender the darkness would release the love interest and engulf the world in darkness forever.’ Do you understand?”

The boy was now shuddering, the blood was flowing from his arm faster and fast and his skin was becoming cooler and cooler to the touch. “I’m...I’m afraid I...do...not...”

Rai knew the boy wouldn’t, he had studied it night after sleepless night and had now only figured out the riddle behind it. “The prophecy describes a darkness blighting the land, the darkness of Darmelle’s chi. Before I came into my power the island was calm and now has darkness, of which I am the center. Darmelle’s prophecy requires me to marry then sacrifice my wife and only then will I gain enough power to control this island, maybe even the world.”

“I...understand...my...Lord,” the boy had stopped walking for some time now and was only held up by Rai’s strength.

“With that power I’ll be unstoppable boy, surpassed by none. But now I must find my bride and see her to sleep.” With that Rai dropped the boy and left the cold dead follower against the wall in a hallway, blood spreading beneath him.

## Chapter Thirteen

The dirtied woman walked around the corner and into the long corridor leading to the bedrooms. All Rai's servants were kept here though she had the biggest room and she could've had worse, she could've been like the followers that were told to stay outside in the cold, the wet, and the dark. Her grey robes drug on the ground behind her as she slowly walked through the hallways as if possessed, as if another had taken her body and controlled it.

Near the end of the hall a man came running around the corner and began to slow as he noticed the woman approaching. He looked at her oddly and she slowly raised her head to look at him. His face was worn as well as his body though cuts and bruises weren't the worst of his troubles. She wondered if staring at his body offended him though she was positive this boy wouldn't notice; she was positive this boy was blind.

It was an off-white color, almost a sickening color of curdled blood on a rusty blade. This girl in front of him was glowing that color and Kenji knew he had seen her before, on the left of Rai. She

was nothing but a servant of Rai and was no better than the dark Lord himself.

“You are here to kill me?” she softly let out.

Kenji was puzzled by the woman’s nerve to ask if she had wronged him when both she and Kenji knew it wasn’t her wrong doing that trapped him in the dungeon with the traitors. “No,” he said; his voice also barely above a whisper, “I seek to kill your Lord, he is the one that has wronged me.”

“But I bear him as my Lord, is that not enough reason to slaughter me right here?”

It was odd the woman used the word slaughter, was that all he was doing here? Was he only slaughtering them like helpless animals? No. Rai and his men had enough to defend themselves and they were going to pay for the thousands upon thousands of lives they took while the Supremacy reigned on Hayatoro Island. “If I killed every being who took on a master I would be no better than your Lord.” Kenji knew those words would sting her.

The woman took note of the words but didn’t show any sign of harm done by them. She had been strong, being with the Supremacy and Rai ever since she was a little girl. Once she had been a normal islander though now showed no sign of that as she sat dully and idly near Kenji. Even her smile, which was prevalent as a child, had now dissipated and only left weak, cracked lips that she spoke from. “And yet you compare yourself to him, you must have some respect for him deep inside. I can almost see the way you idolize him and yet despise him at the same time.” She said these words slowly and her monotone voice drove the words into Kenji deeper than he could’ve imagined.

“Are you blind yourself woman? If I idolized the man why would I be set to kill him?” Kenji questioned.

She didn’t even need to think, it was as if she knew he was going to ask it, “You both are trained by Dai...”

“...How do you know that?!” Kenji asked quickly, cutting her off.

“Rai has often has spoken of you, he possesses great thoughts and can see what threatens his reign through Darmelle’s chi. He has seen you on your path here and has also been informed by his servant Mikio, the same man who poisoned your master Dai.” Looking down she seemed to speak softly to herself now, “I suppose Rai thinks you are dead, torn to pieces by the traitors. Now is the time you should strike if you choose, you have the upper hand and Rai the lower. It is now up to you to bring that hand down upon him or not.”

“You seem to not wish to be here, to not have Lord Rai as your master, are you a heretic?” Kenji wondered.

Looking up she answered, “Heresy will get me killed and I do not wish to die, no I am not a heretic. At the same time though,” she paused, “I wish to be away from this place.”

“Both you and I have led lives before this moment,” Kenji took a deep breath, “do you remember any of what you once have lived?”

