

-Special Thanks

- God for loving me and for sending his son down to die for our sins.
- My teacher, Steve Amidon, for being an awesome teacher and for telling me about Lulu.

~Author's note~

This book is actually a compilation of excerpts from various stories that I have. In the prologue, I have listed the summaries of each individual tale so that you may understand the story better.

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Prologue

You are walking in the forest when you come upon a worn path. As you follow it you find yourself at a wooded lake. When you peer into the water you see some images of people, and as you look at each one, the lake speaks about each of the images.

“The image of a teenage girl on the right with a virtual reality visor on is the story of Fantascape. This story is about a girl named Cali who plays a virtual reality role playing game called Fantascape. Players of the game encounter various computerized monsters and villains known as baddies. The levels of the characters and baddies describe how powerful each one is. For example, if the player is level 3 and there is a monster level 40, they could kill you with one hit.

However, if you are closer to the baddies level or

surpass it you have a better chance of surviving the battle.”

“The image of a young man with in the bottom right the wind is the story of Unicess. This story is about a young man named Angus who is sent on a quest to find healing water to cure a kingdom from a horrible disease. He searches everywhere and discovers rumors of a forest that has rivers that are daily purified by unicorns. The river’s water is said to possess healing powers that can cure any disease and purify any water source. After he gets the water, he hears the legend of the Unicess-which is a maiden who guards the unicorns. After he delivers the healing water, he wants to go back to see if he can find her but isn’t sure if he should because he had an ominous

dream about what would happen to the unicorns if he did return.”

“The image of the young girl on the bottom left is the story of Kapu: This story is about an alchemy student named Kapu, and about what happens when she lives in the ville, a village that has a large academy. Not only does she have her academic and social life to worry about, but there are rumors that the ville is in danger. When she meets two warriors and befriends them, the truth about the rumors is revealed.”

“The story of the young girl with the sword is a story called The Legendary Hero. Chris was just a normal earth girl when she and two of her friends get warped into another world. It is there that she learns that she is the legendary hero that is to fight great evil and free the world from oppression.”

“The image of the hugging couple is the story of the Fated Lovers. The story has different endings, but the beginning of it is the same. It tells of a monster that attacks a town and poisons a girl. A soldier, who loves her, goes to get some items from his ruined house for a trip to a town in hopes to find an antidote. However when he comes back, she is gone.”

Fantascape

Green words float in front of Cali's blue eyes.

They read: loading program....please wait...

As her bedroom melts from her vision, it is replaced with a lush forest. People walk past her, chattering happily.

<<Hey, Cali,>> comes a boy's voice out of nowhere. << Glad that you are able to come to Fantascap.>>

Oh, it's Lance, Cali thinks, looking around. But where is he? I don't see him... She slaps herself on the forehead. Duh! Lance is talking in private chat and only I can hear him. He doesn't have to be near me to be able to talk to me.

<<Cali!?!>> comes the boy's voice again, only more urgently this time. <<Are you there!? Are you ok!?!>>

<<Yeah, I am,>> replied Cali.<<Sorry about that, Lance. But why are you so panicky?>>

<<That's ok,>> Lance replies, sounding relieved. <<Glad you're safe-I was afraid a monster got you. There are rumors of group of monsters that suddenly appear out of nowhere and attack players without warning.>>

<<Oh my...>>

<<Don't, Cali,>> Lance assures her. <<I'll protect you. Where are you at?>>

<<The woods near the beginner's tavern,>> Cali answers.

<<Ok,>> Lance says. <<Wait there, and we can play this game together.>>

<<Sounds fun!>> Cali replies. <<I can't wait! I'll see ya here then.>>

Cali meanders around the waiting spot, and looks around.

Wow, she thinks. All this looks too real to be just an online RPG, and with this virtual reality helmet I bought it looks even more real. What an awesome video game...

A young man wearing a black tunic and pants, and dark gray cape approaches her. His short brown hair is somewhat spiky.

She turns and sees him.

"Hey, Lance!" exclaims Cali, running over to him.

“Hey, Calgal!” greets Lance. “Good to see you again!”

“Yeah,” she says. “Even though we go to the same school we don’t get to see each other very often. And this place looks more fun than school.”

“I agree with you on that,” Lance says. “So what do you want to do?”

Before Cali can answer two other players walk toward them. They are in a deep discussion about local rumors that has been posted on the game’s message boards.

One of the adventurers is donned in black armor and is carrying a tall jagged sword.

The other player is wearing bellbottom pants, a hemp necklace, a beret and small round glasses. His brown hair is pulled into a small ponytail.

“Hey, NewageHippie,” says the guy in the black armor

“Yes, DeathHalo?” asks NewageHippie.

“Have you heard about the nasty stuff that’s rumored to be goin’ on in the Count’s Mansion?” asks DeathHalo.

NewageHippie shakes his head. “Nah, man. I only dig peaceful scenes. So I only know about crafts, fletching, cooking, and...”

“Fishing?” asks the player in black armor.

NewageHippie's eyes widen in surprise. "No way, man. Fishing is so cruel. Those poor little fishies, man, I tell ya..."

"Dude, it's just a game," DeathHalo says.

"No way, man, just imagine if you're the fish..." NewageHippie says. "You're a blue little fishy in the big blue sea or river and you're minding your own business when...Wham!" his body jerks to the left. "A net or a cruel hook pulls you on the ground," He drops on the ground suddenly, "and you're left flopping and gasping for air." He flops around and makes gasping noises.

Cali and Lance watch in amazement.

"Stupid hippies...." Lance mutters quietly to himself.

Cali chuckles.

DeathHalo steps aside and shakes his head.

“Yeaahhh...Anywaaay...,” says Death Halo,
“back to those nasty rumors...Ya gotta hear them!”

NewageHippie sits up and folds his arms. “I will
have nothing to do with violence.”

“It’s not violent,” replies DeathHalo.

NewageHippie’s pose doesn’t falter for a second.
“I will have nothing to do with violence.”

“*It’s not violent,*” DeathHalo says, getting
impatient with his friend.

“I will have nothing to do with violence,”
NewageHippie says.

“*It’s not violent,*” DeathHalo growls.

NewageHippie posture doesn't waver. "I will have nothing to do with violence."

DeathHalo grabs him by the collar and growls. "Whether you want it or not, you'll have something to do with violence if you don't shut up and listen."

"I'm all ears, man," replies NewageHippie calmly.

DeathHalo lets go of NewageHippie. "Good..." He clears his throat. "There's a rumor that the eastern manor has a vampire living in its basement and that he lures female players into his abode. Once the poor girls are in there they are never seen again. There are different rumors about the count. Some say that the count's programming code is infected with a virus or that he is a real person like you or me, and because of either one of those instances he can manipulate local

baddies to do his will. They even say if he really wants a particular girl he'll make trees or other inanimate objects come to life to get her into his manor. Then there's....the disappearances of several players...They've only been females, but it's happened at all levels of 'em. Strong and weak...

"You sure they just didn't get bored and leave the game?" asks NewageHippie skeptically.

"Not a chance..." DeathHalo replies in a serious tone. "According to the rumors, the players haven't logged out...They've disappeared into Fantascap, and haven't been seen since. Many people speculate it has to do with the count."

NewageHippie shakes his head.

"Duuuuude...That's so far out...I mean a runaway vamp...spooooky. "

DeathHalo and NewageHippie walk off

chattering about other rumors.

“Well, one thing I don’t want to do,” says Cali, wrapping her arms around herself, “is go to anywhere near that manor.”

“Don’t worry,” he tells her. “You have me to protect you. We should do something so you can get your mind off of those rumors. What do you want to do?”

“Let’s go to the Gob Woods,” replies Cali.

“That’s supposed to be a good place for beginners to level up. We’re both level three and very weak. I want my level to be higher so I won’t have to worry about baddies as much.”

“But you don’t have to worry about them as long as I’m with you...” Lance tells her, sounding a bit disappointed.

“I know...” says Cali in a comforting tone. “I really do appreciate that....I do...but...I still want to be able to protect myself...”

“Alright....” Lance reluctantly agrees.

Once they get to the woods, they see goblins everywhere. Other players are fighting. One of the dying goblins drops some gold, and the other players stop with what they are doing and look at it. They all make a mad dash for the gold. Suddenly, the world freezes and a few minutes later everything’s a blur. When the game gets back to normal, Cali and Lance notice that not only is the gold gone but so are the rest of the players.

