

1

What Dreams may Come

When: Three months later

Where: Long abandoned military base

In the dream, Lysanias hung unsupported between the earth and the sky. Before him floated a city, and directly below the green landscape withered and died as he watched, helpless. A long track trailed behind the city, clearly visible for miles where Lysanias hung. This was the path it had taken through the sky, carved upon the ground and leaving a swath of corrupted and dying land. The city clearly brought death and worse wherever it went. But this he had seen before.

In the dream, dark clouds swirled above, and shadowy forms seemed to leap and play. Faces came to him, faces of the innocent that had been taken over and faces that lost all expression in a swirl of magical energy. These faces cried out to be saved, to not be turned against their fellow man below. This too he had seen before, and was powerless to prevent.

In the dream, from below, where the land was now blackened and burned, skeletal warriors burst forth and ran in endless waves. Usually the dream ended. Usually Lysanias awoke and felt the hard ground beneath him. But this time they slowed, for in the dream, a bright light fell from the city and landed before the hordes. But the light could not stand alone, and he knew that without that light even he, with all his abilities now and learned in the future, could not stand. But with that fallen light, there was a chance. To stop this darkness and decay before it was too late.

What is that light?

Even as he had the thought, Lysanias' eyes snapped open, and he sat up suddenly in his blankets. All was quiet, a silence like he had never experienced before all around him. In the dimness of the globes of moonlight illuminating the space around him he saw his friend, Don Fortress the dwarf, looking over at him. They had not seen a single soul

since that frost dragon they had encountered on the way here, but Don insisted setting a guard every night. The dragon had seemed nice enough, inquiring if they were lost and if she could help in some way. The three had assured her they knew what they were doing and with a word of caution, the dragon had moved on. Lysanias didn't mind, guarding the camp was probably a good idea, after all. *In this world, you get to live a long time by not taking even the most remote location for granted. Even here, some weird thing might sneak up on you. So much has changed from the world I knew.*

"You all right lad?" he asked, quietly to not wake the other sleeping figure that was nearby. Everest didn't stir, his gnomish features of rocky looking skin lost in the shadows. Nor would he, no matter what Don did, thanks to that shard of crystal still stuck in his back. Even asleep, Everest wouldn't be able to hear him or feel himself being shaken. "Don't tell me you had the dream again?"

Lysanias nodded, grabbing his nearby notebook and scribbling the addition to the dream. *All we've been though, and the fact I'm thousands of years his senior, he still calls me 'lad.' Okay, I was asleep for most of that time so I'm still only about fifteen but I'm also thousands of years old. You think that would count for something.* "I saw something new," he announced when he was satisfied to have captured the additional detail. "Maybe some good news for a change."

"More? You're just a fountain of it lately!"

Lysanias glared at him, the fountain reference being too soon for his liking but his two friends did like to tease him. Amy, the naiad they had been traveling with had left them three months ago using a fountain to return home. This was because she could only come back to the place she had left, so the city fountain was an ideal spot to use. Whenever she wanted company or just to wander about the city she could do so, then go home again when the need became too great. He was still rather bitter about her leaving, despite protests that going home was necessary for her to "clear the way," whatever that meant. Don had a totally innocent look on his face, as though his reference was purely coincidental. "If you're referring to the fact we can probably finish up here tomorrow, I agree with you."

Both looked over at the remains of the war machine they had come here to destroy, thinking how the job at the beginning had seemed insurmountable. Chipping away at it day by day, here in the frozen underground chamber where it had been sitting these thousands of years,

had finally showed an end in sight. They could finally pack up and leave this frozen waste, return to civilization and maybe get warm again.

“So tell me about the dream.”

“Same as before. A skybourne city by the looks of it, tracing a path of destruction across the land. But this time when the skeletons came out there was something else. A bright light fell from the city and stood against them. I got the sense it was a person, and that we needed each other.”

“Did you see a face? Anything we could use to track them down?”

He shook his head. “Just the light.”

“You’re sure the light wasn’t you?”

“I’m fairly certain, yes. Would I have been in two places at once? Besides, how would I have fallen from a city?”

“How did your speck of light? Well, you dream what you dream, I suppose. It’s clearer than baskets on the heads of shopkeepers.” He tittered.

I’m never going to live that dream down. It did lead us to the right place, he seems to forget that. “For all the good it does me. Want me to take the watch?”

“Are you sure? There’s a good hour yet...”

“It’s fine.”

