



A Little Knowledge

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The lightning bolt came out of a clear sky. Jedra, busy haggling over the price of a new waterskin, flinched as the bright blue flash illuminated the food and clothing and harness stands around him. In the same instant, a thunderclap rattled the entire bazaar and echoed off the adobe brick walls of the one- and two-story buildings surrounding it.

Jedra turned, ears ringing, to see a four-slave sedan chair on the ground only a few yards away, the overweight templar it had carried angrily brushing sand off his black robe of office while three heavily muscled slaves frantically righted the chair. The fourth slave lay on the ground, a patch of melted sand a few inches across bubbling beside his smoking body.

The slave must have stumbled and pitched the templar out, Jedra supposed, and the templar had killed him for it. Case closed.

Activity had stopped in the bazaar, but as others came to the same conclusion it picked up again. Jedra turned back to the water vendor, a leathery old elf with an eyepatch over his left eye, and said, “All right, two ceramics for the waterskin, but only if it’s full.”

The elf peered at Jedra, no doubt trying to judge how far he could push this young, skinny half-elf, but at last he nodded. “Done,” he said, and he filled the teardrop-shaped leather sack from a barrel at the back of his stand, careful not to spill a single drop, while Jedra dug into his pouch for two fragments of ceramic coin. They were the last of Jedra’s money. If he was to eat today, he would have to find work or scavenge something he could sell.

Taking the skin from the elf, he drained a fourth of its contents in two long swallows, then slung it around his shoulder by the strap, the weight of it comforting. At least he wouldn’t go thirsty today.

The templar was already gone when he turned around again, as was the sedan chair and the slave’s body. All that remained of the incident was the small glassy pool where the lightning bolt had melted the sand. Ever curious, Jedra kicked at it with the toe of his sandal, and a piece of glass flaked off the top. It was several inches across and an inch or so thick in the middle, but thinner around the edges.

He bent down and picked up the fragment, then nearly dropped it again when he looked into it. There, amid the bubbles and streaks, danced a tiny upside-down image of a thri-kreen.

He looked beyond the glass. The actual creature stood across the way, its six-limbed, mantislike insectile body glistening in the sunlight as it examined a gythka - a polearm with blades at either end - at an armorer's stall.

The thri-kreen seemed oblivious to Jedra and his glass. Cautiously, lest he be less fortunate a second time, Jedra looked through the glass again, turning slowly and watching as the upside-down bazaar slid by-backward. No one noticed that they had been turned on their heads, if indeed they had. Jedra put his free hand out beyond the glass to see if he could feel any sensation.

A point of bright light slid across his wrist, and when he paused to look at it, he felt a sudden sting of heat. The glass had burned him!

Jedra rubbed at his wrist, but he smiled. The glass must still hold a bit of the lightning bolt that had created it. That might be worth something to the right person. He glanced at a spice stand draped with herbs and roots, a stand that was rumored to be a black market outlet for the things used in the creation of magic. The proprietor would probably buy the glass from him.

He took a few steps toward the stand, then stopped, realizing he was reluctant to part with his new treasure so soon. A half-breed elf with no home and no magical training didn't often find himself in possession of wondrous devices. He had no doubt he would have to sell it eventually, but the day was still young and his hunger was still bearable. He would see what else the glass could do first.



He found a quiet spot just off the bazaar, in an alley lined with continuous mud-brick row houses. Their wooden doors and windows were closed tight to hold in the cool air from the previous night, giving Jedra privacy to experiment.

In just a few minutes he discovered the glass's major power, and the reason he'd been burned: When held at the right distance, it made things seem greater than they really were, including the heat of Athas's

coppery red sun. Why most things remained only images while the sun actually seemed to appear beneath the glass was a mystery, as was the reason why objects beyond arm's reach of the glass were turned upside-down.

He had just ignited a dead leaf-no doubt blown into the alley from the king's garden, since few of the freemen living in the row houses would willingly spend the water to keep a plant alive-when he felt a presence in his mind, as if someone were watching him. He had learned to trust that sensation; he looked up to see a human nobleman of about sixty years, his hair as white as his robe, standing at the far end of the alley, mouth open in astonishment. Cursing his carelessness, Jedra stood and began to walk quickly toward the bazaar again. The man must have seen the leaf bursting into flame and would certainly draw the obvious conclusion that Jedra was using the glass to power some sort of magic.

Just as obviously, Jedra was not a templar, and by law only templars and the sorcerer-king himself were allowed to use magic. A commoner caught practicing it could be sold into slavery, even executed. Unused to magic or its implications, Jedra hadn't even considered that danger.

He considered it now. Suddenly sweating, he sprinted for the bazaar, hoping to lose himself in the crowd, but he had hardly made it a dozen paces before the noble found his voice. The shout of "stop him!" pursued Jedra out of the alley, and he emerged to find everyone looking in his direction. None of the dozens of shoppers made a move to catch him, probably thinking him an ordinary thief, but when the noble emerged from the alley behind him and shouted, "A magician! Stop him!" They sprang into action.