“Few memories still haunt my dreams and to no one have I told them to though you are different,” her voice seemed to go less dry and a sense of emotion was injected. “I remember the warm sun overhead on a beautiful morning. I see my mom washing clothing and my father working outside, digging into the dirt and planting crops. Suddenly everything goes blurry and I remember this feeling in my stomach. A

feeling like an endless pit has opened up and I am falling through. I'm scared, and so is my family." She stopped for a moment, "I've never seen why I was scared but I believe it is Rai, he attacked my village when I was young. Then I always wake up and when I fall back to sleep I see my father and mother in a small stone room. Father lifts a wooden door to the room we were hiding in..."

...Kenji got that endless pit feeling in his stomach...his family had a room exactly like that and had gone in it the day before the last he saw them...the day before the last time he saw anything...

"...and he turns to yell at a young boy..."

...Kenji whispered to himself with wet eyes, "Suki?" Could it really be his sister, the one he had never found? But hadn't she died in the fire...

"...I think that boy is my brother," she seemed to snap out of the emotion she felt and back into the monotonous way she had been before. Her dull voice spoke again, "I should not bother you with all this. Lord Rai would not be pleased with me." It was as if she had two beings inside her, the drone Rai had created when he had snatched her, and the one that still knew herself as Suki, Kenji's sister. He needed to reach that young girl before it was too late.

"Your brother was playing with his magic tricks again."

"What?" she asked.

"Your brother, in the dream, he was playing with his magic tricks and that's why your father yelled at him isn't it?" He noticed her color brighten a bit; he knew she was going through every memory to find a recollection of why her father was yelling. "Your name is Suki and I am your brother Kenji. We lived in Nayano with our

mother and father. Our father was a farmer and when the crop was planted he hunted and our mother took care of our home. We went hunting the day after that memory you have, that's when Rai attacked and blinded me; blinded me and killed our parents. Suki...do you remember me at all?"

Her eyes rolled with tears as she began to cry. The drone was gone and she became herself again. Kenji saw her aura turn from the disgusting off-white to a light blue, one of the most beautiful colors he had ever seen the chi take on.

"Please Kenji, I need you to save me," she said softly to him, voice quavering and tears flowing. "I need you to take me away from here."

Kenji gently grasped her hand, "I will protect you I swear it." She was now all he had and he couldn't lose her...he just couldn't...

She pulled her hand back slowly. "No Kenji, there is no life for me out there. If I am to leave here, I am to leave both the island and my body behind. Please Kenji, save me."

A tear flowed down his cheek, was she really asking him to kill her? He couldn't, he wouldn't; she was all he had. "Why? We could leave now, I'll leave Rai be and we'll leave together!"

Her hand stretched out from inside her kimono and handed Kenji a small rusted knife. Too small for Kenji's hands, the knife would be just perfectly fit in one person. It emanated a dull red obviously used before by someone worshipping Rai.

Kenji turned his head as he set the dagger in his hands perfectly. Looking at the wall to his left he slowly shook his head back and forth whimpering, "No, no, no." The dagger began to move

slowly toward her stomach. Tears poured from both of their eyes as Kenji began to shake. His sister couldn't hold it any longer and now began to cry out loud, her voice echoing throughout the hall.

“I love you,” she whispered.

The shiny blade pierced the girl quickly, entering her back and protruding from her stomach. As it passed through she grunted loudly and her eyes widened, the shock was too much for her and she fell into a ball upon the floor at Kenji's feet. Rai stared deep into the face of the blind boy in front of him as he held the bloody sword that had killed his enemy's sister.

## Chapter Fourteen

He looked up from his sister's cold dead body and at the red image in front of him. The tentacles were now whipping around, flailing and crawling around on the walls; Kenji followed each one back to the body standing in front of him. Kenji stood in anger and looked at Rai who noticed Kenji's fingers; little yellow sparks were flicking off the tips.

"And now I'll kill you too like the rest of your family," Rai said finally through blackened teeth. Kenji saw the tentacles begin to reach back as if they were going to strike. But before they could Kenji spun around and ran down the wooden hallway to Rai's unexpected surprise.