“Darn, dialup!” Cali growls. “I hate this lag!”

“Don’t worry about it,” Lance says. “Even though it’s rare for villains to drop gold, you’ll get a chance to get more of it. It seems you can be paid in gold when you sell stuff you find from baddies or by selling stuff you make. They also give gold as rewards for completing some quests.”

“I want some gold so I can buy a better weapons and armor,” replied Cali looking at her small sword, cloth armor, and wooden shield. “These things wouldn’t protect me from a flea.”

Before Lance can respond, a horde of goblins runs over to them. They start throwing jagged daggers at them. One dagger barely misses Cali and hits a tree. The tree withers and dies.

Lance scans the goblins for their levels, and his face turns deathly pale. "Cali, run! They're level 50!"

Cali and Lance run behind a huge boulder, and try to look for a place that leads out of the woods.

"There's not supposed to be any high level baddies here!" Cali exclaims quietly.

"I know!" Lance says. "We can report it later, but right now we need to find a way to escape!"

A goblin hears their voices and throws a dagger at their rock. It instantly melts the rock.

Panic instantly seizes their hearts and their logic escapes them. They dash off in opposite directions.

Growling in anger, the goblin leader forms the horde into two groups. One group chases after Cali while the other goes after Lance.

The villainous pod does not lose time in tracking Cali. Within a few minutes, daggers pour down around Cali like rain, as she zigzags along a dirt path.

I can't let them get me, Cali thinks. They'll kill me in one blow! Cali runs as fast as she can, but the goblins are still close behind her. Out of the corner of her eye, she sees a goblin reaching for a knife. The monster throws it at her, and she quickly lunges to one side to avoid the fatal blow. The knife just barely misses her blond hair. She quickly jerks into the other direction.

Maybe I can lose them in the woods, Cali thinks as she dashes into a sea of dead trees. She hears some rumbling, and increases her pace.

I can't keep this up much longer... She thinks as her legs tremble with fatigue, and within minutes she falls

to the ground. With dread in her eyes, she looks back expecting to see the horde of goblins lunging at her. However, to her surprise, the goblins are gone. She looks around and sees that she is on a small dirt path. Rumbles echo in the distance, and the sky darkens.

Was the rumbling...thunder? Cali wonders. Can it even rain in games?

As if an answer to her question, rain trickles down from the sky

Cali looks around for some shelter. *There's a large house not to far from here. But there's a gate... I wonder I can open it...* She staggers to her feet and walks along the cobblestone path that leads to the gate.

Hmm... She thinks. This gate doesn't look like it's been used a lot with all that moss on the stone posts, and the wrought iron fence is rusty... She taps the gate.

Creaking loudly, it moves a little out of the way.

It's not locked...Cali thinks. I wonder why...

She carefully pushes the gate open, and does her best to ignore the horrible sounds the gate omits. She walks toward the weather worn manor, and knocks on the door and waits.

The sky darkens, and the winds howl as the rain pours down onto the land below.

“Brrrr...” says Cali, her body shaking. “I didn’t know I could feel things in games...The rain...the chill in the wind...is this normal...?” Shivering, she knocks again on the door, but still there is no response. She opens the doors takes a few steps in. The door shuts and locks itself.

She tries to open the doors, but they don't even budge.

<<Cali, are you ok?>> Lance asks worriedly.

<<I'm fine,>> Cali tells him, trying to not sound afraid. <<Are you ok?>>.

<<I'm fine,>> Lance responds, <<I'm in a village called Stonefest. Where are you?>>

<<I'm inside a manor. Did you know there are thunderstorms in this game?>>

<<No,>> replies Lance. << The weather here is nice and calm...We couldn't have gotten too far from each other...What kind of manor is it? Are the people there nice?>>

<<Uh...hehheh...>> Cali laughs nervously. <<I don't know if there is anyone here at all. I knocked, but

no one answered...so I let myself in...and now I'm locked in...and it's dark and kinda creepy... There's cobwebs everywhere, and the place looks like it hasn't been lived in for a long time...>>

<<Alright, I'm gonna ask around to see if anyone knows where you are,>> Lance says. <<Just stay there ok? I'll come to get you as soon as I can.>>

What a place to get stuck in, Cali thinks.

After waiting a while for Lance, Cali walks around the building and sees nothing of interest on the first floor but a flight of stairs.

I wonder what's up there, she thinks. It couldn't possibly hurt to check it out real quick. She inches up the stairs, and looks around. A white transparent ghost floats down the darkened hall. *It's level Thirty-nine! If*

it brushes up against me it could kill me! I gotta get out of here!

As she turns to go downstairs, it quickly materializes in front of her. Panicking, she quickly runs down the hall, and the monster follow close behind her.

I gotta get away from this thing! She thinks. *But how...?* Her eyes dart back and forth along the hallway searching for someplace to go. Suddenly, she spots a slightly opened door. She rushes towards it, and darts into the room. As she closes the door, the ghost passes by. She quickly looks around the room. *Oh, good!* She thought. *There's nothing in here.* She slumps down onto the ground and catches her breath. *I was afraid I would have run into a room with more monsters. I better let Lance know...*

<<Lance....I just saw a local baddie,>> Cali says.

<<What was it?>> Lance says, trying to have his voice sound calm for Cali's sake.

<<A level 39 ghost.>>

<<What!?!>> Lance asks surprised. The calmness in his voice is instantly replaced by panic. << Are you sure?>>

<<Y..yeah.>>

<<Are you ok?>> asks Lance worriedly. <<It didn't see you, did it?>>

<<Yea, it did,>> Cali replies. <<But I think I lost it...>>

<<Ok, stay there and don't move!>> Lance says firmly. <<You're knight is coming to rescue you.>>

My knight...? Cali thinks. Does he really mean that? Could he really be worried, or is he just acting? It'd be nice if he meant it and wanted to be a knight for me...I always wanted to have a guy protect me...Just knowing that someone cares...

Time passes and Cali gets restless. She carefully opens the door, and looks to see if there are any baddies around. Seeing none she carefully starts to explore the second floor of the building. She walks down to the southern rooms, and opens a creaky door. She cautiously walks around on the musty stone floor, and sees rotting corpses chained to the wall.

Ok, I don't want to be here...Cali thinks. I'll just turn around and leave...

A level fifty banshee suddenly appears. Its eye sockets glow blood red as it sees her. As it flies toward

her, Cali runs toward a door. However, as she gets closer to it, a skeleton lying on the floor rises up on its bony feet and lumbers over to the door.

“Great level a fifty banshee behind me,” Cali mutters to herself, “and a level forty-seven skeleton in front of me... Just one hit from either one and I’m dead!”

She looks around the room sees a flight of stairs in a dark corner of the room.

If I can make it up those stairs before they hit me, I’ll be safe, she thinks.

She runs with all her strength toward it. As she is inches away from reaching the stairs, the banshee swipes its ghostly hand at Cali. Cali lunges toward the stairs and barely misses the fatal attack. Quickly she

scrambles up the stairs and scans the floor. No baddies are in sight. She takes a deep breath and lies there for a while.

It's a good thing monsters can't chase me up levels,
Cali thinks. *Or I'd be a goner!*

After she catches her breath, Cali gets to her feet and looks around. At the end of an empty corridor there is an ancient redwood door. She walks over to it and carefully opens it. She sees a man wearing a lab coat. He walks around a chemistry set, mumbling to himself.

“H...hullo?” stammers Cali, not really sure if she should even talk to him.

The mad scientist turns around.

“What are you doing here?” he asks, surprised to see her. “No one is able to enter the count’s mansion without his knowing...I see...he must have led you here.” He murmurs things under his breath that she can’t understand.

<< Lance....>> Cali says. <<There’s a mad scientist in the mansion...>>

<<You moved away from your safe spot!? Why?!>> Lance demands.

<<I got bored...>> Cali says sheepishly.

Lance sighs. << I’m still asking people here in town where you may be at, and so far no one has been able to help me. So just wait there, ok?>>

<<I think I know where I am,>> Cali says tentatively.

<<How?>> asks Lance.