A tall, massive half-giant with arms the size of Jedra's legs swung a sack of grain off one shoulder just as Jedra ran past, catching him square in the back with it. He staggered forward under the blow but kept his footing, only to slam into a compact, musclebound dwarf. The dwarf's blocky head reached only to Jedra's chest, just high enough to burst his new waterskin with the impact.

He dodged around the dwarf, but the entire bazaar seemed out to get him now. A noble's order was almost as good as law, especially an order the templars would so obviously support. None of the crowd wished to be caught disobeying that order lest they be accused of aiding in an escape. Such people often found themselves sharing their quarry's fate.

Jedra whirled and leaped back into the alley, dodging dwarf and half-giant and bowling over the noble, but he skidded to a stop when he realized that the noble's cry had brought people running from the other end, too. He was trapped. He looked to either side but saw only the closed doors and shuttered windows of the row houses lining the alley. Could he leap to a windowsill and from there to a roof? Not likely, but he could think of nothing else to try. He crouched to spring, but when he jumped it felt as if he'd kicked a hole in the ground rather than launched himself into action. He heard astonished gasps from the crowd and looked down to see a shimmering circle of darkness beneath his feet. He had just enough time to scream before he fell through.



He landed on his feet on hard-packed dirt, but the remains of his abortive leap and a sudden rush of disorientation combined to send him sprawling. He threw out his hands to stop his fall, and the glass flew from his grasp to skitter to a stop in a circle of ash next to a pair of dark leather boots.

Straining to see in the dim light, Jedra raised his head to find who the boots belonged to. A short, wiry man with dark curly hair stood before him. The man bent down to pick up the glass took stock of his surroundings, though the circle of ash around the man's feet told him plenty. He was a magician, and not a templar, either. Templars drew their power from the city's sorcerer-king, but other magicians had to draw upon the life-force around them. Every time a magician cast a spell, he drew his energy from the plant life and fertile soil around him. If a mage wasn't careful, he drew all the lifeforce from an area, reducing it to ash.

"Who are you?" asked Jedra as he stood and took stock of his surroundings, though the circle of ash around the man's feet told him plenty. He was a magician, and not a templar, either. Templars drew their power from the city's sorcerer-king, but other magicians had to draw upon the life-force around them. Every time a magician cast a spell, he drew his energy from the plant life and fertile soil around him. If a mage wasn't careful, he drew all the lifeforce from an area, reducing it to ash.

The man didn't answer. He examined the glass carefully, nearly dropping it when he saw upsidedown images of the room slide through it. "Oho!" he said. "So this is what caused all the commotion. Is it your work?"

Jedra had no idea how to respond. He looked around him and saw that he was in a one-room house, with a cot in one corner, a plank table and two chairs in another, a wooden chest and cabinet in a third, and a workbench covered with scrolls and wands and unfamiliar tools in the fourth. A window in one wall opened onto a shared courtyard and allowed a shaft of sunlight to illuminate the room.

The window in the opposite wall was shuttered, but Jedra could hear the mob shouting in confusion just beyond it. Obviously, the man had rescued him with some kind of spell, but for what reason Jedra couldn't guess. Finally he simply said, "Maybe."

"Good answer," the man said. "Allow me to introduce myself. I am Dornal, mage and member of the Veiled Alliance."

Jedra considered making up a name, but there seemed little point in lying to a mage. "Jedra," he said.

Dornal smiled. "I was right to rescue you, Jedra. You have powers the Alliance would love to learn. You have heard of us, haven't you?"

Jedra nodded. Of course he had. The Veiled Alliance was supposedly a league of mages opposed to the sorcerer-king and his templars and to unscrupulous magicians in general. They worked to put lifeforce back into the world rather than use it up to power their spells. They were a secretive bunch whose existence Jedra had only half believed until now.

"I was looking through the shutter when I saw you practicing your burning spell," said Dornal as he squinted to see the images in the glass. "I assume this is used for that as well?" He swung around toward the open window.

"Don't look at the sun!"

The mage lowered the glass and studied Jedra from beneath narrowed brows.

"It magnifies things. Even sunlight. You could burn your eye with it."

"Oh." Dornal examined the glass with renewed interest. "And what were you doing with it?"

"Experimenting."

"Of course."

A subtle change in the noise from outside made Dornal step to the window and peer through the cracks in the shutter, then he turned suddenly away. “They’ve brought in templars to search the area for magic. We’ve got to go.” He walked to the cabinet, pulled out a cloth traveling bag, and began to throw clothing and valuables into it. The lightning glass went into the bag, Jedra noticed.

“Go where?” he asked.

“We must leave the city for a time,” said Dornal. “I risked a great deal in stealing you away right out in the open like that. Templars can trace the use of magic, and they don’t like to be publicly thwarted; they’ll search for us for many days before they give up.”

“Days!”

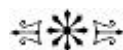
“That’s right. So we would be wise to stay out of their path until that time passes.” Dornal pulled a long, multi-colored tunic from the cabinet and tossed it to Jedra. “Here, put that on.”

Jedra complied, seeing the wisdom in that, at least. He was about to argue about the idea of leaving the city when Dornal tossed him a leather sack and said, “Keep that out of sight.”

