

NU ORMENEL COLLECTED  
VOLUME 3

# NU ORMENEL COLLECTED

## Volume 3

BY FERN MARDER AND CAROL WALSKE

POETRY BY FERN MARDER

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\*Poem by Fern Marder and Carol Walske

\*\*Verses and artwork by Fern Marder and Carol Walske

\*\*\*Artwork by Fern Marder and Carol Walske

## PREVIOUS PUBLICATION:

"Brothers" and "Discovery" - Time Warp 2, © 1979 by Anne Elizabeth Zeek

Price: \$3.50 in person

\$4.50 book rate

\$5.50 1st class

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## AUTHORS' PREFACE

Well, we're back. Bet you didn't expect to see another Collected volume before December. Much less two-plus of them. Actually, neither did we. (Sound familiar?) What makes this whole endeavor even scarier is that, over the two Collecteds (not counting a few pieces of music in the songbook) the only item that will have been published previously is "Brothers," which came to Volume 3 via Time Warp 2.

The past six months have been hectic for us. We each determined to try our hands at the other's craft--Carol trying poetry and music and Fern turning to art. The fruits of some of these experiments are found through these volumes.

On the home front, we both left our former mutual employer and turned to jobs halfway across town from one another. This made for some interesting lunchtime phone calls. It's a good thing the two of us think on the same wavelength. It avoids heart attacks. Consider the following conversation, each of us at our respective desks:

Carol: I've been going over the page layout for Vol. 3 and something occurred to me. . .

Fern: What's the matter?

Carol: I think we have enough material for two Collecteds.

Fern: (two seconds' silence--one per zine) OK, give me your figures. (Carol hesitantly recited pagecounts per zine) I guess that means that the music supplement becomes part of Vol. 4 instead of Vol. 3.

That was it. Instant Vol. 4. Carol later admitted that she expected Fern to jump up and down and scream or something. Fern said something to the effect of if we could do the first two Collecteds in two weeks, we could do two and a half zines in two and a half months. So it goes.

We've also spent a lot of the last few months thinking about where *Nu Ormenel* was going. We decided to define the boundaries of the series. The timeline in Vol. 4 indicates those boundaries, from Kor's early experiences as a child through his ultimate abdication of the *Ormen*'s status. Any *Nu Ormenel* stories that we write in the future will fall within this time frame.

This helped us to see what had been done and what remained to be done in terms of *Ormenel* history. The single largest gap we found was, to our chagrin, also the single most important event in *Ormenel* history: the *Orashathnavi* Revolution which brought Kor to power. We decided to remedy that immediately. We chose to use the format of the perspectives, begun in Vol. 1, presenting the revolution through a series of vignettes and poems/songs that would convey the heart of the war, rather than simply to do a long battle-story.

Speaking of time sequences and the revolution, the last story in this volume, "Ties of Blood," runs concurrently in time with the story "The Celebration of Al-karin" (Vol. 1), opening before "Celebration" and closing after it.

It should also be noted that "Brothers" falls very early in the series, even before Kor has his run-in with the Organians ("Challenge," Vol. 1).

But you don't want to read about us; you want to read about Kor and Roan and company. Enjoy!

# BROTHERS

by Fern Marder and Carol Walske

## Firestorm

"I want some of the humans taken prisoner," Kesan Kothir had said forcefully. "I particularly want younglings, alive and unhurt."

The kilingaven squadron leader frowned, remembering Lord Kothir's orders. He continued with preparations for the attack. This foray was supposed to be a revenge-raid, retaliation against the Federation for their recent surprise invasion into *Ormenel* territory. Why did those in power in the Military have to interject their own personal schemes?

"I really don't care if you like it or not," Kesan Kothir had continued, in response to the squadron leader's complaints. "This 'spy business,' as you call it, is far more important than your military skirmish. This is an experiment that I have devised and that the Emperor Alargor approves of. You will carry out my orders, Commander."

Capturing small children. This was no mission for killing of honor. The squadron commander shook his head in distaste, and reluctantly proceeded to pass on Lord Kothir's instructions to his soldiers.

Under cover of a building thunderstorm, the Imperial ships, like screaming birds, soared over the colony, diving again and again to the attack. The colony's defense systems were quick to respond. Paratroopers leaped from the ships like hunting hawks, descending to fight the colonists on the ground, one by one.

\* \* \*

"Get up, Roan. Move."

Roan came out of his tangle of blankets and blinked up at his father sleepily. "What's wrong, Dad?"

Don Morgan threw some clothes on the bed. "Get dressed fast, son. Right now."

Roan reacted to the command in his father's voice and started hurriedly pulling on his clothes. He heard a noise as of thunder outside, and, faintly, screams and the colony's warning sirens. He glanced up at his father, frightened.

"There's a bad storm out tonight," said Don Morgan grimly. "Perfect night for the Klingons to attack our colony."

Roan froze. "Klingons?"

"Yeah. Come on, move!"

Roan ran down the stairs after his father. As Colony Administrator Morgan's son, he knew very well what this meant. His father had explained to him that the Klingons were taking out their revenge on the Border planets for the most recent Federation-Empire conflict. The colony, Beta Arietis IV, had prepared itself for a possible attack. But, for a week or more, nothing had happened. Roan remembered seeing everyone walk around scared and tense, as if waiting for the sky to fall.

Roan and his father went into the kitchen. Roan's mother was already there, hastily putting together some food and a first-aid kit.

"Listen to me, both of you," said Don Morgan intently. "I have to go over to Colony Defense. That's where I'm needed the most."

His wife left her preparations. She came over and looked up into his face. "Don---"

Morgan reached out and hugged her close. "I'm sorry, Kim," he said gently.

"Can't we come with you---"



"Hush. Everything'll be all right." He broke free of the embrace and looked down at his ten-year-old son. "Roan, I want you and your mother to find a shelter. You know all the shortcuts--take the quickest and safest way you know."

Roan looked up at his father and showed him a confident smile. "Sure, Dad."

His father reached down and lifted Roan for a quick hug. Roan wrapped his arms around his father's neck and let go only reluctantly.

Don Morgan gazed down at his wife and son. "Good luck to both of you." Fear rose in his throat, and prevented him from saying anything more. He gave both of them a last smile and strode out.

Roan and his mother finished packing the food. They peered outside, trying to see through the murkiness of the night.

"Let me go out first, Mom," said Roan. "I'll see if it's safe."

"We'll both go," his mother countered, firmly.

The storm-filled air was heavy and tense. It was oppressively hot. Lightning flashed and thunder rumbled, but as yet the stormclouds hadn't broken. The overcast hung low over the colony town.

They quickly scouted the area. Everything was very still now. Dimly, they could hear voices and cries, but those came from a good distance away. It was lucky their house was a long way out from the center of town, where most of the fighting probably was.

"I don't see any Klingons," said Roan, half-scared, half-excited by the thought. "We'll be okay if we hurry." He grinned at his mother.

His mother gave him a half-hearted smile. "Lead on, Roan," she said, trying to show a courage she didn't feel. "Be careful."

"I will." Roan took the back way around their house, keeping as close as he could to the building and to the trees. He began to enjoy himself. It was fun. He could imagine Klingons all around him, stalking him, lying in wait for him behind trees and bushes.

Even as he thought of it, a figure stepped out from behind a bush. Roan gasped in fright and stepped back.

"Who's there?" said Roan's mother, as fiercely as she could.

"Kim? Kim Morgan?" asked a male voice. The man walked forward. With relief Roan and his mother recognized one of their neighbors.

"Yes, it's me," said Roan's mother. "We're trying to get to a shelter."

"Okay. Be careful; there's a fire up ahead. It caught in one of the houses and is spreading to the woods. Steer clear of it."

"Thanks, we will." Kim Morgan looked at him. "Don't you want to get to a shelter?"

"I'm trying to find out what's happened to my family," said the man grimly. He turned away, and melted back into the trees.

Roan and his mother reached out and clasped hands. Without a word, they moved on quietly, slipping like shadows through the night.

Roan and Kim Morgan soon ran across a small group of people, mostly women and children, making their way purposefully toward the nearest underground shelter. Roan and his mother joined them. Most of the others had weapons of some kind or another, if only kitchen knives and trimmed tree branches, and were prepared to fight if necessary.

Roan kept to the edge of the group. He didn't like being with them; none of them could do any good. He clenched his fists in frustration. He wanted his father, who was a strong and commanding fighter, to be there.

Someone in the crowd screamed. Someone else looked up, and realized that a troop of Klingon soldiers was falling out of the sky, coming down right over their heads. The colonists scattered like leaves as the marauders landed.

Most of the colonists tried to flee; only some of them tried to fight back. Little knots of fighting formed and broke and reformed again. It was obvious that the colonists had little chance against the well-armed, efficient alien invaders.

In the confusion, Kim Morgan had gotten separated from her son. She swerved and ran, avoiding a tangle of Klingons and colonists fighting. She caught sight of Roan and sped toward him. At the same time, she noticed a Klingon soldier nearing his refuge behind a bush.

In desperation, Kim Morgan threw herself at the soldier. Yelling incoherently, she flung the gravel and rocks that she'd collected at his face. The Klingon was momentarily blinded by the onslaught. He put his hands up in front of his face.

"Run, Roan! Get out of here!" shouted Kim Morgan, running toward him.

Roan stood still, poised for flight. He took a step, then hesitated as the soldier came after his mother. "Look out, Mom!" Roan yelled.

Kim Morgan turned to face the Klingon soldier. For close combat, he had pulled out a long knife that flashed silver. Even as she threw out her hands to fight him, he struck her in the neck with his weapon. She fell back and lay still.

Roan screamed. The horror and the terror of the attack, his mother's face--an uncontrollable surge of fury and intense grief shook him. He took another anguished glance at his mother, realized she couldn't be alive, and then he fled. The image of his mother's death stayed as clear and vivid in his eyes as if he were still seeing it. He whimpered, and cried as he ran.



Roan didn't get very far. The troop of Klingons had broken into ones and twos and were dealing with the colonists singly. Two soldiers were loping after him.

Roan reached the cover of a grove of trees. He ran in among the trees, looking for a good hiding place. He stumbled. He fell forward, hands outstretched before him. Sharp snags of branches tore at his hands and arms.

Dead twigs and leaves broke and rustled as his pursuers trailed him. Roan pushed himself up, futilely brushing at the tears of pain and anger in his eyes, and ran on.

The woods were dark and full of noises. Trees snatched at him. Roan tripped and fell again, and suddenly the two Klingon soldiers were upon him.

Roan let out a yell and kicked with all his strength. "No! Let me go!" A hand grabbed him by the collar of his shirt, and something came down hard on the back of his neck. Roan felt a blinding pain and then knew nothing more.

\* \* \*

## Daybreak

Kirin Kothir walked hesitantly into the kitchen, glancing wide-eyed at the unfamiliar surroundings. He stopped in the doorway and stared, trying to take in all the excitement.

It was early morning, just after dawn in fact. Several cooks and kitchen workers were bringing things in and out of the pantry, setting up for the day, and beginning to prepare for a morning meal. Many other kilingau milled about, talking, joking, reaching for food and trying to be heard over the tumult.

The young boy went into the kitchen a little ways, attracted by the smells of food. He hadn't eaten since some time in the middle of the day before, and his stomach was now reminding him of its emptiness. Kirin slipped in, not particularly wanting to bother all the busy adults. He noticed another youngling, his age or maybe a little older, and thought he might be more approachable. He went over to the other and spoke in careful Agavoi. "Say, excuse me---"

The other turned to face him. Kirin could see that he was definitely older, and had two or three inches' advantage over Kirin. The tall, black-haired kiling eyed Kirin up and down. "What do you want?"

"Uh. . . breakfast?"

The youngling pointed at one of the cooks, who was just taking a fresh batch of crusty brown bread out of the oven. "He'll give me a couple of loaves, if I ask him to," he said smugly. "That's because I'm important."

"Oh? Who are you?" asked Kirin, trying to be friendly.

The boy drew himself up to his full height. "I am the son and heir of Kor Kothir," he said haughtily. "My name's Karan Kothir. What's your name?"

"I--I'm Kirin Kothir. I've just been made Second-Son of the Domain. . . Kor Kothir's brother."

Karan looked at him incredulously, his pride almost visibly wilting. "You're my father's brother?" he asked, staring.

Kirin nodded. "I've just arrived," he said. "Kesan Kothir, Lord of the Domain, welcomed me, and told me to go find breakfast."

"Well, then, you can get your own bread," said Karan sulkily.

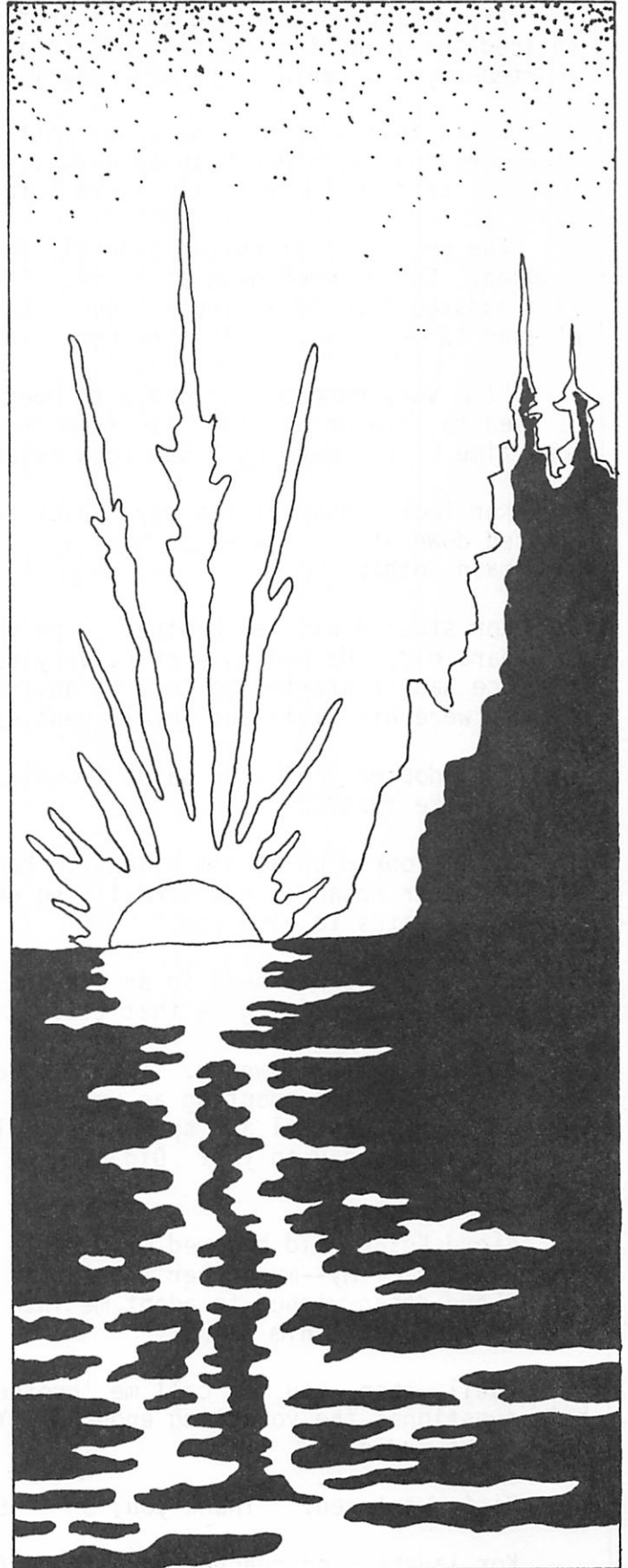
"Could you tell me where Kor Kothir is?" inquired Kirin.