“Because you’re the one making the contain wards that we’re stuffing these bits of metal into. If you can’t make enough we’ll have to stay here another night.”

“I can take a nap if I need to. Or meditate. Believe me, I want to be gone from this place just as much as you do.” The silence and the echoes of the long empty chambers beneath the earth would make even the stoutest heart wary, and all three friends longed to be gone from this place. On the one hand, being so isolated had kept the war machine out of action all this time, buried where it was after the arrival of the chaos moon. But on the other there were times Lysanias had wished it had been preserved a little closer to a warm beach.

“All right lad. Wake Everest up in few hours.”

“I will.”

Don went over to his blankets and lay down, while Lysanias got up and stretched, looking around. The place was as he remembered it, minus the huge war machine, from three weeks ago when they arrived.

Having taken about a month to trek across the frozen north to where his powers told him to find the thing, getting in here hadn't been easy.

Of course, the people that built these war machines wouldn't have wanted just anyone strolling in, would they? Given how intact this place was, they really built it to withstand anything. He looked over at the skeleton of the machine, and the chucks of metal yet to be put into contain wards for easy transport back to the city. *I kept my promise P05, no more war machines from before the chaos moon arrived will threaten the world. Of course, there's still at least two more to go...*

The night continued to pass, and in a few hours Lysanias woke Everest, who slipped on his spell lens and took up his watch. The lens had been made by Don himself, using some of the crystals Lysanias had retrieved in the whole wanderer situation. The alchemists had been interested in the process and helped grind down the crystal, while the wizard tutor Don had hired (reluctantly) showed him how to fabricate the lens to conduct magic. Putting it all together had taken some time, but it had been worth it. Everest could use magic now, and was learning Don's spells. It was after that Lysanias had taken the alchemists up on their offer, making him a "field agent" so as long as he came and shared his discoveries out in the world with them, he would get paid and could go where he pleased.

The lab is just too valuable not to have access to. I can keep my own projects there and if Don wants to do any more fabrication or imbuing he's welcome as my guest. Everybody wins.

He still didn't know if he had done the right thing, closing the portal that let refugee wanderers into this world. But it was done, and at least that one good thing had come out of it. He still had more crystals, unsure if he should keep them or sell them for a tremendous profit. *It just doesn't seem right, profiting from what happened back then. Making a lens for Everest so he can use magic too is all well and good. Maybe I should donate them or something, but to who?* The lens was fitted into a gauntlet, right at the back of his right hand, and Everest practiced the spells he knew every day. He didn't know many yet, but that would come in time. Just being able to use magic as his friend had always done kept him excited about the whole thing. Lysanias smiled a bit as he wiggled under his blankets again. He remembered the look on Everest's face when he had been given the lens. He and Don had worked on it for weeks in secret, and it had come out beautifully. The gauntlets

themselves were made of a strange metal Don called adamant, meaning the gauntlets alone were worth hundreds of suns. *But for me, changing the simple iron gauntlets into adamant was the easy part of the process.*

Finally he slept again, and did not dream.

The next day the three got back to work, pulling apart the remaining shell of the war machine while Lysanias made the wards to store it away for easy travel. He had a large stack of rectangular pieces of paper, each one supernaturally holding a small portion of what had been a nearly 20m tall robot. One only had to say the command word “release” or tear the paper in half and that bit of twisted metal inside would come tumbling out. They had come prepared, Don having purchased a spell to tear metal apart on their way here. Luckily he already knew how to cast Uranus spells so as he cut them apart, Everest helped by carrying them over to where Lysanias made the wards. He would then slap one on and add it to the pile. Little was said, but all felt the excitement of having this job nearly done.

Part of the reason little was said was because Everest couldn’t see Don part of the time. When his concentration was on the spell his concentration on not being unseen slipped. He had been stabbed in the back, literally, by Lysanias during an episode of chaotic magic making him a totally uncaring jerk. The thing he was stabbed in the back *with* was a shard of chaos crystal, making it so anyone not supernaturally or magical aware unable to see him. He had worked out a method to become visible despite this, and Lysanias had offered a ward to help Everest see him, but both had refused.

“I need to master this,” Don had said. “That way I can turn it on and off when I want. Giving Everest something to see me with means I won’t practice as much.”

“Well, if you want it removed or change your mind, Everest, let me know.”

Finally the chamber was empty, and the three friends congratulated each other on a job well done.

“And how are we splitting the profits again?” Don asked.