<<The mad scientist says that I'm in the Count's mansion,>> says Cali.

<<What!? Ok, stay there!>> Lance exclaims, barely being able to hold in his fear. <<I'll find you and help you. Just stay there!>>

<<Ok,>> says Cali quietly.

Lance starts running around town. "Can anyone show me a way to get to the Count's mansion?"

A player in inky black armor turns to Lance.

"Why are you asking about that place?"

"My friend is trapped there," Lance replies. "She just started today, and there are high level baddies in there, and she can't get out."

“This is serious,” the guy says, his eyes narrowing. “Only the most advanced players should go in there, and even then there are no guarantees that they will survive.”

“You mean the Count is really a baddie?” Lance asks, consternated.

“Not just a baddie,” he says. “He’s the boss of the area.”

Unicess

Dark green foliage hung overhead as a young man treaded through the dense lush forest until he reached a clearing where a clear azure river flowed serenely through the forest. He walked to it, and looked around in wonder.

This whole forest seems to be enchanted. He thinks. The leaves on the tree were the healthiest shade of green I have ever seen. And all throughout the forest plants have these exotic looking flowers have the most curious shapes...and the trees sparkle as if fairies have spread their magical dust over them...And there are all these otherworldly noises that sound more like music than animals. He saw some bushes and hid in them while watching the river.

This water brings life into the forest, but that's not the only thing it brings, the man thought. Rumors speak of

unicorns coming here to purify the water daily. If that's true then...

Suddenly, the sound of hooves echoed through the forest. Within seconds, two unicorns danced into the river as the melodious noises in the woods became even more beautiful and vibrant than ever.

I don't believe it, the man thought. The rumors are true! So all my travels have not been in vain....

He watched as their silvery forms mingled with the mist that was forming. Their golden horns shimmered like a lighthouse's light. The two unicorns faced each other and walked slowly toward the other. They touched horns, and then knelt in the water. Their horns dipped into the water, and the water took on a heavenly glow. When it faded, the river became an even clearer shade of light blue.

Suddenly the sparkles from the trees flew to the unicorns and soon they were covered in them. They separated their horns and got up. Rearing, they let out a sound that was more of laugh than a neigh and ran off into the misty woods.

The man remained where he was for a few moments, too amazed at what he saw to move. Then he came out of his stupor, and walked over to the river. He took out ten his flasks, and filled all of them with the water that the unicorns purified.

When the flasks were filled, he left the forest. He walked for quite lost in thought. *Those unicorns...just seeing them made me feel all peaceful and happy inside...When I'm done with this mission, maybe I'll go back and see if I can find them again.* He walked for a

long time on a long dusty old road. At dusk he came upon a village, and he headed toward the inn.

There he saw two men pulling bags off a cart and carrying them into the inn. The older of the two was portly and growing bald, what hair he had left was black.

“Careful, not to push yourself too hard, Brandon,” said the older man as he lifted five bags.

“I’ll be careful, sir,” said Brandon. “You be careful too. You’re not as spry as you used to be.”

The older man laughed. “Aye, that’s true. But no worries. I’ll be fine.” He noticed Angus. “What can I do for you, sir?”

“I’m looking for the innkeeper,” said Angus.

“Well, you found ‘im,” said the man. What can I do ya fer?”

“I’d like a room for the night and some dinner,” replied the man, handing the owner a small pouch of money. He took down his green hood, and shook his head. His black hair flowed down to his shoulders and his bangs fell just past his deep brown eyes.

“Follow me,” said the innkeeper. He walked into the inn and put down his bags. He walked directly behind the counter and opened a drawer. He took out a key with a room number on it. “Here’s yer room key.” Then he turned to the young boy. “Hey, Brandon.”

“Yes, sir?” asked Brandon.

“Bring our guest some roast and some of Mrs. Klimer’s juice,” said the inn-keeper, who showed Angus to an empty table.

“Yes, sir!” said Brandon.

A few minutes had past, and Brandon came in with the meal. He placed it before the man, and went on cleaning the other tables.

A few other people came in from outside and ordered meals and rooms. One of whom was a bard. After he had his meal, the group asked him if he would sing for the tavern.

Smiling, he went to the fireside and took out his harp. He started to thrum it and sang in a sweet tenor voice. The song was about unicorns and about the guardians that lived with them.

The people clapped.

A little girl approached the bard, and tugged on his long sleeve. "Are there any unicorns left, sir?"

"Alas no," said the bard. "They are like the song-made up."

Little do they know, thought Angus. His memories of the unicorns made him form a smile on his chapped lips.

"That's sad," said the little girl, "I wanted to see them."

"Well, chances are that even if they existed," said the bard, "the guardian might have stopped you unless you have pure intentions of entering the woods."

"Who's the guardian?" asked the girl.

“Legends speak of a particular guardian that guards a particular herd. They say it’s a beautiful maiden with long golden curls and azure eye. Nothing other than that has been mentioned about her except she protects the unicorns with her life...”

The man thought about this remark. He had seen the unicorns, but no maiden. He wanted to go back to look for her, but he couldn’t just yet.

“Alright,” said the inn-keeper. “It’s about eleven. Time to call it a night.”

The crowd dispersed, and Angus went to his room. He sat down and thought about everything that happened today.

What to do...He wondered. Ever since I left that forest I have a longing for something, but what? What in my life is missing? After this mission, I will be rewarded

handsomely, and the extra bottles of water I can sell to make a small fortune. But can I find what my heart longs for with money? Is it even in this world? A part of me longs to stay in the forest and live with the unicorns. Being there, seeing them frolic had made me feel so peaceful and happy. Nearly everything outside of that experience seemed to pale in comparison.

In the mourning, Angus continued toward his destination which took him a week to reach it. It was a large kingdom, when he entered in it was deathly quiet, and there wasn't a single person in sight. He walked over to the fountain that was in the middle of the city, and poured the water from one of the bottles into the fountain. Immediately the fountain glowed with a special kind of radiance. The murkiness of the water succumbed to the special water, and within a

minute it was all a shade of crystal blue. Near the well, there was a bell attached to a wooden pole. He went over to it and rang it.

Doors slowly opened up, and people crawled to the fountain so they could drink the healing water. Those that drank it were instantly healed, and they helped others reach the fountain.

While this was happening, Angus rushed to the castle and ran past two guards that were sprawled on the ground. They too had been struck by the sickness that was caused by the cursed water. Angus rushed to the king's bed. There on the bed was a deathly thin king whose pale wrinkles made him look like an unraveled mummy. The man poured some of the healing water down the king's throat. After a couple of seconds, the king's eyes opened.

“Wha-? Oh, you made it,” the king said. His heath already seemed to be returning to him. His wrinkles vanished and he wasn’t looking as thin as he was a second ago. “Thank Goodness! Please take the healing water to my wife and daughter!”

The man took the water to them, and they completely too recovered. Once everyone in the kingdom was back to their normal selves, the king and the man started talking.

“I can’t thank you enough for what you’ve done,” said the king. “You saved my family and my kingdom. I shall always be grateful to you for that!”

“I’m glad I made it back in time,” said Angus.

“Before I give you your reward, will you tell me your name?” asked the king.

“My name is Angus,” replied the man. “And I don’t need any reward, your majesty.”

“Nonsense!” exclaimed the king. He then motioned for one of his guards to come toward him.

“Yes milord?” asked the guard, bowing before the king.

“Bring me back a big bag filled with gems, gold and silver from my treasury,” said the king.

The guard hurried away to do his task.

“Now, Angus,” said the king. “You just wait till he gets back! Then I’ll make sure you get a reward proper for your service!”

“But your majesty....” Angus started to protest.

“But nothing, lad,” said the king. “You deserve something for your troubles.”

After awhile, the guard came back and gave the bag to Angus.

“Now since it is almost night,” said the king. “I insist you stay until the morning.” said the king.

“As you wish, your majesty,” said Angus.

“Take this young man to one of our finest rooms,” said the king.

The guard led Angus to his room.

The king went over to his messenger, and told him to tell the people to meet at the Gathering Site for tomorrow. The messenger left.

After Angus woke up, he started to get ready to leave. Then someone knocked on the door.

“Come in,” said Angus.

A servant came in with some new clothes. A royal blue tunic and pants made of soft yet durable fabric, and a pair of brand new boots.

