

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

Part 4

Sometimes I wonder about the part that Kumara is playing in this story to find his brother, as I think about my role to chronicle this event. I have noticed on several occasions that Kumara has not participated with this endeavor, when he had the chance. Instead, he appears to be facilitating a specific course, directed to a certain outcome, of which I do not know yet. I think back to the few times where he so clearly did not play a part with this quest, as with confronting Krampus, as with the research of the “*Logic Matrix*” and this had me questioning what he really knows about all of this.

That notion was never clearer, than with the reading of the book, “*Rabbit & Hound*”, for even Saint Valentine came under the same impression that occupied my thoughts. Reading from that book, I gained the perspective of Valentine and he was being lead through the memories of Wags the Destroyer, unable to contribute, as if fate or destiny itself was on display and it had little patience or room for interruption. This lack of input or role, I was struggling with, as this too brought me back to my own story. If the consequences of my own life were predetermined, then why go through all this effort and why me? For those where my thoughts I had, as Kumara and I traveled together in silence.

“If only you would ask, Archmage, I would only tell”, Kumara said to me, as he broke that silence.

Kumara was seated upon the dire wolf, Wags the Destroyer and I, next to him with my summoned steed, as we had just recently delivered Zara’s mother to her home and were within minutes of reaching our destination, the entrance to the dungeon of Destard.

I looked over to him in a surprised way, but I should have known better, for those types of interactions Kumara was establishing a reputation for.

What are you having Valkyries work on? I asked Kumara. “Is this the matter that you toil with, inside your mind?”, Kumara asked of me in his casually direct but comforting way. It is one of many questions I might have, I returned back to him.

Kumara looked over to me, then down to the dog to pet him, as the animal moved towards our goal. “She is working on a special book strap, with an iron-cage and key, for Lord Dupre the Champion of the

Virtue of Honor. Her task should not be known until it is right, not for your benefit Archmage, but for his”, he delivered back to me. Kumara then looked my way again, paused and beckoned of me:

“What is really bothering you Archmage, for you have a question to ask of me, so speak and do not worry.”

I hesitantly spoke-up to ask Kumara what his role in all of this was, as we are searching for his brother and what my part was in all of this too. Kumara smiled, which seemed to be a very common thing before he spoke, then said, “I am looking for my brother Archmage and you are wondering if I actually know how this story will end, for I can assure you that I do not. Your role in this quest, is to witness the events and tell the story. Saint Valentine’s role was to assist with this story too, by understanding the choices that Wags had made on his journey, so the Judge could speak for our good friend here.”

As I sat on my horse to consider his words, there was a small pause while he let me ponder what he had just told me, then he said the following:

“I have many responsibilities you see and each person that is connected to this story, must have a chance to make their choices. You are wondering if this is all pre-determined somehow, that you are simply acting in a play and going through the motions or if the future is entirely unpredictable. I can assure you Archmage, that neither are true, while both are also true, simultaneously.

Every single possible outcome has been determined and made known to those who should know them. The choices you make, Archmage, lead to the path of one of those possible conclusions. Once you are on that path, you are not locked into this fate, for that path will get much harder for you, as you try to change course or as others try to change your course, but this is the nature of how currents work. This is also the way that songs are played and how motion itself conducts its business, yet a course change is always available, to you and those you relate with.”

“All outcomes are known but not all outcomes shall exist once the story is told. As mentioned, my good friend, everyone has a part to play and this is the story of your realm, for this has never been about me.”

What is really your role then Kumara? I asked. Kumara answered my question, so casually as he does, by saying, “my role is to make sure to honor the choices made, as with all those who are connected to this story and with you as well Archmage. I shall honor those choices for everyone is entitled to make them and I do not miss my mark, for this I promise you.”

“Telling this story is crucial, for no one would know, if not for you. Everyone gets lost and could use some help to find their way”, he said as he looked to me.

I looked back to Kumara and remembered the words he once spoke to me, then repeated them back to him. To remember is to find your way, I said and Kumara gave me a reassuring smile and nod.

