

The Chronicles of Wetherid II

The Guardians of the Seven Artifacts

Volume 2



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® *The Chronicles of Wetherid Fantasy Series*

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Content Warning

This is a work of adult epic fantasy. While fictional and rooted in mythic tradition, it contains scenes and themes that may be emotionally intense or potentially distressing to some readers.

Specifically, this book includes:

- Depictions of **grief, trauma, and psychological suffering**
- **Fantasy combat** and scenes of **war**, including injury and death
- **Moral ambiguity**, betrayal, and shifting allegiances
- Implied or symbolic **religious elements** grounded in fictional cultures
- **Mentions of ritual magic**, summoning, and spiritual possession
- **Mild sensuality** and emotionally charged scenes between adult characters
(no explicit sexual content is depicted)
- **References to past abuse and domestic violence**, presented as part of character backstory
- Portrayals of **systemic power struggles**, political intrigue, and societal unrest

The content is presented with care and narrative purpose — always in service to character development, world-building, and the emotional arc of the story.

Reader discretion is advised.

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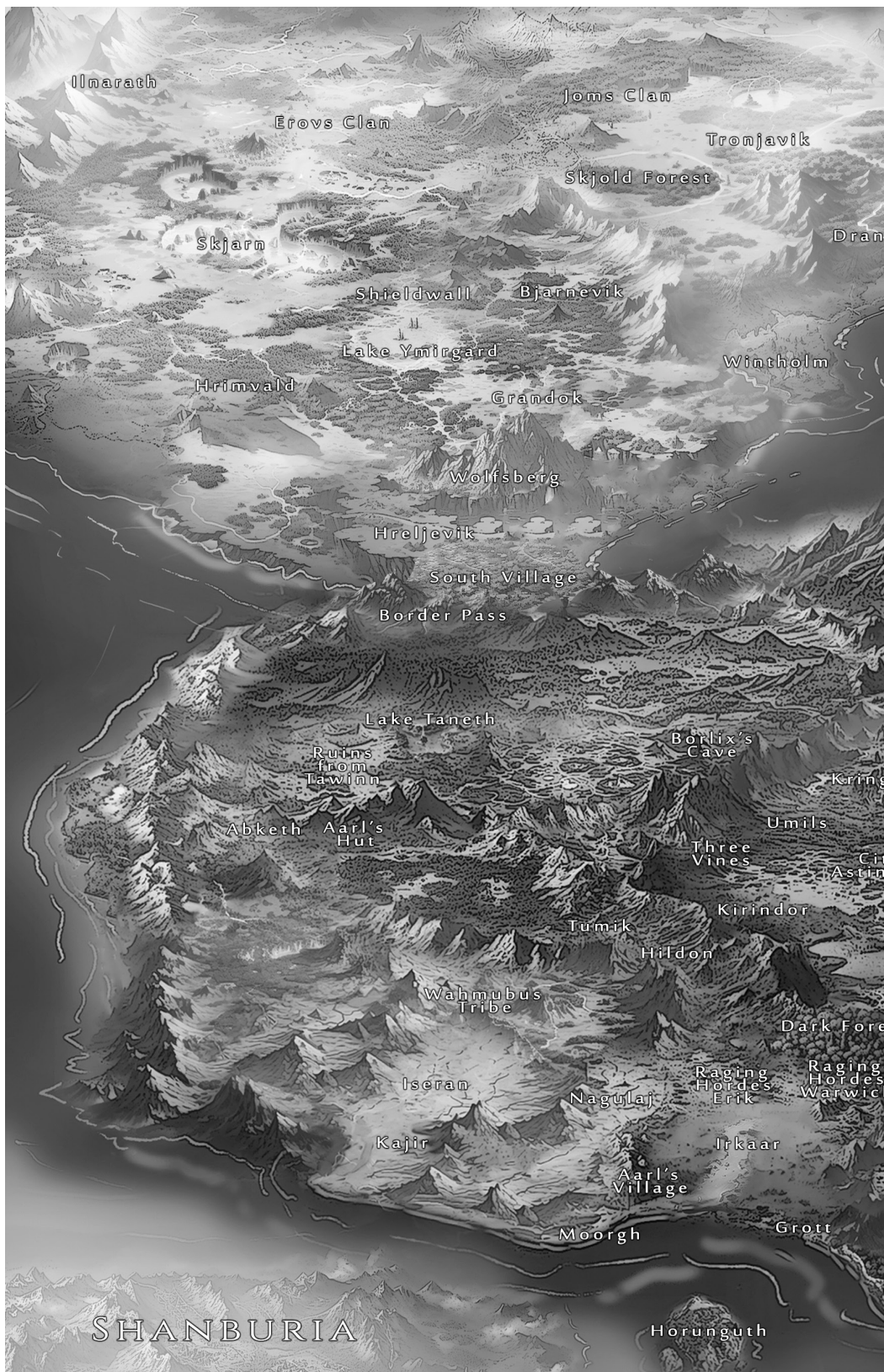
Foreword

Fantasy is more than a story — it is a journey.

A journey through worlds steeped in mystery, ancient powers, epic battles, and perilous alliances. *The Chronicles of Wetherid II – The Guardians of the Seven Artifacts* draws us into such a world: a realm where the future hangs by a thread, where intrigue shapes the fate of kingdoms, and where the line between light and shadow grows ever thinner.

This is not only a tale of heroes and their deeds — but one of loss, doubt, and the search for truth. Each character bears a burden of their own, wrestles with inner demons — and yet they must stand together against a threat far greater than any one of them.

For those who seek rich, atmospheric fantasy woven with deep intrigue and vibrant cultures — this is the story that awaits you.



Ilmarath

Erovs Clan

Joms Clan

Tronjavik

Skjold Forest

Skjarn

Dran

Shieldwall

Bjarnevik

Lake Ymingard

Wintholm

Hrimvald

Grandok

Wolfsberg

Hreljevik

South Village

Border Pass

Lake Taneth

Ruins
from
Lawinn

Borlix's
Cave

Abketh

Aarl's
Hut

Umils

Three
Vines

Kring

Cit
Astid

Tumik

Kirindor

Hildon

Wahmubus
Tribe

Dark Fore

Iseran

Nagulaj

Raging
Hordes
Erik

Raging
Hordes
Warwic

Kajir

Irkaar

Aarl's
Village

Moorgh

Grott

Horunguth

SHANBURIA



Thronheim

KAHROSKA

Ib'Agier

Druhn

Erwight
of
Entorbis

Abandoned
Tower

Ingarr

Kurbun

Clan
of
Wahmuther

Templers
of the
Dragon

Raga
Gur

Zantranos

Tunnel of the
Grey Dwarfs

Miremists

Marnog
Jar

Tongar
Gor

Glorious
Vale

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CHAPTER 1

A Thirsting People

Brown, dry sand swept across the vast reaches of the DeShadin Desert. The sun hung motionless at its zenith, its rays searing earth without mercy. For four moon cycles, no rain had fallen. It should have been a season of storms and downpours, yet something had changed the weather itself.

Life-giving water did not come, and no one knew why.

In southern reaches, oases had run dry. Their ponds vanished; reeds split open, yellowed, and broke. Even towering thorn cacti withered and toppled, drained of all strength.

Gaunt and restless, jackals roamed dunes, noses lowered in search of food or a single drop of moisture, but finding only weathered skeletons of camels, springboks, and desert hares scattered pale across dust. Even desert trolls, once feared, were now little more than shadows. Emaciated, they had withdrawn into limestone ravines, surviving only on trickles of water hidden deep within caves and prey limited to lizards and rats sheltering in faint strips of shade.

Thus, the southern reaches of DeShadin had become a land that forced even the hardiest to their knees.

In the city of Kajir, built by ancient lizard folk of the same name ages before humanity set foot in the desert, Sheikh Nam El Kabun kept watch beside his daughter, Princess Balae, upon the wide palace plateau.

The Sheikh was an imposing figure, wrapped in heavy robes adorned with ornate designs. His scales gleamed deep green, marked by scars of many battles. He wore a cuirass of the snake god across his chest, and at his side rested a gem-inlaid scimitar of his royal bloodline. His eyes were narrow and calm, holding a depth of untamed pride.

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Yet every breath, every twitch of his powerful tail, bore witness to the tension of a ruler refusing to yield, even as time turned against him.

Princess Balae cradled her child in her arms. Her eyes drifted across streets until they came to rest upon the great, round ritual square of the snake god, where a scene of horror lay exposed.

Dozens of dead Kajirs covered the stone—scales dulled, clawed hands limp, tails shriveled. A squad of city guards struggled to drag the lifeless bodies toward the snake pits, moving again and again in a grim rhythm. The last women strong enough to stand threw themselves into the path, hissing and flicking their tongues to shield the remains of their kin.

But in the end, they failed.

Princess Balae lifted her head, looking at her father sorrowfully.

“Look below. They are already collapsing. Water in the catacombs may sustain us and the warriors for another moon cycle—but for common folk, the source of life is almost spent.”

Sheikh Nam El Kabun nodded slowly. “We stand at the brink of extinction. If no miracle occurs, the Kajirs will vanish—not in battle and not through defeat, but through collapse and dispersal.”

He lowered his eyes.

This ancient people, bound to this desert by blood and time, now faced their end. They could endure two moon cycles without water; they were shaped for such trials.

But four?

That lay beyond even their strength. And it was not water alone breaking them; with the absence of rain, all food had vanished. Only locusts had kept them alive until now.

A low drumming rose from the direction of the temple.

Sheikh Nam El Kabun and Princess Balae looked up as heavy gates groaned open.

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A group of priests stepped out, bronze staves in their claws, snakes winding sluggishly about their necks. Behind them followed women carrying round baskets and heavy earthen jars.

“A procession for the dead,” Princess Balae murmured.

The Sheikh merely nodded, eyes fixed upon priests moving in solemn step toward the ritual square. Surrounding guards withdrew at once, bowing their heads in reverence as the procession reached dark pits before the great snake statue.

The drumming swelled—lower, faster—until it throbbed in silence.

One priest stepped to the edge, looked down, and gave a sharp signal. Kajir women opened their baskets, and dozens of snakes slithered into the depths. A sharp hiss cut through the air, and the drums ceased.

The high priest gave a brief nod.

Immediately, women lifted earthen jars, pouring water in a steady stream into darkness. Again, a wild, bubbling hiss rose up as snakes twisted beneath the falling liquid.

When the last drops had vanished and sounds subsided, priests formed a semicircle, lowered their heads, and knelt. Then a deep, resonant chant rose—a dark humming that rolled across the square, heavy with the heat of the day.

“They should have given the water to the thirsty instead of wasting it on snakes,” Princess Balae snarled softly.

A low rumble escaped the Sheikh’s chest.

“Silence! You offend the snake god. We have burdens enough—will you call down his wrath as well?”

Princess Balae exhaled sharply.

“As if it has not already fallen,” she said quietly, her claws closing protectively around her child’s small head.

Without another word, she turned and stepped through the palace entrance.

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The corridor beyond was tall and narrow, its walls clad in bronze relief panels depicting scenes from Kajir history. Between these panels, small oil bowls glimmered, their light trembling across the polished stone floor.

She walked on until the passage widened into a circular chamber where Alnugh, the slave-catcher, awaited her. Beside him waited three nomads of the Scheddifer, bound in heavy iron chains.

As Alnugh caught sight of the princess, he gave a curt bow. "I fear this will be my last delivery for you," he said gruffly.

Princess Balae regarded him in silence for a moment, then surveyed the captives and gave a small nod. "My father will be here shortly to pay you."

Alnugh stepped closer, his lips curling into a crooked grin. "About payment..." He paused, glancing around with a furtive twitch of his eyes to ensure they were alone. "The price of slaves has risen."

A flicker of contempt hardened Princess Balae's gaze. "Slaves?" she rasped. "That word belongs to the past. Meat is the word for it now."

She stepped toward the three men with deliberate strides, her gaze passing over their emaciated bodies. Without haste, she raised her right hand and let the tip of one claw glide lightly across the chest of the middle prisoner.

A thin, bloody line opened his skin.

The man gasped softly, his shoulders trembling.

She wiped blood slowly along her claw, lifted her fingers, and pressed the wet tip into her child's mouth, who clung to it at once and sucked greedily.

A strangled sound escaped the man; his stare fixed upon the child, its lips wet and bright with his blood.

The other two recoiled as far as their chains allowed, eyes wide, breathing fast and shallow.

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The tallest among them whirled on Alnugh, rage flaring across his face. He spat with full force into the slave-catcher's face.

"Traitor!" he snarled, his voice quivering. "You sell your own people for gold! Kajirs will slaughter us. They will devour us like cattle!"

Alnugh wiped his face slowly, his smile widening with relish.

"That may be," he replied calmly. "But I am being paid for it."

The chamber door swung open.

Sheikh Nam El Kabun entered, closely followed by Nazak, the princess's consort. Their eyes went at once to the three trembling captives, faces pale with fear.

The Sheikh turned to Alnugh, his brow lightly furrowed.

"Your delivery comes at a good time."

Alnugh smiled and gave a shallow bow.

"As I told your daughter, scarcity of humans in the south has made trade hardly worthwhile. This is my final shipment—before I depart for Iseran with my men."

A hard line formed across the Sheikh's face.

His eyelids lowered, and his features settled into a calm mask, concealing his sudden anger.

"That saddens me. We have valued your service."

Nazak folded his arms before his chest.

"As far as I know, you are wanted in Iseran. You truly intend to go there?"

Alnugh shrugged, his smug grin unbroken.

"I have set aside enough gold to put every accusation against me to rest."

He gestured briefly toward the prisoners.

"And since we speak of gold—price per slave has risen. Three pouches. You will understand. The entire south has been emptied of men. It took effort merely to find these three."

Sheikh Nam El Kabun let out a low hiss, his expression darkening for a brief moment.

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Then he turned away without a word, crossed to a chest beside the heavy table of darkwood, and took out nine bulging pouches.

In silence, he handed them to Alnugh.

Alnugh accepted them and bowed once more, his crooked smile unchanged.

“My thanks. May the snake god show you mercy.”

With a final, appraising glance at the captives, he turned and stepped out, letting the heavy door fall shut behind him with a dull boom.

For a moment, silence settled over the hall. Then the Sheikh, Nazak, and Balae advanced slowly toward the three slaves. Without a word, they drew back their arms, and with a dull, wet sound, long venomous thorns shot forth from their elbows.

Panic seized the captives.

The tallest staggered back, yanking desperately at his chains. “Please—no! Spare us!” he screamed in a hoarse voice.

The second fell to his knees, tears streaming down his face.

“We... we will serve you! Anything you demand!” he begged, while the third lowered his gaze in silence, his lips trembling.

Without mercy, thorns struck in three swift, precise blows. Twitching and choking, the captives collapsed, writhing briefly as venom seized them until their breathing finally ceased.

The Sheikh regarded the corpses without moving.

“The tall one belongs to my grandson; he will sustain him for a few days. The one with a wound in his chest is for us. And the third—take him to the priests. We require an offering. Perhaps the snake god will yet show mercy.”

Nazak gave a silent nod and called for servants in a deep voice.

Moments later, two broad-shouldered Kajirs appeared, bowing their heads to receive the order. With practiced movements, they lifted the dead captives—two slung across shoulders, the third dragged behind—and carried them from the chamber, the heavy door thudding shut behind them.

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“The scout patrol has returned!” came the agitated call of a guard from the city wall, echoing through the stillness of night.

Orders rang out to open the gate, and a sentry hurried off to inform the Sheikh.

With a groan, the heavy gates creaked inward, and more than twenty Kajirs entered, exhausted, their heads bowed and their steps slow. Torches in their claws cast a flickering light across disappointed faces. Their leather armor was stiff with sand and sweat, their scales dulled by dryness.

Dust clung to their claws, and the fine desert wind had worn their cloaks to a faded grey. Their eyes were empty, marked by heat, thirst, and a desperate, fruitless search.

For days they had scoured southern reaches to the point of collapse, finding nothing but emptiness and death.

“Water...” rasped Kroga, leader of the search party, before sinking slowly to his knees.

A companion moved to steady him, but Kroga shoved him away with the last of his strength. “Let me...”

He struggled for breath, his throat parched.

A guard hurried forward, placing an earthen jug into his hands.

Kroga seized it with trembling fingers and drank greedily, not stopping until the last drop was gone.

Only then did he draw a relieved breath.

With effort, he pushed himself upright again, his eyes drifting to the side.

In that moment he noticed Sheikh Nam El Kabun, who had stepped onto the square before the gate with a small detachment of palace guards.

Nam El Kabun looked at him steadily. “Report,” he demanded in a level voice. “Did you find anything?”

For a moment, heavy silence lay across the square.

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Kroga lowered his eyes, his shoulders sagging, and slowly shook his head.

“No, my Sheikh.” His voice was rough with shame and exhaustion. “We searched for more than forty days. We crossed eastern dunes of Gahanak, moved north to the border of Iseran, wandered west to Thir, and finally south to the sea.”

He swallowed hard, his gaze unfocused.

“But we found nothing. No spring. No oasis. Everything is dry. Even at old watering holes that never failed us before, there was no water. We dug until our claws bled—but everywhere there was only dry sand. No trace of moisture.”

He lifted his head and looked at the Sheikh in despair.

“The south has run dry. We will die.”

Silence settled over the square.

