One of the problems with living in a nontechnical world is that one of the technical amenities I am used to are either nonexistent or very hard to come by. One of the simplest things I missed was electricity. Its interesting that you only begin to understand how easy you have it in another place after you've left it.

“Tome, have you seen… What are you doing?” That was Gamaz. He is one of the few individuals I could trust for some technological sympathy, being that he was in my world with me for a little while.

“I dropped a piece of metal in this crevice and I'm trying to get it out,” I responded while poking a small stick in the crack. The object that I was trying to get out was just a tie clip I had retained from swapping clothes. Even though it was made of cheap steel, it had a lot of sentimental value and I really didn't want to lose it. It reminded me of those days of working with mindless manager and traitorous robot. The reason I had wished for some electricity, I would simple create a coil and form a small magnet to catch the clip—even a simple magnet would suffice. It didn't matter how I managed to drop the clip, but here I was out in an open grassy field poking around with a stick.

“Oh… Have you seen Oper? Normally, he's rummaging around in the woods for food, but he's no where in sight.” Gamaz looked around and then eyed me for a long minute as my attention was on other things.

“Uh…Oper? No. Uh…yes, he was going to the stream to get more fish for breakfast,” I finally was able to say coherently. I looked up and saw him gazing at me; feeling a little embarrassed at my lack of eloquence, I pointed over to where he had gone. “He went through those trees over there.”

Looking the direction I had pointed, he just said “thanks” and flicked his fingers absently. I resumed my quest only to find that the tie clip was missing. I stopped and looked around me but couldn't find anything. I threw the stick down in disgust and rested my hands on my waist like a sumo wrestler. Then, I noticed something in my pocket. Reaching in, I found the tie clip that had been in the crack.

“But, how…?” Perplexed, I sat there for a few minutes turning the clip in my fingers. Just then, I heard the sound of hoofs pounding towards me. Finding myself in the open, I tried to ready myself for a fast dash. A man in full mail armor came riding up to me. He and his horse together were intimidatingly large. He had a shield in one hand and a very long sword at his waist. His hair was black and dirty, and things appeared and disappeared in his beard.

“Knave! Where be the castle Somn?” He asked bruskly.

“I dunno.” In my earlier adventures, I had gotten a little tired of being called a knave. I now understood that it means something like “idiot” or “fool.”

Without a word, the sword flashed out at me. It cut through my clothes and upper arm with little resistance. I stumbled backward and grabbed my bleeding wound. I knew that it was rather deep, because I could feel some of my hand enter the wound. Carefully, I tried to hold it shut. “Why the hell did you do that?!” Was all I could say.

“Impudence will merit you another, more severe punishment. Now, where is the castle Somn?” He said angrily, his sword menacing.
“I said I don't know, so go find someone that does!”

The sword came down again but in a slow backhand motion. Anger darkened my eyes, and something inside me snapped.

“Stop!” I heard my voice yell just as the sword was about to sever my other arm. Then all went black.

I don't know how long I was unconscious, but what was early morning was now late morning and the sun was hidden behind a large tree. Focusing my eyes, I was startled to see that the tree was a man on a horse pointing his sword at me. Hastily, I moved away on my hands and feet, but he didn't move. Then another thought came to me and I looked at my arm—the material was cut and drenched with blood, but there was not hint of any wound.

“What's going on here?” I said looking around.

“What's going on where, magic-wielder?” came a small, very high pitched voice—almost squeaky. I looked around and could find nothing. I didn't really know if I wanted to find out who it was so I asked a different question.

“How was my arm fixed up?” I asked, carefully listening for the source of the answer.

“Oh, I did it, thank ye!” Homing in on the source, I looked and saw a small man—a very small man, around six centimeters. He was bowing towards me in the tall grass. Aside from the obvious lack of clothing, there was enough dirt covering it to make it actually look fuzzy. He looked up at me and cowered a little, then visibly gathering its nerve, said “I did it because you provided me and my family enough food for a complete moon-cycle.”

“Food? What food?”

“Your blood. Since you were wasting it on the ungrateful grass, I figured you wouldn't mind my taking a bit. Then I sealed up your cut.” He said pointing at my sleeve.

I felt a little nauseous. I've heard of living off the land, but this going a little too far. I changed the subject and motioned to the poignant statue. “What happened to him?” Secretly hoping that he might stay that way for a long time.

“You mean you don't remember? Oh, yes, the loss of blood and the fall! You've completely forgotten! I heard you yell 'stop' just as the wicked man was about to make into more food than we could have eaten in three centuries. Then,” he made some emphatic gestures, “he stopped, and you fell.”

He stopped, and I fell? I got up and felt the weakness and nausea from blood loss. Containing the urge to vomit, I walked (more like swayed) circumspectly around the motionless figure. I didn't dare touch him, just in case he woke up or unfroze or... something! It was so eerie! The eyes remained unblinking, the expression fixed, the muscles tensed. I now saw how he could wear the chained armor so tightly: it stretched like material, very coarse material. It did not look very comfortable.

“Little man?” I called.

“Tome? Who are you talking to? And, who's that?” Oper said walking up to me. Seeing that my gaze was downward, he too looked around for a minute. Seeing nothing, he looked at me and shook his head. “What are you looking for? And, you wouldn't happen to know who that swordsman is?”

“I'm looking for a little man. And, him?” I pointed back offhandedly to the horseman, without looking. “He wants to go to Somn or something.” I looked a little further for the
little man and finally gave up and looked at Oper who was staring at me.

“Are you playing games with me again?” The accusing finger moved from me to the horseman. “Why isn't that man moving?”

I looked at the horseman and shrugged. “I don't know. All I said was 'stop'.” That was the truth. I really didn't know why he was frozen there. Just then, Gamaz came walking up. He too was looking at our visitor.

“It looks like he's under some spell.” Gamaz closed his eyes and made some scratching motions in the air with his fingers. He opened his eyes and looked curiously at me. That made me uncomfortable—where I come from, curiosity is dangerous. “It's a spell alright. Should I take it off?”

“Well, I don't see…” Oper started saying.

“No!” Gamaz and Oper jerked their heads towards me. “I don't want him attacking me anymore. Leave him.”

“He won't attack you if you aren't within his range,” Oper said after a moment of watching me. He turned to Gamaz and said, “Release him.”

Gamaz obliged by whispering something. Nothing happened. He tried again. After a minute, he turned to us shaking his head. “Tome has to release him.”

“What do you mean 'Tome has to release him'? Tome doesn't have that much power—he can't even make a fire start!” Oper was quite a different person now that I have come to know him. Before, whenever I made a comment, he would laugh. Well, he's not laughing anymore. I think it has something to do with my habit of getting ill fate or attracting problems.

They have been trying to teach me how use magic but have gotten nowhere. For them, it's frustrating; for me, it's very frustrating. The simple reference made was when they tried to teach me a simple “light a brand” spell. Each time I tried it, it didn't work—like it ignored me for spite.

Gamaz waived Oper silent. “Tome, what would you do to wake him?”

I ignored the patronizing tone and said, “I'm sorry, but I've contributed enough bloodletting because of him to the little man in the grass. I don't want to be a practicing dummy anymore!” Seeing the question in both of their expressions I pointed at my blood stained, cut tunic. As for the other question, I had no idea where the little man was. Relenting a bit, “Okay, fine, I would touch him. But, I don't know why or what that will do.”

“Neither do we, but do it anyway,” Oper said. Then, seeing my objection, he continued: “you don't have to be on the sword-side.”

I was about to reiterate my objection. Oh, I didn't think of that! I walked over to the other side and touched the man's leg. I felt a jolt and was thrown backward. I heard a whistle then a mash of words that I didn't understand that terminated with “Knave, where are you?!” Then a pause and “Who are you?”

I was still somewhat dazed as I heard Gamaz say, “You, sir, had the misfortune of attacking one of the wizards called Tome.” That got an obvious start from the horseman (which is to say the least for me).

“What did he do to me?” He asked looking around expecting something missing.
Tome 2

Getting my composure back, I found his paranoia a bit amusing. Then, I wondered why he hadn't seen me yet.

“You have been frozen there since early morning. Where are you going?” Oper said following the lead. He folded his arms and took a knowledgeable stance.

“Frozen since morning!” He looked up at the sun and said, “The gods of the north! I must go to Somn! I have an important message for the king!” He turned to go but looked back and said, “Would you tell me how to get to Somn?” I was shocked. Why was he being courteous now?

“First, what is the message?” Oper asked. When the horseman was about to object, Oper continued persuasively: “In order to protect our kingdom, is all.” Now, I know that Somn was not “our” kingdom, but the idea was to get some information.

The horseman looked indecisive for a moment then conceded. He straightened in the saddle and (almost) shouted, “All wizards in the land of Worten are cordially invited on the first day of next month to a festival and contest by the Kingdom of Reilsa.” The loud announcement didn't seem to startle Gamaz and Oper, but I had to cover my ears. After all, I was right next to him. Why wasn't he seeing me?

“Thank you. Somn is over there,” Gamaz pointed.

With that, the horseman rode off through the grass in the direction indicated only looking back a couple times. Watching him, I got the distinct impression that he recognized and did not trust them. This disturbed me a bit. I remembered back at the forest when I met the Sammil: Oper said that he could not stay, maybe there is something that I should know (or should be wise not to know) about my traveling companion. Another thing that disturbed me was how did I disable that mighty horseman with only a single word? Also, why didn't he see me after he was released?

I stood up and looked at Oper and Gamaz. They were standing some distance away and Oper had his hood up. How I ever became part of this interesting crew was beyond me. Sometimes, I get the impression that they normally are loners and would prefer to stay that way. Then, are they staying together because of me? If so, why?

“Tome, you can come out now. The messenger is gone,” said Gamaz.

“What are you talking about? I'm standing right here!”

Gamaz looked at Oper. You know what it's like to be the subject of someone's concern. Since I had joined these two, it seems like everything I do goes wrong. How was I supposed to know that telling someone to stop killing me would freeze him in place for a long time. Still, I don't like to be hacked up by someone that probably only enjoys it (now, maybe if he were to feel sorry as he hacked me up…nah, maybe not). I mean its only natural for me not to want to die or at least become mince meat. As I thought about all of this, I walked over to my companions who were looking around for something.

“What are you looking for?” I said looking around also, but stopped when I saw Oper jump at the sound of my voice. Both of them looked at me but not quite on target. It was as if they were looking behind me, so I turned around only to find nothing unusual. “Could you please tell me what's going on!” I said finally.

“Tome it seems to be that you are invisible!” Gamaz said waggling his fingers again, “but, it's not your magic—well, not completely.”
Tome 2

“What are you talking about? Oper said that I couldn’t do magic! Now, you’re telling me that the messenger was paralyzed because of me, and now I invisible because of me! What’s going on here?” Confusion is a constant, aggravating state for me.

Hearing the frustration in my voice, Gamaz reached to my vicinity and touched my forehead. Immediately, I felt a jolt as something like electricity jumped from me to Gamaz. Gamaz flew backward and landed on his back with a loud grunt and thud. I felt that he was trying to calm me, but I don’t think it worked out the way he had expected it.

I looked over at Oper who standing looking at me and back at Gamaz. His gaping, surprised expression was comical, but no one was laughing. I slowly walked over to Gamaz and found that he was unconscious. Reaching down I carefully touched his robe. Nothing happened. Good. I touched his neck and found a pulse. Better. “Gamaz?” I spoke quietly.

One of the hardest things in being from another world is acceptance. I realize that I have a lot to learn about social manners in this world, but when one has two friends who are willing to understand you in some way, it’s hard to lose them.

“Gamaz,” I said louder and shaking him slightly. His eyes flashed open, and I was met with a toothy grin. At first, I thought that the shock had driven him mad. So, I backed away a little. Behind me, Oper stepped back a little. No, I don’t normally have this effect on people. But, what’s normal?

Gamaz got up and exclaimed, “That was incredible!”

Now, I was certain either he or I was mad. “What was incredible?” I cautiously explored.

“I now understand why we haven’t been able to teach you our magic. You are from another world where laws are a little different, therefore laws of this world will not obey your summoning.” Gamaz started to explain further about flows of energy and how one can focus them, just as he had explained before. But then, he explained that not being born here in this world makes it impossible for my system to use this energy. As he explained he waived us forward toward the camp. We followed behind him eventually catching up to him by the time we reached the camp.

I looked at Oper and found him eyeing me as we sat around the dead fire. I poked around in the ashes with a small stick. He still can’t quite understand (or maybe doesn’t want to understand) that I was from another world. I could tell that most of the stuff that Gamaz explained Oper understood almost to the point of boredom. Still, I found the explanation confusing and illogical. When I finally expressed this during a break in the dissertation, Gamaz stopped and looked at me for a second.

