

# **DEADLY PURSUITS**

**Aidan Lucid**

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## Praise for, *The Zargothian Saga Series*

“The flow of, *The Lost Son (Second Edition)*, is such that I just kept on reading. There are some great fight scenes in this book and some very well-fleshed-out interactions of totally believable characters. Give it a try; you will enjoy it, especially if you believe in magic.”

— J.D. Warner, author of *Hexa-tech*

“*The Lost Son* is a unique fantasy novel that begins with a bang. This fast-paced adventure keeps the reader turning pages, while it offers a story that will keep you guessing.”

— Brandy Alexander, author of *Genesis*

“The plot of the book is solid and engaging, exciting and well-developed. All told, I believe Aidan shows promise in his story and I will keep my eye out for the next one.”

— Scott Collins, author of *Days' End*

“*The Lost Son* was written by Ireland’s own Aidan Lucid; and, let me tell you, he is going to be one of the shining stars in the literary world. From the first chapter, this story has it all ...”

- Randy Belaire, author of *The Reckoning: Chronicles of the Shadow Chaser*

# **Books by Aidan Lucid**

## **The Zargothian Saga**

The Lost Son (Second Edition)

Deadly Pursuits

When Worlds Collide (spring 2026)

Jasper's Christmas Adventure (winter 2026)

## **The Hopps Town Series**

The Scavenger (Second Edition)

Unlucky Charm (Second Edition)

Dark Secrets

Lurking Beasts (fall 2025)

## **Stand-alone Fiction**

The Perfect Christmas Gift (a short story)

A Beast Within

*To Joyce,*

*You were one of my first fans. Thanks for your constant support and encouragement down through the years. May your star shine bright in heaven tonight as it did here on Earth. Rest well, my friend.*

## CHARACTER PRONUNCIATIONS

<b>Yorin</b>	Yor-in
<b>Jadin</b>	Jay-den or Jay-din
<b>Slyvanon</b>	Sly-va-non
<b>Karina</b>	Kar-ee-na or Car-ee-na
<b>King Zakerius</b>	Zack-ar-ius or Zak-car-ee-us
<b>King Argoth</b>	Ar-goth
<b>Hamorin</b>	Hammer-in
<b>Hernacious</b>	Her-nace-ee-us
<b>Queen Cyren</b>	Siren or Cy-wren
<b>Hannorah</b>	Hann-nor-rah
<b>Xongrelan</b>	Zon-gre-lan
<b>Damone</b>	Da-moan
<b>Marzaq</b>	Mar-zach
<b>Sorluns</b>	Sor-lons or Sour-luns
<b>Torik</b>	Tor-eek or Tor-ick
<b>Chira</b>	Cee-ra or Kiera
<b>Kymeel</b>	Ka-meel or Ky-meel

<b>Queen Eusaba</b>	You-say-bee-a
<b>King Mordoch</b>	Mor-doch
<b>Nemus</b>	Knee-mus or Nee-mus
<b>Fregon</b>	Free-gon or Free-gone
<b>General Haynach</b>	Hay-nock
<b>Milanak</b>	Milan-och or Milan-ach
<b>Gavanna</b>	Gav-anna
<b>Yeka</b>	Yee-ka
<b>Ramor</b>	Ram-or or Ram-our
<b>Tynia</b>	Ty-nee-a or Tie-nee-a
<b>Gambuine</b>	Gam-bu-ine or Gam-boo-ine
<b>Buran</b>	Birr-an or Burr-an
<b>Knavus</b>	Nay-vus
<b>Taran</b>	Tar-an
<b>Yurk</b>	You-ark

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And finally, you for buying this book. It's my hope that you thoroughly enjoy Henry's second adventure!





## The Story So Far...

As Sergeant Conor MacCall and Captain Edward Johnson, two USAF pilots take to the air in their TBF Avenger in November 1945, they think it's just going to be another routine patrol. What starts out as uneventful, soon turns into the fight of their lives when they have to fend off two dragons. Having narrowly defeated them, they now have to see how they can safely perform a ditching maneuver as their radial engine has failed and they're heading towards the water. Just as it seems like they're going to hit the ocean, a portal opens up and takes them to another world.

Back in present-day America, for Henry Simmons - a seventeen-year-old teenager - life is as it should be for a boy his age: homework, video games, and ogling over the beautiful Tracey Maxwell. His whole life is turned upside down when he finds a mysterious golden coin in his garden. He learns that this coin has magical powers, so he puts it to the test. Henry makes a wish to have Tracey be his date to the prom and she accepts!

However, on prom night, Tracey's ex-boyfriend, Sid Connors, is jealous and beats up Henry, leaving him wounded and bruised. As the boy lies on the ground, blood from a wound on his forehead falls onto the mysterious coin. Suddenly, he and Tracey are magically transported through a portal into another dimension, to a world where humankind is hiding from an evil race called the Sadarkians. Henry's also shocked to find that Captain Edward Johnson and Sergeant Conor MacCall along with Jasper—Henry's neighbor's cat, which is now a talking being—have also ended up in Zargothia. They are discovered by Xongrelan – a dwarf-like creature allied to the humans—and brought before the human King, Argoth. There, the king's sorceress, Karina, reveals that the strangers are the

Foretold Ones and that they have come through the portal to save them. In fact, Henry is the Special Foretold One, whom the Elders—the creators of this world and its Gods—have destined to play a hero's part.