Torches crackled in wind.

Somewhere, a night bird cried.

Muscles in the Sheikh's jaw tightened beneath his scales.

His expression darkened, nostrils flaring.

He drew in a deep breath, as though pulling the weight of the message into himself, then lowered his head—his shoulders rigid with restrained fury and the burden of his powerless position.

Behind him, Princess Balae stepped closer.

She could tell from his expression the news was ruinous, though she searched his face for any sign of hope.

“What will you do now?” she asked quietly.

He looked at her for a long time.

Until the very end, he had hoped it would not come to this. But no other path remained. In that moment, he knew he faced a decision that would alter his people's fate irrevocably.

Kajirs—proud and unconquered since the beginning—would have to bend. Not taken by war, not broken by enemies, but crushed by nature.

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Neither wealth nor sacred places nor their strength would save them.

Not even their God had aided them.

Now only one thing remained: to trade dignity for survival.

His jaw tightened.

He would not accept it.

A final, defiant spark flared in his eyes.

“Perhaps... perhaps we should still go to Thir...” he began.

But a sharp sound escaped Princess Balae.

“Father, no! You know Thir is not an option for us. Humans there would slaughter us the moment we crossed their border. And we are a desert people. What would we seek there? We could not live in such a land.”

He closed his eyes for a moment.

He knew she was right.

With a hard, almost bitter voice, he answered her.

“And Iseran? Is that truly better? We have always been enemies of the Scheddifer. Kajirs and desert folk—we were never made for one another. Our culture, our faith, our way of life—everything divides us from them like a deep abyss. We held them as slaves. We sought to bend them beneath our god's rule. We waged wars against them. Iseran or Thir—I see no difference between them.”

Princess Balae snapped.

“Our warriors are spent. If you lead our people to Thir, you will drive them into ruin. You must negotiate with Sheikh Neg El Bahi in Iseran. It is our only chance. Face the truth, Father—I beg you!”

The Sheikh expelled a harsh breath and turned his head away from her.

Muscles in his arms tensed, and with a violent snap, thorns sprang from his elbows.

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Hissing, his tongue flickering, he held his body taut for a moment.

It was a final, unbridled resistance against a decision long since forged and loathed with every fiber of his being.

“So be it,” he growled.

“The Kajirs will go to Iseran. But heed my words, my child: it will be our undoing. Perhaps not at once, but inevitably. Nothing will remain as it was. We will lose what we are... only to survive.”

Princess Balae nodded in relief.

“It is the only choice, Father. We must go on living.”

She gave him one last look, as if trying to memorize the ruler he had been, then turned and hurried away with quick steps toward her chambers in the palace.

The Departure from Kajir

When Princess Balae stepped into the darkened chamber, she found Nazak asleep.

Quietly, she shook him awake.

“The search party has returned. They found water nowhere. My father has finally made his decision. We will leave Kajir and go to Iseran. He will ask Sheikh Neg El Bahi to take us in,” she whispered.

Nazak sat up, his eyes still heavy with sleep.

“He did what?” he demanded, incredulous. “We are to bow before humans? Balae—that is betrayal. Betrayal of our blood and our history. I would rather die here than bend the knee to them.”

Princess Balae hissed.

“Do not speak such words, Nazak!”

She gestured toward their child.

“He deserves to live. If you will not accept it for yourself, then accept it for our son.”

Nazak gave a reluctant nod, his tongue flicking once.

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She laid their child in the cradle beside the bed.

Then she let a cloak slip from her shoulders, drew off the fine silk dress, and slid naked beneath the blanket, pressing herself close against him.

— ❖ —

Far to the north, in the city of Iseran, Xaroth's voice resounded that same night within the bedchamber of Sheikh Neg El Bahi.

This time, it was no whispered murmur, but a loud, dark voice booming through the chamber.

“It is done. The decision has been made. Kajirs will soon stand before your gates and beg for entry. They are ready now—to bow before you, conqueror of distant lands, subduer of foreign peoples, greatest among all sheikhs.”

Neg El Bahi's eyelids twitched, his eyes rolling restlessly beneath them as searing visions surged within him.

Once more he saw the host of Kajirs marching beside warriors of Iseran.

They struck down Dark Folk of Shanburia, seized riches of the land, and claimed temples that gleamed with immeasurable gold and gemstones.

Xaroth's voice sounded again—this time edged with menace.

“Not all in Iseran will approve your path. But you must remain strong. Remove doubters and your adversaries. They are nothing but the envious—wretched minds without foresight. They do not see what you will bring to pass for them.”

Sheikh Neg El Bahi's lips moved. “Yes... you are right. Envious. Cowards. They are prisoners of the past.”

His voice grew firmer as he spoke into darkness.

“I will remove them.”

— ❖ —

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Three days later, as first grey light touched temple spires, heavy drums began to beat in the city of Kajir.

Dull and solemn, their beats echoed from walls, driving people from their homes. In streets, alleys, and upon rooftops, they gathered—warriors, craftsmen, merchants, the old and the young, women with children in their arms. All had come to hear the words of their ruler.

Before gates of the temple waited Sheikh Nam El Kabun, Princess Balae, Nazak, and two handmaidens. Behind them, priests stood assembled, faces hard and unmoving, bronze staves clenched in their claws.

At pits beside the ritual square, helpers dragged snakes from darkness with long poles tipped with rope loops, stowing them in baskets. Opposite them, bearers brought up the final earthen jars of water from the catacombs beneath the palace; each was counted with care and set in rows—their last remaining reserves.

Sheikh Nam El Kabun stepped forward.

His eyes swept across the crowd, seeing hollow faces, cracked scales, bowed shoulders—a people at the end of their strength.

He drew in a deep breath, stretched out his arms, and raised his voice.

“Children of the desert! The time has come. We have hoped, we have prayed, we have fought. Yet no rain has fallen, no water has reached our city. The snake god has tested us. Now he commands that we move on.”

A murmur passed through the crowd.

Some sank to the ground in despair; others held their children tighter, eyes fixed upon the Sheikh.

“We will leave our city,” he continued. “We will journey to Iseran and there ask for entry. Let each of you examine your belongings one final time—take only what you can carry.

Water and food are scarce. The path through the desert will be hard. We must stand together if we are to survive.”

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Princess Balae stood beside him, relief on her face, clutching her child tightly against her.

Nazak kept his silence, his gaze moving through gathered ranks, weighing their reactions.

Then shouting rose from the edge of the square.

Several elders refused the command.

“We will remain here!” they rasped loudly.

“This city is our home! We would rather die here than march to Iseran!”

A tumult broke out.

Guards rushed in, struggling to restrain the agitated.

Blows were exchanged, harsh hissing tore through the air.

One Kajir, exhausted and desiccated, collapsed upon the stones and did not rise.

For a moment, silence held.

All eyes fixed upon the lifeless body.

Then quiet sobbing was heard.

A woman stepped forward hesitantly, bowed her head, and spoke in a rough voice.

“I will go. For my children. I will not let them die here.”

Gradually, resistance gave way.

More and more nodded, some in bitter reluctance, others in surrender.

To remain meant death.

The Sheikh raised his voice once more.

“Make ready! Tomorrow, before sun rises, we depart. May the snake god watch over us.”

Slowly, the crowd began to disperse.

Some returned to their homes in silence, while others lingered upon the square, as though seeking to delay the farewell that awaited them. Priests secured baskets of snakes with care, while water jars were lifted onto waiting carts.

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A heavy stillness covered the city, broken only by whispers of those who walked one final time along its walls, their claws trailing across rough stone.



The following morning, the city rested motionless within the haze of first light.

Once more, drums beat—dull and solemn—and this time gates of the city opened not for merchants, but for an entire people fleeing annihilation.

At the head of the procession walked Sheikh Nam El Kabun, his gaze fixed unwaveringly on the north. To his right and left marched his commanders, claws resting on their weapons, leather armor drawn tight.

Directly behind him followed Balae with the child, surrounded by guards. Beside them walked Nazak, his head lowered, a curved scimitar slung across his back.

Behind them pressed common folk. Kajirs of every age moved within the mass—many bearing heavy bundles upon their shoulders, others struggling forward supported by kin.

Some of the young clung silently to their mothers, eyes wide with fear.

Behind them rumbled carts, heavily laden with all that the palace storehouses still contained: a few remaining crates of food, the last reserves of water, tools, and sacred baskets of snakes for protection and ritual.

A detail of guards watched with sharp eyes, ensuring that nothing was lost. The rear was held by the army of Kajirs, many hundreds strong. Should danger arise, they would shield the people until the final breath.

As they left the city, they passed ancient boundary markers of their realm. Black, crooked wooden stakes jutted from sand like threatening fingers.

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Between them hung heavy chains eaten through with rust, from which dangled rattling skeletons bleached by wind and sand—remains of those who had once dared enter the land of Kajirs without leave, or depart it without consent.

For the first two days, the path led across parched plains where sand shifted beneath their claws and the sun burned without mercy.

During the day they marched in a silence broken only by the clatter of weapons and creak of carts; by night they lay beneath cold stars, ate nothing, and shared only the barest measure of water.

By the third day, they had entered a labyrinth of limestone ridges where shadows crept across naked rock. At times, yellow eyes of starved jackals flashed between stones, yet they kept their distance, daring not to approach the column.

When the fourth day broke, they reached dunes of Gahanak—a sea of shifting sand that drained their remaining strength. Carts had to be dug free again and again as their wheels sank into the sand, slowing the march while the sun beat down without mercy.

Priests rationed water, yet only a single ladle remained for each.

On the fifth day, they climbed the last high dune. From its crest they still saw an endless sea of sand in the distance—but beyond it, barely visible in shimmering light, lay the first dark line of the wall of Iseran.

They moved on through scorched land, silent and veiled in dust, until the day began to fail.

At sunset they made camp, now only half a day's march from Iseran. Tents stood in tight rows; between them Kajirs crouched, exhausted, their lips dry and cracked.

In the largest tent, Sheikh Nam El Kabun sat in the faint glow of a flickering oil lamp. Thin light slid across his face, deepening lines of care carved into it.

He stared at a carpet, claws of his right hand drumming restlessly upon it. His back was bent, as though the entire burden of his desiccated people weighed upon his shoulders.

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Beside him, Princess Balae crouched and fed her child.

For the first time the gnawing question pressed upon her mind:
Was this salvation—or only a slower dying?

Her eyes found Nazak, a fixed point of defiance at the entrance of the tent.

He stared into darkness without a word.

From afar came the low whisper of wind, and between gusts the dull, brittle crash of clay jars breaking.

They were the last of them—empty and useless—hurled to the ground by desperate hands.

Nazak's thoughts hammered: *Each step drives us closer to the end.*

Behind him, he sensed movement.

The Sheikh stepped to his side.

“We stand close to our goal,” he murmured. “I hope Balae proves right.”

“Yes. Tomorrow we will knock at the gates of Iseran,” Nazak replied. “What awaits us in Iseran?”

He ran a clawed hand over his snout, a gesture of deep weariness.

“Perhaps we should have stayed. To die with dignity.”

Princess Balae rose and stepped toward Nazak.

Her voice was quiet, taut with restrained emotion.

“We had no choice.”

She touched his grim face. “Kajir has withered. Had we remained there, we would all have died—slowly and miserably.”

She held his gaze steadily.

“I know it torment's you. It torment's me as well. But tomorrow we will live. We owe that to those who follow us.”

Nazak kept his silence, his face hardened by doubt.

Sheikh Nam El Kabun stepped aside so that all three stood at the entrance and looked out together into the night.

“All my life, I believed our people would never fall.”

The Guardians of the Seven Artifacts

His claws clenched. “But now... now I see us forced to beg for our lives like mendicants.”

He fell silent.

Princess Balae closed her eyes briefly.

Deep within her, the same fear burned—but she forced words from her chest.

“So long as we have one another, we are a people. So long as we breathe, we carry our history forward. Perhaps we will have to change... but we will not vanish.”

The Sheikh drew a deep breath, then released it slowly. “Tomorrow... tomorrow we will stand before Iseran—and there our fate will be decided.”

Nazak nodded in silence.

Outside, cold night air settled over the camp. Soft chanting of priests mingled with the whisper of wind, which carried from the south last traces of their homeland.



As the sun's first rays crested dunes, they set out once more.

From afar, something unfamiliar shimmered in brown sand. At first it was no more than a shadow in haze, wavering like an illusion, but with every step color took shape—a muted green lifting from the ground, growing clearer.

Soon the first signs of this foreign realm came into full view.

Two obelisks the height of a man, carved from smooth, pale limestone, flanked a barely visible path, bound together by taut hempen ropes. Dozens of narrow banners fluttered in hot wind, their once-strong colors bleached by the sun.

Like pale signal flags they moved above sand, marking the border of the realm of Iseran.

The Chronicles of Wetherid II

Beyond the obelisks, green widened into a broad oasis. Forms of solitary palm trees sharpened, their broad fronds stirring in wind.

Between trunks stretched dark fields along banks of the Aderani. The river came down from the north, born high in glaciers at the border of Tawinn, and ran silver-bright through waste toward Iseran before losing itself once more in sands to the south.

A veil of moist, heavy air lay over the water, strange and almost unreal beside the dust-dry breath of the desert.

When they reached the edge of the oasis at last, a cry burst from the crowd—raw, overwhelming, born of torment endured for moons.

The first of the Kajirs lost all restraint, tore armor and cloaks from their bodies, and staggered forward.

Birds scattered shrieking from palms, and that clearing became a heaving sea of bodies and voices.

They flung themselves onto the riverbank, plunged their heads deep into water, and drank in desperate gulps. Clay jars were dragged forward and filled in haste; claws clamped tight around wet vessels. Some collapsed into shallows, letting water stream over their desiccated bodies, washing away the agony of dryness.

A short distance beyond the river, upon a patch of lush grass, a small herd of goats grazed.

Several Kajirs noticed them and surged—gasping—across the narrow strip that separated water from pasture.

Herdsmen nearby started in fright, crying out and fleeing toward the city when they saw strangers rushing their animals.

A few Kajirs uttered low, feral sounds, the noise tearing from their throats.

Others lifted their heads, tracking fleeing men whose steps kicked dust into the air, before their gaze returned to the herd.

More pressed forward, eyes wild with hunger.

The Guardians of the Seven Artifacts

They drove goats together and raised their blades, ready for the killing stroke.

Then commands rang out across the field.

Powerful Kajir leaders leapt forward, weapons drawn, and placed themselves between their warriors and the herd.

Their voices cut through the crush:

“Back! Weapons down! Whoever steals or kills here will drag us all into ruin—we are at the mercy of Iseran!”

But hunger had already mastered many.

Ragged breath, dust, and sweat fused into a fevered unrest. Some no longer heard; others would not.

With brutal effort, commanders forced order, drove their own men back, and crushed the rising frenzy.

Then a deep rumble rolled across the oasis.

Every head snapped around.

Out of a dusty horizon grew a mounted troop—some forty riders from Iseran, clad in black kanduras, their faces hidden beneath veils of cloth. Their horses galloped in tight formation, every movement drilled and exact. Some carried shortbows, others bore lances whose tips glimmered dully in morning sun.

They drew their line into a wide semicircle around the oasis until intruders were penned in.

A low, guttural growl passed through ranks of Kajirs.

Scales bristled, scimitars flashed free of belts, and foremost fighters snapped thorns from their elbows.

“They mean to kill us!” a voice spat.

One warrior raised his weapon and hissed. “Let them come. We will not fall without a fight!”

The first Kajirs were already stepping forward when Sheikh Nam El Kabun sprang ahead in a single, long bound.

His voice cracked like a lash through the tension.

“Halt! No one strikes! Let them come closer. We will wait and see how they act.”

The Chronicles of Wetherid II

The warriors obeyed.

Blades sank.

No one moved.

All eyes were fixed upon the riders as air trembled.

Sheikh Nam El Kabun held his ground a single step before the line, his gaze locked upon the advancing troop.

Horses halted, scarcely a spear's length away.

One rider guided his mount a step ahead of the others and straightened in the saddle.

His voice rang out, firm and cutting, edged with a hardness that brooked no refusal.

“You have set foot upon the land of Iseran. That is an act of war. Lay down your weapons and leave this territory at once!”

The Sheikh drew himself upright, shoulders back, his stare unyielding.

“Who are you to give us orders?” he called back. “Show me your face, that I may know with whom I speak.”

The rider hesitated, then reached up and slowly drew cloth from his face.

Dark skin emerged, scored by sun and sand, features stern and noble.

“I am Wahmubu, war-leader of Sheikh Neg El Bahi, son-in-law to the ruler of Iseran. I warn you for the last time. Lay down your arms—and depart.”

The Sheikh inclined his head with calm dignity. “Prince Wahmubu of the Northern Tribes, consort of the noble Manamii. Your name is spoken far beyond the borders of Iseran. It is an honor to meet you.”

He stepped half a pace forward, his claws spreading.

“Yes, we have entered your land. I do not deny it. But we do not come with hostile intent. We seek no war. We seek life.”

Wahmubu's voice was cold and hard as iron.

He did not meet the Sheikh's eyes; a muscle pulsed in his jaw.

The Guardians of the Seven Artifacts

“Do not mock me, Sheikh. Your kind brings no pleas—they bring deceit and betrayal. For generations we have been enemies. What game do you play now? Do you hunt for slaves? Or do you dare an attack?”