“That is precisely what I have been trying to tell you,” he said putting his hand on my shoulder. “It doesn't make any sense to you because it doesn't work for you that way. Somehow, we need to find out what it can do and how to control it.” He looked at Oper who was pretty much ignoring us and said, “I think that we should invite ourselves to that competition.” The reaction was as expected: I paled and Oper sputtered.

“You want me to…?”

“You want him to compete?” Oper interrupted me. I wasn't going to say “compete” rather “perform”. In my opinion, magic was nothing but prestidigitation and illusions. Of course, my last act on the messenger was a bit more impressive. Still, my incredulity was
reflected in Oper's eyes and expression. I have come to find that Oper's use of magic was sporadic and a bit more showy than Gamaz's. Still, he also didn't like to use it unless to was absolutely necessary.

“No, not really,” Gamaz said putting up his long fingered hands. “I want him to see the forms of magic and have him try to imitate it—in his own way.” Then after letting that sink in, he continued: “Of course, it couldn't hurt to win some money.” That silenced all objections. Each one of us knew that we were living out in the open more for the fact that we were broke than anything else. Still, I didn't feel at ease with the idea of using magic—it seemed so arcane, so evil.

I sat there for a while thinking about what had been said. Using magic was one of the things that I've been fascinated about since coming to this world. But now that the prospect has arisen, I found myself uncertain and disturbed. First of all, I wasn't sure whether I would be able to perform in some respectable way (for the competition). Second, I wasn't sure if I wanted to have the responsibility it brought. Yet, I knew that it was potentially dangerous if I did not control it. What an interesting anomaly: here I am, seemingly normal, but have retained enough differences from my home world to make me unfit for this world. I wonder if this will eventually make me leave this medieval world?

Absently, I pulled out the tie clip and fumbled with it in my fingers. I have decided to stay here, but if I were posed with the option would I go anyway? I saw Oper and Gamaz rise so I got up and followed them down to the stream. No, I already resolved that; I wanted to stay. But, what if I were forced to leave because of my magic wielding? If I wasn't careful, others might find this difference and make life very difficult (as if it could get any worse).

*Power corrupts.*

Sure, I know that aphorism, but how do I avoid it. I have the power; I will use it, whether I like it or not.

*Respect for power will place it in the proper perspective.*

Then how do I control it? I feel like an unstable explosive just waiting to go off in anyone's hands. How can I allow that happen to my companions? Before, I used to think that my habit for attracting problems was going to separate us, but now I know that if anything, it will be this “gift.” Perhaps Gamaz was right, I could learn a lot from going to the competition. It appears they have gone before—they'll know what to do.

When we reached the stream, we sat down and ate some of the cooked fish that was waiting for us. I found mine a little burnt and dry but didn't care, because I was hungry. My companions saw my turmoil and respected my silence. Finally, I decided I was tired of mulling over the problems and advantages. I concluded that basically there were no advantages, but the problems of uncontrolled use would be more detrimental.

That was when I heard a shrill cry from above. We all looked up and saw a large bird with feathers stretching out like fingers from its wings. It spiralled over us for a long time. “What is it?” I asked.

Oper looked surprised at me and said, “That's an eagle—haven't you ever seen one?”

“No, my home captured all those birds years ago because they were causing too many problems around the domes. I wonder what it looks like,” said my eyes still pasted to the
gliding monstrosity. As if on cue, the eagle began to spiral down. Its wings were incredibly long and had sharp gnarled claws. After a few awe-inspiring minutes the eagle landed on a drooping branch some five feet from me. I was so taken from its majesty that I was startled to find it facing me on the branch. If I had been watching Oper and Gamaz, I would have noticed their amazement.

The bird looked around opening its beak every once in a while. Without thought, I reached out and touched the plumage gently. It thick and waxy. Still, the all the synthetic material in my world could not compare to it. It didn't even occur to me that the bird might object to my touching it, but it appeared to not mind. The head was covered with white feathers, and its eyes were sharp and astonishing intelligent.

“Isn't it beautiful?” I said back my companions.

“Uh, Tome…how did you do that?” Came the wavering voice of Oper.

“Did what? Oh..I didn't do anything. It just came. Isn't that normal?”

“No, Tome, that is not normal. Usually when wild, they avoid human beings. They can be trained for hunting but are thereby attached to their master for life,” Gamaz explained softly. “Do you see any marks of tethering on its legs?”

“What's tethering? Why don't you come up and see it? It's quite amazing,” I suggested. Still, I looked for something on its gnarled scaly legs. Suddenly, the bird took to flight, its huge wings fanning volumes of air towards me. I watched the great bird as it flew out of sight, feeling a slight bit of disappointment.

“What do you make of it?” Oper asked Gamaz.

“I don't know. I think it may have thought Tome to be its master but found that not true. Still, it could have been a scout, but it wouldn't have landed. If anything, it would have attacked.”

“If it's a scout, I think we better move on—just to be safe,” Oper suggested and started walking to the camp.

I didn't argue, but I think they were making too much of it. Still, I helped them break camp and pack up our stuff. You know what it's like moving—it always seems like there is more stuff than when you moved in? Well, when you're camping, it's no different. I just couldn't figure out how we got all that stuff in those bags and packs in the first place.

While I was packing, I kept thinking about the eagle. For some reason, I got the impression that it wanted something. But, how do I tell Oper and Gamaz? It wasn't tangible—I couldn't exactly say what it wanted. And, the fact that it was intelligent (perhaps more intelligent than normal) was disturbing also. I truly wished that it would come back. It was the most beautiful thing I had ever seen! Why did my world ban them?

We placed our packs on our horses. (Yes, we had horses. They were also pretty expensive too. How much? Well, I don't know; all I know was that Oper was grumbling about it for almost a full week after buying them. But, they were good steeds, and it nearly took me three weeks to get used to riding all the time. I tell you that was painful!) We started out in the late summer sun sometime in the afternoon. Generally, we headed for the kingdom of Rielsa.

Somewhat curious about how long it would take, I asked Oper. He gave a noncommittal answer, anywhere from a day to three days. Apparently, he was more than
just a little distracted. I tried to find the source but only got more noncommittal answers.

Just then, Gamaz slowed to meet me and said, “Don't mind him; he'll work it out.” Changing the subject, he said: “I want you to try some things. They aren't hard, but require some concentration.” I knew what he was about to ask me to do, and I was very hesitant to use my “gifts.”

Gamaz took a small rock out of his pouch and left it resting in his hand. “I want you to concentrate on this stone, and take it from my hand.”

The obvious temptation just to reach out with my hand and take the stone after a moment's “concentration” was very difficult to control. I concentrated on the rock for a few minutes (actually it was only a few seconds) but nothing happened. Afterward, I let my shoulders sag in defeat.

“It seems you need to have something that will give you more desire to take back,” Gamaz said letting out a sigh. With a slight flick in his wrist, my tie clip appeared in his hand. I could see the gambit, and what made things worse was I was going to fall for it! Seeing my expression, he held it well out of my reach like a child's game called “keep-away”.

Putting aside my annoyance, I concentrated on getting back my only link back to my past. I concentrated so hard that my head and eyes ached, but nothing happened. After a little while, Gamaz closed his hand and waited for me to notice. I noticed almost immediately but could not understand why he stopped my concentration.

As if to answer the question he said, “You were concentrating to hard and long. It appears to me that you powers lie in strong emotion. You were afraid and angry at the messenger for carving you up for no apparent reason. So you lashed out at him—in your anger. Your emotions must be the catalyst; therefore, your reason and concentration must control it. You must find that point where concentration and will alone will engage those powers. But for now, use your emotions.”

I thought about what he said and found it not very difficult to arouse some anger to get my tie clip back. Almost immediately, a “felt” something well up inside. I concentrated further until I felt that the “well” was full enough and let reach out and snatch the clip from his hand. What happened next was totally unexpected. In an eyelink, the clip was gone, and I heard a loud, sharp whistle doppler by me with a small snap in the distance. It happened so suddenly, I lost track of the clip.

Gamaz, too, was surprised. His hand remained suspended as his attention moved from it to me. At first his lips moved, then speech slowly became audible. It was very hard to understand him in this state, so I waited until he was a little more coherent. This required a little patience, but I managed.

“That…that was incredible,” was one of the first things tumbling from his mouth. He shook his head and flicked his wrist again. Within his palm appeared the clip, but this time it was covered with fresh wood and treesap. Shaking it a little, he inspected it and found it in satisfactory condition. “Well, it certainly appears to me that you really need to control your temper,” he said finally.

Until that point, I felt sort of pleased with myself. I had a power that I could merely dream about, but now I was finding that perhaps it was just a little too dangerous. But, this
thought brought me to another problem: if I had the “gift” all along, why didn't it appear back in my home world? I asked Gamaz.

“Don't forget, Tome, your home world was a Technical world—part of a technical universe. This is a realm of magic. Possibly, if some of your colleagues were to come here they could find that they have abilities too,” he answered with a shrug. Then with a more concerned expression, he said, “Tome, what you have is very powerful. I have never seen so much power; perhaps it has to do with your being an outworlder. Still, that leaves a problem: you cannot stay here unless you control that magic. It could destroy in the wrong hands. I don't doubt your maturity, but there are those in this world that would take advantage of your naivete. If that were to happen, your power could be used for something very wicked.”

I thought about that. Part of that had been my earlier concern, but it was moot to mention it. Then with new resolve, I reached out with my mind and snatched the clip from Gamaz's hand, placing it in my own. It was so easy that it was almost fun. (What was not so fun was trying to get rid of the recently acquired treesap.)

“After your lessons using that power, I will try to teach you some more subtle ways of doing it,” Gamaz said reprovingly. “The one key is control. When you are out of control, your power will be too.”

We rode along in silence for a while. The late summer sun beating down on us. There was not path to follow, and if there were, I have noticed that Oper and Gamaz would always opt not to take it. I guess it just didn't take them to where they wanted to go. The land was mostly cleared from trees. Those trees that remained were in little copses, often in shallow valleys. Everywhere else was tall grasses and avoidable thistles. The grasses made me think of the little man that healed my wound. I thought back to when I was invisible, I bet the little bugger did that and it was accentuated by the electric charge.

I thought about what Gamaz said. This power is awful. I could hurt unintentionally and thoughtlessly—I couldn't let that happen! The sun was sitting low by this point and our moderate gate was slowed to find a suitable spot to camp. I watched out also, even though I knew nothing about what a “suitable spot” was in the first place. After getting frustrated from passing by many places I thought were good enough, I let my mind wander back to the most beautiful bird I had ever seen—the eagle! I really wanted to have it, but I knew that it was unlikely. Yet, inside, I felt that there was something really wrong but couldn't put my finger on it.

Again my mind flashed back to the little man and his magic. If my “magic” is so foreign to this world, could there be alternate forms of “magic”? Then, I thought, I wonder if I could make myself invisible without the little man's help? No, I better not; I don't want to electrocute anymore people. Electricity! I wonder if it is the same kind?

That thought halted when Oper held up his hand and pointed to a small copse of trees on a hill. I started forward, heading toward the copse, but Oper reached out as I passed and grabbed my reins stopping my horse.

“What's wrong?” I asked, somewhat confused. I thought we wanted to camp.

“Shh!” Oper hissed and cocked his head to listen.

Then, I began to sense it. I couldn't hear anything, but I felt something in those trees.
Instinctively, I thrust my mind forward searched the copse. Inside I could feel five minds—all of whom had vile thoughts that made me shiver. They saw us! Just then five men rode out towards us carrying swords.

“Thieves!” Oper spat.

“They must be pretty desperate to ride out at this distance against three people,” Gamaz said from behind.

Suddenly, I felt a cold chill as if there was one other that could not be seen but hovered watching. I looked around and saw nothing.

Oper saw my distraction but didn't have the time to verbalize the question, for the thieves were on us. Why we didn't run, I didn't have the time to evaluate. Swords appeared in Oper's and Gamaz's hands from scabbards lashed to the saddles.

Frankly, I didn't know what to do. I didn't have a weapon, what's worse is the fact that if I had one I wouldn't know how to wield it. So, I backed my horse off a little just to watch in futility. The frustration I felt was more than I could bare—to watch my companions attacked by these wretched assailants. But, unfortunately (all in the matter of perspective) one of the thieves began to trot up to me.

Angry at them for attacking was bad enough, but coming for me—especially when it was obvious that I didn't want to be part of the escapade. Now I was very angry and excited. I felt that reservoir filling fast. Within a second, I lashed out, and the rider and mount stopped and stayed in place. It worked before, so why not?

I looked back at my companions and found them doing better than I had expected. I realized then that they didn't need my help there, but they didn't know about the unknown entity above. I searched above our heads and found a mind floating some fifty meters above us, apparently invisible.