As Henry feels lonely and grows accustomed to his new surroundings, he meets Daniel - a snobby boy who secretly envies Henry's powers and Hannorah - Karina's apprentice - who can also hold her own in a fight. Tracey and Henry become her friends, but Tracey secretly has a crush on Daniel, too. While in Zargothia, Henry tries to become more than just a friend with Tracey but she chooses Daniel. However, she does get to know Henry better as they learn how to use swords and spar with one another. A relationship blossoms between Tracey and Daniel, leaving Henry a little more than jealous.

Karina tells Henry the history between the humans and Sadarkians. King Zakarius, the King of the Sadarkians, also knows that the Foretold Ones are in this world. He is on the march, determined to seek out and destroy Argoth's people in their hidden refuge known as Little Zargothia. Zakarius sends a spy, disguised as a boy, to trick Henry so that he can steal the magic diamond that hides their town. The spy succeeds in his mission. This is Henry's first test as the Special Foretold One - to successfully retrieve the diamond. Henry and the others pursue the thief and recover it.

That night, as everyone else celebrates, Henry learns more about the history of this strange dimension, the shocking truth that he was created by the Elders to save humankind and that the Elders had sent him to Earth for safekeeping until he was old enough to return to Zargothia. The Sadarkian King, Zakarius, hates humanity because they betrayed and abandoned him many years ago when he needed help the most. Since then, he has sworn vengeance.

Just as their relationship is hitting its stride, Tracey catches Daniel kissing another girl. She feels betrayed and grows to respect Henry even more, training harder as a warrior, to watch his back for the upcoming battle, and to help him, along with the other new arrivals, to get home.

Despite his misgivings, Henry continues to train and Argoth

prepares his army for war. When all is ready, Argoth and his army set off to reconquer Zargothia and save humankind.

The two armies meet and a mighty battle ensues. It sways back and forth. Zakarius makes a last stand in the throne room. He and Henry fight and the boy becomes mortally wounded. Just before Zakarius is about to behead Henry, the boy's friends arrive. Karina, through Jasper's help, manages to defeat Zakarius. Everyone gathers around Henry's lifeless body; Karina knows what must be done next. So, she performs a special sacrifice in order to restore his life.

Henry lies dead, but the Elders intervene through the use of Karina's magic. The American teenager wakes up alive and well, flanked by a relieved Karina, Hannorah, Tracey, and Jasper. Zakarius's army is then defeated.

Now that the war is over, Henry, Jasper, Tracey, and the two airmen return home through the portal that brought them to Zargothia. The two American teens arrive outside their high school just as Prom Night draws to a close. Henry, now knowing that using the coin to get Tracey to be his date was wrong, confesses to her what he did. She is furious and demands to go home. The following Monday at school, she talks to him and although still angry at what he did, Tracey forgives him but says that it will take a while to become friends again.

Eleven months later, Slyvanon, who barely escaped the castle when the battle was lost, is now on a mission to gain his revenge on Argoth. He seeks a weapon to destroy the human king once and for all.

Little does Henry know that Zargothia will need him again...



## Prologue

### **The Forest of Egorthinia - Eleven months after Argoth's victory**

As Marcus rode through the forest, the scorching sun beat down on him, causing his long, red scraggly hair to be tied up in a ponytail and sweat to trickle into his unkempt beard. A powerful scent wafted from the pine trees and flowers.

Marcus was the exiled rebel who had led the failed rebellion against Argoth after the Treaty of Egorthinia was signed. After being banished to the outskirts of the kingdom, Marcus had to hone his hunting skills and became an excellent hunter. Today he caught two rabbits and a stray chicken.

It had been difficult at first, finding only tall, overgrown trees for shelter on a cold or rainy night. Over two months, he had gathered enough wood to build a small cabin. Marcus loathed the fact that he had to resort to ambushing lone riders to steal the tools necessary to build his new house.

Now he had a reasonably comfortable home - his little cabin was finally finished. To many, they might consider it squalor but to Marcus, one bedroom and a kitchen was heaven and was better than sleeping out in the cold. There was no longer any need to seek solace under the scant shade of a tree.

Little shafts of sunlight poured through branches while a refreshing breeze rustled the leaves. Birds chirped a delightful song.

A sudden, high-pitched scream disturbed the peace of the forest. Marcus reached for his hilt. Sitting astride his horse, Yorin, he shook the reins, digging the spurs into the stallion's side. Yorin broke into a gallop.

After riding for just a few minutes, they could only hear

pounding hooves until the familiar scream echoed once more. He followed it until he heard another one close by, accompanied by what seemed like the growling of two rabid dogs.

He halted Yorin, tied him to a tree, and removed the hunting knife from a scabbard attached to the saddle.