“A gift from the king. After you put them on, I am to escort you to the Gathering site.” Then the servant closed the door.

Angus smiled, and put on the new clothes. He followed the servant and was amazed to see at what he saw. The entire kingdom had gathered there. The servant led him across the platform, and right up to the outdoor throne. They stood beside the king.

“Kneel before me, Angus,” said the king, and Angus kneeled. “I, King Hessar, dub thee, Sir Angus, Bringer of the Healing Water.” He touched Angus’s shoulders with his sword. “Rise, Sir Angus.”

As Angus rose, the crowd cheered.

“Now!” said the king. “For the celebration feast!”

The king sat at the head of the table beside his wife, and Angus sat beside the Princess. From there it was knights, to guards, to servants, to citizens. They ate, drank, and talked for hours.

After the meal and the general dismissal, the royal family and Angus went back inside. They went to the library to talk for a while.

“Now, my lad,” said the king. “I have also arranged to give you a fine steed to keep. I am also aware that some of the ladies in the kingdom have taken a liking to you. You are welcome to marry any single lady you so desire.”

“Thank you, your majesty,” said Angus. “But I don’t know any of them, so I really couldn’t choose.”

“Understandable,” said the king. “I also want to make sure that you know that you are free to go anytime you wish. The knight title was just one of your awards. You’re not indebted to stay.”

“Thank you, your majesty,” said Angus.

“Oh, Sir Angus,” said the princess. “How did you find the healing water?”

“Well...” said Angus.

“Yes, do tell us your story,” said the king. “I’d like to know how you knew where to go.”

“Well, your majesties,” said Angus. “I asked some healers about healing water in general, and they

told me where they got theirs. So I followed their directions, and found it.”

“Oh, you’re being modest,” said the queen.

“Didn’t you have any trouble getting the water?”

“None at all,” replied Angus.

“Amazing!” exclaimed the king. “Your adventure was filled with uncommon luck! Well, we have to go about the kingdom to see all the people that need our help. We shall return before evening, but you are free to leave anytime or stay as long as you wish.”

As they left, Angus’s mind wandered back to the legend that the bard had sung about. He walked around the expansive library and finally found a section with myths and legends. He looked at the books, and saw a book called Mystical Creatures. He

carried the large book to a table and started reading.

After hours of reading, Angus drifted off to sleep.

Angus was back in the forest where he first saw the unicorns. He heard the sound of hooves, and he hid behind a gigantic tree that had a kind of velvety moss around it. As he watched the unicorns play, he noticed that nothing out of the ordinary happened for a while, but then a young woman came towards the unicorns.

She was a tall and slender with long golden curls and blue eyes. Her fair skin was mostly concealed by a silvery gown that had intricate designs on it. It was so long that it reached her bare feet.

The unicorns saw the girl and walked up to her. She stroked their heads, and seemed to be speaking to them in a musical tongue. The unicorns neighed

playfully at her, and pranced around as if asking her to play with them.

The maiden laughed. Her laugh was the most beautiful laugh he had ever heard. It was the kind of laugh that calmed the soul and made whoever hears it have this strange peacefulness.

Suddenly to his amazement, the maiden instantly turned into a unicorn with gold mane and a golden tail. The three unicorns ran off to a meadow.

He stealthily followed them to where they went. A unicorn herd approached the three unicorns that he had been watching. An older unicorn approached the golden haired unicorn. They touched horns and then neighed. Then the three unicorns joined the herd of silvery unicorns.

Suddenly a dark shadow covered the meadow. A band of hunters had managed to break into the forest, and started to shoot at the unicorns. The herd scattered, but several of the unicorns were hit. The golden haired unicorn paced back and forth among the dead as if she was unsure if she should go with the herd or stay and help the victims. One of the hunters took aim at her, and was about to fire when Angus ran over and pounced on him. Angus was atop of the hunter he was about to pummel him when another hunter took aim at him and fired.

Angus awoke with a start. He was back in the library. He sighed with relief and flipped through the book till he reached a section about unicorns.

It read: Unicorns are beautiful creatures. They usually look like horses with a single horn on their

foreheads. These horns are rumored to have special powers, and it is said that one who cuts a unicorn's horn off, fills it with water, and drinks it will be healed of any disease. And if a person were to have a piece of the horn stuck in their heart would let them live forever. The hooves of unicorns could be used to make powders that could also heal people, get rid of wrinkles; heal any skin disease, and any skin problems. Their hair is so fine that the rich would pay handsomely if they could have something woven from unicorn hair.

Then there are the guardians of the unicorns. Some say they are different mythical creatures or even humans themselves that can turn into unicorns in some unknown way. One such guardian has been labeled Unicess. Not much is known about this

guardian except that it is a young maiden with a fair complexion, long, golden, curly hair, and blue eyes.

No one knows how she came to be with them, but she protects them with her life. She can also turn into a unicorn at will.

That sounds like the girl from my dream, thought Angus.

“Well, well,” said a gruff voice.

Angus looked up and saw a rather muscular man looking down at him. He had black hair, a black beard, and dark gray eyes. He wore an interesting garment that resembled chain mail. He wore a leather belt that held a hunter’s horn.

“Who are you?” asked Angus.

“I am Lord Reynold of the Sisko Shire,” replied the man. He looked at the book that was in Angus’s hand. “I didn’t know that men like you were interested in girly things.”

Angus ignored that remark with great difficulty.

“What do you want, milord?”

“I was told that a Sir Angus was in here,” said Lord Reynold. “Have you seen him?”

“I am he,” replied Angus.

“I heard you have your own story about the healing water,” said Lord Reynold, ignoring Angus’s excuse. “Tell me how you found the water.”

Kapu

“No! It can’t be!” cried Kaelin, jumping back. His hands were slicked with so much sweat that he was barely able to hold onto his river-blue sword. His silver eyes widened in terror as his cerulean hair nearly stood on end.

It’s Malvei! But he was supposed to be vanquished over three millennia ago! How could he here now?! Kaelin’s mind raced trying to figure out what to do next.

His instincts told him to flee, but to where? The shadows in the forest would provide no sanctuary, after all the fiend thrives on darkness. He could try to retreat, but he had a mission to complete. But still if he

was killed, the mission would be a failure...and his sister would never be found...

The fiend took a step closer to Kaelin. Instantly Kaelin could feel his energy seep from him like grains of sand from an hour glass. Icy fear gripped his terror-stricken heart so intensely that Kaelin's grip weakened on his sword, and it fell from his hands.

Malvei's shadow slowly started to enclose the terrified youth.

Before it had completely covered him, Kaelin took out a photo of a teenage girl with lilac hair and purple eyes. He held it with both hands and gazed at it lovingly.

*Sister...I wish I could have found you...He thought.
But at least I know that you are alive...Tears streamed*

down his eyes as he tore the picture into shreds of shimmering paper. *And I shall make sure that he never finds you...Kapu...*

“Kapu?” asked the professor.

“Here,” Kapu replied, rising up her slender arm.

“Alright, that’s everybody,” said Mr. Holden, “Now we can get to today’s lesson.” He walked across the room to a tall shelf. He took down a small purple circular container from the top shelf, and turned to address the class. His jet black bangs nearly touched the rim of his silver glasses. His gray eyes eagerly peered at his students, as he revealed to them the object he retrieved for the class. “We will learn how to

shrink things using this powder, adeptly named Minimizing Powder or M.P.”

“Oh boy!” said Takain, as he rolled his russet eyes. Shaking his head, his spiky hair hardly budged. “Shrinking! This ought to be interesting.”

Mr. Holden walked over to Takain. “So you don’t think learning to shrink things will be fun?”

“About as much fun as watching a worm eat,” said Takain.

The class chuckled.

“In that case,” said Mr. Holden, smiling wryly. “I suppose you don’t mind if I shrink you?”

“Shrink me?!” Takain’s eyes widened in surprise.

“Will do,” said Mr. Holden.

“Wait!” exclaimed Takain, but Mr. Holden had already blown some small lilac M.P. crystals on him.

Instantly a purple spiral encaged Takain. The never ending spiral moved slowly at first, but it gradually picked up speed until it became one large purple blur.

“Wow,” said Kapu. Her lilac dress was blowing in the breeze that the spiral created. Her dark purple eyes widened in amazement. “That’s one long spiral.”