The Sheikh's nostrils trembled almost imperceptibly, yet his voice did not waver.

“You are mistaken, Prince Wahmubu. You have surely heard what is happening in the south. Wells are dry. Oases are dead. No rain falls. Our people stand at the edge of thirst. We are not here as conquerors, but out of necessity. Out of hunger. Out of thirst. We do not come to rule—we come to survive.”

“I believe not a word of it,” Wahmubu snapped back.

Princess Balae stepped to the Sheikh's side and spoke with steady force.

“My father speaks only truth. Our people stand at the brink of destruction. Carry this word to Sheikh Neg El Bahi—we ask for nothing more.”

“You have no right to ask for anything,” Wahmubu cut her off.

His scrutiny moved deliberately over ranks of Kajirs, taking in their hollowed forms, frightened children, and elders swaying on failing legs.

For a single heartbeat, the hard line of his mouth softened before his expression became an unreadable mask.

Even if they speak truth—they have shed blood. They have slain hundreds of my kin, taken slaves, forced men and women beneath their god. They are like their snakes: treacherous, dangerous, and without restraint.

He let his breath out slowly and turned his gaze to his riders.

He knew he could not risk a battle against this desperate multitude.

He needed time—time to bring the full host to readiness.

After a brief silence, he gave a curt nod.

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“So be it. I will carry your message to Sheikh Neg El Bahi. But on one condition: you will lay down your weapons and draw back your thorns. My men will remain here and keep watch.”

Sheikh Nam El Kabun bowed respectfully. “I thank you, Wahmubu—warrior beneath the sun, prince of the desert. That is a wise decision.”

He turned to his warriors and raised his hand in command.

With heavy hearts, most of them at once loosened their weapon belts, set down their scimitars, and let thorns slide back beneath their scales.

Princess Balae nodded in assent.

It was a silent accord, greater than any she had ever granted a human before.

Wahmubu turned to his riders. “Remain alert. Let not a single gaze leave them. Should even a spark of betrayal flare, you know what is to be done.”

He drew reins tight, wheeled his horse, and drove it into a full gallop toward the city.

Thundering through the gate, he forced the animal at speed through narrow alleys leading to the palace. People leapt aside in alarm, pressing against walls or diving behind stalls. At one merchant's stand, the horse struck a table in passing, scattering fruit and vegetables across paving stones. The vendor reeled back, hands raised reflexively.

“Clear the way!” Wahmubu shouted as he reached the broad, stone-paved main street.

A patrol of city guards hurried aside, staring after him in astonishment.

Just before white marble steps of the palace entrance, he vaulted from the saddle while the horse was still moving.

Surging up steps, he rushed through open double doors and ran the length of a corridor until he burst into the hall, his breath rasping.

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Sheikh Neg El Bahi sat upright and composed in the majlis at the head of the chamber, seated upon a finely woven carpet amid richly embroidered cushions. His posture radiated calm authority, while his gentle gaze rested on Manamii and the two grandchildren beside him.

Scent of incense filled the hall, mingling with the rich scent of freshly brewed tea, while soft, muted light laid a veil of stillness over the room.

The children listened intently to their grandfather's words as Manamii poured tea and settled once more upon patterned cushions with fluid grace.

Wahmubu stepped forward, still fighting for breath, and began to report what had taken place at the oasis.

Before the Gates of Iseran

At the same time, the situation at the edge of the oasis grew dangerously tense.

Tension among Kajirs stretched to the breaking point.

Nazak planted himself at the water's edge, his eyes narrowed to slits, his teeth bared.

Though his body held almost still, his tail lashed the ground with force, carving furrows into sand.

Several riders closed in around him, lances thrust forward, their voices hard.

“Lay down your scimitar! Now!”

The Sheikh stepped forward, his voice cutting like steel through the standoff. “Drop the weapon! That is an order!”

“Nazak!” cried Princess Balae. “Do as my father has commanded!”

But Nazak did not obey.

Several Kajirs beside him likewise held their ground, their bodies taut with restrained violence.

The Chronicles of Wetherid II

“For the last time—lay down your weapons! Or we strike!” shouted one rider, a tall man wrapped head to foot in black garments.

With a domineering gesture, he broke from the line and drove his horse straight at Nazak.

The animal slammed its chest into him, hurling him aside.

Nazak staggered back, the insult burning across his face.

With a sharp hiss, he snatched up his scimitar and rammed it deep into the rider's throat.

Blood burst free; a horse reared with a shrill scream, and the lifeless body of the Scheddifer struck sand.

For the span of a single breath, everything froze.

Then violence broke loose.

Kajirs surged forward with hissing cries—towering bodies two heads taller than any man, massive in frame yet fast and relentless. With drawn scimitars, snapping thorns, and slashing claws, they crashed into stunned riders.

Horses reared, lances split beneath impact, and thorns and blades tore gaps into that formation.

The fight dissolved into raw sound—screaming horses, cracking wood, the brutal clash of iron. Men were wrenched from their saddles, screaming as they struck ground with shattering force. Horses fell; riders were trampled; cries died in sand.

Two men from the rear tried to break away to summon reinforcements, but two Kajirs ran them down, cutting them apart before they could escape.

Blood darkened ground and steel alike as the riders' formation collapsed.

Princess Balae stood paralyzed at the edge of the slaughter, her eyes wide, face drained of color.

Horror locked her muscles as she saw Nazak—upright, blade drowned in blood, his gaze cold and fixed.

“Nazak... no...!” she hissed.

The Guardians of the Seven Artifacts

Her voice was swallowed by the roar of fighting.

Sheikh Nam El Kabun forced his way between fighters, past raised blades and choking dust, his heart striking like a hammer.

“Enough! Stop!”

But the battle swallowed his command.

When he at last broke through the final line, Nazak stood before him—unmoving, a hiss vibrating low in his throat, his blade still locked in his claws.

The Sheikh halted, his breath heavy, and saw it at once.

His son-in-law would not yield.

“Lay down the weapon!” he called one final time.

Nazak did not move.

His body coiled, his mouth hardened into a thin line.

A single, merciless thought cut through Sheikh Nam El Kabun's mind: *There is no other way.*

The realization was as cold and sharp as the thorns that slid from his elbows with a hiss.

With one single, irreversible thrust, he drove the venom-tipped point into his son-in-law's throat.

Nazak reared up, his eyes wide, claws raking convulsively through empty air.

Then his body gave way, collapsing into sand where he settled, unmoving.

Sheikh Nam El Kabun stood over him, thorns slick with blood, his gaze fixed upon the lifeless form.

Breathing hard, he lifted his head.

“Bind the rebels,” he forced out hoarsely.

The clatter of falling weapons shattered stillness.

Horses of the riders of Iseran snorted, and scattered voices died away.

Kajir leaders surged forward, hurled rebels to the ground, stripped them of weapons, and bound their limbs with rope.

The Chronicles of Wetherid II

Princess Balae remained apart from the fighters, a handmaid pressed close at her side, the child clutched tight in her arms.

Her eyes did not leave Nazak's body, her face pale.

Then she broke from her rigidity and moved—staggering, without a word.

She sank down beside him, falling into sand to lay her brow against his chest.

Her claws tightened.

“No...”

Tears ran down her face.

Around her, all grew still.

Not a sound disturbed the moment.

Then surviving riders of Iseran closed ranks once more and advanced in a dense line, horses stamping restlessly, lances lifted, drawn swords held firm.

Step by step, they pressed forward, prepared for another thrust.

Balae lifted her head.

Her shaking voice carried across water and sand.

“Halt! You see what has been done. This was the treachery of a few—my father himself ended it!”

She pointed toward Nazak.

“He slew my husband to preserve peace. What clearer proof could there be that we do not seek war?”

The riders held.

Their gazes swept over bound rebels, frightened people crouched in sand, and blood darkening the ground of the oasis.

Balae stepped forward, wiped her face, and called out in a hard, cutting voice.

“All Kajirs—kneel! No resistance! Whoever refuses will cast us all into ruin!”

The Guardians of the Seven Artifacts

Hesitant at first, they knelt—one after another—until at last the entire people lay upon the ground.

A fearful silence settled over the oasis.

Sheikh Nam El Kabun still stood beside Nazak's body, thorns withdrawn.

His stance was rigid, but a great weight was etched into his features.

Balae raised her head and looked toward him.

She could tell from his expression he had acted for the survival of their people.

Yet as she looked at him, she felt something within her fracture.



Meanwhile, within the palace, Wahmubu delivered his report to Sheikh Neg El Bahi and Manamii.

"My Sheikh," he began in a steady voice, "they stand at the oasis, less than half a day's march from the city. Emaciated. Exhausted. Barely able to remain upright. They spoke your name, begged for entry—and their ruler himself ordered his warriors to lay down their weapons."

Manamii sprang to her feet, eyes flashing with fury.

"This is nothing but deception. They seek to ensnare us! I spent years freeing Scheddifer from their claws—men, women, children—forced to bow beneath their god. What they endured was fear, guilt, and unending bondage. You cannot trust them!"

Wahmubu nodded in agreement.

"Humans and Kajirs are too different. Their laws, their truths, even what they hold sacred stand opposed to ours. Their honor is forged in blood and submission, their order in strength and fear. Even their presence among us is a danger."

He pressed his lips together.

The Chronicles of Wetherid II

“What is sacred to us, they profane. What they venerate, we reject. If we admit them within our walls, they will carry discord with them—and in the end it will lead to violence and war.”

Sheikh Neg El Bahi listened to the words of his daughter and his son-in-law, yet he said nothing.

Instead, he turned inward—to a voice that had long since become an echo within him.

Shanburia will burn! it thundered through his mind, flaring as though it were his own will. *With Kajirs at your side, no army will stop you. This is the moment.*

Images flared again: hosts marching beneath his banner, battles that would crown him with power.

At last he rose slowly.

His features hardened, unfamiliar in their severity.

When he spoke, his voice was deep—no longer entirely his own.

“Kajirs are to be admitted into the city.”

Manamii stared at him in disbelief. “You... what are you saying? You would let those creatures—our mortal enemies—into our city? Have you lost all judgment?”

The Sheikh's gaze darkened.

He answered with cold finality.

“Kajirs have laid down their weapons. They ask for refuge. We will grant them entry.”

Wahmubu stepped to Manamii's side, his expression an unreadable mask. “My Sheikh, forgive me—but why? After all they have done to our people?”

For a single breath, Neg El Bahi hesitated, as though forcing an answer from himself.

Then he spoke with controlled resolve.

“They are broken. They come not as enemies, but as supplicants. We show our power not by refusing them—but by taking them in.”

The Guardians of the Seven Artifacts

“Father!” Manamii cried. “If you wish to help them, then give them water, food—what they need to return. But do not let them remain here. This is madness!”

Wahmubu nodded firmly.

“Yes. Mercy does not require blindness. We can aid them without opening our gates.”

A hard twitch passed across the Sheikh's face.

For a moment he seemed to struggle against himself—then his jaw locked.

“And then what?” he said quietly. “When they return to a land without water, without food? Then they will stand before us again. And again. And again. We solve nothing by turning them away. We only lose time.”

He leaned forward slightly, a dark undercurrent entering his voice.

“No... we must think beyond this. Kajirs could become our strength. Their will. Their bodies. An army that will increase the power of Iseran.”

Manamii stepped back in disbelief.

Her voice rose sharp with shock.

“Power? Since when do you speak of power, Father?”

Wahmubu moved a step forward, trying to meet the Sheikh's gaze.

“If this truly concerns aid and the preservation of peace... we could build a water channel. A conduit leading into their lands. That would allow them to remain in their homeland without us taking them into the city.”

Hope flickered in Manamii.

“Yes. We help them—but we do not take them in.”

The answer cut across the room.

Sheikh Neg El Bahi clenched his hands into fists.

“No. They will remain here. That is my final word.”

Silence fell.

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Then the Sheikh straightened, his expression set like stone.

“Wahmubu! You will ride back to the oasis at once. Bring Kajirs into the city. I will speak with Sheikh Nam El Kabun. The great hall is to be prepared. We will soon have cause for celebration.”

Manamii stepped close to her father, her eyes wide with despair. “Father, please... think on this once more. You are not as you were.”

The Sheikh lifted his hand in dismissal.

“Enough. Tend to your children, Manamii. Leave the fate of Iseran to me.”

Then he turned to Wahmubu with iron finality. “Ride. Now. Carry out my command.”

Wahmubu kept still for a single breath, his gaze resting on Manamii.

Then he bowed his head in measured restraint.

“As you command, my Sheikh.”

He turned away, his brow drawn tight, and left the hall in silence.



When Wahmubu reached the oasis again, several of his men hurried toward him, their faces taut, eyes dark with unrest.

“Prince! They attacked. There are dead among us.”

Wahmubu halted.

Before him lay blood-soaked sand, strewn with lifeless bodies of his riders, splintered lances, and shattered bows.

He ground his jaw.

Bitter certainty rose within him.

They are false. They are killers. They have not changed.

His hands tightened into fists.

The Guardians of the Seven Artifacts

As he was about to mount his horse to return to his Sheikh, Princess Balae and Sheikh Nam El Kabun stepped toward him.

Balae looked at him with fever-bright eyes, the child clutched in her arms, her face drawn by exhaustion and grief.

The Sheikh inclined his head slightly, his voice deep and burdened.

“Prince Wahmubu... we ask your forgiveness for what has occurred. It was not the will of my house. Nazak... betrayed us all. He and his men planned this uprising. It was done against my command.”

He glanced briefly toward Princess Balae, who struggled to keep her composure.

“I myself slew my son-in-law. It was... the only way.”

Balae stepped closer, her voice hissing softly.

“We know how it appears. But please... believe us. This was not an assault by our people. It was the treachery of a few. My father acted to preserve peace.”

Her gaze held his.

“We wish to live... not to fight.”

Wahmubu stared at them.

The conflict within him was plain to see.

His reason urged him to turn back, to warn his father-in-law of the ruin he was unleashing.

Then he remembered the strange, unyielding hardness in the voice of Sheikh Neg El Bahi.

This is not the man he was. This choice goes against everything he once stood for.

He closed his eyes for a single breath, gathered himself, and forced the decision past his lips.

“We will bring them into the city.”

A low, angry murmur rippled through ranks of his riders.

Some shouted openly; others cried out in bitter turmoil.

“We must not! Lizards have killed our brothers!”

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One man slammed his lance into sand with such force that the shaft shuddered.

“This is madness!”

Wahmubu raised his arm.

The gesture alone cut uproar short.

His voice followed, firm and unbending.

“It is the will of our Sheikh. I obey it—and you will obey it as well.”

A heavy silence fell.

Some riders averted their eyes; others pressed their lips tight to choke back protest.

Fingers clenched around lance shafts; horses snorted and stamped restlessly.

At last, one by one, the men lowered their heads—unwilling, yet bound by duty.

Then Wahmubu lifted his voice across the oasis so that all could hear.

“In the name of Sheikh Neg El Bahi—the gates of Iseran shall be opened! You are granted entry!”

For an instant, the world seemed frozen.

Then tension broke.

Cries burst forth—first scattered, then swelling into a raw, overwhelming wave.

Some Kajirs fell to their knees, giving thanks to their god, voices lifted skyward.

Others wept without restraint.

Warriors loosed loud, hissing calls.

At that moment, Sheikh Nam El Kabun stepped forward.

His towering frame rose stark from the mass.

As he lifted his arms and released a sharp, commanding hiss, his people fell instantly silent.

Every eye turned to their ruler.

The Guardians of the Seven Artifacts

With a firm voice that carried across the oasis, he called, “Obey the orders of your leaders. No more uprising—our fate is being decided now!”

Across the full breadth of the oasis, warriors of the Kajirs gathered, exchanged signs, and formed into closed ranks. Unarmed, yet in strict order, they took up marching formation.

Behind them, priests assembled beside carts bearing sacred snakes and the last of their provisions. The old straightened with effort; the young moved to support them. Mothers took their children by the hand or lifted them high as calls and hurried footsteps echoed around them.

Wheels groaned, wood creaked, and over everything lay taut anticipation.

Wahmubu stood beside his horse, watching every movement with unyielding attention.

Sheikh Nam El Kabun and Princess Balae moved along ranks of Kajirs, checking order, then turned toward Wahmubu.

Their eyes met only briefly.

A single nod from the Sheikh was enough.

Wahmubu swung into the saddle.

“Forward—by ranks!”

His voice carried across the oasis, and the column began to move.

Along the road, people of Iseran gathered, staring at the advancing host and speaking in uneasy clusters.

Some turned away and fled back toward the city.

A Fragile Peace

A dry desert wind hung over the square before the palace as the procession of Kajirs assembled. Ranks closed and carts halted. Commands rang out briefly before falling silent, leaving only the sound of exhausted bodies sinking to their knees.

The Chronicles of Wetherid II

Others straightened with effort, lifting their eyes to towering gates.

Hundreds of Iseran's inhabitants crowded the square, stairways, and colonnades, faces a mixture of fear and hatred, their eyes following every scaled form.

No word was spoken.

No call broke the silence.

The air stood heavy with expectation and fear.

When the caravan at last came fully to a halt, Wahmubu dismounted.

At that moment, massive palace gates groaned open.

Strained stillness settled over the square.

Crowds drew back as if at silent command, parting to form a narrow corridor that led straight to palace steps.