Marcus crept undetected toward the source of the cries.

Two large brown and white wolves cornered an elderly Sadarkian dressed in a tattered silky purple robe. The wolves looked like they belonged to the dreaded mercenaries of Ludongorg. Marcus grinned as the Sadarkian pleaded for mercy. He considered letting these wolves kill him until he noticed the jeweled rings on the creature's fingers. This was a person of importance.

*He might be useful,* Marcus thought as he unsheathed his sword.

"Get back, get back!" the hunched Sadarkian shouted, holding them at a distance by waving about a short walking stick.

Aiming the knife at the one on the right, Marcus threw the weapon, finding its mark in the wolf's chest.

The remaining animal spun around, his jaw open in a combination of surprise and rage and ran toward his new target. It leaped at him but Marcus moved out of its way. They circled each other, the animal snapping with saliva dripping from its mouth. Marcus looked into its eyes, waiting for the next leap.

He didn't have to wait long. As they continued to circle one another, the wolf, impatient and hungry for the kill, lunged at him. Equal to the animal's move, Marcus raised his sword, the wolf jumping onto the end of his blade, letting out a long whimper before closing its eyes.

The rebel sighed, relieved the animal was dead and removed his blade, wiping it down with a leaf he had plucked from a nearby tree.

The Sadarkian cowered on the ground, shielding his head with both hands. "Do not hurt me! I have nothing for you to steal."

"I just saved your hide so why would I kill you?"

There was a gash over the elderly nobleman's left eye. A thin line of blood flowed down the side of his face.

"Are you badly hurt? Can you walk?" Marcus asked.

"Ye...yes, I can walk."

“Good. My house is fifteen minutes by foot from here and you can clean yourself up there.” He sheathed the sword and extended his left hand.

Reluctantly, the wealthy noble took it and stood up.

“My name is Marcus. Yours?”

“Mine is Slyvanon,” he answered, limping toward a small stick about ten feet from where they stood.

“Slyvanon... Slyvanon... I know that name.” His eyes suddenly lit up. “You were Zakarius’s wizard.”

“Correct and his former advisor,” he said with a great deal of pride.

*Hmm...you will be very useful indeed.* “Please forgive my appalling manners. Here, take my horse. I can walk.”

“Thank you.”

Marcus helped Slyvanon onto the saddle and they made their way to the cabin.

“Tell me, Marcus, why did you help me? Are you not angry at my kind?”

The man took care in how he replied. “Of course I am. My father died fighting Sadarkians, but I share the same enemy as you.”

“Oh? How so?” Do you not love your King?”

“Once, but that was a long time ago,” he answered in disdain.

“Why? What happened to make you hate Argoth?”

“I tried to kill him after he signed the treaty,” he bowed his head in sorrow and continued, “but I failed and he banished me from his kingdom.”

“I see.” A pause lingered between the two for several minutes before Slyvanon spoke again. “And do you think of getting your revenge?”

“Every day, but how can I? I’m just one man. It would be madness to even try.”

“Yes, I suppose it would be but...ah, never mind.”

“But what?”

“Never mind. It would be too much for you.”

“No. Go on. Tell me, please!” Marcus’s cheeks reddened with embarrassment at the sheer desperation in his voice.

“I think I might know a way for you to have your revenge. There is a legend about a powerful weapon hidden in a cave about ten days’ journey from here. I am told it holds incredible power.”

“What is it?”

“I don’t know. Of course, the legends mightn’t even be true.”

While Marcus walked beside his horse back to the cabin, he thought for a moment of getting such a weapon, decimating Argoth’s army and finally, the king himself.

“Do you think the legends are true?” Marcus asked.

“Yes, I do. The person who told me this wouldn’t lie about such things.”

*A long journey like this needs a lot of food and warm clothing.*  
“And you know where it is?”

“I do but as I said, it’s far away and I was told there are lots of thieves hiding near the roads to the cave.”

“A minor problem; I’m sure your magic could stop them.”

Slyvanon didn’t utter a word but instead, gave a thin, unnerving smile. Instantly, a grimace replaced the smile as he winced in pain.

“I could not take on more than one. My magic would be useless against large numbers.”

Marcus contemplated Slyvanon’s answer and felt perplexed.  
“Why didn’t you tell Zakarius about this weapon?”

“I only learned of it after the war was over. There were many times when I wanted to go there but I knew it would be impossible on my own.”

“What if…” Marcus paused, caught amid an inner struggle with what he was about to say. “What if we go together? I’m good with a sword and I can hunt, too. We’d never be hungry.”

“If we do get there, how do I know I can trust you? What would I gain by doing this?” Slyvanon asked.

“I am a man of my word; I’d never betray anyone and you’d gain revenge on Argoth. If this thing is as powerful as you say, then we’ll kill Argoth and his army and not only rule Zargothia but all the lands beyond its border.”

Slyvanon chuckled. “I like the way you think, Marcus.” His chuckling abated. “Do I have your word then that we will share

power?”

“Yes,” Marcus said, extending his left hand to shake Slyvanon’s.  
“You have my word.”

