

Angel Assassins

Book I

Lineage and Lies

By

J.J. Greaves

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To my wonderful wife.
Who believed in me, even when I didn't believe in myself.

Chapter 1 – BETRAYAL

Alone in the dark she knelt, staring at the eerie green glowing orb in front of her. She was there, but then she wasn't, her deep blue eyes were open, but unblinking, occasionally her brow would furrow, apart from that she just sat and stared.

‘Finally, where have you been?’ the first words she had uttered for hours.

The orb spoke, a dry rasping tone

‘I had a little trouble, it won't happen again’

‘It'd better not do!’ she bit her lip realising that she had overstepped the mark with her curt reply.

The orb didn't mind, this time! She had information it wanted, in any other circumstance the conversation would have ceased, but it had to have the information.

‘Where can I find him?’

The woman still wasn't sure of the orb's motives

‘I need your assurance that he will come to no harm’.

Thousands of miles away, somewhere between time and eternity, a figure sat in a darkened room in front of a similar glowing green orb. A broad wicked smile spread across the face of the figure bathed in the green light. I have her he thought to himself.

‘His well being is my utmost concern’ the rasping voice trying to sound like it cared.

The woman was still not convinced, but who else could she trust, she briefly entertained the thought of going to her father, but as soon as the thought entered her head, it disappeared. The creature from beyond time, whispered through the orb,

‘You don't need to speak to anyone about this, just tell me everything.’ The words were barely audible to the woman, but that was his way, suggestion, subtlety, stealth. The creature spoke out loud again,

‘Please, if you are as concerned as we are, then you will let us know where he is!’

There was a pause from the woman, and then she relented,

‘He'll be here in one week, our time. I'm not sure where on the estate he will be staying, but he will not be far from the main house, your people will have to find him.’ The doubt and guilt began to swarm in her head, the orb felt it too.

‘Let me assure you, I will personally see that he is not harmed, thank you for your help, and remember do not let anyone know of our conversations, it may hinder our mission to save him.’

The orb went dark and dropped into the woman's hand, leaving her in total darkness.

She told herself that she had done the right thing and tried to believe it.

‘Lights’

The room was bathed in a comfortable light, she looked at her watch and tried to stand up, her legs ached; she had been kneeling for over five hours. Letting out a sigh, she again wondered if she had done the right thing. She pushed the thoughts from her mind. Hiding the orb in the antique pine cupboard by her bed, she stretched and pulled out the elasticated white band that was holding her long dark hair in a loose ponytail. Throwing the band on to the bed and running her hands through her hair, she suddenly realised she was hungry. She picked up the pillow she had been kneeling on and threw that on the bed as well and headed for the door. A couple of seconds after she had left the room, she popped her head around her bedroom door.

‘Lights’ she said again. The bedroom lights slowly dimmed as she closed the door and headed down the hallway to the kitchen to find something to eat.

The owner of the other orb smiled again as the light of orb faded away. His smile grew wider until he couldn't contain it anymore, he let out a laugh, the evil sinister sound echoed around his chamber. Sometimes humans were so gullible. He stood and arched his back and laughed again. He was a master, a human one, well he was human once. He had devoted himself to the pursuit of power, at all costs. He had been on Xaria since the beginning, thousands of years ago, but what was time when the planet you lived on was somewhere between time and eternity. It had been an old trading post that had been used as storage for smuggled goods. That was before the first fall, Morning Star's fall. Xaria was now his domain and he claimed all that was below it, namely the Earth. He was the prince of the air and he had plans for this Earth, this creation of IAM.

The orb lit up before the master again, an act of will on his behalf. He thought to his apprentice, 'Drago, I want you and Xavier in my chambers at once.' There was no verbal response just a thought that appeared in the master's head,

'I'll go and get him master.'

The door slid open without making a sound and Drago peered into the gloom. The room was basic to say the least. The only furniture in the room was a wooden slat that utilised as a bed and seat. Xavier was sat cross legged on the makeshift bed facing the wall, but the wall wasn't actually there. Before him were open fields, trees and various creatures. They were in fact cows, but Drago had never seen a cow. Without looking from the wall Xavier addressed Drago.

'What do you want, can't you see I'm busy!'

'Usually I wouldn't disturb you in your search, but the Master wants us.'

Xavier yawned and waved away the image on the wall.

'Did he say what it was about?'

'No, but it sounded urgent, I think we'd better get going.'

Drago's blunt tone was more out of fear, from what the Master may do if they took more time than he deemed necessary. Xavier hopped off the bed.

'Don't worry, Drago, it's probably nothing important'

Despite his response, Xavier thought differently. Deep inside he was worrying, what if they have found him? What if they already have him? 'I should have been out there not in here' He silently chastised himself as he followed Drago out of the room.

The door slid closed with a dull click. Xavier fell in line behind Drago as they made their way along the stone passage way. The passage was carved right out of the grey stone base of the mountain, which formed the lower levels of the citadel. It ran for about a mile and had many doors and passages leading off it, Xavier knew very few of the creatures that occupied the citadel. Most of its occupants were Grand Masters and kept themselves to themselves. They reached the end of the passage and descended down a steep flight of stairs. The crystalline lights, that lined the stone walls, cast long shadows as they made their way down into the bowels of the citadel. At the end of the passage way they turned left and continued walking until they reached the entrance to the antechamber that contained the entrance to the Master's audience chamber. Xavier had to stoop slightly as he stepped through the low archway into the circular room beyond. Xavier loved this room. The stone walls were clad in polished timber which arched up towards the roof. A large ornate chandelier hung from the ceiling bathing the whole area in subdued light. The timber walls were covered in intricate carvings of plants and trees, a garden of amazing splendour. The large wooden door set into a stone frame, was carved with the centre piece of the garden, a huge tree bursting with fruit. At the base of the door the artist had etched the garden's name in the ancient language, Eden. Xavier ran his fingers along the walls, feeling the deep grooves in polished

surface. Drago headed straight for the door, not wanting to keep the Master waiting. He was just about to knock on the door, when it swung open.

‘Come in’ said the voice beyond the door.

Drago looked at Xavier expecting a response. Xavier had seen it before, a simple trick, and usually used on those new around masters. Drago had been in the citadel for over five Earth years, yet it had only been in the last month that he had been allowed down to the lower levels, everything was still new and exciting. He had much to learn. Xavier cleared his thoughts and stepped past Drago, sliding on an eye shield as he entered the audience chamber. It was brightly lit, with wax dripping candles adorning every available ledge and space, but as soon as Drago entered, the room exploded with a thousand points of light. None of them seemed to have any source. They were just there, as if all the stars in the nearest galaxy had come to rest in this one room, again this was for effect. All the masters, this one in particular liked their little games, especially when it meant gaining the awe and respect of new novices. Drago had just managed to stagger through the doorway and was now on his knees, shielding his eyes from the pain he felt at such an intense brightness. Xavier had seen this done before, hence the eye shield. To him the light felt no brighter than a cloudless sky on a spring morning. The light dissipated and Xavier helped Drago to his feet.