From shadowed interior beyond the gate, a firm, commanding voice rang out before its speaker emerged into light.

“You have traveled far, Sheikh Nam El Kabun. What brings your people to Iseran?”

A hiss passed through Kajir ranks as the man stepped forward: Sheikh Neg El Bahi. To either side stood viziers in rigid formation, hands folded, faces unmoved.

Half a step behind him, offset to the right, stood Manamii.

Her fingers rested in restless tension upon the hilt of a dagger at her belt, her gaze darting from one Kajir warrior to the next, weighing each as a threat.

At the foot of the stairs, Sheikh Nam El Kabun lifted his head with visible effort to face the man who had once been his mortal enemy.

“The desert has cast us out,” he said hoarsely.

Each word strained his voice; his throat was dry.

“In the south, there is no water left. We ask for... refuge.”

Manamii stepped forward in a single hard stride, and her voice lashed across the square. “Refuge?”

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A cold fury settled in her features, her eyes promising violence. “And what else? Our land? Our homes? Yesterday, your blades ran red with our blood!”

A threatening hiss rolled through front ranks of Kajir warriors. Their thorns slid halfway from their arms, muscles twitching. Some townsfolk recoiled in alarm; city guards' hands went to spears and blades.

But a single, sharp hiss from Princess Balae was enough. The Kajir warriors drew back, their thorns slowly retracting. Sheikh Neg El Bahi laid a calm hand upon Manamii's shoulder. She fell silent at once, though a vein throbbed at her temple. He turned to Sheikh Nam El Kabun, and when he spoke, his words carried clearly across the square.

“The time of enmity is past. Iseran will grant you refuge.”

Then he raised his voice until it rang from walls.

“We open our gates—and our homes.”

Unbelieving glances flew between people and Kajirs.

No one had expected this.

“From this day forth,” the Sheikh continued, “every household in this city will receive Kajirs, feed them, and give them water.”

A surge of anger spread through the human crowd. Some shook their heads violently; others stepped back, lifting their hands as if to ward off the decree.

Confusion and distrust lay on the faces of the Kajirs. They had expected rejection or battle—never this impossible mercy.

Wahmubu climbed the steps and took his place beside Manamii.

There he slowly set his hand upon the hilt of his sword, met his father-in-law's eyes, and gave a barely perceptible shake of his head in protest.

“This is my will,” Sheikh Neg El Bahi replied coldly, holding Wahmubu's stare without yielding.

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“Betrayal!” a voice suddenly shouted from lower ranks.

“He is selling us to lizards!” another voice roared from the front left.

Guards seized their lances and closed ranks.

A sharp command from viziers cut through the air and smothered outcry at once.

A strained silence settled over the square.

Nam El Kabun studied his counterpart's face intently for any flicker of deceit.

But Neg El Bahi's expression did not change.

The longer Nam El Kabun watched him, the deeper his doubt grew.

Is this truly mercy—or a snare whose purpose I do not yet see? But what choice do we have?

At last he lifted his head.

His voice lay heavy over the square.

“The people of Kajirs, who stood upon the brink of death, thank you for this trust.”

A low, unwilling mutter answered him from among humans.

Tension thickened with every breath.

In that moment, Sheikh Neg El Bahi stepped down palace stairs toward the crowd.

At once the last murmurs died away.

“Sheikh Nam El Kabun, Princess Balae,” he said with open hands as he came to a halt before them. “You are my guests. Follow me into the palace. There we shall dine together and speak of all that must be settled.”

Disbelief spread across the faces of people. Many stood staring at Kajirs in silence, unable to grasp what they had just heard.

Wahmubu took Manamii's hand, and together they descended the steps slowly.

Reaching the bottom, he stepped forward toward rulers of the Kajirs.

The Guardians of the Seven Artifacts

His shoulders drew tight, and his voice thundered across the square.

“The enemy who stood before our gates only moments ago and slew many of our brothers—shall now sit at our table?”

His gaze was raw with undisguised fury as he thrust out his arm, a hard line drawn between himself and Kajirs.

Shouts of agreement surged from the crowd.

One man slammed his fist against a guard's spear, and a riot threatened to erupt at once.

Guards reacted instantly, driving their shields forward and forcing agitated people back.

Manamii gave a barely perceptible nod.

He had spoken the truth—the same truth that burned within her.

A sharp, sand-laden gust swept across the square.

For a brief moment, air seemed to stand motionless, heavy with tension.

Sheikh Neg El Bahi fixed his gaze on his son-in-law.

“Wahmubu,” he said in a voice unnaturally cold, “times have changed. Kajirs are guests, not enemies. Accept this.”

Wahmubu clenched his fists behind his back and nodded unwillingly.

Balae felt his fury and rejection clearly.

She knew he was right: their peoples had always been enemies.

Yet she remembered what her own people had already lost—and what now stood at stake.

Her breathing grew shallow, her heart beating fast and heavy.

The death of her husband, the dying of her people, the endless march through the desert—none of it could be in vain.

One single thought took clear form within her: *We will survive.*

Slowly, she lowered her head.

Sheikh Neg El Bahi turned to his viziers.

The Chronicles of Wetherid II

“Oversee dispersal of the Kajirs. See that our guests lack nothing.”

Viziers stepped forward, breaking from their line along the palace wall and moving toward guards. Their faces remained unmoved, their voices carrying the full authority of their ruler across the square.

People of Iseran drew back with hesitation, while Kajirs, exhausted and silent, pressed closer together. Guards moved slowly among them, dividing them into groups and making certain that no one was left behind.

At last a long procession formed: viziers and guards at its head, behind them Kajirs, surrounded by men, women, and children of the city. Streets and alleys filled, and the steady stamp of countless steps echoed from walls.

Kajirs studied buildings with wary attention as they were led through the city.

At each house where the column halted, a vizier stepped forward, unrolled a parchment, and read aloud names of the inhabitants, waiting until they emerged from the crowd. Guards then led assigned Kajirs to doorways, which residents opened with visible reluctance so that all might enter together.

Each time, doors fell shut with a final sound—a silent mark of resentment.

Then the procession moved on again, slow and wordless, through the narrow maze of alleys. With every stop, the number of Kajirs grew smaller.

Again and again, doors opened, and they were brought into homes and sometimes into workshops. When the column had finally dissolved, streets lay empty and every door was closed.

Viziers and guards returned to the palace.

Soon unrest stirred behind the city's walls.

Low voices passed through houses. Fear, anger, and mistrust spread from room to room.

The Guardians of the Seven Artifacts

At the edge of the northern market, in the great smithy, a bearded man stood in silence before his cold anvil. Only a meager bed of coals still glowed in the hearth.

No one worked.

Amid tools and blackened piles of coal crouched eight exhausted Kajirs, their eyelids heavy with weariness.

The blacksmith stared at them, his hands clenched so tightly around the haft of a hammer that his knuckles ached.

“This is madness,” he growled hoarsely. “Eight of them in my workshop. There is scarcely room for my own family.”

His son, barely fifteen summers old, retreated wordlessly into shadows behind bellows, not daring to look at the reptilian figures.

Kajirs did not move, yet their mere presence made the already cramped space feel suffocating.

A few streets away, in the living room of a carpet weaver, a woman sat on the floor, her fingers twisted tight in the fabric of her dress. Beside her stood her husband, pale and unmoving.

Two small children clung to her, while three Kajirs crouched at the far end of the room. Hatred lay in the air, unspoken.

The woman whispered, barely audible. “We are to live under one roof with the murderers of our son?”

Her husband did not answer. His gaze remained fixed on enemies who, years before, had taken and slain one of their children.

The Kajirs lowered their heads and drew in upon themselves. Their silence made the tension in the room almost unbearable.

Not far from there, in a house scented with spices and honey, a merchant fought to hold his composure. He lived alone with his daughter and had been given four young Kajirs to take in.

“You will remain here, at the edge of the room,” he said firmly. “You will take only what is given to you.”

The Kajirs nodded.

As he turned away, his daughter slipped to his side.

The Chronicles of Wetherid II

“Father,” she whispered, her voice trembling, “I do not want them sleeping in my room.”

He laid his hand on her shoulder.

“They will stay here with me. I will watch over them,” he promised. He spoke more gently than he felt, his gaze moving over the four figures before him. In his eyes lay a father's fear—and the bitter certainty that he could not protect his daughter if matters truly turned against them.

Farther out, near the edge of the city, in a small house with a sagging roof, a young woman knelt beside a chest, thrusting clothing and bread into it in haste.

Her husband stood at the door, listening for every sound in narrow alleys beyond.

Three Kajirs had just set down their bundles in the kitchen without a word.

She spoke in a strained whisper.

“We cannot stay. Tonight, we leave the city. We go to my sister in the north.”

Her husband shook his head.

“Gates are closed. Guards will stop us. They may even imprison us for neglecting our duty,” he answered in a low voice. “We will go—but not now.”

The look in his eyes showed that he shared her fear.

In one of the larger houses near South Gate, an old woman sat upon the threshold. On the ground beside her lay a worn knife. Her fingers rested close to its handle.

Four Kajirs slept curled together in the corner of her living space—too exhausted to stir.

“The Sheikh forces us to shelter the enemy,” she murmured to herself, her eyes never leaving the sleeping shapes.

Scenes such as these unfolded in countless houses, and behind every closed door, unrest continued to grow.

The Guardians of the Seven Artifacts



While Kajirs were being led to their assigned quarters, Princess Balae and Sheikh Nam El Kabun entered the opulent banquet hall, guided by two viziers. Sheikh Neg El Bahi, Manamii, and Wahmubu were already awaiting them in the majlis.

Limestone walls bore intricate reliefs—battle scenes from the history of the Scheddifer and depictions of their gods.

Thick carpets in radiant hues covered the floor.

Massive bronze chandeliers, laden with hundreds of burning candles, cast flickering light across gold-embroidered wall hangings. At the hall's center stood broad tables laden with rare fruits, steaming bowls of spiced meats, freshly baked flatbread, honeyed pastries, and carefully stacked nuts and dates.

The incense and rich scent of roasted lamb—slowly turned on a spit by a servant—merged into a heavy haze that filled the room with dense sweetness.

Not far from the Sheikh's throne, dancers moved upon a raised platform. Their hips turned in measured rhythm, fine veils swirling about their bodies, while musicians played a slow, deep-toned melody upon drums and stringed instruments.

Sheikh Nam El Kabun and his daughter took their places upon richly embroidered cushions and layered carpets.

The two viziers sat as well, holding themselves motionless, backs as straight as spears, hands clasped so tightly their knuckles were white.

Princess Balae kept still, gently rocking her child, while her father's eyes wandered restlessly through the hall.

Opposite them, Wahmubu kept his head lowered, his left hand locked around Manamii's.

Only Sheikh Neg El Bahi sat in perfect composure, a subtle smile resting upon his lips. In his thoughts, Kajirs were already bound to him, his own people already pacified. It was the first step of his greater design.

The Chronicles of Wetherid II

As he selected a few dates from an ornate golden bowl, he turned to Sheikh Nam El Kabun.

“It must have been difficult to watch your people perish. How many fell to drought?” he asked calmly.

Sheikh Nam El Kabun nodded slowly.

“More than a third of our people died—of thirst and hunger. We have never endured such a calamity before.”

He hesitated, and when he spoke again, his voice had lowered.

“I thank you for receiving us. It is an act of great generosity... especially when our peoples...”

He broke off.

Then he forced out the next words, quietly.

“...were enemies.”

Sheikh Neg El Bahi lifted one hand slightly and smiled thinly. “Let us not dwell on the past. Let us look ahead—to a future we now share.”

Manamii turned toward Wahmubu.

She met his eyes, her own conveying a silent, urgent plea.

Wahmubu tightened his grip on her hand and raised his voice.

“My Sheikh,” he said evenly, “I am your son-in-law and Warmaster. Will you not tell me what kind of shared future you speak of?”

His gaze passed briefly over the two reptilian figures.

“Until now, Manamii and I believed Kajirs would remain only for a limited time—until their land recovered. But if I understand your words correctly, you pursue... other intentions.”

He paused for a breath, then held his father-in-law's gaze, his own unwavering.

“Intentions which—pardon my frankness—go against our way of life, our culture, and our faith.”

Sheikh Neg El Bahi had begun to reply when Manamii cut in.

“And I will speak plainly—our people will not simply accept this, Father.”

The Guardians of the Seven Artifacts

Her eyes flicked to the two viziers, who met her gaze with visible hesitation.

“Men and Kajirs could not be more different. I do not know what change has come over you...”

She broke off and gave him a look of profound disbelief, then turned her gaze to Balae and her father. “Take as much water as you need—but leave Iseran.”

Her voice was hard, unyielding.

Sheikh Neg El Bahi rose in open irritation. “Enough, Manamii. This is not for you to decide. And you shame not only me, but our guests as well.”

He turned toward Sheikh Nam El Kabun and Princess Balae, inclined his head briefly, and spoke with controlled formality. “Forgive her. My daughter speaks from pride—and fear.”

Balae and her father returned the nod, their expressions impassive.

Manamii’s nostrils flared.

She was already rising to leave the hall in open protest when heavy doors swung open.

A handmaiden entered, leading Manamii’s children by the hand.

The moment the servant saw Kajirs, she froze.

With a sharp intake of breath, she drew the children tight against her chest.

Little ones stared uncertainly at the massive, scaled figures of the strangers.

A stifled whimper escaped them—then broke into loud, frightened sobbing.

Manamii spun toward her father, eyes widened with a mother’s fury. “Do you see it? Your own grandchildren fear them!”

Sheikh Neg El Bahi cast only a brief glance at the children.

“They will grow accustomed,” he said coolly. “Your fear is unfounded.”

The Chronicles of Wetherid II

Manamii ignored him.

She turned instead to Wahmubu and fixed him with a silent look that permitted no contradiction.

“Come,” she said quietly. “We are going.”

Together they moved to the handmaiden. Manamii knelt, lifted her daughter into her arms, and smoothed the child's dark hair with careful tenderness. Prince Wahmubu bent to his son and closed the boy's small hand firmly within his own.

Then he straightened.

His gaze passed briefly over the two viziers before he lowered his head—short, formal, and without once looking at Sheikh Neg El Bahi.

“Manamii is right. It is better that we leave you now, so that you may deliberate on your plans without restraint.”

With stiff, formal steps, they left the banquet hall.

The handmaiden hurried after them, still pale, visibly shaken.

Doors crashed shut behind them.

A Bloody Alliance

For a moment no one spoke.

Only music drifted faintly through the hall.

Princess Balae's breath hitched.

Her claws bit into the cushion beneath her, and a guttural hiss rose in her chest before she forced it down.

Her eyes met her father's.

In that silent exchange lay the shared truth: they had come seeking refuge in the palace of an enemy—and had now been openly rejected by his own blood.

Sheikh Nam El Kabun turned back toward the gates.

Scales along his neck rose slightly.

The Guardians of the Seven Artifacts

His tail was rigid, every muscle of his body held in iron restraint over his fury.

The two viziers exchanged a look and withdrew a fraction, knowing how deadly this moment had become.

Sheikh Neg El Bahi drew a slow breath and spoke in a calm, level voice, as though pressing down a flame that still threatened to blaze.

“I ask your forbearance. My daughter was guided by fear.”

He lifted his hand in a measured, inviting gesture.

“But now let us speak. There is much I must know.”

He inclined his upper body slightly forward.

“What is the state of your warriors?”

Sheikh Nam El Kabun lifted his head at last.

His voice was firm, edged with pride.

“They have suffered. Hunger and thirst have taken many. Survivors are weakened—but their will remains unbroken. Give them water. Give them food. Grant them only a few days of rest—and they will again become the host that even your strongest warriors once feared.”

He paused.

His claws spread slightly.

Within Sheikh Neg El Bahi, memories stirred: battlefields veiled in dust and blood, broken bodies strewn across the ground, the silent advance of reptilian warriors through the night. He remembered their speed, their sharpened senses, the venom in their thorns—working within moments, locking muscle and breath alike.

He gave a slow nod.

A shadow of hunger crept into his gaze.

Princess Balae straightened and studied the ruler of Iseran with sharpened attention.

“Why do you ask this?” she said.

The Chronicles of Wetherid II

Sheikh Neg El Bahi leaned back and folded his hands before him.

A fevered gleam burned in his eyes.

“Have you ever heard of Shanburia?”

Balae and her father exchanged a brief glance and shook their heads.

“A continent beyond the Southern Sea,” he continued. “Lands of rich soil. Mountains heavy with silver and gold. Cities filled with people—waiting to be subdued.”

He lifted one hand, his fingers tracing the air.

“A realm that will bend to our will. That will lead Iseran—and you, my allies—into a new age.”

His voice rose, drawn tight with conviction.

“Imagine it: humans and Kajirs, side by side, carrying banners of conquest.”

Both viziers, who had remained silent until now, went pale. Their bodies stiffened almost imperceptibly; eyes flicked between faces at the table. To them, Shanburia was no more than a name from ancient chronicles—a distant legend, not a place of flesh and soil.

And now their ruler spoke of invasion.

Of slaves.

Of spoils.

This was not the man they had sworn to serve. Yet neither dared speak. Silently they listened on, fixing every word in memory to report later to Manamii and Wahmubu.

Sheikh Neg El Bahi leaned further forward, his gaze pressing into Sheikh Nam El Kabun. “All that is required is your will. Your people. Your warriors—their strength. Follow me. And we will shape a new world.”

