

Chapter 1.

I am Rolanz, keeper of the Cube. Listen to me, Oh Children of Light. If you learn and obey the lessons I tell your power will be as the great Tauritor. Take heed, oh warriors of Zoltaire.

I was Shaman to the king of Zoltaire. Among my duties I supervised the training of His Majesty's children and various relatives. It was here I met the great Tauritor, although at that time he was merely a child. He was among many who had applied to receive tuition in the arts and mysteries before becoming an entrant in the Canigna Games. Only those who succeed at the Games may enter the Academy of Transient Thought.

To establish his eligibility a meeting was arranged. Tauritor had to prove he was worthy. I took the shuttle to Malaluana on the primitive planet Earth during the earth year of AD 796. Tauritor's father, King Somal had a hunting lodge, modest little place two hundred domes radiating from the central quarters. The land was thick with forests. Wild animals, foxes, wolves, stags, and boars roamed. It was isolated and protected from the primitive earth people by a large dome of invisibility.

I remember that day well. It was the feast of Menties, celebrating the overthrow of the hated Lord Phloda. The Prince loved hunting the primitive earth stag so a hunt was organized for my benefit. King Somal and Queen Rya did not join us. The Prince and entourage, totaling some one hundred in number, set out. Those who had mastered the wild horse rode, the remainder walked. Tauritor rode as I expected him to. Of the six hunting dogs with us, Tauritor's dog Jedda, was said to be the bravest. The Prince was quite merry. Little did he know that before the earth sun set his life would change. He called to his father that he would not return without a stag. I enjoyed the ride. It was many seasons since I had been there.

As we rode, I noticed an earth boy walking in the distance. I watched as he followed the path that led from the river. I was not concerned. I knew he could not see us.

Before long the hounds picked up the trail of a stag and leaped in pursuit. I was about to warn the Prince of our collision path with the earth boy, when the Prince called a sudden stop. Jedda was not with the other dogs. One servant informed him that Jedda had been with them when they had crossed the stream. Another stated he had seen him racing back the way they had come. The Prince turned his horse, and took off at full gallop. We followed in haste.

As we neared the complex, Jedda ran towards us. The dog was covered with blood. He staggered, then collapsed on the ground. Jumping from his horse, the Prince rushed inside. I followed. Pools of blood lay on the floor and stained the torn tapestries, scattered cushions, and bedclothes.

Tauritor pulled the bedclothes back. There lay the still warm bodies of his mother and father. Blood dripped from the fatal wounds. Tears streaming down his cheeks the Prince fell to his knees beside them. I have seen much death but I'm still shocked by such brutality. I turned as a deep voice spoke from the blackness of a darkened corner. It was Reltig, Prince of Dracala, nephew of the hated Phloda. Tauritor and I were grabbed and held by his men who had been hiding in the shadows. Outside cries pierced the forest, as the others were slaughtered. The Prince struggled in vain.

'I see you have taken the way of Phloda,' I said.

'Phloda's way was the right way. You will learn Shaman,' Reltig said and turned from me and approached Tauritor.

'You can join your King and Queen or come and serve me, as the Shaman will,' he said.

'I'd rather die,' shouted Tauritor, breaking free from his captor and making a wild plunge at the murdering Reltig. It was a brave action, but Tauritor would have fared better if he had been still and waited. Time provides opportunities.

They knocked him down and we were tied together. I was spared because those who kill a Shaman are cursed. Reltig, Prince of Dracala, left vowing that we would serve him.

We were dragged from the dwelling. In the distance I could see the earth boy, his mouth open, staring. Reltig had destroyed the dome when he attacked. Everything was visible to the boy. I willed him to hide before they saw him. I saw his face change as my message entered his thoughts, and he dropped amongst the grass unseen.

We walked past where the bodies of the slaughtered Zoltairian soldiers and servants lay. I said a silent prayer for the spirits to guide them in their journey.

They dragged us up the hill through the forest. Brambles and thorns tore at our flesh and ripped our clothes.

Tauritor walked head high, ignoring the insults of our captors and the crack of their primitive whips across our backs. At the top of the mountain, Reltig turned and pointed his weapon. The scene of horror disappeared and all that was left was a crater. No one except the earth boy would know what had happened there.

As the earth night descended, we altered direction going west towards the sea. I knew we would eventually move to the sea because this is where they hide their transporters. We walked in silence with only the sound of tramping feet and the whish of the whip breaking the calm night. We met no one. Towards earth morning, I heard the sound of the sea. We stopped.

Tauritor and I were thrown into a Dracalian cage of accelerated pulses. It was the only prison that would hold me. My powers were ineffective against this force. They left us to sleep.

The primitive earth boy came crawling out of the bushes. I shook my head. A guard was coming towards us. He squirmed back into the bushes and remained still. The guard gave us only a passing glance, then walked on. The earth boy, wriggling on his stomach, again came back.

'You cannot break through,' I whispered, 'it is impossible.'

'I will try,' he said.