At first, I didn't know what to do. I mean, this magic-stuff was all new to me. I searched around in its mind and found that it had been watching us all day and was tired. That gave me an idea—I used the little physiology I knew and found the spot in the brain that induces sleep and “flicked” it. Immediately, the being feel asleep. But, that caused a problem—it started to fall. And from that height, I really doubted it would survive to impact.

I only had moments. Quickly, I used the same kind of force I used to take the clip and pushed rather than pulled. At first, I felt the being start to rise—rapidly. So, I released a little so that the gravity was slightly greater than my “pushing”. Minutes later, it landed gently in the tall grasses around ten meters away.

I opened my eyes and saw Oper and Gamaz staring at me again. Chagrined, I looked them over. They had a couple cuts, but were not significant. Oper's eyes were angry and Gamaz's were disappointed.

“What were doing back here while we fought?” Oper exploded.

“I can't fight,” I said lamely.

“That's ridiculous!” Oper was still yelling.

Gamaz felt a little more sympathetic. He placed a restraining hand on Oper and said, “he's got us a captive.” But from the tone, I could that I had really disappointed him.

“Two,” I corrected quietly.
The two of them looked back at me. I dismounted and started to walk over to the resting captive. Oper began to object, but was restrained. I could feel the captive was sound asleep—too asleep. It was alive, just it was sleeping at a very deep level of unconsciousness. That scared me. Still I stopped and pointed down to where it was.

Gamaz came up with Oper lagging behind. Gamaz scratched at the air and nodded to Oper.

“What is it?” Oper asked.

“I don't know,” Gamaz and I answer in unison. Looking at each other, we smiled, and I thought I saw approval in Gamaz's eyes. He flicked his finger and the object melted into view. I don't know what the other two were doing, but I stood there and stared. Lying before us was the most beautiful woman I had even seen. She wore a white robe and had a golden rope around her waist. Her golden brown hair clumped delicately around her head and was strikingly contrasted against the tall verdant grasses. Oper let out a soft whistle.

“She's been watching us all day,” I said. “Even though I could not fight your way, I think I could fight this way,” indicating the spells. Both Oper and Gamaz nodded pensively.

Oper reached down and shook her. She didn't respond. Gamaz knelt down and listened to her heart, looked up, and shook his head. Oper bowed his head.

“No! She's not dead! She's asleep!” I felt cold. Reaching into her mind, I could feel a glimmer of life—fading fast. Not much time. She didn't do anything! I can't let her die!

“Move back!” I barked with such force that both Oper and Gamaz jumped back.

“Tome, it's not your fault,” Gamaz said weakly but without conviction. I ignored him. I knelt down and called up this “power” more than I had ever before. I could not let this person die because of me. Reaching in her mind I found the place I damaged. It was terrible—rather than stimulating the section in her brain, I had actually destroyed it.

I felt doubt creep insidiously into my thoughts. But, I would not be deterred. First, I forced her heart and lungs to work, then I began repairing the damage. It was so difficult, but I remembered what had been there. It was like restoring peas starting with split pea soup. Finally, I was almost done, but the strain was too much. Blackness funneled my thoughts, and I collapsed. I was unconscious until the next morning. For some reason they didn't want to take the spell off of the last thief, so they left him for me.

I awoke with a terrible headache and someone placing a wet cloth on my forehead. I looked up and a woman with delicate features and golden brown hair. Startled, I jumped and rolled out of a raised cot landing with a thud on the ground. My head started throbbing louder; my brain felt like someone had put it in a food processor and wasn't pleased with result, so they did it again. I heard some chatter in a female voice but could not understand a single syllable.

With some outside help, I managed to get back in bed, but I insisted on sitting up against all objections from those around me. Now, I could feel three minds around me. They were filled with concern and concentrated worry. I looked up and saw the woman's face again, weariness overtook me again, and I began to weep. I was forced back, and easily I fell asleep.

I awoke with the feeling of a semi-familiar gaze upon me like the viewer was calling me. Oh, sure, I normally could feel the gazes from all the rest but this was particularly
disturbing. I arose without any pain. All the others were asleep under the early predawn sky. I felt strange like someone had taken all the ground away from beneath me. I looked down and saw that I was not walking on the ground. Where am I, I thought—curious but strangely calm.

I looked for the gaze and found the eagle looking at me. An image of a clean shaven young man superimposed itself on the eagle. He was a little shorter than me and had blond hair. He just stood there watching me. Finally, I broke the silence.

“You wanted something?” I asked.

He didn't answer, but continued to watch me. I began to feel uncomfortable. I recognized the eagle as the one that came to me before, but I did not understand how this young man related. Upon a notion, I thrust my mind to contact his. He blinked but did not object.

I saw various images. Some of which were him working as an apprentice to some wizard when he was boy. He worked for the wizard for many years, but then the wizard started acting crazy after a strange man came to visit. The wizard cast a vile spell that turned the boy into an eagle. Then, he drove the boy from the house. As the boy-eagle flew about the house not knowing where to go, he saw the man return and the house exploded in green fire. Only the man left.

For years, the boy-eagle avoided all men. A few tried to hunt him, but failed. Finally, the (now) man-eagle is tired of being something that he isn't. Through his eyes, I could see myself standing below him. Something came over the man-eagle (call it understanding or trust, can't describe it), but he felt like he could trust me. I understood through his thoughts that he let me touch him—it was like a bonding or an oath.

There was no emotion, no feelings. Only statement of fact. His name was Botham. Apparently, the man-boy wanted to return to being man if possible. Otherwise, he wanted to stay with me. It was a childlike trust so completely pure and untarnished. Just seeing this trust made me feel terribly cynical.

“All you sure you want to go with me?” I asked. I felt a confident affirmative. Such trust! How could merit it? “Come to me,” I told him finally.

With that I returned to where I had been resting. I was astonished to find my body resting below me, but I knew everything was all right. I hoped I would never do that again! I wouldn't exactly want anything to happen to my body while I was away!

As soon as I returned I awoke and felt a slight headache. I got up carefully and looked around. We had camped in the same copse that the thieves came from. That only made sense, no one would bother us because of the historical existence of the thieves. The sky was clouded and a storm was gathering. I felt eyes watching me from the limbs.

“Botham, come down,” I called softly. I heard a shake of a branch and the large eagle came down and landed on a low branch next to me. I reached out and touched the plumage. “Someday, I hope I can be worthy of your trust and be able to return you to your original form.”

“All? Is that you?” I heard Oper speaking softly. He jumped up and hugged me knocking the wind out of my lungs. One of these days I'm going to have to teach him not to incapacitate me with his welcomes.
“If you're trying to keep from waking everyone,” Gamaz said, “you're too late. Tome, why didn't you tell us that you were alright?”

“I didn't want to wake you,” I said, but before an objection could be voiced, a white-robed figure rushed up and kissed me! After a few moments, I was able to break away. It was the woman!

“Thank you for saving my life!” She said.

“But…but…it was my fau…” I stammered.

“Don't worry, Tome, all's been explained,” Oper said, putting his hand on my shoulder.

“This is Tolmarathan, she prefers Tolmar.”

I reached out my hand, but was kissed again. Maybe she doesn't know that custom… I carefully pulled away, afraid of offending her. Of course, it took me a little to compose myself. After a minute and sufficient blushing (on my part), I was able to finish up introductions.

“Oper,Gamaz, and Tolmar, this is Botham,” I said pointing to the massive bird.

“Isn't that the eagle that we saw before?” Oper asked.

“There is something strange about that bird,” Gamaz said, “there's magic around it, but faint.” The eagle opened its wings in objection and made a small cry.

“Botham, it's okay. They won't harm you. These are friends they came be trusted also,” I said calming him. My three companions looked at each other. I realize that I have nothing but surprises, but these were surprising to me also. I mean I didn't want all of these problems or powers. “Botham, can I explain your situation?” The bird tried its best to give an understandable nod. This was done mainly for my companions.

I was able to summarize Botham's past within a few minutes. I thought about the group. Five people (well, four and a bird). For loners, this will be a difficult transition. Having a group of five people is difficult especially when only a few are used to each other's methods. I knew that it was going to take time, but as long as things don't blow up we'll do fine. (I'll tell you about that one, later…)

“There is still one other point to consider,” Oper interjected. Then pausing a minute, he smiled and said, “We still have one frozen thief out in the middle of the field.”

“He's going to be a bit surprised when he wakes up to find himself frozen for two days and his companions at arms missing!” Oper said with a wry smile.

That made me think. Turning to Tolmar, I asked, “Why were you floating over us invisibly for all that time?” I honestly tried to make it not so blunt, but hiding my emotions has always been rather difficult.

The reaction was hardly what I expected—she blushed. I got a warning glance from Gamaz, so I did not pursue the topic any further. Seeing that there wasn't much more to discuss and, basically, trying to get out this embarrassing situation, I got up and start out to the field where the unfortunate man was still trying to approach an absent opponent. It was almost tempting to leave him, no doubt he would be freed eventually. But, that would have been cruel.

The others riding their horses had already taken their positions around the figure when I finally reached it. I opted not to take my mount, because I didn't think my mount would like the shock very much. In fact, I didn't like it either. And, judging from Gamaz's expression, I
could tell that he was not very willing to discharge me. Great. What am I going to do with it?

Reaching out I touched the mount's hind leg and felt a surge of power went up my arm. This time it wasn't electricity, but was power—raw power that made me feel stronger and more energetic. Somehow, I have got to learn what this power is in order to control it. I stepped back and let the others take care of the rest.

Immediately, the thief continued his approach, but suddenly realized that something was wrong. It was pretty obvious there was something wrong. I mean its not normal for a person on a horse to disappear and be replaced by a small armed circle with a definite time change. The expression and reaction were priceless. First his jaw dropped, next the horse stopped, then the sword in his hand wilted and fell out of his hand, and finally, his cheeks became as white as his eyes.

“Friend, why did you come out to attack us?” Oper asked. The answer seemed rather obvious, but I didn't say anything.

“Ah… I… uh… didn't attack you,” he stammered.

“To be exact, you were about to attack a companion of ours named Tome,” interjected Tolmar. Oper looked at her with a smile of approval. I wonder if there was something between the two.

“I… uh… didn't want to….”

“You are lucky that he let you go,” Gamaz had his say.

“L… let me g… go?”

“You have a t.. t.. terrible stammer, don't you?” Oper concluded with a smile. Then turning his expression stern, he said, “Move!”

The thief didn't need anymore coaxing than that—he turned his mount about and galloped away. The fear in his eyes helped me conclude that he was likely not to directly bother us ever again. It was the indirectness that bothered me. Why were my companions trying to build me a reputation? I'll have to ask them one of these days.
The morning passed rather tranquilly after that incident. Having lost all that time due to my unconsciousness make me feel a little guilty though. If we were to make the festival and contest in time, according to my estimates we were going to have to hurry. Of course, my concern was shared by the others.

“We have about two days before we arrive at the castle Reilsa,” commented Oper. “And since the contest will start in five days, we should have plenty of time.”

Although he tried to say it optimistically, I still had a hard time believing that there weren't going to be more “mishaps.” I don't know why—I just have the habit of getting into trouble. No matter what, I feel we are going to have to hurry to get to the kingdom—more for the sense of safety than anything else.

As we travelled, I was able to get more information from Tolmar. She really is a mystery to me. She says that her home does not have that much sorcery, yet practiced enough magic to float above us for that whole day and maintain invisibility. Then again, she always is very shy around me but talks freely with Oper and Gamaz. Maybe she can sense my being an outworlder—maybe she's likes me more than she expresses. But that doesn't make any sense! Wouldn't she want to talk to me, then? The only thing I could conclude was that women in both worlds did not make any sense.

I rode pondering about these things when the wind started to pick up. I wouldn't have really noticed until what had been a bright day darkened rapidly. Turning, I looked at the source. Perpendicular to our route, a large storm approached blackening out the sky and the lands round about.

“A thunderstorm,” said Oper, “a pretty big one, too!” He really didn't need to tell us the weather, we were well aware of its size. But that was his way of saying, “Let's go find some shelter—fast!” but in a more subtle way (like trying to be subtle with a laser rifle in hand).

The wind quickly started picking up and soon it was difficult seeing the way. It was even hard finding the spotty copses of trees for cover. Finally, we found a large copse and headed for it. Debris was flying about with such fury at this point that we had to wrap ourselves up for protection. The horses really didn't like being in it either—every once in a while a mount gave a complaining whinny, tossing their heads about. I really didn't know how the eagle was doing, but I didn't worry too much. He's taken care of himself for this many years, so why not now?

When we finally reached the trees, we were so thrashed it was hard to be cheery about the whole situation. Still, we stayed out of each other's way as we set up for camp. Remember what I said about running into problems all the time? Okay, I'm pushing the point too far. And you'll be telling me this is all a coincidence, right?

