

The Golden Trio

&

The Quest for Ladon

*By: Mathew D. Miles*

**Written from the perspective of:**

*Archmage Guildmaster*

&

*Mariah the Champion of the Virtue of Honesty*

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*Part 5*

On the front of Celestial Shield that Kumara, the dog and I recovered from the dungeon of Destard was a rather perfectly chiseled pattern of beams or rays, as if coming off of the sun itself. At first glance, I thought the detail work was painted on, but I soon realized, after inspecting the aegis closer, that the metal or stone itself, was a different hue just below the surface. The change in color in the channels or the raised features on the surface, produced shadows, as to highlight the entire display. Also, the way the sun-rays seemed to be formed suggested that the shield was cast as opposed to forged. This was quite the impressive artifact, I thought.

That made sense after all, since Kumara said it was created in the Lake of Mana in the Second Plane of Existence.

The color of the shield was identical to Valkyries armor and I knew this must be from a single-large piece of an ocean sapphire, since there were no seams that could be detected. Unlike the armor of the Valkyrie, where several ocean sapphires created the ensemble, this shield was clearly made from a single gem-stone. Not exactly a round gem at that, as it was a shield, but still, it was flawlessly whole.

I stopped to consider this for a moment and remembered back to “*The Book of Dragons*” and the portion about Kumara’s father, Typhon the Great. The book told of his teeth and claws being made from the largest of these stones ever produced. I was a little taken back by this notion and to think how big that dragon would actually be, as I looked upon the shield, I held in my hands with awe.

On the back of the item was an inscription that slightly resembled a tree or a bush and it was organized in an array exactly as what could be found inside of “*The Logic Matrix*”. For how those numbers were arranged in the book, compared to the scribed markings on the shield, were the same. The resemblance to the inscription I looked upon and the number placement, in the book, were so precise, that no detail was over-looked. I had no doubt they were the same thing, which was the same conclusion Sir Dupre himself came to.

I recalled that Lord Dupre had recognized the formation of those numbers in the “*Logic Matrix*” before. He had mentioned that the pattern was the mark of the first paladin, Maleki. Clearly Maleki must have had access to the same knowledge that I had, for I am almost certain “*The Logic Matrix*” came first. Still

though, despite being the first paladin, Maleki seemed important somehow and I wondered if the skeleton we found buried in the dungeon of Destard, was in-fact of him.

Lord Dupre also described this symbol as the chalice of the paladin order or the sigil of Maleki. That chalice or sacred grail must be this important thing that I was to pay attention to, or so I thought at the time. There was one other chiseled mark on the back of the shield, just below the symbol of the chalice. The inscription read the following words: "Mother, for it is my honor".

Nothing more could be found on that aegis, but I did wonder how the inscriptions came to be, as they looked to be carved into the sapphire itself. Ocean sapphires were supposed to be an indestructible material, so I decided that I would ask Valkyries about that, when I gave her the shield. I'm sure she might have an idea about the process of engraving these gems, being the expert that she was, I thought to myself.

We have heard no word back yet from Lord Dupre or Mariah and for that matter, we have not heard anything back yet from the other expedition either. It was just me and Valkyries on the first floor, as she was finishing up her work on a very impressive strap and iron bindings. The iron portion of this strap formed an elaborate binding or cage with a lock mechanism. Valkyries had even so much as take the liberty and engrave the features of this device. Directly above the lock mechanism was the symbol of the paladin, a cup. Clearly, that strap that she was making, was for some book of great importance, then I considered that notion. What book of high-substantial gravity would Lord Dupre be in possession of, to warrant such a detailed and secured device? I wondered.

Kumara came inside of the house and wanted to know if I had finished inspecting the shield and I returned to him that I was about to show Valkyries the markings, to see if she knew how the engraved features on the back were made.

Kumara smiled at me, as that was his way of telling me there was more than what lay on the surface and as usual, he would follow this up with some kind of profound guidance, as he then said: "Nothing can mark that shield Archmage, save for one thing. Those markings were created by the ancient magic of the cosmos, that yourself had witnessed firsthand in the cave system of Destard."

That makes sense, I returned to him.

If the magic had caused those markings, then the implied identity of the skeleton would in-fact belong to Maleki, for the symbol on the back was his sigil after all and the phrase under it must be more important than I had considered earlier.

"Finished", Valkyries said and set down the book strap, then turned around.