Taking a piece of wood, he inserted it between the bars. Tauritor grabbed it and they both twisted. To my surprise, the bars snapped easily. A simple piece of wood solved the problem of confinement. We were free.

Tauritor wormed his way through the bars. 'Come,' he said.

I knew I could stay. They would not hurt me but the earth boy fascinated me. Silently, I wiggled through the bars and followed them. Behind us we heard an almighty roar. They had found the empty cage.

'Hurry,' the earth boy said beckoning us. He led us into a narrow canyon. The cliffs towered above us as we raced over the rocky floor. I had never run as fast as I did that day. Behind us came the sounds of racing feet and shouts of victory as they spied us. Onward we ran, with the Dracalian soldiers pounding behind us. Before us lay the end of the canyon stark and seemingly impassable. The earth boy kept going.

'In here,' he said and darted in between two rocks. We followed him into a chamber surrounded by sheer cliffs.

'Look up,' he said.

We had entered a rock chimney. Above us we could see the sky.

'Place your foot where I place mine,' the earth boy said and started climbing. Tauritor followed close behind. There was only just enough room for me to fit between the walls.

'Come,' said Tauritor, looking down at me.

Slowly focusing all my powers, I envisioned the channel of the wind. Floating as if on the wind, my feet started to climb. Below me I heard a yell. The soldiers had found the chimney.

I looked down. A soldier had started to climb. He had only climbed a short distance when he slipped and fell. We were half way to the top when another took his place. The soldier climbed steadily and was coming closer. Then he fell to his doom.

At the top the earth boy put out his hand and I grabbed it.

'They cannot follow us now,' Tauritor said as Andrew helped me to my feet.

'Hurry,' I said. 'We must get under cover.'

We scrambled over the barren rocky landscape following the boy, climbing towards the mountain peaks. I knew that the Dracalians would be delayed. They would have to go back the way they had come but I was anxious. At last the earth boy stopped.

'You will be safe in the cave,' he said and squeezed behind a rock.

As I came through the hidden entrance into the cave, I hesitated. Tauritor was standing, staring. I looked around. The cave was filled with the skeletons of earthmen. In their hands were swords and spears. Many still wore their battle helmets, rusty with age. Battered shields also rusted with age were piled in a recess in the wall.

'We are safe here. This is the cave of the warriors,' he said.

'Who are you boy?' I asked.

'I'm Andrew. I live here in the cave. When my father the keeper died, I became guardian. I must stay until the crystal of power is split.'

'The crystal of power?' I asked.

He pointed to a green crystal embedded in a rock at the far end of the cave.

'The legend says it is a crystal of great power and that two together will lift the crystal, and, one day bring peace.'

Tauritor walked to the crystal and stood looking down at it.

'You know we are not of this earth,' Tauritor said.

Andrew looked at him. 'I know you're different'.

'And you're not afraid?' I asked.

'I would not have helped you if I was.'

Tauritor turning to the earth boy, said 'I must thank you.'

I nodded. 'You have both done well. Earth boy, Andrew, you have shown great courage today and, Tauritor, you have pleased me. We will sleep now.'

The floor was hard but I slept. I dreamt the skeleton warriors came to life. They feasted around a huge fire then danced before me. Heads, arms and feet dislodged in their wild dance then reassembled. Then they stopped and two smaller skeletons glided to the crystal and lifted it out of its rock. There was a blinding flash of light; the stone glowed blue and I awoke.

I could hear the soldiers outside the cave. I looked towards the two boys. They were awake.

Tauritor turned to me, 'I know the skeleton warriors will protect us,' he said. 'I had a dream where the skeleton warriors danced.'

'I too,' the earth boy said. 'What does it mean?'

'The warriors have talked. Tauritor, help the boy pick up the crystal.'

The earth boy Andrew shook his head as he looked with fear towards the entrance. 'No one can,' he said. 'Many have tried. They left defeated.'

My will compelled them both to look at me. 'Together you will lift the crystal. Now, before it is too late.'

Shouts of triumph came from outside as the soldiers discovered the cave entrance.

Together, Tauritor and Andrew lifted the crystal. There was a flash of blue light and a shaft of light from the crystal pierced the rock at the entrance to the cave. We could see through the rock as if it was transparent. We watched

as the Dracalians ran screaming in terror, then stumbled and fell dead. The light died and the rock at the entrance to the cave retained its form.

Tauritor and Andrew stood together staring down at the crystal they were holding.

'Will we put it back?' Tauritor asked.

'No,' Andrew said. 'It can never go back.'

'Look at it,' I instructed.

They looked. The crystal had split into two. The crystal, once dull and lifeless, glowed in their hands. The piece that Tauritor held was blue while Andrew's glowed with a white light. They were different yet they were one.

In that moment I knew that our destiny had been decided.

'You have been chosen. Each of you has half the crystal. You will rule, but only when you work together and there will be peace, but it will be at a cost. There is much for you to learn. We will go together.'