

The Awakening of Navi Septa Part Three
The Swarm of Bees
By Linda Williams

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Appendix

A Few Extracts from the Prophecy

Some characters in this book

* Indicates characters we have met in the earlier books

The seven young people of the prophecy

- *Raynor Antiquarian
- *Tandi Riverside, Raynor's wife
- *Asha Herbhealer, married to Robin Markand
- *Derwin Herbhealer, Asha's brother
- *Conwenna Prospector
- *Lee Restorer, Asha's cousin
- *Ahren Dairyman

Helpers from the north

- *Robin Markand: partisan from Chussan
- *Prince Roarke of Vittalia
- *King Rajay of Daish Shaktay
- *Namoh Hillfarmer: Rajay's friend
- *Valya Northwestern: Rajay's friend
- *Bonor: Rajay's bodyguard
- *Hampen the Tong: naval captain
- *Zafan and Dan: sometime pirates and now naval captains
- *Merien: son of the Prime Minister to the Emperor of the Ocean

People on the Island of Creations

- *Lord Jarwhen
- *Lady Mercola: his wife
- *Pa Ganoozal: Lord Jarwhen's right hand man
- *Ma Ganoozal: his wife

The Teletsians

- Lord Coban: the Pearl Lord of Teletsia
- *Stellamar: his daughter
- *Kitab Antiquarian and Mrs Antiquarian: Raynor's parents
- Berny Restorer and *Mrs Restorer: Lee's parents
- Mr and *Mrs Herbhealer: Asha and Derwin's parents
- *Mr Prospector: Conwenna's father
- *Drusilla Prospector: Conwenna's aunt
- Wale Fisher and Mrs Fisher: working for the Restorers
- Saman and Freddi: failed assassins
- Euclip, Rollo, Chariss and Munnir: freed slaves
- Mr and *Mrs Riverside and *Gwant and *Mabron: Tandi's family
- *Mr and Mrs Dairyman: Ahren's parents
- Erin Heber: Duke of Castle Mount
- Resistance Group members: the Dyeman family, Fern Innkeeper, Coffius Coffeeman, Mr, Mrs and Zoey Herder, Sparkly and Borry Diamondcutter, The Woodseller family, Pat Foodman and Pastow
- Professor, Garma and Saray Nalanda from Gyan-on-Sea University
- General Woodenton: General, Teletsian army
- *Some of the Head Sorcerers: His Supreme Lordship, Head of the Special Secret Police, Head of the Intelligence Service, Master of Annihilations, Master of the Spy Birds, Chief Priest for War and Weaponry, et cetera

Prologue

Over five years ago, my younger brother Derwin, my cousin Lee, myself and four other young people – Raynor, Tandi, Ahren and Conwenna, from the country of Teletsia, were chased off to the north of our world on what most sensible people would have called an insane, unachievable journey. Maybe they were right, but sane people are not always the ones to listen to. Hounded by the Sorcerers who ruled Teletsia and wanted us back, dead or alive, we finally made it to our goal, the hidden kingdom of Sasrar. We had a lot of help, without which we would never have even got out of Teletsia, let alone to Sasrar. In this elusively ordinary country we learnt many things, the most valuable being of a subtle, powerful and spiritual nature.

Two years later, Lee, his friend Ahren and I went south to the country of Daish Shaktay, where we helped put the rightful heir, Rajay Ghiry, on the throne. He was, to begin with, a partisan and we joined forces. The boys did the sort of things brave freedom fighters do, while my role was to give inner spiritual awakening.

One of the people in this part of the saga was Robin Markand, from Chussan City, south of Sasrar. He guided us across the desert in the southeast of Chussan so we could find Rajay Ghiry in the first place, and risked his life in doing so, because he was an outlaw at the time. Robin and I met up again in Daish Shaktay, as he played a key role in the war there, and to my surprise he asked me to become his wife, which I naturally did.

Chussan was then governed by a nasty collaboration between the priests, who dominated peoples' minds, and two ruthless brothers, Shaitan and Kaitan, who controlled them politically. Robin, and Lord Albion, the rightful ruler who was then in hiding, made Chussan ungovernable. They and others gave inner awakening to many people there and as a result the predominantly sensible folk of Chussan realised their religion was a con trick and even felt quite ill when they went to the temples. Plus these people did not suddenly have a whole host of problems, as the priests threatened they would, if they stopped bowing down to their ritualistic mumbo-jumbo, and no longer gave these priests a hefty portion of their wages. People were no longer completely addicted to strong drink, because as their awaked subtle systems became more sensitive they no longer desired alcohol. The numerous drink shops lost customers and money, but more so the priests did, because they had the monopoly on growing and distilling it. The economy was in free fall because it relied on taxes from alcohol and money donated to the temples.

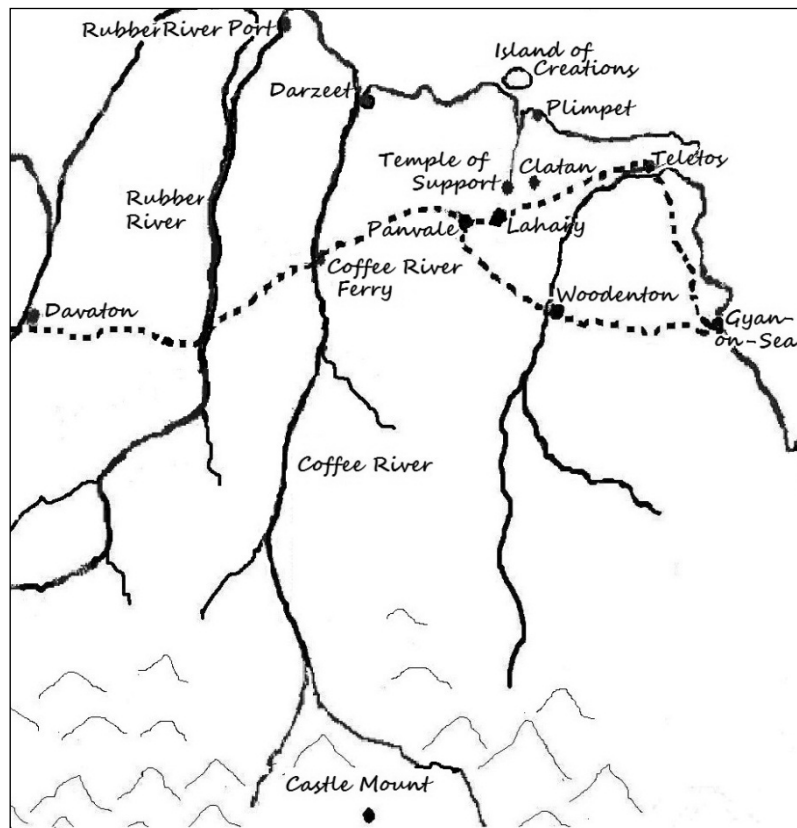
All over the country people demanded change. Lamech, the headman of a nomad tribe, raised an army and prepared to march on Chussan City, but Albion asked him and the other groups of Robin's resistance network to wait until the rotten, overripe fruit of the regime was ready to fall; only then would he allow the possibility of war. One summer's day the flying horses took Albion and Robin, along with Raynor and Ahren, to Lamech's army on the plains. Once those animals put their feet on the land of lower Chussan events moved fast, because the horses embodied the power of positive destruction and wherever they put their feet they set this off. In Chussan the flying horses had a good effect on the minds of the people, possibly because this was the country that corresponded to the sixth subtle centre, within us in the brain. By the time Lamech, Albion and the cavalry closed in on Chussan City, the rulers had fled.

The Chussan army and police hadn't been paid for months so lacked enthusiasm to defend the capital and the majority deserted by the time Albion reached town. The rest surrendered and Albion pardoned everyone who had been a part of the former regime provided they admitted their crimes and asked for forgiveness from the families of their victims. Albion emphasised the power of forgiveness as the way forward and many people did nobly forgive those who had

given them much grief. Albion offered Robin an important position in the new government, but he said he had other things to do.