Heavy canvas was draped and lashed to low sturdy limbs. Soon we had a well anchored shelter, there was a small window-like opening and a tent door both with a flaps for protection. For now, the window was left open, because the wind wasn't strong enough to make much of a difference. The enclosure was tall enough for Oper stand up in and enough room for moderate comfort from claustrophobia.

The horses were very nervous by now. It took all of us to get them into the tent and under control. Gamaz went from mount to mount whispering something in their ears. Soon the horses were sleeping peacefully while the storm raged on.
Yet, there was one difference in this storm. The wind was hot—not cool like just before a rain. It was something like a very strong sandstorm, but there was no sand only plenty of forest and meadow debris. I sat there looking out the window at the storm coming in its fury when I heard a loud screech outside the tent flap.

Both Oper and Gamaz jumped for the door to let Botham enter. With effort, he stepped into the tent. Obviously, eagles were not used to walking—just flying. Still I could understand from the speed of those winds why he would prefer to walk. As soon as he was in the large enclosure, he took flight over the horses to land on a low branch near one of the rippling tent walls.

I went over to him and respectfully touched the plumage. Ever since I learned that was the way to show friendship, trust, and concern, I didn't mind adhering to the custom. He was hot from the effort of flying in this maddening weather.

“What does it look like out there?” I asked softly.

From his mind I could see most of the area being affected. I sensed concern and was amazed to find fear in such a great bird. Still, I reminded myself that this bird had once been a boy and was never given the chance to mature.

“Don't worry—it will pass,” I said reassuringly. Somehow, I got the feeling that there was some basis for his fear, but I pushed that thought aside.

The day droned on. The winds became more and more fierce. Once in my home world, I had been in a hurricane—simulated of course. And this reminded me of that but only to a point. The first difference was that the simulation did not last for many hours; second, this storm was dry—strangely dry—I thought thunderstorms ended in rains; and finally, the simulated hurricane didn't threaten to bring a creaking tree down upon me.

Sometime in the afternoon, the lightning started booming in the distance or cracking overhead. And by evening, the situation was getting desperate. The storm still continued to worsen and soon the trees in the vicinity started to topple and crash to the ground. Before that time, it pretty much was a very large wind and thunderstorm. Now it was life-threatening.

Now, I admit that sometimes I would try to choose optimistic point of view in difficult situations (no, really, I do try), but for me to say that things were going to get better at this point would have been a moderate application of over-optimism. All this time, I had some fears concerning the storm's origin. Now with the storm's persistence, I was having to face some very difficult decisions.

I looked out the little window-like opening thinking about certain magical possibilities. Okay, I admit it! This is the first time I am willing to blame an occurrence on magic. It's not really normal for me to assume things like that. I am a technologist—I have to explain things by physical laws. Now I'm beginning to believe some of the old whisperings from the village people but only in a limited way. Some things have to come from magic. I mean, how else did that woman in the first kingdom that welcomed me to this world become alive?

Oper was sitting next to me. He really hadn't said anything this whole time, and sometimes I got the impression that he too was worried. But, Oper is too proud to admit this worry. I looked at him and carefully sculpted a non-imposing question.

“Oper,” I started. He looked up at me making more difficult to pursue the query. “How
long do you think this storm will delay us?” He continued to look at me and waited for what seemed an eternity before answering.

“Tome, I will answer the question you're trying not to ask,” he said softly, “I am worried about our safety. This storm does not want to let up as if something is holding it here.”

“Am I that obvious?”

He smiled and said, “No, you're that good a friend.”

That hit the spot. There have been a few times when Oper has shown how much he likes me by his suffocating welcomes. But, this was the first time that he sincerely said it. I felt my eyes burning a little so I turned away to control its display.

I looked over to Gamaz and Tolmar. They were talking quietly trying to keep their minds off the above-raging winds and calamity. I got up and started to walk quietly over to them. I saw Botham watching me, but I kept walking.

Soon they saw me and stopped talking. Gamaz looked at me directly, but Tolmar kept her eyes turned. Doesn't she like me? Sometimes I feel like a teenager trying to please all the girls just to be liked—but here I am in my mid-twenties.

I turned my thoughts back to the present problem. “Gamaz, do you sense magic in this storm?”

A shocked looked appeared on Gamaz's face. “Am I to understand the Magic-Doubter is having second thoughts?” He asked with a grin. I felt my face turn red slightly from embarrassment. “Okay,” he relented his teasing, “I'll check.” Once again he close his eyes and made like scratching motions with his fingers in the air. After a minute, he opened his eyes, his face suddenly showing concern. “As far as I can tell, there is no magic behind this storm,” he said. But before I could say anything, he said, “Yet, I am not sure that this storm is natural.”

Just as I thought. “Can you do anything about this?” I asked referring to the storm.

“No. I know some magic, but it is not powerful enough to effect something like this.”

“Do you think I could help?” I felt so inexperienced, yet I knew that something had to be done.

He looked at me for a moment. “I am not familiar with your kind of magic. It seems almost random—like it was mind-controlled rather than arcane. Many centuries ago, there was something called 'sorcery'. Tolmar calls your magic this. It could be that there are others who could wield the same power. If this is true and the power behind this storm is sorcery, we are in grave danger—especially you!” Almost on cue, a loud splintering and crash interrupted our discussion, distracting us for a moment. The tree was very close—almost too close. Gamaz looked at me again.

I knew the concern. This storm had to be stopped, but did I have the power? I turned and looked at Oper. For the first time, I saw real worry drawn on his face. He knew it too. I was the only one who might be able to stop this thing.

But, how could I? I had only learned a little about this power a few days ago. Intriguing! Only three days ago! Within that time, I've become very dependent on it. A few months ago, I learned that I could “see” and “feel” things that others normally are oblivious to. Now, those are an integral part of me. I really have changed from that underground robot refurbisher I once was.
A groaning creak and splintering from the tree we were under brought me back from introspection. I'll have to think about that later, I thought. With little effort, I thrust my mind up into the clouds above and started searching. Within a small time, I found a mind but it was not tangible. Sure enough—Magic was the source! It didn't take me very long to decide even with all my cankerling doubts.

It was pretty obvious what I was thinking, Tolmar was still looking away. Oper sat quietly watching. I turned and started for the tent flap. In a flash, Oper was there restraining me with his large strong hand. I was so deep in thought that I jumped.

“Tome, you can't go out there!” Oper said. I looked at his face and saw our resemblance again. I couldn't say anything. I touched his hand, and he released voluntarily. My eyes burned more than ever and felt the tears welling. Reaching down, I loosened the ropes that held the flap closed. Moments later, I was outside leaving my friends inside the shelter. Oper stood there dumbly for a few seconds then closed the flap, tightening the ropes again.

Even in the confines of the woods, the debris stung sharply at my exposed flesh. I wrapped myself in my cloak but found that it was insufficient against the terrible winds. A few times, I was thrown to the ground, and once I was actually picked up into the air a half a meter. Still, I continued towards the center of the tormented grassy field.

The lightning at this point was frequent and provided enough light to give everything a silvery-silhouette glow. Out in the open, the noise was deafening. The tall grass bent and gave under twisting and slashing currents. The damage I saw just from walking out to the field impressed me and made me doubt my abilities again.

By the time I reached about the center of the field, I felt my hair rise from static electricity. Quickly, I dropped to the ground just as a lightning bolt crackled nearby shattering a tree. My ears rung, and my eyes were ineffective from the afterimage. I decided to stay there.

I sat up and concentrated. Blocking out everything, I thrust my mind up into the sky and found the mind again. I couldn't freeze it because it was just like what I was doing—something like extending the consciousness into the sky. You can't quite attack that.

Unless…. No. I didn't have the time. I had to stop the storm before anyone (or any more people) got hurt. With my mind, I surveyed the area. Much of the forests were damaged beyond repair. The center of the storm resided over the kingdom of Reilsa itself. It couldn't tell where the mind was originating, so I went to work on trying to disperse the storm.

The first thing I did was to try pushing the storm away. No good. There was so much energy built up from the storm itself it was like pushing against a wall of cast iron with a straw or moving bread dough with a needle.

I gave up that idea and search for something else. The storms I was used to abated with cool rains. The problem was the air was too hot to rain. I thrust mind up further above the clouds and found a fast running wind high up in the atmosphere. I learned about these air currents back on my home world. If I were to divert this enough, I could take away some of the energy in the storm.

Using the push-pull I learned I created a shield like wall in the path of the stream and deflected its flow into the storm. It worked like hot metal in wax. Quickly, I cut the storm
up into pieces by changing the angle of the shield. The storm tried to rejoin, but the pieces soon became too fragmented. The process of breaking up the storm caused some of the regions to cool enough and allow rains releasing more of the generated energy.

Suddenly, I felt the static charge again. I couldn't get to cover and I felt that this one was aimed at me! Quickly, I enclosed myself in another shield just a bolt thundered down and surrounded me in white-hot light. I was stunned for a little while. I don't know how long but it was enough to realize that I might be vulnerable. Checking around, I found that both my shields still existed! But, how? I thought that I have to concentrate to keep them. Oh, never mind! I just was happy that I was still protected—I'm not about to argue with semantics. I also found a large thunderhead directly over me—no longer over Reilsa.

I could sense the cloud above was building up energy for another bolt. I reached up and changed the direction of the jetstream shield slightly. Within minutes I could feel the frustration of in the mind in the cloud as the remaining thunderhead disintegrated. It was almost enjoyable! Finally, the cloud broke up and dumped rain over me giving up the rest of the stored energy. As it rained, the water bounced off my shield like a hot skillet.

I searched the skies trying to find the source but soon found the air in my space getting stale. So, I released the shields. Cool fresh air rushed in along with plenty of rain. Within minutes, I was drenched. I searched long after the rain let up but couldn't find the source. Giving up, I stood up and found myself surrounded by armed men. Why did I feel like saying “out of the frying pan…” again? I didn't struggle because I was too drawn to fight.

As I was led away, I could see the effect of the lightning attack. A circle about two and half meters in diameter was blacked—all except a one-meter circle in the center. Gee, I wonder why, I thought to myself with a smile.

As I walked, I nonchalantly checked the numbers around me. There were six well armored men carrying bows and swords, clearly each experienced and well trained. Not one got close to me: they just surrounded me—as if they feared me. Six men? That is interesting—who ever wanted me respected me. We walked a ways before heading for the forests.

I heard a screech above us. Looking up I saw a large eagle—Botham! He started to dive at one of the guards with full claws bared. I saw a motion in the corner of my eyes. Glancing over I saw one of the soldiers nocking an arrow.

“No!” I yelled. Instinctively, my mind flashed out shattering the bow. The wielder jumped away, stunned. The other men looked at me in amazement. Two others started to nock their bows. Seeing their determination, I yelled “Botham, stop! I'll be alright!”

The great bird swooped and started to rise. One of the two who about to fire lowered his bow and looked at me impressed. The other fired but missed. In my anger, I shot my mind out and exploded his bow briefly stunning the wielder.

“Why the hell did you do that?” I yelled at the fool in the common tongue. Oper and Gamaz have been teaching me some of that for the last couple months—a very frustrating experience. But as they said, the personal language does not work when I don't hear their voices first.

I felt one approach from behind. I reached out again and froze him. Another approached and two others aimed their bows at me. Seeing their determination, I put a
Tome 2

shield about myself leaving the top open for air. A little while ago, I felt drawn and tired, now I was wide awake and ready for more action—its amazing what adrenaline can do.

“Answer me! Why did you shoot at the bird?” I yelled again. One of the arrows flew and bounced off the shield like it hit a rock. I ignored it.

The man I was addressing looked a little intimidated but was able to hide it well from the others. He straightened his shoulders and walked toward me. When he reached me, he was measurably larger than Oper. He had a large mustache that drooped beyond his chin. (I wonder where the others were?) I looked up at him and saw dark angry eyes. His arm muscles were about twice as thick as my leg muscles. I could not find a single ounce of visible fat—all his veins bulged out on his muscles.

“You broke my bow!” He thundered.

“Of course I did! I'm not the kind of person that likes fools that shoot at retreating eagles!” I yelled back.

He lifted his fist and aimed it for my face. I stood firm. In a flash, the fist contacted the shield. In my mind, I felt something shatter as the shield splintered from around me. The compression shot me backward, throwing me some five meters. Stunned, I lay there for a minute trying to regain my senses.

When my vision cleared, I found the monster of a man standing over me with his sword in his hand waiting.

“Have you had your say yet?” he asked with a sneer.

In my arrogance, I felt I could take care of myself and could easily freeze all of them, but I wanted to know why I was being taken—just in case there was a connection with the storm. If there was another sorcerer, I wanted to know.

“Where are you taking me?” I asked.

“You are hardly in the position to ask,” he laughed.

With that, two men lifted me up and my arms out straight. I really had not idea why but did not resist. The man walked up to me lifting his sword to my chin.

