

Prologue

The Tyrant's face was alight with victory. He had done it! It had cost him the lives of many of his soldiers to get through the traps set to guard Two of the Seven, but he had made it. All he had to do was open the box, which he did with great ceremony. However, when he looked at his treasure, his delight turned to rage. He quickly called the historian who had translated the story to him. "The story said nothing about this!" he yelled at the historian. The historian fumbled with the scroll, scanned it, and blanched. "Sirrr... it seemsss I skippeddd over the end. They were separated as a precaution. I'm extremely sorryyy," He stuttered. The Tyrant smiled a cruel smile, and said, "Oh? I'll make you sorry." And with that, he grabbed a nearby guard's sword, thrust it between the historian's legs, and yanked it upward in a powerful rising slash. The two pieces of the historian thunked to the ground at the same time. The Tyrant handed the sword to the repulsed guard, put on gloves, pocketed the Emerald and Topaz that had been sitting in the book, and strolled toward the airship humming his favorite tune, "Poison in Your Wine." The airship took off; taking the most hated and feared man in the world and the possible salvation of the world with it.

Chapter 1

Karie sat in a hollow behind a statue, wondering when her luck would run out. She'd nearly been seen and caught six times. Once when she almost forgot to put on a visibility lenses and nearly set off the security lasers, twice when the Guard's Mastiffs had caught her scent and come running, and three times she'd rounded a corner and nearly run straight into a guard force. "How did I get myself in this?" She murmured to herself, thinking of how it all began....

She'd been born before the Tragedy, but she only knew of it from stories. A great and peaceful family of royalty, suddenly dying violent deaths, their only living relative, a cruel, evil, greedy, man, replacing them as heir to the throne. The taxes tripling, anyone who doesn't pay tossed in the castle dungeon, anyone who robs the king hanged. Her father and mother were too poor to pay tax, and had died in the Castle dungeons. Now Karie was eighteen, and a thief. She had shoulder length, dark, brown hair, and a slim, but wiry, build. Her features were somewhat sharp, and she had eyes that never seemed to have a color to them. She specialized in pick pocketing Imperials, but had recently discovered the chance of a lifetime. She'd recently stolen from the Captain of the Guard a parchment that specified a secret passage into the Castle and directions to the Treasure Chamber. Under the cover of night, she made her way slowly through the Waterway's beneath the Castle. After reaching the entrance to the Castle, she found the directions to the Chamber, which was written in riddles. And that's where she is right now....

"The key to the chamber is a box without keys, hinges or lid, yet golden treasure inside is hid. What a load of trouble this is," Karie muttered as she wandered the Castle, "Why couldn't they write the directions like normal people. Bother. A box without, hinges key or lid. Then it isn't a box!" She wandered the Castle for several more minutes swinging her dark brown hair out of her face, looking at the pictures, looking for some clue. A battle went by, a surrendering, a portrait, a golden egg, a ... "Wait"; something had clicked in Karie's head. "A box without hinges, key or lid, yet golden treasure inside is hid" She said slowly to herself, "That's it!" She reached toward the picture and touched it. The jewel studded surface

of the egg rippled, as if it were made of water, and divulged a gleaming stone, as bright as the sun. Suddenly, the sound of voices made her turn around. She looked around; hoping for a hiding spot, but the corridor was bare. Karie knew what she must do. She must fight them. She presses herself against the wall, and listens. She distinctively hears two voices speaking loudly. "So, I hear the His Highness has had something valuable transferred here. You know anything about it?" "Said one of the guards. "Don't know what it is, but I heard His Worshipfulness has been searching for it for years and that it's some sort of gem" said the other. Now that sounds like something worth stealing, Karie thought, and then she struck. There were two off them, one with a club, the other with a sword, both with distress flares. She tripped up the club-wielder, and then dropped him with a quick right cross. The sword wielder got ready to fire his distress signal when Karie, in one fluid motion, picked up the club and hurled it at the sword wielder. It struck him between the eyes, and he fell like a stone. She quickly and efficiently stripped them of all valuables, and took two daggers she found with her. She dragged the men down the hall, behind a statue, and bound and gagged them with their manacles and handkerchiefs. She sat next to the guards, looking over the glowing stone. It seemed to suck in the light around it, and as she looked, she saw words engraved on the stone. Please don't be another riddle she thought, as she read the words, please. She groaned aloud "Blasted riddles" She said, "What I would give for clues in plain Rababnan."