Air in the chamber grew dense.

Sheikh Nam El Kabun turned his head toward his daughter.

Mistrust stood naked in Balae's eyes—sharp, alert.

The Guardians of the Seven Artifacts

Now she understood the true weight of open gates, feasting, sudden mercy.

A bitter line tightened her mouth as she folded her arms.

“And how do you intend to reach Shanburia?” she asked quietly.

Sheikh Neg El Bahi smiled and rose with deliberate calm. “A wise question.”

He stepped to one of the great oval windows and motioned for Sheikh Nam El Kabun and Princess Balae to follow.

“I have long since made provision.”

The two stepped beside him and looked out.

In the palace garden stretched a vast storage yard where countless timber trunks, stacked in dense rows, covered a wide area.

“We will build ships,” he declared with pride. “A fleet. We will bring it south to the coast—and from there, we will sail to Shanburia.”

Sheikh Nam El Kabun shook his head in disbelief.

“A fleet? That would take months—if not years. And how do you intend to transport ships across the desert to the coast? That is madness.”

Sheikh Neg El Bahi broke into a broad grin.

“You underestimate my foresight, my friend. Within sixty days, ten great warships will be completed. All of Iseran will labor for it—your people as well.”

He fixed them both with his gaze.

“All materials are prepared. Timber comes from the Dark Forest—oak, fir, pine. Metal for fittings from Ib'Agier. Ropes and sails from Thir. I have spent a fortune. But it will return to me a hundredfold.”

His eyes flared briefly.

“Shanburia will belong to us.”

The two viziers leaned toward one another and whispered low.

The Chronicles of Wetherid II

“He means to build warships. We believed the wood was meant for expansion of Iseran—new houses along the river, storehouses for the people.”

The younger nodded tensely.

“We must inform Manamii and Wahmubu at once.”

“Wait,” murmured the elder, his eyes fixed on the Sheikh. “Let us hear whether he reveals more.”

At that moment, the two sheikhs and Princess Balae turned from the window and returned.

Sheikh Nam El Kabun seated himself directly beside Neg El Bahi, while Princess Balae took her place in silence beside the viziers.

“You have indeed made provision for everything,” Sheikh Nam El Kabun said evenly. “But how do you intend to bring ships to the south?”

“We will roll them upon timber,” Sheikh Neg El Bahi answered with rising excitement. “My master builders have shown me how it can be done.”

Princess Balae lowered her head a fraction.

Her voice took on a quiet, hissing edge.

“Yet your daughter and your son-in-law are clearly opposed to allowing our people to remain in Iseran. How do you intend to resolve this conflict? They are not entirely wrong. Your people will never accept us. It is only a matter of time before unrest rises—and then your undertaking will collapse.”

Sheikh Neg El Bahi kept his silence.

Her words settled heavily into the chamber; his fingers drummed slowly upon the cushion.

Before he could answer, Sheikh Nam El Kabun rose.

His gaze drifted to the platform where dancers still moved beneath low, steady music.

“Perhaps we should continue this discussion elsewhere,” he rasped. “There are too many ears in this hall.”

The Guardians of the Seven Artifacts

Sheikh Neg El Bahi stood without hesitation and clapped his hands once, sharply.

Dancers froze; the music stopped at once.

After a brief pause, dancers, musicians, and servants withdrew in silence.

Heavy doors closed with a dull, final sound.

Sheikh Nam El Kabun turned to the two viziers.

His gaze became unnervingly still, as if weighing the souls of the two men before him.

“Can they be trusted?”

Viziers stiffened.

For a single breath, the hall lay in absolute silence.

Then the elder rose in open indignation, his voice trembling despite his restraint.

“Sheikh Nam El Kabun. We have served our ruler for decades with loyalty and without blemish. You enter this city as a supplicant—and dare to question our allegiance?”

His eyes flashed.

“We tolerate your presence because our Sheikh has willed it so. That alone grants you shelter. It does not grant you the right to speak to us in this manner.”

The younger vizier nodded in fierce agreement, hands clenched into fists.

“We have given everything for this city, for our people. Do not forget that.”

For a moment, silence settled once more over the hall.

Princess Balae let her gaze pass calmly between the men, scales around her eyes drawn taut.

Sheikh Nam El Kabun remained unmoved, his lids half lowered.

“I merely asked,” he said quietly, “because much is at stake.”



Shortly before midnight, they still sat together upon carpets of the hall. Shanburia—a name that had once been whispered only in ancient tales—had, through their words, become a tangible realm whose riches now seemed merely a matter of division.

Candles had burned low, their light moving over wall reliefs in slow patterns. The scent of wax lay heavy in the air. The stillness of the late hour pressed upon the chamber.

Sheikh Nam El Kabun leaned forward slowly, the dull sheen of his scales catching candlelight.

When he spoke, his voice was rough, but resolute.

“My warriors will stand with you—if you secure our survival and grant us a future.”

His gaze fixed directly upon the ruler of Iseran.

“For that, we require our weapons. And a share in what we conquer together.”

Sheikh Neg El Bahi nodded slowly, a thin, almost unnatural smile resting upon his lips.

His eyes burned with a fevered light.

“Your warriors are indispensable to this undertaking. I am prepared to return your weapons—and to grant you a share in the wealth of Shanburia.”

He leaned back, his hands folding before him.

“One third of the land, goods, and treasures we claim shall be yours. And likewise, one third of slaves who will serve us.”

His rigid gaze allowed no contradiction.

“This is my offer. Iseran extends its hand—not merely to secure your survival, but to raise your people to new power and standing.”

Balae straightened slightly.

Her gaze shifted from her father to Sheikh Neg El Bahi.

“A third of slaves?” she said low, her claws twitching.

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“Our people have suffered great loss. We will need every hand to shape a new future. Will a third be enough to restore our strength?”

Sheikh Neg El Bahi turned to her with patient firmness.

“A third of Shanburia's slaves is a generous share, Balae,” he replied in an unwavering voice.

Balae pressed her lips together. “A third...”

It was less than she had hoped for—but more than she could have demanded as a petitioner.

She gave her father a slight nod of silent assent.

Sheikh Nam El Kabun released a quiet hiss, his claws moving restlessly across the cushion.

“There is unrest in the streets. My people are not welcome here. Citizens of Iseran meet us with mistrust. To prevent riots and secure order, I propose that the city guard be formed of both humans and Kajirs—until departure to the coast,” he said.

Sheikh Neg El Bahi inclined his head slightly.

His eyes narrowed for a brief moment, a muscle twitching in his jaw as he weighed the words.

Then he interlaced his fingers and set his hands upon his lap.

His gaze rested on Sheikh Nam El Kabun for a short, calculating moment.

“A joint guard...” he murmured, almost to himself, his voice scarcely more than a whisper.

Then he lifted his eyes.

The fevered resolve returned—stronger than before.

“So be it. City guards of Kajirs and humans. Until departure.”

The elder vizier adjusted his turban and cleared his throat.

His voice trembled slightly; his eyes moved uneasily between the two sheikhs, deep lines drawn into his brow.

“My Sheikh,” he began, “such a mingling... it is a dangerous step. Old hostilities run deep. Our people will not understand. It will sow bitterness.”

The Chronicles of Wetherid II

“And the slaves of which you speak,” the other vizier added, his voice low and firm, like a judgment that could not be bent.

“Our laws speak of freedom, Sheikh. They forbid the making of men into slaves. This goes against principles upon which Iseran was built.”

Sheikh Neg El Bahi dismissed the objections with a short, hard shake of his head.

His gaze fixed upon something only he could see.

For a moment his voice faltered, a rough sound escaping his throat before he forced it back under control. Visions of Xaroth held him in an unyielding grip and would not release him. Only the next step mattered to him now—not objections of his counsellors.

“The past lies behind us. We step into a new future—with new laws and new commands,” he replied with a firm voice and rigid stare. “Kajirs will fight at our side. And they will receive their share. The city guard will be mixed, and slaves will serve us. This is my will. Any who oppose it, oppose Iseran.”

The two viziers drew strained breaths.

The elder averted his eyes for a moment, a profound sign of disapproval; the younger swallowed hard, looking to the floor.

Sheikh Neg El Bahi rose slowly.

“Let us seal our alliance,” he said with solemn force, and reached for a richly ornamented golden chest set into a niche beside him.

With controlled movement, he opened the lid and lifted out a precious dagger, its golden hilt set with gemstones that flared in candlelight.

He straightened, gripping the dagger with both hands, and stepped forward.

Sheikh Nam El Kabun rose as well and advanced a single step.

Now they stood face to face, their movements solemn and ceremonial.

Neg El Bahi lifted the blade between them.

The Guardians of the Seven Artifacts

With a brief, decisive motion he cut into his palm and pressed it against the metal.

Blood ran along the blade.

His voice rang deep and dark.

“I, Sheikh Neg El Bahi, ruler of Iseran, swear to grant Kajirs protection and their share. Together, we shall conquer Shanburia.”

Then he passed the dagger on.

Nam El Kabun grasped the hilt and drew a claw across the blade until blood seeped from a fine cut in his scale.

His voice was steady.

“I, ruler of Kajirs, swear loyalty to this alliance. My warriors will serve you, Sheikh Neg El Bahi, and together we shall conquer Shanburia.”

The two viziers stepped back instinctively.

One held his breath in horror and helpless restraint; the other shook his head almost imperceptibly.

Sheikh Nam El Kabun let the dagger fall.

Mingled blood ran along the blade, dripped onto the carpet, and sank into fabric.

Then a voice was heard—barely more than a breath drifting through the hall.

Shanburia will burn.

None could say whether the words had truly been spoken or whether they had risen only within their minds.

Sheikh Neg El Bahi turned to Princess Balae.

“Remain in the palace. I have prepared chambers for you in the western wing. Until our departure for Shanburia, we shall live beneath one roof, united in conquest of that new realm.”

Princess Balae inclined her head, her eyes watchful.

Her gaze flicked briefly to the viziers, then to her father.

“We accept your offer with thanks, Sheikh Neg El Bahi,” she said evenly.

The Chronicles of Wetherid II

Her face remained composed, yet her breathing quickened against her will.

Her gaze fell to the dagger upon the carpet, its blade still dark with blood.

A vow had been spoken—it granted her people protection and water, yet bound them to a war whose end no one could foresee.

“May the price not be too high,” she whispered, scarcely audible.

Her tail swept restlessly across the carpet, then snapped to stillness.

The viziers stood rigid, their lips sealed.

Without a word, they watched the two sheikhs and Balae leave the hall.

Anger and fear held them fast.

A blood pact had been sealed, and they had been powerless to prevent it.

Heavy doors fell shut behind the two sheikhs and Balae.

For a moment, the viziers remained alone in the empty hall.

Then they turned and hurried out. With quick steps, they crossed the dark corridors of the palace; only the muted echo of their own footfalls followed them. Before the door to the chambers of Manamii and Wahmubu, they exchanged a grave glance, then knocked—first softly, then more urgently, until wood creaked.

At last Wahmubu opened the door, drowsy, still half dazed, startled by the late visit.

In lowered voices, the two reported what had been decided in the great hall: alliance, oaths, division of spoils. Only at the end did they add that Sheikh Nam El Kabun and Princess Balae would now remain in the palace for the night.

Wahmubu blinked, shaking his head as he began to grasp the danger.

The Guardians of the Seven Artifacts

“Our ruler has followed secret designs, kept us in the dark—even deceived us. I can scarcely comprehend it. All of this shows that he no longer thinks clearly. We must act.”

The two viziers nodded in silence.

Wahmubu covered his face with both hands and rubbed his brow and eyes.

“Send a trustworthy man to northern Scheddifer tribes. He is to inform my father and the shaman Maroo. After that, he is to seek out Nagulaj and inform him as well. Wait here. I will write two messages that must be delivered in person.”

With that, he withdrew into his chamber.

Manamii stirred awake and looked at him in confusion. He quickly told her what had transpired and what steps he intended to take. Manamii agreed at once, for she too felt that something within her father was no longer as it had been.

While the two viziers waited, Wahmubu wrote two messages upon parchment, sealed them with care, and at last placed them into their hands.



That night, while Iseran lay in hushed darkness and only the distant cries of jackals and the whisper of wind through the streets were heard, Xaroth's voice rose again within the chamber of Sheikh Neg El Bahi.

It was darker than before, its tone steeped in rancor.

“You did not heed my warning,” he spoke. “The envious and doubters multiply. They whisper in streets and sow distrust—even within your own house. You must remain resolute. Harder still. Your plan must not be imperiled.”

Sheikh Neg El Bahi tossed restlessly in his sleep, sweat glistening upon his brow.

He murmured hoarsely.

The Chronicles of Wetherid II

“I will... I will instruct city guards to strike more decisively... to silence agitators...”

Dark shadows began to circle through the chamber, weightless and flowing, until they thickened and drifted toward the sleeping sheikh.

One by one, they slipped into his body.

Sheikh Neg El Bahi jerked.

His form arched and tightened as though he sought to resist—but it was futile.

A ghostly force lifted him from the bed and crushed him back down, until no resistance remained within him.

Xaroth's voice rang out again, now cold and unyielding.

“Your own family is blind to what you are creating. They stand against you. You must not tolerate this. Act.”

The sheikh's closed lids fluttered.

His body shuddered, his breathing broke into harsh bursts, until at last—with the last of his strength, scarcely audible—he whispered.

“I... will make it clear to Manamii and Wahmubu... that they must end their resistance...”

Xaroth's voice softened, almost coaxing, and sounded one final time in his ear. “It is for their own good. One day, they will thank you.”

The sheikh's ragged breathing filled the darkened chamber.

He tore himself from sleep, but rest did not return to him.



In another chamber of the palace, sleep also fled someone that night—Princess Balae, whom her people reverently called the Pearl of the Desert.

She and her father sat opposite one another upon unfamiliar carpets, in a room that did not carry the scent of home.

The Guardians of the Seven Artifacts

“If we conquer Shanburia,” Balae whispered, “many of our warriors will fall.”

Her father did not answer at once.

His gaze rested upon the darkened door, as though he might see through it.

At last he spoke quietly.

“You are right. Who will protect our people when the strongest have gone to war?”

“No one,” Balae replied, “unless we place our trust in the promises of Sheikh Neg El Bahi.”

Scales along her arms lifted briefly, then smoothed again. “And what if he deceives us? What if we fight... and in the end he alone rules Shanburia?”

Her father closed his eyes for a moment.

“Then we would have been nothing but tools.”

Princess Balae fell silent.

Yet in her mind's eye stood Nazak's face—his gaze full of pride and defiance—and she heard his last words before he fell.

“He saw it coming,” she whispered. “Nazak knew our people would never live beneath a foreign desert banner.”

Sheikh Nam El Kabun lowered his head.

“He acted before the time was ripe. His uprising would have destroyed us all.”

“And yet he was right,” she replied bitterly. “He died for that truth.”

A long silence followed, broken only by their shallow, restless breathing.

Only in the first pale light of morning did they sink into a few brief moments of exhausted sleep.



The Chronicles of Wetherid II

In the morning, a knock came at the door.

Two servants of the Sheikh asked Balae and her father to come to the throne hall.

They rose, every step feeling heavy, the scales of both dulled by long wakefulness as they moved with measured restraint through the silent corridors of the palace. When they entered the hall, they paused for a moment, their eyes sweeping swiftly across the gathered assembly.

To their left stood several of their own leaders, speaking softly in hissing undertones.

To the right, dozens of humans had assembled: advisors of Sheikh Neg El Bahi, the two viziers, three pashas, several aghas, and guards who spoke among themselves with excited gestures and restless movement.

At the head of the hall sat Sheikh Neg El Bahi. To his right were Manamii, Wahmubu, and their children, their faces tense as they looked toward the reptilian figures.

Manamii sought Wahmubu's gaze with open concern.

When Sheikh Neg El Bahi saw Balae and her father, he rose with slow ceremony and began to speak.

“My friends, come closer. I have taken the liberty of summoning several of your loyal warriors here, for it is important that they too learn this: the people of Iseran have entered into an alliance with the Kajirs of the South.”

A loud murmur ran through the ranks of humans.

Startled glances crossed between them, while a low, rippling hiss passed through Kajirs.

Manamii was about to speak at once, but her father noticed the movement from the corner of his eye, raised his hand, and stilled her with a sharp glance.

Wahmubu drew a deep breath, shoulders tight.

He too held back, waiting to see where these words would lead.

“Come to me,” the Sheikh called to Sheikh Nam El Kabun and Princess Balae.

The Guardians of the Seven Artifacts

They exchanged a brief glance and stepped forward.

Their steps echoed along the red runner that led through the center of the hall—past rigid, hostile stares of humans and astonished faces of their own warriors—straight toward Sheikh Neg El Bahi.

He summoned one of his advisers.

The man stepped forward with a rolled parchment in his hands, bowed deeply, and took his place at the Sheikh's side.

With a calm, steady voice, he began to read.

“Decree of the Ruler of Iseran: From this day forth, Kajirs are recognized as allies of our realm. They are permitted to take up their weapons once more. The city guard shall be reinforced by their warriors; their commanders shall rise into the ranks of our shared army. Kajirs are granted permanent residence in Iseran. They shall be free to practice their faith; their beliefs and rites shall be respected. They may take up work, engage in trade, and contribute to building our prosperity.”