“I don't want any more surprises, wizard. Understood?” He lifted his hand with fingers spread and pressed his thumb to my forehead. Moments later, I felt a numbing sensation. I tried to fight it, but it spread too fast. When it was done, I could not control a single skeletal muscle—I couldn't even talk. But I was wide awake and all my senses functioned. The only thing I could do was to look around without moving my head. Why did he paralyze me? I thought about what Gamaz has to do to do his spells—he uses his hands! They think I have to use the same technique. I could use that to my advantage, but I still would need someone to free me from this stasis.

I heard the large man barking some orders, telling two men to make a stretcher and the other two to free the man I froze. So, he is the leader, I thought. I was laid on the ground. Inwardly, I smiled (I had to because, as I said, my facial muscles were paralyzed), because I knew that their magic would be ineffective. Therefore, they would give up trying to free him and try to (I heard a scream and someone landing on the ground) touch him. If I had been able, I would be laughing uncontrollably now.

“You think you are so clever,” the leader said looking down at me. I could only return the gaze. “Wait till our wizard has gotten what he wants from you. Then I will have the
pleasure of killing you very slowly.”

After some very long minutes, two men placed me on a stretcher and started carrying me. Seeing that I could stare into the early evening sky, I let my mind wonder. I thought about the most beautiful woman I had ever seen—Tolmarathan. The way she cannot look at me was as if she was afraid of me—my being a “sorcerer”. No… that wasn't it—she was hiding something! Maybe she doesn't want me to see something that would appear in her eyes. I wonder what that was. She certainly doesn't have any problems expressing her thoughts to Oper and Gamaz. Soon my mind gave in to fatigue as the adrenaline waned, and I fell asleep.

I awoke the next day before the morning sun. I was lying flat on the ground still facing into sky-blocking tree tops. I closed my eyes and thrust my mind out to survey the area. There were two guards sitting a little distance away, maintaining vigilance over me. Further out I found the mind of the leader that paralyzed me. He was resting quieting and dreaming about fighting an incredible monster. His heart was racing but seemed to find the challenge exhilarating.

Searching further, I found the three other guards sleeping also. One of them was having a nightmare about being frozen in space as thousands of ants slowly ate him away. With grim satisfaction, I realized that I was the reason he was having this dream. I felt a little justified, because I felt that coming up behind someone is a bit cowardly—especially for this world.

That made me think a little. A long time ago, I would not have assigned “cowardly” to the act. I would have called it something else, like “opportunistic”. The idea of disgrace and honor was something very prominent in this world. Perhaps, I am acclimatizing far more smoothly than I thought. I left that thought for another day.

The last two men were dreamless. Their sleep was deep and ponderous. All of the guards were within a ten meter radius from me. Further on, I found three minds that were very familiar—Oper, Gamaz, and Tolmar! They were watching quietly some twenty-five meters away.

Carefully, I reached into Tolmar's mind. I was most familiar with hers—after all, I had to repair part of it. Carefully, I placed an image of me in her consciousness and sent the feeling that I was all right but paralyzed. At first, her mind rejected this information shaking it off like a daydream. I tried again but actually tried to send words.

<Tolmar?> I asked. I saw her shoot a glance around her person, but found nothing. I saw her lean over and ask the others what they wanted. After understanding that they had not said her name, she turned her attention back at my campsite. Through her eyes, I could see our smoldering camp fire.

<Tolmar, it is me! I'm Tome!> This time she listened incredulously. I told her that I was paralyzed but wanted to see where this would lead. Finally, I told her I wanted them to follow me at a distance. When I finished, I waited for her to assimilate it. At first, she didn't believe it. I tried to think of some way to prove it, but nothing came to mind. I gave up and retreated back and searched further. I felt the mind of Botham overhead but let him be.

Returning, I found that the leader's dreams had changed from fighting to being in a room. I decided to play a little game to see what would happen. I carefully entered his mind
like I did Tolmar's and entered his dream.

It was so real! Every detail—scene and sound—was incredible. I never realized how well the mind could reconstruct its own world to deal with reality. I appeared in a room. Draperies hung luxuriously from cut stone walls and long, thin windows. The floor was covered with a low haze. The leader was pacing quietly back and forth, looking down at the haze.

I approached. He stopped and looked at me. I waited patiently for him to recognize me. Within moments, his demeanor changed and a sword appeared in his hand. I guess I didn't bring him good memories.

“What do you want, wizard?” he sneered.

“Nothing. Why are you pacing?” I figured that the best way to get information was to be as non-threatening as possible.

He waited for a minute, not knowing what to do. His shiny blade lowered carefully. But there still was distrust in his eyes.

“I have to lead an army against foes from the north. If I fail, all will be lost.”

“Who told you that you have to do this? This seems like a terrible burden for one person.” I tried to play the game as well as I could, hoping that it would eventually effect the man's conscious feelings about me—enough to free me.

He thought for a minute, his brows deep and ponderous. His calloused hand came up and pulled at the long mustache. “No one,” he said finally.

“Then why did you assume this responsibility? Did you feel that you are the only one that is capable to do it?” I was now trying to reason with him. I did learn that he was used to receiving orders. Seeing his confusion, I said, “If you don't want to do it—don't!”

Just then another man burst into the room. The leader turned to look at him. The messenger knelt before the leader and said, “The enemy has burst through the border, sire! Our armies have all deserted! We are left defenseless!” With that, the leader placed his hand on the man's shoulder. The messenger looked up questioningly.

“Go to the passageways! Save yourself!” he said magnanimously. The messenger quickly got to his feet and ran off. The leader turned back to me. “Wizard, you might as well save yourself too. Do you know the passageways?”

I was confused. He didn't like me—why is he concerned for my safety? Shouldn't he want me to die also? I chose my words according to the standards of honor I have learned from this world.

“No, sire,” I figured I might as well use the address the messenger used, “I will stay with you!” Immediately, his expression changed from distrust to respect. Good. It will take a little while, but I believe that he will begin to trust me.

He walked up to me and clapped me on the shoulder, turning me toward the window. We stood there and watched the armies come and come. There were so many! For as far as I could see, I couldn't even see the ground. I tensed and felt fear. The leader noticed and squeezed my shoulder reassuringly. Soon the door was being pounded in. The door gave, slamming into the walls. Hundreds of men poured in coming towards us.

He awoke. I quickly pulled back and tried to force my heart to relax. I have faced death many times in the past, but nothing like that! It was unimaginable! Such fear—I haven't
ever felt so much fear! I lay there for a few minutes panting, feeling the sweat evaporate in the cool morning air. Something nudge my consciousness; I opened my eyes to see the leader standing over me, watching me.

I looked at his expression. The dream had effected him but only a minor way—he still had some distrust. Maybe entering someone's mind for that purpose was wrong? Something inside just didn't feel right. Influencing other's thoughts felt wrong. I don't think I should do that again.

“Good morning, wizard. How did you sleep?” he asked watching me. I really didn't know why he was asking these questions—it was pretty obvious I was unable to respond. “I suspect that you have learned your lesson. I'll release you to let you stretch your legs.”

What was this? Did the dream effect him more than I suspected? “But the first sign of any magic, I will paralyze you again. Understood?”

He waited for a moment, sizing up my no response. Then reached down and touched my hands and feet with his thumb. Warmth spread from those points until I had full usage again. But I still couldn't move—I was so stiff that even lifting my hand was an experience in pain. He helped me up while all my muscles screamed in protest. While the others prepared a breakfast over the rekindled fire, I performed the old head-shoulders-knees-and-toes to alleviate the stiffness.

We ate...something—I don't know what it was, but it was salty and fried. I think it had once been red meat many years ago. Anyway, the guards broke camp, and continued on our trek while the air was still cool.

I couldn't quite get my bearings. As far as I could tell, we were walking around the kingdom—at least perpendicular to the way my companions and I were going. We were still in the forests with the trees opening up every once in a while to let sun shine through. We didn't have any trouble walking through, the thick mat of pine needles kept underbrush to a minimum.

Within an hour, a distant howl caught my ears. I looked at the leader and saw that he had heard it too. He raised his hand commanding us to stop.

“Dogs!” he said looking around. Quickly, the other guards took positions making a small circle. The way the commander said “dogs” they were something to fear. I really could not understand why they were so afraid—I mean, they're only dogs. What could they possibly do? Slobber on us? Oh, terrible!

Still, having these seasoned men making such preparations, I decided to make myself more useful. I grabbed a long stick about two meters in length from the forest floor and proceeded to clean the bark off. When I was done, it wasn't as nice as I would have liked, but without more effective tools, I couldn't be too picky. Even then, the dogs were upon us.

I was in the circle of guards. Every other guard had a bow while the others had long swords. Searching about, I found the commander and went over to him readying my crude staff.

“Wizard! Get back!” the commander barked.

“No. I want to fight also,” I said coolly. After saying that, I knew I had said the right thing. The only way to prove the dream true was to play the part. Otherwise, the commander could never develop the trust I needed. And from the look I got from him, this
was happening.

The dogs were the ugliest things I had ever seen. There were some fifteen or sixteen
and they attacked in small groups—very intelligent! I was surprised how well they fought.
Within minutes, we were surrounded and the bows were only effective in keeping them
distant. Once in a while, I could hear a loud yelp as another got shot.

I was a little disappointed as none of them came to us. But, my disappointment didn't
last for very long. For some reason, the pack moved over to us. I tried to use my crude staff
to ward them off—not really hitting them. Don't get me wrong. I wanted to hit them, but the
stick was too awkward.

Suddenly, one of the dogs grabbed angrily at the end of the staff and proceeded to pull
on it. I was surprised for a moment but didn't lose it. I couldn't believe it! The dog was
trying to disarm me! I struggled futilely trying to retain control of the staff. Finally, I pulled
it angrily out of the mut's maw, swung around and struck the dog on the skull. It fell limp
on the ground and began to twitch. A sick feeling flooded over me, and I backed up into the
circle.

I sat there dumbly as the battle continued. I never killed before. And no matter how
much I tried to console myself, I found each argument a feather under the weight of killing.
Soon it was over the rest of the pack ran off, and the guards were congratulating themselves.
But, I didn't want to talk to anyone. I just wanted to be alone.

“Good job, wizard!” The commander clapped me on the back. “When you playing
with the mut, I honestly thought that you were out of control. But, by the gods, you really
did'im!” He was laughing jovially, but I did not join him. I felt ashamed. I bet if I had
killed another human being he would be twice as happy! With that, I turned to him sternly.
Trust or no trust, I was not going to make myself into something I cannot live with.

“I'll have you tell me now where you are taking me. I have had enough of playing the
sheep going to the slaughter! I believe you also know that I am able to take on you and your
guards. So, either you tell me now, or I will leave!” I was able to keep my voice low
enough that only the commander was able to hear me, but the growl in my voice was
stronger and louder than the dogs we had just destroyed.

The jovial comrady eyes dulled to that of the commander I first met. In one single
sentence, I was able to destroy all semblance of trust. Nevertheless, what was done was
done. I stood firm.

“I cannot tell you. And, wizard, don't try to fool yourself: we can control you. But, you
will go with us—if not voluntarily, involuntarily.” I saw his hand flash out, but before I was
able to defend myself, cold blackness engulfed me as I was knocked unconscious.
“Will he be alright?” The unfamiliar voice pounded into my throbbing skull. My extremities felt puffy and tingled a little. Most of all, the lump on my head felt larger than my head.

“Yes, but I'm afraid that he will have a hard time thinking straight for a while,” came the voice of the commander. I could almost hear him smile.

“Why did you do it? I told you that he was to be unharmed,” the other man's voice sounded a little annoyed.

“After helping us fight the dogs, he turned on me. I could not understand why only that he threatened the whole operation.”

There was a loud grunt, then someone was opening my eyes and looking in. The light was terribly bright, and I shuddered under the glare.

“Well, he's awake. Fortunately, he only has a minor concussion. Let's hope that you haven't knocked out all his senses too.”

I felt a sharp jab in my side. Against my better judgment, I opened my eyes and tried to sit up. Immediately, whatever I had digested from the fried salty meat erupted from my mouth, and I lay back with a small groan.

I felt a cloth touch my face and mouth. Opening my eyes, I saw a blurry woman clean me up. She turned to wring the blood-stained cloth in a small basin. I looked around and saw no one else. My attention turned back to her. If she had been pretty, her age must have mercilessly dragged that away with her youth. Still, her eyes were kind.

“Where are they?” I managed.

She looked at me and asked, “Who?”

“The one who captured me and the other,” I said coughing.

“Oh, you're talking about Jaus and Dimer. They'll be back,” she smiled ominously. Somehow, I was beginning not to like the old woman anymore. She lifted my head slightly and started to pour a bitter hot liquid down my throat. I could do nothing but swallow.

“Now go to sleep. You will need your rest.”

“For whath?” My tongue was strangely numb so my 't' ended up being a 'th'. A lazy drowsiness crept over me. The drink! That hag! Got to fight it... got to....