"Well done as usually", interjected Kumara. "The Archmage has something for you", he added.

"Take the shield my-dear, for it belongs to you now", Kumara spoke, then paused briefly to say, "to replace your missing shield, that you sacrificed for this quest so many years ago. Perhaps we can find you a better sword too, one befitting of who you are", Kumara added. "Thank you, milord", Valkyries returned to him, then bowed her head in reverence.

So, I approached Valkyries and handed her the shield. Quite the artifact I added as she took the item.

Something very unusual transpired, that I would not understand until later, but the familiar colors of the bright-blue and teal armor that Valkyries wore, changed to that of white and silver. The colors had somehow come alive, as she took ownership of the shield. The new colors of her armor move about her, like the clouds in the sky wrapping themselves around her body, as she held the aegis in her hands.

The shield itself was a mixture of a dark-cobalt, brilliant white clouds and silver undertones, as with the display of a precious kind of marble, but only living. Both the shield and her armor behaved in the same manner and it was clear to me that the reaction was caused by Valkyries taking the shield into her possession.

Before I could make any kind of comment, the memory of the tinker said the word, “forerunner”.

I could hardly speak, for this had caught me entirely off guard, but I managed out the first thing I could think of.

Valkyries? I asked.

She looked to Kumara and then to me, as both Kumara and I were fixated on her. She finally spoke out and said, “the shield cries out to me in pain, for I can hear it suffering in agony, longing to be with its other half”.

“It does my-dear”, said Kumara, then he asked, “What else do you see?”

“It wants to be rejoined with a sword and I can see it, buried away in a tomb far from here. Many half-angels surround this place, guarding the sword with their very lives, but the shield begs me to re-unite them together, it cries out for this. The great sadness and sorrow, the shield tells me has lasted a millennium”, Valkyries described of what she saw.

The memory that just spoke before, which is also the memory of the virtue of sacrifice spoke again and returned to us a destination for this sword, as it said, “Reg Volom”.

What is going on? I asked

Reg Volom is a very dangerous place located in the land of Ilshenar. It can be found on a small island in the middle of the lake, across from the shrine of spirituality. Many creatures of fey origin inhabit the forest that led to a small cave, the path to reach the island. I have never personally been to the island or Reg Volom, but I have read many accounts of those who have and the survivors had described angel like beings there. These must be the creatures that Valkyries saw too.

“Valkyries”, Kumara said, then added again, “you must travel to Reg Volom with the shield and find this sword, for those two artifacts were made from the same gem-stone before the realms of mankind ever existed, so they share the same name. For that sword in question is known as the celestial blade, the counterpart for the shield you now hold. As you have found this discovery, at this exact moment, so too should your decision be made. If you should decide to re-unite the shield with the sword, you must leave now and with haste”.

Valkyries instantly and without hesitation made her way for the door. I insisted to know what was going on, then asked, who will watch the Dragon Soulforge?

“Valkyries take the Archmage with you, for he will be of some assistance in retrieving this item for you, but I will stay here to operate the Dragon Soulforge”, he said.

“Archmage, let’s go and Archmage, no questions please”, Valkyries instructed of me. “Something very important inside of me is tied to this thing and I must act now, for the cries coming from this shield are defining and they are affecting me greatly Sir”, she added.

I understand, Let’s go then, I affirmed back to her.

As we approached her flying horse she asked if I had ever ridden a Pegasus before and I responded to her by saying that I thought it was a unicorn, but no, I have never ridden anything outside of the spell, I use to summon the horse I ride.

“Hold onto me tight, as tight as you can, for if you fall off, I do not know how I will explain to Kumara that you lay dead in some field somewhere”, she instructed of me.

I nodded, as I thought about such a horrible fate and I made sure to pay her words a very close attention.

The horse violently left the ground by Valkyries authority and it flew very sure of itself at great speed, too great I thought. I did as Valkyries instructed of me and held onto her very tightly as to not fall off. I did eventually open my eyes to take a look around and that is when I noticed her.

On the ground, below us, I could see the familiar women from Destard, in plain view.

Durendal, I muttered.

For she was following us and must have followed us all the way back to the PAWS Soulforge. That did not bode well and I was right to have been paranoid, the entire journey back from Destard, I noted. The Pegasus did fly fast much faster than horse travel on the ground, so I was not worried of her pursuit, at least not at that moment.