"He's somewhere over there," said Karan unhelpfully, pointing to a group of people. He gave one last look at his new uncle, and disappeared into the crowd.

Kirin, who was very hungry by now, asked for and got a loaf of bread. Tearing off and hungrily chewing a large chunk of it, he walked over and looked up at the group of people Karan had pointed to. Kor was a center of a cluster of six or seven people, all of them talking to him at once. Kirin had no trouble picking out his new brother--Kor Kothir looked very much like his son Karan.

Kor was a tall, broad-shouldered and well-muscled killing who moved with the lithe power of a wolf. His hair and eyes were dark. He held himself well, and gave off an assurance, a presence, of proud leadership.

Kirin had heard so much about Kor Kothir--the legendary fighter and strategist, the bold hunter who had revitalized the Space Service. The actual man fit the legend well, Kirin thought admiringly, taking in every detail.



Kirin slipped in close to his brother. He stared up at him. Kor finally noticed the youngling watching him so attentively. "Good morning," he said courteously and genially. "What may I do for you, little one?"

Kirin felt a little shy about introducing himself in front of all these strangers, but he plunged ahead anyway. "I wanted to find you, sir, and greet you," he said politely. "I'm Kirin Kothir. I'm your new brother."

The center of attention suddenly focused on the young boy. Somebody laughed. Kor grinned down at Kirin. "Now that's what I call efficiency," he said humorously. "One minute I don't have a brother, the next minute I do. I'm pleased to meet you, little brother. Where did you come from?"

"I'm very honored and proud to meet you, sir," declared Kirin respectfully. "I used to live on a planet far from the Kilingarian. I've been travelling a long time. This morning I saw Lord Kesan Kothir, and he adopted me."

Kor looked down at the boy, quick interest flaring in his expression. He glanced down at Kirin's right hand and saw that he indeed bore the silver ring of Domain Kothir.

Kor studied his new brother. The youngling appeared to be about nine or ten years old. He had pale skin, very pale for a kiling, and reddish-brown hair. His face hadn't started to take on any real character yet; Kirin's most striking feature were his vivid and intelligent eyes.

"He adopted you?" Kor said, frowning in puzzlement. "Now why would he do a thing like that?"

Kirin looked up at him blankly. Kor added, "No offense meant to you, Kirin, but my father Kesan is not normally so generous. Second-Son of *krasaia* Kothir is a high status to give you."

Kirin ducked his head in an awkward bow. "I know it is, sir. I'm indebted to Lord Kesan for giving me that title." He glanced up at his brother hesitantly.

Kor was still frowning. Inwardly, a little suspiciously, he wondered at his father's motives in adopting an untried, unknown child into the household. Kirin must be a very unusual and special youngling to have earned Kesan's notice. "What did Kesan say to you? Did he give a reason for accepting you as his own son?" Kor asked.

"Lord Kesan said he owed my parents a great debt--a life-obligation," answered Kirin. "My--my mother and father are dead. To repay his obligation to them, Lord Kesan wished to adopt me into his domain and raise me as his own son. He told me to call him Father."

"Well, then, you may call me 'brother,' or 'Kor,'" said Kor, deciding that he'd questioned the youngling enough. "You certainly don't have to call me 'sir,'" he added.

Kirin went red. "Thank you, s--- Excuse me. Thank you, Kor."

Kor laughed and reached down to ruffle Kirin's hair. "That's better. Now let me introduce you to some of my friends, Kirin." In short order Kor called



out a number of names and pointed to people. Among them were Tharuna Chikios, Kor's lawyer and very dear friend; some cousins of Kor's; the head cook of the kitchen, and many, many more. It was clear that all of them held Kor in the deepest esteem and affection.

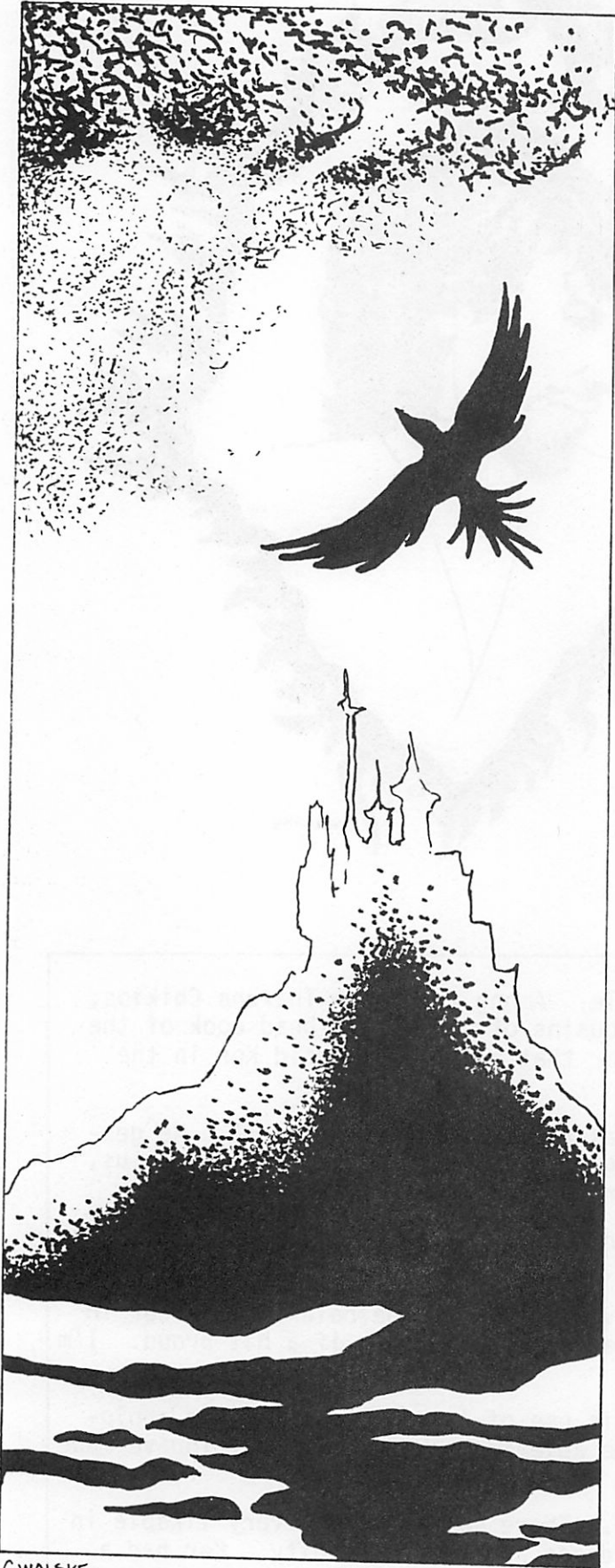
Kor slipped his arm around Tharuna as he finished the rollcall. He gestured at the bread Kirin was still holding. "Would you eat breakfast with us, Kirin? It'd be four of us: you, me, Tharuna, and my son Karan."

"I've already met your son," offered Kirin. "I think he was a little bit upset to find out that I was your brother."

"Was he now?" Kor chuckled. "You've just upset the balance of power in this domain. Don't worry, Karan is generally good-natured, if a bit proud. I'm sure you'll become fast friends."

"Thank you, sir." Kor frowned at his use of 'sir.' Kirin smiled apologetically, and said, "I'm very proud to be able to know all of you. You've made me feel less alone and strange."

Kor smiled engagingly down at Kirin. There was something very likable in the boy, some mixture of open warmth, boldness and eager vivacity. Kor had a



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momentary wistful thought of how good it would be to have Kirin as his own son.

He said, with formal but amused courtesy, "I welcome you to the family, Kirin, and wish you many long years of strength and harmony. I'm pleased to have you become a part of the household."

Inwardly Kirin felt like leaping for joy. His face glowed with pleasure. Today, he had been adopted into a powerful and important domain, and he had met a brother who was both a military legend and a strong and friendly man. "I think I'm going to like being a Kothir," he said happily.

Kor laughed and put his hand briefly, gently, on Kirin's shoulder. "Come, little brother."

Kor summoned his son Karan. The four of them--Kor, Kirin, Tharuna and Karan--collected armfuls of food and made their way out of the kitchen, outside to share their breakfast under a clear morning sky.

\* \* \*

## Discovery

Kor learned, from Kesan, that Kirin's father had been a fairly well-regarded minor politician--a kiling who'd left the Kilingarlan for the out-worlds. Kirin's mother had been of some other species of the *Ormenel*; not much else was known about her. Kor learned very little more from Kirin about his past; Kirin was too caught up in the excitement of his new existence to worry about the old.

Kirin was a small boy, and had the small boy's usual tendency to be--occasionally--inconsiderate, mischievous, and overly daring. Like a young

animal, his attention was easily captured, and just as easily lost; his moods were capricious; his actions often seemed whimsical. However, unlike other kilingau his age, Kirin also had fits of quiet, almost gloomy seriousness.

Kor found that, through Kirin, he had a chance to be a father again. Karan didn't need or want Kor's guardianship. In the early years, while Kor was still struggling to rise in the Space Service, Lord Kesan had raised and educated Karan. Now Karan, knowing his grandfather better than his father, turned to Kesan first and most often.

But for Kirin, everything about the Kilingarlan and *krasaia* Kothir was different, and wonderful. In Kirin's company, Kor rediscovered the pleasure of freeing his imagination and seeing things as if for the first time.

After a few years and the chance to come to know his brother, Kirin found himself looking forward eagerly to Kor's yearly home leaves. A surprise visit was all the more delightful.

Kirin leaped up, excited, when Kor walked into his room late one morning, unannounced. Kirin had heard nothing of his brother's arrival, and he was touched by his brother's gesture of familiarity in coming to see him first.

"Kor," Kirin said, running to hug him, "welcome home. I didn't know you were coming. When did you arrive? How long can you stay?"

Kor laughed at Kirin's exuberance. "A few hours ago, and not long." Kor saw Kirin's expression sober. "Long enough to spend some time with you, though," he added quickly, putting an arm around Kirin's shoulders. "It's good to see you, little brother."

The two exchanged news for a while. Before Kor left, Kirin had extracted a promise from Kor for an archery lesson, sometime before Kor was to report to Military Command.

Kor bent over behind Kirin and guided his brother's arm through the motions of drawing the bow. "No, don't bend your left arm. Pull through strongly, evenly--that's it. That's good, Kirin."

Kirin made a few trial shots at the padded target. Kor watched him critically, made a few encouraging remarks, and suggested that Kirin move back from the target a bit.

Kirin, excited by Kor's approval of his growing skill, willingly backed away. He considered the distance and suddenly realized how small and far away the target seemed. He put all the strength he had into his draw and let the arrow loose.

The arrow soared up through the air and sailed through a partially opened window.

Kor moaned softly and closed his eyes. He reopened them to see Kirin looking up at him rather anxiously.

"That wasn't so good, was it?" the youngling asked.

Kor tried to repress his grin. "It was an excellent shot, Kirin," he said gravely. "The trajectory was clean--good curve, good elevation." Kor paused and glanced up at the window. "However, I am sorry to say that your aim is atrocious."

Kirin looked dismayed. "I hope no one was hurt," he said hesitantly.

"Well, we've heard no cries of pain or rage," said Kor. He couldn't hold his amusement back any longer. He grinned at Kirin in secret delight. "Do you think, Kirin, that you could try that again?"

Kirin smiled happily, relieved to see that his brother wasn't angry. "I could try to hit something this time," he suggested.

"Remind me to take cover then."

\* \* \*

Kor's new tour of duty brought him near the Kilingarlan often, though sometimes only for a few days. He always found time to spend with Kirin, and tried to make each visit special.

Kor was very aware of how important he was in Kirin's eyes. It wasn't that the youngling was lonely; Kirin had made many friends in the *krasaia*. Kirin looked up to Kor with admiration mixed with awe. Kor, amused, could not help but find this attention flattering. He enjoyed his brother's company, and took pleasure in being with him and teaching him.

Kor didn't quite understand the relationship that had grown between them. It was stronger than the closeness of two brothers, yet not exactly the shared love of father and son. In spite of the difference in age, in spite of their very different backgrounds, they understood each other very well. A look, a word, or a fleeting expression was enough to carry meaning between them.

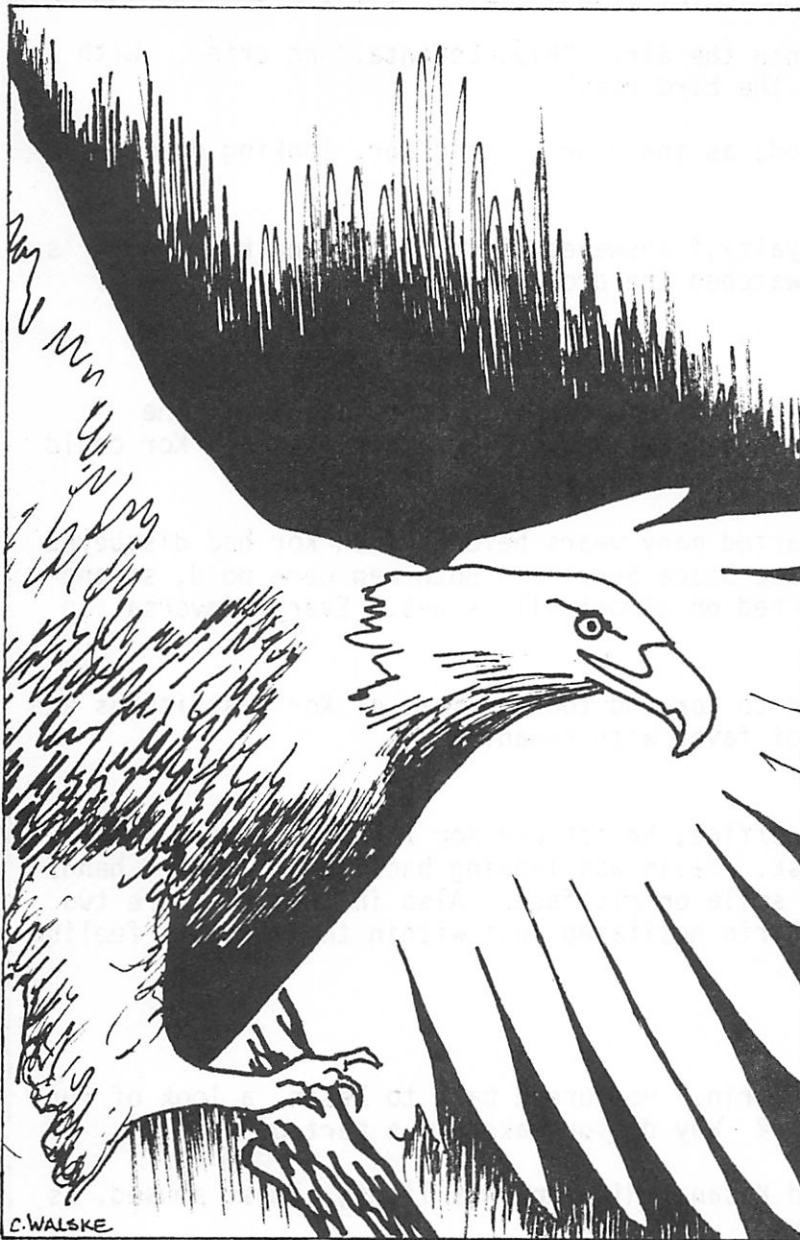
"Raik! Hai-raik!"