"The entrance is guarded by the creature that is born and born again from flame. When you reach the guardian, touch the back with the sunstone to open the entrance."

She sat in the hollow, alternately thinking about the riddle and clubbing the guards to keep them quiet. She hit upon the answer when one of the guards was talking about her death. "We'll burn you at the stake, yes, and you won't be reborn, yes, like a phoenix." Karie clubbed him on the head, thanking him silently for the answer. She made her way slowly throughout the Castle, searching for something, anything relating to a phoenix. She turned a corner and couldn't believe she'd missed it earlier. In side a chamber was a 50-foot statue of a phoenix. That was being patrolled regularly by armed guard and crisscrossed by security lasers. If she tripped the lasers or alerted the one of the guards, she'd bring the Castle Guard down on her, and then she was toast. "Well at least I know this is the entrance," Karie said quietly to herself. She pulled out her small, gray, visibility lenses, and took a look at the laser beams. There was a crisscross of lasers surrounding the statue, forming a sort of cage. Then Karie noticed something strange. Usually, when anybody breaks a laser beam, the laser beam breaks and the alarm sounds. However, what was strange right now was that the guards were walking through the beams left and right, but weren't setting them off. She took a closer look at them. They were wearing regular Imperial armor, but there was not one bit of skin showing. A plan began to form in her mind. Obviously, the armor protected them from the beams. The hard part was the fact that every five minutes the guards rotated. She came up with her plan and waited. She watched the guards, seeing which the same height as her was. Then she set her plan in motion. She waited until her choice was guarding the front, and then dropped her dagger. The Imperial jumped, turned his head, and went toward her hiding place. She struck fast. With the pommel of her other dagger, she hit him on the head. He was out cold. She quickly stripped him of his armor and weapon, a dart gun, and phase two of her plan began. She shifted with the guards until she reached the back of the statue, then, as they came around the corner she shot them with the armor piercing tranq darts. Then, she took off the restrictive Imperial armor and touched the statue. It glowed for a second, and then the back opened and she strode down the steps and into the Treasure Chamber.

The first thing Karie noticed was that it was dark. She raised the sunstone and suddenly the whole room was thrown into sharp relief. There were mountains of gold, piles of gems, heaps of priceless artifacts. She was immediately drawn to large topaz sitting on top of a pile." So this is what those idiotic guards were talking about", she said as she picked up the gem. However, as she touched the stone, something strange happened. There seemed to be a second source of light in the room, and she was it. She looked at herself. She seemed to be covered in a holographic armor the same color as the topaz. It was not heavy Imperial armor, but appeared to be some sort of light, loosely segmented armor. Her moment of reverie was interrupted when her armor disappeared and a cold, drawling voice said, "Well, looks like we've caught our thief." Karie turned slowly thinking, seven really isn't my lucky number, and she turned around and saw the Tyrant.

The Tyrant was a pale, thin, balding, somewhat tall man with a drawling voice. His Guard Captain and his Chief Magician flanked him on either side. The Tyrant looked around, saw the Topaz was missing, and said, "You have two choices." Karie glared at them and said, "What are they?" The Tyrant replied "Option one: you attempt to run we either kill you or capture you and painfully and publicly kill you. "What's the other option?" You surrender the gem, and come quietly to spend the rest of your life in the Castle dungeons." Karie pretended to think about it, then she said, "I take option three." The Tyrant, amused, said, "And what is option 3?" Karie acted fast. She whipped the dart gun out from behind her back, said "This!" The Guard Captain, the Chief Magician, and the Tyrant were crumpled heaps before they could react. Karie took one look at them, and ran.