‘The blindness, will clear in a few minutes’ Xavier whispered in Drago’s ear.

The Master, a cloaked figure reclined upon a huge ornate crystal throne, no doubt with a smug grin under his cowl. The throne was a new one. He seemed to change them every few days, another one of his little quirks. It was mounted on a white marble mezzanine floor at the far side of the chamber. There were three sets of steps up, one set directly in front of the throne and the others at an equal distance away on the left and right of the central steps. Behind the throne was another ornate wooden door that led to the Master’s personal chamber.

‘Where have you been?’ the Master wheezed, they hadn’t been long, but anything less than immediate was too long.

‘I got here as fast as I could’ Drago replied, still trying to shake the light spots from his eyes. The Master gathered his black robes and dismounted from his far too extravagant throne. He dramatically paused for a moment half way down the marble steps, staring off into space as if trying to fathom the mysteries of the universe, then abruptly snapped out of it. Beckoning Xavier and Drago forward, he began to detail his encounter with the young woman who knew the whereabouts of their prey. Xavier was trying to focus and not let his mind wander as the Master spewed forth his information. Drago on the other hand was almost dancing with excitement wringing his hands and muttering the occasional

‘Excellent news my master’ or ‘Wonderfully done my master’.

The Master loved it and hardly noticed Xavier’s muted response. With a flourishing crescendo the master brought his tale to an end and once again laughed at the naivety of his contact. Drago eagerly joined in forcing his laughter out, which in itself was more comical than anything Xavier had seen in sometime. This excellently timed bit of sucking up from Drago had given Xavier a reason to genuinely laugh out loud with the other two. Xavier stopped suddenly, dropped to a crouch and pulled two cylindrical objects from their position on the back of his belt. Xavier sensed something was wrong.

‘Ah, my most jumpy Xavier, I should have known they wouldn’t have stayed hidden long from you’

Drago was just staring at Xavier as if he had gone mad. The master continued.

‘There is much you can learn from Xavier, young Drago. You may come out my friends!’

Xavier stood from his crouch as three figures appeared from behind the master's throne and bowed slightly. They were dressed in black cloaks that shrouded their faces and apart from the slight bow they stood motionless and said nothing.

'Xavier they will accompany you and Drago, you will leave immediately' The Master turned to Drago, 'make the necessary preparations'

'Where are we going' asked Drago.

'Earth'

Drago bowed low and left, his mind full of adventure and the prize.

After the door had closed, the Master addressed the three figures in hushed tones and they in turn nodded to Xavier and left. Xavier nodded a response, all the time thinking that this complicated matters. As the Master sat back on his throne, he beckoned to Xavier. He had come to trust Xavier's judgement and frequently included him in discussions of both sensitive and secretive matters, much to the annoyance of the Masters other minions.

'Do you think that three will be enough?' the Master quizzed Xavier. Xavier stroked his chin thoughtfully.

'We'll probably not need them, but better safe than sorry' The Master's eyes grew distant for a few seconds.

'And what about Him?' He finally said.

Xavier gave the impression that he was thinking again

'I am sure that He will not cause us any problems'

'Well lets try and get in and out without getting spotted' The Master seemed unduly concerned. Was there something he knew that Xavier wasn't aware of?

'You know how important this boy is' the master blurted out. This was most out of character.

Xavier began to scan the room for something that was out of place.

'Don't worry we'll get him and be in and out before they know he's gone'. The Master pulled himself up to his full height on his throne

'Do not disappoint me Xavier. You may leave me now'. Back to his old self importance. Xavier was about to go to leave through the door he had come in by,

'Through my study Xavier, there is a bag in there that you will need for your trip ahead'

Xavier nodded and left through the back door of the audience chamber, leaving the Master to his contemplations.

Xavier entered the Master's study. He was initially hit by a fragrant aroma; it was a sweet smell, concealing another smell that was vaguely familiar to Xavier. It tugged at the corners of his mind, he had smelt it before, but couldn't quite place it. He had the definite feeling that something more was going on, but he couldn't quite piece it together. The study was roughly oval and brightly lit with lanterns that hung around the walls between giant book shelves. The shelves were full of books from Xaria and Earth. Each book was pristine and dust free, the Masters most prized possessions. In the centre of the study was a large marble desk, black as night. It looked like it had been carved from a single piece, there were no visible joins. It was flawless. One of the Masters old thrones, with deep purple cushions, sat behind the desk. Beyond the desk, there were three sofas with more deep purple cushions. They were set around a marble table that match the desk. Nothing was out of place. All the books aligned in order, cushions placed evenly, even the shadows cast by the lanterns were perfectly symmetrical. This, Xavier was used to, having been in the Masters study numerous times. But the smell was new and so, come to think of it, was the outburst. The further he ventured into the room the more the smell and the Master's outburst gnawed at his sub-conscious. It was very uncharacteristic of the Master to let his guard down like that. In fact, Xavier couldn't recall a time when that had happened before. He closed his eyes and

replayed in his mind all that had happened since he and Drago had entered the Master's audience chamber. It suddenly hit him. The throne, the Master had literally only just got a new one, he changed them often, but that throne was something else. It had masked those three people far longer than Xavier's keen senses would have normally allowed, unless, unless it was some sort of permanent portal, but then only.... the smell suddenly became clear in his mind.... only one species on Xaria had perfected that sort of technology. The smell was that of a demon.

'Great' Xavier said under his breath, 'things just keep getting better.'

A thousand thoughts tried to flood into his mind. Pushing them aside, Xavier realised he had to stay focussed, his very life may depend on it.

The only problem was that having figured out what was amiss, Xavier still had no idea how the demon was involved, if he was involved at all. And if he was part of the Master's plan, which house was he from? A low house looking to increase it's standing with the aid of the Master or a larger house looking to claim the Master's prize. Xavier was beginning to like this less and less. He drew his mind back to the issue at hand. Looking around the room, there was only one bag visible; it was in the centre of the Master's desk. He sat down heavily on the edge of the desk and picked up the bag. He weighed it in his hand; it felt as if it was empty. He loosened the draw string and withdrew a small blue teardrop shaped object hanging from a thin silver chain. He slid the object into his pocket and tossed the bag back onto the desk. His thoughts returned to the demon. He scanned the room once again. Nothing looked out of place. He circled the comfortable seats that were at the far end of the room, the smell seeming to be strongest there. Xavier put his hand in his pocket and felt the pendant; it was cold to the touch. Pulling it out of his pocket, he rolled it round in his fingers, lost in thought. The pendant pulsed in his hand and a picture of the target appeared before him.

'You're right' he said to himself, 'get in and get out. Worry about all this later'

He put the pendant back in his pocket and headed out of the chamber, his thoughts now focussed on the upcoming mission and the increasing players that had come to the party.