'My wife is from Teletsia,' he explained, 'and those people are still groaning in pain from their evil rulers. Now Chussan is free, it's time to go there.'

As in the other two books of this trilogy, I, Asha, am the narrator.



A Map of Teletsia

Chapter 1 The Jewel Merchant

Robin Markand, alias Ron Jeweller, arrived in the city of Teletos on a Daish Shaktay warship, the Queen Zulani. It was a stately galleon with three masts, many sails and a line of cannons on each side. It was the first ship to visit Teletsia from Daish Shaktay since Rajay Ghiry had become king, because until now he had discouraged contact with this inauspicious country.

Teletos, the capital, was built on a number of islands in the estuary of a river, and Robin landed unobtrusively and disappeared into the business quarter, leaving Namoh Hillfarmer, now Lord Santara, to attract attention. Namoh announced he was from King Rajay, on an official mission to buy guns, as Teletsia had the best cannon foundries. With him was Valya, Lord Northwestern, who had come to iron out a few diplomatic problems. These were not the main reasons for the voyage. Robin was, and the other two were just to detract from that.

Robin was finding Teletos uncomfortable. The climate was hot and the vibrations were dire. He had a small lime in his pocket, to absorb some of the subtle heat and pervasive evil, but it didn't do much good, like trying to keep warm in a blizzard with a candle. Except this was the

reverse and his body reacted to this ill-fated land by becoming hot and sweaty, in an attempt to throw off the disturbing negativity permeating the place. Robin had put a darkening juice on his face and hands and had dyed his hair black. He was tall and broad shouldered, like many northerners; his features were regular and his eyes brown, nevertheless his disguise wasn't too bad. It wouldn't do if people immediately recognised him as coming from Chussan or Sasrar, because the High Priests, commonly known as Sorcerers, who ruled Teletsia, knew their prophesied downfall had a lot to do with these countries. Robin spent the morning setting up his 'cover'. He deposited his jewels in a reliable bank, made contact with some reputable jewellers, found a good hotel for him and his bodyguard, and they both had lunch. After this he put his feet up for a rest and considered the events that had led up to this moment.

The plan had been worked out in Chussan City the previous autumn, when, a few months before, Rajay and some of his friends went there for Albion's coronation. Prince Roarke of Vittalia had brought them up in his flying ship; he had done major modifications on it so it would now go to other countries. It had something to do with the fact that since so many people now had awakened Trees of Life, it was possible to draw on the energy of Mother Earth and Father Sky in a different way.

The day after the coronation Robin and I, Asha, had invited Rajay and the others from Daish Shaktay out for a meal at the best restaurant in town, run by an ex-partisan friend of Robin's. We walked through the streets of the city from the palace, which was set in large grounds. Albion had insisted on some bodyguards accompanying us, but as we strolled along the broad avenues of the city centre we felt safe, because most people recognised us and knew who our guests were.

The locals stood aside for us, greeted us respectfully and many even cheered us, because Robin was famous now, and very popular, and many folk of Chussan knew the stories about Rajay, the brave and gallant young king of Daish Shaktay. We stopped to say a few words to people we knew personally, soon turned up a side street and entered the restaurant, on the ground floor of an old townhouse, at the back of the central courtyard. We sat at a large table that Robin's friend had specially prepared – a crisp white tablecloth, bunches of flowers and the best china – and the table was near the open doors onto the garden, behind which were the high wooded hills that surrounded the city. Rajay asked Robin and me to sit next to him.

'So, Asha, how's life in the mountains?' he began, because we had been living in a cottage near the three astrologers, in the village of Upper Dean.



‘Quite a change from Malak Citadel!’ I laughed. ‘I spent last winter trying to keep warm and helping to reprint the original version of the holy book of Chussan, written by their prophet, who was a simple potter.’

‘Tell me more.’

‘I worked with a man who has a printing press in the village. He’s also a bookbinder and we got a lot of books ready to send down to the plains. Albion has no desire to destroy the religion of Chussan; he just wants everyone to get it right. The priests had changed it so much in order to mesmerise and frighten people so they could dominate them, and make money out of them.’

‘Anyway, one day I was in the astrologers’ library, an enormous room lined from floor to ceiling with books, and was at the shelf where we kept the original of the potter’s book. I noticed a small, leather bound volume with the words Teletsian Prophecy (Chussan version) embossed on the spine in gold letters. It was in our Chussan dialect, so I took it home to read because the library was freezing. Later Albion came to supper with us, as he often did. He explained that the potter who wrote the sacred book of Chussan, which we were reprinting, and the author of the Teletsian prophecy were the same person. When he’d written the prophecy, he had to leave Teletsia and went to live in Chussan. He worked as a potter to disguise his identity, because he was a learned man and a guardian. In the version of the Teletsian prophecy at the astrologer’s house there’s a very interesting section called The Swarm of Bees.’

‘It tells how once the world was nearly destroyed by a terrible devil who had a special power: he couldn’t be killed by anything on two or four legs. So the Creator made a swarm of bees and told them to go and sting him. They did and the devil died, because there were thousands of them and they had six legs. The bees were reborn again and again, evolving through all the levels of creation. It was foretold that these bees, now people, would search for and find some higher knowledge. Like bees, which are collectively aware of their queen and operate almost like one organism, these people would have one overwhelmingly strong desire – to put the world right when the outlook again looked bad. Maybe we from Teletsia and people like your friends are those same souls.’

‘Could be. It’s cool on my hands when you say that and the vibrations are flowing strongly,’ Rajay replied. ‘Any attempt to liberate Teletsia certainly will have to be a group effort; there’s no way you seven Teletsians and Robin could do it alone, but we must try something. If the country which corresponds to the first centre of the earth’s Tree of Life is not alright, the whole world will suffer.....’

Robin recalled what had happened next in the restaurant. He had heard children’s voices and turned to see Raynor’s young wife Tandi come through the door. She had five children with her – her twin girls, another small girl and two boys, Robin’s sister’s children. Tandi saw us with Rajay, smiled, greeted him respectfully and made for a table in the further corner, but the boys had other ideas and ran over to us before she could stop them.

‘Hello Uncle Robin! Aunt Tandi is taking us out for a treat!’ said Falcon, the elder one.

‘That’s nice. Go and sit down over there with her. This is Uncle Rajay and we’re talking about something important and grown up,’ Robin tried to be the authoritative uncle. The boys did not take the hint, and were not going to be put off.

‘Wow! Some of Uncle Robin’s best bedtime stories are about you!’ Falcon went on. His younger brother Eagle just stared shyly, one hand to his mouth, delighted to be so close to his idol but not sure how he was supposed to behave in front of him.

‘Sit here with us, all of you,’ insisted Rajay.

‘Do you know what you’re in for?’ I ventured.

‘I’ve got to get used to it! I’m a father now, as of last month.’ Rajay’s wife, Queen Zulani had recently had a son. ‘I’ve had a fair amount of experience in matters of warfare, state and diplomacy, but kids – I’m not so sure of myself there.’

Some time and a number of cakes and frothy milk drinks later, Tandi had been introduced to the visitors from Daish Shaktay. Somehow we managed to keep the children fairly well behaved and went back to the original conversation while they tucked in.

‘What brings you to Chussan, Witten?’ asked Robin.

‘King Albion invited us to the coronation and,’ he paused, ‘we have the best jewels on the continent in Daish Shaktay, but Chussan used to have the best cutters and setters. If we can find any of the old craftsmen, we could set up some joint trade, to the benefit of both countries.’

‘My father has some friends in that business.....’