The harsh cries of the bird-of-prey echoed up into the sky. One of its golden eyes fixed on the two brothers standing before it and stared at them unblinkingly.

"Is he really mine?" asked Kirin excitedly, looking up wide-eyed at his older brother.

"My gift to you, Kirin," said Kor. He gestured at the bird. "Look at him. He's only a fledgling, yet see how proud, how wild he is." As if in response, the huge black- and gold-winged *kevri* arched his neck and preened. "Learn to work with him, Kirin. Share his strength. Show him your courage, and your own pride, and he will hunt for you."

Kirin looked gravely at the bird. "I shall name him 'Lokanta,' the Proud," he declared. "Thank you, Kor!"



"My pleasure, little brother," said Kor, smiling down at Kirin. He reached out to put his hand on Kirin's shoulder. "I've given him his basic training. I've hunted his mother and him together. His mother is a swift, deadly hunter. See if he will take to your arm."

Kirin put his left arm in front of the *kevri*. The bird cocked his head at Kirin, then stepped off his perch onto Kirin's arm quite naturally.

"I wish my sleeve was of heavier fabric," said Kirin, wincing a little as the bird's talons gripped his arm.

"I shall get a hunting glove for you to wear," said Kor. "You should carry Lokanta about often, so that he gets used to you."

Kirin looked from his brother to the fierce bird. "He is very imperious," he remarked. "Why do you give me such a noble gift, Kor?"

"He is very special to me, and so are you. Both of you are of a kind--young,

strong, untamed." Kor looked up into the sky. "Even though you can't fly as the hunting bird can, Kirin, guard jealously your pride and freedom." Both Kirin and Lokanta looked attentively at Kor.

"I don't think I need tell you of the importance of courtesy and honor," said Kor. "You already know more about honor and place than I did at your age. But--be selfish, preserve your self-will. Don't let others corrupt your purpose, or deter you from what you feel is best."

"I already know what's best," said Kirin, his young face intent and grave. "Lokanta and I have both learned from you. I know that I want to follow all the things you've done, and be near to share with you always."

Kor gazed at him and smiled slowly, proudly. A new light of strength and hope was in his eyes. "You move me to great joy, little brother."



Kirin swept his left arm into the air. "Fly, Lokanta!" he cried. With a few mighty strokes of his wings, the bird rose.

"As brave, and strong-willed, as the *kevri*," said Kor, looking down at Kirin.

"And guided by love and loyalty," answered Kirin, returning his brother's gaze. They stood together, and watched the proud bird soaring into the sky.

\* \* \*

The closer Kor and Kirin became, the more Kirin became aware of the fierce antagonism which existed between Kor and their father, Kesan. Kor could do little right in his father's eyes--and the feeling was mutual.

Kesan and Kor's war had started many years before, when Kor had disobeyed his father's wishes by entering the Space Service. Both men were bold, strong-willed and intelligent; they clashed on almost all issues. Every conversation became a battle.

As Kirin grew more attached to Kor and took on some of Kor's attitudes and ideas, he fell increasingly out of favor with Kesan.

As Kirin came into Kesan's office, he noticed Kor first, standing stiff and tense in front of Kesan's desk. Kesan was leaning back in his chair, hands clasped behind his head, a faint smile on his face. Also in the room were two of Kesan's innumerable guards. Kirin hesitated just within the doorway, feeling a strong reluctance to go further.

"Do come in," said Kesan.

Kor glanced around and saw Kirin. He turned back to Kesan, a look of fury on his face. "What is he here for? Why do you make him a part of this?"

"There's good reason," said Kesan. His tone was light, almost amused, as if he were discussing the weather.

"It has come to my attention, Kirin," declared Kesan deliberately, "that you have become rather willful. You've begun to voice independent thoughts in places and at times that you shouldn't--to teachers, to your elders in the domain, even to me. It isn't appreciated."

Kirin stood very rigid, his face showing his confusion and dismay. He could find nothing to say.

Kor, who'd had many long years of Kesan's methods, came to Kirin's defense. "You'd prefer it if Kirin were eyeless and voiceless," he said with arch anger. "I suppose you'd rather he had no mind of his own at all."

"Shut up," said Kesan briefly, not even glancing at him. His gaze remained centered on Kirin. "Kirin, I believe you should know by now how important duty and obedience are. I want unquestioning loyalty, unfaltering obedience from you. I don't want to know your feelings, or your opinions. The only thing that interests me is that you acknowledge my will over your own. Do you

have anything to say?"

"I---" Kesan gave him a look and Kirin subsided. "No, sir," he said.

"You don't want him to think for himself," said Kor harshly. "You want him to be a tool. You forget, my father, that although Karan is under your domination, Kirin is mine. I have taught Kirin to become a man of courage and self-assurance, not one of your silent dutiful slaves."

"I was coming to that." Kesan looked at Kor. "You've always been a source of dissension and trouble in this domain. You never have accepted that I lead here, and not you." Kesan gazed at Kor with disdain and scorn; Kor stared back levelly, undaunted.

"I fully agree that it's not Kirin who's at fault here, but you," continued Kesan. "You don't know when to keep your mouth shut. That's why it's you that I intend to punish, not Kirin."

Kor stepped forward a pace, his hands clenching into fists. "That's what it always comes down to, doesn't it?" he said bleakly but angrily. "Fear and pain are the only weapons you know how to use. If the child is unruly, tame it with a whip."

"Keep talking, and the punishment will be worse," said Kesan calmly. He looked at Kirin again. "I want you to understand that this brother of yours is nothing. His words are empty; he has no power compared to mine. He is a disgrace in my eyes. By giving allegiance to him, Kirin, you dishonor yourself and this domain. I rule here."

Kirin glanced at Kor and saw his barely controlled rage. He said, feeling a little desperate, "Sir, I honor you, and owe you my life. Don't punish him-- if I haven't done right, punish me!"

"You are being disciplined," said Kesan evenly. "You will watch, and learn. Keep in mind that each blow could be a blow on your back, not his."

Kor closed his eyes for a moment, trying to keep down the fury that threatened to explode out of him. The frustration of wanting to attack, to fight, was so great that it left an acid taste in his mouth, and made him shake with futile wrath.

He opened his eyes again and looked at the two guards on either side of Kesan's desk, and then stared at Kesan. "If I didn't have such a strong desire to live, I'd kill you, father Kesan."

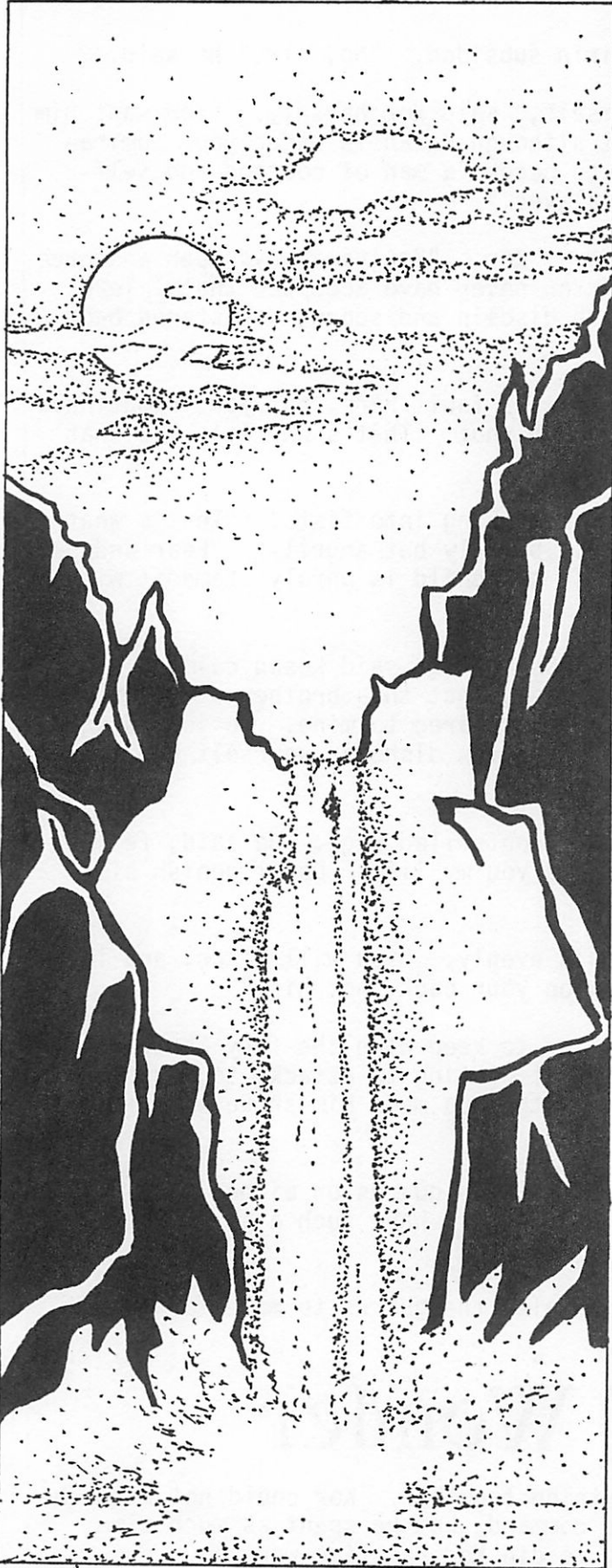
Kesan only smiled complacently and signaled the guards to move forward.

\* \* \*

## Time of Wonder

Kor and Kirin learned to share everything together. Kor could not often be home, because of the duties of his warship command, but he spent as much time with his brother as he could. Kirin grew, as did Kor, as time went on.

After a long absence, Kor returned to Domain Kothir. This time, he had



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managed to arrange for a long home leave--up to four or five months. He had persuaded his superiors in the Military to let him handle a large project that could be done mostly on the Kilingarlan.

He came home just in time to be present at an occasion which no man should miss--the birth of his child.

"Kirin, come quickly!" Kor danced into the room, his expression lit by joy. "Tharuna and I have a son!"

Kirin jumped up and practically leaped into his brother's arms. "That's great! When may I see them?"

"Right now!" Kor swept Kirin out the door in front of him. Both of them looked at each other and laughed for pure delight.

Kor and Kirin went to Kor's dwelling. Tharuna was sitting up in bed, holding a bundle in her arms. The doctor stood beside her; they were talking together softly as Kor and Kirin came in.

Tharuna grinned happily but wearily as she saw them. She gestured proudly at the baby.

Kor went to Tharuna, and sat down on the bed beside her. He put his arm across her shoulders and pulled her in close to him.

"Congratulations, Kor," said the doctor. "He's a fine, healthy son."

Kor grinned in response. "Of course," he said complacently.

Kirin came forward cautiously. "What is his name?"

"Well, we'll formally give the

name at the birth ceremony," said Kor, "but Tharuna and I have already decided to call him Karras."

Kirin was fascinated by Karras, and was full of questions about how one handled babies and so on. He tried to be helpful, and not get in his brother's and Tharuna's way.

Seeing the baby, and watching Kor and Tharuna together, prompted Kirin to think about his own manhood. One day, he decided he had to seek Kor's advice.

Kirin walked into his brother's dwelling and found him in the kitchen, diligently cleaning a tunic. "Courteous day," said Kirin, a little startled to see his brother involved in such work. "Ah--brother Kor--have you taken to clotheswashing?"

Kor looked up, managing to snarl and grin at the same time. "Greetings, Kirin." He gestured at his tunic and made a face. "I have a very, very wet son."

Kirin did a double-take and laughed till it hurt. "That's a good reason to wash one's tunic," he agreed. He pulled out a chair and sat down. "Kor, may I talk to you?"

"That's what you're doing, isn't it?" asked Kor sarcastically, getting annoyed at the fact that the stain wasn't coming out of his shirt. "A lesson for you, Kirin. Don't pick up your son after he's had his mother's milk."

"I'll remember that," promised Kirin. He put his hand on his chin and sat in silence until his brother finished.

Kor took out some food and invited Kirin to share a meal with him. Kirin was only too happy to say yes. Kor explained that his meals were very irregular, subject to the whims of his infant son and Tharuna's needs.

Toward the end of the lunch, Kirin tried again. "Kor. . ." Kirin, not knowing how to say what he wanted to say, let his voice trail off. He rubbed his chin. It itched. The small hairs sprouting there were decidedly a nuisance.

Kor noticed his action and laughed. "That's about the tenth time you've done that, Kirin. What's wrong?"

"Why does it take so intolerably long to grow a beard?" exclaimed Kirin, frustrated.

Kor looked at him, his face full of mirth. "A long, long time," he said genially. "And you will be teased unmercifully by everyone until it is full-grown." Kirin growled between his teeth, and his brother grinned some more.

"There was something I wanted to ask you," said Kirin hesitantly. He felt the urge to rub his chin again, but resisted.

"By all means," said Kor, and tried to look serious. "Please go on."

"I want to know about the *sarasu*."

Kor made a sound suspiciously like a choked laugh. "What can I tell you that you don't already know?"

"A lot," declared Kirin emphatically. "You've had years of experience with the Renewal. Why hasn't the mating drive come to me? I'm old enough for manhood."

"Maybe next year," said Kor indulgently. "After all, I had to wait until I was twenty before the *sarasu* first came for me."

"But I've felt desire," protested Kirin. "Do you know Tirashkai Ochavi? She's a few years older than I am. I--well, we've been sharing pleasure. If I'm able to want to share the *sarasu* with someone, how is it that it never came?"

There was a long pause. Kor rose from his chair and walked around the table slowly. He gazed down at Kirin, and dropped a friendly hand on his shoulder. Kirin looked up.

Kor sighed. "Kirin, have you considered the possibility that the Renewal might not be the same for you as for others? Kesan has told me that your mother was not a killing."

Kirin looked suddenly troubled. "You think that could have an effect on it? I mean, my blood father---"

"Little brother, I don't know enough about it. I'm no doctor." Kor pulled out the chair next to Kirin's and sat down. "But I do know that the furyfever is different for each man and woman. There are a few killingau who never know the *sarasu*, or those who feel it so differently that it becomes something entirely new."

"Perhaps I should go see the doctor," suggested Kirin doubtfully.

"Yes, I think that would be a good idea."

To Kirin's surprise and chagrin, the doctor reported that, due to many factors, the *sarasu* would never really arise for Kirin. His body would not feel the violent awakening of the furyfever in Spring. But he was fertile, and sexually capable.

The doctor also informed Kirin that he had indeed reached puberty, and was therefore of an age to go on his *imleth*--his Passage. Kirin returned to Kor with his troubles.

Kor listened as Kirin, rather worriedly, told him about the doctor's remarks. "Well now," he said thoughtfully, "you shouldn't feel bad about the lack of *sarasu*. Who knows? You may be able to feel all the pleasure without suffering any of the pain."

"I'm not so much concerned anymore about the *sarasu* as my forthcoming *imleth*," Kirin clarified. Kor raised his eyebrows and then nodded in understanding. Kirin moved closer to his brother. "Tell me about the Passage, Kor."

Kor smiled, somewhat wryly. "Well, you've been told all the stories and

legends that deal with *imleth*, and you've been trained to live alone in the wilderness for a long period of time. You've proven your skills--to my satisfaction at least--as a hunter. What do you feel you lack?"

"Sometimes, in spite of all the training, an individual might die," said Kirin slowly. "Your older brother died during Passage, didn't he?"