Finally, the spiral faded, and there on Takain’s chair was a miniature Takain.

“Hey!” said the boy who shared the table with Takain. “His clothes shrunk along with him! I thought he’d be in a big pile of clothing.”

“A very good observation, Benjamin,” said Mr. Holden. “Not only does this powder minimize the person’s atoms but that also of whatever the person has with them at the time. Likewise, when I bring him back to his normal size, he along with anything that he is wearing or holding will also go back to its original size.”

“Cool!” exclaimed Benjamin.

“Yes,” said Mr. Holden. “Our technology has come quite far.”

“Make me normal!” squeaked the small Takain.

“Alright!” said Mr. Holden. He closed the M.P. container, and put it back at his table. He then picked up a blue container. “This is a Restoring Powder or R.P. It will do many things including unshrinking Mr.

Takain, here.” He opened the container and bent down. “Ready, Takain?”

“Yes!” Takain exclaimed.

Mr. Holden blew the azure powder toward his shrunken student, causing a sky blue spiral to envelop Takain, and within seconds Takain was back to normal.

Takain patted himself, making sure that he really was back to normal.

“Now,” said Mr. Holden, “with those two powders you just blow them toward the object you want to shrink or return back to normal. Don’t touch it though, or you may be affected too.”

A bird flew into the classroom and hit the gong with its beak.

“Alright, class,” said the teacher. “That’s the gong. Proceed to the next part of your schedule.”

A group of giggling girls left the building first.

“That was so cool!” cried Lauralee, one of the girls in the group. “Did you see Takain’s face as he shrunk?” She flipped her long auburn hair and batted her russet eyes.

Boys quickly flew over to her and made a fuss over her.

“It was so funny!” said Lorinna. Her light brown bangs flowed past her chestnut eyes. “I wish I had a Remembering Stone with me at the time! That way I would always have a recording of that moment!” She giggled again.

“I didn’t think it was funny,” snapped Takain.

“How would you like it if I shrunk you?”

“Remembering Stones are so cool,” said

Lauralee, ignoring Takain. “They can record anything that goes on around them, and display it back in a 3-D hologram without flaw.”

“Hmph!” said Takain, stomping off.

The girls giggled.

“What’s your next class, Kapu?” Magenta asked as she brushed her magenta colored hair.

“Multiple Tongues,” replied Kapu.

A few boys walked past the group of girls.

“Hey,” said Lauralee, looking at the boys that just past by. “Isn’t that boy with the sandy brown hair and eyes, Larate, Kapu’s crush?”

Kapu blushed.

“Why, yes,” said Lorinna. “And he’s also in her Multiple Tongues Class.”

“Ooooh!” said Lauralee. “I see a potential relationship!”

“Hey, look!” said Kapu, trying to change the subject. “The warriors are back from training!”

A small group of armor clad people were dragging weapons at their sides. They sat down on some flat-sided rocks. A few of the warriors leaned their heads on the hilts of their weapons.

“I’m glad I’m not a warrior,” said Lorinna. “Look how beat they look.”

“And getting wounded just at practice!” said Magenta.

“And wearing all that armor,” said Kapu. “It would be so hard to move.”

“Not to mention you get all dirty, sweaty, your hair gets messy, and you smell terrible,” said Lauralee. “How uncouth.”

Suddenly a man clad in chain mail went over to the group. The warriors jumped up as he approached them.

“You, you, and you,” said the man. “Come with me.”

The three selected warriors marched quickly out of the courtyard, following their instructor. After they were gone from sight, the remaining students sat back down.

“Two girls and a guy,” said Magenta. “I wonder how the girls can carry a broadsword and a spear.”

“I wonder where they’re going,” said Kapu.

Suddenly a little ringing sound came from Lauralee. She reached into her pocket and pulled out a round golden watch. “Oh no! I only have two minutes to get to math class! See you gals at lunch!” She rushed off.

“Hey, her class starts the same time as ours!” exclaimed Kapu. “We better hurry or we’ll be late!”

Kapu and her friends rushed to their class room. They had barely made it in when the gong bird flew in. They rushed to their seats just as the gong bird hit the gong with his beak.

Their teacher, Mr. Parle, walked in and put his books on his desk and faced the class. "Today, class, we will begin a new language," he said. "But first I have new seating arrangements for all of you."

The class cheered.

Mr. Parle picked up a piece of paper. "Table one: Macha and Greenly. Table two: Lalu and Lecca. Table three: Rouge and Lorna. Table four: Naej and Aren. Table five: Whel and Leal. Table six: Kapu..."

Oh please, oh please, God, she pleaded. Let me sit by Larate.

"...and Larate," said Mr. Parle.

Thank you, thank you, thank you! Kapu thanked God.

Larate, who wore a dark brown tunic, walked over to the table.

“Table seven: Lorinna and Magenta.” The two girls walked over to the table. “Now, we’ll begin with the language. During the next following months, I will teach you the language of Berat. First, we’ll begin with the simple conversations. Since Berat is a very hostile and war-like country, with which we hope to make peace with, you will have to be careful with what you say. For instance, if you say hello or hi there, you’ll be killed instantly.”

The students gasped.

“Instead you say, ‘who dares to walk before me?’ said Mr. Parle. “As you see, it uses our same words but since it’s crucial to use them correctly we added it to the Multiple Tongues course. Now, let’s continue on

with the lesson. Let's say if I wanted to answer the question I had previously asked, I'd reply thusly: 'It is, I, Mr. Parle who dares!'"

Suddenly a loud wailing noise sounded throughout the classroom.

As students started to panic, Mr. Parle quickly took action.

"Everybody get in a single file line, and head directly to the meeting place."

They quickly obeyed him, and hurried toward the woods. There other teachers and students from various classes were waiting and chatting nervously. In front of all of them were a group of warriors with their weapons at ready. Although, just students, they

were ready and willing to protect them from any possible danger.

A tall female knight rode out toward them on horseback. Her long black hair went past her metal clad shoulders, and her gray eyes scanned the group. "It's alright. It is just a drill." She said to everybody, and then she turned her attention to the warriors. "Have them stay here until you receive orders to let them in. The High Office of the ville will make an announcement that everybody will be able to hear."

The warriors nodded, and the lady rode off. Soon after that, a little melodious ring came forth from the ville.

"This was just a drill. You all did very well. Everybody may go back to what they were doing."

The warriors put back their weapons, and made sure that everybody was on their way back to the ville.

When Mr. Parle and his students reached their classroom, he instructed them to be seated.

“You all did very well just now,” he said, “I’m proud of you all.”

“Mr. Parle?” asked Rouge. “What would have happened if it was real?”

“Well,” said Mr. Parle, “while we would be waiting in the woods, the head scout would be close to the city to determine the winner and...”

“What do you mean?” asked Naej.

“I mean,” said Mr. Parle, “that the head scout would be carefully watching the ongoing battle. If we were loosing, the head scout would come back and tell

other scouts, then they would tell us the outcome, as well as the other groups of people in hiding.”

“What would we do then?” asked Aren.

“We would go to the castle,” replied Mr. Parle.

The gong bird flew in and hit the gong with its beak, and the class was over.

“Class...” Mr. Parle started to say, but was interrupted by the stampede of his students rushing out the door, “dismissed.” He finished.

“Excuse me, Mr. Parle?” asked Kapu, who had a troubled look on her face.

“Kapu, what can I do for you?”

“What would happen if the castle was taken over?”

“Try not to worry about that for now,” said Mr. Parle. “We have good warriors here so we wouldn’t lose a battle. As for the castle, it has even more skilled warriors and knights to protect it. So you see no need to worry.”

Kapu went out to meet her friends so they could eat lunch together. When they got the food they wanted, they went to the square and sat down at a table.

There were two warriors guarding the square. They were there to make sure no fights started and to check for any intruders.

“So what did you guys think of the drill?” asked Lauralee. “I thought it was for real.”

“You and our entire class,” said Magenta. “I’m glad it was just a drill.”

“Hey, Kapu,” said Lauralee. “What’s the matter? You haven’t eaten anything.”

“She’s probably too happy about her new table mate in Multiple Tongues,” said Lorinna. “It’s Larate.”

Magenta shook her head. “If that was the case, then why is she so gloomy looking?”