“Sixty, twenty, twenty, right?” Lysanias asked, sensing a way to get back at Don for that fountain jab the night before.

“I’m not greedy, I’ll take fifty,” Everest assured them, taking the

joke over. "You each take twenty five."

"That's generous of you," Don grumbled. "Who did the most work?"

"I think that would be me," Lysanias assured them, trying to salvage his momentum.

"You just sat around drawing on paper!"

"I was moving the things. You know how heavy those slabs of metal were?" Everest protested.

The three grinned at each other. "Let's just get packed up. Dinner is on me tonight, but only if we're someplace with lots of ale!" Don promised.

"I'll get the fire started," Everest offered. "I think I can manage that much with this baby here." He stroked his gauntlet.

"Keep stroking it like that, you'll go blind," Don warned him.

"Says the dwarf always stroking his beard!"

"That's why I've got it. Makes me look wise and important."

I just wish I could get rid of mine. Oh well. The things you do for friends.

Lysanias gathered up the wards, carefully stacking them and putting them into his trunk. He packed up his blankets and other utensils, making sure he didn't leave anything. Don was doing the same, picking up his and Everest's stuff while he arranged some wood they had brought into an upright triangle.

"Create fire!" he intoned, gesturing at the wood. It burst into flames, and he smiled. "Hey, did you guys know I can do magic now?"

"We know!" both shouted back at him.

"Just checking."

With the site picked up the fire and Lysanias' sword pommel were the only source of light now, the globes of solid light having been packed away. Lysanias held up two wards. "Gentlemen? Who wants to go first?"

"And you're sure this is the only way?" Everest asked, looking at it distastefully.

"Unless you want to walk back for three weeks. Everest, we've been over this. I have to carry anything I teleport, and that means lifting it. I can't put effort into both lifting more weight and putting spiritual energy into my will at the same time. Thus, if you want to get back to the nearest town safely I need to carry the least amount I can. That means a cozy ward for both of you, I invoke the spirit of the dragonfly with the

help of this fire, and a moment or two later you're out again. Yttrius was inside one painted on a rock with my blood, if you'll recall. I've gotten better at making them since then and she was fine. You'll be fine too, trust me."

"Come on Everest, don't be a scared cat. I'll go first."

"Thank you Don. And away we go!" Lysanias stuck the ward onto him and Don allowed himself to be sucked inside. "See, nothing to it." He stuck it into his pocket. "Your turn." He held up the other ward.

"Just don't lose it, or whatever."

"As I've said before, even if I did you would come out in a few hours. You can make your own food and water," he painted to the spell lens, "so even if we were separated somehow you would be fine."

"I hope so. Just get it over with."

"I live to serve." The ward was placed, and Lysanias was alone.
Now for my part.

He called upon the spirit of the dragonfly for a moment, knowing this would make the teleport a bit easier. The fire made calling the spirit easier, it wasn't needed otherwise, strictly speaking. He then took one last look around the old army base. It had been stripped out before they arrived, and anything not nailed down had become worthless due to age. There really was nothing left for him here, so it was time to head back to civilization. *But I know we can do it now. As long as the war machines are inactive, like this one was, cutting them up is time consuming but possible. Let's hope the other two go as smoothly.* From his pocket he grabbed the drawing he had made of the town as an aid to memory, and thought about arriving there just at the outskirts. With that he concentrated, wishing there was more plant life around here so there was a ley line or two he could use. But the frozen north was just that, a barren wasteland, so all the energy he had was that within him. He threw as much as he could into his will, and folded space around his body.

When he opened his eyes he beheld exactly where he had wanted to go, the village of Baytown. His eyes couldn't help noticing the mountains in the distance, especially the tall one where the portal used to be. He sighed, wondering how Esta had fared and why he couldn't seem to get an answer when he asked the universe if the being was alive or dead.

I hate being this close to that place, but it's the nearest town to the frozen north and they can buy some of this metal from us. I want to

spread it out so nobody gets any bright ideas about somehow putting it back together. Better get the guys out though.

Taking the two wards in hand he said “release” and both dwarf and gnomad reappeared before him. The paper burned away and the pair blinked against the light.

“See, wasn’t so bad,” Don told Everest with a slap on the back.

“Still creeps me out. Are you sure practicing teleportation won’t help?”

“The only thing that will help is trying to build up my scrawny arms. Maybe when we aren’t running around saving the world for the eighth time I can lift heavy rocks and build up my muscles. Until then, practice will let me go further more reliably but won’t help me carry any more weight through the teleport.”

