

## Chapter 1

Zack panted as he struggled to rise to his feet. He managed to pick himself up, trying to inhale as much air as possible.

"Had enough?" Called a voice a few metres away.

"Never," Zack responded, sneaking a glance at his polearm that lay just out of his reach.

The man charged at Zack, sword in hand. Zack closed his eyes, just for a moment and took in a deep breath.

With two hands on his sword, the man swung his sword in a downward motion, trying to cut Zack in two.

Zack roll to his left at the last possible moment, narrowly avoiding the downward swing on the sword. With one hand, he scooped up his pole arm and planted his foot hard in the sand, changing direction and heading right for his target now.

"Not fast enough," Zack panted while charging at the man.

He swung his polearm with all his might, his target, stood still, waiting for his attack. The man blocked his swing with his sword. Zack spun to his left, trying to strike again. The man ducked under the second attack, and responded with a swift kick to Zack's chest. Zack raised his polearm to block the blow.

*Crack.* The polearm snapped in half. Zack quickly jumped back, trying to gain some distance while he thought of a new strategy. Before he could regain his balance, the man was already charging at him. Zack pulled a stone off his belt and crushed it in his fist. He raised his arm, and shot a gust of wind at the man.

The man kept charging. A small, invisible barrier appeared before him, cutting the gust in half. He wound up his sword mid charge, preparing another attack. Zack rose both halves of the polearm, forming a cross to block the blow.

In the blink of an eye, the man leapt over him, soaring through the air.

The world went slow as Zack watched the man flipping over him. His eyes widened as he watched the man. He landed behind him, and jammed the but end of the sword into the back of Zack's neck.

Zack's vision went black, as he fell face first in the sand.

## Chapter 2

Zack opened his eyes. His head was pounding like a hammer. He pulled himself up to a sitting position, trying to remember what had happened. He last remembered receiving a strike to the back, everything else was a blur.

Zack looked down, realising he was sitting on a bed. He glanced around the room he resided in. The room was small and dark, other than a single lit candle that sat on a desk. Zack rose out of the bed and moved towards the candle. Next to the candle, lay a few old books, none of which Zack had recognized. He worked his way to the door, slowly opening it.

"Look who is finally up." Called a man from the kitchen.

"How long was I out for?" Zack asked.

"Just a few hours. The food is almost ready."

"Thanks uncle Felix." Although Zack always called him uncle, he had no blood connection to Felix. Felix was a close friend of Zack's father. Ever since the disappearance

of his father almost a year ago, Zack had no one else to turn to. Felix took him in, and promised to care for him, until his father was found.

Zack made his way to the small wooden kitchen table, and took a seat, rubbing his throbbing head. Felix turned towards him, setting down a bowl on the table for Zack.

Felix was a fairly intimidating man. He stood at nearly six foot and two inches tall, with a scar across his cheek. He had short black hair with a grizzled beard.

"I see training was more than you can handle this time," Felix smirked as he sat down. "You must be quicker on your feet. You cannot allow someone to get behind you that easily. "

"Yeah, yeah, I know. I almost had you though,"

"Whatever helps you sleep, son." Felix let out a laugh. "Eat up before the stew gets cold. You need to make sure to regain your strength. Tomorrow there will not be any training. I have a job for you to do."

"Oh yeah? What would that be?" Zack spoke with a mouth full of stew.

"I need you and Freya to head to Elmsdale. There have been whispers of multiple disappearances in the last few weeks there."

Zack stopped eating and looked up from his bowl, meeting Felix's gaze.

"I want you and Freya to head there first thing in the morning. Talk to some of the townspeople and try to gather any information you can. It could be just rumours, but if these aren't rumours, it needs to be checked out."

Zack remained silent.

Felix continued, "I know this could be hard for you, but if there is any chance that this is connected to.." Felix took a deep breath, "your father, I don't think we can leave this un-investigated."

Zack sat back in his chair. His mind racing. His throat closed. "Okay," he finally got out.

"Freya has already been updated on the situation, so she will be ready to head out first thing in the morning."

Zack looked down at his food. His emotions began to run wild. He remained silent for the rest of the meal.