“You’re right,” said Lorinna. “What’s wrong, Kapu?”

“Well...” said Kapu, “that drill got me thinking. What would we do if our ville and our castle get taken over?”

The Legendary Hero

“Battle stations!” roared the king, rising from his throne. “And the rest of you,” the king said to his children, my friends, and me, “will follow the guards to safety.”

“Me?” I asked.

“Yes, you!” the king said.

“But, Your Majesty...” I started to protest.

“But nothing,” the king said. “I’m the king, I make the rules around here, and I order you to...”
Before he could finish, an evil looking man broke the doors down. “Vortex!” The king growled.

Vortex had raven black hair, a dusky tinted beard, gray dismal eyes, and wore a long smoky colored robe-like uniform. He walked right into the

room as if he owned it. A horde of demons followed after him.

“Ahhh, King Stieress, why do you try to avoid the inevitable?” Vortex asked the king, in a casual manner. He then noticed us. “I didn’t know the ex-king entertained *children*.” He narrowed his eyes.

“Trying to find a new job as babysitter since you’re no longer a king?” He strolled toward my friends and me.

“I am still king!” the king declared. “And as king, I demand that you leave my kingdom at once!”

“Such a brave speech,” Vortex chuckled, looking gravely at the king, “considering you have no hero to protect you.” He smirked, walking closer to the king.

“I sent one of my creatures to slay her. Even if your hero was still alive, I have the Dark Elements- the Dark Crystal and the Dark Orb.”

So this is the creep who wanted me dead, I thought,
carefully watching him.

“And we both know,” Vortex said, “that the hero wouldn't even last a second if she came close to them. They would have a certain affect on her...” he replied, unpocketing a pure black crystal that reeked of evil.

Once he drew it out, I suddenly got dizzy and weak. I fell to my knees, and leaned against the wall.

Vortex happened to see me at that time, and he turned toward the king.

“Well, well, well,” Vortex said, “Stieress, have you been holding out on me? It looks like we have the hero here after all,” he announced. Glaring, he pointed at me. “You are foolish to even think that you could beat me and my army!” He pointed crystal at my face.

A horrible feeling engulfed me as I slumped on the floor. I could feel my strength being drained out of me.

Vortex drew closer to me and put the crystal on my right cheek. At that instant my entire body felt like it was on fire, and soon blackness engulfed me. It seemed like I was lost in the void forever when suddenly, I felt intense pain surging throughout my entire body.

“Uunh,” I groaned, stirring a bit.

I felt a bolt of anguish hit my body all at once. Moaning, I tried to curl up in a little ball, but firm hands held me still. The pain ebbed.

“Did we achieve our goal, or did our work nearly kill her?” I heard a soft voice ask.

“Wait and see,” replied another voice.

I slowly opened my eyes and saw concerned heads hovering over me.

“Thank goodness you're alive!” Terril exclaimed, looking relieved.

The king sighed with relief. “We were afraid you wouldn't make it.”

“Where am I?” I asked weakly. “Where are my friends?”

“You're in the healing chambers,” the queen replied.

“Your friends were abducted by Vortex,” replied the princess.

“I have to rescue them!” I exclaimed. I tried to sit up, but somebody stopped me.

“You're in no condition to go on a rescue mission,” a woman told me. She was wearing a long white robe-like uniform. She had a gentle look in her silver eyes. Her silvery, wavy hair touched her shoulders.

“Who are you?” I asked.

“I am a healer,” she replied, smiling at me, “You couldn't save them. Vortex has The Dark Elements, and you saw what they did to you. You wouldn't last a second against them.”

“We'll try to send some soldiers who are brave enough to go over there,” said the king, “but that might take a while...”

“I can't wait that long,” I said. “They're in danger!”

“You just focus on getting healed,” said the king.
“You can’t help them in the condition you are in.”

“How long will I be here?” I asked the healer.

“Three days,” she answered.

“Great,” I muttered. “King Stieress, what happened after I lost conscious?”

“I have a Remembering Stone here,” said the king, placing it on a stand. “It’ll show you everything that happened.”

Suddenly a 3-D image appeared, and I saw what happened.

Once I had fallen, Terril lashed out at Vortex with his staff. Vortex, however, dodged his blow and grabbed the staff. After he struck Terril with it, he cast the staff aside and pocketed the crystal.

Suddenly June rammed into Vortex and knocked him down.

“Curse you, girl!” growled Vortex. He grabbed June by the arm and pushed her over to his minions. One of Vortex's evil vampires seized June from behind.

Beth was rushing over to help her when two other vampires pounced on her.

“I'll leave you and your family alone for now,” Vortex said, “but just so you can agonize about what tortures I will have in store for your entire kingdom. And there's nothing you can do to stop me!” he added, cackling. Then he and his army left, taking my friends along with them.

After their departure, Terril came to and staggered to his feet. He walked over to where I was

laying and knelt down by me. Placing his hand on my neck, he frowned.

The king and queen came over and stood beside him.

“Is she dead?” the king softly asked.

“No, but she will be if we don’t get her to a healer immediately,” Terril replied firmly.

The king ordered two of the soldiers to get a stretcher to put me on. When they came back, they picked me up, placed me on the stretcher, and carried me off to the healing chamber.

The image faded, and the king put the Remembering Stone in his pocket. “That’s what happened. Don’t worry about you’re friends. We’ll

think of a way to save them. You just get some rest and recover.”

I nodded and closed my eyes.

Oh, Lord, I silently prayed. Please let me know how my friends are...someday...please tell me...

When I finally drifted off to sleep, I had a horrible dream.

My friends were chained to a bloodstained and mossy wall, and a dark shadow loomed over them. It was Vortex.

“You will be perfect bait!” laughed Vortex.

“Once that hero knows that you are here, she will rush to your aide, and when she does my plan will spring into action!” He laughed vilely.

“What do you have planned!?!” Beth demanded.

“Wouldn’t you like to know!” He jeered. “Do you think I’m stupid? If I tell you, you would tell her. I don’t like people who want to spoil my plans!” He took out a black jagged dagger and slit Beth's cheek.

“Leave her alone!” roared June.

“Another bold one!” Vortex hissed. “You children are so annoying! You need to learn your lessons. I’ll think of other ways to punish you after my dinner. Until then.” He walked out and shut the door.

Once he was gone, June asked Beth if she was all right.

“Yeah, it's a small slit,” Beth replied. “I wonder if Chris is still alive.”

“I'm sure she is,” June assured her. “Vortex wouldn’t be scheming if she was dead.”

“Yeah, but, you saw how she reacted when he pulled out that crystal,” Beth said sadly.

“Yeah, she acted as if it was draining the life out of her....” June said miserably.

“I told her I didn't like her being a hero. That it would get her killed!” Beth cried. “But she didn't care! She said she had to help them at all costs!” she started to sob.

After a long time had passed, Vortex returned with some of his monsters. He sneered darkly at my friends.

My dream was suddenly shattered by the sound of Terril's concerned voice and the shaking of my body.

“Thank goodness, I've woken you up in time!”

he said nervously, as he stopped shaking me.

“Why were you shaking me?” I asked, in a daze.

“You were having a nightmare,” he answered. “I had to wake you up!”

“You knew I was having a nightmare?” I questioned.

“You were tossing and turning,” he explained.

“Why didn't you just let me sleep through it?” I asked. “It's not like they are dangerous.”

“Maybe not in your world, but here they are,” he told me. “Somehow villains have mastered the black art of dream witchery. Such techniques make whatever happens in dreams affects dreamer. It first happened in our kingdom when the Vortex's invasion was first

upon us. Just a week ago someone died sleeping. His wife said he was having a nightmare, but she didn't try to rouse him until she noticed that he had slept in far too late. When she went to his side he was dead," he went on. "Several similar instances have been reported since then. Now you know the danger. Just to be on the safe side you should tell me what yours was about."

I told him everything.

"It seems like you and your friends are in grave danger," Terril said grimly. "I've have a meeting with the king soon. I'll tell him about it then. We will think of a way to save your friends. Don't worry. Just focus on recovering."

After another day went by, Terril came into the healing room.

“Just checking to see how you were doing,” he said.

“I’m feeling better,” I told him. “However my friends are in still danger, and I have to wait one more day here.”