Jedra nearly collapsed when he opened it and saw a double-handful of silver and gold coins. He’d never before held even a single silver piece. A fortune this size would take him a dozen lifetimes to earn, and at least a lifetime to spend. If Dornal trusted someone he’d just met with such wealth, then the man must be a powerful mage indeed. And if so, then he certainly knew more about keeping himself safe from templars than Jedra did. The boy stripped off his ruined water-skin and used its tie to secure the money bag around his neck, making certain it hung hidden beneath his tunic.

Dornal tossed another money sack into his traveling bag, tied it closed, and stepped to the back door. “Coming?” he asked.

Jedra couldn’t see that he had much choice, not if the templars were looking for him. “I guess,” he said, and followed the mage out the door.



Within hours he found himself sharing a cramped cabin in an upper deck of a merchant caravan headed for the city of Tyr. It was hardly a caravan, really, just a single enormous wooden wagon pulled by two

equally enormous mekillots-long, wide, lizardlike creatures with hide thick enough to turn arrows. The wagon they drew looked like a castle on rollers, complete with battlements from which guards could fire on the raiders and wild beasts that roamed the desert. Inside was a warren of decks and compartments with enough cargo capacity to hold an entire bazaar's worth of goods.

This wagon's cargo also included slaves, destined to labor and probably die on the ziggurat being built for the sorcerer-king of Tyr. Jedra shuddered when he thought of the poor creatures huddled in darkness just a few decks below his own. Had it not been for Dornal's intervention, he might have found himself in a similar situation.

The dry, musky smell of mekillot hide poured in through the single foot-square porthole in their cabin, but closing the shutter would have been worse. They'd only just left the city, but Jedra was already sweating with the heat and he knew it would get much worse as the day wore on. They needed all the fresh air they could get, even if it did smell of dust and lizard.

They also needed the sunlight the window admitted. Dornal was examining Jedra's mysterious piece of glass, holding it up to the light and branding lines into the tiny tabletop jutting out from the opposite wall.

"It doesn't seem to need life-force to power it," he said. "Truly astonishing. What else does it do?"

"You saw how it magnifies things," Jedra said. He was sitting on the edge of the cabin's single bunk, trying to keep from getting sick with the swaying of the wagon.

"Yes, yes, and it makes distant things look smaller and upside-down," said Dornal. "I fail to see the usefulness of that, unless you could actually make something become smaller and upside-down. Is there a spell for that, perhaps?"

"I don't know," Jedra said. "I don't think so."

"You don't think so." Dornal peered at Jedra through the glass. "You know, it's becoming quite clear to me that you know very little about this . . . this device. You didn't make it yourself, did you?"

Jedra had been dreading this moment. He considered lying, but he knew he'd be caught in an instant. Reluctantly he said, "No. But I saw how it was made."

“Did you now? Tell me about it. What spells were used?”

Dornal was obviously testing him. Carefully Jedra described how the templar called down the lightning bolt and how he had found the glass afterward.

“A lightning spell,” Dornal mused when he was done. “Yes, I suppose there might be enough energy in a lightning spell to make something like this, but if the templar didn’t fashion it on purpose, then I don’t suppose he knows anything more about it than you do.”

“Probably not.”

“And you know next to nothing. You’re not a mage at all, are you?”

“No,” Jedra admitted. Hopefully, he added, “But I bet I could learn.”

Dornal laughed softly, and his laugh sent a chill down Jedra’s spine. “Oh, no doubt you could. You’ve got potential. I can sense it in you. But I see no point in training my own competition.” He waved an arm, and Jedra felt his muscles lock into place. The wagon lurched, one of its wheels no doubt falling into a circle of ash that suddenly appeared beneath it as the magician above cast his spell. Unable to keep his balance, Jedra toppled to his side on the bunk.

With effort, he could still speak. “What are you doing?” he demanded.

“Retrieving what’s mine.” Dornal knelt beside Jedra and removed the money bag from beneath the boy’s tunic. “Thank you for carrying this past the gate guards for me,” he said, pouring into his hand a collection of crystals and amulets that would have marked anyone as a magician on sight. “I wasn’t sure we’d make it past them unchallenged.”

Dornal had cast some kind of illusion on the bag, Jedra realized. He kicked at the magician with all his strength, but his spell-bound leg hardly moved.

“You used me,” he hissed.

“I did. Get used to it. It’s going to happen a lot where you’re going.”

“Where’s that?”

For answer, Dornal merely pointed downward. Then he waved his hand again, and Jedra lost consciousness entirely.



Jedra woke to intense heat and the smell of dozens of sweaty, unwashed bodies. The only light came from two barred windows set in doors on either end of the hold, the doors themselves opening only into dim companionways, but the boy didn't need light to know where he was. Dornal had sold him into slavery, probably for little more than the cost of his passage. He'd taken back his tunic, too; Jedra now wore a simple breechcloth.

He sat up and looked around him. There were twenty or thirty others in the hold with him, all bound at wrists and ankles with heavy leather manacles and tied to the wall with ropes attached to the collars around their necks. Jedra saw that the slavemaster hadn't been picky; there were humans, dwarves, an elf, even one of the insectile thri-kreen.

"What did you do, cross the wagon master?" a female voice asked. He turned and saw a short, round-faced human woman sitting beside him. She wore a halter in addition to her breechcloth.