Rai's face twisted as surprise struck him, he hadn't expected the boy to run; he expected him to fight. Yes, this would be fun.

Kenji turned the corner at the end of the hall and ran through the next hall while Rai followed. In Kenji's mind he saw the tentacles slithering up and down and left and right as they carried Rai. To anyone else with normal vision all they saw was Kenji running from

Rai, who was floating down the hallway. As he was floating Rai turned his head left and right menacingly and with a single scowl the red tentacles blew out pieces of the walls. One wall blew open into a room, killing all of Rai's followers inside.

Hall after hall the wood was broken and various enemies killed. Kenji continued to run though his heart beat and his feet ached. He needed to escape and get out into the open where he could confront Rai, not here in the building. Rai was catching up, another hall, another hall...

...Kenji found himself back in the entrance way to the building. The door was to his right, if he could only...

...One of the red tentacles caught Kenji in the chest and sent him through the wooden wall that held the doorway. He was now outside in the brisk, early morning air. The moon still shone and his breath now appeared in front of his mouth every time he breathed out. Kenji could feel his heart beat in his fingers it beat so loud and he knew Rai was looking right at him.

And he was right; to his left Rai floated out the door as the tentacles emerged and carried him out. Rai's face was still distorted, this time with anger. He stopped and looked down between Rai and the building. "Do you honestly think you..." Rai was screaming at the top of his lungs at Kenji, "...you could defeat *me*? Some poor blind boy with no family and nothing to live for?" Rai calmed a bit finally and laughed to himself. "Do you see what kind of fool Dai has made you out to be? I'm only glad he did it to you and not me."

Suddenly Rai let out a scream and his tentacles pointed straight out from where ever they were. They sliced right through the wooden

ground of the city and through off of its walls. Slowly the whole castle behind him began to fall backward and one by one boards underneath the city snapped as gravity pulled its prey to the cold depths of the ocean below. Kenji saw followers of Rai finally catch up and get to the door with only enough time to see them and the castle fall away from everything else. Few tried jumping off the falling section of the city though none succeeded and only made their descent that much faster.

Kenji backed away from Rai as he watched the man closely, waiting for him to strike. One by one the tentacles eased and became their once slithery selves. Rai began to near Kenji slowly though suddenly fell to the ground as his tentacles disappeared. The clouded sky opened and a ray of light large enough to engulf Rai shone down though unlike sunlight, this was the complete absence of everything. It was a blackness Kenji had never seen before and knew it wasn't a good sign.

Soon Kenji heard a voice emanated from the area as it grew in size. The voice was deep and dark; it wasn't Rai's voice. "Finally," it said, "finally I am granted the ultimate power that I have always deserved." That voice was Rai! What had happened to him?

The light pulled away and the clouds formed back together. Where Rai once was now stood a demon of incomparable features and all that Kenji recognized was the soft red glow from his eyes; the rest of his body, even in the complete darkness of Kenji's mind, shone black.

His mouth had gone as had his nose but now where his cheeks once were, long red slits had been cut, three on each side All his hair

had gone as well as his clothing, exposing his now dark grey skin which was covered in lumps and bumps. He stood about the same height but his legs were now different. Now he had four legs, each had a knee cap aiming perfectly away from the others. It looked as if his backbone had been pulled out and bent, from it sprouted two black, bumpy, fleshy wings. Each arm split in the middle and produced two arms, just as the beast that had once been his master.

“You cannot have that power, your plan had not been finished!” Kenji screamed.

“Oh you heard me talk to that fool?” Rai said in his wispy dark voice. “True I told him my plan though I never said what part of the prophecy was already fulfilled.”

Kenji turned and ran, he was still in this hellish city and needed to get out. Surprise didn't catch him this time as Rai flapped both wings and flew after him. It was a race to the finish and the loser died, both men knew it. Kenji's heart pounded and Rai's mind raced. There it was, up ahead, Kenji saw the doors. He saw Rai flyby so close overhead he heard the creature breathing; then he saw Rai blow through them. Though he ached he wasn't going to stop, not for anything or for any reason.