“Soon you’ll be able to go out and save them,” Terril told me. “Oh, by the by, Princess Siba wants to see you. She wanted to make sure you were up to talking.”

“I am,” I told him.

He nodded and called the princess in, and then left.

She entered with a troubled look on her face

“What’s wrong?” I asked, while doing my best to sit up.

“I came down here to see how you were doing,” she said, “We have been really worried, and have been praying that you would have a fast recovery...” She glanced down to the floor, trying to hide her tears.

“Princess, is there something else that’s bothering you?” I asked.

“Yes,” she replied. “I’ve been worried about this since the encounter you had with Vortex... It’s about what would happen if Vortex comes when you’re still not fully recovered!” she added, bursting into tears.

I took a deep breath and sighed. “Princess, I’m doing much better. I’m not doing as bad as you think I am.”

She looked relieved. “I’m so glad to hear that! Oh, father wanted me to give you these.” She handed

me some items, "This," she said pointing to the dragon armlet, "will give you contact to any good dragon anywhere near you."

"This?" I inquired pointing to a griffon necklace.

"That lets you be invisible," she told me, "and this," she said, pointing to a golden ring that had two wolf heads facing each other, "allows you to have keen eyesight, hearing, sensing, and swift movement," she replied. "All are tokens of our gratitude."

"Thank you," I said. I put on the dragon armlet and the wolf ring, and pocketed the griffon necklace.

"It's happening!" A healer ran down toward us, panting heavily. "Vortex and his sinister mob have come for the kingdom!" He closed the door quickly and locked it.

“What are we going to do?” inquired the frightened princess.

“You two are going to hide somewhere where he can't find you,” I told them. “Best to hide in different areas, you have less of a chance of being found that way.

“What about you?” she asked.

Loud and heavy footsteps were heard from the stairs that led to our room. The monsters were at the door in no time, and they were pounding at the door so heavily that it shook so violently that I thought it would shatter.

“Don't worry about me,” I said. “You two go hide before it's too late!” I said, unpocketing the necklace.

The two of them hid in the room.

“Hope this necklace works,” I said as I slipped it
on.

The door splintered and fell to the floor in pieces.

The monsters swarmed into the room.

Fated Lovers

Everyone in the tavern stood still too afraid to move. The wailing of the sirens filled the whole town.

“Jack....” Tala says. Her long blond bangs nearly hide the tears that are welling up in her azure eyes.

Jack casts his head down in sadness as tears flow from his hazel eyes. He shakes his head his black hair wisps upward trying to capture any moment of solace it can get.

“Don’t worry. Remember,” he says. “We are trained for this.” He rushes out of the tavern, and towards the guard tower where a large group of soldiers have gathered. One man who wore green plate armor paced in front of the group.

There’s the captain, Jack thought, as he ran into his assigned position.

“Alright,” says the captain, “remember aim for the fleshy part of the beast, and when you see it coming toward us-which you will- brace yourself for impact! We have to save the town at all cost! Now, get into your assigned locations and arm yourselves!”

Jack runs to his spot, takes out a crossbow and knocks an arrow in it.

The guard tower starts to shake. A huge scaly monster tears through the farmland section of their village. The creature’s monstrous form is similar to that of Komodo dragon. From its massive scaly maw, it spews its vile breath into the town. The fumes reach the livestock first, within minutes the animals fall over and start convulsing.

The giant lizard’s slimy tongue coils around a cow, and quickly pulls it into its mouth. As it swallows

it whole, nearby villagers scream and run off into the commerce section of town.

The monster's pitch black eyes follow the movement of the villagers. A flicker of excitement flashes through them, and it chases after the poor terrified people. Screaming, the small group of villagers tries to make it past the guard tower.

Come on, come on, Jack thinks. Just a little closer...then the archers in the top part of the tower can send the first wave of the assault...Only their range will reach the monster...

With tears in their eyes, the civilians run as fast as they can. One young child slips and falls to the ground. As a young woman rushes over to help him get up, the beast's shadow hovers over it and it lands in front of them.

Darn, Jack thinks. It's blocking them from the tower!

I wonder if it's close enough for the archers to hit...

The monster puts its muzzle near to the two shuddering figures. As it smirks, razor sharp teeth glimmer in the sun's faint rays.

Closing her eyes tight, the young maiden holds the little boy close trying to shield him from the monster.

As the monster opens its mouth, a shower of arrows assails the beast. Rearing in anger, its large feet make holes in the cobble roads. As glares at the tower in unwavering hatred, a bone-chilling growl comes from the fiend's mouth. It charges at the tower and rams its steel tipped horns the building's sides. The foul creature shakes it head and tears off the top of the building.

Jack watches in terror as his friends plummet from the tower to their doom in the darkness below.

Swallowing his grief, Jack aims his arrow at the beast's eye and lets it fly.

The beast screams in pain, and tries to dislodge the arrow from its eye with its claws.

While it is distracted, the remaining guards shoot as many arrows as they can at the monster. The creature jumps back, surprised by the last ditch effort of the sentries.

It growls menacingly at the tower, and exhales its deadly breath into the building. The guards run out of the towers, trying to escape the fumes.

Sneering, the beast quickly turns around to block the road the guards were heading for. As it turns,

however, its massive scaled tail tears through a house and sends the rubble across another avenue. It turns its head to the side and gives the shaken warriors a glance that mocks their hopes.

That look... Jack thinks, paralyzed by fear. I've seen it before....that time with the cavera! He shudders at the thought of the giant rodent-like creature.

"It's going to eat us!" Jack shouted. "Run!"

Scattering in terror, the guards look for an escape, but with the recent destruction they soon realize that all but one of the escape routes have been blocked off. The only route out of the town is being blocked by the fiend.

It bends its neck back, readying itself for a fatal strike.

Just then a shadowy figure emerges out of the

smoldering remains of a popular tavern. The person's cloak sways in the smoke filled breeze as the brave soul charges at the beast. After deftly jumping up on its back, the person takes out an enormous buster sword and plunges it into the creature's scaly hide.

Where did that sword come from? Jack wonders, too stunned at the recent events to even think about escaping. *I didn't see it when the person jumped.*

Shrieking in agony, the beast tries to buck the person off. When it realizes that its strategy isn't working, it turns its head toward the valiant warrior and emits its poisonous breath in the hero's direction. The warrior jumps up as the noxious fumes are exhaled. Landing on the creature's head, the person runs down the beast's long thick neck and then stops in the middle of it and slices through the foul demon's

neck in one clear blow. The monster's neck falls down by its collapsing body. The impact of the fall takes down five of the nearby buildings and they crumble onto the body of the beast.

As the guards stand there in a stupor, the captain runs in front of them.

"Alright everybody," he says. "We have a lot to do. Jack, Ragil, and Xafd, I want you to see if you can find that hero! If you do, I want you to alert me about it as soon as possible!"

They hurried over to the corpse of the monster, hoping to locate their new hero.

"Do you think anyone was able to survive such crash?" asks Ragil, who wore battered guard with blood stained armor.

"You kidding?" asks a Xafd. His bronze armor

glimmer in the various fires that have broken out around the town. "From where the person was at? Probably ended up being crushed by the fiend's massive bulk."

"I think I found him!" exclaims Jack. "I see someone leaning against the well!"

The soldiers dash over to their fallen champion.

From how he's leaning against the well, Jack thinks, it looks like he is close to dying...

They come to a screeching halt as they see who their hero really is. Their courageous fighter is a young year old girl. Her long blond hair lies covers some of her face and they can barely see her azure eyes. She desperately tries to breathe in the air around her.

The soldiers are so surprised that they are struck motionless at their discovery.

It can't be....Jack thinks. It just can't be...

"Tala!" Jack cries as he rushes over to her. He kneels down beside her. "What's wrong?"

"Poison..." is the only word Tala can manage to get out. Her body shakes violently as she tries desperately to breathe.

"Someone, get a healer, quick!" Jack cries.

Ragil dashes off to find a healer. Minutes later, he returns with one who quickly kneels beside her in order to examine her.

"This is the most severe case I have seen so far," he says, concerned about the girl's condition. He quickly takes a flask of liquid and hands it to her. "Drink this."