I awoke with the sunrise and found the pain in my head almost gone. I opened my eyes and looked around. I was on a cot in an open lean-to with five guards standing around me. There was one wall beside me but the other walls were open with only long slender posts holding up the fabric roof. Feeling brave, I tried again to get up. I was more afraid of the nausea than the guards by this point. I wondered how long I had been asleep and where my companions were—no doubt nearby.

Touching ground, I felt a little light-headed and wobbly but was able to walk. Stepping out of the lean-to, I was surrounded by the five guards. Putting up my hands, I said, “I only want to stretch my legs. Will you please let me do that?” Hesitantly, the guards gave ground but would not leave my side. Each of them had his sword drawn.

I walked around and tried to get the stiffness out of my joints. The morning was incredibly beautiful—bright and blue—with a slight scent of pine. Still, I felt a little lonely. So reaching up with my mind, I found Botham in the trees. I resisted the urge to call him down. No matter what I said to the guards, eventually I could see Botham stuffed on
someone's table. I told Botham that I was all right and asked him where the other's were. The response I got back was a little surprising. They were not around! I let my mind stew on that for a while.

“Well, I see our 'guest' is up and about,” said a man a head taller than me. I guess I was a little small for this world. Still no one seemed to take notice. “You look a little familiar to me, but you are shorter than what I expected,” he continued, sizing me up. Well, strike no-height comparisons. He was definitely different from the men that took me. He wore black robes with open sleeves and had long blond hair and beard. Unlike the others in the camp and most I met before, he was clean and comely.

“Expected? What were you expecting?” I asked folding my arms. The similarity between Oper and me might cause a problem here, but I didn't want to pursue the topic. For the last few months, I've had to deal with this problem.

“Oh, so he has spirit too! Good! I like a challenge!” He said with a smile placing his hands on his waist.

“A challenge? What are you talking about?” I paused and then changed my tone. “You seem to know well enough about me; now, why don't you tell me about you?” I asked more casually.

He waited for a minute then said, “I am Dimer. I called you here.”

“Some call. You should have used a hammer—more subtle,” I wryly said touching my head finding a cloth bandage.

“Sorry about your headache, but the witch should have taken care of that. Still, Jaus said that you were getting a little upset?” The others in the camp seemed to not mind chatting. Dimer’s tone seemed casual like peer-to-peer. This was perhaps the first time that I have been addressed in this world by an official without feeling like dolt. “So, are you traveling to the competition? I’m sure you have heard about it.”

His casual conversation was only getting me annoyed, so I said, “Why did you bring me here?” I'm the kind of person that likes to get to the point of a discussion which is why I have a terrible time with diplomatic situations. When someone wants to talk to me, that's fine as long as topic is brought up quickly so that I understand person's viewpoint.

His countenance changed a little. “Why and how did you stop my storm?” Just as I thought, I was taken to the source of the storm. Now, I knew his stance—he and I were working against each other. That could be very bad.

“Why did you create it?” I wasn't going to beat around the bush. He knew that I did it; therefore, why should I deny it. “It was disrupted, because it was about to destroy me.” I didn't say anything about my friends for the mere fact that they don't need any undue attention at this point.

To my surprise, the man smiled—not pleasant, I assure you, but he did smile. “Why I created it is none of your business, but how you dispelled it is mine,” he said gritting his teeth in a low growl.

I couldn't quite tell him that I used something that I don't quite understand myself especially with something as despised as sorcery. So, I thought back to what Gamaz did to dispel things. “I just did this,” I said waving my hand. Like I said before, both Oper and Gamaz have been trying to teach me their magic but to no avail.
“Impossible! I detected no such magic! There was also a genius there—you used a strategic counter-measure!”

I thought back to Gamaz—he didn't find any magic either. “Strange, I detected no magic either.” I fought the urge to smile from how ridiculous “strategic counter-measure” sounded. You know how some people try to use strange terminology to prove their own competence? So it is in my old world. Well, it seems that this world has the same problem. Nevertheless, I didn't answer him. What could I say? I blew it away? No.

Seeing that I was not being very cooperative, he became impatient and stormed off in a huff. I watched him walk away following his path with my eyes. After a few minutes, he called a couple men over and spoke with them pointing over at me. When he was done, he resumed his march to a large tent while the two men came over to me.

“Yes?” I asked trying to look as innocently as possible. Of course one of these days, my impudence will kill me, but it hasn't yet. Perhaps it will when this world learns enough about me to sate their wicked curiosity.

One of the two held me at bay with a sword drawn and to my throat while the other tied my hands again. I was really getting tired of being bound. But, really, that was for those that did the “hand-waiving” magic. They would have to knock me out or something to take me out completely. So I was still relatively safe. That thought was interrupted by someone behind me touching my neck.

I don't know what he did, but I awoke later that night with another terrible headache. I was back to my original perch—in the cot under the lean-to. Normally if they had wanted me unconscious, I would have stayed unconscious for a long time (perhaps too long). Then, why was I awake? A sound! No, not quite—a presence—someone was standing nearby watching me.

I reached out and found an unfamiliar mind watching me very carefully. Oops! It just noticed my probe. How did it do that? No one can do that…well, maybe the Sammil. But…

<Not worry. I friend. Friends yours called me.>
<Oper, Gamaz, and Tolmar?>
<Yes. Transform can you?>
<Huh? What’s “transform”?> I knew what it was in my world, but what it means here—who knows.
<Why can't you do it?>
<Not man. If man, others see. No allow.>

He's not a man? Yet if he were, the others would notice. But, how could he not be a man and be a man at the same time? One of the things that really made me confused in this world is the numerous paradoxes presented. This was one small example of one. What is interesting is the fact that this individual (whatever it was) was quite efficient with telepathy. I'll have to learn that too—telepathy (a new ability I have learned) was really a strenuous task.

<Where are the guards?>
I was beginning to telepath a little like my “liberator”—that's scary!

I felt impatience grow a little. He (or it) thinks that this stuff is natural to me. Well if it is physiologically, I will still acclimatize a bit first. Moments later I saw complex pictures coming from the mind. Superimposed, I saw a man change to a bird. Then the communication ended. I lay there stunned by all the information, but it stuck. Basically, a detailed form is pictured in the mind's eye and the human form is “forced” into the form. Of course, according to the instruction I learned, it was a lot more than that.

That's strange! Now for the ultimate paradox: if I were able to do such a feat, how would I still be human? Would I mentally become the animal or thing that I imagined? If not, where is my mind? If so, how do I return? This disturbed me too much.

No answer. I searched around finding nothing there.

Alone again. How many times have I been left with my own resources? Too many. I pushed mind out further and found my friends and the strange mind with them. They were waiting expectantly. For what? Why don't they come and get me.

That was the strange mind. I'll have to meet it one of these days, I thought. Okay, I'll try it.

I didn't have a template to work from and there were so many different options. It took me a little while just to decide on a form. I chose a sparrow. First, it would make be small enough to get through these bands that were knumbing my hands. Second, I should get away easily.

I thought of the form carefully designing each detail I could remember. Then, transformed.

I felt really strange. Know what its like to be pulled (every bone and sinew) through your belly button? No? Neither did I until this moment. Somehow, though, I knew that I could not let this distract me. I felt my legs and arms shrink down further and further. I felt the feathers form and a tail sprout. I don't know how long it took, but the pain made it feel like an eternity.

Looking around I saw everything differently. First of all, I all around me and it was bright enough see everything like it was daylight but the colors were much more bright. I could clearly see the guards because they were almost glowing red. I heard things that I didn't before—insects moving around (this made me hungry), and men sleeping. Also, the odor was incredible—it was going to take a good long time to get used to these heightened senses.

I tried the new wings and saw the ropes that once held me. Now, how do I get these things to work? I thought to myself. This didn't occur to me when I chose the form. Oh, well, I chose it; it's up to me to get them to work. First, I started to pump them like I saw the birds once before. Immediately, I felt a lift but only slight. I also noticed that the cot was interfering with my attempts. I moved over the ledge and tried again.

Losing my balance, I fell off to the ground. I struggled back up and shook myself.
Again I tried the wings and found I was in the same problem as before—now the ground was interfering with my wings.

Why me?

I gave up and started to walk toward my companions. Soon, I found that my form really didn't lend itself to walking. What was I supposed to do now? Change back? Why not? Wait a minute…if I changed back I could freeze anyone on watch, but not before an alarm was raised. Well then what?

I stood there for a few minutes trying to decide when I was interrupted by one of my new acute senses. I heard the rush of wings overhead. I was out in the open. Instinctively, I took flight trying to reach the cover. Before I realized it, I was flying. Still, I couldn't be distracted. I didn't want to be eaten alive!

I landed in a tree on one of the lower branches just in time. But to my dismay, I found the tree not uninhabited. There were human-things in there. I started to take flight again when I heard a voice.

“Tome! It's us! Change back!”

It sounded familiar. Oper! But, where was he? I only saw human-things here. Wait a minute! He is human,…and so am I! Or, I was. Quickly I changed back, breaking the limb I was on and landing semi-regracefully on my rear. We paused for a minute to check if the guards heard the noise. Nothing.

I was then attacked by embraces—especially by Tolmar.

“We thought you were never going to get away,” Gamaz whispered patting me on the back. “By the way…” He pointed to my head. Not knowing what he was talking about, I reached up and found feathers instead of hair. Oops. That was an easy fix (well, sort of).

We moved away deep into the forest. Branches and leaves slapped me in the face. Finally when we got far enough, they sat me down for something like a debriefing.

I told them that all I knew was there were well trained men for magic and two leaders: Jaus and Dimer. Jaus did not like magic, yet wielded it. Dimer was the one started the magical storm. But, that was all I could remember. I never was any good at recognizance.

“Tome, why didn't you escape?” asked Tolmar.

“I felt I had to find out about the person who started the storm. When I was captured, I had a feeling that they were sent from him,” I responded carefully.

“You really were taking your chances,” Oper said. I was about to object when he raised his hand and continued, “I'm just saying that you have powers that I don't understand and your assuming that their mystique would protect you is foolishness.”

“Right he is,” said a voice from behind me. I turned and saw cloaked figure standing there. From the clothing, either the person was underweight or had a lousy tailor. He walked over to me carefully as if trying not to fall and placed his hand on my shoulder. Boney fingers with long talon-like nails gripped me.

Recognition beyond I would have ever expected from normal senses washed over me.

“You're…?”

“Fn'lor Canna. I am not human, and you're not either,” the voice said slowly. His hood moved as he looked from person to person. The movements were jerky like a bird.

“What are you talking about?” my voice almost lost control. I was quickly hushed and
the visitor squeezed painfully into my shoulder. Regaining a little control, I continued, “I am just like my companions!”

“Without magic, no human can change; no human can see minds.”

“You are right, Canna,” Gamaz stepped in. I looked at him wondering what he was talking about now. He of all should know of my humanity! “But, Tome is a sorcerer not a magic-wielder. That is why we called you; we thought that you would remember about the sorcerers of old. We need to know about Tome’s powers.”

I wanted to ask this guy why did he make me change if he knew that I was human. But, maybe he reasoned that I was not human by the fact that I saw into his mind. I was about to pursue this when I felt something change in the being's countenance. Something about “sorcerer” made Canna nervous and uneasy. The grip he had on my shoulder loosened, and he pulled away. Instinctively, I reached up and tried to rub the soreness away.

“Sorcerer? They're dead. Gone. I don't like them—they hurt us,” Canna said with a bitterness. “I cannot help you. You are friends, but I cannot help enemy!” The form started to shimmer and dissolve into a medium sized bird in mid-air that flew away.

“Canna! Canna, wait!” Oper called after him but to no avail. Turning to me he said, “you have quite a legacy to face!”

Without another word, we moved further out and resumed our trek towards Reilsa. When we were about five miles away from Dimer's clan, we found a small grove of trees and bedded down for the night. Something in what Canna had said made me worried, but I wasn't the only one. I could feel the same from each member of the party. Remember what I said a little while ago? You know, about this clan of loners and this uneasy relationship? Well, I got the distinct impression that this was about to be put to the test.

As I was about to fall asleep, something knudged me in the back of my mind. I was really tired and was going to ignore it. It had been a full day. Still, the prompting persisted; so, I relented my need to sleep and got up to look around for what was calling me.

Reaching a tree I found Botham perched on a branch. I walked up slowly and carefully touched the plumage renewing our friendship. It had been so long! I felt a further nudging and looked up at Botham. His penetrating and trustful eyes turned. Following his gaze, I saw another bird that was much smaller than Botham. The image shimmered, and within moments, I saw Canna!

“Canna! I thought…you didn't like sorcerers…!” I stood there confused (and tired—I wished silently for a good night's sleep).

“I am sorry. I judged too quickly,” he said carefully. “With your friends, you are different,” he continued repentantly and almost reluctantly.