“One more thing Archmage”, he continued. Yes? I returned to him, still considering what he spoke.

“We have arrived at Destard”. I looked around and sure enough we were stopped directly in front of the dungeon of Destard.

Right-right, you are, I added and I got down and dismissed my summoned horse, then we went inside to explore or find whatever was to be found, for this was the nature of our visit to this place.

We were drawn here by the work of Mariah who mentioned that in one of the episodes, she thought referred to the recent activities of this dungeon, which was basically a massive cave system. Specifically, she discovered an episode that was about nature and dragons and those activities reported to the Kings Guard about Destard, where regarding fey creatures being drawn to this place.

Besides, it would have been good to dust off some of my arcane arts and practice them again, for I seldom get the chance and as a result, I am nowhere near the capabilities with my disciplines as Mariah is.

I am an Archmage, for this is the title that I carry, but I have long been removed from being a fully qualified Archmage, as some might believe me to be.

It was dark when we entered the dungeon, but I could hear many creatures lurking inside, then I cast my night-vision spell to have a look around. I briefly noticed another person in the distance, on some kind of mounted beast, but they were gone, out of my line of sight the moment after I cast the spell.

The cave entrance took us into a large cavern and there were many creatures, with a few smaller dragons and drakes. "Have no fear Archmage, for we should be safe". Should? I asked. "Yes, but you might want to stay close just in case", he insisted with a smile.

Wags the Destroyer ran ahead and as he did, he drew the attention of several beasts and monsters. Mariah was right, there were many fey creatures here mixed together with these dragons. I had no idea what was going on or why they would be here, but I vaguely suspected that somehow Kumara knew.

I could hear Wags ahead of us, as we walked, then noticed the dragons and fey creatures had no interest in attacking our position, for that was not the custom to such a place. There were many skeletons strewn upon the ground, that we stepped over, that told a much different story and fate of those less fortunate.

The dog had drawn the ire of a Shadow Wurm, which was a dragon that practiced necromancy. As soon as we got near Wags, the Shadow Wurm noticed Kumara and disengaged to let us pass, then I remembered Kumara's words to me, of that of staying close to him, so I made sure I did. I looked up at this very intimidating black dragon and it was without a doubt eyeing me, as our small group moved past it.

We journeyed through a poison field and I could feel my lungs fill with poison gas and I started to cough. I was constantly using my arcane arts to remove the poison, as we walked. I assumed Kumara would be immune to such things, but not the dog, though he was not affected by the clouds as I was. I wondered about that, and thought back to the book that Valentine had given to Zara, then thought perhaps the dog had some special ability that I didn't understand.

Of course, he did I continued to think, for I often find myself not understanding most of the things of these past few months. Instead, I have just come to accept them.

Kumara stopped near a grouping of stalagmites and he stayed silent for a moment. My night-vision spell in this location barely worked at all, as my sight was very-poor. I stepped a few paces around one of the features on the ground and could see a torch slowly forming in front of me, far above where I was at, as my eyes adjusted to the darkness, to make out what this odd-looking thing was.

Then I heard it.

A deep rumble started to form near the torch and my eyes identified the source of the dim light. I could see a massive greater dragon standing no further than ten feet away and it was completely still, watching me as fire grew in its open mouth. I was paralyzed, unable to move and Kumara slowly walked to my side, then touched my shoulder with the staff he carried with him.

When he did this, the entire room started to reveal itself, as I could make out all of the dark spaces and small lines of detail that made up the room. The Greater dragon turned and slowly lumbered away and then I looked around the rest of the room in amazement. I could see a large congregation of very impressive dragons walking all around us. I took a few steps back and bumped into something, quickly turning to find the dog sitting down, as our eyes met. He reached out a paw to touch my leg, then he returned to his patiently waiting position.

In front of him, where Kumara was standing, I could now see some kind of azure or teal-glow coming from the ground. I heard the heft of nearby dragons positioning themselves behind me and I quickly moved forward a bit.