They talked on, and Witten took a leather pouch out of his pocket, and tipped some stunning uncut stones – diamonds, rubies, sapphires, and also some large pearls, onto the table. The children stared, fascinated, and the two boys, Robin’s nephews, stood up to have a closer look. Rajay did not say anything and I could see his attention was elsewhere, possibly on what we had been speaking about earlier. He trusted Witten to look after all the important matters concerning trade and finance in Daish Shaktay – he concentrated on politics and inner subtle wisdom, which for him were intimately connected. He stirred his spiced tea thoughtfully, watching the children as they pored over the priceless jewels.

‘What’s on your mind?’ I asked him, because I knew him well, and was often aware of what his facial expressions meant.

‘To cleanse Teletsia, our problem is not only one of power.’

‘I don’t understand.’

‘As I promised, you can have my army and navy and my experience in strategy, if I can come up with anything useful.’ This was extraordinarily modest, considering Rajay was one of the most inspired exponents of guerrilla warfare ever. ‘I wouldn’t lend you my armed forces if it was absolutely hopeless; I’d never send my men to certain death. If it comes to war, it won’t be easy though, because the Sorcerers’ weapons are better than ours, unfortunately, and their warships more advanced. Also there’s some sinister power behind those Sorcerers of Teletsia that we guardians haven’t been able to fathom. Nevertheless, there may be ways we can fight them, and you have the flying horses, who’ll set off the power of positive destruction if you take them there. We know what they did in Mattanga. Plus with your subtle Sasrar abilities, I doubt the Sorcerers could reduce you to ashes, as they have a habit of doing, I’m told.’

‘I hope you’re right there.’

‘That’s not all we’d have to contend with.’

‘What else?’

‘The Sorcerers have mesmerised and terrified generations of people in Teletsia. As a result, their inner Trees of Life may be so damaged, it might be difficult to awaken them to their own inner joy and peace, and healing powers,’ explained Rajay. ‘The only way to make them realise they can be free is to give them awakening though, because you can’t free people who don’t want to be freed. I had the support of nearly everyone in Daish Shaktay, or it would never have worked out.’

Robin joined in our conversation: ‘Somehow we’re going to have to get into Teletsia secretly and start to awaken people without anyone knowing we’re doing it. Then, like here and in Daish Shaktay, the collective awareness will change and everything will improve.’

‘But “Who will put the warning bell on the cat?” As the mice said in the children’s story,’ put in Tandi, while trying, with only limited success, to make the children eat politely, because the wild strawberry tart they were tucking into was too delicious to eat slowly.

‘I know,’ Falcon piped up.

‘Tell me your idea, little one,’ Rajay encouraged him.

‘See, Uncle Robin is really good at dressing up. My Uncle Robin is a very important freedom fighter. Well he was until we won the war,’ said Falcon proudly. ‘Whenever he came to see us he looked like someone else. One time he was a shepherd with a beard and another time he was a teacher with a black hat,’ Tandi and I looked at each other doubtfully but Rajay indicated to

Falcon to go on. ‘Sometimes he had grey hair and looked really old. If Uncle Witten could give Uncle Robin some of his jewels and if Uncle Robin could make his face a bit brown like Aunt Asha’s, he could go to this Tel – what’s it called?’

‘Teletsia,’ I helped him.

‘OK, Teletsia,’ went on Falcon. ‘Uncle Robin could go to Teletsia and sell jewels and no one would know he was from here, because we don’t have jewels here much and no one in our country has got a brownish face like Aunt Asha’s or yours.’

‘Young man, you’ve hit the nail right on the head,’ said Rajay.

Chapter 2 Making Contacts

Robin came out of his reverie, slept for a while and when it was cooler, in the late afternoon, he went out to explore Teletos. He had directions to the bookshop owned by Raynor’s father, where my mother Mrs Herbhealer worked, and also had the addresses of Raynor’s family house, my parents’ apartment and my cousin Lee’s family home. He decided to start with the bookshop. He took a boat taxi and after being punted up and down a few canals was put off on one of the many landing stages and told how to find the shop, which was nearby. The door pinged as he went in and between the shelves of books, scrolls and manuscripts a middle-aged man was sitting behind a desk. His brow was furrowed and his expression sad.

‘Excuse me,’ began Robin, ‘I was told you specialise in old manuscripts.’

‘Yes sir. Is there anything in particular you are looking for?’

‘The one I’m interested in is very rare and I need to discuss it with the owner.’

‘That’s me, Kitab Antiquarian.’ Robin recognised the family likeness.

‘Are we alone?’

‘Yes, my assistant is not here today.’

‘I’m looking for a copy of an ancient prophecy. Someone said it was banned, but that you might have one.’

‘If it’s banned then I wouldn’t have it. I wouldn’t carry illegal goods.’ A flicker of fear crossed Mr Antiquarian’s face.

‘I come from a land where we are freer, and we know about this prophecy. It tells of a group of young people who travel from here to our part of the world to gain spiritual powers.’

‘I don’t know what you’re talking about.’ Mr Antiquarian was increasingly nervous. This was just the way the Sorcerers would try to catch him out. Although this young man looked pleasant enough, he could still be their informer.

‘Mr Antiquarian, I have a letter for you. It’s from your son, who’s a good friend of mine. Raynor is very well, and is now married to Tandi Riverside, from the farm near Clatan. You’re a grandfather because they have twin daughters.’ He handed over a letter, written in Raynor’s distinctive hand. He felt a tremendous constriction in Mr Antiquarian’s heart as he recognised the writing.

‘There must be some mistake. Both my sons are dead,’ he said sadly. He didn’t trust this stranger, who began to see what a terrible country this was. Before this, Robin had only felt it inwardly, on his subtle system.

‘Well, forgive me for having bothered you, but he definitely described this shop and... I’ll leave the letter. Raynor told me tell you your dog, Nog, also survived and escaped with him.’ Robin looked pointedly at Mr Antiquarian. ‘I’ll drop by again before I leave. I’m here on business for a few days.’ He realised he was getting nowhere but felt it might be worth mentioning Nog, who had originally been the Antiquarians’ lovable but useless watchdog. The Sorcerers would be unlikely to know that. He wanted Mr Antiquarian to read the letter; it might

help him to be less suspicious, because there were references in it to incidents only known to Raynor and his father.

‘I’ll see what I can do, sir. I can’t make any promises though. Good morning.’

Robin left the shop and decided to visit Lee’s parents. He hailed a mule cab and gave the driver the address. They clattered through the streets, lined with decaying mansions, decorated, if one could use that word, with hideous gargoyles, and the avenues were lined with shady trees, mostly in need of attention. Every now and again they would cross a bridge onto another of the many islands that made up the city and Robin was eventually dropped off outside the large door of an imposing townhouse, almost a palace. He knocked and was let in by a doorkeeper. Inside was a central courtyard and beyond was a larger yard, through some archways opposite the door he had come in by. Round this second yard were a number of outbuildings and behind was a wharf which gave onto one of the canals.

‘Mr Restorer is out at work,’ explained the doorman. ‘Would you like to talk to his wife?’

‘Yes please,’ said Robin.

‘She’s with Mr Prospector, one of the tenants, but if you wait I’ll tell her there’s a visitor. What name shall I give?’

Robin knew Conwenna’s father was a prospector and lived there with his sister. Conwenna was the youngest of our group who had escaped from Teletsia to faraway Sasrar. The problem was, before leaving Teletsia, she had discovered he had been forced to spy on us, for the Sorcerers.

‘I’ll come back later,’ he went on. ‘I’m here on business and I need to rent an apartment for a short time.’

‘The Restorers own quite a few buildings like this, divided into flats.... Oh – there’s Mrs Restorer now.’

Lee’s mother also had a sad expression but was as bright as her son when she began talking. Robin told her what he needed and she invited him in.