Slyvanon shook it and their pact was made.

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A month later and after many days of traveling, they were relieved to finally arrive at their destination.

“Behind this lies the weapon you seek,” Slyvanon told his new friend.

Lowering his hood, he gazed at the tall rock. He wondered in what form the powerful tool of destruction would come. “Let’s not wait any longer. Move it.”

Slyvanon nodded. The wizard held out his arms and began chanting aloud in his own Sadarkian language for what seemed like ten minutes before halting.

In a trice, the flame on the torch that Marcus held was quenched. Both he and Slyvanon were now left in complete darkness. Marcus shielded his eyes as Slyvanon was engulfed in a blinding yellow light and hoisted from the ground by an invisible force. He began his incantations again; a low rumbling echoed throughout the vast cave.

Fearing that a malevolent spirit might lurk about, Marcus drew his sword, retreating from the rock. It shuddered while rolling to the right. The room was revealed, showered in light from torches hanging on the walls. In its center was a statue of a bald, sword-wielding warrior with a perfect god-like body, wearing only a leather skirt and sandals.

The supernatural light gradually diminished until it no longer emanated from Slyvanon’s fragile, old body. He stumbled about with vertigo until Marcus caught him.

“Are you all right?” Marcus asked.

“Yes, a little winded but I will be fine.”

“What happened?”

“I prayed to my God, Hernacious. He helped me move the rock.”



“So that’s why you were covered in the light?”

“Mmm-hmm.” Slyvanon stared into the room, his attention focused on the statue. “It’s time to take what we came for.”

They entered the damp room. Marcus was in awe at the skill of whoever had sculpted the warrior. Never had he laid eyes upon something so lifelike. Every inch exuberated excellence, from the eyes to his chest. There was an inscription at the base of the statue which read, “Jadin, The Assassin.”

“Is this the weapon?” Marcus asked.

“Yes. I will release Jadin.”

“How will he stop an entire army?”

“He’s more powerful than any wizard, almost like a god in some ways. But there’s something you should know. While I was in that trance, Hernacious said there was only one thing that could free this beast,” Slyvanon said, pointing to the bald assassin.

“What is it?” Marcus asked, unable to steer his eyes away from the statue.

Suddenly, the man gasped as he felt a sharp pain in his chest. Looking down, he discovered a blade protruding through the skin underneath his left breast.

“Human blood,” said Slyvanon in a venomous tone before removing the sword. Blood cascaded from the wound and Marcus’s mouth.

“You...scum,” was all that Marcus could utter. Taking two last breaths, he pitched forward, never to savor the taste of revenge that he so longed for.

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Slyvanon bore a merciless grin as the pool of red liquid expanded underneath the human and flowed toward the statue. When the blood touched the base, it slithered upwards, eventually encompassing every inch of Jadin, transforming the sculpture from a dull gray to a dark red.

The torch’s flames altered their color from an orange to a pale blue. Slyvanon stood unperturbed, observing what was happening

around him. For the last seven months, he had waited for this moment. All that meticulous planning had at last come to fruition.

When Argoth's army had defeated Zakarius's forces, Slyvanon had stolen away, unnoticed from the castle. He hid in the wilderness, always choosing to travel through the backroads to areas that were not heavily populated by humans. The wizard had felt that his god had forsaken him until one night, a soft, fatherly voice spoke from the darkness.

"I have not abandoned you, Slyvanon. I am merely recuperating. There's much use for you yet."

Hernacious explained to him about Marcus and his lust for revenge. The god told him how the man could be found and predicted that he'd rescue him. He told Slyvanon about Jadin, explaining that only the blood of a human who hated Argoth as much as any Sadarkian could free the assassin. This was a curse the Elders had put on the statue so that it would make it harder to unlock. They had meticulously planned every detail and flawlessly executed their plan.

Slyvanon took a few steps back from the blood-covered statue. Dust fell from it as fissures appeared on Jadin's stoney prison. Bright, egg-yolk yellow beams of light seeped through the cracks. The light pulsed; Slyvanon felt a tremor. It came from the statue.

The tremors intensified. Slyvanon stumbled about until he steadied himself, leaning up against the wall. More cracks formed as the stonework fell apart.

Without warning, the statue exploded. Slyvanon formed a bubble around him to protect himself.

The tremors stopped.

When the dust settled, there, floating in mid-air was Jadin. One side of his body was snow white while the other half was purple.

The old wizard clicked his fingers and Jadin floated to the ground.

Having removed the bubble, Slyvanon said, "Awaken."

The assassin woke up. "Whe...where am I?" Jadin asked, rubbing tiredness from his eyes and staring at Marcus. "Who are you?"

“He is the key to your awakening. My name is Slyvanon and I’m in need of your service.”

“My... *service*?” he regarded Slyvanon with a questionable look.

“Yes. You have been created by my God, Hernacious for a special purpose.”

The assassin studied the flesh on his arms and legs with disbelief. “Why did he create me?”

“Like I said, you have a special purpose. That body is indestructible. No weapon can wound or kill you. You have the strength of twenty men.”