Chapter 2

As Karie ran, she broke the laser cage. An alarm loud enough to wake the dead started sounding, but she didn't care. She was beyond stealth now. When she'd shot the King, she'd signed her own death warrant, and a slow and painful one it was going to be. Her only chance was to escape and hope that they hadn't got a good look at her. Hiding was no use. She'd have to escape by force and force alone. She thought of her escape routes. They didn't know of the way she came in, but there were laser beams all over the area. The moment she set foot over there, they would spot her. And one look at her escape route and they would put guards on all the sewage entrances. The moment she came out they'd have her. She quickly rifled through all the possible escape routes. She could dive off the roof of through a window into the moat, but then she would be extremely easy to fish out of it, and if they didn't, she'd be stuck in the moat with the piranha –like Aronwa. She could dress up as a guard and attempt to sneak out. But it would awfully suspicious if, in the middle of an alarm, a guard tried to sneak out. They'd probably have her remove the helm and then her goose would be cooked. One other notion came to her, but she dismissed it as madness. But, as she thought about it, the idea made more and more sense. Then she thought of something that was almost funny. She'd make history books anyway. If she got out, she'd be the world's most successful thief. And if she died, she'd go down as a rebel, a person who refused to give in to the Tyrant. So, she set off to escape. It's a million to one chance, she thought, but what have I got to lose? And with that, she set off at a run for the Castles front door.

Karie worked her way to the drawbridge, shooting any guard patrol that got in her way; only stopping to take the tranquil darts off their gunner. She was going to need a lot of darts for the drawbridge. After awhile, she made it to the bridge.

Karie hid behind a pillar and looked. There were about 50 men, mostly carrying close combat weapons, some with guns. She flicked the setting of her gun to full automatic, and burst out from behind the pillar. The first row was down before they knew what hit them. The second row went down while they fumbled with drawing distress flares. The third were in the process of prepping the flares when they got shot. The fourth row was about to fire when the darts hit them. It was the fifth row that fired. 10 distress signals fired at once cannot be ignored by anyone, unless they were civilian, blind, and deaf. Distress signals send a pulse to all other distress signals within a mile range, telling where they were fired. They make a light that fires so high, so far up, and so loud, you'd think there was a full on airship battle going on. Karie swore under her breath as she took down the last row. She had to get to the drawbridge before it closed. She turned to the drawbridge and got a nasty surprise. The drawbridge, apparently, had an automated system that activated when the distress flares were fired, and had closed soundlessly. She was trapped like a mouse in the lion's den. And reinforcements were on the way. She could hear them thundering down the hall. As she sat there, she slid her hand into her pocket and touched the gem. All her hopes, fears, strength, and desires flowed into the gem, and it seemed to grow brighter. Then they came. The whole of the castle guard was on her before she could prepare. She prepared to go down with a fight, when suddenly, a noise filled the room. Slowly, every head turned to look at the drawbridge. The noise continued, and suddenly, the drawbridge, its chains suddenly snapping, came crashing down. And there, framed in the door, stood a dragon.

The dragon was covered from head to toe in golden scales. It flicked a lazy golden eye over the scene. It saw the Imperials, carrying all manner of weapons, about to rush the lone figure of Karie, holding her dart gun loosely and standing there in awe of the dragon. Its eye's flashed angrily and it raised its claw. It made a slashing motion in mid-air, and its golden eyes flashed. Out of nowhere, a rain of golden arrows appeared, and fell on the soldiers, killing and maiming them left and right. Karie took one look at the massacre, then looked at her savior, and turned and ran.

One of the Tyrant's best marksmen was one of the groups that were shot. The arrow hit him soundly in the chest, and, while not piercing the armour; the force was enough to send him into shock. With his last ounce of strength, he took aim at Karie and fired.