Kor saw the nervousness that Kirin was trying to hide. "Yes, he did," he said softly. "Or at least he never came back. Don't fear, Kirin. You've been well-trained; you're strong and intelligent. You should have no trouble undergoing *imleth*."

Kirin looked down, his face troubled. "My son Karan successfully completed Passage a half year ago," Kor reminded him. "You're certainly as capable as he." That seemed to make Kirin feel better.

Kor thought about his own Passage long ago. In defiance of his father he had stayed out on *imleth* over the ninety-day limit. He had come back to find that his father had declared him dead. How furious his father had been to see him still alive!

So Kor, to put Kirin's mind fully at ease, sat and spoke of his *imleth*. He told Kirin, as if relating a story, all the tribulations and delights of the minimum sixty-five-day trial. Kirin was alternately fascinated, dismayed and amused by the tale of Kor's adventures.

Afterward, he grinned at Kor, his natural good humor restored. "Thank you, brother. Will you be home when I return from *imleth*?"

"When I return"--that's a good attitude," said Kor cheerfully. "I expect so. Actually, the Military is just as happy to have me here, out of harm's way as they would call it." Kor smiled at his brother. "I would be proud to welcome you home from the *imleth*. Come to me first when you return."

"I will," promised Kirin.

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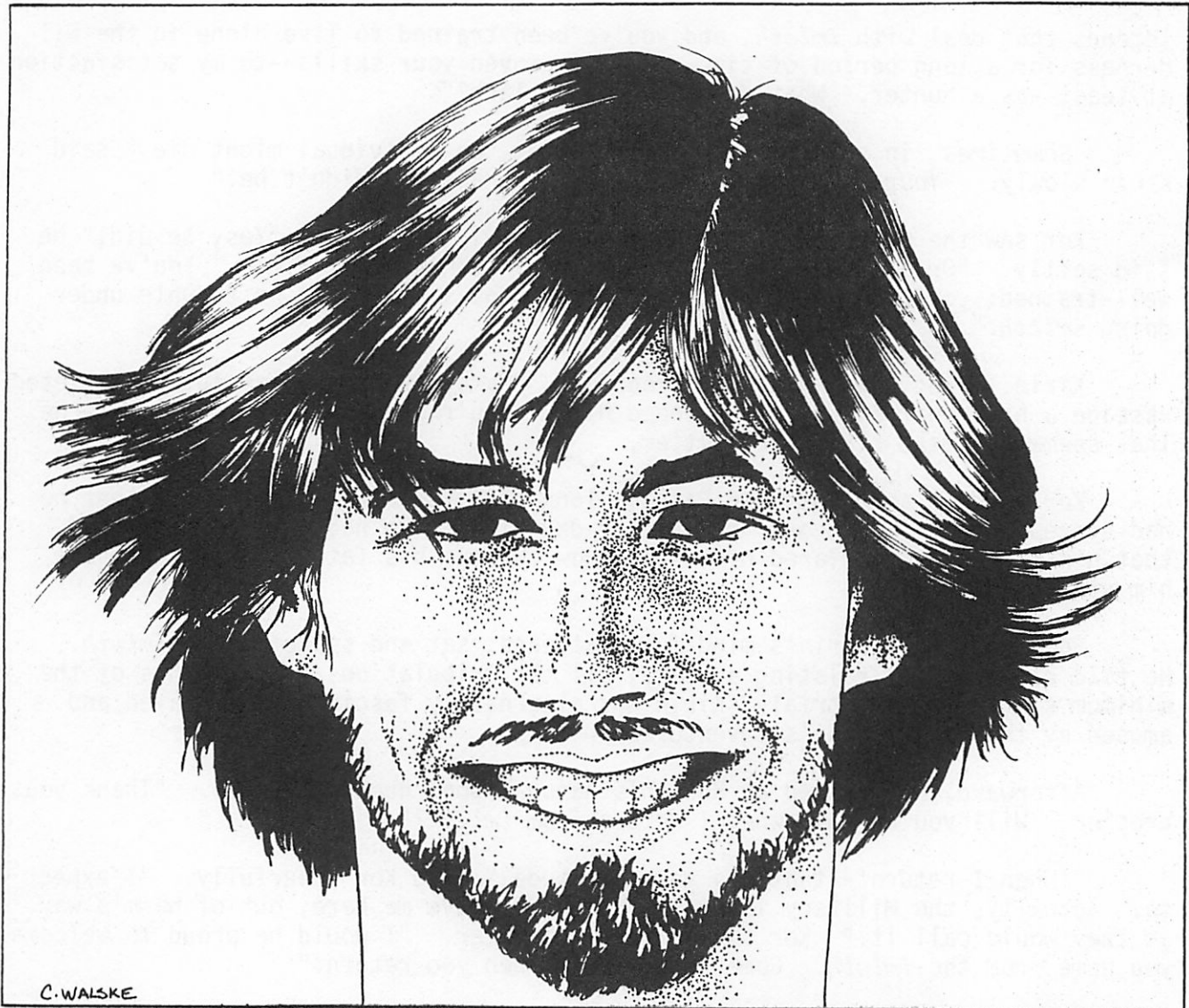
Kirin walked in. He was filthy, bruised, scratched and weatherworn. There was a bandage untidily wrapped around his left arm below the elbow. Despite his obvious weariness, he gave Kor a triumphant smile.

Kor leaped up, his face showing his relief and joy. "Kirin! Welcome back!"

"Courteous greetings." Kirin straightened proudly and said carefully, "I wish to declare my successful completion of Passage, brother Kor. I count my *imleth* as eighty-eight days long."

Kor reached out and hugged Kirin, as brother to brother. "I formally witness your return, and welcome you back into the domain as an adult."

"Thank you." Once the formalities were over, Kirin gave Kor a wide grin. "I had a lot of fun," he said. "Once I got used to sleeping on rocks and waking up every few minutes at all the strange noises, that is. I learned a lot."



Kor smiled warmly. He gazed at his seventeen-year-old brother and saw that he had indeed grown more mature. His skin was deeply tanned--though still so much paler than Kor's--and his hair and beard were long and thick and gleamed with red in the sunlight. Kirin held himself with much greater dignity and self-assurance than he had before he left on *imleth*.

"I'm very happy to see you again," said Kor simply. He put his hands on Kirin's shoulders. "Now, Kirin, I'm going to take you to see the doctor, because you look ready to fall over."

"I think I could sleep for a week," agreed Kirin wearily.

"I will inform Kesan of your successful Passage," said Kor as he walked to the door with Kirin, "and see that you're formally recognized as an adult killing, heir to any good fortune you can achieve."

Kirin's worst malady arising from *imleth* turned out to be a bad sunburn. The doctor pronounced him fit and prescribed sleep as the best cure for his minor injuries.

A few days later, Kor and Kirin celebrated Kirin's successful Passage. From daybreak to sunset, they walked together, played and worked together, savoring their friendship in all the ways they could feel.

When it at last came to sun's end, when the stars began to brighten and the air began to grow cool and still, Kor and Kirin made a small fire to light and warm them. They sat together in the rocky tumble of hills and cliffs at the westernmost tip of the island of Keserek. They were amidst sheer rock and crashing sea; they looked into the west where the sun failed.

The two brothers sat together in silence for a while, held by the view's lonely splendor.

Finally, Kor stirred and broke the quiet. "I'm very glad to be home again," he said softly. "Such great things have happened--Karras' birth, your *imleth*--I'm proud to be a part of them."

Kirin didn't speak. By the light of the fire and the rising moon, he was watching his brother's expression. He gazed at Kor with admiration and awe, feeling a joy so deep it seemed to flow in his blood.

Kor looked across the flames to Kirin. "Little brother, I have a special gift for you," he said. "Normally, it is one which a father should give to his son in a ceremony celebrating a return from *imleth*. However, our father Kesan does not approve of such gestures. So, if you will allow me, Kirin, to take the place of your father for a short time, I would be honored."

"Sometimes I wish you were my father," murmured Kirin.

Kor smiled, a little crookedly. "Thank you, Kirin," he said, a catch in his voice. "As father to son then, I would give you a gift." From an inside pocket in his tunic he took out a knife in a wooden sheath. He silently handed it to Kirin, who accepted it and examined it carefully.

The wood of the sheath was inlaid with onyx and gold. The knife slipped out easily. It had a slender, double-edged blade; the hilt was of gold filigree and was topped by a fire-opal.

Kirin looked up at Kor, his eyes full of wonder. "This is a magnificent gift," he said. "I do not think I am worth its measure. Thank you for thinking so highly of me."

Kor grinned widely. "You're proven your worth, Kirin--not only in Passage but in all the years I've known you."

Kirin seemed faintly embarrassed. He looked down at the knife and said dubiously, "It looks too good to use."

"It's already tasted blood," said Kor with a short laugh. "Use it--when there's need--with honor."

Kirin clasped the knife tightly and said, trying to be formally courteous, "My most sincere thanks to you, Kor. I will use the weapon in your name, and carry it with me always."

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# Sunset

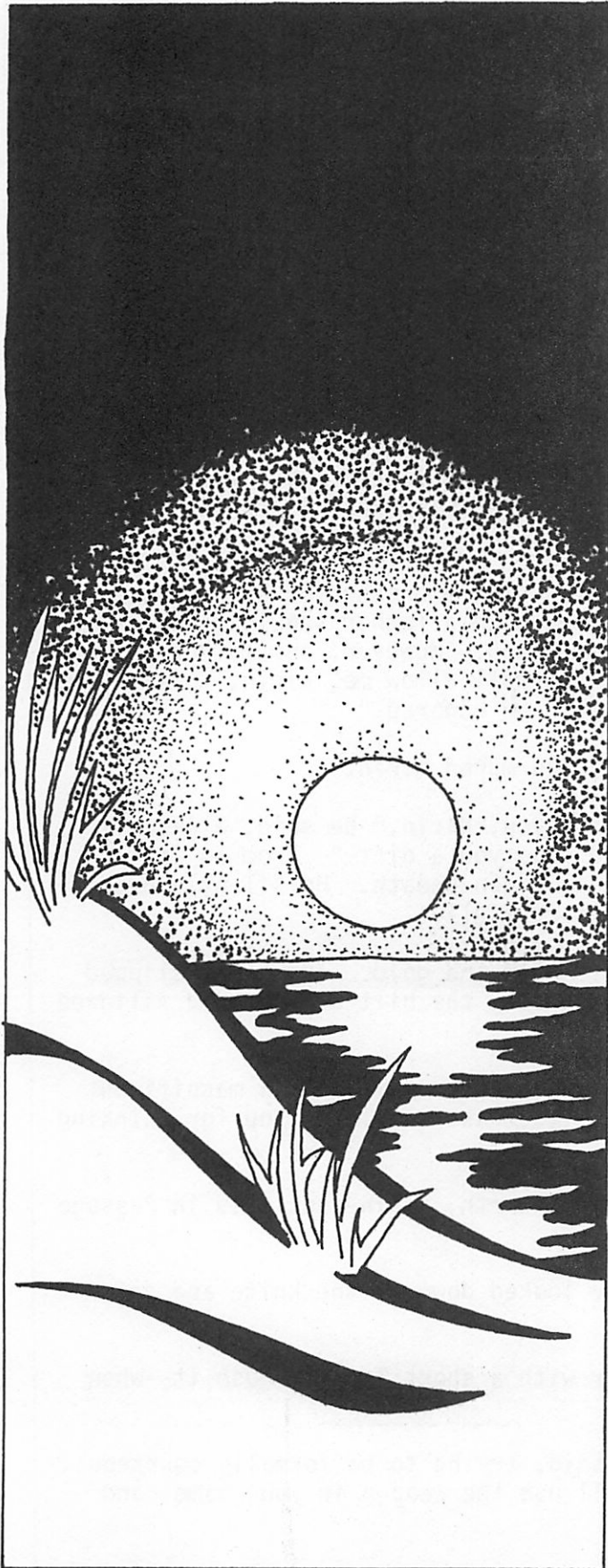
For almost three years Kirin saw little of Kor, except for brief annual home-leave visits. At such times when they were together, he noticed a change in Kor. There were rumors of trouble in the Military, and trouble with the Federation. Kirin knew that some of the Military's internal turmoil had touched on Kor. His brother had suffered a loss of status due to the Military's new suspicious watchfulness and fear of those who held too much power.

Kirin, now almost twenty, showed the first signs of the strong and confident leader he might someday be. In many ways, in temperament and presence, reactions and attitudes, he was very much like his older brother.

Many changes had occurred in Kirin's life as well. After Kirin's Passage, Kesan had begun to take greater interest in him. Kesan had given certain instructions concerning Kirin's advanced training. Kirin had excelled in his education, so much so that at the end of three years he was ahead of many kilingau his age.

One evening Kesan summoned Kirin. They spoke at length about Kirin's future. The young man came out of that meeting, feeling shaken and dismayed, and went quickly to a place of privacy. There he planned and wrote a message to his brother, asking Kor to request leave to come home.

The day Kor returned to *krasaia* Kothir was a hot, end-of-summer morning. Immediately after greeting him, Kirin suggested that they spend the afternoon and evening together on the shores of Keserek, and Kor willingly agreed.



The sun was a fire burning a hole in the flat blue sky. Kor and Kirin took refuge in the sea. The water's surface looked like hot liquid metal, but it felt cool and pleasantly sleek.

They caught fresh seafish for a late afternoon meal. They wrapped it in sea-moss and cooked it between hot rocks under a small fire they built on the beach. The fish, tasting slightly scorched and salty, was delicious.

Kor sat cross-legged by the fire. Licking burnt fingers and frowning, he delicately pulled a long slender bone out of his fish. He took a bite of the fish and grinned appreciatively. For several minutes he ate ravenously.

Kor washed the fish down with cold fresh water and looked at Kirin. He was smiling faintly. "Little brother, I'm very glad to be home, and of course I'm glad to see you again." He paused meaningfully. "But I'm not known as a patient man. Why did you send for me?"

Kirin looked down. He'd hardly eaten his meal; now, nervously, he began pulling the fish apart with his fingers. Kor was home, and Kirin took some small comfort in his brother's familiar warmth and strength, but it didn't give him the courage he needed. "Father Kesan sent for me a week or so ago," he began slowly. "I had been wondering why he had said nothing about my future. I had always wanted to follow you into the Space Service, and Kesan gave no indications that that might not be possible. He's been giving me extra training, some of which would be very useful. I never thought he'd forbid me from entering the Military."

Kor was frowning. "My lord Kesan has very strong ideas on what his subjects should and shouldn't do," he murmured wryly. "I don't think he approves of the Space Service. What did he say to you, little brother?"

Kirin hesitated. In sending for Kor, he was risking Kesan's wrath; but he desperately wanted his brother's guidance. He went on. "Kesan told me that I had been specially chosen for an intelligence mission--a mission to spy on the Federation."