“Really?” Jadin put it to the test. Catching Marcus’s tunic collar, he lifted the dead man without difficulty, flinging him across the room as if he were a rag doll. A bloody trail led to where the dead rebel landed. “Impressive.”

“Yes, it is.”

“So, what is it your God wants me to do?”

“Hernacious created you to kill a powerful human boy named Henry Simmons.” Slyvanon turned his wrinkled yellow palm upwards. Above it, a wavering image of Henry was projected. “This is him. Remember his face well. With him out of the way, nothing will stop us from wiping out all the humans.”

“Tell me where he is and I will kill the boy.”

Slyvanon gave a brief chuckle, admiring the assassin’s enthusiasm. “Oh, it won’t be easy. Henry’s the Son of an Elder – a being more powerful than a God – and the Elders have created a magical coin that protects him. He lives in another world and doesn’t have that coin yet but—”

“How will I get there?”

“I’ll explain in a minute but hear me out.” Slyvanon could tell by Jadin’s agitated demeanor that he was growing impatient.

“Go on.”

“No doubt he’ll be warned about your coming so you must reach him before he gets the coin.”

“Yes, but how will I get to his world from here?”

“Through magic but first I must give you some clothes; I can’t have you going there like that.” Slyvanon placed a hand on Jadin’s

shoulder.

Within seconds, a black leather jacket and leather trousers, a black baseball cap, and white sneakers concealed his unusual skin.

With his left index finger, Slyvanon touched the center of Jadin's forehead. A teal halo enveloped the wizard's fingertip.

"Do not be alarmed. Stay still," Slyvanon said, sensing concern coming from the towering being. He finished quickly and removed his finger.

"What did you do? I feel... strange."

"I have unlocked the power stored in your body."

"You mean I can do magic now?"

"Yes. Go ahead, try it out."

"How do I do that?"

"Just focus on something and it'll do whatever you want it to."

Jadin concentrated on a stone that was near him. As he beckoned it, the stone leaped into his hand. He crushed it, letting the dust slip through his fingers.

"Again, I'm impressed," Jadin remarked.

"Don't use your powers so openly in the boy's world. It will draw unwanted attention. You must hurry." Slyvanon removed a glass vial containing red liquid from inside his robe.

"What's that?" Jadin asked.

"This is the blood of Henry Simmons. Hernacious got it from the last battle when the boy was badly wounded. Then he gave it to me." When Zakarius defeated Henry in the last battle, Hernacious knew that the boy's blood could be useful. He scooped it up after Henry had recovered and left. This he told Slyvanon when he appeared to the old wizard and then gave him the vial.

"This will open a door to his world." The old wizard took out a knife from the robe. "Guard Henry's blood with your life. It's the only way back to this world. When you've completed your mission, do what I'm about to do now to come back here."

Slyvanon poured some blood onto the knife. Its blade became engulfed in a yellow hue. He focused on an area on the cave wall and aimed the weapon at it.

The golden caramel hue cast by torches was now a shimmering

green.

“What’s that?” Jadin enquired.

“The gateway to Henry’s world. Remember what I said, don’t use magic unless it’s absolutely necessary. Here,” Slyvanon handed the vial to Jadin, “take care of it.”

“I will not fail you,” he replied while taking it.

“Hurry and get to Henry before he gets the coin,” Slyvanon warned.

With a nod, Jadin stepped into the shimmering gateway. As he did so, a green cocoon formed around him and then he was gone.



# Chapter One

Harleyville, USA

Present Day

When the green cocoon disappeared. Jadin stood in an alley. In the distance he could hear the laughter of men; their laughing stopped when he stepped into view. They wore leather jackets and pants, regarding him with looks of surprise.

A man wearing an unusual navy-colored hat tilted to the right, stepped forward, “Hey, get lost. We’re having a private conversation here.”

“Sorry. I’ll be on my way.”

“That’s right, beat it,” the arrogant leather-clad man said. Then he pushed the assassin.

Jadin clenched his right fist in anger. “If you value your life, don’t do that again.”

“Oh, is that right?” the man replied.

The group of men now gathered to join their leader. Some folded their arms while others placed a hand behind their back, reaching for some weapon, Jadin surmised. All of them glared at the stranger with angry eyes.

The leader pulled out a knife and so did his companions.

“I’m gonna give you one chance to make up for sayin’ that. Hand over all your money and we’ll pretend it never happened,” said the leader.

“I do not have any.”

“Then that’s too bad, ain’t it?”

“I do not want any trouble.”

“Too bad, you found it. Get him,” the leader commanded.

Gritting his teeth, Jadin felt the anger building inside him. “Stop or I will have to hurt you.”

“Oh don’t worry, we’ll be doing all the hurtin’,” said a gang member, before stabbing Jadin’s stomach but his knife’s blade snapped in half.

“I don’t know what you got under there, but I’m gonna tune you up real good.” Throwing a hard right, the ruffian screamed in anguish as he felt his fingers break when the punch connected.

“That was *very* unwise.” Seething, Jadin caught the thug by the arm and threw him with minimal effort halfway down the alleyway.