I looked at the two of them. Was there some kind of pressure I was not aware of? I looked carefully at Botham, but decided to log the question for some other day. Having another companion would have been rather burdensome, so I just decided to gather information. “Canna, can you tell me why those men who captured me started the storm?”

Canna perked his head up quickly, paused for a minute, then shook his head negatively. “Tell me about the sorcerers.”

The question made the man/bird uncomfortable and he began to fidget. Looking up he saw Botham and turned directly back to me. “They used to capture and kill us. Sometimes
they would change us into monsters that would destroy other men.”

Somewhat sympathetic to his discomfort, I asked one last question: “How long has it been?”

“Four hundred breedings.”

“Thank you, Canna. And, may your nest be always full,” I found myself saying. Now, where did that come from? Judging from Canna's expression before he left, I had said the right thing. Maybe my flirtation with transformation has left some residue thought patterns. I'm not sure I like that. Just before I returned to the camp, I stroked the feathers and said “Goodnight”.

When I got back to the camp, I noticed it was Oper's turn for watch. I sat down next to him and wished some way to express my doubts about going to the competition. But, I said nothing. I watched the night and wondered about the “gifts” I have acquired over time. Were they something that I had when I got here? Were they something I should be wary of? Either way, just as my sensing abilities had become part of me, I was finding myself more and more dependent upon these abilities. That unsettled me most of all. What if they were taken away right at the time I most needed them—right when I put myself in an awkward position. Yes, that last escapade was more than just stupid. I thought about what I did and what I did to my companions. They must have thought my actions were very foolish. Well, they were.

Back when I first came to this world (are there any others like me?), the kingdom threw me in a dungeon that had a magic wall. I wondered what the significance was. It would be nice to go back somehow and learn more about it. Maybe there is a link between it and the sorcerers of old. Why would I want to know more about those sadistic men (according to Canna)? First, I would like to know what I was up against (if I were discovered). Second, that was one perspective. Only one! There must be more truth than from one witness.

“Oper?”

“Yes, Tome.”

“What were the sorcerers of old like?”

There was a pause. Yes, he had been thinking about that too.

“The only thing I know is that they tried to take over and rule the world with their craft.”

“Why is that any different from wizardry?”

“Sorcerers could combine their power and be more powerful than a single man. Wizardry can't combine efforts. When two wizards try to combine effort either the spells get entangled or nullify themselves. Gamaz and I tried to teach you the semantics of magic, but we could never push it into you. You had to find your way by yourself. That will be different and distinct from everyone else. So, it would be incompatible.”

“Do you remember that wall at the first kingdom?”

“No, but you told me about it,” Oper said.

“I wonder if it relates to the sorcerers of the past.”

“That is something I had not considered. I would rather go to that kingdom than go to this competition.”

“Why?”

“Some might recognize me. I don't want that.”
“Why?” I was beginning to feel like a five-year old with nothing but “why?” to ask. Still, I wanted to know why the guard who sliced my arm felt Oper to be a threat. Also are there other complications that I need to be concerned about.

“It's nothing you need to worry about,” he said unconvincingly. “If we go to the competition, I will wait in the woods. There is no need for any problems during your class-time,” he continued referring to the learn-by-example. “Just do me one favor—” I turned to look at him. “Don't try anything until you are away from unwanted spectators.”

I didn't hear his last statement. Something was wrong. The normal night noise was quieter and more distant. Instinctively, I thrust my mind out to sense what was out in the trees. Dimer and Jaus! How did they get here?

I switched to the personal language. “Oper, we have company.” Just then, I felt a cold object at my neck. Judging from Oper's mute response, I gathered that he was likewise impressed. Soon our companions were with us. I watched them as they approached. For being asleep they seemed perfectly awake now. It still takes me a few minutes to get my senses back. I wonder how they do it. The question in their eyes was the same as ours—how did Dimer get by us so easily?

Dimer stepped out with his hood down and surveyed his captives. There were at least ten men standing with swords on my friends or around the periphery. My friends seemed perfectly content to wait for Dimer to speak. I was not so patient.

“How did you find us?” I blurted out. Oper gave me a jab in the ribs. Maybe I should learn a little patience. That jab hurt.

“Well, it seems that not only do we have our captive back, but we have his clan and…,” he paused dramatically while watching me, “we have a sorcerer too.”

I stiffened and the cold blade cut my neck a little. I felt blood begin to drip. In the night light, I could tell Oper and Gamaz were pretty calm. Tolmar showed a little emotion. Good! At least I am not the only edgy one there.

Dimer stepped towards me. “Do you know what we do with sorcerers? No? It has been a long time, but we could re-instate it. Don't worry; it is very quick.”

“How did you find us?” I repeated.

“Let's say that a little bird told me,” he beckoned the shadows, and Canna stepped out. Our jaws dropped. “You see, he tells me everything—especially what should concern me like a new sorcerer.” Canna tried not to look at me. I could not understand his deception.<Why?> I asked him.

He turned his back to me and did not respond.

Seeing what happened, Dimer looked at me and brushed it aside. “Do you have anything to say?” He posed the question to me and waited. I didn't say anything. “There is a price for sorcery in another land. I could turn this situation into something profitable for me.”

The thought of being sold like property would not make someone very comfortable. Well, I was feeling rather uncomfortable at the moment. I looked at Gamaz and Tolmar. Gamaz sternly looked at me; I got the feeling that he was worried. Tolmar glanced at me a couple times, but mostly hid her emotions. I could not see Oper. I wondered about this “sorcery-price” stuff. Would that mean that someone is willing to buy sorcerers? If so, that
would mean that they would still have to exist, because a market exists. If there is no market, no one would want it or none is available. I could certainly understand how someone would want a sorcerer. Therefore, the only remaining criterion is that they are still around (or those searching for them still exist). The problem is that we were not sure if I did sorcery. Sure I did something, but what if it were entirely different from what they want? That could be bad.

Seeing that he was not going to get another response, Dimer motioned to move us. By this point, the cut on my neck had either stopped bleeding or I could no longer feel it. I hoped the former. I felt a gruff hand lift me up while the blade held me under control. I was getting a little tired of being treated like a captive all of the time, but I couldn't think of what to do.

“So you're more than a wizard, Wizard,” I heard the voice in my ear. Jaus. Just my luck. “In my home we used to bake wizards over a slow fire. I would enjoy doing that again,” he purred. By this point I was pretty certain that I did not like Jaus, but I like Canna and Dimer even less. Why? Just a whim, I guess.

As I was led back to Dimer's camp, I searched for Botham. Not there. I wonder where he could be? Well, he can take care of himself. We walked the rest of the night. By the time we got to the campsite, the sun was just above the horizon. Jaus stayed with me the entire way back, I wondered carefully. Why was that so significant? Well, think about it: we were about four miles away from the camp. Holding a knife at my throat all that way must have been very tiring. Still, I was not as tall as he was, but I figured he was probably tired by now. Or, he hates sorcery that much. I really couldn't decide.

“Fortunately, we have managed to learn how to hold sorcerers a few centuries ago,” Dimer said as he returned from his tent with a large ring. A second later he had snapped it on around my neck. “That should make it difficult for you to escape,” he sized up the fit with satisfaction. “I wouldn't try any of your sorcery with that on—it may strangle you.” Turning to Jaus, he said: “You don't need to restrain him any longer; as long as he has the collar and we hold his companions he won't do anything.”

Reluctantly, Jaus released his grip but would not move away from me. That concerned me a little. First of all I wanted to confer with my friends. But that was soon impossible as I watched them each bound and gagged. I really do make it difficult for them. I watched each motion each action around the camp. That was the first time that I wasn't sure what to do. I couldn't just leave, but something was urging me to do so. No, I had to stay.

I walked around with my shadow (Jaus) and watched the others. Mostly, the others now ignored me. It was as if I was no threat at all. However when I walked near Dimer's tent, Jaus was quick on my side encouraging me to detour (swords are very persuasive). There were a couple campfires that burned low in the ground. There really wasn't much else to see, so I went over to my companions and sat down. Jaus just stood behind me. They didn't have much to say (probably because Jaus was there or they were gagged), so I sat silently.

I thought about what I got myself into this time. Yeah, I was feeling sorry for myself—and my friends. A thought came to me: I was never really sure if my abilities stem from "sorcery". Since I've got the time and I have a way to test it (the collar), I might as well find out. I thought about it; if I was a sorcerer and when I used the power, the collar would
constrict. I really didn't want to strangle myself so I had to do something that was not “monumental”. Now, what wouldn't be very monumental? How about moving something very light? Yeah, that might work.

I looked about and tried to find something appropriate. I found a loose rock near my feet. I didn't want to move a rock—that's too easy. Looking up, I noticed Gamaz's gaze and found desperation. The others were looking down. I resumed my search. Not finding anything appropriate, I gave up and decided to move the stupid rock. I focused on it and concentrated. After a second or two, nothing had happened, and I was tired. I straightened my shoulders and looked up at Gamaz again. Wait a second! I was trying too hard. I tried again.

This time I used some of my emotions: frustration from being captive, dislike to Dimer, disgust to Canna, etc. and focused. Suddenly, there was a loud bang as the rock was powdered. Everyone in the circle startled including Jaus who drew his sword and lifted over my head. But, the collar didn't constrict! A series of thoughts flashed through my mind. The first I acted on: I grabbed my throat, jerked my head back and proceeded to pull on the collar. I also held my breath and collapsed on the ground.

As I thrashed about, a cry went out and several men rushed over to watch the wicked sorcerer die. Well, sorry but I couldn't hold my breath that long. Finally, I let go of the collar and relaxed, feigning unconsciousness.

“What is the meaning of this!” Yelled Dimer. “Move out of the way!” I felt him kneel down next to me and check my pulse. Then he probed around the collar. I hoped that my pulling on the collar put deep enough of marks to satisfy him. “Pick him up! Jaus! You're fortunate that he didn't die! You should have stopped him! If he dies, you die with him!” I think he was satisfied.

I found myself being lifted up and placed on a stretcher. As they carried me, I groaned and lifted my hand to my head. Coughing, I massaged my throat and opened my eyes. The face I saw was hardly a beautiful nurse who loves to take care of her patients. Instead I saw Jaus' glower. If I keep this up, I will have the best enemy someone could ever want. They carried me into a large tent and set me down. Well, let me rephase that—Jaus dropped the litter about ten centimeters from the ground. I landed with a little jar. I shot a scowl at Jaus but decided not to confront him.

Everyone left the tent except Jaus who still shadowed me. I sat up and feigned another headache. I had to make it convincing. Now, what should I do? I apparently do not have to worry about the collar—so, escape is possible. But what should I do about my “companion at arms”? I looked up at him, but he only ignored me. I wasn't sure if I wanted to talk to him. After all he was not exactly what I would call being approachable. Imagine what he would say if I told him, “This collar is very uncomfortable”? Do you think that I would get a sympathetic response? Still I had to try.

“How long have you been working for Dimer?” I asked trying to start a conversion.

“That is not your concern,” he said flatly without turning to face me.

“Just a simple question,” I said plainly.

“Six months, Wizard.”

I stopped for a second and looked at him. I was a little surprised that he actually shared
the information without any more prodding. “I get the impression that he didn't intend to
find a sorcerer in these parts; so why was he here?” I decided to go for my original question
when I first met these men. It couldn't hurt now: I was given so many noncommittal
answers that at least an argument is better than boring silence. The answer I got was hardly
what I expected.

Jaus did something that looked like a shrug and stepped to face me. “Dimer was not
invited to the competition,” was all he said. Still, I could see that he was more relaxed and
less threatened by me. Why? He uses magic too. Nothing like stereotyping-hypocrisy to
sour a conversation.

“You mean to tell me that he caused all of this damage just because he wasn't invited?”
I asked incredulously. My voice was little more accusing than I wanted. I was sorry I said
anything the moment I blurted it out.

“Yeah, a little bratty, I think,” he said with a smirk and folded his arms. Again I was
shocked. Why is he opening up to me? Could it be that he is no longer threatened because
of this useless collar? If that was the reason, he is definitely not going to trust me after he
find out that I faked everything.

Then it occurred to me. That storm was more than it was supposed to be. Why?
Because, he was barely able to protect the camp. Something had gone wrong.

I sat there thinking about that possibility. Jaus looked at me and then looked out the tent
flap. Turning back to me, I saw something in his expression. At first I was perplexed. Then
I realized something: he and I were alone in the tent. I began to worry a little more than
usual. Jaus walked up to me and squatted down in front of me.

“Wizard, you faked the collar's constriction, didn't you?” He said in a hushed tone with
a slight grin. I was shocked. How did he know? What was I supposed to do?

“Yes, I did.” I needed to gain his confidence—even if it meant that I lose my advantage.
“What are you going to do?” He looked at me and grinned. He stepped up to the tent flap
again, looked outside and left.