The dart came at Karie from behind and scraped her cheek, creating an arrow shaped scar on it and getting enough tranquilizer in her to knock her out eventually. She kept running, but eventually slowed down as the drug took hold, she realized what was happening and began to panic, then remembered. She had an anti-sleep drug in her thievery kit. Which was in her house? Her house was a mile away. She could make it. She ran. The world twisted, and she fell multiple times. The drug reduced her to stumbling slowly, drunkenly, to her house. She had reached her house. The world was a black cone of vision. She climbed the few steps of her house and the blackness closed in. She lay there, not moving, on her house porch.

Chapter 3

The first thing Karie registered was the smell of smelling salt, and her heart soared. She must have gotten inside and knocked the smelling salt jar over as she fell. Or, maybe one of her friend had seen her lying there and dragged her in her house. The second thing she felt was a weight on her wrists and the coldness of iron, and her spirits dropped. She opened her eyes and pieced together the scene. She

was lying on her back in her house. From the weight on her wrists, she figured there were manacles there. And leaning over her, grinning was an Imperial, holding a bottle of smelling salt to her nose. From the noise in the background, others Imperials searching her house for valuables. The Imperial, noticing she was awake, turned around and shouted to his comrades, "Hey guys, looks like our little babies awake!" "Great," Karie thought, "I've been caught by Imperials with senses of humor. She quickly looked around for a chance to escape and saw one, just one. So she did what she could to her captor. She kicked him. The kick, which was aimed for the groin, would've been very effective if the leg chains around her legs hadn't stopped it. However, she did get a particularly vicious kick in on the man's shin. He hopped about in pain for several seconds, and then turned to look at her. "You're a feisty little one, now aren't you," he said viciously before slamming his spear butt on her head. Stars and a ferocious pain exploded in Karie's head, as she lay there dazed. The next thing she knew, she was roughly being hauled to her feet. Apparently, the Imperials were done ransacking her house. There were five of them in all. The one who had revived her was apparently the leader of the group, as he did all the commanding. His squad formed a rough box, with two gunners in the back, pointing pistols at Karie, and two sword bearers in the front, swords drawn. The captain himself stood in the front, yelling and shoving people out of the way. And Karie was in the middle, stumbling and tripping over the leg chains, the iron manacles, biting into her skin. She looked around, desperate for a chance to escape. But she saw none. She couldn't get the manacles and leg chains off, and even if she could, there was no hope. If she broke off and made a run for it, the gunners, even if they couldn't hit the side of the Castle wall, couldn't miss at point blank. Same thing would happen if she tried to attack the swordsman. If she dropped back to take down the gunners, the swordsman would cut her to ribbons. And that was without these blasted chains, Karie thought to her. Her only chance was from outside help. But, as she looked around, she saw it would not come. The people were cowed, frightened of the Imperials. Karie knew and had helped many of them. The people looked at her with pity in their eyes, but they knew what would happen to them if they tried to help. They would share her fate at the cruel hand of the Tyrant. Karie hung her head and gave herself up to the inevitable. However, warmth in her pocket made her realize that there was one small chance. She quickly tried to remember what had happened before. She slowly reached into her pocket, grasped the stone and... "Company halt!" The commander bellowed at the top of his lungs. The box and Karie stopped." The captain looked at the gunners" Fletch, Arden, stick those pistols at the prisoner's head. Nothing clears your mind like a cocked pistol, Karie thought as the captain bellowed more orders. The captain turned to the swordsman," You, Ballwin, put that sword to her throat, and you, Vhlla, give her a full body search." Reginald put his sword away and began the search. With two pistols on her head and a sword on her throat, Karie tried not to fidget as much as possible. Reginald finally finished the search and handed the results to his captain. "Just dust and pocket lint captain, with the exception of this" Vhlla said, and with that handed the Topaz to the captain. "What is it!?" The captain demanded. "Captain Sir, it seems to be a gem. I took it because it might have some magical power and it might be what she stole." Reginald reported this quickly and efficiently, apparently expecting the question. The captain slowly smiled,"Good Vhlla, good. This might be the evidence we need to convict the wench." He said indicating Karie. With that the company began moving at double speed, their thoughts obviously on how the Tyrant would reward them when they brought him their prisoner. Karie again hung her head and gave herself up to fate.