"I trusted a magician," he said after a moment.

She laughed, but not unkindly. "Not a wise idea," she said.

A dwarf two people beyond her did laugh unkindly, but not at Jedra. In a voice like distant thunder he said, "You should talk, templar."

The other slaves laughed. Jedra stared at the woman in open amazement. She's a templar? "Wrong," she said to the dwarf. "I was a healer. My powers are psionic, not magical, and to be a templar you've got to know magic."

Jedra knew next to nothing about psionics, the mental abilities that some people could call upon instead of magic, save that such powers supposedly didn't require life-energy to fuel them. He had wondered if his own ability to know when people were watching him was psionic, but he'd never before found anyone who could tell him.

He was about to ask the woman beside him, but the dwarf wasn't through taunting her. "You worked for the templars," he said. "That's practically the same thing."

"Slaves work for the templars, too," she spat back at him.

"But you got paid for it. Blood money," said the dwarf.

Jedra normally wouldn't have gotten mixed up in someone else's argument, but he wanted to talk with this woman. Besides, he couldn't

help noticing that, given a bath and a chance to brush out her shoulder-length brown hair, she would be rather pretty. It was enough to make him say, “Does it matter? We’re all slaves now.”

The dwarf growled, “Yah, thanks to the likes of her. And maybe you, too, eh? You like templars, do you?”

Stunned by the sudden accusation, Jedra stammered, “I-of course not. I mean.”

Stay out of it, the woman’s voice said clearly in his mind. *I can take care of myself*. Aloud she said, “Leave him alone. And leave me alone, too, or I’ll heal your mouth closed for you.”

“Hah,” the dwarf snorted, but Jedra noticed that he shut up.

The woman turned her attention back to Jedra. “So just how did trusting a magician get you here?”

Jedra told her the whole story about the piece of lightning glass, ending with Dornal’s betrayal.

“He told you he was one of Those Who Wear the Veil?” she asked.

“That’s right.”

“Well, that was his first lie. The Veiled Alliance really are honest magicians, for the most part. But they’re secretive as thieves when it comes to talking about it, and they hate people like this Dornal.”

“I wish I’d known that before,” Jedra said.

She laughed again. “We all wish we’d known something we didn’t, or we wouldn’t be here, that’s for sure. What’s your name, anyway?”

“Jedra. What’s yours?”

“Kayan.”

Jedra looked up and down the slave hold, but the other slaves had already lost interest in the two of them. He leaned close to her anyway. Softly, he asked, “How did you do that, when you spoke to me in my mind?”

You mean sending thoughts? It’s a simple psionic power.

It wasn’t quite like hearing her voice, but Jedra understood her words perfectly. His intention to ask about his own ability vanished in a sudden, more immediate question. “How far can you reach with that?” he asked excitedly.

“Depends on how well I can visualize the person I’m trying to contact,” she said aloud. “If it’s someone I know, I can talk to them almost anywhere. Otherwise, they’ve got to be close.”

“Then you can call for help!”

She shook her head. “Who would I ask? Most of the people I know were the ones who put me here in the first place. They’d think it was real funny hearing from me now.”

“But there must be somebody-“

“Look, nobody I know is going to come after a caravan just to rescue a couple of slaves. So unless you know someone-“

“The Jura-Dai would.” The voice was high and pure, and came from directly across the hold from Jedra. He looked up to see an elf staring at him. His eyes were set close in a narrow face, and his nose was slender and long. Everything about him was long. Even bent at the knees, his legs stretched nearly across to Jedra, and his reddish blond hair reached the floor despite being braided. He was like an exaggerated version of Jedra himself, whose elven features had been rounded and shortened by his human heritage.

“What?” Kayan asked.

“I am Galar of the Jura-Dai tribe. My people would come for me if they knew I was here.”

“They’d attack a caravan just for you?” Galar laughed. “There is plenty of treasure on board, too.”

Jedra said to Kayan, “You can send a message to his tribe!”

Kayan shook her head. “I don’t know anyone in his tribe. So unless they’re traveling along right beside us, I can’t reach them.”

“You could try.”

“And get myself blasted unconscious by the guards?”

“Huh? How would they know you’d done anything?”

She looked at him like he had drool on his chin. “One of the guards is a psionist. That’s one of the ways they keep slaves in line. He’ll be watching for escape attempts.”

“Oh.”

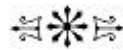
Kayan’s expression softened. “Look, I’d try it in a minute if I thought it’d work, but I know my limits. I can’t contact any random elf out there. That’s just not the way it works.”

Jedra nodded, feeling hope drain out of him, but a sudden thought checked his plunge into despair. “Wait a minute. These psionic powers of yours- are they something you can teach?”

“Well, you’ve got to have some inherent ability, but otherwise, yes, it’s possible. Why?”

Jedra nodded toward Galar. “You could teach him. He knows plenty of elves.”

Kayan looked at Jedra as if he’d just suggested escaping by a trapdoor and then shown her one at her own feet. But she’d been a slave long enough to know how debilitating false hope could be. “Well,” she said cautiously, “it might be worth a try.”