“Crap,” another said before he and the others ran, leaving their leader alone.

The assassin stared down at the skinny individual. Slowly, Jadin walked toward him.

“Look, I’m sorry, okay.” He emptied all his pockets, holding two fistfuls of cash. “Here, take everything. You want this jacket?”

“All I want is your knowledge of this world,” Jadin snarled.

“Huh?”

He caught the thug by the throat, holding him a few feet off the ground, and pinning him up against the wall. Placing his left palm on the leader’s head, he absorbed all of the man’s knowledge.

Having sucked all the memories from him, Jadin broke the thug’s neck, letting him slump to the ground.

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The school bell rang. Henry let out a sigh of relief as the last class of the day ended. With books packed into his bag, he slipped the strap over his shoulder and left.

Joey fell in behind him, a red baseball cap covering his crewcut.

“Hey, Henry. Thank god history is over. I thought it’d never end.”

“Yeah, Mr. Royce is *so* boring.” Henry impersonated his teacher by speaking in a monotonous tone. “It’s like his voice stays the same the whole time and never changes.”

Joey chuckled at his friend’s impersonation. “What are you

doing tomorrow evening?” Joey asked as they walked out through the school doors.

“I don’t know, my chemistry assignment, I guess. Why?”

“Me and a couple of guys are gonna play some baseball in the park. Wanna join us?”

“I’m not too sure I can. That assignment is pretty important.”

“Aw, come on. Can’t you pull yourself away from your books for one night?”

“Yeah, I guess. Okay, count me in.”

“Cool, it’ll be fun.” Joey unlocked his bike and got on it. “Catch you later.”

“Bye.” Henry waved as he watched his friend cycling down the road. The cream-colored schoolbag swayed side to side on his broad back as he pedaled.

“Hey there,” a familiar voice said. He turned around to see Tracey beaming back at him in her denim skirt and white blouse. Her auburn hair had a more vibrant hue, appearing golden when touched by the sun’s rays.

“Hi,” Henry replied. “You’re in a good mood today.”

“Well, graduation is nearly here, so why wouldn’t I be?”

They both began walking towards Henry’s bike.

“Well... we’ve got exams coming up.”

“Ugh,” Tracey groaned, “don’t remind me. So, I was thinking maybe we could go for a shake later.”

“Can’t. I’ve got studying to do.”

Tracey met his gaze with a bemused one of her own.

“Or not,” Henry added sheepishly.

“Look, I get it, you want a good grade. I do too but you gotta take a break every once in a while, right?”

“Yeah, but my parents are expecting a lot from me, especially my dad. I thought you’d understand with your dad being the principal an’ all.”

“I study too but like I said, you gotta have fun.”

“Yeah, I know.”

Tracey cleared her throat as she continued, “Especially after what happened last summer.”



Henry stopped and looked around. “You didn’t tell anyone about that, did you?”

“Come on, Henry, give me a break. Who’d believe me anyway?”

He sighed with relief. “Thank god. No one can know about that, okay? *No one.*”

“I got it. Chill.” They began walking again. “Still haven’t told your folks, have you?”

“No. Don’t know if I can.”

“You’ve got to sometime.”

“Yeah, but I gotta find the right moment first.”

They arrived at Henry’s bike. Tracey looked at her watch. “I gotta go. I’ll be grounded if I’m not home in the next twenty minutes. Text you later.” She waved goodbye and he watched her walk away.

*Man, someday I hope we can be together.*

Last year, after returning from Zargothia, he confessed to Tracey that he used the coin’s magic to persuade her to be his prom date. Tracey was livid at first, refusing to speak to him on the taxi ride home. Over the weeks though, her frostiness towards him thawed until she became close friends with him again, forgiving Henry for misusing the coin. He learned the cost of abusing true power and vowed not only to Tracey but also to himself, to never repeat that mistake again.

Henry glimpsed Brad Thompson and his friends sauntering down the footpath on the opposite side of the road. Brad glared at him briefly before moving on. Henry grew used to the intimidating stares and they didn’t bother him anymore.

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Joey turned the key in the lock, opening the door. Circular patches of sweat were on the back of his t-shirt.

“Who’s that?” Esther called out.

“It’s me, Grandma. Relax.”

“Oh good.”

Joey knew she would be in the living room watching TV at this

hour, catching up on her daily fix of *Dr. Phil*.

“I left some dinner in the microwave and when you’re finished, take out the trash.”

“Yes, Grandma,” Joey replied, rolling his eyes heavenwards. Esther never gave him anything that didn’t have strings attached. As she always said, “I do something for you; you gotta do something for me.”

When he finished his dinner, Joey washed the dishes. It was Spaghetti Bolognese, but the spaghetti, as usual, lacked any real texture.

After taking out the trash, Joey went up to his bedroom to do homework. The room was small, just big enough to have a bed, one locker, and a unit in the corner to hold a TV and games console.

Just as Joey opened his math book, his cell phone rang. “Mom” was the name that appeared onscreen.

“Hey, Pumpkin,” Dana greeted.

