

CHAPTER 1

The King's Request

It was a dark hazy night and all was silent save the chirping crickets outside my door. A violet sun was beginning to rise over the misty horizon illuminating the golden leaves of the many hebrock trees that filled the glen that my small cottage rested on. Suddenly I was thrown from my slumber by several knocks upon the door that shook the dust from the rafters, which fell upon my head. Brushing the dust from my hair, I walked to the door, and as I opened it a giant startled me. A man standing over seven feet tall and weighing easily over three hundred pounds greeted me. The man looked to be quite old from the graying in his long hair and scruffy beard. His eyes were a somber gray but they held a look of pride and nobility. He wore a long golden cape and a black suite of armor. In his left hand he held a glimmering blade with the king's emblem encrusted upon the hilt, and in his right hand he held a parchment sealed with an emblem of a golden dragon's head. Indeed this man was one of the king's noblemen perhaps even a paladin or a Great Messenger.

The giant man smiled and gave a courteous bow. Then opening the parchment he began to read, "Dear kind sir, from request of your king I ask for your services. Word of your talents have reached far and wide and I King Varadon ask of your abilities to find me a precious item. I shall be willing to pay you one million gold pieces for your troubles. I ask for you to find me a legendary animal known as the Midnight Eagle. As legend would have it the feathers of this bird have great magical powers and I wish to have these feathers so that I may gain great wisdom and knowledge so that I can make Zenita a better and safer place. I would greatly appreciate your services in finding this magnificent animal and shall give you any needed provisions for your trip. You have my best wishes, and greatest gratitude, King Varadon."

Pondering the idea I knew this job was much harder than the king made it out to be. The Midnight Eagle is no ordinary eagle. It is as dark as the midnight sky and has the ability to change its color and its texture to blend in to its surroundings. The midnight eagle is a bird of legend which most believe does not exist. Its size is astounding for its wing span is rumored to be over thirty feet. Its power is unbelievable for legend has it that it has turned castles to ruins. It has talons sharper than steel, and a beak able to tear a man limb from limb in a matter of seconds. Its crimson red eyes can freeze its prey with a mere glance and spot a minuscule insect from five

miles in the air. It is rumored that the bird can travel at speeds beyond a human's comprehension and maneuver unlike any other animal upon the planet. Legend has it that it lives in a valley called Magista, hidden somewhere in the Kragar Mountains which have not been visited by human kind in over a thousand years. It is said the Kragar Mountains lie beyond the domain of Morph, a being whose power surpasses any mortal. But at the price of a million gold pieces and unsurpassable fame how could I refuse such an offer.

"I shall accept the offer but I shall need many provisions."

"Excellent, then we shall travel to Castle Zyfay, where King Varadon shall give you anything you ask, for he shall be overwhelmed with joy for he did not think you would accept his offer. By the way I am Lord Vakron, High Messenger and a member of the elite Golden Guard. If it suits you I shall join you in finding this legendary animal."

"I have heard of you for you are deemed as one of the greatest fighters our time has ever seen. It would be an honor to have you on my side for I might need some expertise fighting."

Bowing courteously Vakron replied, "It would be an honor to follow you, for you are deemed as the greatest tracker and treasure hunter of all time. I also honor you for you have never kept a single treasure you have found but instead gave it to those who desperately needed them. Indeed it is no wonder why people travel half way across the world for your services."

Continuing he said, "I have also heard rumors that you are a formidable fighter, one who should not be angered. Some even tell me it is you who killed Sir Grackmor, leader of the Black Guard."

"Yes that is true but I did so only in self-defense. He asked me to find a legendary ring, a ring that grants one's evil wishes. When I refused his offer he attacked me leaving me no options."

"I need no explanations. But Sir Grackmor was once a good man and was at one time the Grand Paladin of the Golden Guard. That was until he wanted more power and more control. So he formed his own force of paladins, which he came to be known as the Black Guard. They were once a threatening force to the Golden Guard and nearly extinguished us. But once Sir Grackmor was killed the Black Guard fell apart. So I am in debt to you and insist in coming along."