My thoughts quickly changed to that of my current state of being in the clouds, attached to Valkyries and her horse. If I didn’t know any better, I would be overcome with excitement for this was truly an epic adventure, to be flying like a dragon.

As I have come to do so many times before, I often answer my own questions as I ask them, which has led me to not ask as many questions openly as my younger self would have, for I did know better about this very unsafe form of travel. So, when that understanding came to me, I was utterly terrified at the notion of falling, so I clung to Valkyries words and squeezed onto her as tight as I could.

The trip eventually led to a cave system and I had lost all of our bearings by that point. I do remember trying to hug myself around the horse and Valkyries, as to make myself smaller, to prevent being struck by some protruding rock formation inside of the cave we flew at reckless speeds.

Eventually and suddenly, I recognized we had arrived in Ilshenar. The cave system was instantly replaced with open blue-skies, the green rolling hills and the harmonic forests. I could see the lake where Reg Volom waited for us and the fortress itself. The loyal and mighty Pegasus made its way directly to the island where the conclusion of this portion of our quest would be found.

You have been here before Valkyries? I asked, since you know your way, I added. "I don't know", she said." It's like reflex, I know how to get here, but I have no known memory of this place", she replied.

Perhaps the shield was helping her with that respect, I considered.

When we landed, I realized how graceful the animal made such a soft landing and If I wasn't watching the entire ride come to an end, I would have never known we were on the ground. Perfection, I thought, the very example of perfection, for this is what it must look and feel like.

Valkyries rode the horse into an open courtyard and I could see several dozen creatures, that looked very human, save for their massive outreached wings behind them. They were all round us, on the ramparts, some in the courtyard, but I could see the majority of these beings where inside the fortress itself. They were as Valkyries described them, as being half-angels.

We need to be careful Valkyries since Kumara isn't here, I insisted.

"You are safe Archmage, these half-angels serve Kumara and I would assume they know to expect us", she responded.

As Valkyries walked into the first room, every one of these human-like angelic beings stopped to stare at us, as I considered, because she carried the celestial shield on her back. As we made our way to the entrance of the crypt, as Valkyries had also said, nothing would attempt to stop us and I did feel very safe here.

We had the complete attention of that place and within just a few paces into the grand hallway, I noticed that the half-angels had no interest in my presence, whatsoever. They paid me none of that attention they gave our direction, but instead every one of them turned their bodies in some form of proper etiquette, to face Valkyries as she walked.

So as Valkyries walked past the beings, one by one, they bowed their heads and kneeled before her, as I was unsure what to make of this strange behavior of honor. I considered briefly that perhaps Valkyries was much higher on some kind of angelic order, than I previously I understood her to be. Perhaps all of her kind, the Valkyrie themselves were something to be revered within the services of Kumara. Regardless, we found the crypt open with many decorations of that of faces hanging above the stairs leading to the catacombs. Valkyries did not even so much as to give me a moment to inspect them, which I was not accustomed to find myself so carelessly wading past things of great interest, especially in places that could prove to be quite dangerous.

This was her quest after all and if she needed my help, I suppose she would ask for it, so I proceeded inside, as to not get lost myself, for who knew what lay beneath us.

I heard the unsheathing of a sword and after casting my night-vision spell, I could see Valkyries cutting down some lesser ghouls and a few spectres that linger about the place. I felt completely useless so far on this little adventure and that would not change down in the crypt, for I could not cast a single spell before she had dispatched with everything. Valkyries eventually walked us into a small room, with a tomb inside, then she said "This is the place Archmage".

Looking around the room, I could see many manuscripts and scrolls and I could tell the room had been undisturbed for many years, maybe even many decades. There were four large glyphs around the

marble tomb in the middle of the room, but before I could even try to interrupt the glyphs, Valkyries was attempting to find her way inside of the tomb itself.

There were no markings or names on the large ornate box, but Valkyries said that the sword was inside and she seemed to be relentless to retrieve it. The shield must be guiding her and I remembered her saying that the possession of this artifact, was affecting her greatly. I knew she wanted this quest to be over, as I watched her work so diligently to get the top portion open.

She used as her tool, the sword she normally carries and I thought back to her sacrificing her spear to create the Dragon Soulforge many years previously. As she worked the sword into the cracks to break the seal, the blade was just too soft and the metal was becoming untrue as it bent and distorted itself, to the immovable object. She then attempted to use the shield to do what the sword could not achieve, but it was of no use, as now it was clear that something was keeping the tomb sealed and we didn't have the means to open it. Those glyphs, I wondered, then made mention to Valkyries.