‘I’m from Daish Shaktay,’ he improvised, when they were sitting comfortably in her living room. ‘I’m a jewel merchant and I need somewhere for my bodyguard and myself - a fairly upmarket place, because my clients are from the wealthier classes.’

‘We have one or two flats that might suit you. My husband has just finished converting them,’ she began, and offered him a cooling drink.

‘Interesting, I met a young chap named Restorer from Teletsia some months back. Looked like you in a way. What was his name?’ Robin made as if to wrack his brains. ‘Lee, Lee Restorer. Any relation of yours?’ He looked at Lee’s mother. She put her hand in front of her mouth to stifle a cry.

‘Did you say Lee? A young man of maybe twenty?’

‘That’s right. Mrs Restorer, I have a letter for you from your son, now rising high in the service of King Rajay of Daish Shaktay. You can be very proud of him. Here, read this.’ With shaking hands she did so, and then looked in wonder at the stranger.

‘And – you’re Robin?’

‘Yes,’ he smiled - that gentle, trusting smile I knew so well.

‘And my niece Asha? In the letter Lee says you can tell me about her. Is she - still alive?’

‘She’s my wife.’

Later Lee’s father came in and Robin and Mrs Restorer were still talking.

Robin decided it would be better if he didn’t take one of their apartments and continued to live in his hotel. He stayed the night with the Restorers and the next morning they went round to the bookshop. When my mother came in to work Lee’s father, my uncle, told her the good news.

‘Robin, how is Asha?’ asked my mother, with tears in her eyes.

‘Fine. You’d hardly recognise her. She’s become so beautiful – she’s not thin and nervous and dreamy any more, and looks so elegant when she dresses up.’ Robin was exaggerating about me – but then he is my husband.

‘I can’t believe this! And Derwin?’

‘He’s fine too, and he’s taller than you – he’s strong and stockily built, like Lee. He spent some years in Sasrar, but now he’s living with a brilliant young man in the land of Vittalia, who’s teaching him to design things you couldn’t even imagine – like flying machines, amazing stuff!’ Robin paused. He wanted to awaken these people’s Trees of Life. That’s what he’d come for. ‘I don’t know how much you know about your prophecy, but the whole point of the young people going to the far northern country of Sasrar was so they could gain spiritual powers to help put this place right.’ Everyone was silent and Robin wondered if he had gone too fast. Maybe they were just nervous. It was such an appalling country, with informers and spies everywhere.

‘I’ve been blessed with subtle wisdom, which is why I can judge, quite accurately, whether it’s safe to talk openly to you. The powers we learn about in the secret northern country of Sasrar, which is mentioned in your prophecy, are entirely benevolent and I’ve come here to share them with you. Mr Antiquarian, it was through your son’s bravery, helped by Lee and the others, that Asha was able to reach my country of Chussan, near Sasrar. I’d like to give you the most important gift anyone can bestow. If Asha and the others were here, it would be their greatest desire to give this to all of you.’

Robin was shown into a shady back yard with a tall tree in the corner. They sat on the paving stones and he asked them to put their left hand out, palm upward and their right hand on the ground. He told them to request the earth to absorb the negativity of the Sorcerers of Teletsia that was affecting them. He knew some of the more traditional families in this country worshipped the all-pervading power in the form of the Mother Earth, so this made sense to the present company.

‘Ask the all-pervading power to awaken your inner Tree of Life,’ continued Robin. ‘Then you’ll become aware of the joy within.’ He was quiet for some moments. He put his attention on each person in turn and eased the blocks within their subtle systems. Soon he felt a lightening, a release.

‘Put your right hand on your heart and ask, “Am I pure spirit?” Then put it on the top of your head and ask, “Please, all-pervading, compassionate Mother of Creation, awaken my spirit.” Now, everyone, put your left hand outwards and your right hand just above your head. Do any of you feel a coolness, or perhaps a warm wind flowing?’

To begin with no one felt anything. Robin knew the strain on the subtle system of living in Teletsia was considerable and would dull their ability to feel the cool vibrations, or even heat, which indicated the subtle system was throwing off impurity. He stood behind my mother and circled his right hand clockwise above her head a few times.

‘I feel a breeze flowing above my head!’ she said.

‘Yes, I do too,’ agreed Lee’s mother, Mrs Restorer.

‘That’s the sign that your inner Tree of Life is awakened.’

‘The Sorcerers told us that a feeling of heat was a sign of spiritual power,’ said Mr Restorer, ‘so one can safely assume that’s not true.’

‘You’re right,’ added Robin. ‘Heat implies friction and some problem, whereas when the subtle power awakens it flows without impediment, so it’s cool. The temperature of the spirit is very cold - completely still and orderly, but is the source of all movement.’

He showed them how to sit quietly with their attention on the top of their heads in order to feel peace and joy and inner thoughtless bliss. Then he told them how they could reawaken the connection with this power, this inner state, any time they wanted, by raising their hands up from in front of the base of their abdomen to above the head, and by moving their hands around their body in an arch they could protect themselves from subtle negativity such as the Sorcerers

emitted. My mother sent out for some refreshing sherbet drink and they all sat in the yard and enjoyed it, but Mr Antiquarian was uneasy.

‘Mr Antiquarian, why don’t you trust me?’ pleaded Robin. ‘I’ve just risked my life by showing you the first of the powers that will eventually finish the Sorcerers off. If they knew I’d done this, I’d be found dead in one of your canals almost immediately.’

‘With respect, how do we know you’re not a clever agent of the Sorcerers?’ he objected.

‘I’m about to show you how to use this awareness to know right from wrong or truth from falsehood and how to resist the Sorcerers’ influence over your minds. If I were the Sorcerers’ spy, I might put something over you, show you some magic, or hypnotise you, but I wouldn’t strengthen your free will and ability to resist them. Now your Tree of Life is awake, you can ask any question you like, or put your attention on any person or situation. If you feel cool breeze on your hands as you do so, you know it or they are in tune with the all powerful and benevolent force of the divine. If something is wrong or someone is evil you’ll feel heat on the palms of your hands and tingling on your fingers. Would I tell you that if I worked for the Sorcerers?’

‘I apologise, Robin.’

‘There’s more to show you, but we must be careful. The Sorcerers will soon suspect something, because you’re the parents of the young people of the prophecy. My true identity must remain a secret. For the time being I’m Ron Jeweller from Daish Shaktay.’

Robin spent the day with our parents and stayed the night with my mother. My father was away on business; he was a medicinal herb dealer and often out of town. Our flat was not large and Robin was shown into my bedroom. He noticed that my mother had never cleared out my things, even after nearly six years, because she had always had a tiny ray of hope that I would reappear. He asked for a bucket half full of water with some salt in it and soaked his feet in the salty water to draw out some of the darkness of Teletos: the subtle, inner darkness that had eaten into everyone’s hearts and minds. After some time he threw the water down the drain and felt better. My mother cooked a tasty meal for Robin and she admitted that she had been having dreams that someone would soon come with news of Derwin and me.

‘You’re my son too now,’ she said. ‘I wish I could give you some nice gift, but the Sorcerers make our lives very hard.’

‘You’ve already given me Asha, that’s the greatest gift I could ever have. She’ll come back soon, but first there’s much to be done, and you can help us.’

‘You must be so careful what you say. They could even be listening even now.’

‘It’s all right, in a place like this I check out everything I say on the vibrations. I’ve been a freedom fighter, and if you get that wrong you don’t live to tell the tale. I’m only posing as a jewel dealer. Asha and I have more important things to do with our lives than to spend them getting rich. We have everything we need: a little house in the city and a cottage in the mountains of Chussan, and that’s plenty for us.’ He did not mention that the house was in the garden of King Albion’s palace, a gift from him at the time of his coronation. My mother was increasingly impressed by this courteous young man and delighted that I had such a good husband, but could not help being nervous; in Teletsia people like Robin never escaped the net of the Sorcerers or their Special Secret Police, the Specials, for very long.