Drago hurried around his room, packing his bag. He threw a few clothes onto his makeshift wooden bunk and continued rummaging in the cupboard that housed all his worldly possessions. He was excited. This would be his first time off Xaria. His thoughts turned to the prize, if he could get it for the master, then maybe he would be given a bit more respect around here, maybe he could rise to the level master quicker than he had initially hoped, he rubbed his hands at the thought. He mentally ran through all the things he needed to do and realised he had not sorted provisions for the trip. Leaving his bag on the bunk he headed out of his room and into the citadel in the direction of the kitchens.

Chapter 2 - THE HUMAN QUARTER

The citadel of the Grand Masters of Lucandria stood foreboding in stark contrast to the rest of the buildings around it. It was the central point for one of the larger satellite cities that made up the great city Lucandria. They had levelled a whole mountain to build it, using the grey stone to construct both the citadel and the surrounding buildings. Part of the mountain base had formed the foundation for the citadel, but after years of expansion a third of the citadel was now below ground, passages and rooms hollowed deep into the root of the mountain. The part of the citadel that was above ground, spiralled upward into seven great spires, the centre one tallest, with the others forming a perfect hexagon around it. Lights blazed out of the windows on the outer walls, many of its rooms containing foul things long since forgotten. To be given a place in the citadel of the Grand Masters of Lucandria was a great honour. Some grand masters had dedicated their lives to attaining such a lofty position. Out of the great archway on the central spire, Xavier crept. He made his way out of the citadel, being careful not to be followed. You never knew on Xaria who would extend the hand of friendship, if there was such a thing in this forsaken place, or remove your head from your shoulders. He breathed in deeply as he hit street level. The citadel air was always so musty and dank. He loved getting out of there. It was starting to get dark and cold, he looked up at the myriad of stars that were beginning to appear. After a brief look left and right, he pulling his overcoat collar up around his neck he quickly crossed the street and slipped round the corner of the opposite building, a strange shaped building that stretched up to the sky like a monolith. He hugged the wall of the building and peeked round the corner towards the exit of the citadel he had just come out of, 'can't be too careful' he thought to himself.

He gave one last peek and satisfied that he wasn't been followed set off up the street. He stayed close to the buildings, in the shadows. After crossing two intersections, Xavier turned left up a small alley which ended at a large wall with a thick wooden door, with a small port hole in it. He tapped at the door and a pair of eyes appeared in the round port hole.

'Who are you? What do you want?' The eyes darting side to side to see if Xavier was alone,

'I seek entrance most vigilant gate keeper' Xavier said with a smirk.

'Oh it's you! You gonna be long?' said the eyes.

'No. I just need to see Nathan'

The port hole shut and after a minute of shuffling around behind the door, it slowly swung open, revealing the owner of the eyes, a small round fellow, who badly needed a wash, he scowled at Xavier,

'Come on then!'

Xavier stepped through the door. The small round fellow looked out into the growing gloom before closing the door and fixing the 12 bolts and replacing his stand box in front of the door directly under the port hole. Xavier watched in amusement, the small man turned and almost jumped out of his skin.

'Are you still here?' He said, his scowl returning to his face.

'You never change, do you' Xavier said with a laugh. The Gate Keeper just ignored his comment, scowled some more and returned to his seat. He picked up his pipe and a bowl of soup; that was now getting cold.

'I'll be a couple of hours.'

'Make sure you are!' replied the Gate Keeper not even looking up.

Xavier made his way down a dimly lit tunnel, the steps barely visible, the air smelt stale, he reached the bottom of the stairs. As the tunnel turned abruptly to his right, he walked through the archway in front of him. It led him to a cavernous room that seemed to have been hollowed right out of the grey rock. Torches lined the rough walls casting dull circles of light on the black stone floor. Across the room was a wooden door set into the rock wall, it had a rather large brass handle that reflected the light of the nearest torches. Xavier strode across the room and using both hands turned the handle and pulled the door open. He blinked as light streamed into the room through the open door. The door opened out to a set of steps that led to a large open square, it was packed with all sorts of characters. The warm breeze ruffled his hair. He stepped through the door and pulled it gently behind him.

Time in 'The human Quarter' was always out of sync with the rest of Xaria due to its position and the rotation of the planet. It was mostly in eternity and for only a portion of the day in time. So when Xavier entered the square it was late afternoon and equivalent of Earth's summer, despite the fact that it had been almost dark and autumn when Xavier had left the citadel. He stood for a moment taking in the scene. The square was roughly eighty feet deep and almost the same across. It had square white paving slabs, interspersed with circular patterns made from smaller slabs of stone. Each corner of the square had a huge white stone pillar; each of them supported struts that ran the entire length of each side of the square, from the struts hung flowers and green climbing plants. Past these pillars, another set of steps, led down to a further large square paved area with taverns and shop fronts surrounding two sides of the square on Xavier's left and right. He picked his spot and headed to the other side of the square. Keeping his hand on his money bag in his pocket he entered the throng of people. He reached the other side, from this vantage point at the top of the steps he see all the way down the main street. He slipped off his over coat and draped it over his left arm, hiding one of his cylinders in his left hand. He left the second cylinder on full view. This would put off any would be opportunist thief or mugger. Satisfied that his cylinder in his left hand couldn't be seen he set off down the steps taking them two at a time. After a brief look behind him, more out of habit than to check if he was being followed, he started down the main street taking in the sights. He loved the Human Quarter, he felt a connection here, no one took any notice of him, just the way he liked it. He got far too much attention in the citadel, so he liked having the chance to be alone with his thoughts, enjoying the stroll, before he had to get down to business. He reached the junction at the top of the main street. Left would take him to Thanigans, a particularly well used and popular tavern; he thought about it for a few moments and then decided it was probably best to stick to his plan. If he went to Thanigans he might not return for a number of hours and he didn't want to miss the mission timetable. It might put him in a difficult position. He didn't want to have to explain where he had been. So with a tinge of regret he headed right and down towards the trading courts, a group of small squares with shops and stalls renowned for selling everything and anything. If you couldn't get what you wanted here, then you probably couldn't get it on Xaria. Despite its size it even surpassed the markets at Jarako for variety and choice. He passed several small shops, eating places and trader's stalls, each selling various delicacies. By the time he had reached the second trading court the smell of the food was making his stomach rumble. He suddenly realised that he hadn't eaten for a while and he hadn't sorted out any supplies yet for the mission. No doubt Drago would sort something out and it may even be nice this time! As Xavier was thinking it would probably be best if he was to sort something out while he was here, a large hand planted itself on his shoulder 'You really don't want to shop here my friend' Xavier turned to greet the familiar voice, 'Nathan my old friend', Nathan had a big grin on his face. Xavier could hardly recall him without a grin and a warm greeting. He stood at least a foot higher than Xavier, with broad shoulders, his

long blonde hair seemed in sharp contrast to his tightly buttoned black long coat he always wore. Nathan was one of the first to be brought to Xaria.

‘Less of the old if you don’t mind’ the mock hurt tone added for dramatic effect.