It took the company a further five minutes to reach the Castle. There the Tyrant was waiting. You know,

Karie thought, it's a pity he survived where I shot him. Because there, in the middle of his throat, where the dart had hit, was a scar shaped like a single glowing, eye. He sneered at Karie, and then turned to the squad, "State your name and squad's name, captain." The captain stood to attention and said, "Captain Sarman, and privates Vhlla, Ballwin, Fletch, and Arden." The Tyrant smiled, "do this simple task," he said, "and you shall be promoted. Take the prisoner to cell block D4" And with that he turned on his heel and left. Karie's heart sank lower and lower as she was marched to her new home.

Cell block D4 was, as most people would say, a classic dungeon. Little stone space. Pile of straw for bed. Small window grate. And little hole in the corner for a bathroom. Karie took this all in at a glance. She and Captain Sarman's company had taken him down several flights of stairs, through several bottlenecks, and uncountable security checkpoints. When they had finally reached the cell, they removed the leg chains and manacles. But, Karie's freedom was short-lived. With several missing teeth, a few gasps of pain, and a lot of spectacular bruises, the squad forced Karie into the cell and got the leg chains on the wall on her. Whoever designed this place really thought it out, Karie observed? And they had. The leg chains wouldn't reach long enough to hide next to the door and ambush anybody coming in through the door. There was also a food slot to minimize the opening of the door. The ceiling was smooth, so you couldn't hang from the ceiling and ambushing the guards. In fact, short of blowing a hole in the ceiling, Karie saw no way to escape. So, she lay down in the pile of straw that was used as a mattress and slept.

She was woken by the food flap opening and Private Ballwin saying, "Wakey wakey sweet heart, your trials today." Karie stretched and yawned and looked at her breakfast. A bowl of water, a dry crust of bread, a brick of some unidentifiable meat, and a mush. Might as well get used to it, Karie thought, biting into the bread and drinking from the bowl. She spent the next hour or so chewing her way through her meal. She spent another hour or so lying on the straw before she heard the lock turning. The whole of Sarman's squad was there, plus Sarman himself. Karie noted with a dark pleasure that the squad sported some very obvious bruises and were obviously nursing bruises in more unpleasant areas. They jumped her as soon as possible and shackled her hands and legs before unlocking the wall chains. They then frog marched her to the courthouse.

The courthouse was a high ceilinged room. There was a clear space in the middle for the accused to be. The area was surrounded by elevated stands for everyone else to sit in. At the moment, the stands were filled with guards, jury, and the Tyrant, who sat smirking at Karie, who was manacled to a chair. Suddenly, a man stood up. "To all present, I present the honorable judge Balthar." A man in golden armor strode into the room, carrying an arrow gun. I suppose I should be in awe, Karie thought, being tried by a high judge. The judges were, at their core, highly trained military units. They were appointed by the Tyrant to judge any large breaking of the law. They all were skilled with certain weapons, High Judge Balthar apparently skilled with an arrow gun. He had fine features, but they appeared chiseled on. "All rise," said the High Judge, "we are here today for the trial of Karie unknown. May the trial commence?" He turned to face Karie. "Karie unknown, you are accused of the following charges: Grand Larceny, Petite Larceny, Treason against the Empire, Illegal Practice of Magic, Illegal Use of Magic, Breaking and Entering, Assault and Battery, Assaulting a Royal Personage, Resisting Arrest, Illegal Possession of Weapons, and Illegal Use of Weapons. What is the defense' plea? Guilty, or not guilty?"

Karie mentally flipped a coin in her head. She had absolutely no clue what Balthar had said.” Not.... guilty?” Balthar arched an eyebrow,” Then let the trial commence.” The next hour or so passed in a blur to Karie, with her catching a few snippets, saying a few things, but mostly she was bored out of her mind. Then she realized His High Judgeness was speaking to her.” Karie unknown, it is the decision of the jury that you are sentenced to death. You will be whipped 100 times, branded on both cheeks, and then hung by the neck over a burning fire. Does the defense have anything to say?” Karie said the first thing that came to mind. “Bit overkill, isn’t it?” The judge looked a little thrown by her answer, but quickly regained composure.” The court also finds you in contempt of them, and decrees that you will be whipped with the cat o’ nine tails. Court is dismissed.”