“Mom, I told you to stop calling me that,” Joey reminded her, annoyed. “I’m not a two-year-old anymore.”

“Don’t raise your voice to me, young man,” she scolded.

“Sorry.”

“You having a bad day?” Dana asked.

“No. It’s just any time you start off with ‘Hey Pumpkin’, I know you’re not coming home tonight.”

“I tried, honey, I really tried but the captain’s making us all work overtime on this homicide case.”

“Couldn’t you tell him ‘no’? Just for one night?”

“I can’t, Joey. You know I make sergeant next month and I worked my butt off to get that. If I slack off now I won’t get the promotion. Plus we could do with the extra cash.”

“Yeah, I know,” Joey said, deflated. He slumped into his chair.

“It’s not like your father is coming around anytime soon to help.”

“Okay, Mom, I get it,” Joey said, irritated.

“You’re raising your voice to me again. I hate it when you do that.”

“Sorry. I...I just get tired of only seeing you for half an hour before I go to bed or not at all some nights.”

“I know, sweetie, but it comes with the job. If I could spend more time with you, I would. I hate being away.”

“Sure.” Joey tried to not sound too disappointed. He could hear the hurt in her voice. “Gotta go, Mom. I’ve got homework to do.”

“I love you, sweetie. Be good for grandma.”

“See you later.” Joey hung up and looked forlornly at his games console. “I guess it’s just you and me again tonight, huh?”

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### **King Argoth’s Castle, Zargothia**

Having spent several hours inside her room reading numerous books, Karina took a stroll in the royal gardens. A gentle breeze carrying the scent from the roses greeted her.

Bending down, she brought one close to her nose, inhaling its glory. Cyren had a rare flower called the Arache brought from a valley thirty miles away. It changed its color in accordance with the weather.

Karina had thought of Henry and sometimes she missed his company.

That night as she slept, Henry featured in one of her dreams. The sorceress dreamt the boy was fleeing from something that she couldn’t see. Henry was running, constantly looking back to see if what was chasing him was catching up. Karina tried to reach out and catch the boy but couldn’t, with him always being inches out of her grasp. She tossed and turned as the teen cried out for help. The dream ended with him diminishing from her view, running into a blinding white light before screaming in terror.

She sat up panting heavily and in a cold sweat. The nightmare was too real to be ignored.

*Maybe this is a warning,* she thought.

Swinging her legs from underneath the bedsheets, Karina stood up and walked to the window, cracking it open. Usually, at times like this, she would use her powers to concoct some potion to help her go back to sleep. But she couldn’t do that anymore since giving

up her magic to save Henry's life.

Karina's heart pounded faster as the hinges on the window whined as a sudden gale forced it back to its fullest. Grabbing her sword from its midnight blue scabbard at the foot of the bed, she knew something was wrong and was prepared for an attack.

*"Relax, Karina,"* a voice said telepathically.

"Who is that?"

*"It is me, Hamorin."*

When he finished speaking, Karina relaxed her rigid stance.

"Sorry, most precious Elder. I did not recognize your voice. It has been a while since we have spoken."

*"No need to apologize. Please stand up."* Hamorin shimmered into view, garbed in a snow-white monk's robe.

Karina stood up. She observed that his silver beard was neatly trimmed and his white hair was short too.

"I have come for your help."

"My help?" said Karina, confused.

"Yes. Zargothia is in danger and so is my son. There is not much time to explain how but Hernacious has killed another of the Elders—"

"Then that means..." Karina paused, bowing her head apologetically for interrupting.

"Yes, he now has the ability to create life. I will explain later how he did it but for now, I need you to do something for me."

"Anything. Just ask."

"Go to Henry's world and give him this." Hamorin reached out his right hand. In the center of his pale palm was the magical golden coin.

Karina took it but gave a worried expression. "You want me to go to Henry's world?"

"Yes, his very survival depends on it."

She gulped and her face paled a little. "But, how will I cope there? It's so different from here."

Hamorin smiled, placing an understanding hand on her shoulder. "I know but you got good instincts. So use them and you'll be fine."

*Easy for you to say.* Karina swallowed a spit of consternation.

“I...I don’t know, Great Elder.” Karina half met his gaze as she continued in a meek voice, “I don’t wish to offend you and will do anything to protect Henry...but I’m scared. What if I don’t get to the right place or world?”

“Your fears are understandable, Karina,” his soft voice now turned serious as he continued, “but even as we speak, Slyvanon has sent a powerful assassin to kill Henry. That coin will protect him.”

“Oh...I see.” Images of Henry being run through by the assassin’s blade or other weapons ran through her mind. This was something she could not allow. Karina loved him too much to let it happen. Straightening her shoulders, she asked, “When do I leave?”

“Immediately.”

“I must tell Argoth.”

“There’s no time. That can wait until later. You have to leave now.”

“Allow me to change my clothes first.”

“No need.” Hamorin snapped his fingers.

Karina now wore a marigold shirt and denim jeans. She examined the new outfit. “These clothes are strange but thank you.”

“They are what people wear in Henry’s world.”

“How will I get there and find him?” Karina asked.