‘Well anyone over 6000 years old, is old in my book’ Nathan was just about to reply when Xavier answered for him

‘Well if you live between time and eternity’ Xavier mimicking Nathan’s voice. They went through this charade every time they met. Nathan faked a hurt look and promptly burst out laughing and embraced Xavier.

‘It is good to see you my brother, but what brings you down to our quarter and so late in the day?’ asked Nathan. He guided his friend across to his transport pod waiting at the other side of the road.

‘Business I’m afraid’ answered Xavier. Xavier looked down at Nathan's pod.

‘Is this new?’

Nathan chuckled.

‘Technology moves so quickly, I thought it was time for a new one’

The pod was silver and shaped like an elongated sphere. There was a slight hiss and the top part of the pod split in half, opening on its vertical axis showing off a very opulent interior. A small section of the bottom part of the pod, opened out into a set of steps. There were five seats around the edge of the pod, all facing inward, leaving a gap for the steps. Each of the seats had integrated arm rests. The furthest chair opposite the steps had the pod controls, as part of the arm rests.

‘Very nice’ said Xavier as he climbed in and took a seat on the left and strapped in. Nathan climbed aboard and sat in the control seat. Nathan swiped his hand over a red sensor and the pod closed, as the steps began to rise up and fit into place, Xavier could hear the dull hum of the power core firing up.

‘No time for a stop at Thanigans then?’ said Nathan

Xavier didn’t get a chance to reply before the vehicle sped off. The acceleration forcing him back into his seat. Nathan flicked a switch and the pressure eased, but they were still travelling at an incredible speed. They hurtled along, out of the human quarter and into the suburbs. Weaving through streets lined with exquisite detached houses, some fortified with guarded gates. Nathan hit another switch and they just managed to make the entrance to Nathan’s home. The security gates swung closed as the pod stopped with a jolt.

‘You still not slowed down yet then’

Nathan raised an eyebrow. They climbed out and headed up the drive towards the impressive house. Xavier loved Nathan's house, it always felt very homely, in complete contrast to the citadel. The front of the house had two large circular windows on either side of the double wooden doors set at the centre of the house. The same style windows were on the first floor, except for a fifth smaller circular window over the door. As they reached the door, it opened for them. After they had entered, the doors closed quietly behind them.

Several hours later Xavier emerged from the house, a bag in hand. He waved a goodbye and climbed into the old black pod that Nathan had said he could borrow. Nathan watched as his friend disappeared up the road in his old pod and wondered if he would ever see him again, he hoped so. He thoughtfully closed the door and decided he needed a drink.

Chapter 3 – THE LANDING PARTY

Drago took the last few steps of the stairs in one bound, landing lightly on his feet. He ran along the corridor, skidding to a halt in front of a large wooden door. He pushed open the door to the kitchens and waited for the smell to hit him. If there was one place in the citadel that Drago loved, it was here. The pungent aromas assaulted his senses. It smelt so great he could happily stay here all day. The kitchens serviced the whole of the citadel and although Drago rarely saw a master down there, the cooks were always busy preparing enough food to feed a small army. The kitchens were separated into three large areas. The first was filled with rough tables and chairs with a serving hatch that lead to the second area. This was filled with preparation benches with huge ovens that lined the walls. The final area was taken up from floor to ceiling with food, wine and other delicacies.

He waved to the cook by the serving hatch, she was plating up what looked to be an evening meal. She gave him a smile as he headed to the preparation area. One or two of the cooks waved at Drago as he entered, but many were engrossed in their culinary tasks. The head cook a burly giant of a man, who went by the name of ‘C’, surveyed a large pot that was bubbling on the stove. He had a massive jaw, which protruded past his long grey and white hair which dropped below his shoulders, his apron was covered in stains which looked like they had been there from before the beginning of time; it was tied round his waist and accentuated his portly torso. He turned and peered down at Drago.

‘What can I do for you master Drago?’ His voice resonated around the kitchens. Drago liked the head cook, because, other than Xavier, he was the only one that treated him with at least a little respect and besides his jokes always made Drago laugh.

‘C, I need some supplies for a couple of days’

Drago thought he better get some supplies for the hooded masters as well.

‘I need five lots, if that’s OK?’ said Drago.

‘I’m sure we can sort something out’

The head cook lent down towards Drago, looked this way and that, cupped a hand beside his mouth and whispered

‘Word has it, it’s a very special trip’ Drago was amazed at how fast word got out, especially in a place where secrets were a lifestyle.

‘C, you know I can’t say anything’

Then mimicking C, Drago cupped his hand by his mouth, shifted his eyes back and forth and whispered ‘But yes, you’re right, it is a special trip!’

With a wink, C turned and headed towards the larders.

‘You want your usual?’ C shouted from the larders

‘Why not’, Drago shouted back.

After a couple of minutes C appeared with four canvas bags and five dark green bottles. He laid the bags on the counter and proceeded to pack three of the bottles in one of the canvas bags.

‘There you go master Drago. You bring me something back from your trip and we’ll call it quits.’

‘Deal’ said Drago as he hoisted the bags up and over his head so that he had two bags dangling at either side of him and picked up the remaining bottles.

‘Take care of yourself C’

‘And you master Drago, and you.’

With that Cook turn back to the kitchens and reprimanded one of the junior cooks who was loitering around the larders with his hands in his pockets.

‘Ah, Drago, there you are. Got the supplies?’ Drago followed the voice to a dark corner, high up in the chamber. Xavier stepped out into the light. He had been standing in the shadows of the transportation chamber since he had returned, watching all the preparations.

‘Did C give you some edible food this time?’

Drago held up the prize of four canvas bags and the couple of green bottles, but wasn’t really focusing on Xavier at all. He was transfixed on all the hustle and bustle in the chamber. Xavier jumped down from his vantage point and landed lightly by Drago. He took a couple of the bags from him and had a quick look at the supplies inside.

‘It’s never usually this busy’ whispered Drago, ‘do you think we are going to get him this time?’ again in a whisper.

Xavier looked up as the masters enter the chamber, then answered under his breath,

‘Maybe’ he said.

Xavier closed the bags and handed them back to Drago, before starting across the chamber to meet the masters.

The tallest of the three masters stepped forward as Xavier came up the steps.

‘Everything is ready’ Xavier bowed.

The master just nodded and Xavier extended his arm indicating the transportation platform. Drago had already climbed onto the platform, having put supplies into each of their packs. The masters stepped on and assumed their quiet formation. Drago raised an eyebrow and threw Xavier his pack. Xavier placed his hood over his head and Drago followed suite. Xavier nodded to Drago ‘Ready?’ Drago was just about to say no when they vanished.