‘How can I be of help?’

‘We need to get into Teletsia and awaken the Trees of Life of large numbers of people and teach them to use their inner powers. Then the collective vibrations of the country will change and the power of the Sorcerers will diminish. We’re going to have to do this secretly, because the Sorcerers will do their best to stop us. They know the prophecy too. I, and the seven young people from Teletsia, from Raynor down to Conwenna, have very influential friends these days. We’re being lent an army and a navy, as well as other weapons. However, we must first try to free the people here from the influence the Sorcerers have over them. We have to transform your people from within, not destroy them.’

‘Raynor’s father has a clandestine society of people who are doing research on the prophecy and my brother and sister-in-law, Lee’s parents, also have many friends who are trustworthy. But seriously Robin, you might be best to go home to Asha and forget us. These Sorcerers are just too powerful.’

‘We’re not going to leave you to suffer. Your daughter made a vow to try to help this country, and for the last five years her whole life has been a preparation for that, and she’s my wife, so I’ll support her. In fact that was why she agreed to marry me, because I promised to help her. The power of the vibrations is the strongest force in the universe and we can call on it for help. Another thing, I don’t want you to be short of money any more.’ Robin handed her a small leather bag with a drawstring tie. My mother opened it and it was full of rubies, sapphires and diamonds. ‘There are plenty more where they came from.’

These were from our friend Rajay, who had told Robin to make sure our families were comfortably off from now on. Daish Shaktay was rich, and getting richer by the day, partly because as king, Rajay understood that generosity in the right places created blessings for both him and his people.

‘You can’t do this.’

‘Yes I can. It’s only natural to look after my family.’

Robin told my mother he would meet her at the bookshop in some days’ time, ostensibly to pick up his purchases. She, meanwhile, would put the word around about the real reason for his visit, and they would take it from there.



Teletos, showing the relevant places

Chapter 3 **Blinding Light**

Robin returned to his hotel and found his bodyguard Bonor relaxing in their living room, reading. He was short in stature, with close cropped black hair and a medium brown skin, had a fierce expression until he smiled, and was strong and muscular. No one had ever got the better of him in close combat, either with weapons or without.

‘Where did you get to? I was expecting you the night before last, but I felt on the vibrations that you were OK,’ he said casually. Bonor knew all about the Tree of Life. He was usually Rajay’s chief bodyguard.

'I went to see the families and gave them awakening.'

'I assumed you had. I think the Specials might be on to us. There was one here earlier, asking after you.'

'I'll lay a few false trails; some genuine jewel trading. How's Namoh getting on?'

'He says having to deal with the top brass Sorcerers is more painful than his fighting wounds, on a subtle level, and every evening he goes back to the ship feeling nauseous, so has to spend ages clearing his inner Tree of Life of the negativity the Sorcerers emit. He's negotiating to buy guns and spinning it out so as to give you plenty of time. Little do these Sorcerer types suspect that we might use those guns against them one day.'

'Be careful what you say. Walls have ears here. Poor Namoh - rather him than me! What about Valya?'

'He's going through it too. Says these Sorcerers are slimy characters and it's a good thing he can check on vibrations when they're telling lies, which, he says, is almost all the time. He also goes back to the ship at night feeling completely drained. Reckon you've got it easy.'

'So far.'

Two days and quite a few diamond, ruby and sapphire deals later Robin sent Bonor round to the bookshop to see Mr Antiquarian. He told Bonor to bring Robin to his home early the next morning, because there were very few people about then. They set off from their hotel while it was still dark, with a detailed map of Teletos, having left by a servants' entrance. One doubtful looking character tried to follow them but they shook him off after the first mule cab, which dropped them at the fruit and vegetable market, a hive of bustling activity at that hour. They made their way through it, avoiding piles of fruit and vegetables, merchants bargaining with farmers and porters with baskets of produce on their heads, and left by another entrance.

They watched carefully to make sure they were not followed, took three more mule cabs, went a long way round to shake off anyone trailing them and were soon enjoying an early breakfast at the Antiquarians house. Mr Antiquarian had collected together a number of friends who were secretly studying the prophecy and my mother's group consisted of close friends and relations, including the astrologer Mrs Starwise. Robin talked to her as he savoured an aromatic cup of Teletsian coffee.

'Asha told me about you and sends you her best love,' began Robin.

'That's nice of her to remember me. I was worried when they all went off so suddenly - touch and go, that was,' she replied.

'What do your stars tell now?'

'Big changes: war, or maybe inner transformation.'

'Let's hope for the latter, but you've got powerful friends if it has to be war.'

'I've a feeling you know more about life than most people.'

'You're right. I've been blessed in that way.'

'I saw in her stars that if Asha survived the journey north she'd make an excellent marriage and possibly finish up with...'

Robin realised she had seen through his best kept secret and indicated with his finger on his lips for her to keep her knowledge to herself.

The Restorer's group included a retired fisherman, Wale Fisher, who offered to ferry Robin around town via the canals. After breakfast the guests gathered round Robin in the part of the garden concealed from prying eyes by high evergreen hedges.

'It's great to meet you all,' he began. 'I know your prophecy says the young people will go to the northern country of Sasrar, gain spiritual powers and then return to overthrow the Sorcerers, but it seems to be working out differently. I'm here in their place to begin with. My wife is Asha and the others are my friends. I've known about these powers since I was a boy and have visited Sasrar many times. Those are my credentials - I hope I pass the test,' Robin paused and an elderly man with white hair came up with tears in his rheumy eyes. He lovingly took Robin's hand in his.

‘My son, I never thought I’d live to see this blessed day. We can’t thank you enough for risking your life to come and give us what we’ve been seeking for generations. Before you share this wonderful experience, let’s give thanks to our blessed Mother Earth.’ Everyone crouched down and put their right hands respectfully on the ground and their left one on their forehead in gratitude. ‘And now, show us what you came for.’

‘Imagine yeast in bread,’ began Robin. ‘You don’t see it, but it makes the whole loaf rise. It’s like that with this new awareness. If a few of you get it, it will affect the whole population, quite spontaneously. The more of you do this and the deeper you go into it, the more powerful this effect will be.’

He gave them their awakening. None of them felt the vibrations straight away, because living in Teletsia had dulled their sensitivity, but their desire to get it and their gratitude to Robin was intense. He and Bonor gave healing vibrations to clear some of the subtle dirt from their Trees of Life, and by the end of the morning most of them had felt something on their hands, all had experienced inner peace and felt a release from the tension and psychological pressure that dominated everyone here. Robin also showed them the bandhans of protection and request, and how to do some of the treatments for clearing their damaged subtle selves, like putting their feet in salty water for a short time each evening and sitting in meditation with some candles at their left side.

He had nearly finished when he felt a constriction in his abdomen. This was the place of the true master, but as he felt discomfort it indicated the opposite, the false teacher. His left thumb began throbbing violently, indicating impure knowledge or sorcery. He looked up and saw some vultures hovering high above the garden. He hid himself under a tree and soon the birds, and the nauseous feeling, went away. He suggested everyone should go indoors and they finished the session in the large hall. Mrs Antiquarian invited Robin and Bonor to stay for lunch after the others had left, and asked for more details about her son Raynor, her grandchildren and the rest of us. Afterwards Wale offered to punt the guests back to their hotel.

‘We’ll cover you with a tarpaulin so you look like merchandise, if you don’t mind,’ he suggested. ‘There aren’t many folk about in the heat of the day so we should be all right.’

‘Yes, that’s a good idea, but it’s not safe to meet here again,’ said Robin, ‘however, there’s one more thing I must show you - the fire ceremony. We need some time together, preferably not on private property, so it won’t incriminate anyone if someone sees us who shouldn’t. When you’ve found somewhere, leave a message on our ship, the Queen Zulani, with Namoh Hillfarmer or Valya Northwestern.’