We may have to do some research to find the correct procedure to open this tomb, I said to my friend, who was acting overly ambitious with her endeavor. I did notice several manuscripts on our way here, there must be a spell, a lever or something to activate those glyphs, I added, but Valkyries completely ignored me.

She Stopped briefly after I mentioned that to her, then declared that "Something is wrong", then added quickly that "we need to go back". Yes, I agree something is wrong, we rushed into this place without being properly prepared and we should have tried to communicate to those half-angels about the mission you are on first. Perhaps they might be of some use, I said in return.

"No, you don't understand", as she gave up trying to open the tomb and started to make her way for the entrance of the crypt, then said, "I can sense a great evil, so something is very wrong Archmage", she said, as she continued to walk. I quickly followed her in tow and realized she had that ability to sense those things, and I got very worried that we had disturbed something in this place by our reckless actions.

As she walked, I quickly cast my defensive spells on the both of us and we exited the crypt. Upon leaving that dark and mysterious place, we stumbled into a great battle being waged, just outside of the halls, in the courtyard. As we walked towards that battle, I could make out the angelic human-like creatures that occupy this place, fighting intensely with something else or someone else.

Then I noticed the Pegasus.

I could see Valkyries' loyal and graceful horse, lay dead out in the open courtyard, for something has struck the great animal down.

When Valkyries saw this too, she burst into a dead sprint with sword drawn and shield out, as I lumbered after her as fast as I could.

It was Durendal, for now I could clearly make out the enemy foe. how? I wondered.

How was she here? This is not possible and what does she want with us, to pursue us so vigorously? I lamented.

I could feel my senses being drawn to that of panic, fear, anger and raw emotions as I entered the small battlefield.

Valkyries engaged the target without any fear and struck several strikes, that would deal anyone a mortal wound, but it was clear that Durendal was not to be affected by such things, as she was not human at all.

I could get a clear vision of her now and I could see she was in-fact undead or demon-like, of which I have not seen another creature like her before. She moved with such blinding speed, as nothing seemed to be her match, not even Valkyries. The many hundreds of half-angels were being reduced way too quickly.

I began to summon air elementals as fast as I could, as this place had a strong affinity to the spirit, so I would use these creatures to fight for me, with an increased effectiveness, then provide any healing that may be needed. After I had summoned four elementals, a trick that only an Archmage know how to perform, I let them loose on this great foe, that I mistook earlier for a woman.

In a single swing, from the frightening blow of one of Durendal's upper-cuts, the mighty war axe, she carried, cut down three of the half-angels with a one motion, then she turned to backhand Valkyries, in such as violent display of raw power. I watched my friend fly across the courtyard into the open dirt as if she was a pebble. The devastating blows from Durendal were instantly killing the dozens of angel-like beings and their numbers were being reduced at a much faster rate now. I knew my healing spells would be pointless, so I switched to that of my offensive abilities.

Valkyries cried out a vicious war-cry, as she quickly got to her feet and ran back in fray. I noticed the shield that she carried with her into battle, was on the ground where she left from and I stopped casting my arcane arts for a moment to return aegis to Valkyries.

As I reached the shield, I saw the swing from Durendal again turn its attention to Valkyries and this time it severed the sword she carried in half and took a large section of her hair with it. I cried out for her as I thought she might have been mortally injured. Durendal then kicked Valkyries in the stomach, which sent her flying backwards again.

There were only three of those angelic beings left alive at this point. How is it possible this thing is so powerful, I wondered?

By the time I reached my friend to help her up, checking to make sure she was not hurt too badly and returning the shield to her, all that stood against Durendal had been vanquished. My elementals were all expired and the rest of the angel beings lay dead.

I turned to face Valkyries and instantly Durendal was behind me, as she moved at blinding speeds. I felt a massive constricting pain on my head and I was being picked up off the ground by her great strength. Durendal had me in her grasp, as she turned me around to face her. She had picked me up by the top of my head and I could feel her claws dig painfully into my scalp. I looked down to the war-axe she brought up to my throat, as I struggled. I could see that she was attempting to force my head over its sharp edges, as she had the intention to decapitate my head from my body.

Valkyries had spared my life and for that I am most thankful for.