“Fine, I get it. Let’s go sell this stuff and get something to eat.”

“Now you’re talking sense!” Don agreed with a smile.

“Where did you find all this?” asked the being in charge of the sorting operation in town. Lysanias recalled that rock and raw ore were brought from the nearby mine on the track system, sorted, and the rock was sent back to be dumped. They had tumbled out a small fraction of the metal they had lifted from the body of the war machine, stopping the sorting for the moment as everyone clustered around the group. Lysanias was still a bit uncomfortable in groups like this, and tried to hang back behind the others. Don didn’t have that particular hang up and gladly stepped up to the...

What species is he? Lysanias sent into Everest’s brain as Don launched into his daring tale of crossing the ice to find the lost treasure as marked on the old pirate map they had found.

“Must you do that?” he hissed back. “You can talk, you know. He’s a brownie. He wouldn’t be offended to be asked, taking an interest in people isn’t a crime.”

“Oh.” Lysanias looked the little guy over and the two, he and Don, stood almost eye to eye. The brownie had a wide face, and larger hands than Lysanias would have thought were necessary, given the size of the rest of him.

But the connection to Everest was still open, so Lysanias decided to have a little more fun. *Look at those hands! I wonder what else he has out of proportion to the rest of his body.*

Now Everest had to try and keep a straight face and threatened to snicker uncontrollably. “Would you stop that!”

Finally the two agreed on a price, and the twisted hunks of metal were loaded into carts to be brought to the boats so they could be shipped. Don took coin from the brownie and both thanked the other. But the brownie looked troubled.

“We haven’t had this much metal in some time,” he explained. “It could be a problem.”

“How so?”

“Pirates. When this was a fishing town they stole our fish. Now they try to steal our metal. Say, you all look like fighting men!” He looked the group over. Lysanias had at his left hip the sword left to him by his parents. It was unremarkable now, having been on fire some time ago, but it could still detect and wound shadow kin unlike anything else in the world. At his right hip was the quiver full of stone “arrows” he could manipulate and throw with the earth moving technique he had learned from Everest. He was wearing the spider silk armor he had technically stolen from the elves, as it was comfortable enough that he hardly noticed it, and his hair and beard were wild again and in need of a trim. *Have to remember to get that done before we leave.*

Everest had a matching set of gauntlets on, because just having one gauntlet to hold his spell lens would have looked really weird, and twin daggers attached to his belt. These had stone handles so he could remotely wield them, and as a gnomad had dark, almost rocky looking skin. He was wearing just normal heavy clothes and boots he always did, plus had a pack on his back.

Don eschewed the “traditional” battle axe he said some of the stupider members of his race employed in combat for a halberd, given he needed all the reach he could get. This was currently inside a contain ward so he didn’t have to drag it about. He was instead armed with his normal falchion and strapped to his back, behind a similar pack, was his shield. He didn’t use it in combat all that often but it had saved his life from a cave in shortly after Lysanias and he had met, so he was sure to always keep it there. He too wore warm clothes and stout boots, given where they had been. His pride and joy, the fine beard that sprouted from his chin was combed and neat.

“We’ve been known to be in a scrap or two,” Don admitted. “What of it?”

“Could I perhaps interest you in sailing this metal down the coast to Dvergerforge? You aren’t heading back north again, are you? Lots

of dwarves in that area I hear, if you want to be among your own kind again.”

“Wouldn’t mind that, actually. I don’t think we’re heading back north, but you want us to, what, protect this shipment?”

“Exactly. With so much to lose it would be a pity if pirates got it instead. We would pay you, and the voyage would be free of course.”

“Just a second.” He turned back to the group and Lysanias realized he had switched languages from trade to dwarven, not that it made any difference to him but it was strange to hear different sorts of sounds from a person when they all seemed to mean the same thing. “What do you say, Lysanias? I know Everest doesn’t like to teleport but you need the practice. Did you want to go back to Fareborough directly or go part of the way by boat?”

“I’ve never traveled by boat,” Lysanias thought. “We would be heading south, and that’s where we would need to go anyway. How long would it take?”

“How long?” asked the brownie. “Depends on the winds. Maybe a week or a little bit less.”