Galar, they soon discovered, had all the telepathic ability of a rock. He couldn’t even make himself heard psionically across the slave hold, much less across the expanse of desert between him and his tribe. Jedra, however, surprised them all. With only a few hours of Kayan’s coaching, he learned to send his thoughts to anyone in the hold, even the thrikreen. His control was terrible-everyone near his intended target heard garbled voices in their heads, as well-but the raw power behind his sending was more than Kayan had ever seen before.

“You’d better stop,” she suggested after a particularly strong blast had reached half the slaves in the hold. “There’s no way the guards could’ve missed that. They might not care about a little telepathy among the slaves, but they’re going to do something about it if you keep it up.”

Jedra sighed. He’d been given a glimpse of something incredible within himself, then told to close his eyes. “I think I should try to contact the Jura-Dai,” he said. “You admitted my power’s stronger than yours; I might be able to reach them.”

“No!” Kayan pounded the deck between them with her fist. “You don’t know what you’re talking about. Your unfocused thoughts wouldn’t make it beyond the first dune. You’ve got to learn control first.” She leaned back against the wall. “Wait. Bide your time. Sooner or later an opportunity will come along, and then maybe you can use your talent.”

“Maybe,” Jedra grumbled, but he supposed Kayan was right. He would wait for a little while. He soon learned that the easiest way to wait -and to escape the heat- was to spend as much time as possible

unconscious. He leaned back against the wall and let the creaking of the wagon lull him to sleep.



Jedra floated face-down in a pool of water. The bottom was far out of reach, but the water was so clear only a faint shimmering told him he was seeing through anything but air. He drifted peacefully along, watching his shadow slip over the sand below, but when another shadow blotted out his own and he turned to see what cast it, he found himself suddenly sinking downward.

He thrashed his arms and legs, but the water wouldn't support him. He hadn't been breathing while adrift; now he needed to breathe desperately but couldn't.

The foreign shadow extended itself toward him, and suddenly Jedra felt a hand clasping his arm, pulling him upward. His head broke the surface, and he gasped in a breath, blinking in astonishment at his rescuer. It was Galar, still bound at the wrists, but behind him Jedra could see an entire tribe of elves. He saw their gaily colored tents, their herds of long, beetlelike pack animals called kanks, their willowy children playing in the sand-

Jedra sat up with a start, momentarily disoriented to find himself back in the slave hold of the merchant caravan. He'd seen a tribe of elves! He could still see them clearly in his mind.

Could his sleeping brain have used some sort of psionic vision to locate the Jura-Dai? It was possible; Kayan had told him he had other untrained skills besides telepathy. Jedra turned to ask her, but she was still asleep, and now that he was using his eyes again, the image in his mind started to fade. He closed his eyes and tried to concentrate. Yes, there they were, a whole tribe of elves camped out near a desert oasis. He could still see them, but he knew he couldn't hold onto them for long.

It was now or never, he realized. Concentrating hard on the elves in his vision, he tried to focus his thoughts in the way Kayan had taught him. He felt a hint of recognition, a faint twinge of "contact." It was enough. He summoned all the energy he could muster into the single thought:

Galar of the Jura-Dai is held captive in a caravan a day out from Urik on the road to Tyr.

Retribution came suddenly and with such intensity that Jedra cried out as if he were being burned alive, for that was exactly what it felt like. He writhed in agony, feeling his skin peel away in sheets of flame. The pain was worse than anything he'd imagined possible, and it went on and on, far longer than it would have if he'd really been on fire. A real fire would have killed him by now.

Then, as suddenly as it had come, the pain went away. Jedra collapsed on the deck, gasping for air.

Kayan lifted him to cradle his head on her lap. "You had to try it," she said.

"Dream," Jedra whispered through the memory of pain. "I saw the elves in a dream, saw my chance."

"Your chance to get us all punished," the dwarf growled, eyeing the door warily, but no guards appeared.

Galar looked to Jedra and asked, "Did you reach them?"

"I don't know." Jedra's whole body shuddered involuntarily with the release of tension. "I couldn't tell."

Galar asked Kayan, "Could he really have found them in a dream?"

She shrugged. "Who knows? It's possible, I suppose. What did you see?"

Jedra described the camp, with its colored tents and pens full of kanks.

"Colored tents?" asked Galar.

"Red and green and yellow, with blue and yellow banners flying from their peaks," Jedra said.

Galar shook his head sorrowfully. "I don't know whom you saw, if indeed you saw anyone at all, but the tents of the Jura-Dai are the color of the sand. Their only marking is the tribe totem on the walls." Galar held out his arm to show them a tattoo on his wrist: an angular, stylized raincloud with daggers for raindrops.

"Oh." Jedra pulled himself up to a sitting position. "I was stupid. I'm sorry."

"Don't be," Kayan said. "You didn't know" I'd have probably done the same thing in your position."

“I didn’t know,” Jedra said sullenly. “That’s starting to sound like my motto.”

“Don’t be so hard on yourself,” she said. “You’re learning.”

“Oh yes” I’ll be a master by the time I die on the ziggurat.” With that, Jedra turned away and refused to respond to any further words of comfort.