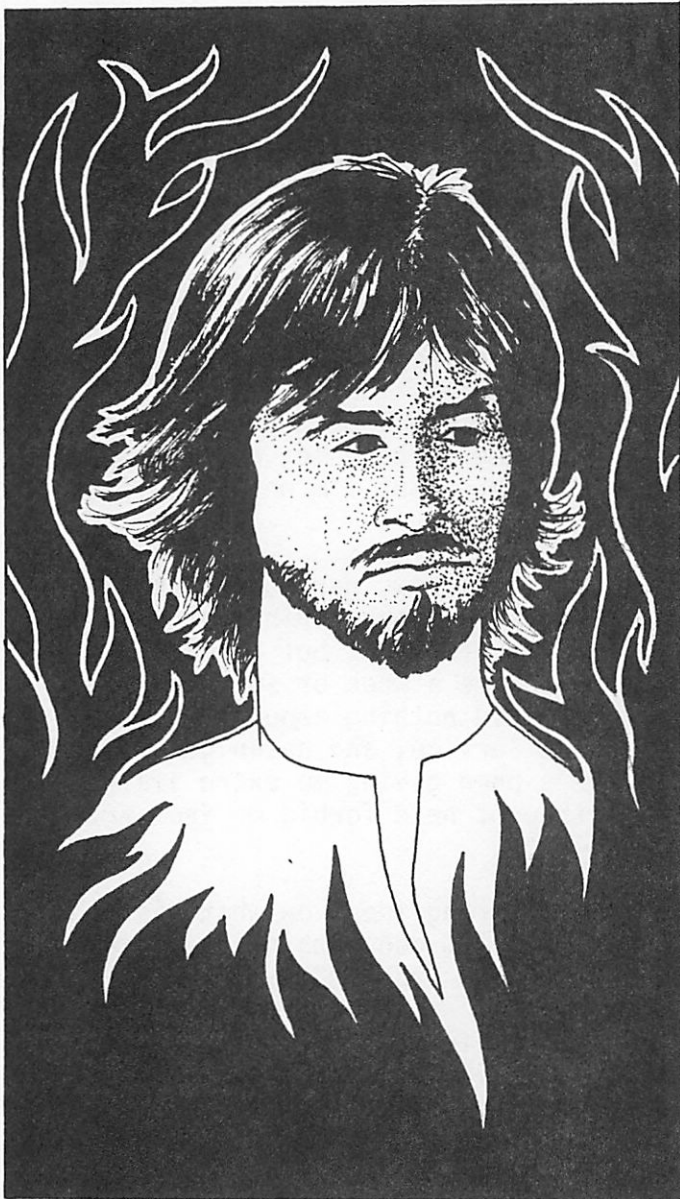
"Kesan told you what?"

"I dared not refuse him, but I don't want to be a spy!" Kirin exclaimed. "I don't want to go to the Federation. I'd have to live like a *Federen*, and act like a *Federen*. It would be horrible!" Kirin suddenly realized how insolent he sounded. He reconsidered and went on. "But I should obey him. He adopted me, and has shown me the privileges of being a Kothir. Kor, what must I do?"

Kor realized for the first time how desperate Kirin's conflict was. "I'm sure he made you feel quite indebted to him, little brother. But if you deeply feel, in your heart, that you cannot do it," he said slowly and deliberately, "then don't. However, if you refuse, be prepared to face harsh consequences."

Kirin looked at Kor and thought about how strong and proud his brother was, yet how scarred and cynical from his many long battles. "You defied Kesan's commands," said Kirin. "But I don't--I don't want to suffer at his hands the way you've suffered. I couldn't bear that."

Kor was quiet for a long moment. "I made a choice," he said finally.



"I've had to abide by it. I haven't regretted what I did, though."

The shadows were lengthening as they finished their meal. The white and silver seabirds were circling over the beach. Their wails seemed to be full of sorrow over the sun's fading light.

Kor and Kirin scattered the fire and tossed the remnants of the fish to the seabirds to scavenge. By unspoken consent, the brothers moved along the beach. It was still very warm. The sand was pleasantly slithery under their feet and the sea-breeze was fresh.

"I don't like the sound of your 'intelligence mission,' Kirin," said Kor slowly. "But I certainly wouldn't ask you to disobey Kesan. I know that I've made myself an outcast from this domain; I won't urge you to do the same. In one sense, this mission would be your work and your duty to the *Ormenel*."

"My duty, and my responsibility," added Kirin. "That's what Kesan said."

Kor and Kirin looked at each other. There was doubt and fear in Kirin, but also much zest, and enthusiasm for a new venture. Kor seemed tired and somewhat careworn.

"Kirin, I wish that I could help you," said Kor, his frustration showing in his voice. "I wish that I could find the words or the wisdom that might guide you. But I've made so many mistakes, little brother. My father and the Military never cease to remind me of my failures. I do not know what to tell you."

"I would be glad to serve the *Ormenel*," said Kirin after a silence. "I just wish it wasn't a spy mission."

"It may not be for long," said Kor, but his expression lacked conviction.

"It will probably be for years," said Kirin emphatically. "Kesan says I must train there, and work in their Star Fleet. For several years I must be a perfect *Federen* to prevent any suspicion. Then the *Ormenel* will begin to ask me to obtain information."

Kor scowled darkly. "I don't approve of such subterfuge."

"Brother Kor, you're not making it any easier for me to face!" cried Kirin

suddenly.

Kor looked at him in amazement, and just as quickly backed down from Kirin's anger. "I'm sorry, Kirin," he said. "Sometimes I don't think."

"That's all right," said Kirin after a moment's pause. "I would rather know your honest feelings."

"Mmmh. Well. I suppose my teaching you System English is about to become worthwhile."

"Yes, even though I am to study it further before I go," said Kirin. "The Intelligence service--the Kirespi--has all sorts of things to teach me before I go. And they have to make me look like an Earther, and train me to fit a new background. They've even found an Earther name for me--something strange, and hard to say--Roan."

The two brothers continued to walk slowly along the beach, watching the sun descending through belts of cloud in the western sky. The sun shone gold and orange on the black waves of the sea.

"Before I go," said Kirin soberly, "there is something I must give back to you, brother Kor."

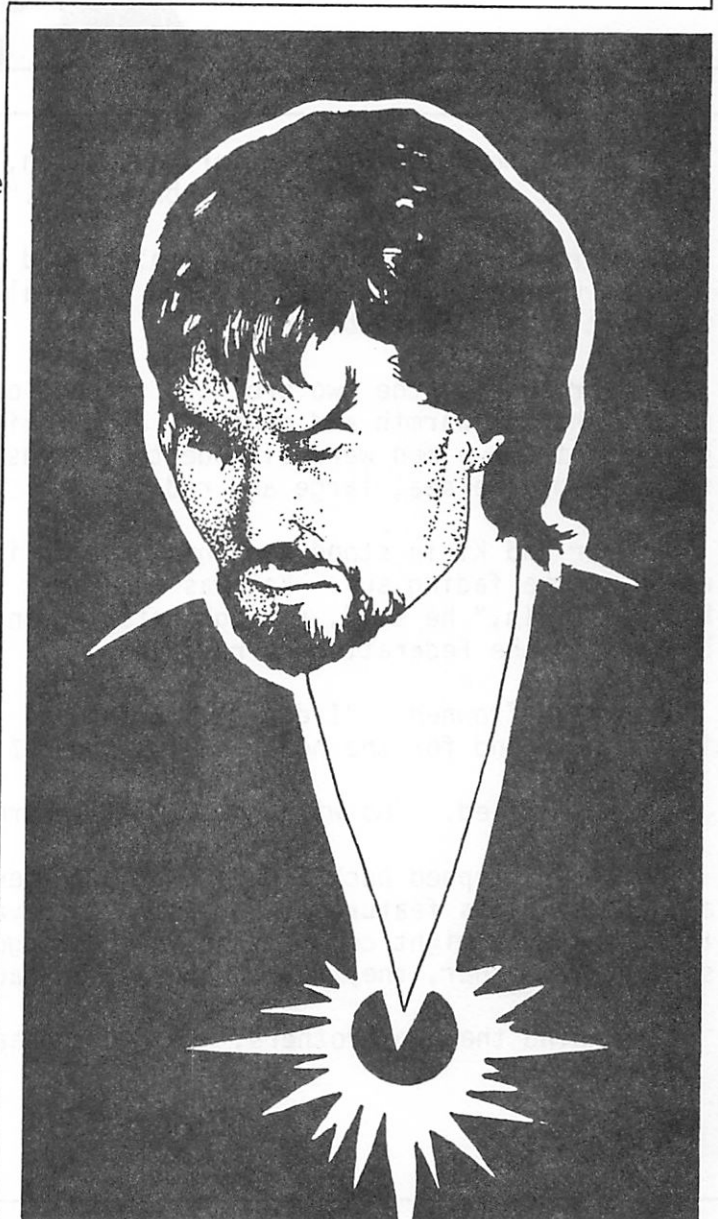
Kor stopped, and looked at him inquiringly. "I leave soon," said Kirin, "for preparations."

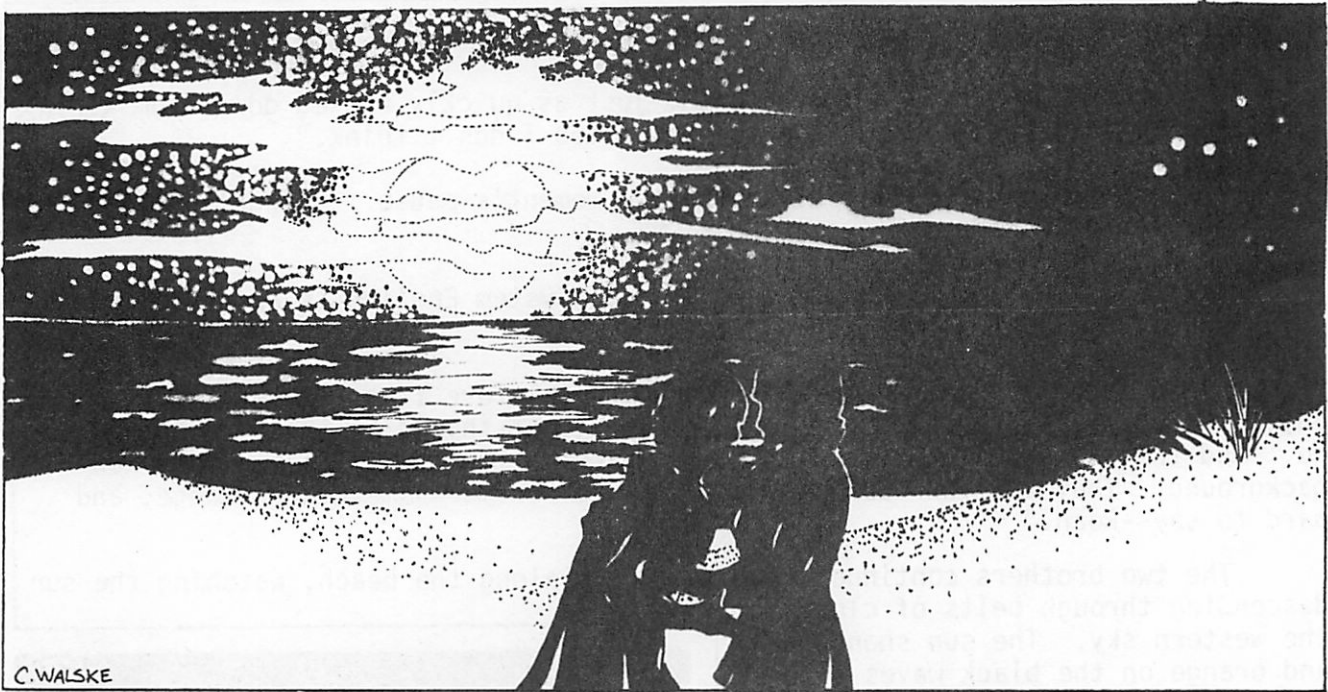
Kirin reached into his tunic and pulled out his knife. The gold and steel, gem-capped knife glinted faintly in his hand. The light brought out the weapon's gleam and the vivid expressiveness of Kirin's face.

"I can't take this with me to the Federation," said Kirin, holding the knife out toward Kor. "I wish I could--it's so much a part of you, and me, and our sharing."

Kor, who was watching Kirin steadfastly, gave him a brief look of warmth and amused affection. Kirin looked unhappy. "I must give the knife back. It belongs to you once again."

Kor reached out and placed his hand over the knife. For a moment, their two hands touched; the blade lay between them.





"I'll hold it in trust for you, Kirin," Kor said intently, "until you return. I'll wait for you to come back home."

Kirin looked at him. He straightened and held his head high, feeling the glow of renewed strength and pride. He swallowed and blinked several times as the salt of his tears blinded him.

Wordlessly, the two brothers reached out and clasped arms, for a brief moment sharing warmth and comfort, each taking strength from the other. The figures of the two men were silhouettes against the sunset sky. The sun sat on the edge of the sea, large and red.

Kor and Kirin stood together, facing into the west, looking out over the water at the fading sun. Kor was the first to speak again. "I'll miss you, brother Kirin," he said, a laugh catching in his throat. "Don't let the barbarians in the Federation corrupt you."

Kirin frowned. "I don't look forward to the new life. But, I will do it-- in the name and for the honor of the *Ormene*l, and for your sake, Kor."

Kor smiled. "Go with honor, little brother."

Kirin stepped back a pace or two. There was a new expression of assurance and pride in his features. He seemed to have prepared himself to accept the future, whatever might come. "And you, Kor, go with strength and joy," he said softly. Together, they turned and walked back along the beach.

Behind the two brothers, the red sun sank into the fiery sea.

\* \* \*

# Nightfall

For several days without success Kor tried to get in to see his father. He was told again and again "Not yet; Lord Kothir is busy." Impatient, he stalked the domain, wanting full answers to all of his questions about Kirin. As he waited and thought, many questions arose, small mysteries about Kirin or what Kesan said of him that had never been solved.

Finally, one of Kesan's aides sent for Kor, and informed him that Kesan would graciously see him now. Kor somewhat sardonically thanked the man, and walked boldly into Kesan's office.

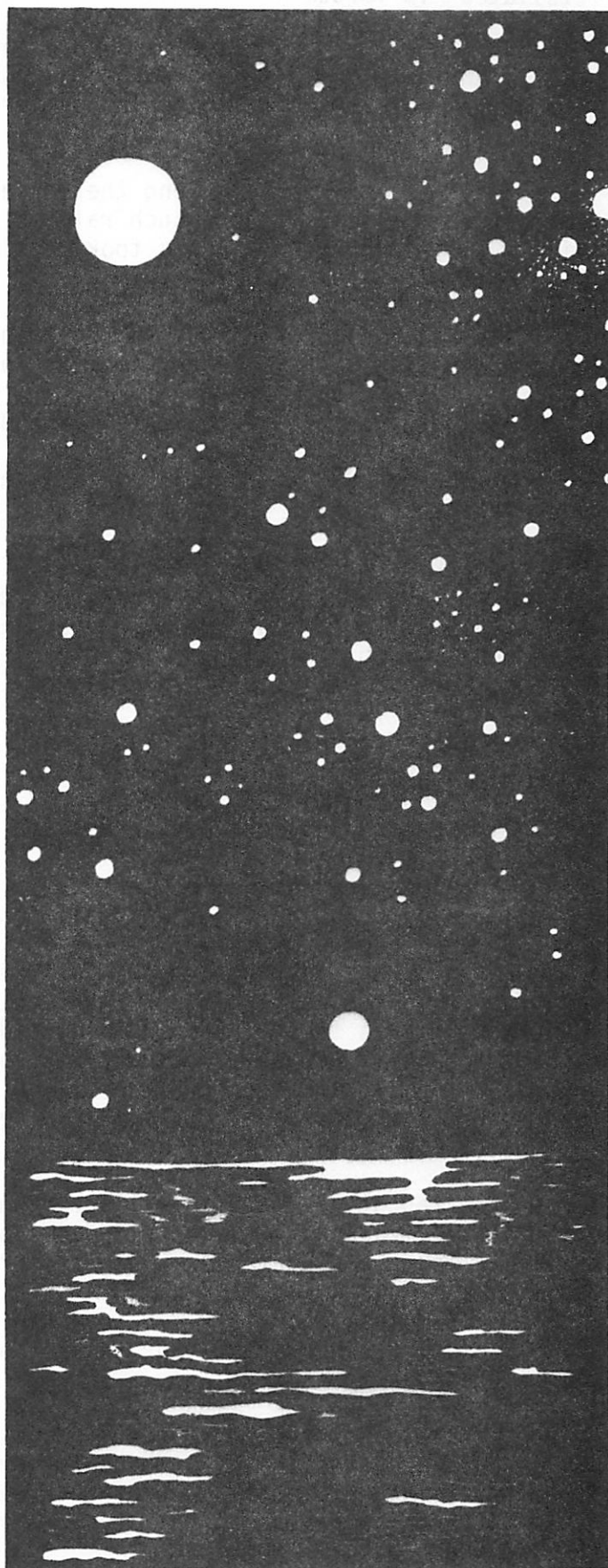
Kesan looked mildly annoyed at Kor's unannounced entrance and lack of greeting. "You don't seem able to show the least courtesy," he commented

"Not to you," retorted Kor. He gazed at his father defiantly. "Whether you know already or not, I'll tell you. Kirin summoned me home. He told me a ridiculous story of your plans to send him off to the Federation. What's the meaning of this?"