“This is the exact location Archmage”, said Kumara, then he continued, “for this is the very spot I last stood many thousands of years ago with my sisters and brothers, when we created this realm. The light you see is residual magic of the cosmos, that was used to create this place, for this location is still very powerful and strong, even after all this time.”

I looked down and I could somehow see an outline, not on the ground, but just underneath it. This display as with the aura, must be the benefit of the affect I had received from Kumara’s dragon signet. Kumara nodded for the dog and Wags stood up and went to the center of this azure-glow and began to dig in the earth. As he dug, I watched, then I could see the teal-lights move around Wags like fireflies being disturbed by his efforts. They swirled around the motions of the dog and the dirt, as he was stirring the two together. It was as if two worlds existed at once, somehow being merged as one, as a paint brush blended that of colors, that of what I could now see and what was physically there before.

It did not take the dog long to reach something, so I joined him to help with the excavation, for I did not have a desire to stay here longer than I needed to be. There was some kind of metal at first, then we discovered it belonging to a shield. A minute or two later we had uncovered this shield and when I pulled it from its resting place, it was like tearing it away from something and this unsettled a great amount of this residual magic of the cosmos that Kumara had described of the azure-glow.

Under the shield was a skeleton and its ribcage. Wags continued to dig and as he did, I stood up to present the shield to Kumara and that is when I saw someone in the distance again. When my eyes made contact with this person, they noticed me too and quickly hid from my view, but they were very far away from us, as to keep their distance. Still, I was able to get a good-look at this person, especially with this enhanced vision bestowed upon me by Kumara’s signet. That figure was dressed in red and black, wearing a type of skeleton armor, holding a large war-axe and sitting upon a Bane dragon mount.

Someone is watching us, I spoke to Kumara. “I know Archmage, you are quite safe, do not worry”, he said in response. Do you know this person who watches us, I asked? “I do, for that is Durendal, the daughter of Triston of Curtana”, he answered as he took the shield from me and gazed upon it.

“The celestial shield, for this seems to be our intended task Archmage and there are some inscriptions too, that should be of some great use to us on our quest”, he added.

What is this shield, that you know of and what about this Durendal person? I asked. Kumara handed the shield back to me and said the following:

“When you are finished with this aegis Archmage, I would like to give this precious artifact to Valkyries, for she has sacrificed her own shield and weapon when she first arrived and now, she is defenseless, least for the very simple iron weapon she is in possession of. For this is not becoming of the Valkyrie in my service. The celestial shield was constructed in the Lake of Mana, well before this realm was ever created and it needs an appropriate home.”

“As for Durendal, she will not approach us, as my presence blinds her from seeing, as she has come to learn of our encounter here. She will keep her distance, but I sense she is looking for something, not this shield, but something else.”

I took the shield from Kumara, while Wags the Destroyer had finished unearthing the skeleton remains. When the entire skeleton was exposed to us, Kumara reached down and touched the bones with his staff and as he did the remains dissolved and merged with his signet, in the same way I assumed the rabbit from the book did. He then reached for something and in his hands, he produced a glowing crystal, that shined a vibrant emerald color, for this must have been the crystal in the book I had also read about.

He placed the crystal where the skeleton was located and waved the staff around the area, as the glowing ancient magic responded. The azure-aura began to be pulled into that very crystal, that was laying on the dirt, a few feet into the hole that Wags had created.

I watched the display, as all these particles of earth and light were being forced to the crystal and I put my hand up, in front of my face, to protect my eyes from the small whirlwind and commotion that was being produced. The intensity of the light grew at the source around the crystal and there was a large explosion of Azure color, that then changed to every possible color, like some kind of magical firework. That explosion briefly blinded me and I could hear the dragons near us move away from our location too, as they made noises, as they must have been startled, as I was.

When I looked down, there was no hole and I could no longer see any signs of this ancient magic, as the dirt was flat and undisturbed. Laying on the ground where the excavation took place was a jar and a blanket, of some mysterious origin. Kumara opened the jar and placed something inside of it, then turned to me and said, “shall we go?”.

What did you place inside the jar? I asked.