Chapter 4

Karie stared at the wall, bored out of her mind. She had sat in cell D4 for what felt like years, but was probably about a week. Her execution preparations would have taken longer, but the Tyrant had expected the verdict of guilty and had prepped the gallows as soon as she was arrested. The execution prep was taking so long because the Tyrant hadn’t prepared for the extent of the punishment. They had to build a fire pit, whipping post, branding station etc. Karie felt like she knew every crack in the walls of her cell. She almost wished for the execution so she could escape the boredom. Almost. The only time her spell of boredom was broken was by mealtime. At the crack of dawn and at the set of the sun, a mat would be slid through the food tray with the same old bread, water, meat brick, and mush. Karie silently hoped the food in the afterlife tasted better. At least I won’t have to wait long, she silently thought. Her rather painful execution was scheduled for tomorrow. She looked through her small window. It was getting dark. Her “food” was coming soon. It came. She looked at the guard, trying to pick out who it was, but it was no one she recognized. She attacked the food. She was eating the mush when her teeth bit down on something hard. She quickly pulled it out of her mouth. It was covered with unidentifiable gunk, but she still recognized it. The strange guard had managed to sneak her the Topaz. A smile began to form, one that had not appeared for weeks. She had a plan of escape.

When Sarman’s squad came for her in the morning, there was the usual bout of swearing, kicking, and fighting, before they managed to get the manacles and leg chains on. They gave her a quick pat down and marched her to the ground floor, where she was shut up in a heavily fortified prison carriage and was transported to the center of Dulsca for the hanging. While she was in the carriage, she spat out the Topaz. She had expected the pat down, so she took the only option. She swallowed the Topaz. If she could somehow summon the dragon again, she could easily escape. She slipped the Topaz into her pocket, in easy reach of her manacled hands. Then the prison carriage opened, and she was roughly yanked out into the open.

Karie was amazed at all the instrument of death and pain the Empire had amassed for her death. I guess I should be flattered, she thought to herself. She was yanked up in front of the whipping post. The executioner slowly read out the list of her crimes and the punishment to the scared people of Dulsca, then turned around and said,” Does the condemned have any last words?” “ Yes, I do,” Karie said,

slowly touching the Topaz behind her back and letting her desperation, hopes, and strength flow into it,” Let’s say goodbye. Until next time.” And then the square dissolved into chaos.

The golden dragon landed in the square, knocking most of the guard off their feet and crushing a few of them. Karie didn’t wait. She quickly ran over to a guard, made a quick search of his pockets, found a key, and unlocked her manacles and leg chains. She was quickly looking for a means to escape when a soft voice invaded her mind. “*Quick, child, climb on my back,*” the voice said. Karie looked around, wondering who could have said that, when her eyes fell on the dragon. “*Well, what are you waiting for?*” the dragon thought, looking exasperated. Karie sprinted toward the dragon through the carnage. As she was running, she ran into private Vhlla, carrying her toolkit. He’d apparently been promised the toolkit after her execution. She had more than a little pleasure as her right cross connected with his jaw. He crumpled like a tin can. She grabbed her toolkit and ran for the dragon.

The dragon was there patiently waiting for Karie. Karie quickly looked over the dragon, trying to find the most comfortable place. She settled for a hollow in the base of the neck. “*Shield your eyes, child,*” the dragon shouted through her mind. Karie covered her eyes. The dragon concentrated, and a ball of light appeared in its claw. Everyone froze, fighting soldiers, running citizens, all froze, transfixed by the light. The dragon threw the light into the air. It hung there, every eye following it. The dragon closed its eyes and closed its claw into a fist. The ball exploded, and anyone who had their eyes open fell to the ground, blinded and in pain. And Karie and the dragon flew away.