"Well then my friend, lead the way."

Luckily Lord Vakron had traveled with Torox his war steed, for it made the journey much quicker. Days and nights of traveling through the darkened forests of Shandralin brought

us to the beautiful valley of Menengir where castle Zyfay lay. The wondrous land seemed enchanted for its beauty was beyond anything I had ever seen. The castle rested on a lake of crystal water hundreds of feet high on a mountaintop. Icy waterfalls fell from the mountaintop to a beautiful lake below. The only way to the castle was by air or through secret caverns constantly guarded in which one had to enter from hundreds of feet below in the mountainside. One would first have to cross the lake in a boat guarded by a legion of paladins to the mountainside entrance. They would then have to travel through the waterfall into a small hole hidden not only by the falls but also by several feet of silver-thorned bushes. Then they could enter the first cavern, which is guarded by a second legion of paladins. One would then have to travel through a maze of caverns in which a guard is posted within every fifty feet. It is no wonder castle Zyfay has never been attacked, for entering its gates are nearly impossible.

Giving me a smile Lord Vakron said, "As you see castle Zyfay is now the most formidable castle in the entire universe. A Delphic Zelian class one barrier is now surrounding the castle, keeping any airborne creature from nearing the castle gates. If a human so much as comes within fifty feet of this barrier he would be instantly evaporated regardless of the armor he was wearing."

"Very impressive. But why so much protection?"

"Awe, have you not heard?"

"Heard what," I eagerly replied?

"King Varadon is next in line to become Grand Lord of Zenita."

"Grand Lord?"

"Yes, Grand Lord. He shall then be in charge of all the armies of Zenita and made the head of the Council of Times. With such power and control there would be many who would try to take his life."

"The Council of Times? I don't believe I've heard of it," I said a puzzled look upon my face.

Raising his eyebrows Lord Vakron replied, "The Council of Times is a league consisting of one member from every planet within the universe. It is a league of enormous size and enormous power. Being that Zenita is the planet that trapped the universes greatest threat, we have been given the power to head the council. With such power Varadon could become almost inhuman, what one would call immortal or god-like. I am glad that Varadon is not a wicked man

full of hatred and bent on power. I suppose that is why he seeks the feathers of the midnight eagle, for it could give him the wisdom to head such a force."

Scratching my head and hesitating, "The universes greatest threat, I don't believe I know what you are talking about."

Shaking his head with disbelief and giving a sigh he replied, "Valcor I am surprised you know so little about these matters. I thought you were the foremost expert on myths, legends, and history."

I shrugged my shoulders. "Apparently not."

"Well an immortal being of extreme power, a being flowing of evil, hatred and destruction was trapped in a nexus by Zeniton, creator of our world. It is the council's greatest priority that this being be trapped for all eternity. I do not know how King Varadon can handle such a responsibility, but I admire him, perhaps more than anyone on this planet.

"Well enough of this rambling. Let us go and meet King Varadon for he shall be overwhelmed with joy to see that you have accepted his offer."

Entering the castle gates was an adventure all in itself. By the time we had entered the castle I wondered if all the trouble was worth it. But once I saw within the castle I knew that the troublesome inconvenience of trying to enter was well worth it. As I entered the castle my mouth dropped open and my eyes grew insanely large. I stood in awe of the castle within that was even more beautiful and spectacular than it was from the outside. Even on my many adventures across the world, I had never seen such beauty. Every square inch of the castle was bedecked with wonder. Everywhere I looked there was beauty and an extreme sense of pride and nobility. Intermingled within the beauty of the castle were thousands of guards and numerous warriors whose sole purpose was to protect the great king who ruled over this exquisite land. In fact even members of the Golden Guard as well as the High Protector (which I met later) were present. Indeed King Varadon was the powerhouse of Zenita, and deep within I prayed that King Varadon would not fall to corruption.