The fields stretched out as far as the eye could see, the left of the field was bordered by a line of fir trees, split in half by a path that ran for a few miles leading to a densely populated wood of firs and evergreens. On the horizon, a large copse of trees of similar variety to the wood stood dark and foreboding. Apart from the slight breeze singing in the trees, all was quiet. Without warning there was a burst of blue light, then it was gone, five figures appeared in the middle of the field where the light had been. They were shrouded with black hooded cloaks, each of them carrying a pack. The five figures pulled back their dark hoods. Three of them looked strikingly similar, youthful faces with long black hair. Two of them were male with deep set eyes. The other, a female stepped away from the group and scanned the horizon. All three seemed unaffected by the journey, they were masters after all. The other two figures, Xavier and Drago, looked around at their surroundings, having to let the white spots in front of their eyes disappear as they adjusted to the darkening sky. The sun had set and the warm summer breeze gently rocked the long grass on the field back and forth. Drago was the first to notice the female and stared, the words ‘but you’re a girl’ were just about to come out of his mouth, when Xavier, who had seen female masters before, nudged him. The female walked up to Drago,

‘my name is Pian’ and she extended her hand, Drago felt a little embarrassed being singled out, but took her hand. He was transfixed as her dark eyes bore into him. Her voice found its way into his head,

‘Just because I am a girl, Drago Xatzeemalaak, doesn’t mean I couldn’t kill you in a second.’

Drago quickly removed his hand from hers and looked to Xavier with wide eyes. Then Javen, the tallest master, spoke, his voice deep and gruff,

‘Enough! We’ll need to find somewhere to put our things!’ Xavier nodded at him; the three long haired masters replaced their hoods and set off across the field towards the copse of trees on the horizon. Xavier anxiously followed them with his eyes as they disappeared into a dip in the landscape, he almost breathed a sigh of relief when they reappeared again a few moments later, I hope my instincts about those three are right, he thought to himself. He flattened down an area of grass, sat down and started to rummage through his pack, his head barely visible above the field’s tall grass. Drago paced about impatiently, until Xavier motioned him to sit.

‘We don’t have time to sit and contemplate life’ Drago complained, Xavier lifted his head and fixed his eyes on Drago

‘If you want to go roaming this place unaided, be my guest, but we will find him a lot quicker if you display a bit of patience and wait for our three friends’ cocking his head towards the copse, Drago dropped his eyes and Xavier continued to search the pack. Drago stared up at the now dark sky, bright with stars and a full moon, putting his pack behind him he leant back into the grass, ‘They’re Masters, but different?’

Xavier just nodded without raising his head from his searching.

‘That girl might be cute, but she’s a complete nutter’ said Drago

‘I wouldn’t let her hear you say or think that, well the nutter bit anyway’ replied Xavier still lost in his search.

‘I suppose I should just relax and wait here’ Drago said through a slight yawn and more to himself than to get a response from Xavier. He closed his eyes and was soon asleep. Xavier glanced over to the now snoring Drago and shook his head a little with a smile. He pulled out of his pack what he had been searching for.

‘There you are!’

It was the bag from Nathan, he felt the orb inside. Making sure it was at the top of the pack. He pulled the pack’s drawstring tight and neatly tied it.

‘Just in case’ he said to himself as he patted the top of the pack.

Drago came round after what he felt was ten minutes, but in fact three hours had passed. He felt cold. He rubbed his eyes and sat up. A hand grabbed him by the shoulder and another covered his mouth, the surprise made his heart feel like it was going to come out of his chest.

‘Don’t make a sound’ Xavier whispered, slowly taking his hand from Drago’s mouth,

‘You nearly frightened me to death’ shouted Drago.

‘If you don’t be quiet, I’ll make sure I make a good job of it next time! Look, listen!’

Xavier stretched out his hand and pointed towards the copse, at first Drago couldn’t see or hear anything, and then through the trees saw a glint of light and then another.

‘What’s going on?’

Xavier shrugged back at Drago not knowing himself.

‘Is it one of our friends?’ Drago whispered,

Xavier shook his head.

‘I doubt it, they wouldn’t have been seen, they have ways of avoiding...’ before Xavier could finish his sentence their three companions burst through the trees heading at full speed towards them, hot in pursuit were three men dressed in black and brandishing what looked like guns.

Drago looked at Xavier.

‘You were saying!’

Xavier looked blankly back at Drago, mouth open. From the edge of the trees a fourth person stepped from the shadows and shouted something, the three pursuers instantly dropped to the ground and rolled to the right. Xavier and Drago looked at each other, from their position they

saw the fourth man raise his arm and take aim at their friends, his arm recoiled as if firing a weapon, but there was silence, no gun shot, not that a gun could hurt a Master, just a deathly silence, even the sound of the breeze through the trees was silent. Drago noticed it first, a black globe speeding from the figure towards the running Masters, with every second it was expanding and gaining. Several things bothered Xavier about this situation, how had the Masters been seen and why were they running?

‘We must have landed too close’ he said to himself. Drago was too transfixed on the globe to hear Xavier’s murmurings. The black globe had now almost reached one of the flagging Masters and was now as big as its target. Drago’s mouth dropped open as the Master let out a terrified scream as the blackness engulfed him, the scream abruptly stopped as the blackness and the Master were suddenly gone. The three men had taken up pursuit of the remaining two Masters, with the figure from the copse catching them up with amazing speed. Xavier grabbed Drago’s pack and slung it at him

‘Time to go!’ he picked up his own pack and started to wade through the tall grass. Drago was still sat there stunned at what he had just witnessed. ‘Now Drago, come on’ He still didn’t move, Xavier ran back through the flattened grass and grabbed Drago by the scruff of the neck, hoisting him up to his feet, drawing him face to face.

‘Now!’ Xavier almost growled.

The Masters had cut across the field heading towards a break in the line of the trees that bordering the field. Xavier and Drago headed off hoping to meet them before they cleared the field and before the four men caught them.

They converged at the break in the trees and sprinted the several miles along the pathway and then on into the wood. Branches clawed at them as they weaved their way through the trees. Drago felt like he had been running for an eternity when Javen glanced back,

‘I think we have lost them’ he rasped.

The small group had left the path quite a while back thinking that if their pursuers were still following them, they would think that the band had stayed on the path and headed out of the woods. Drago dropped to the ground exhausted.

‘What in Xaria was that?’

‘Something you don’t want to mess with’ replied Pian, the other surviving Master.

‘Someone’ Xavier said under his breath; he hadn’t moved from his spot since they had stopped. He was crouched down, sat on his haunches and balancing himself with his hands. Xavier stared out through the trees. His face was a mixed picture of concentration. Beads of sweat studded his brow.

‘What do you mean someone?’ asked Pian appearing a little shaken up by the whole ordeal.

Xavier shook his head slightly and stood.

‘Whoever spotted you was not from this realm and whatever took out our friend was certainly not from this place.’

Xavier looked at the ground thoughtfully, deciding if he should tell them who it was, he decided against it, they would find out soon enough. Xavier raised his head.

‘We’ll make camp here, try and get some rest. I’ll take the first watch.’

Drago was asleep within seconds of his head hitting his pack. Xavier chuckled to himself, remembering the first time he had come through the portal to Earth and how tired he felt.