I sat there alone for several minutes thinking about the possibilities. Most of the
possibilities rested on Jaus's integrity and loyalty. The day waned. I didn't know what was
going to happen, but no one had killed me yet. In fact, the camp was still calm during dinner
and towards the night. All the guards were talking loudly or were busy eating. They even
fed us. How did Jaus know that I faked the scene? Why did he tell me? What was he going
to do now?

After dinner, I was led back into the tent. A few minutes later, I heard Jaus's loud voice.
He stepped into the tent. I was sitting on my cot, my only restraint: an ineffective collar. He
looked at me and closed the tent flap.

“How did you know that the collar didn't work?” I asked.

“I've strangled people before: their faces turn blue not red. Also, as you were grasping
the collar, you left marks on the back of your neck. If the collar had actually been
constricting, you would have left deeper marks from your fingers on the front of your neck.”
His answer was punctuated with a wry grin.

I looked at him in amazement. “Why didn't you tell Dimer?”

“What makes you think I didn't?”

Copyright © Sean Walton 1998
“I am assuming you didn't, because the camp is very relaxed—including Dimer.”
“That's my business,” he said leaning against a pole. “I will make sure that you and your friends don't get away! You are worth more alive than dead.”
“Do you intend to sell us?”
“Not your friends—you! As Dimer had said, the price for a sorcerer is very high in other lands. Here you are dead; there are enough people here who remember what the sorcerers did that they will immediately burn you if the discover your true nature.” His tone gave me shivers. I looked away and thought about this bondage.
“I will go with you willingly, but let my friends go.”
“How very selfless of you,” he said with a sneer. “No, with your comrades with you, you will more willing to oblige us.”
“For a man that respects honor, you really have a strange sense of loyalty and honesty,” I growled. He shot a look at me, but I had my head in my hands. I did not look back. Instead, I lay down and tried to get some rest. I heard some movement in the tent as Jaus settled himself.
I broke the silence, “You told me that Dimer conjured the storm. You didn't tell me what went wrong: why wasn't Dimer able to control it?”
“For a wizard, you ask a lot of stupid questions,” was all I got.

Early next morning, the camp was packed and we began our trek. It didn't take long to figure out that we were not going to Reilsa. We found a road and began following it southeast. We went through one town; I was surprised that no one noticed us. How can anyone not notice that fact that we had about fifteen guards and four prisoners? The fact that our group looked so conspicuous made me wonder even more about those towns we went through. Maybe there was a spell on us—I can't believe I would be thinking this! I'm starting to blame more and more on magic. Maybe there was a simpler solution: maybe the people were just plain blind!

All of us were riding horses. My companions followed behind us—why I don't know. Perhaps it had something to do with my dubious worth as a slave. With my friends behind me I little more to do that to try conversation with those around me. Naturally, that didn't turn out too well.

“So how long have you been working for Dimer,” I asked one guard. After waiting for a long while and not hearing anything, I decided that I could find more amusement by fiddling with the knots on my wrists. Sure, when I was walking around, I wasn't tied up. But when we rode, they felt that they couldn't let me control my horse. I guess was just fine—I still feared ever being on one of those beasts in a full run!

We stopped at the next town and found some lodging. It had been so long since I slept in a real bed, I savored the mere thrill of walking into the tavern. I looked at the barkeep and my heart sunk briefly: he looked a lot like the Mirror from my previous adventures. Calming myself from sheer panic, walked through the dining hall (staring at him—and him at me!) to where we were led. The stables! Bleah! Oh, well, I guess that could do for a while, but I sware, Dimer is cheap!

My companions had not been able to say much during the trip. I guess that was since they were still gagged. No doubt Gamaz or Oper were working hard on an escape plan, but
they were hardly in a position to divulge their genius.

“Hey, Jaus,” I called.

Jaus looked up from untacking his horse. He has been a little friendlier since the night before. He walked over rubbing hands to get the horse’s sweat off. “What do you want, Wizard?” Maybe our blooming friendship needs a little more fertilizer. Looking around the stalls, maybe not…

“I was wondering if you could loose my friends for a while?” I asked.

“No.” He walked around to each one and checked the knots.

Maybe he does need some fertilizer, I scowled. Somehow, going to this place to sell me off didn't make me very happy. Maybe it's servitude that rubs me the wrong way—mostly, I can't see myself as a servant to anyone. But what about my friends? They aren't any use to Dimer: so why are they being brought. Even more, what is going to happen to them? There was only one conclusion: as soon as they have worn out their usefulness, they're as good as fish bate.

Jaus was still working with the ropes. So I attempted to get more information from him. “Jaus,” started softly, “what happened with the storm? Why was it out of control?”

Jaus stopped and looked at me for a long time. From his feelings I could tell I touched on something that he felt strongly about. He made some aggressive pulls at the rope he was tying making sure that it held. I began to wonder whether I had pushed that topic once too many times. Then, he walked towards me, his attitude was definitely foul. Before I could say anything, he dragged me to my feet and pushed me at knife-point out beyond the edge of the woods and beyond the light within the stable.

When we finally stopped we must have traveled at least a kilometer or two. What would Dimer think of this kidnapping from his kidnapping? I suspected that nothing good would come if he knew.

“So, Wizard, you want to know?” Jaus said in low and gruff tones. He stepped around to face me, his knife still poised. “I lost five good men to his foolishness!” He pointed emphatically back at the camp. A hunch indicated he was talking about Dimer. “When he started that thing, the storm began to attack the camp—it was supposed to attack at least two miles from us! And that witch! She kept us from stopping him. Before the storm moved away, trees had fallen on five of my men. There was nothing we could do.” His tone was softening, but there was still much ire.

“Started what thing?” I asked during the short break.

He glared at me and said, “He had this little glass bowl of some kind. From it he conjures the things he wants.”

His hatred for magic wielders seemed tangible and reasonable. I thought about his reference to his men, which implied that they were a group before Dimer came along. “So, you lead a group of mercenaries which Dimer hired?” I didn't really want to say “mercenaries” but I didn't know another way to say it in the common tongue. Mercenaries are solders who are without honor in this culture. Jaus is a man of honor.

His reaction to my malapropism was mild but understood. “Yes, Dimer hired us to raid Reilsa. He was angry because they would not allow him to compete. The way he worked that bowl, I understand why he was rejected.
“We were supposed to wait until the storm had destroyed the turrets and the gate. He claimed that he could control the storm enough to do that. When the ceremony began, it became obvious that the bowl was controlling him—he actually appeared to enjoy the destruction! That fool!”

After a long silence, he looked at me and said, “Wizard, why did you enter my dream?” My jaw dropped. I was expecting an entirely different question or request. How did he know? Only one way to find out.

“How did you know…?” I actually began to fear him. I am used to being in control, due to my feeble, untamed gifts. Wait a minute… How could I possibly be in control if my gifts are untamed? I'll have to consider that later.

He brushed aside the question and repositioned the knife. “Why did you enter my dream?”

I sputtered for a minute, trying to come up with an adequate reason. Finally, all I could say was: “I felt that you were an honorable person, and I wanted your confidence.” That was very hard to say! Why? I have always been plain (or should I say “blunt”) with people. But consider, you are standing in front of a person that holds your life at his hands. What you say and how you say it are going to be very important. Sure, I could disarm him with a thought, but his trust is more important than my safety. Safety is drawn from trust.

He seemed impressed by my answer; the knife was sheathed. He grabbed my arm and walked me back to the stable. Nothing more was said; his grasp was firm but not aggressive. I had a lot to think about.

We walked a little distance; I was surprised that we had actually walked that far. I began to sense something beyond what I could see. Jaus appeared to notice it too. We slowed and became more cautious. The knife was back in Jaus's right hand. I didn't know whether to try to break free or try to defend myself. I still wasn't sure if Jaus trusted me.

I felt the hair on the back of my neck rise. I turned around, breaking Jaus's hold on me, and looked behind us. At first I didn't see anything. I stopped to peer closer at the deep forests. Jaus notice what I was doing and looked the same direction.

“Day'nah!” He gasped.

“What?” I strained to see anything moving.

“Shut up! Get down!” He grabbed me and planted my face into the ground. I came up spitting leaves and dirt. At first, I was about to say something to the affect “Why the hell did you do that?”, but I thought the better of it.

I began to feel something—more than one something—surround us. There were four or five, but I couldn't see anything. They moved, shadowed and dark, without sound. They were…hungry, yes, I guess that would be the word. I looked at Jaus. He was poised for a fight, his large knife waiting. He was afraid. The was no possibility that he could fend them off. I started to rummage around in the loose, dead leave. Nothing. No branch, no stick. Who cleaned up this forest?

I didn't want to do it, but I concentrated on one of the creatures. I couldn't see it, so I felt where it was. And, I focused. I heard a low, wet thump with a sound of tree limbs snapping. It was no longer there. The creatures waivered. Again I focused on another one. Again, the low, wet thump. The last three fled.
I looked up and saw Jaus staring down at me, his face white and his mouth agape. I began to smell something rank (behinds the rotting leaves—in my hair and mouth). It smelled like rotting flesh topped with honey—made me gag a little. I looked around and still couldn't see the creatures. There were reddish-brown splotches of something scattered all over the forest floor and trees. These creatures apparently left us with a bang.

Getting up, I started walking back to the campsite, trying to avoid the fleshy lumps and shattered bone. I wonder what those things looked like… Jaus still had not said anything; he just followed along behind me. I think he was stunned.

“What do those things look like?” I asked breaking the cold silence. With leaves stuck in it, the collar began to annoy me; it was not hard to remove.

“Do you have any idea what a day'nah is?” He finally blurted.

“No. I don't even know what they look like,” I said still pulling leaves out from my tunic. I took off my tunic and shook it.

“Didn't you see them?”

“No.”

Jaus' expression shifted to a humorously perplexed expression. “You didn't see them and yet you can destroy them.” He stated trying to let that one sink in.

“Yeah.” As I think back to this time, I didn't see them, because I couldn't. To this day, I still don't know what those things looked like. All I know is that made my life a little more interesting: there were creatures in this world that others could see, but I could not.

We walked in silence for what seemed a long time. We really did walk quite a ways into the forest, didn't we? I thought about the events that led up to this point. Here I had powers that could be very hazardous if used wrongly. I was a prisoner to a mercenary and a mad wizard. Now there are some who want to have this kind of power. Somehow, I feel that my life could have been a little less interesting. Well, maybe not.

We got back to the stables the place in shambles and several men were dead among them were Dimer and the old witch. I looked around trying to absorb the scene. What happened? Jaus had his knife in his hand again and went from body to body.

“Most my men—dead; two got away,” he said finally.

“Where are my friends?”

He looked at the ground. “It looks like they were taken through there.” He pointed at the stable door. The straw and dirt on the ground was cast about in grooves and bunches, showing a struggle and something being dragged.

I headed after the marks. When I reached the door, a hand grabbed me and threw me head over heals into a pile of straw. “What the…!” I looked up and saw Jaus standing over me. His hands were open and arms extended like large tongs reaching for some fresh meat on the barbecue. “Jaus, I don’t know what has gotten into you—you know I am not your enemy.” I realized that my rationale may not be very convincing. In fact, I wasn’t convinced myself.

“I have lost my men and my money,” he growled. “Do you think I am going to let you go? You wizards are all alike; power is more important than lives. We will find your friends…my way! And, then, we will see about my money.”

“Is that all that is important to you?” After thinking for a minute about his “proposal.”
Tome 2

“That all I have left!”

Amazing. I looked at him. In his eyes there was nothing else: no glory, no fulfillment, nothing. Only money. I pitied him. What I see in life is its adventure, and maybe, I can help someone along the way. My hopes of finding an ally in him faded. He disgusted me.

“You can come along if you wish. I can take care of myself: I don’t need you. If you want money, I can’t help you—but I will not be sold. I don’t believe that I will be much use to you dead.”

If it were possible, Jaus’ eyes would burn like a pot in a kiln. “Then I guess you will have to die.” He drew his knife and moved towards me.

Didn’t he hear me? I said that I would not be much to him dead. What’s so hard to understand about that? His hands were out ready to parry any attack. I crawled backward. I was about to freeze him when I realized that he normally is very fast when he attacks, leaving little chance for his opponent. So, why was he going so slowly? Something caught my attention: Jaus’ eyes were glancing to his right periodically: as if he wanted me to look in that direction.

I shot a look and didn’t anything. Jaus was still approaching. Was it a trick? Jaus’ expression was turning desperate. This time I shot my mind in that direction and immediately found two strangers. I froze them.

“You’re not very quick are you, wizard!” Jaus said with a low growl as he relaxed his stance.

I stood up to see what I had frozen. “How was I supposed to know you were faking? First your very convincing, and second, I thought you were serious about that money stuff.” I walked past him and over to the statues.