Kesan raised his eyebrows in disdain. "Both you and Kirin show a regrettable lack of tact. But no matter. I have no objection to giving you an answer, now that your 'brother' is gone."

Kesan settled back in his chair and smiled. Kor winced inwardly at his father's expression. It was a familiar, cruel smile.

His father began. "Allow me to relate to you a short tale. Nine years ago, the Federation invaded *Or-mene* territory. Naturally, we



retaliated--in force.

"At the time, I was the *Ormen* Alargor's liaison for the Border planets. I devised an experiment--to train and use human prisoners for special purposes, including the purpose of doing espionage for the *Ormene1*. Both Alargor and I thought it was an ingenious idea.

"So, military forces along the Border were instructed to take prisoners in their revenge-raids. In one such raid on a planet, a colony planet named Beta Arietis IV, kilingaven soldiers took captives. Some of the human captives were only children."

Kor stalked forward and slammed both hands down on the edge of Kesan's table. For long moments father and son locked gazes.

"Why are you telling me this?" Kor demanded.

Kesan smiled again. Deliberately, he began to play idly with the knife that lay on his table. He continued with his story.

"To try out the experiment myself, I decided to take one of the human prisoners. There was one youngling who retained his spirit and intelligence even after mind-breaking. He was quick, and bold, and learned his lessons well. He seemed to adapt to being a kiling easily, so I chose him. I accepted him into this domain as one of the family."

Kor paled as he saw what Kesan was leading up to. "No," he began harshly, "I refuse to believe---"

"The brother you cherish so dearly is a human," said Kesan.

"You lie," Kor exclaimed, enraged. "I don't believe it. Mind-breaking a child! Even you couldn't be so cruel, so heartless, to---"

Kesan made an abrupt, vulgar gesture with the knife he held, and Kor shut up. Kor tried to master his anger and to understand the impossible, incredible idea. "Kirin was taken prisoner in a raid on a Federation planet? And conditioned to believe he was a kiling? Why does he look like a kiling?"

"Some work was done on him," said Kesan indifferently. He's still a human internally--obviously, he had no *sarasu*."

"You taught him to be a kiling. You raised him as your son, spent time and money on his training---" Kor stopped short and stared at Kesan. "You think this is a large elaborate joke, don't you? You're playing games with people again."

"I fail to understand your fervent outburst," said Kesan calmly. "He's only a human, after all."

Kor stared at Kesan, stunned into silence. For a moment he stood very still, held by astonishment at Kesan's words and his own rebellious fury. "Even if he is human, he's still my brother," he exploded. "How can his ancestry possibly matter, in the face of all that we've shared?"

"It doesn't matter to you?" asked Kesan contemptuously.

"No." Kor leaned forward, his face only a few inches from Kesan's. "Who-soever lives in our land and shares our water, who knows our language, is raised in our culture, and adds to our honor is one of us."

"I don't care what you feel," said Kesan. "Kirin was a tool designed for a specific purpose. My experiment worked. Kirin--a capable, intelligent, loyal subject of the *Ormenel*--will serve well. He goes back to the Federation, thinking himself to be a killing." Kesan smiled at his own shrewdness. "A human spying on his own. It's a pity you can't appreciate the value of someone like Kirin; the plan is perfect."

"You're insane," said Kor angrily. "You take special pleasure in taming people to your purposes. You've captured and perverted the mind of my son Karan; you've tried to force me into submission, and you have poisoned the life of a young man who will never be whole again. What happens after Kirin's outlived his usefulness in the Federation? Do you bring him back and remake him into something new? What would happen if he found out that he's a human--I ask you, what would happen then?"

Kesan shrugged with ostentatious indifference. "It hardly matters. Kirin is far beyond your reach now. You may never even see him again." He put down his knife and smiled, looking almost like a feral cat, amused by his victory.

Kor went back to his dwelling. He walked slowly, defeat and frustration showing in the gracelessness of his movements and the lifelessness of his features.

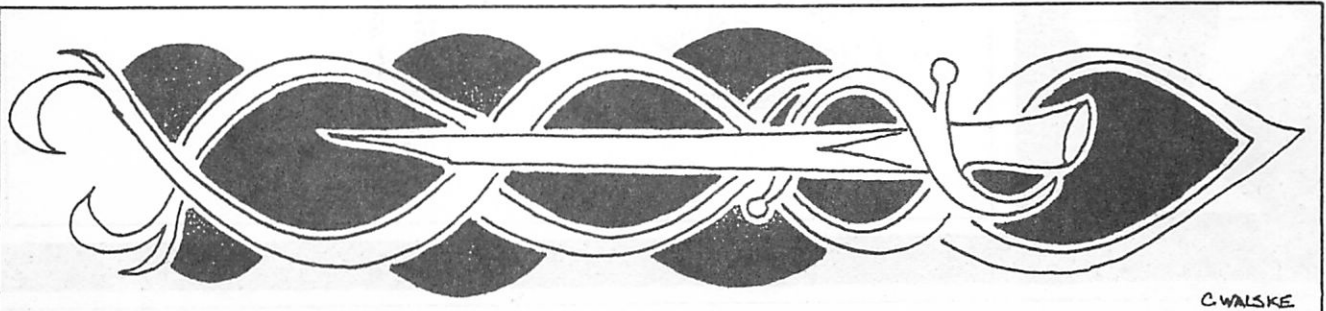
Kor thought long on Kirin. He paced in his room, and went finally to stand by a window. It was late. Both moons were up. Kor could see them shining silver on the sea and on the beach where he and Kirin had walked just a few days before.

Kor had to admit that Kesan had won again, at least for the moment. The thought of all his father had done to him and to Kirin filled him with black bitter anger.

He realized suddenly, with flaring hope, that Kesan's victory was hollow. In spite of Kesan's cruelty and abuse of power, Kor and Kirin had been brothers, almost shadows of each other, sharing life, sharing their hearts. "We discovered joy together, you and I," he said softly. He knew that he loved Kirin, whether his brother was human or killing.

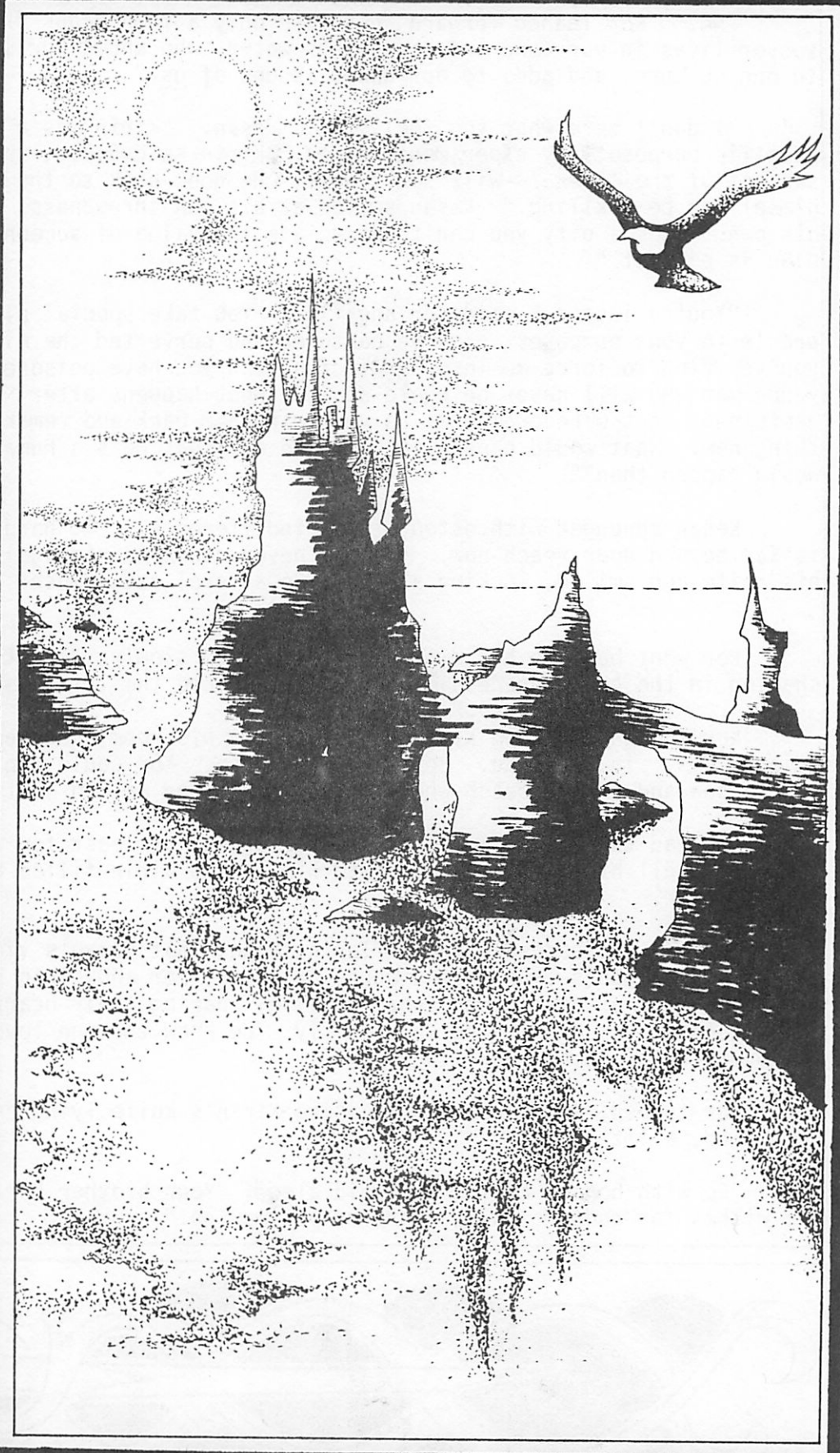
Kor turned, and happened to notice Kirin's knife lying on a nearby table. He smiled, a little sadly.

"Go with honor, Kirin," he said aloud. "Your brother Kor sends you his love and wishes for good fortune, wherever you may go."





# DISCOVERY



Learning how to go with honor,  
seeking one who knows how to give,  
finding courage, wisdom, harmony  
and a place to live.

Brother who has shown me honor,  
brother who has shared with me  
all the joys and trials of life  
and taught me to be free.

Though we follow different roads  
forever our way will be the same:  
fight for the right  
to do as our hearts must do,  
live all our lives in honor's name.

Brother who has shown me honor,  
brother who has shared with me  
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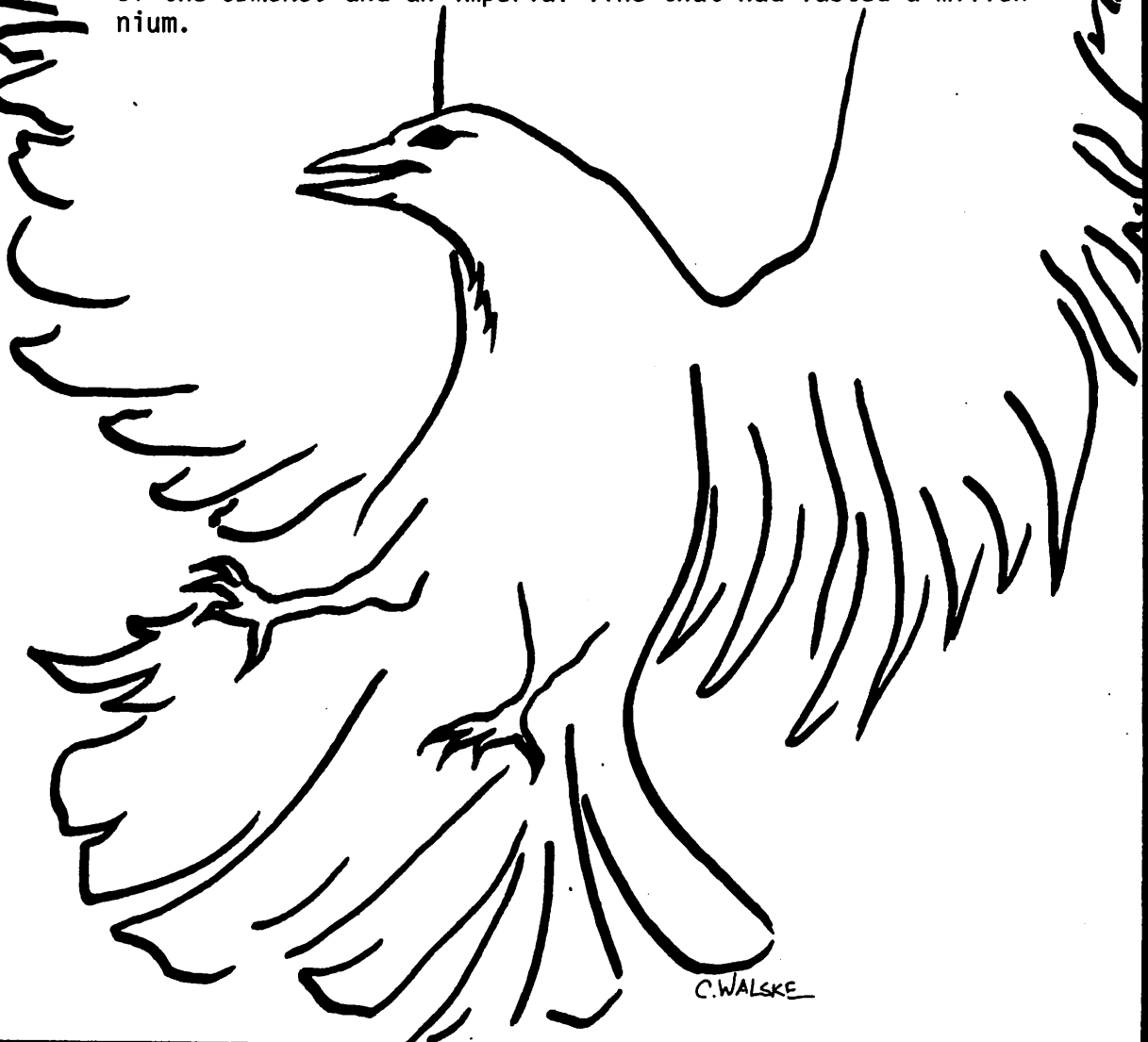
The *Orashathnavi* Revolution--

## FIGHT FOR HONOR

These are some of the myriad tales, poems and songs of the *Orashathnavi* Revolution, the fight for honor that brought Alkarin the Glorious to power, and restored an ancient tradition of integrity and honor to the *Ormenel*.