She had rammed her broken sword into the back of the demon's head, as I could see the broken blade had impaled her face, through her left eye and shattered her bone helmet. Instantly, I was let loose and fell to the ground in great pain. Durendal reacted swiftly, by swinging at Valkyries, but missing her all together. Her next swing would not miss however, as she drove the war-axe into the front of my friend, who then had Durendal's full attention.

Durendal turned her wrist to deliver another devastating blow, then then another swing, but somehow Valkyries had blocked those advances with the shield she held in her hands, the one I had just returned to her. Each vicious blow forced her down to the ground, until eventually Valkyries lay out-stretched, helplessly holding the shield in front of her with both hands. Durendal pulled the broken-blade from her head and tossed it aside, then stood over Valkyries.

"You are defeated", said Durendal, then she continued, "hand me the skull if you value the life of that mage or your own life". I remembered her saying this and I was very much confused by those words at the time.

What skull? I asked, but received no reply.

Valkyries was pulling herself backwards on the ground, holding up the shield to protect her vulnerable position and she ignored the words from this nightmare over her. Durendal lay siege to her again, when she didn't respond and struck even harder, laying down strike after strike, but Valkyries blocked them with the shield she held. Not so much as even a scratch was on the artifact she carried, but this onslaught could not go on for much longer, for this I had no doubt about.

My friend would be unable to return any kind of counter offensive, and eventually Durendal would land a strike to end her.

The advances stopped and Durendal said, "I will take that shield too".

"You will have to kill me first", responded Valkyries.

Durendal reached down and grabbed the edge of the shield and threw it across the courtyard, exposing Valkyries who lay beneath her and she said:

"Then I will take thee".

It is a rather interesting notion, looking back to events of great conflict and strife, for how slow everything plays out, as if the wheels of time itself took notice and paid its full attention. The smallest of details present themselves and not a thing can hide or be forgotten. Those small flickers of existence share something of great significance with the moments of our lives that are also of great joy, for the very same reasons. Both command every one of our senses, so we can mind those perceptions, so we can feel, see and listen with absolute clarity.

Sometimes, those events of great conflict and strife are also the same moments of our life that are of great joy too, for this was one of those moments.

A Loud noise could be heard in the distance, like angels singing and it was magnificent. This audible display caught the attention of everyone, including Durendal, for at the entrance of the courtyard was the source of that angelic symphony.



Mariah and Lord Dupre stood at the ready, for how they knew where to find us, was unclear at that time, yet they stood there with the determination of an army who had never known defeat. In Lord Dupre's hand was the source of that great singing. The sword of his mighty paladin order, but it had erupted with flames and gave off a bright red glare from the base of the weapon he held.

"Tyrant of the west, daughter of Triston of Curtana, betrayer of my father's fathers, for you have no honor left", said the lord paladin commander.

"That is a fancy sword", Durendal ushered back, "for it shall make a nice trophy indeed" and then she recognized something, the very-thing in Lord Dupre's other hand.

"The skull", she exclaimed, then demanded, "You hold the conclusion of my quest!".

Mariah took instant notice of those words and looked down to the white object in Sir Dupre's hand.

Then the mighty paladin commander spoke: "I do betrayer", as he held up his sword in front of him and added, "So here is your conclusion of your quest, that I do hold, for I will take thee".

Mariah twisted her arms and body, in a very quick fashion and engaged herself, then summoned a massive fire ball, sending it towards the demon. Durendal swung her body around to dodge the bolt and as she did, she returned fire. Durendal threw her mighty war axe in the direction of Mariah and Lord Dupre upon completing that turn. The Axe buried itself deep into the side of the archway where they both stood, inches from Mariah's face.

Lord Dupre charged in and held the hilt of his blade tight in his hand, as he did the flames from the sword grew stronger and intensified greatly. Durendal drew two blades from her side and ran to meet the charge. She then crossed both blades to block the lord commanders first strike, to unleash a vicious counter-attack, a thing I had witnessed her do several times, in such a short period before.

The flaming sword ignored her advanced, like truth itself, for it would not be persuaded, even in the slightest. So, the mighty paladin weapon then cut both of the blades that Durendal held cleanly in half, as if they were made out of parchment. The weapon Lord Dupre wielded also sliced through Durendal's bone breastplate too, from that first initial impact, causing her body armor to collapse and fall away. As it did, she took several steps backwards and laying on the ground with her destroyed battle armor, also lay a book.