Chapter 5

To Karie, the sensation of flying was amazing. The wind whipped her hair in her face, and she felt like laughing in glee. She was free. No chains, no oppression, no limits. She could feel the dragon’s emotions, and she found that the dragon had the same feelings. Then reality slapped her in the face. She found herself thinking in stuttering sentences. “*Who... what are you?*” she thought toward the dragon. The dragon was silent for a second, and then said, “I am Ciallmhar the Golden, one of the Seven, and Guardian of the Topaz. I’m a dragon of legend.” “Which legend?” Karie asked. “It is not well known”, Ciallmhar said, “But it goes like this...”

In the beginning, there were seven dragons. They were perfect. They had no flaws, physically or mentally. The one unnatural flaw in them was that their heart was formed by a huge gem. The Topaz, Ruby, Diamond, Emerald, Amethyst, Sapphire, and Opal dragons, however, scared the human magicians. They captured them, and while they could not kill them, they disfigured them. They cut open their chests, and removed a part of their heart. From the Topaz, they took her strength. From the Ruby, they took her patience. From the Opal, they took her security and mind. From the Diamond, they took his willingness and flexibility. From the Amethyst, they took her selflessness and modesty. From the Sapphire, they took his warmth and impulsiveness. And from the Emerald, they took his compassion and mercy. Using their magic, they crafted a suit of armour with the gems inset in it. The Topaz taker took the Topaz armguard and became a master of Angelicus Magic. The Ruby taker took the Ruby breastplate and became a master of Pyrum Magic. The Opal taker took the Opal sword and became a master of Aelean Magic. The Diamond taker took the Diamond shield and became a master of Terra Magic. The Amethyst taker took the Amethyst greaves and became a master of Reflectega Magic. The Sapphire

taker took the Sapphire helm and became a master of Aequem Magic. And the Emerald taker took the Emerald armguard and became a master of Ragnarok Magic. However, the Emerald taker was overambitious. He attacked his fellow magicians in a bid to gain their armor. The other six retreated, seeking help from the dragons. In the process, they found that they could control the dragons. With Six of the Seven under their control, they attacked the Emerald pair, as the taker and the dragon were called, and the pair were killed. The magicians, realizing that if the armor was worn by one person, they would be unstoppable, but after a year, the power would tear the wielder apart and unleash, destroying the world in the process. The magicians decided to return the gems to the dragon's hearts, but they couldn't do it. The magic required that one of them should wear all seven armor pieces. But, they would not risk it. Instead, they broke the armor from the gems and scattered all across the land. They guarded them with traps and magic. And the dragons slumbered, waiting for the time of direst need, when the riders would return....

It took Karie a few seconds for the meaning of the story to sink in. Then, realization hit her like a lightning." So, *I'm a rider,*" Karie thought, *"but how is that possible. I can't use magic..."* she was going to continue when Ciallmhar interrupted her. *"Do you not carry the symbol of Angelicus, the Arrow of the Fallen Angel? That symbol alone is a channel for Angelicus magic. However, the Topaz bolsters that power, giving you the power that you need to channel the energy, allowing you to use Angelicus magic. You will not be a normal magician, however. You will be a master of Angelicus magic, not the magician's Gray magic. What you have seen me do is only part of what you can do when you get the Topaz Armguard. When we next land, I will teach you the power of Angelicus Magic. But in the meantime... Hold on child, we must fly!"* The last expletive was added when a Sub Sonic Needle Nose of the 50th Air battalion dropped out of formation and attacked the dragon and its partner.