Only a stones throw away, in the branches of one of the many trees, sat the fourth figure; the one who had taken out the master with the mysterious black orb. He had heard all the conversations and now watched the small group ready their makeshift camp. He nodded to himself, stroked his

goatee beard, a habit he was well known for, slid down from his perch and was gone without a sound.

At some point in the early hours Xavier had shaken Drago and told him he was going for a look around and that it was his watch, Drago groaned an acknowledgment and promptly went back to sleep.

The air was fresh after the brief thunder storm in the night. Xavier made his way back to the path. In one hand he held a cylindrical shaped object, its diameter was small enough to comfortably grip. It shimmered with a light of its own. In the other hand on the end of a thin chain he held up a tear drop shaped pendant, it pulsed with a dull blue light. He pointed the pendant to his left, the way that they had come the previous night, the blue glow disappeared. He swung his arm around so it was pointing up the path to his right, the pendant burst into life again.

‘Well if it says that way, then that’s the way I go’

He slid the chain over his head. He looked around, it was almost light now. He looked down at the cylinder in his other hand and squeezed it gently. Before Xavier could blink, a blade shot out of the cylinder with a guard forming into a protective curve over his hand. The outside of the guard and the back of the blade rippled and a set of serrated teeth appeared. A pommel formed on the end of the cylinder. Two lengths of brightly coloured cord that twirled in the slight breeze were tied to a small silver hoop hanging from the pommel. He cut the air with the weapon a few times before squeezing it again and the blade was gone. Hooking the cylinder to his belt, he took another glance up at the sky, then started off up the path way. He could feel the pendant pulsing against his chest. The path was thin, but well worn. It followed the hedgerow line that bordered the wood they had hidden in over night. The path started to incline ahead of him. Xavier broke into a slight jog as the steepness increased. He reached the crest of the hill, the wood far behind him now. Looking across the valley, the fields spread out in front of him, in the distance he could hear the murmuring of a stream. Feeling the pulse of the pendant getting stronger, Xavier started his descent into the valley, towards the wheat fields in the distance.

Chapter 4 - CONNECTIONS

Jake Avalon sat and waited He'd been doing a lot of that lately, waiting that is. It was usually for Lucian, his Grandfather, as it was today. Jake shifted his weight slightly on the tree stump he was sitting on, there had been a thunderstorm during the night and he was starting to feel the damp come through his three quarter length khaki shorts. He stared out across the estate and idly scratched at the birthmark on the back of his hand. The fields seemed to go on forever, the river bubbled by, and all was well with the world, apart from the waiting. Jake liked it here. It was beautiful, quiet and above all away from the house. Jake reminded himself that he was supposed to be feeling annoyed that his grandfather was late, but he couldn't help but relax in these surroundings. It was late summer and the warm sun permeated through his t-shirt, the trees heavy with yellowy gold leaves that clung to the branches fighting the slight breeze. The fields overflowed with wheat and barley, almost ready to be harvested. Something caught Jake's eye as he stared across the fields, it was only a slight movement, but a movement none the less. He fixed his gaze on the field, in an attempt to see the movement again. Nothing! His focus shifted to the river that ran between where he sat and the field. Nothing! He was a little way off from the river bank and the river was quite wide at this point, his eyes traced the bank for as far as he could see and back again. He was about to relax, when all of a sudden he had the distinct feeling that he was being watched. He squinted trying to focus farther down the river again. His gaze swept back along the river edge, there; deep in the wheat field something moved again, he could just make out a shape. Jake looked harder, he felt his vision seem to intensify as he fixed upon the shape, within the shape he saw a pair of eyes, yes they were eyes, they were staring at him. Jake shook his head as the intensification of his vision made him feel light headed. He looked again at where he had seen the movement and once again his vision intensified. The eyes were still looking at him. Jake stared back;

'You see me don't you' the voice was as crisp and clear as if the thing was stood next to him,

'Yes' Jake replied without missing a beat.

'Yes what?'

The voice behind him made Jake jump. Jake swung round and came face to chest with Gabriel; to say Gabriel was tall would be telling the truth, however, he had a presence that if you didn't know him would make you afraid, very afraid. His dark cropped hair along with his attire didn't help either, totally in black, a long wool overcoat, concealing a shoulder holster holding a rather large gun and sunglasses; you'd think he was some sort of bodyguard and not the head keeper of the estate. Behind Gabriel were some of his grounds men, they looked like they had just got back from a bodyguard convention. Then there was Sara, Gabriel's daughter. Jake's cheeks blushed when his eyes met hers. She was amazing, how could anything so lovely come from him. Long dark hair, deep blue eyes, she looked almost fragile, except for this edge. Maybe it was the way she carried herself, what ever it was Jake loved it. He felt alive when he was with her;

'You like her don't you?' the voice again as if the thing was beside Jake.

'Pardon' Jake blurted out going even redder, Gabriel grabbed Jake's cheeks and pulled his head and came down to eye level

'I said, Yes what?' Jake blinked at Gabriel,

'They can't hear me, I'm in your head', Jake frowned and turned to the field across the river trying to make out the thing.

‘Don't let them know I'm here, they've come for me, but they must not find me’. The voice said quickly.

Gabriel smiled and winked at Sara, she knew that look, not again, was all she could think. The friendly slap on Jake's arm almost knocked him over, sometimes Gabriel didn't realise his own strength. He righted Jake.

‘Hey anyone at home’

All Jake could say was ‘huh!’

Gabriel was just about to start teasing Jake, which he did often and usually about Sara, when Sara spoke

‘Jake have you seen anyone go through here’. Gabriel looked almost annoyed that his fun had been stopped and raised an eyebrow at his daughter,

‘Yes, I was going to get to that’ said Gabriel.

‘No you weren't you where going to start teasing him, again’ she replied.

Gabriel was just about to respond, when he decided against it, she had that look in her eye all women seem to be born with.

‘Ok, Ok’ he turned to Jake and sighed muttering ‘women’ under his breath, as much to Jake as to himself.

‘Jake have you seen anyone on the estate this morning’

The voice in his head pleaded with him

‘Please don't tell them I'm here’

Jake tried not to turn towards the field, he couldn't help himself. He tried to cover it up and hoped that no one had noticed

‘What? Around here? N..No.’

Pointing in the general direction of the river and stammering slightly.

Gabriel removed his glasses

‘Are you sure Jake, it's important.’

It was Gabriel's serious fatherly tone that he'd heard him use on Sara many times.

‘No, I'm sure, I mean yes I'm sure. Err Why?’

It was Gabriel's turn to be defensive. He slid his sunglasses back on,

‘Oh nothing, just some reports that there had been some poaching going on last night, don't worry I'm sure we will catch him’ Gabriel caught himself ‘I mean, them, if they're still around.’

Gabriel turned his long coat swirled round,

‘Let's go’

He motioned his men back to the house on the horizon. Sara smiled at Jake, turned and followed her Father.

‘She likes you too!’

Jake swung around expecting the thing to be next to him, but it was still in its hiding place across the river.