She takes it but her respiratory problems make her choke on it. She tries it again, and this time she

manages to drink the tonic. Her body relaxes and she falls upon Jack. Taken by surprise, he falls back but still manages to catch her before she falls to the ground.

“What did you give her?!” he demands angrily.

“It’s a quick fix,” replies the healer. “I hastily made it while the town was first being attacked by the beast. The tonic temporarily takes away the affects of the toxins.”

“So what’s wrong with her then?” Jack asks.

“Why did she pass out?”

“When she drank the potion, it released the effects of the poison,” the young healer explains.

“Going from complete misery to no suffering at all must’ve have been a shock to her system.”

“Thank goodness she is alright,” Jack sighs with

relief.

“For now she is,” the healer sadly says. “Its affects will only last a week. It was the best I could do on such short notice. The beast’s breath was so deadly that there is no complete cure that I can make. The symptoms will reoccur and she will eventually die from them...”

“There must be something we can do for her!” exclaims the young soldier. “After all that she did for us!”

“The only thing that I know of that could counter such a poison and save her from its grasp is a unicorn’s horn. Legends say it can cure any disease or affliction. However there are no unicorns in these parts...such a journey could take months or even years...and by then it would be too late for her.”

The healer thought for a moment. "If you do not want to chase unicorns there is one more option...you can go the Capitol Kingdom. The wise men there might be able to offer a solution...but that would take a few months to reach..." he sighs. "It seems that all the options are no good...Both take up too much time, and there are no guarantees with either of them."

"What if you make enough of those quick fixes for her until we find a horn or go to the Capitol Kingdom?" asks Jack. "Couldn't you make her some?"

"I do not have enough ingredients to make that many potions," replies the healer. "One of the larger towns may have enough ingredients for a few weeks... You might be able to make it before her symptoms reoccur, but you would have to leave today."

"I'll get her to the city before it's too late," Jack

says. "If you have any of the potions you can spare it would be greatly appreciated."

The healer shakes his head. "I can't spare any...others are suffering as well. Although it will not cure them, they should have some time with their loved ones..." The healer says saddened at the fate of the townspeople. "However I can give you the recipe for the quick fix." He hands the young man the list. "I'm sorry, but I must go to aide the others..."

"I understand," Jack says sadly. He faces his comrades. "Tell the captain I'm leaving. I have other matters to attend to now."

"Are you sure you want to leave, Jack?" Xafd asks.

"Yes," replies Jack, as he lays the Tala gently down beside the well. "I'm going to go home and see if

it's still intact. If it is, then I'll pack for my journey and come back for her." Jack pockets the recipe. "Please watch over her until I get back..."

"Alright, lad," says Ragil. "We'll watch over her."

Rushing over to his house, Jack finds it half collapsed and on the brink of caving in. He carefully goes inside and quickly rummages around his broken house and stuffs some essentials in his rucksack. Once he is done packing, he dashes over to where he left the girl. His heart plummets as he sees his fellow comrades sprawled on the ground. His eyes quickly dart to over where he put Tala, but she is gone.

He quickly runs over to Ragil who is coming to.

"What happened here?" exclaims Jack, kneeling beside him. "What happened to you? And where is

Tala?"

"That girl is possessed or something, I tell ya," he mutters. "When she came to, she asked where she was, and how she was feeling better. We told her that she was still by the well, and that the tonic temporary cured her, and that its affects would wear off in a week."

"We told her that you were going to help her find a cure for her," says Xaft, sitting up. His eyes are wide with surprise. "When she heard that, she had this look in her eyes...it was something...something I'd never seen before..."

"She was trying to leave when we stopped her," says Ragil. "We told her she wouldn't make it far in her condition, but she said she didn't care at all. We still insisted that she stay and wait for you, but she

said she wasn't going to. We encircled her to prevent her from leaving, but she grabbed her sword and then all went black.

"Where did she go to!?" Jack frantically asks.

"She left toward the eastern woods," replies the soldier with the blue armor. "I remember seeing her head that way before I lost consciousness. She's still not fully recovered so you shouldn't have trouble catching up with her...But if you do follow her beware her sword!"

Swallowing back his sadness, Jack dashes toward the eastern woods. He desperately searches for any clues as to which direction Tala has taken. He finds some broken foliage and limbs. He darts along the trail. "Tala! It's me, Jack!" he calls, searching desperately for her. "I just want to help! Please! Let me

know where you are!”

Silence.

He searches along the trail that she left until it became too dark to see. After making a campfire, he leans back against a tree and hugs his knees to his chest.

Why won't she answer me? He wonders, silently crying. Is she too far off, and not able to hear me? Or can she hear me, but refuses to answer? If so, why won't she let me help her...I love her so much...ever since that incident...

His eyes fog over with memories of the past...It was two years ago...before he had become a soldier for the town...He was just a young man then at the age of fifteen. He was out hunting for some food for his recently widowed mother and the rest of his family.

He was in the woods stalking a deer. As he drew

his arrow and took aim, the deer started and darted off into the misty woods. He was about to go after it when he heard a bone-chilling sound. It was the sound of giant padded paws running in his direction. Before he could react, a lion-sized rat pounced on him. Its saber like fangs was an inch from Jack's face and its talons were sinking into his skin.

His nerves left him as he all he could do was to stare down the beast's throat. He had never seen a cavera before, and he still hoped he hadn't. Caveras were known for their persistence. They never once gave up on a prey, and no prey had ever escaped from them. They've been known to take down straying livestock as well as passing caravans.

Jack closed his eyes and expected its teeth to tear through his flesh....but he didn't feel anything...He

heard the scream of the cavera, and a thud. When he opened his eyes, he was next to the corpse of the giant vermin. Next to it was a blond haired woman pulling her bloodied blade from the beast. That was when he first met Tala.

After that incident they got to know each other a bit more. Even though she was a wanderer, she came to visit him every so often. With each visit, they grew closer and closer...The last visit was the one that was the hardest on him.

It was at the Dragon's Eye Inn in town; they were talking and enjoying each other's company. Then their chatter dwindled to an awkward silence...he couldn't stand it anymore...he had to act...

"Tala," he said in a voice that was both serious and sincere. "I...I love you...I want to be with

you...always... I've had felt this way for a while...I just haven't had a chance to say it....But I love you with all my heart..."

Tala's eyes widened in surprise, and then grew watery. "Jack....that's... so...sweet...." she said, her whole appearance softening. "I love you too..." She cast her head down, and tears rolled down her cheeks. "But...it just can't be..."

Jack was absolutely crushed. Tears streamed down his face. "Why?" He managed to ask.

"There...are just some things about me..." she said, her voice became quieter and sadder. "Things...that I can't get you dragged into...I wouldn't want anything bad to happen to you..."

"I don't care what happens to me!" he declared. "As long as we can be together I don't care what

happens to me!!” He took her hands in his, and squeezed them lovingly. “All I need is you.”

She smiled sadly at him. “I wish it could be that way...”

Sirens suddenly filled the air, and all chaos broke loose...the dreaded monster stormed their once peaceful town and nothing was ever the same again...

Jack’s mind wanders back to the present and remembers its misery. He decides he cannot wait till morning. He puts out the fire, and walks around the forest with the light of the full moon to guide him.

Hours pass and the sun wakes to find Jack still searching for his beloved. Not long after, Jack collapses from severe lassitude. He struggles to get up, but only manages to get to his knees.

“Tala!” he cries out in between sobs.

“Tala...Tala...” His heart feels like it is forever shattered. He collapses to the ground and sobs.

She's gone, he thinks. The love of my life...gone forever...

Epilogue

As the pool's stories end, they leave you with wonder and great impatience.

"What happens to all those people!?" you demand. "You can't leave their stories like that! I have to know what happens! Will the Vampire get Cali? Will the hunter kill the unicorns? Will Kapu's ville be invaded? Will Chris's griffon necklace work or will she be seen by the monsters? And what about the Fated Lovers! Will Jack find Tala in time or is she lost for good!? I have to know!"

"I have no more to tell," answers the pool, "but the answers will come. You just have to wait for them."

The images of the pool fade one by one until the water looks normal again.

“How much longer do I have to wait?” you ask.

But the pool is silent.

Frustrated, you get up and leave the pool. As you walk out of the forest, you can't help but remember the pool's last words.

“The answers will come,” you say. “I just have to wait...”