“I will open a portal to take you there. Use this compass to find my son.” Hamorin gave her a round, silver metal device with a red needle. “That’s called a compass. The N is for north, S for south, E for east, and W for west,” the Elder explained.

Hamorin then channeled all his attention on the open window. His eyes changed from their normal state, the irises brightening.

A violet dot appeared and then expanded into a swirling portal.

“Go now and give Henry that before it’s too late.”

Karina nodded but regarded the gateway with some trepidation. Her lips trembled for a few seconds but she quelled any fear inside. *I must do this for Henry. His and all our lives depend on it.*

“I know you are scared, Karina, but you will be fine. I promise.”

“Thank you, Great Elder. Wish me luck.”

With an uneasy glance at the gateway, she walked into it.

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With his left hand supporting his head, Henry read over the chemistry notes he had taken earlier at school. Even though his eyes focused on the bulky tome, his mind wandered to Zargothia.

“Stop,” he scolded himself. “I got to concentrate.” Rubbing his eyelids, he yawned, stretched his arms, and resumed reading the chemistry book.

He was only into the second paragraph when his thoughts drifted to Argoth again. Soon, the boy fell into a deep sleep.

In his dreams, he saw Argoth’s castle. Everything was peaceful until dark, threatening thunderclouds concealed the blue sky. Lightning crashed down on the townspeople. Henry knew something was wrong and his gut feeling was right when he heard a loud, tenacious roar, along with hundreds of black dragons dotting the horizon. They showered the people below with columns of fire. Sadarkians rode the beasts, laughing at the tumult below.

Henry woke. He wiped his forehead drenched with sweat. He drank some of the water from the glass and shut the book.

“Joey’s right, I’m spending *way* too much time studying.” He scrolled down through the contact list on his cell phone, stopping at Tracey. Tapping her name, it rang twice before she answered.

“That was quick. Were you sitting on it?”

“Ha, ha, very funny. Didn’t get enough of me at school?”

“Yup, you read my mind.” Henry and Tracey chuckled. “I just wanted a quick talk.”

“Is everything okay?” Tracey asked.

“Yeah...well, no. I’m having dreams about Zargothia again.”

“When you say *dreams*, do you mean nightmares?”

“Um...” Henry paused, fishing for the word to describe them. “I think they’re more like visions.”

“What makes you think that?”

“They’re too real. It’s like...it’s like I can feel everything that’s happening in them.”

“Weird. But you know what I think?” Tracey said.

“What’s that?” Henry braced himself, knowing it wasn’t what he

was hoping to hear.

“I think you need a more active social life and I’m not talking about *Fortnite* weekends online with Joey.”

“Oh...” Henry winced and immediately blushed. “You heard about that, huh?”

“Please, you guys were giggling about it like two girls at school the other day! Seriously, getting a 100 killstreak is not something you brag about - and *especially* not on Facebook,” she said in a stern tone.

The boy’s cheeks went redder. “Oh...you saw that, too.”

“Yes. Calling the guys you beat ‘noobs’ on Facebook is so not cool.”

“Sorry. I guess we got carried away.”

“That’s an understatement. But seriously, you need to get out more. What are you doing this weekend? Please don’t tell me it’s another *Fortnite* marathon.”

“No. What’ve you got in mind?”

“How about I meet you at Margie’s Diner on Saturday for a few ‘shakes and then we go catch a movie?”

Henry thought about it for a moment. “Sounds cool.”

“Good. Don’t worry about those dreams. I’m sure you’re just reading too much into them. Speaking of reading, let me guess, you got a book in front of you, right?”

“Ever think of opening up your own psychic hotline?”

“Smartass. Don’t make me come over there. You won’t like it when I get angry,” she joked.

“Oh really? Why, you gonna turn into She-Hulk or something?”

Tracey chuckled. “Maybe...or something worse.”

Henry laughed at her comeback. “Okay, okay. I’m putting it away.”

She gave that sweet soft laugh that he loved. “That’s better. Go watch some TV. Don’t worry, everything will be fine.”

“I hope so. Thanks, Tracey. See you tomorrow.”

“Night.”

“Goodnight.” She hung up. The call made a smile spread across his face.

As he turned the dimmer dial on the desk lamp, his room went dark. He went to the living room to watch TV. But try as he might to forget about his dream, it refused to leave his mind. The harrowing screams still rang in his ears. The boy hoped it was nothing more than a nightmare.

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Through the knowledge he had taken from the thug, Jadin found an internet café and learned the location of Henry's home through an extensive Google search.

Jadin skulked in the darkness and climbed a tree overlooking the houses in Henry's neighborhood. Using his magic, the assassin could see through each home until finally he found Henry's. He grinned as he watched the boy he had been sent to find. The assassin needed to study the teenager's movements and when the moment was right, he'd strike. He wasn't certain if Henry had the magic coin Slyvanon had told him about and didn't want to act too hastily. But once Jadin knew for sure that he was powerless and ripe for the kill, then he'd pounce on him mercilessly.

"Rest while you can because I am coming for you. *Very* soon."