Robin and Bonor returned to the hotel without any problem, but that evening a couple of Specials came round to the Antiquarians, demanding the names of the people who had been there that morning. Mrs Antiquarian explained it was their wedding anniversary and they’d had a bit of a do. She apologised for not informing the Specials and offered them some left over celebration cake. She put a gold coin in each of the pieces and they went away after eating the cake and pocketing the coins.

Journal of Warzog, Scribe to the Most High Priests

I, Warzog, scribe to the Lords of Teletsia, do hereby record a special meeting of their Supreme Lordships.

‘We must be alert in these uncertain times,’ began His Supreme Lordship. ‘A spy vulture on a routine flight today came back with some strange information. The Master of the Spy Birds will tell us what happened when he took the spirit out of the bird and made it tell him what it had seen.’

‘One of my vultures was hovering over the Antiquarian family’s house. It noticed a number of people in the garden and one of them emitted a blinding light - a golden aura. We don’t know what this means but we can’t be too careful with that family.’

'Let's arrest them. We'd get some sense out of them under torture or by reading their minds,' suggested the Head of the Special Secret Police.

'No,' demanded His Supreme Lordship. 'We'll learn more if we watch them for some time.'

'I don't know if it's connected,' added the Chief Priest for War and Weaponry, 'but I heard something similar yesterday. As you know, there's a Daish Shaktay warship in the harbour. Their Foreign Minister wants to buy back some slaves our slave merchants had captured from there - a few fishermen and artisans. This King Rajay is an odd chap to care about such unimportant people. Secondly, they're negotiating to buy some heavy cannon. Don't worry, I'm only selling them guns we've rejected as unreliable.'

'The strange thing is this, the chief Daish Shaktay negotiator for the arms deal is a youngish man who outwardly appears quite normal, but when our Truthsayer went to meet him, he couldn't bear to look at him for long. He too emits a blinding light, but only the most psychically aware High Priests can see this. There was a lesser light coming from Lord Northwestern, the other minister, and even the ordinary sailors have some unseen armour around them. Not only that, the Truthsayer was unable to read their minds.'

'We'll monitor the situation,' ordered His Supreme Lordship. 'I don't trust these Daish Shaktay men. Look what they did to our allies in Mattanga! Total destruction of an entire culture! Make sure a spy vulture follows the Antiquarians, especially if they're involved in any group gathering.'

Two days later, in the early morning, Wale Fisher rowed through the busy harbour to the Queen Zulani. He went on board and was shown into the captain's cabin, which Valya and Namoh, now Daish Shaktay ambassadors, shared with Zafan, undercover agent for the Emperor of the Ocean and captain of the ship. They stood up to greet Wale, who was a little taken aback.

'Please sit, Mr Fisher,' began Valya. 'We were waiting for you.'

'Thank you sir, I'll be all right standing,' Wale replied. 'I won't take much of your time. Mr Restorer said to tell you they'll be meeting on an island tomorrow afternoon. I'll take Mr Robin there, because it's some way downriver.'

'Robin feels it would be safer if I came this time,' said Namoh. He had grown and matured in the last couple of years and although still slim had filled out since his partisan days.

'Show it to me on this chart and I'll take Namoh there on one of our launches,' said Zafan. He was tall and heavily built, sported a powerful beard and moustache, but had cut his hair and no longer had a mariner's pigtail.

'As you wish, sir,' said Wale.

'Please sit with us and take some refreshment. In Daish Shaktay we'd never let you leave without having something,' insisted Valya, who, as custom demanded, treated every guest with the same courtesy, regardless of their station in life.

The next day Zafan and Namoh set off looking as if they were going on a picnic, with a hamper of food stowed very visibly in the boat. It contained items for the fire ceremony, hidden under the cold roast chicken, crusty bread and bottles of freshly made lemonade. They also had firewood with them because Namoh didn't want to waste time collecting wood for the ceremonial fire. They sailed down the estuary for some distance then rowed up a smaller river to an island; the same one as where Lee, Raynor and I had made our vow to try to help our country. Here they met the Antiquarians and their friends.

Namoh explained they were going to worship the creator in the form of the fire element, while Zafan prepared it. They would offer various things to the fire, praising this element as the destroyer of negativity and neutralizer of evil forces. Once it was burning merrily, Namoh began saying the qualities of the all pervading power in her form as the Mother Earth. After each name everyone would take a few dried herbs, pieces of scented wood and grains and offer them to the

fire. After this was finished, everyone could think of problems and ask the power of the fire to absorb them.

This went on for some time and finally someone said, 'Let the fire destroy that power of the Sorcerers which forces animals and birds to serve them.' At this moment, Namoh felt a constriction in his abdomen and a throbbing on his left thumb. He noticed two vultures flying high above, one wheeled and left and the other swooped down, disorientated.

'Let's say that again,' Namoh requested, and as they did so the second vulture fell into the fire. The smell was awful as it started to burn, so he quickly took it out.

'That wasn't a normal bird,' warned Mr Antiquarian. 'We've been spied on.'

'We've finished now,' said Namoh. 'Let's get out of here.'

Zafan put out the fire, buried the ashes and the remains of the bird and everyone left the island, either walking home via a number of different paths or rowing innocuous pleasure boats down the small river and up the estuary.

Journal of Warzog, Scribe to the Most High Priests

I, Warzog, have this to report concerning another extraordinary meeting of the High Priests.

'What news from those vultures?' asked His Supreme Lordship.

'One returned,' replied the Master of Dead Souls. 'I read its mind and it reported the same light as was seen in the Antiquarians' garden. The other disappeared.'

'It must be the same people,' put in the Head of Psychic Research.

'A Daish Shaktay jewel merchant has been noticed emitting the brightest blinding golden light yet seen. He might be at the bottom of this. Tomorrow, I want some assassins, posing as jewel thieves, to go to his hotel and kill him,' said His Supreme Lordship.

'That man was in his hotel when the vulture saw the light on the island,' noted the Head of the Police.

'I'm sure if we get rid of him this situation will resolve itself. He was absent from his hotel when the first bright light was seen and he might be the one spreading this power. If we do away with him, it will be a warning to the others not to meddle in our country's affairs,' concluded His Supreme Lordship.

Namoh and Zafan returned to the ship and later Valya arrived. He was tall and had a dignified air, and was dressed formally, with a finely embroidered white shirt, a long gold-edged coat and elegant leather boots over silken trousers, so as to impress. After three years of a delightful marriage and with an extremely important position in his country he looked happy and confident, no longer the disowned aristocrat turned partisan.

'So how's the world of diplomacy?' Namoh asked Valya.

'Painful. My Tree of Life is screaming in agony at having to spend so much time with the top Sorcerers, but I've managed to buy back some slaves captured just before Rajay put a stop to all that. It's cost a fortune but it's worth it. I wish we could help the others, taken in earlier times.'

'Once we've freed Teletsia we will.'

'They'll be returned at dawn tomorrow. How did it go on the island?'

'Fine, but something strange happened,' Namoh told him about the vultures.

'It's time we left. We shouldn't push our luck too far.'

'Let's go and get Robin tomorrow morning.'

The next morning Robin was selling jewels in the living room of his hotel suite. Bonor was out of sight in the bedroom, alert and ready for trouble. Robin's first client was a middle-aged woman, who bought three star sapphires and a diamond. He noticed Mrs Antiquarian come in and sit down. While the dowager was counting out her gold coins, Namoh, and Valya, who was now once more able to walk without a limp, came in and sat at the back of the room with Mrs Antiquarian. His friends had swords and Robin knew they would have other weapons as well.

However, many well-dressed men wore swords just for show. The dowager left and soon after the door flew open and in rushed three men with stockings over their heads. Two drew knives and the third took out a pistol and pointed it at Robin.