Rai looked down as the remaining portion of the city exploded, sending pieces of wood and body parts everywhere. Below the cliff in the water Rai couldn't tell if the people splashing around were creating the white waves or if the wind was. He wasn't concerned though, he knew with this chill whomever fell into the water didn't live long. For miles upon miles Rai could see large black lumps, bodies, floating on the top of the water. All were his followers save the 1,000 traitors and

Kenji's sister though she had served him well enough to be called his follower; yes, she granted him this amazing power. Rai looked back down to find Kenji pulling his body over the tip of the cliff and onto solid ground then standing up. This child was beginning to become pesky...

Kenji looked up at Rai with drained eyes, his body ached and he felt as if he were dead and hadn't fallen over yet but he had a bit more in him, he just needed to push himself a little harder. Rai's body began to glow a red aura, not only in Kenji's eyes but to everyone with normal vision. His muscles pulsated and his veins began to grow in his arms. He started to convulse over and over and shake as the red grew deeper, darker, and larger. Rai's back split open and out of it crawled a beast the size of the massive wooden city Kenji had just escaped. The creature snarled as it dripped blood and clear puss. A long tail swung in the air below the body which was composed of a huge red ribcage which at the front held the transformed body of Rai, still attached. Two arms on the creatures left and one on the right swayed in the air and its large red head with its deep beady eyes bore a hole right into Kenji's soul.

"It is complete!" blasted Rai. "Finally I am fused with him, I am Darmelle!" he screamed.

It flew left and right, swaying its massive body in the air until one of the arms swiped the ground right from under Kenji, sending him and a large chunk of dirt hurling towards the deep, crashing waves of the ocean. Kenji's eyes slowly closed in midair and he began to concentrate, he could feel the bright chi pulsing throughout his body, he was becoming the bright chi. Without knowing Kenji began to

glow a bright white light and stopped in midair though he still felt as if he was falling. From his feet the veins in his body began to suddenly harden and pull to the outside of his skin. On his front they stopped near his waist while behind him the veins continued to pull out all the way to his upper back. As they reached outside his skin they expanded, becoming hard matter covering over half his body and expanding high above and below him. He opened his eyes and moved his head, right above his head a massive creature was built onto him like a huge hat. Below him the solid substance turned his two legs into one long tail that split near the end. The creature he was part of swung each of its arms, one on each side and belted a massive roar that sounded like a mix of crushing rock and a large squeak of a mouse. Kenji had now become part of Ryr, the child of the chi he practiced.

Rai came at him but Kenji was too fast, his body swung with the creature and cut open part of Rai's beast's skin. They began to swoop at each other, back and forth and back and forth, each catching the other, sometimes Kenji got Rai twice. Each pass raised them higher and higher above the cliff and above the icy waters below them. Far below on the shore people began to gather from nearby cities to watch what the massive sound on the island had been. Many of the people below were men who had gone to protect their families though now many of them sat with their mouths open and fingers pointing in the air. Soon the creatures were so high up that the watchers below only saw the flicker of light from the clouds above as each creature swiped at the other and created a scar and emitted sparks.

Everything happening to Kenji felt completely normal; it was as if he had been a part of this creature for his whole life. Both he and

this monster knew how to move together and exactly what the other was thinking; was it the same for Rai? As they fought Kenji passed Rai and slashed at him, opening a wound and sparking into the night sky. When he hit the peak of his turn his head peaked above the night clouds, *what was that?!* Kenji thought suddenly by what he saw. He needed a better look but the next three passes Kenji was scarred by Darmelle's beast, each time he was hit he dropped a bit more. Soon they were back under the clouds and Kenji knew he couldn't continue to do this same motion each time and expect to see what was above the clouds. After the final third pass instead of turning Kenji went into a dive forward towards the water; Rai noticed this and spun around to follow going twice as fast as Kenji was. Just as Rai reached the tail of Ryir both Kenji and Ryir shot straight up into the sky sending Rai forward; Rai instantly spun, realizing what Kenji had done, and followed him as fast as possible. Kenji pushed as hard as he could, just a bit more...