The most remarkable aspect of this war was not its battles, nor its noble concept. What made the revolution memorable for all time were the people who fought in it. The warriors, the strategists, the statesmen, the unlikely allies.

Foremost among all these was Kor Alkarin, military genius, eloquent statesman, visionary and leader. A man consumed with a fire of revenge and a desire for honor so strong that it carried him and a thousand thousand rebels to a distant, unexpected, unprecedented victory over the organized military of the *Ormenel* and an imperial line that had lasted a millennium.



## DAWN OF THE WARLORD

The door to the office opened, and Kang Keorl stalked in haughtily. He came to within two meters of Umil Kosseren, and looked down his nose at the planetary governor of Merthron.

"Well," he said disdainfully, "you summoned me here, on 'personal, urgent business,' and I came."

"I do thank you for coming, Commander Keorl. I--"

"Don't thank me," interrupted Kang savagely. "I came because I wanted to come. I have an affair of my own to settle with you." He moved forward still farther, his every word and movement menacing. He stood over Umil and for the first time stared straight down into Umil's eyes.

Kang's voice was very cold. "A personal, urgent matter, Governor Kosseren. A week or so ago, a fleeing ship came to rest over Merthron. Your ships--at your express command--destroyed that ship, and all who were aboard it." Kang took another step forward, and his hands moved up, as if he wanted to grip Umil Kosseren by the shoulders--or perhaps by the throat.

"You knew what you were doing," he continued, harshly. "You knew who was aboard when you blew that ship to pieces. Umil Kosseren, I Challenge you, to avenge the death of Kor Kothir!"

Umil took several steps back, taking himself out of range of those murderous hands. He looked not in the least perturbed; he seemed even faintly amused. "You would avenge the death of Kor Kothir?" he repeated in an incredulous, slightly mocking voice. "Kor Kothir, infamous traitor, who dared to try to escape from Salao? Whose companions killed all the guards and the warden of Salao in the attempt? Who dared to come here to Merthron, and ask me for sanctuary? Why shouldn't I destroy his ship? I was doing the *Ormenel* a favor."

A sound, a choked snarl of rage, came from Kang. "Do you accept my Challenge?" he asked hoarsely. "Answer quickly!"

"No, I do not," said Umil Kosseren calmly. "I reject it, for I was not the one who decided on the destruction of the prisoners' ship!"

Taken aback, Kang stared. But then, bent on his quest, he demanded, "Then who did?"

Umil lifted his eyebrows and smiled. "I will let you talk to him yourself," he said. He moved toward a door.

Kang's hand shot out and grabbed Umil by the arm. "You used to be a friend, Umil," he growled, "but now, by your strange smiles and mysterious behavior, you've made yourself my enemy. I'll deal with you later---after my Challenge."

"I'm sure you will," said Umil politely, remaining completely unruffled. He pulled free of Kang's grasp, walked to the door and opened it. He gestured down the corridor. "The first door on your right, Commander Keorl. Good luck with your Challenge." He moved back as Kang strode past him with not even a look. Then Umil turned his head aside, and smothered his laughter behind his hand.

Kang thrust open the first door on the right and walked in, not caring for courtesy, propelled by righteous indignation. He noticed nothing of the room, only the man standing, gazing at a map on the wall, his back to Kang.

"Whoever you are, I Challenge!" Kang announced stridently.

The man slowly turned, an expression of amazement on his face. He looked the intruder up and down, eyebrows lifted high, and said, reasonably, "Why in the name of Maraku would you want to do that?"

Kang stared, bewildered. He saw the face of a stranger, but there was something familiar, compelling, even haunting about that dead-level, commanding, dark gaze. He recovered himself. "Umil Kosseren claims that you ordered the attack on the ship of prisoners escaping from Salao."

The man, unexpectedly, lifted his head and laughed merrily. "Yes, I ordered the destruction of the prison ship," he said, through his chuckles. "And I will accept your Challenge, Kang Keorl, but I suggest you take a closer look at what you're Challenging."

Kang could have shouted his rage. "Is everyone mad?" he exclaimed. "My closest friend is dead, and you give me riddles!"

The man paced forward, and stopped a half meter from Kang. "Look at me," he said quietly.

Despite himself, Kang looked. The man's face was haggard, etched with lines, lines of pain and trouble. He was almost pathetically thin, and though he held himself straight and proud, the great weariness in him was plain to see. His long hair and full beard had been trimmed, but bore the patchy lackluster of ill health and abuse.

Kang stared hard at the rueful, expectant, almost mocking expression on the other's face. He looked at the new, angry scar on the other's cheekbone, and at the old scar between his eyebrows. . . "Kor?" he whispered.

"Yes."

Kang uttered a strangled cry of exasperation and astonishment. He fairly lifted Kor into the air, throwing his arms around his friend and crying out broken phrases of incoherent joy.

Then the impossibility of what was happening hit him, and he held Kor at arm's length and asked, somewhat awkwardly, "Why aren't you dead?"

Kor laughed. "Why, so that I could come here and torment you, of course." He laughed again at Kang's contorted expression and then gestured toward several chairs placed by a window. Kang followed him blindly.

When they were seated, Kor leaned forward and grinned. "My dear friend, just because a ship is destroyed in space doesn't mean that anyone was aboard it. I spoke to Umil--an old friend who owed me an obligation from long past--and he agreeably sent his defenses to blow up the prison ship, after we were all down on-planet. Alargor's ships, arriving on the scene, found only debris, and Umil reported that he was responsible for the prison ship's complete annihilation. And everyone, including the *Ormen* Alargor, jumped to the same--calculated--conclusion that you did." Kor leaned back in his chair, obviously pleased with himself.

"Alargor's ships, those few that were in the area, turned back when they heard that Umil had blown up the ship?" Kang asked, reasoning it out slowly.

"Would you question the word of a planetary governor? Especially when he was telling you what you most wanted to hear in the first place?"

"No---" Kang suddenly burst out laughing, the joy welling up inside him again. "You always were the clever one." He shook his head, grinning. Then he snarled and jumped to his feet. "I'm going to kill Umil! He let me make a fool of myself!"

"If your encounter with Umil was anything like your entrance here, I'd say he's probably rolling on the floor with laughter."

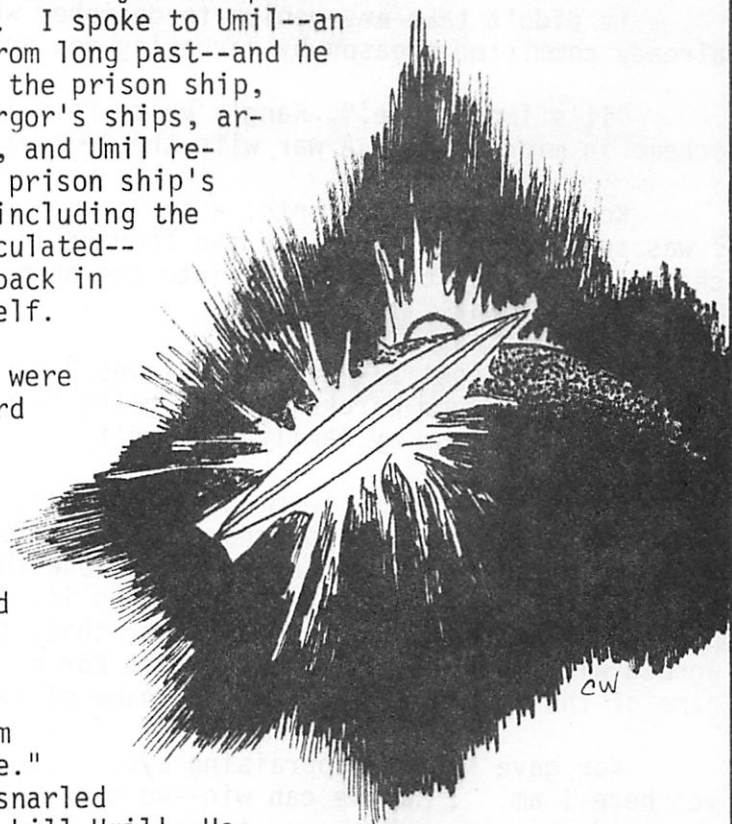
Kang bared his teeth in a grimace. He looked down at Kor, glowering. Kor looked back at him, his eyes gleaming with irrepressible laughter. Then, on impulse, Kang laughed and pulled Kor out of the chair. He embraced his friend gleefully. "You're a devious bastard." He propelled Kor toward the door. "Come, help me kill Umil."

Kor and Umil teased and chided Kang all afternoon and through dinner that evening. The meal had nearly ended when Kor asked that a fresh round of wine be poured. After Umil obliged, Kor stood at his place, and raised his glass toward Kang. "If I may be permitted to ruin your dinner, my friends. . ."

Kor lifted his goblet high and said, "I drink to the rebellion that will destroy the *Ormen* Alargor and restore honor to this *Ormenel*." He drank deeply of his wine and sat down. Kang and Umil simply stared at him.

"Will you not drink to my cause?" Kor prompted gently.

Kang, stupefied, slowly raised his glass. "I would be delighted to salute Alargor's downfall," he said cautiously, taking a swallow of wine, "but I, ah, don't see any war here." He looked around the room with exaggerated care. "Umil here just destroyed the only ship you had."



Kor cleared his throat and raised his eyebrows. He smiled faintly. "That, gentlemen, is what I need to talk to you about."

It didn't take any genius to decipher what Kor wanted. Umil exploded. "I've already committed treason by harboring you and all your hungry friends, Kor---"

"It's impossible!" Kang's voice rose in a roar. "You have some ludicrous scheme in mind again! A war with the *Ormenel*? That's madness!"

Kor looked at them both, a smile on his lips. "Come now, my friends. Before I was sent to Salao, what was the thought in all of our minds? Dissension, and change! I merely bring it out into the open, now, and proclaim it for all to hear. It's time for war."

"That'll cost all of us our lives!" Kang exclaimed. "And, speaking of cost, where by the Wargod Maraku are you going to get the money for your war? And the fighters? Not from my family you won't!"

Kor listened with seeming patience and then spoke in measured tones. He turned to Umil first. "Governor Kossereen, for the moment I will be satisfied if you simply continue to do as you have done this past week: hide us, feed and house us, care for our sick and wounded. And if, when the time comes, a few of your people decide to join our poor ranks, that, too, will be most appreciated." Umil agreed willingly enough, knowing that Kor could have asked for much more, in the name of their friendship or in the name of the revolution.

Kor gave Kang an appraising eye. "Escape from Salao was 'impossible,' and yet here I am. I say we can win--we must win--if any of the thousand of us who survived the escape are ever to see our homes again. As for committing your family and fortune, I don't ask it. I'll settle for a promise of your personal assets, and, of course--"

"A promise of my personal assets!"

"Stop exploding, Kang; you'll get indigestion."

"*Krasaia* Keorl is the third richest domain on the Kilingarlan! Do you know what I'm worth?"

"Too much," said Kor gravely. "As I was saying, you'll also return to me any funds that made it safely to you when I was sent to Salao. Your fortune will be returned, doubled, when we take the *Ormen*'s palace."

"Don't you mean 'if'?"

"I said when," Kor said forcefully. "Are you with me, oath-brother?"

Kang gaped at the audacity of Kor's request--nay, demand. He took a deep breath and continued to argue; Kor continued to persuade. Several hours and a bottle of wine later, Kang finally capitulated. "Kor, my friend, I suppose--if you really want to commit suicide in such an ostentatious way--that I'll help you."

Kor raised his glass one last time. "To you, my friend and comrade. . . ." Kang smiled and moved to drink, but Kor quickly added, "Your agreement should be enough to sway the rest of your domain to my thinking." With that, he downed his wine, before Kang could amend the toast.

"You scoundrel," Kang grouched, but then he smiled and continued, "You're probably right."





## TOMORROW'S PROMISE

We answer the call of an ancient voice;  
we stand to the test of our skill.  
We ask to be given the ancient choice  
of honor or death by our will.

We live for the day when we may end our fight,  
when all of our trials will be done.  
Renewed be the promise of victory and right,  
and honor again can be won.

## THE WOLF AND THE BEAR

"So. What's this I hear about a revolution, my friend?"

Kor turned quickly toward the source of the voice. He looked at the man standing in the doorway, and smiled with genuine pleasure. "Karth! I didn't hear you sneaking up on me."

Karth Keorl bent his head to avoid the top of the doorway and leisurely strode in. "I was perturbed to learn of your death," he said with mock gravity. He reached out with his right hand, and he and Kor locked forearms.

"It's good to see you alive," said Karth simply.

Kor's eyes gleamed. "I'm glad to be alive. I hoped you would come, Karth. I trusted to your brother Kang to send you to me."

Karth, a giant of an Agau who stood two and a half meters tall, turned slowly, looking around at Kor's war-room on Merthron. His girth matched his height; he was solid and mighty as the mountains he came from.

There were maps hanging askew on the walls, covered with notations and scribbling; papers, both blank and written on, lying everywhere. "It's true, then," Karth said slowly, indicating the room.

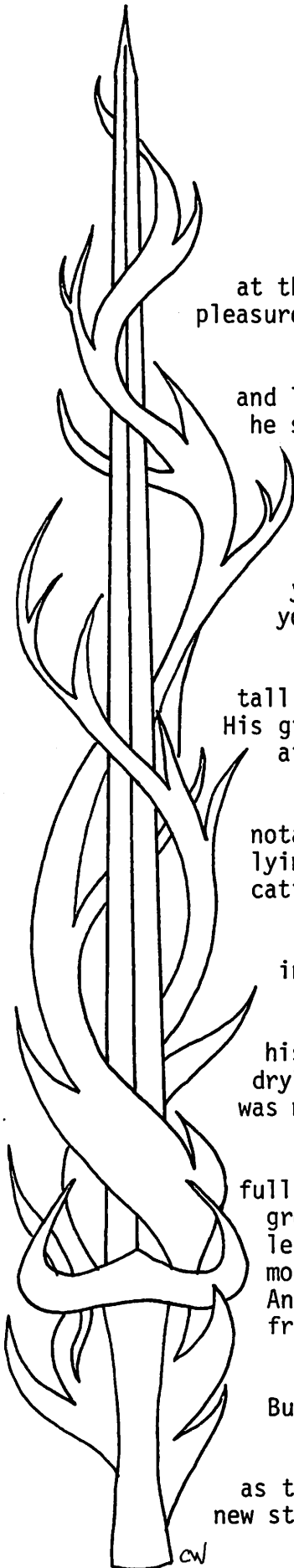
"Quite true." Kor looked at Karth. "And I've been waiting for you to come and fight and plan at my side."

Karth's eyes were cool grey and very keen. He scrutinized his friend, the beginnings of a smile on his face. He said dryly, "From what Kang was saying, I gathered that all you wanted was money and a supply of fighters."