The wagon rolled on. Exhausted, Jedra slept, this time without any dreams of elves, and when he awoke it was already morning. The guards brought wooden mugs of water and bowls of thin gruel, but Jedra had barely eaten half of his before they unshackled him and led him into the upper decks of the wagon. He expected to be taken to the psionicist and reprimanded again for his offense, so he was surprised when the guard brought him to the cabin he had shared for so short a time with Dornal. The guard knocked, and the mage himself opened the door.

“Well, hello,” Dornal said, stepping aside. “Do come in.” The guard gave Jedra a shove, and he staggered into the room.

“Thank you,” Dornal said, tossing the guard a silver coin. Jedra gasped. That was probably more money than the man made in a month; Dornal was obviously buying his silence. Sure enough, the guard left and closed the door behind him.

“You were holding out on me,” Dornal said, almost conversationally. “You shouldn’t have done that, because now I will have to use less subtle methods to extract the information I need.” He waved his hands, and Jedra once more felt his muscles lock into place.

The wagon lurched. He felt himself topple forward and instinctively tried to throw out his hands to keep his balance. Spell-crippled, his arms didn’t move, but he nonetheless kept his balance, and Dornal, directly in front of him, staggered backward as if Jedra had actually pushed him.

“What’s this?” the man asked, astonished. He righted himself and waved his arms again, just as Jedra frantically tried to imagine a fist slamming into the magician. Dornal rocked back on his heels with the blow, but the renewed binding spell clamped down on the boy with the force of a giant’s fist; he fell face-first to the deck, striking with a resounding thump. Blood gushed from his nose, and it felt as if he’d bitten his tongue.

“Your pitiful little tricks won’t help you, boy,” Dornal growled, kicking Jedra repeatedly until the half-elf nearly fainted from the pain of broken ribs and a fractured skull. Jedra tried to scream, but the binding spell wouldn’t allow it. He tried to strike out psionically, but the pain prevented him from concentrating.

Satisfied at last that Jedra was subdued, Dornal dragged him by the heels into the patch of sunlight shining through the porthole. Jedra felt the heat on his bare back, then a sudden burning. Dornal was using the lightning glass on him.

“Now,” Dornal said, “you will tell me everything you know.”

He relaxed the binding spell enough to allow Jedra to speak, and the boy let out his breath in a long, gurgling scream. At last he found his voice. “Stop!” he shouted, turning his head far enough to see the magician kneeling over him. “I’ll tell you anything you want!”

“You will tell me the truth,” Dornal said, drawing the point of heat slowly across Jedra’s back “Starting with what other powers you have and how you invoke them.”

Cursing and weeping with the pain, Jedra told Dornal what little he knew, but the magician obviously didn’t believe him. He held the glass over the boy’s back, demanding more, until Jedra wished he had some hidden knowledge to give Dornal so that the torture would end.

At last Jedra screamed, “I don’t know any more! Kill me or let me go, but stop hurting me.”

Dornal leaned back out of the sunlight and scraped sweat off his brow with the edge of his hand. “You’re in no position to make demands,” he said. “On the other hand, I’m beginning to think you’re telling the truth.” He gave Jedra one last burn just for spite, then went to the door and shouted for the guard to put the boy back in the hold.



This time his wounds were real. Jedra was dimly aware of being locked up again, of warm hands touching him, of Kayan and Galar discussing his injuries, but he was beyond caring. He wanted only to die.

Even death was denied him. Jedra felt strength pouring back into him with the same relentlessness with which it had been ripped away, healing and revitalizing his wounds. It took time; he was aware of the

wagon moving again and of the day wearing on into night. He was aware of Kayan holding onto him throughout. She was doing this, he knew. She was lending him her strength.

He woke with the dawn, aching and hungry but healed. Kayan looked gaunt with fatigue. When the guards came with food and water he made her eat and drink most of his, despite her protests that he needed it as much as she did.

“You gave me too much of your own strength,” he said. Then, more softly, “I didn’t know such a thing was possible.”

“Of course it is,” she said. “That’s how healing works. All of my powers are like that. Sharing thoughts, sharing ability, sharing health it’s all the same sort of thing.”

”Sharing ability?”

She shrugged. “Well, if you’ve got something you can do but I can’t, and if I’ve got something I can do but you can’t, then we can put our heads together and do them both at the same time.”

Jedra could feel sudden excitement building in him. “What if you try to share the same ability? Does it get stronger?”

“Depends on what you’re trying to do. Why?”

“What would happen if we both tried calling the Jura-Dai?”

Kayan snorted. “Will you forget that idea? Wasn’t it enough that you almost got yourself killed?”

“Not if we can make it work this time. Look, you’ve got the control we need to actually reach someone. I’ve got the power to get us there even if we don’t know just who we’re looking for. I was close last time, I know I was. A little more control and I’d have made contact.”

“You think.”

“I know.”

“If you’re wrong, then we both suffer the guards’ reaction. I can’t heal you again if I’m hurt too.”

The dwarf said, “Whether he’s right or wrong, you’d better be able to take care of the guards before you try anything. Another escape attempt and they’ll probably punish us all. And if they do, I promise you, you’ll regret it.”

“We’ve got to try something,” Jedra said. “We’ve got to escape this caravan before we get to Tyr.”

“I have no objection to escaping,” the dwarf said. “You just make sure we do escape when you try it, though.”