...They both broke the cloud top at the same time and both noticed the large creature staring down at them. Both stood agape at the beast looking down upon them; this beast was bigger than the island itself and sat upon the cloud tops. Ryir and Darmelle seemed like babies to this larger monster as everything sat quiet for a moment. Kenji and Rai both knew who this was in front of them though their eyes barely could conceive it; through chi vision Kenji saw and through normal sight Rai saw but both knew it as Archein, big brother to both Ryir and Darmelle.

Archein's hand began to lower and slowly grasped Ryir and Kenji and pressed him against his stomach where they melted into the

great being above the clouds. “NO!” screamed Rai desperately. “This is impossible! Darmelle’s chi is superior!”

In the prophecy both young boys had fought for the affection of their big brother and now Ryir had prevailed. The massive Archein pushed both hands straight out with palms aimed toward Rai and pointer fingers touching. Each hand’s center began to glow bright as a white ball formed between them. It grew larger and larger in front of Rai’s still dark eyes.

“NO!”

The ball shot forward producing a long line behind it of pure white chi energy. Onlookers back on Hayatoro Island watched the sky as the clouds lit up a pearly white in the dark night sky. Rai’s body was sent flying backwards as it separated from Darmelle’s, leaving both to bleed out as they fell to the waters below them. From the skies the onlookers watched as a single body of a young man slowly glided down to the ground, setting down gently upon the wet grass.

Kenji opened his eyes slowly and for the first time since losing his vision saw colors other than the basic chi glow. He saw villagers looking over him; they all were blurred together though their outlines were still shown by the chi. As they looked at him each noticed his pupils had become pure ivory white. He tried his best to remember what he could but last he knew he was in Archein’s hand.

“Are you ok?” a man asked finally.

Kenji looked at him, he could faintly see the man was wearing a hat and a red kimono. He smiled, “Yeah, what happened?”

The man brushed his hair back as everyone chuckled, “Well we all heard noise and came to see what was going on. Saw some creatures flying through the air but not much more than lights when they were up in the clouds. Then we heard a loud bang and the clouds lit in the night here and well you floated down as two other things fell hard into the ocean way out there,” the man pointed off the cliff they all sat upon.

Carefully Kenji stood, the onlookers helping him. “What has happened to the city?” one woman asked. “What of Rai?”

Kenji looked at her calmly and breathed out a deep sigh, “Both have been destroyed; the city and the dark lord Rai are no more.”

Rejoice, the crowd screamed and yelled blessings to Kenji and each other as Kenji simply stood there, tired. This was his reward, these people would live, their children would live, their children’s children would live... He found himself on the cliff alone as the rest of the group began the walk home to spread the good news.

The morning sun had begun to glow upon the far reaches of the island as Kenji began to walk down from the cliff. As the sun hit him he warmed though the chilled morning air still bit at him where his clothes had been ripped and torn. While walking tears began to flow from his eyes and he went to sit on the cliff edge overlooking the water. Head in his hands Kenji cried every tear he had in him; he cried for everything. Most of the tears shed went to his family and Dai. Many of the tears fell for his sister, the woman he had known for only a small amount of time but respected and cared for much more than anyone upon the island could know. Everyone that had mattered to him had been taken by Rai and now he was gone, no more would he

attack islanders upon Hayatoro Island. Kenji looked out over the golden sunrise and golden, shimmering water with glistening eyes, tears slowly halting and his heart slowly calming. It wasn't fair to Kenji, his whole life everything was taken away from him over and over. Villagers on the island were all grateful to be alive but Kenji didn't know if he was like the others. He was an outcast and had nothing to live for, did he? All his family was now was a memory and he needed to preserve it. Death wasn't an ending for them but a beginning for both him and the rest of the island. The idea that this all would end someday scared Kenji; one day the island would be gone, the people would be gone and he would be gone. He was scared of what happened to him after he died and wondered about it. In life he was taught everything by his family, would it be that way after he died? Would he die and see his mother who would then explain everything to him? Life was precious and nothing could have told him better than the adventure he had just been on. Every second needed to be lived up to it's full potential as if it were his last and that was exactly what he was going to do.

Kenji stood up, took one more look at the ocean in front of him, and turned to continue walking down toward the nearest town. The sun shone down upon the ground which was now well saturated and basked in the glow of the sun. His back straightened out as Kenji walked on; one day he'd see his friends and family again, one day he'll see them all again.