The adviser paused.

His voice faded into the strained stillness of the hall.

“In return, Kajirs pledge to support the endeavors of the realm of Iseran without reservation—in peace as well as in war.”

The hall erupted.

Cries of disbelief and raw outrage flared.

Breaths caught; hands clenched around hilts; faces blanched or darkened in anger.

Among Kajirs, faint glimmers of relief stirred—small, fragile sparks against the mass of human rejection.

Sheikh Neg El Bahi stood rigidly, his eyes fixed on some distant point only he could see.

It is spoken now. All have heard. There is no turning back.

Before him, Princess Balae looked down at the child in her arms.

No one wishes this bond—no one but him.

The Chronicles of Wetherid II

She raised her eyes briefly toward Sheikh Neg El Bahi.

He truly believes we shall become his servants.

Then Manamii and Wahmubu rose at the same moment.

Their faces were rigid, carved with fury.

“We will not allow this!” Manamii cried, her voice sharp with disbelief.

Wahmubu stepped forward, tore the parchment from the adviser's hands, and ripped it apart.

Fragments pattered across the floor like brittle leaves.

For a heartbeat—silence.

Then the hall exploded.

Sheikh Neg El Bahi surged to his feet, his voice thundering. “Guards! Seize them—both of them! The children as well!”

Armed guards stormed forward from all sides.

Manamii clutched her children to her chest as she was forced back; Wahmubu fought to shield them, teeth bared, eyes blazing.

But guards overwhelmed them.

Manamii's cries and the terrified wails of the children echoed through the corridors as they were dragged toward the dungeons.

Wahmubu's voice roared after them—cut short, forced down by many hands.

Within the hall, chaos erupted.

Shouts, curses, overturned stools; men grabbed at sabers and daggers; aghas and pashas leapt to their feet.

Sheikh Neg El Bahi raised his arms, his voice cutting through the uproar.

“Guards! Restore order! This realm tolerates no revolt!”

The city guard pressed forward, shields locked, lances leveled, swords drawn.

Sheikh Neg El Bahi stood unmoving upon his dais—cold, severe, unyielding.

Sheikh Nam El Kabun turned to his daughter.

The Guardians of the Seven Artifacts

In her face, he saw not a princess, but the last hope of a dying people.

She gave a single, almost imperceptible nod.

His tail struck the floor with a sharp, cracking snap.

A thought formed within him, cold and precise: *A ruler who chains his own blood will sacrifice us without hesitation.*

He drew a slow, deliberate breath, savoring the moment before the slaughter.

Then he released a shrill sound—not a cry, but a hissing signal that cut clean through the tense air.

For a single heartbeat, Kajirs in the hall froze.

All eyes turned to their Sheikh.

When his thorns snapped forward, they understood the command.

A second signal followed—a piercing cry from Princess Balae, fierce and sharp.

Her own thorns flicked outward.

She straightened, one arm wrapped protectively around the child, drawing silken cloth closer against its body.

Her gaze remained steady and resolute.

Then violence broke loose.

Without a sound, Kajirs moved as one, a silent, scaled tide sweeping over unsuspecting humans. Screams clashed with the hissing of attackers. Some stumbled back, reaching in blind desperation for weapons; others stared in frozen shock, but it was already too late.

Two Kajirs seized a guardsman in mid-leap, driving him to the ground; one thrust his thorns into the man's throat while the other tore a shoulder joint apart with a single bite.

Blood struck wall hangings, and within heartbeats, the floor darkened.

A vizier was hurled against a marble column with such force that he collapsed lifelessly before a sound could leave him.

The Chronicles of Wetherid II

The clash of steel and tearing of flesh filled the hall as human ranks broke apart.

Scaled bodies drove them back; claws ripped; jaws crushed bone and sinew.

One Kajir vaulted over an overturned table, landing among three men and opening them with a single sweeping strike.

Blood spread across carpets as more attackers surged in.

Princess Balae stood frozen, her face serene and terrible, watching the future of her people being born in blood.

Beside her, her father fought with deadly precision, his cries cutting through the hall—sharp and unrelenting.

Within moments, fighting ebbed.

Bodies lay scattered.

The throne hall, once filled with splendor, now stood as a slaughterhouse.

Sheikh Nam El Kabun's breath came in deep, ragged drafts, the scent of blood heavy in the air.

He stood amidst the carnage, his clawed hands slowly unclenching.

Then he turned toward Neg El Bahi.

The ruler of Iseran leaned rigidly against a pillar, his face slack with horror, eyes wide and unseeing. A stray blade from one of his own men had cut his side, but in shock he scarcely felt it.

Sheikh Nam El Kabun approached slowly until only an arm's length separated them.

Without glancing at the wound, he looked directly into the man's eyes.

"You humiliated us," he breathed, his voice a dry rasp. "You mocked us. Now watch your realm fall. Our people will be free. Yours will serve."

Sheikh Neg El Bahi tried to step back, but his legs no longer obeyed him.

The Guardians of the Seven Artifacts

Lips forming silent words, his gaze held no plea, only the stark bewilderment of a ruler betrayed.

Mercy did not come.

With a single, sudden motion, Sheikh Nam El Kabun's elbow shot forward.

The thorn pierced ornate robes and struck the heart.

Sheikh Neg El Bahi's eyes flew open.

His fingers clawed weakly at his chest.

A final, broken sound escaped him; then he sagged, sliding down the column to lie still.

Sheikh Nam El Kabun stepped back and drew a long breath.

The thorn retracted into his arm with a soft hiss.

He looked down at the fallen ruler, and a slow, cold smile touched his lips.

Chapter 2

The Fallen Warmaster

Marnog Jar, the city of the Mist Elves, lay wrapped in dense veils of mist.

Prince Sylvian took Kyrintha's face in his hands.

He kissed her briefly—more out of duty than tenderness—before releasing her to mount his spider, turning from her anxious gaze without looking back.

With practiced movements, he checked his weapons and tightened the saddlebag straps, each gesture controlled yet visibly strained.

Kyrintha moved closer.

“Be careful. Especially at the border wall to Wetherid. If the Raging Hordes discover you, they will take you captive—if they do not kill you outright.”

She laid her hand upon his arm.

“Please... spare me that pain.”

“I will be watchful. Your concern is the Dark Forest. When I return, your plan should already be underway,” he replied.

He laid his hand over hers in a brief sign of resolve, then urged his spider forward.

The soft drumming of the spider's legs upon the damp wooden walkways soon faded into the hush of the swamp as he left Marnog Jar behind. The moor swallowed him beneath its wet shroud. The croaking of toads and the guttural calls of marsh birds broke the stillness, echoing dully across the black water.

Veils of mist drifted between the trees, creeping over tangled roots and knotted branches. Every fiber of the moor was saturated, and a sharp, rotting stench hung thick in the air.

The Guardians of the Seven Artifacts

At times the fog banks parted for a single heartbeat, revealing fallen trunks with twisted limbs, moss-choked ruins, and dark water holes that devoured all movement.

But in the next instant, the veil closed again, denser than before.

Yet Mist Elf eyes were made for such twilight. Where others would long since have been lost in the haze, Prince Sylvian perceived a familiar, shadow-laden grey in which no detail escaped him. This inborn gift guided him safely through the moor for two days.

Time and again he encountered scouts of his own people, exchanged brief reports of movements in the South, and lingered at their hidden campfires.

By the evening of the second day, the marshland gradually rose and grew firmer beneath the spider's stride; yielding ground gave way to gravel and rock.

That night he made camp upon a dry rise.

From there, in the last dim light of dusk, he could already discern the first foothills at the edge of the moor.

With the first light of the third day, he pressed on. As the morning wore on, the fog slowly thinned, revealing ever more clearly the jagged rock formations bordering his path.

By midday, he reached the narrow ravine.

Slowing his spider, he straightened upon its back, fixing his intent gaze upon the slender valley framed by sheer stone walls. Beyond it rose the thick, sharpened wooden stakes of the great border wall—a vast bulwark raised twenty years earlier to halt the advance of Fallgar into Wetherid.

In several places along the wall, the banners of the realms of Wetherid still hung. Frayed by wind and marked by rain and sun, they were nevertheless unmistakable. They marked the border between the two realms—silent and absolute.

Four tall watchtowers rose at strategic points along the fortification, black and menacing against the pale sky.

The Chronicles of Wetherid II

Upon the battlements, sentries patrolled—massive barbarians clad in heavy leather armor and furs. Long braids fell over their shoulders; dense beards framed their coarse faces. In their fists they carried heavy axes and long spears, while broad knives hung at their belts. Small round shields with iron bosses rested beside them, and bows were slung across their backs.

At the foot of the wall, ceaseless labor was underway. A dozen men worked with crude tools upon the fortifications: rotten stakes were torn from the ground and replaced with fresh trunks; angled braces were driven deep into the damp soil, ropes drawn tight, cracks sealed with clay and resin.

Hammer blows thundered through the ravine, accompanied by the rough cries of the workers. A cart laden with timber and iron stood nearby, while two men sharpened tools upon grinding stones.

Prince Sylvian watched the workers for a time, motionless, before giving a slight nod.

He observed that the guards on the towers remained vigilant; every movement below was noted at once.

Weighing his chances, he knew an attempt in daylight would be folly.

He would have to wait for the cover of night.

His eyes searched the terrain for concealment.

To the left, slightly off the path, he discovered a dense cluster of thorned bushes—thick enough to hide his presence, yet open enough to keep the wall in sight.

Carefully, he guided his spider into the tangled growth.

The creature sensed the narrowness and hesitated, its long legs trembling.

He felt its unease, yet there was no other way.

With a firm pull on the reins, he forced it onward.

The spider reared briefly, releasing a sharp clicking sound before yielding and slipping into the thicket.

There he remained, watching the wall.

The Guardians of the Seven Artifacts

The hours crawled by.



When twilight deepened into a moonless night under heavy clouds, the darkness was complete.

Prince Sylvian drew his spider from the thorn scrub.

His gaze surveyed the ravine, now drowned in shadow, as a fine mist rose and crept across the loose stone.

Cautiously, he led the spider along the right-hand cliff face.

After several hundred steps, he pulled the reins taut, and the spider began its ascent.

The rock was smooth and damp, eight legs seeking purchase in cracks and small ledges while Prince Sylvian leaned far forward to maintain balance.

Halfway up, he guided the creature slightly left, angling toward the wall.

The stone became brittle.

Every step was perilous.

Suddenly, a fragment broke loose beneath a rear leg.

As the rock splintered softly, a surge of cold terror struck him, instantly quelled by rigid control.

At once, he threw himself sideways, pressing his body against the spider's flank and driving his shoulder against the falling stone.

With all his strength, he intercepted its weight and wedged it soundlessly against the rock face.

His heart hammered.

Yet he forced his body into stillness, listening intently until he was certain the sentries had noticed nothing.

The spider climbed on at a measured pace, pressed flat against the rock face, until it reached the height of the palisade.

The Chronicles of Wetherid II

Directly beneath him lay the border wall. Several huts ringed an open square where two dozen barbarians sat around a great fire. They sang loudly—low, rough chants in a tongue Prince Sylvian did not understand.

He counted the sentries, gauged the number of men at the fire.

The spider crept onward, unhurried and controlled, close along the stone. He held the reins steady, ready to halt at the slightest tremor.

The noise of the camp drowned the faint scratching of the spider's limbs, allowing him to slip past the wall unseen, hugging the cliff until the camp lay behind him.

Beyond the palisade, barely visible in the darkness, stretched the wide steppes of Thir.

He guided the spider down from the rock face and across open ground through the tall grass swaying in the night wind. Only when he was certain he had passed beyond sight of the camp did he halt, glance back once, and steer the creature into a small stand of tamarisks and robinias to rest.

Within the shelter of the trees, he remained motionless and watchful for the remainder of the night.

— ✧ —

At first light, Prince Sylvian mounted again and continued southward.

By midday, the fortified road appeared ahead, and the spider came to a halt.

From this point on, caution was imperative.

Dismounting, he slipped the saddlebag from the spider's back and opened it.

Rags emerged from within; he slipped into them, stowing his fine clothing deep in the bag.

The silver mask came off next.

The Guardians of the Seven Artifacts

Briefly, the true face beneath stood revealed in the pale light, laced with deep scars—marks of countless battles.

Fingers moved without thought across an old, raised welt on one cheek.

He inhaled sharply, forced the memory aside, and drew the hood of his cloak low.

A small pouch found its place at his belt.

Then a hand rested upon the spider's neck.

The creature stilled, as if understanding the unspoken command, and slipped soundlessly into the tall grass.

Only when it had vanished from sight did Sylvian cut a sturdy branch from a nearby tree to serve as a walking staff.

The journey continued on foot—back bent, steps measured, gaze fixed on the road south.

At a crossroads he paused briefly.

To the left, the road led into the Glorious Valley; to the right, toward the village of the Raging Hordes.

Neither turn was taken.

The straight path led forward until the outline of a tavern rose ahead—the trade station of Irkaar.

He checked the hood one final time.

Head lowered, Sylvian approached the building.

One hand closed around the cold iron latch.

Assuming the posture of a crippled wanderer, he pressed the handle down with deliberate care.

As the door opened, the smell of smoke and spilled mead struck him hard.

Stillness held on the threshold, ears catching voices within.

His gaze passed through the room—patrons measured, escape routes noted.

Then he entered fully and closed the door quietly behind him.

The Price of Silence

Built from roughly hewn beams, the tavern smelled of smoke and old wood; the earthen floor was hard-packed, the walls dark with soot. A long counter stretched to the left, with a barrel set into it beside a shelf lined with mugs of clay and wood. At several tables sat men from Thir, their voices mingling into a coarse murmur. Farther back, two powerful barbarians wrapped in thick furs crouched without a word, drinking mead from heavy cups, scars running along their forearms.

To the right, a group of traders had spread out their wares: rolled blankets, saddle fittings, knives in leather sheaths. One counted coins, another tested a strap, while two argued in low voices over a measure of weight.

Behind the counter stood the innkeeper—a broad-shouldered man with sun-browed skin, powerful arms, and a round face that seemed to miss little.

As Prince Sylvian moved farther inside, the innkeeper cast him a brief, measuring glance.

“What will it be, stranger?” he called across the tables.

Wordlessly, Prince Sylvian pointed at a mead mug.

The innkeeper responded with a short nod.

While Prince Sylvian continued to study the room, he noticed a Glorious Elf seated in a darkened corner far from the noise. Beneath his dark cloak he wore silver armor, set with violet gemstones and worked with fine engravings.

His head was slightly lowered, yet his alert eyes rested on the entrance.

That must be Elroth, he thought.

Stooping, he approached and sat at the table, saying nothing.

The innkeeper brought the mug, set it down without question, then turned to the Glorious Elf.

“Will the noble lord require anything as well?”

A brief shake of the head was the only reply.

The Guardians of the Seven Artifacts

The innkeeper turned away and returned to the counter.

"It was wise of you to agree to this meeting," Prince Sylvian said.

A faint grin touched the corner of his mouth as he took the mug and drank slowly.

Elroth pressed his lips together.

His sharp gaze searched the prince's face for a sign of reaction, yet found none.

"My presence," he said, his tone cold and controlled, "is no admission of your lies. Lies that serve only to reveal the corruption of the Mist Elves."

Faint amusement flickered across Prince Sylvian's expression.

"Spare me these words of feigned innocence. I do not accept this pretense of a clear conscience."

He loosened the pouch at his belt and laid it deliberately upon the table.

"I have proof. Proof of your betrayal—of everything that defines your people."

Elroth's eyes dropped to the dark leather, his expression tightening at once.

"Proof? What proof could you possibly hope to present?"

The lines of his face sharpened; his breathing grew uneven.

Prince Sylvian leaned forward.

"You cannot deceive me. Or why else would you have agreed to this meeting—with your enemy?"

Elroth answered with forced composure, yet the edge in his voice revealed the strain.

"I wished to hear what you presumed to claim—with your own mouth. And to look into your eyes as I hold you to account for it."

His hand slid with deliberate purpose toward the hilt of his sword.

Prince Sylvian caught the movement at once.

The Chronicles of Wetherid II

His words sharpened.

He cast a cautious glance about the room to make certain no one was watching, then opened the pouch.

Carefully, he drew out a ring—slender, fashioned from a golden alloy, crowned with a deep violet stone set into a fine ornament shaped like an oak leaf.

Elroth's gaze remained fixed upon the piece.

“What is this ring meant to prove?”

The tension in his features eased, a fleeting release.

Prince Sylvian traced the violet stone with his forefinger.

“It is your ring. The ring of the Warmaster of the Glorious Elves.”

He let the words hang in the air between them.

Elroth replied instantly, speaking with calm conviction.

“There are many rings in this world. This one is not mine.”

“Of course it is,” Sylvian answered, unperturbed. “And I am certain Queen Eledhwen will recognize it as well.”

Elroth inhaled sharply and fell silent, the air thick with unspoken words.

Then he lifted the ring, turning it slowly between thumb and forefinger.

His eyes narrowed as he examined the fine workmanship.

“You may be right. Now that I look more closely... it does resemble mine. I must have lost it at some point. Where did you find it?”

A short, harsh laugh broke from Prince Sylvian.

“Lost?” he scoffed, leaning forward. “You did not lose it—of that I am certain.”

Elroth's expression hardened.