As Lord Vakron led the way to King Varadon's chambers, I stumbled this way and that, staring in awe of the many wonders of the spectacular castle. As we reached the chamber doors two Delphic Zykor Dementors greeted us. Whispering to Lord Vakron, "I thought the Delphi race was all but extinct."

Whispering back, "These are the last of the Delphi race. They are the greatest warriors Zenita has ever seen, it is too bad that they are near the brink of extinction."

"Is it not true that the Delphi can live over ten thousand years," I asked quietly.

"That is true," Vakron whispered back.

Striking his sword upon the ground, "Enough of the whispering," shouted one of the dementors. "Like usual we must check to see if you are armed. The King and Lord Orgoth are within."

"The High Protector is here," Vakron asked, his voice rising?

"That is correct," replied the other dementor. "You are clean. You may enter."

As I walked through the chamber doors I turned around to catch one last glimpse of the endangered race of warriors. Indeed they were built to be warriors. They towered at over eight feet tall, and weighed easily half a ton. They have an exoskeleton made of a strange type of bone impenetrable to steel. Their muscles are built like the mysterious ant allowing them to lift over a hundred times their weight. Not only are they enormously powerful but their agility and speed are ten times that of a human. They are able to see in all wavelengths of light allowing them to find any object, inanimate or animate. Their skin color is a deep purple so vivid that it is inescapable to the human eye, yet they have the ability to change the color of their skin to fit their surroundings making them invisible to their enemy. It is no wonder the world was afraid of these warriors and become the target of mass genocide. It is a shame for they are not a violent race, but rather a peaceful race that were forced to fight. How I pitied the two warriors, being the last of their kind. How could they protect the leader of our kind knowing that it was us humans who led the genocide to destroy them? As I stared at the necklace about my neck I remembered the shorok people who had destroyed my hometown so many years ago, later giving me this token of their regrets hoping that I could forgive them. I tore the saddened memory from my neck and handed it to one of the dementors. Bowing my head I graciously said, "I am sorry for what we have done."

Looking at the necklace he read it aloud. "Remorse...Regret...Forgiveness...Peace...and Love... We know not what we do." A gentle tear ran down his cheek. "Thank you, but we hold nothing against your kind, we understand the fears of the past," he said smiling

"Truly I am sorry. Humans fear what they don't understand, and feel threatened by those who are stronger or different than them. It is a tragic flaw of all human kind. We even attack

those of our race who are different, for we cannot see anything or anyone but ourselves as equals. We have good hearts but our eyes won't let us see, that even though we are different, we are still the same."

The other warrior replied, "Thank you for your kindness, if only everyone thought as you did then our race would still be thriving today. I shall not forget you and I swear that I shall be there for you if your life is endangered. That I promise."

The chamber doors shut behind us and there stood King Varadon bedecked in more jewels than a treasure box. Beside him stood a massive warrior in a green suite of armor, no doubt made out of herogen, the universes strongest and rarest substance.

"Valcor you have come! I cannot believe my eyes, I did not think you would take my offer," the king said his voice booming. "Come, make yourself at home. Something to drink, or to eat perhaps?"

"No thank you. I come only for provisions for the trip. I must be on my way for it shall be a long journey. I shall rest and eat at your table when I return. I will drink till I am drunk, and enjoy your festivities till I pass out. But not until then."

"If that is the way you would have it."

"It is. I thank you for your hospitality and your graciousness."

Lowering to one knee Lord Vakron said, "My Lord I have chosen to travel with Valcor, for there is a debt I owe to him. If I may have permission I would like to go."

"Then go. Now rise from the floor and see me as your equal."

"But I am not your equal. I am a lord and you are my king..."

"All men are equal in the eyes of the Almighty, and so all men are equal in my eyes. One's rank means nothing; it is what is in one's heart that makes him who he is. Now Vakron take Valcor to get his provisions and then leave for your journey. I look forward to seeing your return. Good luck my friends, I shall be eagerly waiting."

Lord Vakron grabbed hold of my arm and took me from the king's chambers. With Vakron leading the way we soon came to a large room. There I gathered the provisions I needed and then we set off on our journey.