Kumara returned to me, with his usual smile, then said, “some reagents, with some extra black pearl and mandrake root of course. This is for someone else, as a small gesture of good will Archmage. I have come to learn that this person would very much appreciate the notion.”

We made our way out of the dungeon and then back to the PAWS Soulforge, but as we traveled, I still had the feeling that we were being watched or followed. I often looked around but saw nothing, as I assured myself, that I was just being paranoid.

I thought of this Durendal person, as this was my only thinking at the time and likely why I was feeling thoughts of paranoia. For this person was looking for something and I had a feeling that there might be a connection to the quest we were on, but the most likely consideration was that I would never see Durendal again.

I looked down to the shield, on the side of my summoned horse and realized, now in the light of the day, that that material was like the armor that Valkyries uses and I understood why Kumara wanted her to have it. She had sacrificed so much and I often over-looked that, only because she never mentions herself or anything she would ever need. I considered this for a while and found myself feeling shame with my petty or selfish ambitions, for she was always serving so gladly and still is. I was honored to know her in-fact.

I am sure Kumara must think very highly of her because of her service too, but also because of the shield I was to give to her.

“I do”, said Kumara

I forgot that Kumara could understand my thoughts and I only hope that I did not think anything he might find to be of poor taste.

I looked to Kumara and smiled and he returned to me smile back, as we continued our journey back the PAWS Soulforge.

I would wait until we returned to the back to the house to examine the markings on the shield and then my thoughts drifted back to Durendal again, the daughter of Triston of Curtana, whoever that may be. I began to form questions about who this Triston of Curtana was and then I wondered why Durendal was blinded by the presence of Kumara?

This connection could not be so easily or carelessly be disregarded.

I heard another noise off in the woods and turned to look in that direction, to only find nothing as before.

Paranoid again, I thought, as we continued our way back to the PAWS Soulforge. For this was not becoming of an Archmage who was once the Guildmaster for the Mage’s Guild.

-Archmage Guildmaster

“Awaiting the sunrise to the east” the inscription read at the base of the statue that both Lord Dupre and I stared at. Are you ready for this? I inquired of him. Lord Dupre looked over to me, then back to the statue and then he held out his hand. I took that for an affirmation to continue on, for Lord Dupre does not speak often, but he doesn’t need to, for his actions speak volumes.

I held the golden-skull in my hands, that we had retrieved from the dungeon of Doom and were standing directly in front of the statue of Helios. That statue was facing the eastern horizon and the vast sea

ahead of it, as he pointed onward. I looked up from peering at the skull, to the western skies as I the darkness all around us began to soften. I could start to make out the crest of light emerging in the distance and I turned to Sir Dupre and handed him the skull that I carried.

“Thank you, sister”, he returned to me as he held the heavy artifact in both hands and stared into the soulless eyes of the signet of power. As the light took siege over the skies in front of us, Lord Dupre held up the item, so it would face Helios and we awaited, for whatever would transpire. The light from the sunrise to the west found its way to the golden-skull and reflected some of that light back to the statue, yet no change could be witnessed.

Both the paladin commander and I watched the small particles of faded-light begin to rise on the surface of the statue of Helios and I instructed Lord Dupre to keep holding the skull where it was at.

Instantly the sun peaked above the horizon, to the west, and the intense rays reached the artifact, then to the front of the statue, but still no change. The rising-light had stopped ascending up the face of the granite features of Helios and I realized that was a positioning problem. I quickly instructed Lord Dupre to change how he held the skull so that the light could reach the eyes on the statue and so he did.

He played with the angles, like a puppeteer would orchestrate the strings to create the fluid motion of his artform and then the statue opened its eyes. That startled me some, as the display was rather ominous, then the spear that the statue was holding slowly started to change shapes.

Keep holding that location, I instructed the lord commander.

The lance that the statue once held, was now a scabbard in its right hand and Helios began to kneel before the two of us. Helios extended his left hand, then put his palm up, then the statue thrust out the scabbard it held to our direction, as it stayed in a kneeling position. Lord Dupre placed the skull upon the outreached hand and took a few steps backwards. We watched for a moment but there was no change, then I blurted out to Dupre, the sword! Put your sword in the scabbard Sir and so he did.