‘Give us your jewels!’ he demanded. The thugs had not seen Namoh and Valya behind the door. Namoh noticed the first robber had his hand on the trigger, drew a dagger out of his boot and threw it, and it caught the man in the back. He dropped to the floor as his pistol cracked and the bullet somehow caught him in his head as he fell.

Valya pushed Mrs Antiquarian into the bedroom, and Bonor ran in to help drawing his sword. The other two intruders brandished their knives ineffectually. Bonor flipped the weapon of one out his hand, cutting him slightly, and the other knelt on the floor, his hands above his head. Namoh looked at the man he had attacked and what with the knife in his back and his own bullet, he soon breathed his last.

‘Are you two working for the Sorcerers?’ demanded Valya. ‘Or High Priests, if you like it better.’ One of the captives tried to run out of the door and Namoh grabbed him.

‘Don’t kill him too! His vibrations aren’t too bad,’ cried Robin. He went over to him, put his knife on the thug’s neck and continued, ‘Are you working for those devils? Or are you armed robbers?’

‘Oh, sir, those stinkers sent us to kill you, but now we’ve failed, they’ll kill us!’

‘In that case,’ went on Robin, removing his knife, ‘we may forgive you. Those Sorcerers hypnotise you to do the strangest things.’

‘We’ll leave you here, trussed up until someone finds you,’ said Valya.

‘That would be the end for us! Please take us prisoner!’

‘That dead one was no friend of ours!’ the other spat out, nursing his wounded hand.

‘All right,’ agreed Robin, ‘you can come with us. Bonor, can you bind up his hand?’

‘We’ll do anything not to have to face the Sorcerers,’ begged the first.

‘Don’t try any tricks on the way back to our ship or we’ll kill you,’ Valya threatened, and to Robin, ‘Namoh and I have finished our business. It’s time to go – now!’

‘We’ll leave by the water gate at the back,’ said Robin calmly.

‘Our launch is waiting there,’ added Valya.

‘What about the body?’ asked Namoh.

‘We’d better put it in the bedroom, and hide that rug – it’s covered in blood,’ advised Robin. ‘Put the clean rug from the bedroom over that bloodstain, then lock the bedroom door and we’ll take the key. But hurry.’

Namoh went into the bedroom and told Mrs Antiquarian that someone would contact her group in the next few weeks. They were to give awakening to others but to be careful, as further help was on the way. He warned her about the body, but said on no account to tell anyone and to leave at once. Unfortunately, at that moment a housemaid knocked on the door leading from the passageway.

‘Are you all right, Mr Jeweller?’ she called nervously. ‘I heard a shot.’

‘Yes, fine, thanks,’ Robin went out. ‘I was cleaning my gun and it went off unexpectedly. Take this lady downstairs and see the doorman gets her a mule cab, will you?’ He gave the girl a silver piece and packed her and Mrs Antiquarian off.

‘That was close,’ said Valya, dragging the body into the bedroom and switching the rugs, ‘I’m going to check on the women.’

He went along the passage and looked over the banisters, from where he could see Mrs Antiquarian telling the man on the front desk that Mr Jeweller did not want to be disturbed for the rest of the morning. Meanwhile Robin quickly wrote a note for the manager, explaining that the gold he had left in the hotel safe was for his hotel expenses. He didn’t say anything about the body, locked the door as they went out, put the ‘Don’t disturb’ sign on it, and the cavalcade left via the back stairs and the servant’s entrance.

Wale was waiting at the water gate behind the hotel, as he had brought Mrs Antiquarian in a punt. He showed the Daish Shaktay sailors, in one of the ship's launches, a short cut to the harbour via some narrow canals and some time later the party boarded the Queen Zulani. They immediately left the harbour. The current of the river and the wind were with them as they glided down the estuary and away from Teletos. The freed slaves who had joined the ship earlier in the morning were given the best possible treatment and the two failed assassins were locked in the hold.

The hotel maid saw Robin and the others sneak down the back way but didn't stop them; Mr Jeweller tipped well and was a nice young man, and if guests wanted to use the staff exit that was their affair. After they left she went into the room, opened the door with her pass key and saw a bloodstain where Namoh had not quite managed to clear it away. She noticed the bedroom was locked and opened it too, blanched at what she saw, relocked the room, replaced the 'Don't disturb' sign and went off duty at once as it was the end of her shift. The maid who came on next didn't disturb the guests either because of the notice.

The body was only discovered in the evening when some Specials came round to talk to the jewel merchant. Both maids behaved as dumbly as they dared. It was safer that way in Teletos.

Journal of Warzog, Scribe to the Most High Priests of Teletsia

I, Warzog, have this to report concerning another extraordinary meeting of the High Priests.

'What happened to your assassins?' demanded His Supreme Lordship.

'Something went wrong, Your Lordship. One was found murdered in that jewel merchant's hotel room and the other two disappeared, along with the merchant. The Daish Shaktay mission sailed away at the same time,' replied the Head of the Special Secret Police.

'They didn't buy the guns either. I suspect they discovered the ones we were offering were duds. I don't know how, because we tested good ones in front of them,' added the Chief Priest for War and Weaponry.

'In future, we must make sure that the senior priests who can see the blinding light patrol more diligently. Then we can pick out any troublemakers. This light may be connected to a power we cannot control,' continued His Supreme Lordship.

'I'll try and raise a storm to sink their ship,' suggested the Master of Weather Manipulation.

'You'd better, because we must defend the fatherland from these people at all costs,' concluded His Supreme Lordship.

Chapter 4 Debriefing Failed Assassins

The Queen Zulani sailed into the open sea, but unfortunately a real grandfather of tempests hit them. The ship was blown way off course, far to the east of the Island of Creations. It should have been an easy trip, but now they were a long way out to sea. Robin, Valya and Namoh, avowed landlubbers, were recovering from the storm and having their first hot meal for three days. They were in Zafan's cabin, which was also his dining room and working space. Down in the hold the failed assassins were suffering horribly from seasickness, but at least it took their minds off their hopeless predicament. By the third day they were feeling better.

'You awake, Freddi?' asked Saman, the other captive. He couldn't see very well in the half darkness of the lockup and was lying in his hammock.

'Yes, and I think the ship has survived the storm. I reckon they'll sell us as slaves, don't you?'

'They may.'

'I pray they don't torture information out of us first,' moaned Freddi, still feeling queasy. 'They didn't look like torturing types, but I've heard awful things about Rajay Ghiry, their king.'

'You've been listening to the Sorcerers' people. I've heard fantastic stories about him, and all his followers too.'

'I hope you're right. I guess this is the end of our researches into the prophecy. It's a pity, because I heard the seven escaped rebels might be coming back soon.'

'I wish we could have contacted that girl who came round and set up our local Resistance Group, and got us going on this prophecy research in the first place.'

'I heard she's from that rich family of pearl dealers, the Pearl Lords, who live up Plimpet way.'

'Let's look on the bright side. We're alive, we're out of Teletsia and from what I've seen of these people, I'd rather be a Daish Shaktay slave than an unwilling assassin, forced to kill for the Sorcerers.' Saman heard footsteps approaching. 'There's someone coming. If they question us, I'm going to tell the truth and I hope it doesn't cost me my life.'

'I agree with you.'

Bonor came into the captain's cabin a little later.

'Is everyone all right?' began Robin.

'We lost a mariner in the storm, washed overboard. He was a friend of mine,' Bonor replied sadly.

'I'm sorry to hear it,' added Valya. 'We must compensate his family.'

'He was a good man and I'll miss him sorely, but it could have been a lot worse. At least we didn't all go to the bottom,' said Zafan, busy at his desk in the corner.

'I've got good news about your captives,' Bonor went on.

'Oh yes?' said Namoh.

'I went to see them and the marines warned, "Remember your bandhan of protection, these lads are quite disturbed." So I made the bandhan and they saw me. I got talking to them and finished up awakening their Trees of Life. Was that all right?'