I was all too familiar with those bindings, since I had recognized those volumes many times before. That book was clearly one of the tomes written by the Old Ones.

Durendal was briefly in shock, for it seemed she had seldom, if ever, faced a situation where she was clearly out matched, for this I could tell. Briefly, as mentioned because the lord commander's next strike would cut her down, without hesitation where she stood. The flaming sword, not even so much as to slow down, as it met her flesh and bones. Durendal had been cut in half and she collapsed to the ground, erupting in fire.

We all watched in those few moments, as she was reduced to the charred remains of what was. Mariah walked over to the now dead creature and said: "Now passes Durendal the daughter of Triston of Curtana the last King of Hespera."

I looked to Mariah when she said this. King of Hespera? I asked, but did not get any responses from her.

I stood to my feet to very much welcome Mariah and company, for they surely had spared our lives this day and then I recovered the book laying on the ground.

I opened the bindings to find the usual blank pages within, but its black leather shell led me to think that perhaps this was either the *"The Book of Demons"* or the *"The Book of Corruption"*. Mariah walked over to study the tome and she reminded me of her research. I wasn't exactly sure what points of logic she was trying to make, as I would need to revisit the *"Research Codex"*, but she believed this ancient manuscript to be *"The Book of Demons"*.

I trusted Mariah's keen eye of detail and I put the book away to show Kumara so we could work to unlock this thing and verify its identity. We still had much to uncover to find Ladon, but perhaps this book would be of assistance.

As I did put the book away, I heard a familiar noise, of that of Valkyries unleashing her war-cry, as I had heard her yell out not so long ago. I had for a time, forgotten about Valkyries as she had made her way to the entrance and retrieved Durendals' war axe.

The rest of us turned to find her charging in, but before anyone could respond in any kind, she had run past Mariah with the axe in tow. Valkyries unleashed a powerful strike to the remains of the demon that lay dead on the ground, removing its head with one mighty swing of the weapon. As the axe lay sticking part way out of the ground, we stood still, as to not move or even say a word. We just stared at Valkyries who stood over what was left of the daughter of Triston of Curtana and Valkyries was a mess.

She was breathing very heavily, covered in dirt, blood and missing half of her hair, from a strike that almost ended her.

Valkyries meet our eyes, one by one as we said nothing. She then spoke and said, "I just wanted to make sure it was dead".

Her attention then turned to that of her horse and Valkyries slowly walked over to the Pegasus, which she loved, then laid down next to it. She began to pet the mane of the once mighty steed, then she gently kissed the animal on its forehead and closed her eyes as she pressed her own head against that of animal's.

Mariah, Lord Dupre and I, quickly discussed the events and shared some of our discoveries and journeys together in quiet, while we left Valkyries alone, briefly to grief. I was truly amazed with what I was learning, but we needed to return to the PAWs Soulforge and Valkyries still needed to retrieve the Celestial Blade.

More importantly though, she needed our attention for she had sacrificed much with her service and we needed to attend to her right now.

Lord Dupre walked over and picked up the shield to carry it to Valkyries, then he helped her to her feet and placed the shield in her hands.

"We shall honor her memory", the lord commander said, speaking of the Pegasus.

Lord Dupre then looked upon the inscriptions of the shield, now in the hands of my friend, to see the sigil markings of the first paladin and the inscription below it. Valkyries looked up to Sir Dupre in tears while the lord commander returned the following:

“The Skull will open the tomb, so you can recover the sword”. Valkyries peered at the skull in his hand and nodded.

We slowly walked through the battle field, to the now empty fortress and proceeded to the crypt, while no one said a word. Once we reached the entrance of the crypt, the faces on the wall, that hung over the stairs had opened their eyes upon us coming into their view. I had thought they were decorations before, but it appears now they acted as a type of lock mechanism instead. The skull in the paladin commanders left forced his itself up to greet the faces, as this was clearly the key.

We all watched as Lord Dupre held the skull in front of the many faces that each inspect the skull. A dull white-glow came from the artifact in Sir Dupre’s hand, as it reacted to the many faces in some unknown way. Eventually a spirit formed in full-body below the artifact that Lord Dupre held. This spirit, then bowed its head, as its own facial features made its presence known. The spirit raised its hands as if it was to bow or pray, then walked forward into the crypt. Somehow this transaction had created a kind of spiritual guide or celestial being, so we followed this thing in kind.