The moment the mighty sword that Lord Dupre carried with him was secured in its new resting place, the white granite of stone began to be pulled into the skull itself. The two rubies on the weapon, of the paladin order, glowed with such an intense light that I was compelled to look away, but I stopped myself as to not miss any detail of that event. Eventually the white features of Helios were replaced with that of a very large being, for kneeling in front of us was no longer a statue at all, but that of Helios the Helmsmen of the Sea.

The gemstones on the sword quieted their song and the skull was no longer golden, but pure-white. Lord Dupre walked closer to inspect the artifact, as that item was now the Skull of the Innate Will, the signet of air and the sigil of the Kingdom of Lemuria. The lord looked up to Helios and the being returned a smile to Dupre, then it spoke: “It is my honor Lion of Lemuria”, then Helios added, “for my sword now belongs to you as well”.

Lord Dupre looked to the sword as the scabbard was still held out, to the both of us, so the paladin commander drew the weapon from the side of Helios and as he did the weapon erupted in song, much in the same way it did in the dungeon of Wrong, when Lord Dupre strummed his thumb across the blade, but this time the sound was much more magnificent. Those notes now play, as if angels were

playing them at the side of this weapon. As the singing choir played on, the sword drew fire from the air and the blade was now engulfed in flames.

“Caliburnus”, said Helios, “for that is name of your weapon, Lion of Lemuria, and as the songs guide your strikes, the flames shall burn away all things untrue”, he added.

“The skull awaits Lion”, Helios said as Lord Dupre put the weapon away and turned his attention to the Skull of the Innate Will. The paladin commander grabbed hold of the artifact away from the grasp of the Helmsmen and when he did, Helios quickly stood upright again returned to stone.

I looked over to Lord Dupre and much anticipated his returned glance, but he did not look to me. Instead, he now held the skull in both of his hands and was peering into the bright ruby eyes in front of him, but unmoving and motionless.

Sir? I beckoned of him, but he was mesmerized, as he continued to stare at the skull.

Lord Dupre? I called to him again, but still no reply.

Brother! I called out, then ran to his side to break his trance and as I did, he put the skull down to his side, turned and said, “the skull shared a vision”.

What? What vision? I asked.

“Reg Volom”, the paladin commander returned, then said, “I saw Valkyries there as she flew to Reg Volom with the Archmage and entered that place”. What would this mean? I asked. “The vision kept my attention to the entrance and soon a figure followed her”, he answered. Could you tell who that figure was? I again asked of the lord. “No, but it was dressed in red and black, wearing armor made of bones and it was welding a war-axe, while riding an all-black Bane Dragon.”

“I think the skull was showing a future event, not what was currently happening”, the lord spoke.

It will take some time to get to Reg Volom, I instructed Lord Dupre.

“My previous visions of Valkyries suffering some great and horrible fate, that I have seen many times before, for I fear that may be upon us right now and we must make haste Mariah”, Lord Dupre said, as he handed me the skull, in a very serious tone.

I hesitantly took that great artifact of power, but felt nothing unusual about it, then realized how light it was, almost as if it weighed nothing at all. I ran to Lady, my horse to put the skull in a safe location and quickly turned back to Lord Dupre, as he was still standing where I had left him.

“Durendal” he spoke.

What? I inquired of him.

“Durendal, that figure is Durendal, of this I know”, he replied, as our eyes met.

As he said that name out loud again, a sense of great panic and fear filled my entire body.

For Valkyries and the Archmage were in grave danger, of that I knew.

-Mariah the Champion of the Virtue of Honesty

End of part 4

The Golden Trio and the Quest for Ladon

Sandals of Time

Author: *Mathew D. Miles*

The Golden Trio & the Quest for Ladon part 4: *Part of the 3rd 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 Finale: *Succubus & Valkyries and the Quest for Ladon*

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