“He’s right,” said Kayan. “It’s a long trip. We can afford to wait for a better opportunity.”

“I don’t want to wait.”

“Well you’re going to have to,” she said, “because I’m not going to help you get yourself hurt again.”

Jedra looked to Galar for help, but the elf only held out his slender hands in a gesture that said as plain as words, “What can we do?”



About midday the caravan came to an outpost. The slaves could hear shouts of joy from the wagon guards, but those shouts soon turned to dismay when the guards saw that the outpost had been raided recently. The wagon stopped only long enough for the guards to sift through the ruins, then started up again. That night when they brought water, the mugs were only half full. When the slaves complained, one of the guards growled, “Be glad you get any. The raiders poisoned the well. We’re all on half rations until we get to the next outpost.”

The slaves had been getting the bare minimum already; half that was hardly enough to keep them alive. They made it through another day and a half before a sandstorm blew up out of the deep desert and forced them to a stop, and there they stayed for two more days, listening to the howl of sand-laden wind battering against the wagon’s closed hatches. The second day they got no water at all.

Their mouths and tongues were too swollen to allow speech. *They’ve given up on their cargo*, Kayan said in Jedra’s mind when the evening water time came and went without a show of guards. *Now they’re hoarding what’s left for themselves. I think it’s time we tried calling for help*, Jedra answered.

No.

Why not? We’ve got nothing to lose, do we? We’re going to die in this hold in a day or two anyway, unless we do something.

Kayan said nothing. Jedra could hear her labored breathing in the dark beside him.

Let’s at least say we died trying.

After a long time, she answered, *Let's see if we can try and live to tell about it instead.*



The convergence felt a little like the sharing of thoughts, but this time their combined consciousness grew until they felt like a single incredibly powerful being. The slave hold took on a shimmery, not quite substantial quality, as if the linked Jedra and Kayan existed on a higher plane that was only loosely tied to reality. It looked much like Jedra's underwater dream when he had seen the elves.

Unlike in his dream, they could move freely here, directing their attention wherever they chose. Cautiously, lest they alert the psionic guard to their presence, they drifted through the wagon's walls and out into the desert, searching for a tribe of elves.

The sandstorm was a whisper of motion, nothing more. In the dream, Jedra and Kayan became a swift, sleek-winged bird darting over the desert. The minds of other travelers were great funnels down which they could slide, only to find themselves looking out of strange eyes at the interiors of wagons or tents. None belonged to the elves they sought. They searched outward in ever-widening spirals, leaving the storm behind and speeding over the dunes faster than any real bird could fly, rising higher and higher to see more desert at once-until, finally, they found an enormous well leading down toward dozens of tents pitched at the base of a mountainous dune.

The tents would have been hard to spot if the dreamscape hadn't exaggerated them out of proportion, for they were the same grayish yellow color as the sand. Their walls were decorated with the stylized cloud raining daggers that Galar had shown them.

Found them! they thought together. They dropped toward the largest tent, felt themselves being drawn into the mind of the elf inside, and looked out through his eyes to see a bard playing a harp to a dozen or more elves reclining on woven rugs. The elves' clothing made up for the lack of color on their tents; men and women alike wore loose, rainbowcolored blouses and pants. Desert life had darkened their leathery skin to a deep brown.

Jedra's and Kayan's host became aware of their presence, and quickly they sent, *Galar of the Jura-Dai is a slave in a caravan caught in a sandstorm five days out from Urik to Tyr.*

They had no time to listen for a response. The tent and its occupants swirled as if they were smoke blown by the wind, and suddenly Jedra and Kayan were adrift over the desert again. *The guard, they realized. He heard our sending.*

A whirlwind danced across the dunes toward them: the guard's attack on their minds rendered visible in the dreamscape. Kayan and Jedra became a bird again, darting in and out around the whirlwind, seeking some sign of weakness where they could press an attack of their own.

Inside, the part that was still Kayan said, directly into his mind.

They flew over the top and down through the center of the funnel. The whirlwind writhed like a snake, trying to throw them out, but they were faster. When they reached the point of the funnel they grew larger and spread their wings outward with the force Jedra had discovered when Dornal had attacked him. The whirlwind spun into fragments, leaving a dark shadow of itself in its place. Jedra and Kayan slid into the shadow and found themselves in a silent, unguarded cave. They had knocked the guard unconscious.

Kill him, Jedra said.

No, heal him so no one else knows anything happened, Kayan answered, including himself.

They wound their way through the dark caverns of the guard's mind, sealing off whole sections of it as they passed. They let him keep just enough psionic ability to monitor the slaves but not enough to harm them, and they blocked his memory of the battle completely. They left him snoring peacefully in his cabin, then dissolved their link.

Coming out of convergence felt like losing half their intelligence. Jedra wanted to join again immediately, but the new fatigue in his dehydrated body warned him that he had already paid a high enough price for their temporary enhancement. Doing it again would have to wait for better days.



The sandstorm blew over in the night, and the wagon moved out again the next day, reaching another outpost by evening. This one was still standing, and for the first time in three days the slaves received water. Their strength slowly returned, and Jedra and Kayan began to hope they might survive long enough to learn whether or not their efforts had come to anything.