“Is that all? I was afraid you were going to say a month. That’s not so bad.” He turned back to the others. “That’s at least a few more chances to refine this dream. I’d like to arrive back at the city having a little more information. Just saying a skybourne city is likely to rain death upon the land isn’t very helpful. This spark of light that left, maybe if I concentrate on dreaming about that I’ll get somewhere. And the more places I see, the more places I can get back to in a hurry. We have the time now, let’s get closer to Fareborough without using our legs so the teleport is easier. I can’t practice that on the boat, but I can once we get off. The practice is the same and the trip is easier because we’ll be closer. It’s a better situation I think.”

“Fair enough. We’ll take the job!” he said to the brownie.

“Splendid. We’ll put you up in the inn for the night, ship leaves tomorrow.”

“Lead the way! Oh, is our meal included for tonight?”

The other two just shook their heads.

2

A Ship Twice Attacked

When: The next day

Where: West of Baytown

“How was your night?” Don asked Lysanias as they made their way from the inn to the docks the next morning.

“Fine. You?” he replied with a yawn, not really thinking it was more than polite conversation.

“What? I’m asking about the dream, lad! Did you dream about the speck of light?”

“Oh, right!” He perked up a little. “I’m not sure. I was behind someone and it seemed they jumped off a cliff. But then there was this leaf falling from a tree, and a bird was startled and a single feather lightly touched the ground where it had been.”

“But nothing we can use? A face? A name? Amy knew your name the moment she saw you. You remember, when you were groping her underwater?”

That earned him a glare. “Yeah, she also has been doing this for maybe hundreds of years. Besides, she probably asked the universe my name after seeing me in her dream.”

“Couldn’t you do that?” Everest asked.

“Eventually,” he admitted. “I would need a little more detail, I think. Right now I don’t even know if this person is male or female.”

“Female,” both answered at once.

He looked between his two friends. “You two creep me out sometimes, you know that? And why are you still sharing a room? That brownie would have given us three. You don’t think something was going to attack the inn, do you?”

“You really haven’t figured that out lad? I considered you the smart one of this group!”

“Hey!” Everest protested. “I thought I was the smart one!”

“You’re the well read one. There’s a difference.”

Everest seemed thoughtful a moment. “I concede that point.”

“So figured out what?” Lysanias persisted. “I don’t get it.”

“And we’re not going to tell you,” Don told him with a shake of his head.

“Morning!” said the brownie. They had reached the dock and the ship, now loaded with the ore and bits of metal the group had provided, was about to cast off. The sailors were rushing about the deck, checking the ropes and doing whatever it was sailors do in this sort of situation. “Ready to go?”

“Are you coming?” Don asked him.

“Me? No, I’m the supervisor of the mining operation here. I keep the people in line and the ore, such as we have left in the mines, flowing. Sailing is actually work. I just came to make sure you didn’t get left behind.”

So wait, his job is to stand around and make sure people work? And he gets paid for it?

“We’re ready. Your shipment will get there safely if we have anything to say about it,” Everest promised.

“Splendid. Say hello to the dwarves for me!” He inclined his head as they passed and walked up the board to the ship. Lysanias nearly fell and had to be grabbed by Don and Everest before he splashed into the water below.

“Harder than it looks, huh?” he asked with a grin as they steadied him.

“No, not really,” the other two assured him.

Now aboard and moving, the ship took the first day just to leave the bay area, sailing through a narrow channel out into the ocean around sundown. The ship then turned and headed south west, following the coast. Lysanias was throwing a handful of colorful stones to the deck and looking them over, thinking about Amy.

“That’s where those went to,” Don remarked, coming over to him. “I wondered.”

“She said I could have them. To remember her by.”

“You miss her, don’t you?”

“Of course I do. There was still a lot I could have learned from her, and don’t make any jokes. I can feel that you want to. I’m talking about her seer abilities.”

“You can feel that?” Don took a step back.

Lysanias’ half glared at his friend. “Maybe. The point is, we could

have used her. I'm sure her dream about this light would have been far more useful than mine was."

"Perhaps, lad. What is with the stones, anyway? She said they could help her but she never actually used them."

"It's a way of reading how they fall. She said everything is connected, even the falling of these stones. I thought maybe as I dreamed of things falling, they might give me a little more insight."

"And have they?"

He snorted. "Look for yourself!" He threw them down again. "There, you see? A clear result!"

Don looked the stones over. There were smooth rocks, in no pattern or layout he could make any sense of, laying there on the deck as stones usually did after being thrown. "If you say so, lad."

"But the way the stones fall-" he said to himself, looking them over angrily. "I mean look! This half seems to suggest death, and on a massive scale. But this one half seems to suggest life! Make up your mind! The stones are split and that's all they'll tell me about this person. They are surrounded by both life and death at the same time. It's clear-but meaningless!"