Jake thought to it

‘I think they have gone’ He breathed a sigh of relief

‘Very good, you're a natural, I knew you would be!’

The thing stood up and moved from its place to the waters edge. It was a man. He looked a little older than Jake, but not much. He was kind of familiar. He had dark hair, athletic build, and strange clothes, not completely weird, just different. The man smiled, the voice came into Jake's head

‘Thank you Jacob Avalon, I am forever in your debt’

Then with a salute the man turned and was gone.

A bit bewildered by the whole thing Jake continued to stare at the spot where the man had been hiding. A glint of sunlight reflected off a metal object where the man had been. He wanted to shout after the man, but he was gone. Jake looked up at the sun, it had started to get really warm, he stared back over at the object on the bank, he took a quick look around, 'What the heck!'

He stripped off his t-shirt along with his socks and trainers then waded into the river in just his shorts, heading for the far bank. From a little distance away a figure stepped back from the tree he had been hiding behind, it was Gabriel. He rubbed his crescent shaped goatee beard. 'So it has begun' he turned and headed for the house.

The river was cold despite the midday sun; Jake concentrated on the far bank; it was further than he thought. The river had a slight current that pushed Jake side ways. Every now and again he would check that he was still in line with the object and find he would have to correct his path. After a little struggle Jake clambered onto the far bank dripping wet. He shivered and began to think this wasn't a good idea. He pushed his way through the tall sheaves of wheat to where he thought he had seen the object; he looked back to the bank where his clothes now lay. He was still slightly down stream despite having corrected himself during the crossing. Jake was feeling a little less cold as the sun in the cloudless sky began to warm him. He ventured further into the field and then started to move upstream to where his mysterious friend had been hidden. Reaching the spot where the object lay, Jake crouched and stared at the object. It glowed with a faint blue light and seemed to pulse as if alive. Jake tentatively reached out to it and retracted his hand, not feeling sure whether he should pick it up or not, finally after a few minutes of further staring, curiosity got the better of him.

The pendant despite its size felt heavy, it began to pulse quicker the longer Jake held it. Suddenly Jake felt as if he was being watched. He shoved the pendant in his shorts pocket and dropped down, hiding amongst the wheat sheaves, scanning the surrounding area.

Gabriel sat in his car wondering if he should have left Jake on his own, should he explain to him what was going on. Did he really know what was going on, Gabriel wasn't so sure anymore, he had been away for so long and now this. Was it the beginning of something or was it just another day at the office. If people were trying to get to Jake then he would have to be ready, even if it was Jake's own Grandfather, Lucian. His mind drifted to his daughter, Sara, she was a lot like him in so many ways and yet he sometimes didn't understand her at all, should he tell her about what was going on, would talking it through with someone help? He put his head back against the headrest and looked to the heavens. Could he keep up this façade?

'What should I do?' He said out loud.

Nothing. For eons he had stood in the heavenly courts, he had been the one to send the Word of the Lord to so many down the ages and now when he felt he needed to hear from IAM for himself. But there was nothing. He knew how it worked though, he closed his eyes and remembered the heavenly court, his fellow brothers and IAM, the Word and the Spirit, it warmed his heart and he knew he could carry on. He got out of his vehicle and headed towards his office, his mobile rang.

'Yes',

'Sir they have been spotted',

'Where?' asked Gabriel whilst checking his watch.

'The east side of the estate Sir, near where they landed' Gabriel thought quickly, should he get Sara involved? He would rather have her with him; yes best have her along, just in case.

‘Right, get all the men together and come and get me, I’m at my office.’

‘Yes Sir. Erm Sir, do you want me to get The Detachment?’ Gabriel thought for a moment.

‘No, just have them on standby.’ The man confirmed the order and hung up. Gabriel pushed a small button on the side of the phone, there was a quiet click and the top section of the phone popped up. Pulling it free, he squeezed one end and a rubber hook sprang from the edge and an ear bud protruded out below the hook. Hooking it over his ear and sticking the bud in his ear, he adjusted the microphone at the other end. He scrolled through the touch screen on the remaining part of his phone and pressed the ear piece icon. The phone vibrated and shut down, a low pitch double beep echoed in his ear, indicating the ear piece was activated.

‘Speed dial, Sara’ He spoke into the microphone and he could hear his ear piece phone begin to dial his daughter’s number. I love technology he thought to himself. Sara answered.

‘What’s up Dad?’

‘We’ve got a fix on them; I need you at the office in two’,

‘Ok, I’ll be there’ and she hung up.

Gabriel contemplated his decision not to call in the Detachment, but decided he didn’t need them just yet. Gabriel headed back to his vehicle and opened the boot; he slid his hand along the rear bumper and found the switch, click, the floor of the boot opened with a slight hiss, revealing a cache of weapons. He changed his silver 9mm’s for two odd looking black guns, sliding one into his shoulder holster and the other in a holster strapped to his back. He pulled out a couple of objects that looked like batteries and slid them into the shoulder strap holders. He reached for two thick chrome wrist guards and clamped it to his wrists. He felt their weight and with a thought the right wrist guard with unimaginable speed enveloped his whole hand and a four foot blade shot from the top and a handle butt protruded from the bottom. It shimmered in the sun, a faint glow emanated from the weapon. A number of intricate carvings decorated the blade. The carvings were more than impressive pictures; they gave the blade its power to cross both the physical and spiritual realms. He held it up in front of him, watching as the carvings began to glow and then with another thought it retracted back into its original form. He flicked another switch and the false floor of the boot hissed back into place. Ensuring that car was locked he headed back towards his office to wait for Sara.

Chapter 5 - CONFRONTATION

Six of his men were already standing in front of his office, they snapped to attention when they saw Gabriel approach. Gabriel nodded to them and they fell in behind him. As they headed towards the east side of the estate, Sara came running up her long charcoal peacoat flapping behind her.

‘Button up girl, you’ll catch a cold!’

She just looked at him, head cocked putting on her little girl face

‘Oh! Daddy!’ she said with a pout.

They smiled at each other. He was glad he had decided to bring her along. She buttoned her coat and slid on a pair of shades and fell in beside her Father as they strode across the main lawn of the estate heading towards the main gate. The guard on duty looked up from the newspaper he was reading, seeing that it was Gabriel he dropped the paper and snapped to attention. Gabriel gave him a brief nod as they passed through. Glancing back over his shoulder Gabriel noticed that the guard had picked up the newspaper again. He thought about stopping and reprimanding the guard, but he knew he didn’t have time. Pressing the side of the ear piece he made a call.

‘Speed dial, security’

‘Yes sir, how can I help you?’

‘Who am I speaking to?’ asked Gabriel

‘This is Brett sir’

Gabriel liked Brett, he was in his early twenties, but he had a good head on his shoulders and was a quick learner. He did his job to the letter and he always showed Gabriel respect.

‘How did you know it was me?’

‘I memorised important numbers sir, so I know who is calling when the number appears on the display’

Gabriel was impressed.