Chapter 6

As Ciallmhar flew, Karie saw the attackers. The Tyrant apparently wanted her badly. Following her and Ciallmhar were the famed 50th Air Battalion. The 50th Air Battalion was mostly composed of Sub Sonic Needle Noses, small, one man, fast aircrafts capable of shots or lasers. The rest was composed of three large aircrafts, the Leviathans, Behemoth, and Kraken, that had droids, carriers, and detachable turrets at their disposal. At the moment, they were using their full power. They appeared to be attempting to capture Ciallmhar and Karie alive, as they were firing paralysis shots, bullets that release a chemical that freezes muscles. Due to Ciallmhar's aerial acrobatics, they were proving ineffective. However, the Leviathan, Behemoth, and Kraken were catching up. Fast. Also, Ciallmhar was quickly tiring out from the dodging and weaving. And the Para darts were hitting their marks. They didn't do much damage in the beginning, but the gunners soon acquired a new target. They began to fire at Ciallmhar's wings. Karie hung on as Ciallmhar jerked left and right. Then, Ciallmhar dropped like a stone, falling into the forest below.

The forest actually saved Karie and Ciallmhar. The pine trees broke their fall, severely injuring them in the process, but saving them from a painful impact with the ground. Karie suffered quite a few scratches

and a few bruises, but was otherwise unharmed. Ciallmhar, on the other hand, was scratched all across the length of her body and couldn't move her wings. And to top it all off, the 50th Air Battalion was blotting out the sun and raining paratroopers in the general vicinity, trying to find the crash site of the dragon. It didn't take long. One of the paratroopers soon found Ciallmhar and her rider, raised a distress flare high, and fired. She would have attacked, but she was unarmed, he saw her first, had a tranq gun and she had no intention of being tranked again. "Drop any weapons on your person and put your hands where I can see them!" The soldier shouted. Karie did as she was told, all the while communicating secretly with Ciallmhar, who was pretending to be out cold. *"I have a plan," Karie thought, "When I cause the distraction, we run, got it?"* Ciallmhar silently agreed. Karie turned around to see the force assembled in front of her. The whole force was carrying tranq guns and stun swords, blunt swords with an electrical current running through it that paralyzed whatever it touched, and striding through the crowd, in golden armor and arrow gun in hand, visor up on his horned helmet, had to be her least favorite lawmaker, High Judge Balther. He smiled at her, with a smile that said "Come here so I can finish the job and shoot you." He raised his hands to his side in greeting, a sign to show greeting or to say I'm unarmed. In Balther's case, it showcased the rather large arrow gun on a strap around his shoulder. "My, how small a world it is Karie. I'm delighted to see you," he said, his voice dripping with false sugar. "I wish I could say the same," Karie replied, distractedly. She wasn't really paying attention to Balther at the moment. Behind her back, her hands were scrabbling for the flash grenades she had hidden in her back pocket while flying. As she was desperately trying to grasp the grenades, Balther unsoldered the arrow gun. "Well, this chat has been nice, but we really need to get on with the execution," Balther said, aiming the arrow gun at Karie, "Please place your hands where we can see them." By that time, Karie had a flash bang. So she acted. She pulled the pin and threw the grenade at Balther, then dived. Balther had a few seconds to pull the trigger before several magnesium and solinium flares exploded in his face. He collapsed screaming. The shot he did fire missed Karie and went straight through a nearby tree trunk. Most of the soldiers surrounding Balther were blinded by the blast, and those who weren't rushed to help their commander, who was clutching his face and screaming. As Karie climbed on Ciallmhar's back, she looked back at her work and smiled. She hoped she burned that insolent judge's face off. As soon as Karie was secure, Ciallmhar took off into the woods.

Chapter 7

As it turned out, pursuit did not follow Karie and Ciallmhar immediately after their escape. Apparently, the soldiers had contacted the airships to report the severe burn that Balther had contracted. Then they stood around, nervous and distracted, wondering what to do, as they had no higher officer to give orders to them. When the second in command (who had a rather large fear of heights,) finally managed to get down on a shuttle, he had Balther drugged and put on a stretcher. After that was over, he finally ordered the troops to go after the dragon and the rider. However, as this had taken roughly an hour or so, Karie and Ciallmhar were off hiding out in a cave a few miles away. They would have been farther away, but Ciallmhar couldn't risk flying due to the Kraken, the Leviathan, and the Behemoth searching the area for the fugitives.

At the moment, Karie was learning the basics of Angelicus Magic from Ciallmhar.