Wordlessly, he closed his hand tightly around the ring.

“What are you implying? That I am a liar?”

The Guardians of the Seven Artifacts

Prince Sylvian's hand shot forward, seizing Elroth's fist and forcing it open with unexpected strength to snatch the ring in one smooth motion.

"Do not attempt to deceive me," he growled.

His voice cut coldly through the room.

"That is an art I master better than you."

Elroth drew his hand back and clenched it again.

"What is the point of this? Even if it were my ring, it proves nothing. Spare me these games. Say what you intend."

A cold smile crossed Prince Sylvian's face.

"Your fury. Your agitation. They speak loudly enough. None of it matches the nature of your people."

He drew the leather pouch closer, rested his fingertips on it, and tapped it twice—softly.

Elroth's patience broke.

"Speak at last. What are you driving at?"

His hand moved beneath the table, finding the sword's grip.

"You should be thankful you still have your head."

Prince Sylvian's left hand slid unhurried to his boot, drawing a dagger soundlessly to ease the tip within a hand's breadth of Elroth's side.

"Restrain yourself," he said. "You are in no position to issue demands."

With his right hand, he opened the pouch.

Deliberately, he drew something dark from within.

At first, it was only a matted lock of hair.

As he continued to draw, Elroth froze.

His eyes widened in shock.

A shrunken head now rested in Prince Sylvian's hand.

Elroth froze; the color drained from his face.

The Chronicles of Wetherid II

Prince Sylvian noted the reaction with evident satisfaction, cast a swift glance around the room, then pushed the head slowly across the table.

“Do you recognize her?” he whispered.

Elroth's face turned to stone.

Prince Sylvian slid the dagger soundlessly back into his boot.

“Of course you do. Her name was Rayla.”

His voice dropped to a murmur.

“You lay with her. In Irkaar. Not long ago—certainly not long enough for you to have forgotten.”

Elroth recoiled as if struck.

His breath caught, his stomach clenching as he battled a rising wave of nausea.

“What... what happened to her?” he forced out, scarcely audible.

Prince Sylvian answered without warmth.

“I had her executed. The foolish girl returned to Marnog Jar, because she was heartbroken.”

His gaze was unyielding.

“I do not tolerate betrayal. I do not tolerate Mist Elves who abandon their homeland. And least of all do I tolerate young women who give themselves to corrupted men such as you.”

Elroth's eyes did not leave the shrunken head.

His breath seized in his chest.

He placed both hands on the table, as if steadying himself against a weight that pressed invisibly upon him.

A faint tremor passed through his shoulders.

That desire had poisoned him from the start. It had not been a thought, nor a mere longing. It had been something else—something alien that had taken root within him and altered him from the inside. And he had allowed it.

His jaw clenched.

The Guardians of the Seven Artifacts

The memory returned with a clarity that tightened every muscle. He—a Glorious Elf.

Pureborn.

Of ancient lineage.

A son of a people who, since the beginning, had withstood every lure of darkness. That had been his standard. His foundation. And he had been the one to betray it.

His gaze flickered, then looked down again at the head before him.

“Where...,” he began.

Prince Sylvian cut him off, calm, almost indifferent.

“From Rayla herself. She told me everything.”

He leaned back, as though the conversation had only now begun to take a more agreeable turn.

“She fled Marnog Jar for Druhn, hoping for a new life. There she secured passage on a ship bound for Irkaar. She reached the city alone—knowing no one, with no shelter and not a single coin—and wandered the streets for days in search of work, finding only hunger and solitude.”

A thin smile touched the corner of Prince Sylvian's mouth.

“Then she met a man. A man who claimed to be a merchant from Thir. A human and a Mist Elf—nothing could be more ill-matched. Such a thing had never occurred, at least not openly. And yet: she believed him. She loved him.”

His gaze drifted briefly to the shrunken head.

“Of course, he was no merchant; before long, he forced her to serve in a tavern—first with labor, then with her body, and finally with theft. He called it protection. He called it love.”

Slowly, he drew the pouch a little closer.

“But Rayla was naïve, not foolish—and driven by desperation. In secret, during the hours he did not watch her, she kept records: names, habits, payments, stolen goods. All written on a single piece of parchment. Perhaps she already sensed that it would not end well.”

The Chronicles of Wetherid II

Prince Sylvian gave a soft laugh.

“When she understood what she had become, she fled—and returned to Marnog Jar.”

He paused, took a sip of mead, and set the mug down silently before looking directly at Elroth.

“That was her first mistake. She was broken and confided in my wife, Kyrintha. That was her second—and final—mistake.”

Elroth shut his eyes.

His face remained still; only his breathing betrayed him.

He imagined drawing his sword—the blade cutting through the Mist Elf's throat.

Perhaps that would be the swiftest way to end it.

Prince Sylvian noticed the shift.

“If you are thinking of answering with violence, I suggest restraint,” he said calmly. “Rayla did not merely steal your ring. After you had fallen asleep in the tavern—after all that had passed between you—she cut a lock of your silver hair. It is now safely kept in Marnog Jar.”

Elroth breathed slowly.

“So—what do you demand? Silence in exchange for gold?”

Prince Sylvian gave a faint, amused smile.

“What use would I have for gold? I am the ruler of the Mist Elves. I possess more wealth than you will ever hold in your hands.”

He paused, his eyes narrowing on Elroth.

“I want you to help me overthrow Queen Eledhwen. That is what I demand of you.”

Elroth shoved his chair back and rose, his right hand closing once more around the hilt of his sword.

Several patrons glanced toward them; a few voices fell silent.

“Sit down—now,” Prince Sylvian said sharply, swiftly pushing the shrunken head back into the pouch.

The Guardians of the Seven Artifacts

Elroth swallowed his anger and slowly lowered himself back onto the bench.

Around them, the noise of the tavern returned, as though nothing had occurred.

The innkeeper approached with measured steps.

“If you have a quarrel, settle it outside,” he said, shoulders squared. “And this is a tavern, not a place to linger. What may I bring you? Something to eat? Today there is hare stew, Thirian style. Two bowls?”

Elroth shook his head.

His stomach was in knots.

“Two mugs of mead,” Prince Sylvian said.

The innkeeper nodded and returned to the counter.

“We Glorious Elves do not drink alcohol,” Elroth said.

Prince Sylvian gave a mocking grin.

“You can afford a cup. You are Glorious no longer.”

Elroth's gaze dropped to the tabletop.

A faint sound escaped him.

“Demand what you will. But I will not help overthrow my queen. I would rather die.”

Prince Sylvian studied him with a serious air.

“Is that truly what you wish to do to your daughter? To your wife? To leave them behind—alone, without your protection—burdened with the shame that would then be laid bare?”

Elroth's fingers clenched.

He turned his head aside, letting his gaze drift across the tavern's guests without truly seeing any of them.

“I advise you to think again,” Prince Sylvian said.

Everything inside Elroth hardened.

He cursed the day he had touched the girl.

Despised himself for every word he had spoken to her, for every glance.

The Chronicles of Wetherid II

He pushed the thought aside as though it did not belong to him.

A laugh rose within him—dull and hollow.

It rose like an echo, stirred something deep in his core, and shaped itself into a voice—low, mocking, unmistakable: *You will burn, Glorious Elf.*

Elroth's eyes flew open.

His breath came in ragged gasps.

“What is the matter with you?” Prince Sylvian said coolly. “Do not pretend to be wounded now. You chose this path yourself. Do not act as though this surprises you, pains you, or moves you to regret. Follow my instructions—and no one will ever know.”

While the mocking voice still echoed in his mind, Elroth struggled for composure, clinging to the single clear thought that remained.

Dazed, yet slowly nodding, he asked:

“But how can you guarantee that you will keep your silence if I help you?”

Prince Sylvian's mouth twisted into a crooked smile.

“There is no such guarantee. But consider this: why should I break my silence, when doing so would cost me a man who will stand in my debt until the end of his days?”

A hard laugh escaped him.

Elroth lowered his head into his hands, rubbing his palms over his face again and again.

He understood: there was no escape.

He was a prisoner of his own deed.

Powerless, he listened as Prince Sylvian unfolded the plan in precise detail.

His voice was clear, controlled, without haste.

“It is quite simple, Elroth,” he began, tone cold and businesslike. “You will not murder your queen. You will not ignite

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civil war. Nothing so vulgar. You are a strategist—so you will move with deliberation.”

Elroth raised his head.

His eyes were empty.

“What... what do you require of me?”

“You will go to your queen and report a new, urgent threat. A threat from the south.”

Prince Sylvian's eyes glinted.

“The balance in Astinhod is a powder keg. Everyone knows this. Convince your queen that the governor of Irkaar intends to exploit that weakness to expand his own power. Press her to send her finest troops to Thir—to suppress a supposed rebellion or to avert a trade war.”

He leaned closer, his voice scarcely more than a hiss.

“Keep her occupied. Draw her attention away from us—away from Fallgar. See to it that her armies are in the wrong place when the true danger comes.”

Elroth stared at him in horror.

“You want me to surrender my own people to you...?”

“I want you to protect your family, Elroth,” Prince Sylvian corrected softly. “The rest is merely the price you must pay for it.”

The sounds within the tavern began to change. First the murmur of voices softened, then chairs scraped across the floor. A few patrons rose; one after another they left the room. Doors closed. Footsteps faded. At last, only the dull crackling of the hearth and the clink of cups being cleared away by the innkeeper remained.

It was late afternoon when Prince Sylvian finally rose and fixed Elroth with a keen gaze—waiting until he understood, until he yielded.

Elroth straightened, but his posture was that of a man already broken.

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“You are vile and treacherous. But you leave me no choice. I will carry out everything exactly as you have instructed. And for that, I despise you.”

He faltered, drew a heavy breath, then added:

“And myself.”

Prince Sylvian gave a broad, venomous smile.

“You are beginning to resemble a Mist Elf.”

Elroth remained motionless.

No reply passed his lips.

He walked to the counter, laid a few gold coins upon it, and left the tavern without looking back.

Prince Sylvian stayed seated at the table a while longer, unmoving, as the final sounds of the room faded. Only when complete silence had settled did he rise and step out into the cool evening air. He followed the familiar path back to where he had hidden his spider.

With a shrill whistle he called for it.

Moments later, the creature crept out of the tall grass, its long limbs soundless, body pressed low to the ground.

He stripped off the rags, drew the silver mask from the saddlebag, and set it upon his face.

Casting the cloak about his shoulders, he waited until night had fully claimed the land.

At last, he began the return journey—by the same perilous ascent at the border wall that would lead him back to Marnog Jar.

Homecoming of a Traitor

Leaving the steppes of Thir behind, Elroth looked out over the wide flower fields stretching southward into the Glorious Valley. Even from a distance, the land began to fall away, the light slowly changing.

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A dense, mixed forest filled the valley. The trees stood tall and ancient, some with trunks broader than a house. Many bore silver leaves that rustled softly in the wind.

Between them grew flowers of uncommon size and color; some chimed when touched, while shrubs bore berries as large as a fist. From the hanging vines, swarms of butterflies burst upward, scattering in all directions before settling once more among the branches.

The creatures of the forest moved without fear as Elroth passed.

Shortly before midday, he reached the great lake that divided the valley.

At the shore, a raft lay secured to a narrow jetty.

He stepped aboard, loosed the rope, and slipped soundlessly across the water.

During the crossing, his thoughts turned inward.

Soon he would face his wife and his daughter. *How am I to look them in the eyes after all that has happened—with this betrayal within me?*

Sitting upon the floor of the raft, he struggled with himself wordlessly.

After a while, loud cries of "Manda Goij!" rang across the water, causing him to straighten.

His gaze moved across the fortifications the Glorious Elves had raised along the shore after the Battle of Ib'Agier.

His warriors stood in gleaming silver armor, bows of glass upon their backs, swords and shields raised. Their pale, luminous skin shone in the sunlight, and their eyes brightened as they beheld their Warmaster.

Behind the noble warriors lay the old, dense forest, suffused with a violet shimmer that emanated from the crystals anchored in hidden pools, along the avenues, and within the ornate dwellings set among the trees.

From afar, Elroth lifted his hand in greeting, yet his gaze remained dark.

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The weight of his conscience pressed heavily upon him.

As the raft touched the shore, he cast the rope to one of his men.

The elf caught it, bound it firmly around a post, and held out his hand.

With a steady pull, he helped Elroth ashore.

Elroth returned the gesture with a brief nod and walked on without a word along the stone bulwark.

He answered the guards' greeting with only a fleeting glance before turning into a narrow path hidden between tall shrubs, following it deep into the forest.

His steps crunched softly upon the colored leaves covering the ground like a glowing carpet. On either side, the mighty trunks of silver trees rose up, their light shimmering within the veins of their bark. Songbirds darted overhead with bright calls.

Deer stepped from the undergrowth and paused for a moment before moving on again. Hares crossed his path, and even two foxes followed him for a short distance with alert, peaceful eyes.

The Glorious Elves did not hunt.

They ate no flesh.

They were no threat.

Their sustenance came from roots, herbs, wild tubers, and the fruits of the forest—in reverence for all that lived.

Elroth came to a silent pond hidden beneath a canopy of hanging ivy and dense climbing plants. The water was clear, deep, and unmoving; only a faint violet shimmer rested upon its surface, almost alive. At the bank stood statues of white marble—the ancestors of the Glorious Elves.

As Elroth's gaze passed over them, he sensed that their eyes were watching him.

A cold chill passed through him, bringing him to a halt.

Something in those gazes seemed to pierce his façade.

Glossary

A

Aarl

One of the companions from Thir. Experiences a vision of the past upon touching the Table of Laws. Captured by the Mist Elves in the Mistmarsh.

Aelvor Frostshadow

Ruler of the Frost Elves. Forms an alliance with the Mist Elves due to the melting ice in the north and prepares for war against the people of the Northlands.

Ahnwen

Master of the Coin on the Council of Astinhod. Reluctantly agrees to release the imperial treasury in exchange for a ceasefire.

Aldion of Kirindor (Grand Duke)

Lays siege to Astinhod with heavy war engines. Demands the imperial treasury and the crown in return for a ceasefire in order to proclaim himself king.

Alnugh

A ruthless slave trader who sells humans to the Kajirs of the DeShadin Desert as food.

Ardor

Druid of the Dark Forest and shapeshifter (lynx). Attempts to prevent the schism within the Druid Council by accusing Elmar and Gejel of treason.

Arik (Jarl the Strong)

Ruler of Grandok and an influential jarl of the Northlands.

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Warns of the demonic threat posed by Xaroth and helps the Konge unite the feuding clans through a sworn oath.

Arkondir

War Marshal of Astinhod. His murder, together with that of Queen Lythinda, serves Elroth as a pretext for betraying the Glorious Elves.

Aronya

A leader of the rangers. Uses the accusations against Mergoldin to break her kin free from the rule of the druids.

Asteran (Count Asteran)

An elderly noble on the Council of Astinhod. His assassination by Aldion intensifies the political crisis in the city.

Azrakel

The Soulbinder, immortal lord of the undead in Zantranos (Fallgar). Forms an alliance with Gorzod and joins the hunt for the companions.

B

Balae (Princess)

Daughter of the Kajir Sheikh Nam El Kabun. Presses for the exodus to Iseran in order to secure her people's survival.

Belmarr of Kring (Duke)

Military commander of Astinhod's defense. Opposes negotiations with Aldion but is forced to accept the council's decision.

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Borlix

A dwarf from Ib'Agier and one of the companions. Infiltrates the Gray Dwarf city of Ingar and guides the group through its tunnels. Captured by the Mist Elves in the Mistmarsh.

Brumir Ironfist

King of the Gray Dwarves of Ingar. Arms the Dark Alliance with dark iron, but deliberately delays deliveries to extort tribute from his allies.

D

Darion Altheras (Grand Chancellor)

Chairman of the Council of Astinhod. Leads desperate efforts to save the city through negotiations.

Drobal (Master)

Mage and leader of the companions. The only one to escape capture in the Mistmarsh, forced to leave his companions behind.

Dark Forest

Ancient woodland and homeland of the druids. Site of the intrigue that leads to the schism of the Druid Council and the rangers.

Durgax (*historical*)

Former king of the dwarves whose conflict with his brother Grolmix led to the split between the dwarves of Ib'Agier and the Gray Dwarves (as recounted by Borlix).

E

Eldavin Frostnight

High Elder of the Frost Elves in Ilnarath, who consents to the war alliance with the Mist Elves.

Eledhwen (Queen)

Ruler of the Glorious Elves. Deceived by Elroth and persuaded to send her finest troops to the wrong border, leaving her valley undefended.

Elmar

Druid of the Dark Forest who engineers Mergoldin's downfall and triggers the schism of the Druid Council through his accusations.

Elroth

War Marshal of the Glorious Elves. Blackmailed by Prince Sylvian over a past transgression, he betrays his queen. Dies together with his wife Tralja after falling from the Elven Tree.

Elvoran

Mage of Astinhod. Defends the city walls with magical shields alongside Raynarus until complete exhaustion.

Elyria

Daughter of Elroth. Captured by Prince Sylvian. Gorathdin's attempt to rescue her fails.

Erov

Clan leader of the western mountains in the Northlands. Ends his bitter feud with Jom over the Frost Ore Mines and swears loyalty to the Konge for war.