'Obviously,' replied Valya. 'Rajay didn't lend us this ship to buy guns; that was only a cover. Did they feel anything?'

'To begin with just heat, and they were shaking in fear, at least I think it was fear. The marines and I gave them vibrations and cleared their subtle centres somewhat, and they were fine.'

'That's amazing, considering they were murderers,' said Namoh.

'Would you have a word with them? They've got quite a tale to tell.'

'Zafan, you're the captain, what do you say?' asked Valya.

'Fine by me,' Zafan looked up from his charts. The sailors had spotted some islands and Zafan was trying to figure out where they were.

A little later, washed and cleaned up, the failed assassins were led before their captors by Bonor, who assured them that they were not going to be either tortured or thrown to the sharks. Robin, Valya and Namoh sat at one end of the long table and Zafan was still at his desk. The prisoners knelt in dread and apprehension, despite Bonor's soothing advice.

'Get up,' began Valya. 'This is a Daish Shaktay ship and even our king doesn't allow people to kneel before him. Everyone in our country has the right of appeal, whatever he's done. Sit at the end of the table. We want to talk to you.'

'Yes, sir,' replied the boys nervously.

'You don't strike me as assassins,' Robin sized up the two boys, barely fully grown, with the practised eye of someone who had raised a whole country of partisans. The captives were wide-eyed in terror and Valya, Namoh and Robin, who were relaxed, happy and curious, tried to calm them down.

'Take it easy,' continued Valya. 'We need your help as much as you need ours.' The two Teletsians were surprised - how different these strangers were from the Sorcerers or Specials! Bonor put his hand on Saman's shoulder.

'Just tell Lord Valya what you told me,' he urged. 'You may even have friends in common.' Namoh made a bandhan of request under the table, asking that the Teletsians should speak out and not be afraid. He felt where their inner selves were weak, by putting his attention on each of the boys in turn and checking on his own fingers where their problems were. Each finger corresponded to a particular subtle centre, and so he could help settle their fear.

'What's your name?' asked Robin.

'Saman, my lord.'

'I'm not a lord. My father's an animal dealer. He's the First Lord of Daish Shaktay,' Robin nodded at Valya. He wasn't usually so casual, but wanted to put Saman at ease. Valya, never happy in his nobleman's role, understood this and smiled. He had recently given away nearly all his extensive ancestral lands to his tenants and Rajay had rewarded him for his generosity by making him his Prime Minister.

Saman, less scared now, began his tale.

'Freddi and I are from a small town in the country. At school we were always in trouble and nearly got sent to the Special Clinic, where they do terrible things to children. One day, about five years ago, there was an earthquake in our area. We heard it had been set off by some young rebels who'd messed about with an ancient temple near us. Then a girl called Stellamar visited us and helped us form a group of people who secretly wanted change. She's been doing this all over the country.'

'We need to meet her,' said Robin. On their way down, they had dropped Ahren, Conwenna and me off at the Island of Creations. A launch had taken us to the north side of the island under cover of night, but the Teletsian coast guard was watching the island's port and it had proved impossible to take the ship into harbour, because they had to appear neutral, and the Island was the enemy of Teletsia.

'She told us there was an ancient prophecy about some young people...'

'We know all about your prophecy,' interrupted Robin. 'Go on.'

'No wait,' put in Valya, 'Bonor, go and get some refreshments for these young men. What would you like, some juice, or spiced tea?'

'Whatever you're having, my lord,' said Saman, flabbergasted at this turn of events.

'Continue,' ordered Robin, increasingly interested.

'These young rebels were said to be heading for a magical country where they would get special powers to overthrow these wretched toads we have running our country - the Sorcerers. I hope you're not going to send us back there?'

'Not yet awhile. Tell us more.'

'We heard that a boy from Clatan, the next town to ours, and a girl from a farm near there had disappeared then, although it was all hushed up. We tried to find out more, and also about the prophecy, but about six months ago we were caught by some Specials with some damning information on us.'

Bonor soon returned with the refreshments. They ate and drank without speaking and Namoh, Valya and Robin continued to give healing vibrations to the boys with their attention.

'It's time for some introductions,' Valya broke the silence. 'My name is Valya Northwestern and this is Namoh Hillfarmer. We work for King Rajay of Daish Shaktay. We've just been giving some subtle healing to your damaged Trees of Life, your souls. Do you feel better?'

'Yes,' said Saman, 'As if a great dark cloud has lifted from me.' His friend agreed, between slices of cake.

'I'm Robin Markand. I work for King Albion of Chussan. We didn't come to Teletsia to buy guns and sell jewels; we came to help fulfil your prophecy.' The boys stared in astonishment. It was too good to be true.

‘Whatever were you playing at, trying to be assassins?’ grinned Namoh. ‘You should learn your trade better if you want to have a hope in a million against us. We’re seasoned fighters. You’re extremely lucky we didn’t kill you.’

‘I was going to explain that bit, my lord,’ said Freddi hesitantly.

‘Call me Namoh, but yes, please do.’ Namoh, still young enough to be a university student, initially refused to use his new title, Lord Santara. It was a bit of a sticking point between him and Rajay, who said it would give him status as one of his ministers. Namoh insisted he was a farmer and proud of it, and that Namoh Hillfarmer was a good enough name for him in any company. He finally agreed to use his title in public – like the need for smart but unavoidably uncomfortable clothes.

‘When the Specials caught us they took us to the Sorcerers in Teletos. We were given the choice of being ‘treated’, that is having our powers of speech and reason taken from us and being sent to the slave farms, or becoming assassins and killing suspects like you and our former friends. We reckoned the least worst option was assassins and on no account would we actually murder anyone. After some time our excuses for failure wore thin and if we hadn’t managed to kill you that was it – the slave farms. You understand why we didn’t want you to leave us behind?’

‘Most definitely!’ said Robin with feeling.

‘We can’t thank you enough for getting us out of Teletsia,’ added Saman. ‘We’ll do anything in return.’

‘Would you like to do what we’ve been doing in the past?’

‘What’s that?’ asked Freddi.

‘Partisans, freedom fighters and more. You can help awaken your benighted country and free it from the curse of the Sorcerers.’

‘I can’t believe it!’ cried Saman. ‘We’ve talked about this for years.’

‘And in a few days we’ll introduce you to the boy from Clatan who escaped to Sasrar, the northern country. I’ve just been there myself, learning about the spiritual power,’ said Namoh.

‘We thought you were going to sell us as slaves!’ beamed Saman.

‘No way, but we’re going to the Island of Creations,’ Robin took over. ‘We’ll have to clear the subtle centres of your Trees of Life before we get there, because if there’s too much negativity in them, the protective forces of the island won’t allow you to land. If the Sorcerers tried to they’d be fried the moment they set foot on the ground there, or something nasty like that.’

‘Can you put us right so fast?’ asked Freddi anxiously.

‘Oh, yes. We just request the all-pervading power of love to heal you, and you two need that more than anyone,’ Robin assured them. ‘For us, being partisans isn’t all fighting.’

‘You’re in good hands,’ Valya guaranteed. ‘I was badly wounded and had lost my will to live, but some of the escaped Teletsians and a friend did this on me, and now I’m completely recovered. Well, the best surgeon in the country operated on me, but it was this extra help that saved me.’

‘By the way,’ said Namoh to Freddi, ‘did the ship’s doctor have a look at you?’

‘Yes, I’ll be fine and....’ he turned to Bonor, standing behind, ‘thank you for not hurting me more.’

‘I had to disarm you. It’s not hard if you know how to use a sword properly, which I’ll teach you to do. I’m King Rajay’s chief bodyguard and I fully intend to take you boys in hand before you’re let loose as partisans. Right now you’re a total liability to yourselves and anyone fighting alongside you.’ Everyone laughed.