We trailed the spirit, which kept both hands up in front of its face and head down, as if praying, walking through the burial site to the same place me and Valkyries were at earlier. Upon reaching the tomb me and Valkyries tried to open, but could not, the spirit said some unknown phrase, which activated the glyphs.

We all heard an unlocking sound, then the celestial being vanished as if it never existed.

The paladin commander and Mariah looked to each other, then Sir Dupre pushed the lid of the tomb away, with almost no effort and we gathered close by, to look inside. What we found were the very old remains of someone who had suffered greatly, as their body laid charred and melted by some catastrophe event of some unknown, great and intense heat from long ago.

“The Mother of my mothers”, the paladin commander returned.

I looked to Dupre when he said that, as he had said something similar before, when he called Durendal the betrayer of his father’s fathers.

Valkyries reached for the sword, that had five brightly glowing patterns on it. I could see those patterns were like star constellations, of which no words could describe their benevolence. As she picked up the sword in her hand, the light from the constellations swirled around the blade and then that of her arm, in the same way that the ancient magic of the cosmos had done so before, in the dungeon of Destard. In-fact I knew somehow, those magics where the same thing.

While Valkyries held the Celestial Shield in her left-hand and the Celestial Blade in her right, we watched as she began to change in front of our very eyes.

We all witnessed, as she was no longer of pale-white as a Valkyrie, but instead had flesh tones as young women. Her armor had shifted to be that of a flowing silky garment, but still made from the quite indestructible Ocean Sapphires, colored white and silver now. How they moved, was anyone’s guess, but they did, like leaves blowing in the wind, effortlessly.

Her hair transformed into shoulder length curls and that of the color of an autumn's sunrise. She was no longer covered in blood and dirt. Instead, she was made clean, without a mark and exceptionally regal, as flawless as the most masterful works of art could imagine, but could never quite deliver.

"My memories have returned to me", Valkyries said, as she looked to me specifically. Mariah and Lord Dupre, clearly had not found the correct words to return to her and I was of no exception.

"Archmage, for you once asked me why I was not like the other Valkyrie, it so now appears you were right to think this all along", she added.

"The Forerunner", Lord Dupre uttered, but said nothing more.

Yes, the forerunner I thought, for the memory of the virtue of sacrifice had said this too. Perhaps she was a champion of the virtue of sacrifice, for I would need to discuss these matters, as well as others with Kumara.

Valkyries looked to the paladin commander and said, "My name is Jehanne of Aquitaine and I was once the Queen of many noble and good people".

I noticed Sir Dupre was completely caught defenseless as he was swelling up with tears and he managed a response. "They are all gone, for that was a long time ago", he said.

"What then became of my son?" she asked and quickly added, "please have good news".

After a long pause, the lord commander said:

"He became a man of honor and produced men of honor and that line that he established created an order dedicated to that honor and I am of that order."

He pointed to the inscription on the shield and said "that is his mark, the mark of the first paladin of our sacred order, that your son Maleki."

Jehanne read the inscription, then looked at the one just below it that said, "Mother, it was my honor" and began to cry, then the mighty paladin commander put his arms around her and whispered into her ear:

"For I am of that order of honor, that your son had created, but I am also of his line too.", pausing slightly to add, "I will be the son to you that you never knew."

I could make out the mighty paladin commander saying one more thing to her and that was:

"For it will be my honor".

My friend Valkyries was never a Valkyrie this entire time, but this forerunner instead, who I learned was also once a Queen of the once mighty kingdom of Lemuria, one of the first kingdoms of our realm and her name is Jehanne. For I have come to learn that she is Jehanne of Aquitaine the forerunner the last Queen of the Kingdom of Lemuria.

I have come to learn that Lord Dupre the Champion of the Virtue of Honor, is in-fact the Lion of Lemuria, that the monks of the Empath Abbey kept a prophecy, proclaiming him to be this lion before he even existed, promised by Lemuria herself. This prophecy was written and held in a book describing also the

end of that once mighty kingdom. The monks had held onto this secret for a thousand years and it was of great burden to them, but they were relieved of that burden as they presented to him, what they kept safe for him.

Valkyries, or Jehanne had made a leather and iron strap, with key, for Lord Dupre on behest of Kumara, for this very book, that those monks had burdened themselves so greatly to hold for him, was more valuable than they even knew.

Kumara helped me discover the nature of this book too, for it was a book created by the Old Ones, as he knew this book very well, he claimed.