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Eryndor

Opportunistic council member in Astinhod. Supports Lady Merdiva's scheme for personal gain, but is murdered by her during the escape with the treasury.

F

Fehlgor

Undead adviser to Azrakel in Zantranos.

Foyar

Mist Elf and spider rider. Travels with Haloyan to the Frost Elves and proves that the wild ice spiders of the north can be tamed.

Frost Ore Mines

Resource-rich mines in the Northlands that are the long-standing cause of conflict between the clans of Erov and Jom. Placed under royal control by the Konge to unite the clans.

G

Galandia

Crystal Guardian of the Glorious Elves. Warns the queen in vain of Elroth's plot and the danger rising from Fallgar.

Gejel

Ranger of the Dark Forest. Blackmailed by the Mist Elves through the captivity of his daughter Juhva. Deliberately sows doubt in the Druid Council, causing its division.

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Gorathdin

Half-elf and one of the companions. Leads a rescue attempt for Elyria in the Mistmarsh but is confronted and captured by Prince Sylvian.

Gorzod Grauwings

Orc shaman and servant of Xaroth. Travels through Fallgar to forge the alliance against Wetherid and is punished by the demon for hesitating to kill Prince Sylvian.

Gravek

Druid of the Dark Forest who unsuccessfully attempts to mediate between the rival factions.

Grolmix (*historical*)

Brother of Durgax, whose greed for dark iron and power led to the schism of the dwarven people and the rise of the Gray Dwarves (as told by Borlix).

Gromak

Clan leader of the ogres of Wahmuther. Allows himself to be incited by Gorzod against the companions and drives the construction of siege engines for the alliance.

H

Hajan

Commander of the Mist Guard in Marnog Jar, who receives Gorzod upon his arrival.

Hakon of Drang

Young, hot-headed clan leader in the Northlands. Ends his dispute with Runa of Wintholm and joins the war oath.

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Haloyan

Envoy of the Mist Elves and cousin of Prince Sylvian. Forges the alliance with the Frost Elves in the north.

J

Jom

Clan leader of the northwestern Northlanders. Ends his long feud with Erovo over the Frost Ore Mines and marches to war at his side.

Jonjar of Tronjavik

A fearful clan leader whose settlement lies directly in the path of the Frost Elves' advance.

Juhva

Young elf and daughter of Gejel. Her captivity among the Mist Elves is used to coerce her father into betrayal.

K

Kaaron

Leader of a thieves' gang in Astinhod. Freed from prison by Lady Merdiva to help smuggle the imperial treasury out of the besieged city through a secret tunnel.

Kaelan

Leader of the western ranger kin. Joins Aronya's break from the druids.

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Kelyiron

Master of Law of the Glorious Elves. Opposes Elroth's deception.

Kolgor

One of the three ancient ogre elders who mistrust Gorzod's plans and Xaroth's influence.

Konge (Stojvar Icegaze)

King of the Northlands. Opposes the fragmentation of his clans and unites them through a historic oath to defend against the elven alliance.

Kroll

Commander of Gorzod's warriors, sent to hunt the companions.

Kroga

Leader of the Kajir scouting party who brings news of the final drought, triggering the exodus to Iseran.

Kyrintha

Wife of Prince Sylvian. A manipulative intriguer who orchestrates the blackmail of Gejel in the Dark Forest.

L

Lady Merdiva

Baroness of Astinhod. Exploits the siege to execute a plan to escape with the imperial treasury. Murders Eryndor and escapes with the aid of the thief Kaaron.

Lerka of Wolfsberg

A prudent clan leader in the Northlands who joins the Konge's war oath.

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Lythinda (Queen)

Murdered Queen of Astinhod and Gorathdin's beloved. Her death is the source of his deepest grief and drives much of his later actions. Her memory is used by Borlix to remind Gorathdin of his true values.

M

Manamii

Princess of Iseran. Fiercely opposes the alliance with the Kajirs and is imprisoned by her own father, Sheikh Neg El Bahi.

Margok

One of the ogre elders who views Gorzod's promises and the demonic alliance with skepticism.

Mergoldin

High Druid of the Dark Forest. Loses his authority when the World Tree is shrouded in Xaroth's darkness during its questioning.

N

Nam El Kabun (Sheikh)

Ruler of the Kajirs. Leads his people to Iseran to escape the drought, kills his son-in-law Nazak for disobedience, and later murders Sheikh Neg El Bahi in a coup to seize power.

Nazak

Husband of Princess Balae. Defies the order to submit to the humans and is killed by his father-in-law Nam El Kabun at the oasis.

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Neg El Bahi (Sheikh)

Ruler of Iseran. Under Xaroth's influence, admits the Kajirs into the city, betrays his own family, and is ultimately murdered by Nam El Kabun in the throne hall.

O

Orveng

Scholar at the Konge's court who presents the strategic threat posed by the elven alliance on a map during the war council.

P

Poldros

Adviser and servant of Azrakel in Zantranos.

Prince Sylvian

Ruler of the Mist Elves and master intriguer. Blackmails Elroth, holds his daughter Elyria hostage, confronts Gorathdin over his failure, and ultimately captures the companions (except Drobald).

R

Raynarus

Mage of Astinhod. Fights alongside Elvoran to maintain the city's magical shields until complete exhaustion.

Regindar

Ranger of the Dark Forest and messenger of Mergoldin. Escapes

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Lady Merdiva's betrayal during the transport of the treasury and races back to warn Belmarr.

Rha'Gorr (Cave Troll)

An ancient, solitary cave dweller beneath Ingar. Guides the companions to the artifact and later helps them escape the Gray Dwarves.

Rohedan

Council member in Astinhod. Publicly humiliated by Belmarr in the council and stripped of all influence.

Rohnog

Scholar and adviser to the Konge in the Northlands.

Runa of Wintholm

Clan leader of the wealthy trading city of Wintholm. After initial hesitation, commits her fleet to the common war.

S

Sieghild of Hrimvald

Clan leader in the Northlands who resolves her border dispute and swears loyalty to the Konge.

Stojvar Icegaze

See **Konge**.

T

Temeth

An elderly, mediating druid on the Council of the Dark Forest.

Thalanor Icelight

A conservative elder of the Frost Elves who opposes the alliance with the Mist Elves but is overruled.

Thorgar

Warden of the Northlands and one of the companions. Fights the overwhelming forces of the Mist Elves in the Mistmarsh but is captured.

Tonkor

Spokesman of the ogre elders who openly mistrusts Gorzod and Gromak and warns against the pact with the demon.

Torsten of Hreljevik

Clan leader in the southern Northlands who joins the oath.

Tralja

Wife of Elroth. Upon learning of her husband's betrayal through her gift, she seeks to warn the queen and dies after falling down a stairway during the ensuing struggle.

V

Veridian

A druid who exploits Gejel's doubts to accuse Mergoldin openly and demands the questioning of the World Tree.

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Vrenli

Keeper of the Book of Wetherid and one of the companions. Uses the Crystal of Sight to locate the next artifact, but is captured in the Mistmarsh.

W

Wahmubu

Prince of the northern tribes and son-in-law of the Sheikh of Iseran. Warns against the alliance with the Kajirs and is imprisoned by his father-in-law.

Werlis

One of the companions, missing an arm. Overpowered and captured by the Mist Elves in the Mistmarsh.

X

Xaroth

A demon known as the *Burner of Worlds*. Speaks with Gorzod, punishes him for failing to kill Prince Sylvian, and drives the preparations for his arrival in the world.

Z

Zelivra Iceglow

Ruler of the Frost Elves. Negotiates the alliance with the Mist Elves alongside Aelvor in order to save her people from the melting ice and reclaim the Northlands from humankind.

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Places & Realms

Astinhod: Capital of the realm of the same name in Wetherid; besieged by Aldion.

Aruvaren Islands: Distant island chain in the Southern Sea; revealed by the Crystal of Sight as the location of the Lute of Peace.

DeShadin: Vast desert southwest of Wetherid, homeland of the Kajirs, struck by a catastrophic drought.

Druhn: City in Fallgar near the Fortress of Entorbis.

Dark Forest: Ancient woodland realm and home of the druids and rangers of Wetherid.

Fallgar: The eastern great realm, homeland of orcs, Mist Elves, ogres, and undead.

Grandok: Second-largest city of the Northlands, home of Jarl Arik.

Horunguth: Island in the southern sea, homeland of Master Drobai.

Ib'Agier: Powerful dwarven city and mountain region in Wetherid.

Ilnarath: Gigantic ice-built city of the Frost Elves in the eternal ice of the far north.

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Ingar: Underground city and weapons-forge of the Gray Dwarves in the Kirbun Mountains.

Irkaar: Port city on the southern coast of Thir, ruled by a governor. Destination of Lady Merdiva's flight and the companions' next goal.

Iseran: Human city in the DeShadin Desert, overrun by the Kajirs.

Kajir: Capital of the lizardfolk in the DeShadin Desert, abandoned because of the drought.

Kirbun Mountains: Mountain range in Fallgar in which the Gray Dwarf city of Ingar lies.

Marnog Jar: Capital of the Mist Elves, built on stilts in the swamps of the Mistmarsh.

Mistmarsh: Vast swamp region in Fallgar where the companions are captured by the Mist Elves.

Northlands: Northernmost realm of humankind, made up of feuding clans who unite in the face of invasion.

Raga Gur: City of the orcs in Fallgar.

Skjold Forest: Mythic forest in the Northlands.

Valley of Ice Flames: Valley of pure ice in the far north where the dangerous ice spiders nest.

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Thir: Coastal region in the south of Wetherid, home to the port of Irkaar.

Thronheim: Capital of the Northlands and seat of the Konge.

Wahmuther: Steppe region in Fallgar, homeland of the ogres.

Wetherid: Western great realm containing Astinhod, the Glorious Valley, the DeShadin Desert, and the Dark Forest.

Zantranos: City of the undead in Fallgar and Azraket's seat of power.

Peoples & Factions

Druids of the Dark Forest: A druidic circle whose power and unity fracture in the crisis of the World Tree.

Frost Elves: A people living in Ilnarath in the far north, driven by the melting ice into war against the people of the Northlands.

Glorious Elves: A people from a hidden valley in Wetherid, drawn into the conflict through Elroth's betrayal.

Gray Dwarves of Ingar: A splintered dwarven people who forge dark iron and play a key role in arming the Dark Alliance.

Kajirs: A proud lizardfolk of the desert, forced into conquest by the drought.

Mist Elves: A people of Marnog Jar in Fallgar, known for spider riding and poison; forge an alliance with the Frost Elves.

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Northlanders: Humans of the Northlands, united by Konge Stojvar in the face of invasion.

Ogres of Wahmuther: A large, warlike clan under the leader Gromak, building siege engines for the alliance.

Orcs of Raga Gur: Warrior tribes under the shaman Gorzod, serving Xaroth as hunters and scouts.

Undead of Zantranos: Legions of reawakened corpses under the command of the Soulfinder Azrakel.

Rangers of the Dark Forest: Armed elven kindreds who protect the forest; after the crisis of the World Tree, they split from the druids.

Beings & Creatures

Ice Spiders: Giant, armored spiders from the Valley of Iceflames, tamed by the Mist Elves for war.

Hornbear: Large predator of the Dark Forest.

Life Tree: Central sanctuary of the Dark Forest.

Marsh Spiders: The giant spiders used as mounts by the Mist Elves.

Forest Shrieker: An uncanny, plantlike creature from the deep woods of Fallgar.

Warg: Large, wolf-like riding beast of the orcs.

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Desert Trolls: Creatures of the DeShadin Desert, emaciated and weakened by the drought.

Artifacts & Objects

Dark Iron / Dark Ore: Valuable, near-indestructible metal mined by the Gray Dwarves and forged into weapons for the alliance.

Crystal of Sight: The first of the seven artifacts. Used by Vrenli to locate the next artifact before it is taken from him in the Mistmarsh.

Lute of Peace: The third of the seven artifacts; its search leads the companions to the Aruvaren Islands.

Table of Laws: The second artifact found, a stone tablet bearing ancient commandments, carried by Aarl after its discovery in Ingar.

Dear Readers,

Here ends the second volume of *The Chronicles of Wetherid II*, at a point in the journey where hope seems more distant than ever.

If Volume I was the departure, then Volume II is the storm. In stories, as in life, strength is often not born of victory, but of defeat. I wanted to show that heroism is not always rewarded, and that even the noblest intentions—such as the attempt to save a single life—can sometimes lead to catastrophe. It is these moments of failure and helplessness that give the characters their true depth and force us to ask: What is an oath worth when the world around you is breaking apart?

You have seen Astinhod fall to betrayal, the ancient order of the druids begin to falter, and dark alliances take shape in both north and south. You have shared the companions' fate as they walked into a trap and paid a bitter price for their humanity.

Yet even though the walls have fallen and our heroes lie in chains, the end has not been written. Darkness may seem triumphant, but it has overlooked one truth: Master Drobol is still free. And as long as even a single spark glows in the Mistmarsh, the fire of resistance has not been extinguished.

Thank you for walking this dark path with me. For bearing the weight of this volume, and for remaining true to the story even when it bares its teeth.

The cards have been reshuffled, the weapons distributed, and the true war for Wetherid still lies ahead. How will the companions escape? What price will freedom demand? And what role will the Table of Laws play in the hands of the enemy?

We will meet again in the next volume—when, from the ashes of defeat, new hope begins to rise.

May your courage never falter.

Christian Dölder

The Chronicles of Wetherid II

About the Author

Christian Dölder, born in 1975 in Carinthia, Austria, is a fantasy author with a lifelong passion for storytelling. From a young age, he was drawn to the creation of imaginary worlds. Influenced by the works of J.R.R. Tolkien, C.S. Lewis, and Robert Jordan, Christian began crafting a fantasy saga of his own.

He sees himself not as a writer, but as a storyteller.



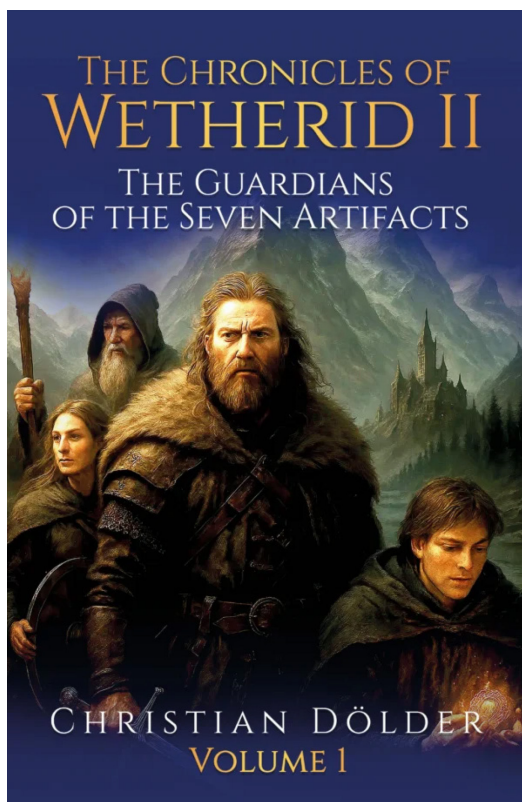
His debut novel, *The Chronicles of Wetherid: The Legacy of the Elves*, was published in 2024 and has since drawn a loyal readership. With this book, Christian invites readers into a richly detailed world of magic, intrigue, adventure, and complex, human characters.

Known for his immersive storytelling and the depth of his world-building, Christian draws inspiration from the forests and mountains of Austria, where he spends much of his time.

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www.wetherid.com

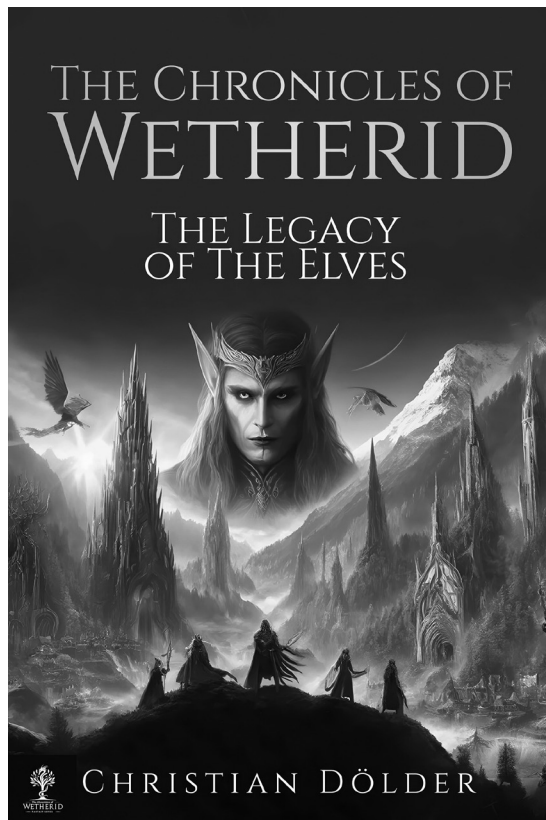
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In the enchanting world of Wetherid, nestled within the rolling hills of Tawinn, lies the village of Abketh—a place where the whispers of ancient trees and the laughter of children fill the air. Bram, a shy young boy, often feels like an outsider, until a chance encounter changes everything. When the mysterious Master Whitebeard, a wise and kind mage, invites Bram to explore the secrets of the magical forest, an extraordinary adventure begins.



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