"This woman, you mean?"

"You said that before. Why do you think it's a girl?" He swept the rocks up and stuck them back into the pouch with a snarl. *Stupid rocks.*

"I can see the future too, lad. And I don't need any stones to do it. Amy had to leave to 'clear the way' didn't she? Said her time with us was done and there was another that we needed instead."

"You don't think she was leaving because another woman was going to take her place, do you?"

"That is what I think. Didn't she also say you were doomed to have woman come into, and leave your life, basically forever?"

"I was trying to forget that part."

He shook his head and put a hand on Lysanias' shoulder. "Not to worry lad. I'll never let you forget it."

"You're all heart. I suppose putting the two together would mean it was a woman, but that's still not proof."

"Agreed. We're counting on you to get me where I need to be to save you- I mean the day, again. Have a good night!"

Just you wait, this time I'll be saving you. It has to happen some-time, right? "See you tomorrow."

For two days the boat sailed, following the coast with a favorable wind. The coast rolled by, and as it was fairly mountainous it was rather boring. Using another spyglass he had made, Lysanias saw airships and skybourne cities, and always scowled at them. Looking the other way he saw boats moving away from them, and pointed them out to Everest.

“Where are they going? Is there something out in that direction?”
I remember them saying any ship that sailed, air or water, past a certain point never made it back. So where are they going?

“Probably Paradial. It’s an elven controlled island where one of the Heaven gates is.”

“Open Heaven gates? Reminds me of home. Wish I had mastered that remote viewing Amy could do, or at least leaving my body. I could have gone over there to see it.” He swung the glass to the west, looking for an island but it must have been too far away as he only saw the horizon. And the ship that seemed to be coming directly for them. “Hey, is that ship coming towards us?”

“What ship? Let me see that!” Everest grabbed the glass and peered through it himself. “Oh great. This glass is probably better than the one they have. I’m going up on the observation post to check it out.”

Better you than me. Being up in the balloon was bad enough, at least that was mostly calm. This boat is an accident waiting to happen if I go up there. Or is it more accurate to say that I’m an accident waiting to happen if I’m on the boat up there?

Moments later Everest came down and reported there was a ship heading for them. The sailors got ready, getting out cudgels and blades, and everyone looked tense.

“I guess it’s time to earn our pay,” Don said with a smile. He got his halberd out, not having his sword and shield at the moment. He preferred the polearm anyway, and looked excited.

“We’re not going to have to kill them, are we?” Lysanias asked. “I’ve done enough of that since waking up.” *The elf taken over by the spirit of one of my people, a progenitor. He wanted me dead because I had survived the flood. Then the annunaki possessed by the shadow kin, though I suppose Don finished him off. YMOI got killed because of me. The innocent camp of those half goat people, what did Don call them? The shopkeeper, ran him through myself. That killed the shadow kin along with the innocent man. Now I have to kill pirates, for a bit of metal I would gladly give them because I have so much now? It doesn’t seem right.*

“If they try to kill us, I suggest you do the same,” Everest told him. “Their deaths are their own fault if they come at us with deadly force.” He had his first pair of daggers in his hands, waiting for the ship to get closer. He had pulled these from under his jacket, leaving his second pair in the sheaths at his side. These were the metal ones, the ones made of a more special material had yet to be tested, and weren’t of much use against pirates.

“I suppose.” *Is this really the world you had in mind, Allfather? I’m not supposed to kill, but how do I avoid it?*

The boat got closer and closer, and suddenly they heard a boom and the water in front of the boat geysered up. “Canon,” snarled Don. “A warning shot, or just missed us?”

“Canon?”

“Remember those small guns the wanderers had?” Everest asked. “Or the alchemists, they offered us some guns to shoot the solidified light into possessed people.” Lysanias did, after they had blown the portal room up they had run into some with weapons that shot hot metal out the front. “Scale those up and make it shoot a ball the size of your head. That’s a canon.”

“Great.”

“Only if you’re behind it, rather than in front. Better get ready, it seems we are under attack.”

“See you afterwards,” Don told him, relaxing his concentration. Of course, Lysanias could still see him, but Everest and anyone “normal” wouldn’t be able to.

Right. Better get out my spirit too, that should make them think twice about attacking us. Two people they can’t perceive making trouble for them. Mountain spirit, I need your help again.