“All of the angels in my service are described in this book”, he said.

The book contains the accounts of the last priests of Lemuria and they had scribed into that book what they knew it to be called, “*The Great War*”. What they didn’t know was that this book was in-fact “*The Book of Angels*”, created by the old ones themselves.

Those names or people referenced in this book would be forever enshrined in the lake of mana as the celestial beings under the care of Kumara, as this notion was made clear to me by Kumara himself. Lord Dupre would now be in possession of this tome, for he alone shall be entrusted with that burden, as the Lion of Lemuria. He would have access to it only, so he could also enshrine the names of those he so wished to honor, as he is also the Champion of the Virtue of Honor and heir to the Kingdom of Lemuria.

Spring is coming to an end and summer is upon us now, as we turn our attention to the next portion of this quest to find Ladon. It is clear that the book recovered from Durendal, “*The Book of Demons*” will likely lead us to the next portion of our quest.

It also seems that we have recovered one of the mighty signets of power, the Skull of the Innate Will, created by the forge-master Lemuria herself, as the signet of air, which Lord Dupre has been entrusted with the protection of also. I am not entirely sure why Jehanne is not the rightful owner of such a relic, but I didn’t ask, for I have many questions still and I focus on what I can control, which is my research and chronicling. I trust that Kumara would not lead us astray, for he never has yet.

I have received word from Lord Geoffrey the Champion of the Virtue of Valor that Lolo and Zara were escorted back to the capitol and I was to leave soon to meet with them. Stannis the Captain of the Guard for the King’s Guard had insisted on the meeting, for the events that follow would surely require the assistance of the entire realm.

There was also another matter to discuss of grave importance and that was the ancient dragon Sirius, the brother to Kumara and to Ladon. We were searching for Ladon, but we have learned from our quest, of the other brother, who is an ominous threat thrust into the foregrounds now.

There had been no concerns about Sirius up until this point, but we didn’t have the Skull of the Innate Will before either. This very artifact that Sirius had ended a civilization to retrieve, represented a grave danger to own very existence.

Not since my brother, who’s name shall not be spoken, have we faced such perilous times.

Sirius the one who waged his great war, would surely come looking for this skull now, in the same way that Durendal did, but an ancient dragon would clearly not be arrested in his pursuits.

Lord Dupre had taken Jehanne back to Trinsic, the walled-city for her protection, but also to learn that of the order of the paladin too. For this was the order her very son had established so long ago.

This left the PAWS Soulforge attended by Kumara himself. I did not understand why he could not simply hand the operation of the Dragon Soulforge over to another being in his service, but he did say that the “Dragon Soulforge was bound to Valkyries”, so I suppose this was all the reason that I needed.

I would miss my friend and I know she has other more important duties upon her, but I hope she isn’t different for them and I will get the chance to see her soon.

There was another problem too, of Kumara operating the Dragon Soulforge, for this did not bode well. If we were to face an accident dragon, Kumara’s brother, without the assistance of Kumara, as he was occupied with the operations of the forge, then how could we overcome such disadvantages.

We will attempt to keep the skull safe for now and hide it away from Sirius, as this would be our only course until another path was made clear. Still though, the entire realm must be included with these matters. If the ancient dragons have the power to create the world we live in, they surely have the power to undue it too.

The future of our entire realm, would now be in question as it was never before.

-Archmage Guildmaster

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**The End**

**The Golden Trio and the Quest for Ladon**

**Sandals of Time**

**Author:** *Mathew D. Miles*

**The Golden Trio & the Quest for Ladon part 5:** *Part of the 3<sup>rd</sup> series entitled: “The Golden Trio”*

**About the books:** Each book within each series acts as a character in a much larger play. They will tell their own story from their own perspective written by a specific avatar in a specific way. All the books of each series will develop themes and concepts unique to each series, while the 5 series of books in total will tell a much larger story. In addition, a repeating theme is on display in every way possible within all works. They are the following:

\*To remember, is to find your way.

\*This is the story of your realm and everyone has a part to play.

**Book series:** *Sandals of Time*

Series 1: *The PAWS Soulforge and the Quest for Ladon*

Series 2: *The Star of Zara and the Quest for Ladon*

Series 3: *The Golden Trio and the Quest for Ladon*

Series 4: *Toccata and Feud and the Quest for Ladon*

Series 5: *Succubus & Valkyries and the Quest for Ladon*

Series finale: *The Great Library*

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