The other slaves weren't even aware at first of what Jedra and Kayan had done, but since they had already gotten away with it, the two finally decided to tell their fellow prisoners. At first the others were cautiously optimistic, but when another day passed without action, their mood began to grow ugly. "The elves aren't going to come," said one.

"We don't even know if they exist," said another.

"Should've known better than to trust a half-elf boy," a third muttered.

"A half-elf and a templar," the dwarf put in, "feeding us false hope so we'd think they were with us"

Galar spoke up. "If my people heard the call, they will come."

"They heard it," Jedra said. "Give them time; they were a long way away." But inwardly he wondered. Would they come?

He got his answer that evening, when a sudden commotion broke out on the upper decks. Shouts and the pounding of running feet echoed down the companionways, and the wagon lurched to a halt as a loud crack of thunder split the air.

"Link up," Kayan hissed, and almost immediately she and Jedra were back in convergence. The wagon became insubstantial, and their consciousness slipped away and upward to watch the battle.

The desert was covered with elves and their beetlelike kanks. Armed raiders swarmed like ants up the sides of the wagon, hacking at the guards with swords and overpowering them by sheer numbers. A silver eagle with iridescent wings flew through the dreamscape, breathing fire upon the defenders; the elves had a psionicist as well, it seemed. A tiny whirlwind rose toward it-the greatly diminished wagon guard returning the attack-but even as they joined battle a third warrior entered the dream.

It came as a giant black bat, but the bat was different in texture from the eagle and the whirlwind. It had a soft edged fuzziness about it, as if it were somehow less substantial than the others, and its face was recognizably human.

Dornal, Jedra realized. Does he have psionic power, too?

He's fighting with magic, Kayan said. That's why he doesn't look the same as the others.

His insubstantiality in the psionic vision evidently didn't affect his ability to enter the fray. The bat swept over the eagle and the whirlwind, spitting lightning bolts ahead of it like spears. It attacked indiscriminately, blasting both with multiple strikes until the eagle fell smoking from the sky and the whirlwind blew away into nothing.

Then it turned its attention to Jedra and Kayan.

They had been hovering overhead as a bird again, but as the bat rose toward them their combined intellect fashioned a barrier, a sheet of glass that trapped the lightning's fury and held the bat at bay.

Lightning glass, Jedra thought. Exulting in his newfound abilities, he bent the glass to match the shape of the piece he had discovered in the bazaar, and suddenly the bat beneath it glowed white hot, flared, and disappeared in a cloud of greasy smoke.

The dreamscape shook as if gripped by an earthquake, and Jedra and Kayan tumbled out of convergence to find the slave hold full of elven raiders, two of whom were slicing through their bonds.

The leader of the elves, a heavily muscled warrior who bled from half a dozen sword slashes, advanced into the hold. He grinned when he saw Galar and said, "You look like walking death."

"So do you," Galar replied, and the two embraced like long-lost brothers.

"You may all go free," the elf warrior said to the slaves, "but take nothing with you. Everything in this wagon now belongs to the Jura-Dai."

Galar nodded to Jedra and Kayan. "These are the ones who called you here," he said.

The warrior bowed to the half-elf and the human. "In that case, you may take whatever you wish, and you may travel with the Jura-Dai until you reach the safety of your own kind."

“Thank you,” Jedra said. “There’s one thing in particular I’d like to retrieve.” He took Kayan’s hand and led her out of the slave hold, up narrow companionways choked with elves already hauling the wagon’s cargo away, and onto the passenger deck.

Smoke seeped from beneath Dornal’s cabin door. They opened it cautiously, holding their breath against the stench of burned meat, and looked inside to see the magician’s body lying on the floor, his charred flesh curling from exposed bones.

Horrified at the spectacle but unable to look away, Jedra stepped into the room. The floor was barely scorched around the body; it was as if the magician had burned from the inside out.

How could we have done such a thing? He whispered in his mind.

Wild talent can be unpredictable, Kayan answered.

Jedra stared at the body until he was forced to breathe, then finally said, *I think we need to tame it, then.*

The lightning glass rested on the floor near one crisped hand. Jedra picked it up and turned away, but Dornal’s traveling bag sitting open on the bunk made him pause. He upended it, and along with the clothing out fell two small leather sacks. One held magical amulets, and the other was full of money.

Jedra took them both and left the room. *These will probably be useful where we’re going,* he said as he closed the door behind him.

“Where is that?” Kayan asked aloud.

“Someplace where we can find a real member of the Veiled Alliance,” he said. He led the way out of the wagon’s interior and down the gangplank to the sand where the elves were piling their booty.

Kayan blinked in the sudden brightness. “Why the Alliance?” she asked.

“Because there’s still too much we don’t know,” Jedra replied. He saw her puzzlement and went on. “Ignorance got me into this mess. If it hadn’t been for you, I’d have never gotten out of it. But even now I know just enough to be dangerous. If I-if we are going to survive in this world, then we need to master the forces that shape it, and for that we need a mentor.”

“We?” she asked.

Jedra grinned. “Well, after all we’ve gone through, I just-Am I assuming something I shouldn’t?”

She shook her head and smiled. “No. ‘We’ sounds just fine to me.”