I hear you. Sanding before Lysanias was his mountain spirit, the manifestation of his inner soul. Looking like a small mountain that had come to life, the spirit was an excellent fighter and could do many of the things Lysanias himself could.

The pirate vessel drew closer, but something wasn’t right. Lysanias could feel it, a potential arcing through the air as though lightning was about to strike the deck of the ship.

“Something’s wrong,” he managed before the sound of outrushing air interrupted him. He spun and several figures stood behind them. Two raised glowing swords, a third hovered in the air just behind them.

“Revenge!” shouted the floating figure, and Lysanias felt a force

taking hold of him and threw him across the deck, making him go sprawling. This knocked the air out of him and he hit the railing of the ship with his back making him cry out before he crumpled.

“Lad!” shouted Don, looking in his direction.

“We have no quarrel with you,” Everest said to the wanderer before him. “We don’t have to fight.”

“*I think we do,*” they replied, raising their blade. As usual the words of the wanderer weren’t exactly heard, but somehow projected into the minds of those nearby. “*Esta sends their regards.*”

“Fine.” The weapon in Everest’s right hand left it, now controlled by his ability to move earth. The wanderer tried to get out of the way but the knife scored, drawing blood.

“*I’ll take the dwarf,*” said the other.

“Oh I just bet you will,” Don replied, turning his attention to the figure before him.

As Lysanias got to his feet he looked over at the hovering figure who was partially transparent. *That looks like one of the dead bodies from that camp the explosion of P05 destroyed. Is that some kind of ghost? How did it suddenly get here, with two wanderers? With his attention on the figure he didn’t notice two shadows slipping under two crewmen that were nearby. I don’t want to get thrown like that again, but I have no idea how to deal with something like that. Maybe my spirit can keep it busy?*

To that end, the spirit started forward, straight for the ghostly figure.

The wanderer before Don charged forward, but he simply brought his pole-arm down, holding the wanderer at bay. He then stabbed forward, catching the wanderer’s sword arm and slicing through the sleeve.

Everest slashed with the knife again, making the wanderer peddle back to try and avoid the airborne blade. He didn’t manage it, the knife scoring and sending more blood splashing to the deck. “There’s still time for you to give this up,” Everest pleaded. “I don’t want to kill you, just let it go!”

“*Never! What remains of my people after our war with the shadow kin are now stuck on my world, unable to come here through the portal you all destroyed. You must answer for that.*”

The mountain spirit reached the floating figure and it didn’t even bother to move as the spirit’s fist went completely through it. The spirit sort of turned with a “now what?” look at Lysanias.

“I don’t know, figure something out!” he shouted to it. *But what*

can I do? An arrow is just going to go through it, and if I can't touch it I can't change it. Can't put it in a ward, don't know any attack magic. Maybe Don or Everest can think of something, if I free them up. He whipped an arrow out of his quiver, sending it flying towards the wanderer Don was fighting. It struck him in the body with the blunt end, and he heard something snap. The wanderer cried out in pain and looked over at Lysanias.

"You'll pay for that sometime," they said, and vanished.

"Thanks lad!" shouted Don.

"Figure out what to do with the—"

"Revenge!" cried the ghost again, bringing his hands together. Lysanias felt the temperature around himself drop and tumbled forward, but his head and left side got caught in the attack. His skin essentially went frostbitten, as somehow the ghost froze the very air around him.

I miss you, Amy. You would have seen that coming and warned me.

As Lysanias hadn't thought of anything to do to the ghost, neither had the spirit, and went to help free up Everest. As it turned, one of the crew screamed as blackness overtook his body. The scream was cut off as the shadow engulfed the man, and Lysanias now saw another man about to be swallowed by darkness as well. *Oh no, "we've got shadow kin here!"*

Don took a step. "Don's maneuver!" he screamed, throwing his halberd at the figure that was now engulfed. *He really said it. I don't believe it.* The shadow kin was still not in full control and couldn't make the man inside dodge, so he was impaled on the blade through the chest. "Get me a dagger, now!" he called to Everest, and held a hand out.

The mountain spirit, now behind the wanderer attacking Everest sent two quick jabs at them, staggering them. *"The emperor was right, I should have gotten more practice."* And they too were gone.

"Here it comes!" Everest shouted, and from the sheath at his left the dagger that was there flew out and into Don's waiting hand. The blade on this one was strange, looking as though it was made of a bright light, rather than steel. The one at his right he drew himself, the other ones falling to the deck.

"Got it."

"What about the ghost?" protested Lysanias.