‘Brett, can you come down to the main gate and relieve the guard there, tell him I want to speak to him later about his lack of attention’

‘Yes sir, I will go right away, anything else sir?’

‘Not at the moment, but good job with the number recall’

‘Thank you sir’

Gabriel ended the call.

They were now weaving their way through the small line of trees that bordered the estates main road. Breaking through the tree line, they reached the river and started to jog along the bank, after about twenty minutes they reached the bridge that intersected with the corner of the wheat fields.

In the distance they could see the copse of trees where they had encountered the group the night before. The group crossed the bridge and dropped low behind the fence that edged the field beyond. Gabriel motioned for two men to go left along the fence line and come round from the North. As the two men head off Gabriel whispered to his daughter

‘Whatever happens, if we get split up make sure that you get back to the house and if I don’t make it back by morning, you know what to do’ Sara just nodded.

‘Ok let’s go’

They vaulted over the fence and sprinted across the open field towards the copse of trees. Half way across, there was a flicker of movement from the trees and they all dropped down in the long grass, Gabriel motioned to the other four men to stay low and spread out into a sweeping pattern

'No one gets through' he mouthed.

They moved silently through the grass. As they got closer, they could hear talking from within the trees. It was low and hard to make out, but there were definitely two distinctive voices. One of the figures stepped out to the edge of the copse, his back towards the field. Gabriel and his men burst from their hiding places. The two figures hidden within the trees didn't have time to run, one of them had been pinned to a tree by three of Gabriel's men and the second shouted

'Whoa it's us, it's us'

Gabriel recognised them immediately. It was a couple of Jake's friends, Abe and Red.

'What the hell are you guys doing here' growled Gabriel.

'We, we were supposed to meet Jake here like an hour ago'. The three men let Red go and dusted him off and shoved him towards Gabriel.

'You know that you guys are not allowed on the estate unless it's been cleared by me.'

The two boys stood before Gabriel looking down at the dirt.

'Hey were sorry man, we just thought that Jake had cleared it' said Red not taking his eyes off the ground.

Abe looked up

'Yeah we thought it was cool. We saw some of your guys earlier this morning over the ridge on the other side of the wood; they were wearing some funny threads though.'

Gabriel looked at his men; they fanned out to the edges of the copse of trees.

'You guys better get out of here, I'm sure Jake is at the house. When you get there, stay there'

Abe looked at Gabriel with a grin, realising that the people they had seen weren't Gabriel's men.

'You gonna kick someone's butt? Can we watch?'

Gabriel gave a slight smirk

'I'll kick your butt if you don't get out of here'

The boys turned and ran off in the opposite direction of the house

'Guys the house is that way'

'Yeah we know we just gotta get out bikes'

The boys pulled a couple of all terrain bikes from behind one the trees, the engines whined as they kick started the bikes. With a quick wave they set off towards the house. Gabriel turned to Sara

'Remind me to have a little chat with Jake when we get back'

Xavier arrived back at the campsite with the sun still low in the sky. Drago was already on his fifth ration pack, the ones that were supposed to last them the whole day. Xavier stared at him with one eyebrow raised. A muffled

'What?'

Was about all Drago could say. He shrugged his shoulders and shoved in another mouthful of food. Javen spoke from underneath his hood, not favouring the sunlight.

'What news?'

He seemed still shook up by the previous evening's events.

'I have locked on our target, but was unable to get to him this time, we must bide our time.'

Javen didn't like biding his time

'Well let's not make it too long, I want to get out of here before we encounter whatever it was we ran into last night'

Xavier was just about to reply when he thought he heard something. He looked at Pian, she had heard it too. Drago was asleep again, mid mouthful.

'Drago wake up you lazy...'

Xavier cut Pian off with a

‘Shush’

They moved in unison to the centre of the camp backs to each other looking outward into the woods. Xavier slowly drew his cylinder from his belt. The others drew similar cylinders from within their robes. Silence.

The whole wood seemed to explode as figures burst out of the trees and surrounded the small band. All of them armed with bladed weapons. Xavier, Javen and Pian activated their cylinders, Xavier’s blade burst forth in a blur. Javen’s cylinder extended to a quarterstaff with serrated blades capping each end. Pian’s cylinder transformed into a formidable War hammer, its handle resting in the crook of her arm as if nursing a child. Drago woke, sat up, yawned and then realised they were in deep water.

‘What the...’

‘Be quiet and get over here’ barked Xavier.

Drago scrambled on all fours to Xavier, unhooked his cylinder and with a great flurry transformed it in to a sabre. He looked around at the figures surrounding them.

‘Four against six guys and a girl, not bad odds’

‘Will you shut up’ Javen whispered through gritted teeth.

A tall figure stepped out of the shadows.

‘Four against Seven and don’t underestimate that girl’

Drago turned to see who had spoken.

‘You’ he spat.

‘Drago isn’t it?’ Within two strides Gabriel was in front of Drago

‘Nice blade’

Drago could have run him through right then and there, but he had heard of people trying that before and failing. Gabriel turned his back on the group and walked back toward his own men.

‘Now we can do this the hard way or the really hard way, it’s up to you’

Drago was seething as he spoke

‘We will tell you nothing Gabriel, renegade! Yes, I know who you are, traitor.’

Gabriel’s blade burst forth from one of his wrist guards.

‘I guess it’s going to be the really hard way’.

Pian had been muttering under her breath throughout the whole encounter and Xavier was waiting for his cue.

‘Illuminous’ she shouted.

Chaos erupted, blinding light filled the clearing. Javen and Pian, who had been protected by their hoods, grabbed Drago, who had been blinded by the light. They made a break for a space between two of Gabriel’s men who were swinging blindly. As they ran from the clearing, Javen and Pian hacked at the blinded men to make a way through. One barely got his blade up in time, but managed to deflect Javen’s blow, which was intended to remove the man’s head from his shoulders. The force of it knocked him backwards, smacking his head against a tree, dazing him. Another was not so lucky, the war hammer cracked into his knee cap, dropping the man to the ground in agony. Drago felt a burning sensation on his neck and cried out in pain, he stumbled slightly; Pian grabbed him again and hoisted him to his feet, pulling him along as they ran from the clearing. Xavier had closed his eyes and somersaulted over the men to his left. He was now sprinting away in the opposite direction to the others. Even with his eyes shut he still had light spots in front of them, due to the sheer brilliance of the light Pian had conjured. He shook his head to clear them as he continued his sprint.

Gabriel and his men had been taken by surprise, the two who had been in the way of the retreating Javen and Pian needed help. Gabriel spoke to the one who had deflected the blow.

‘Get a message to the house, they will come and pick you up’ He turned to Sara
‘You take the rest of the men and go after those three; I’ll take the one that went solo’
Sara nodded to her Father and said quietly
‘Be careful’

Sara and the men set off after Javen, Pian and Drago. After watching them go Gabriel turned his attention towards Xavier, he retracted his blade and with a flurry of his coat was speeding through the woods after him.