"One thing at a time!"

"Revenge!"

“Don’t you know any other-” His sentence was cut off as the ghost pointed, and his extremely flammable spider silk armor burst into flames. The ghost burst into laughter as Lysanias shrieked and starting trying desperately to unbuckle the armor from himself.

“Roll on the ground lad!” shouted Don.

But the deck is made of wood, some part of Lysanias thought to himself. How is setting the boat on fire going to help?

The shadow kin, now in control, tore the halberd from the chest of the victim it had taken over and advanced on the now burning Lysanias.

To his credit, Lysanias didn’t allow panic to cloud his mind. He simply dropped his sword and grabbed a contain ward from his dispenser, pressing it to the more flame resistant straps on his back that held the armor on. He willed just the armor into the ward, and it vanished. The ghost looked disappointed.

Meanwhile the mountain spirit intercepted the shadow kin possessed person running towards Everest, sword out. The spirit struck out, intending to disarm the man and allow the new plan for dealing with shadow kin to go ahead. But the shadow kin managed to get out of the way, so obviously it could see the spirit.

Don struck out with the dagger, and the shadow kin recoiled from it, seeing it was made of solidified light. Don wasn’t very practiced with the blade, and fought with a pole-arm for a reason. He had stumpy arms, and didn’t manage to reach the shadow kin.

Thankfully the alchemists were willing to make more of that stuff, and could make a copy of Everest’s daggers with a blade made of the light that seems to disrupt these creature’s hold over people. I bet it’ll work too, them getting stabbed with it, based on how that one jumped away from the blade. It’s nervous about it for some reason.

The ghost now looked at the fallen blade and smiled, making a crushing motion with one hand. The sword quivered and cracked, nearly bursting apart but the vibration stopped before it did.

I have got to get rid of this stupid ghost somehow! Another attack like that on the sword and it’ll be useless! There’s only one thing I can think of, and I didn’t want to try it like this. I had hoped we could wound it somehow beforehand.

The mountain spirit was up again, and stepped up close to the shadow kin, again trying to disarm it. It brought a hand down on the hand of the shadow kin and smacked the blade out of it. Then it slugged the

man in the chest. It connected again and the shadow kin staggered back a little.

Let's see if this works on ghosts. His spiritual energy lashed out, targeting the ghost. "In the emperor's name..." he began, starting a banishing.

The ghost gave a shout of surprise and vanished.

Hey, I must be better than I thought!

Everest now went to stab his dagger into the shadow kin, maneuvering the blade around the mountain spirit. He scored on the shadow kin's left leg, and the shadowy armor pulled away from the blade, becoming a creature behind the man. It was holding its own leg in pain, but not letting go of the man either. They were still connected by a ribbon of shadow.

"Get over here!" Everest called to Lysanias.

Oh sure. I'm wounded here!

The shadow kin before Don looked to his companion in shock, probably thinking about how it hadn't believed that would actually work. But it had. Don took advantage of the slip and drove the dagger into the man. Ironically he hit the right leg, and again a shadow kin was driven off someone.

"Got mine too, lad!"

Great, make me do all the work, why don't you?

Lysanias staggered over to his sword and grabbed it, thinking it was lucky the shadow kin was fairly near. He stabbed it forward, hoping it hadn't been weakened to the point of shattering, but the resistance as he sliced into the shadow was minimal. He again threw energy into his will, knowing he had a better shot at this with the thing distracted and wounded. "In the name of the emperor, depart this world forever!" he cried, and again spiritual energy lashed out of him. The shadow kin popped like a soap bubble and vanished. *One down, one to go.* It was a simple matter to stagger over to the other one and repeat the procedure, making that one vanish as well.

The sword clattered to the deck of the ship, point first, as Lysanias didn't want to expend the effort to hold it up. The two sailors were screaming and bleeding all over the place, unaware of how they came to be stabbed in the legs. Lysanias was freezing, his chest felt burned, his head was ringing.

"What was that?" Everest demanded, coming over to him. He

had his daggers again, all four of them, and was putting the glowing one back in the outer holsters. “Is Don all right? Are you all right?”

“I’ll live,” he replied weakly. “Don, as usual, is fine. He wasn’t even touched.” *The smug bastard.* He blinked, trying to clear his head. “Wasn’t there something else going on?”

“The pirates are boarding!” someone yelled from the back of the ship.

“That was it,” he remembered with a sigh, closing his eyes and wondering how much worse this day was going to get.