"I need leaders, Karth." Kor paced away, almost prowling, full of an energy that longed to be let loose. "And you are the greatest military leader this *Ormenel* knows. Member of the legendary *Sarki Saiakhkol*, the Legion of Honor, inventor of modern space strategy, and an expert in all kinds of warfare. And, beyond that, a lord of Domain Keorl, and a wise and true friend."

Karth smiled broadly. "Your words are sweet, my friend. But you, too, are a member of the *Sarki Saiakhkol*."

Kor spread his arms wide. "Who am I? I'm dead, as far as the *Ormenel* is concerned. I have to take a new name and gain new status." Kor looked up at the man, eighteen years his senior



in both age and military experience. "I grew up holding you as one of my heroes. I will give the war passion and a drive for vengeance, but you can give the war control, and an assurance of victory. Together we can conquer the *Ormene*l."

Karth stared at Kor during a long silence. "You are very changed. The Kor I knew once would have claimed leadership and tried to make his friends all slaves to his will. The young Kor I knew was full of brash fire and had not a bit of sense in his head."

Kor smiled at the unflattering, but wholly true description. "And now, Karth?"

"You are very changed," Karth repeated slowly, scrutinizing Kor. He grinned suddenly as the impact of Kor's words came home. "You invite me to be a leader of a revolution for honor, and I stand quibbling! Sometimes I am a fool. Show me all your plans, Kor, all your strategies and maps and lists. And I---"

Karth paused. He raised his head and looked over Kor's head into a far distance. "I will give myself to the revolution," he said quietly. He lowered his head to meet Kor's eyes. "I will pledge to share leadership of the war, Kor. We'll scatter and destroy Alargor's forces together. No one will stop us."

"No one will be able to stop us," interjected Kor warmly, and somewhat recklessly.

"I will promise my fortune and the entire resources of Domain Keorl to the fight. And because of who I am in the Military, I think we'll be seeing a large number of ships and fighters coming to join the revolution's muster." Karth's eyes were brilliant with excitement. He whispered, "A fight for honor. . . a return to tradition. We will win."

"A toast of wine to your pledge," said Kor intently. He walked over to a sidetable where stood several bottles of wine and some goblets. He filled two glasses, and raised one to Karth, who took it with a smile.

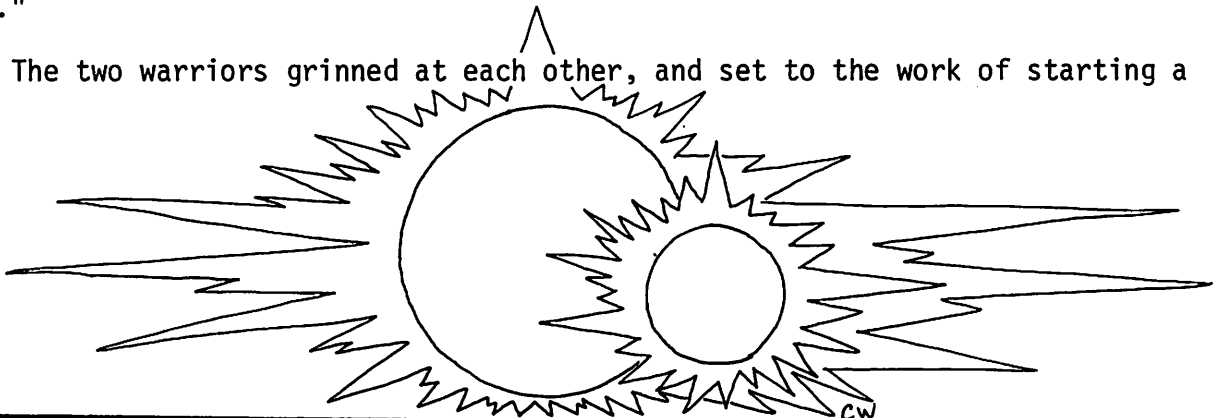
"To victory," said Kor, and drank.

"To victory," agreed Karth. He slapped Kor on the shoulder. "That's a brilliant idea of yours, having a revolution! Wish I'd thought of it."

Kor laughed. "To Karth Keorl and Kor Alkarin," he said.

Karth did a double-take. "Kor Alkarin? Kor the Great Leader? You have proud taste in names for a dead man. . . no matter. To Karth Keorl and Kor Alkarin."

The two warriors grinned at each other, and set to the work of starting a war.



## TO BELL A CAT

'Kalim Saiaf Alargor Rifolorin es Olorin, otherwise known as Alargor the Feckless, First-Father and Foremost of all Domains of the Kilingarlan, Emperor of all planets of the *Ormenel*, is by this proclamation Challenged to the death.

'Let it be known to all citizens of the Kilingarlan and the *Ormenel*: the crime of Kalim Alargor is cruelty and theft, deceit and abuse of power. In the way of order, in the way of honor, banish thoughts of him, his memory; make his name a curse.

'It is seen by the Patterns of Honor as written in the seven books of the *Orashathmawi* that Kalim Alargor has made himself guilty of dishonor, through acts of theft and lies to the citizens of the *Ormenel*, and that he is guilty of abuse of power, in that he has without reason taken unwarranted action against honorable citizens of the *Ormenel*. He has embarked the *Ormenel* on a course of needless conquest; he has encouraged kilingau to use all means, even those cruel or corrupt, to hold ultimate power over all other races. The *Ormen* is charged with exploitation and desecration of all aspects of life in the *Ormenel*.

'Let it be further known that all who stand with Kalim Alargor will be considered as enemies of Kor Alkarin and his friends, and are also liable to Death-Challenge.

'These are the sworn words of the Supreme Warlord of the Rebel Forces of the Worlds of the *Saroranoris*, Kor Alkarin. Sworn to on Sarosmi Orodnathon, *Ormenel* Year 1016.'

Kor finished the draft of the Challenge and dropped his pen. As he was feeling more than a little punchy, the pen missed the table entirely and fell on the floor.

He looked at Kang Keorl, who was relaxing in a chair nearby in the common-room. Kor and Kang, and several hundred or so of the escaped prisoners from Salao, had the run of a remote fastness on Merthron that had been deserted by its former inhabitants. It belonged to Governor Umil Kosseren, of course, who was quietly sending them supplies and money and potential recruits.

Kang, who'd been out in space with his warship for a long, long time before arriving on Merthron, was avidly reading a currently popular book, a lurid drama about Getheni sacrifices on the Kilingarlan of long ago.

"Ah, Kang. . ." Kor waited a minute, but Kang didn't seem to have heard him. He continued, threateningly, "If you could tear yourself away from that *mishmish*--"

Kang looked up with a start. "It's very well written!" he protested.

"Well-written trash, then," said Kor mockingly. "I've got something more interesting for you to read."

"Hope it's got a good plot," grumbled Kang, as he reached over to take the paper from Kor's hand.

He scanned the Challenge silently. At the end, he gave out a disbelieving laugh. "Kor, you're incorrigible. Only you could have the audacity to write such an outrageous piece of tripe. . ." He looked narrowly at Kor, whose eyes were filled with wicked laughter. Kang tapped the paper with one finger. "This reminds me of something."

"It should," agreed Kor.

"Yes, I know what it is. It's like the statement the Military put out when you--ah, I mean when Kor Kothir was sent to Salao."

"Yes," said Kor, grinning even more widely, if possible. "Isn't it delightful?"

"Charming," said Kang dryly. He said scathingly, "'Supreme Warlord of the Rebel Forces of the Worlds of the *Saroranoris*'? What rebel forces? And who's ever heard of Kor Alkarin?"

"Let Alargor worry about that," said Kor.

Kang looked around at the other kilingau in the common-room. "Hey, Katni, Ikio, Karth, all of you others. Listen to this."

Kang had a splendid voice, exercised by years of warship command. He read the Challenge fluently, putting in the proper verve and dash. He got a rousing cheer at the end of his oration, to which he humbly bowed.

"I have a good idea," said Kor. Someone groaned, probably Kang. "Let's send it to Alargor and freeze his---ah, toes off!"

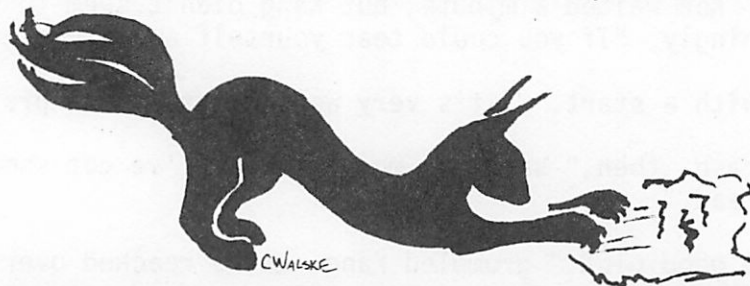
Everyone unanimously and in loud voices agreed that this was a good idea, except that no one wanted to be the messenger. Kor proposed going in person to deliver the Challenge, but that idea was firmly squashed (and so was Kor). Finally, the honor fell to Theremir Keorl, who, as a brilliant spy in Alargor's own intelligence network, could be counted upon to sneak into the *Ormen*'s office, put the Challenge under his nose, and walk off again without ever being seen.

\* \* \*

The *Ormen* Alargor reached for a paper from the top of a pile on one corner of his desk. He read it with growing amazement and scorn.

"What is this nonsense?" he exclaimed out loud. He laughed abruptly, and shook his head. He didn't know where it came from, nor who the idiot was who signed it--but then he didn't much care. He crumpled up the piece of paper and tossed it on the floor for the felines to play with.

Three days later, he was no longer laughing, as Kor Alkarin, Supreme Warlord of the Rebel Forces of the Worlds of the *Saroranoris*, struck on the planet Inirth.





## THE PRICE OF FREEDOM

Kelantan Tarolorin kept his face carefully blank as he entered the Ship's Hall. The high, wide chamber, normally full of chairs and tables arranged between ornamental columns, had been cleared of all its trappings. In the huge space was arrayed ten silent ranks of crew and officers. Every off-duty and nonessential crewmember was present, by Captain's command, to witness the rite.

Kelantan was a young Lieutenant Commander, only twenty-three years old, very new to his rank and this warship. He was a tall, dark Agau, broad-shouldered and powerfully muscled. He had taken great pains with his uniform and grooming; his curly hair was tied back and his beard was neatly trimmed.

Kelantan strode up to the dais at the head of the chamber and bowed to Ikomi Rifolorin, Commander of the Warship *Kalimmos*. She was a daughter of the Emperor Kalim Alargor, for whom the ship was named.

When Commander Rifolorin spoke, her voice was formal and cold. There was no hint of warmth or sympathy for her distant cousin. "Kelantan Tarolorin, Lieutenant Commander and Strategist of the *Kalimmos*, fifth in command, I greet you."

"I salute you, *Kfar*," he said, with equal formality. Though his back was turned to the assemblage, he could feel their eyes on him. A cold sickness had settled into his stomach; he swallowed hard, trying to keep the vile taste out of his mouth.

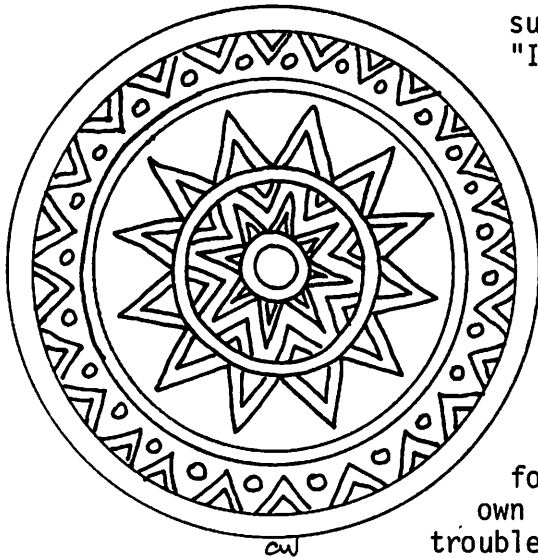
The Commander put her hands on the arms of her chair, and leaned forward slightly. "*Krifar* Tarolorin, your actions on Ursha, while suppressing the revolt there, caused the loss of a scoutship and the wounding of four fighters. Do you acknowledge this?"

Kelantan took a long moment to answer, far longer than he should have. Bewilderment rose in him whenever he thought back to that incident; he still didn't quite know how it had arisen and why he had acted as he did. He bowed his head. "I acknowledge it," he replied.

"Since this loss was caused through your negligence and poor judgment, we hold you accountable. We demand your suffering in payment: ten strokes."

A murmur of surprise and concern went through the ranks. They had expected a tirade on duty and loyalty; they were not prepared for such an unprecedented display of discipline.

Kelantan bit his tongue to keep from crying out in shame and fear. He



surrendered to the situation, as he knew he must. "I accept," he finally said.

He had barely said the words when Shafan Kiumira, a friend and senior officer, came forward from the ranks and stopped beside Kelantan. "I stand to second, *Har* Tarolorin," he said purposefully, looking the Commander directly in the eye.

*Kfar* Rifolorin bristled at his tone and the pointed use of the honorific 'Lord' for Kelantan Tarolorin. She did not need to be reminded that Kelantan was an heir to one of the foremost domains of the *Ormenel*, a prince in his own right, not to be dealt with lightly. It did not trouble her.

The Commander stared grimly at Shafan but did not bother to answer him. Instead, she looked past him to the Chief of Security, who stood in the first line of crew. She nodded, and the officer moved forward. With him came two armsmen, one carrying a lash and two lengths of smooth, thick rope.

Kelantan was led to the first row of columns. At a gesture, he went to stand between the middle two columns. He faced *Kfar* Rifolorin; his back was to the ship's company.

One of the armsmen made two loops in each length of rope, one small one, and one open, slip-knotted ring. He reached up and slipped the small loop of each rope over a hook in either column. Often, when parties were held in the Ship's Hall, those hooks were used for hanging lights, or for bright garlands.

The other armsman, a friend who now guiltily avoided meeting Kelantan's gaze, took the sash-of-rank off Kelantan's uniform tunic and the knife from his belt. He handed these to Shafan, who had moved with them to stand near Kelantan. Then, with some cooperation from his charge, he lifted the tunic over Kelantan's head and folded it neatly. This, too, was passed to the Second.

Though it was never cold in the Ship's Hall, Kelantan felt the movement of air as a chill breeze across his bare skin. He shivered.

Shafan reached out, and gave the young officer's hand a brief, hard squeeze. "Put your hands up through the loops," he said in a low voice, "and hold on tight." Kelantan did as he was told. The rope was comfortingly strong in his hands.

Now, Kelantan felt completely helpless. His feet were well apart and firmly planted to bear his weight. He felt spreadeagled in space, with nothing to support him but the bit of rope. The muscles crawled and twisted along his shoulders and back; his stomach was tight with apprehension.

The Security Chief took the short black whip from the armsman, and went over to stand behind Kelantan. He looked toward the Commander and nodded that all was ready.

"Carry out the punishment," said *Kfar* Rifolorin. Kelantan felt the blood rush to his face, and a wave of sweat broke out on his face, his neck, shoulders, and armpits.

'Ai Maraku,' he whispered to himself, 'ai Maraku, please let me bear this-- please don't let me fail---'

The first stroke whistled, and fell from left shoulder to right side of waist. Kelantan arched away from the blow, pulling with all his strength on the ropes. Unbelievably, they held.

There was a long pause between lashes. Kelantan shut his eyes, feeling sickness shake him, feeling all his strength and courage run out of him like the sweat running down his chest.

The fifth blow bit deep, and a cry found its way past Kelantan's clenched teeth. It did not sound like a killing's voice; it sounded like the cry of a trapped and wounded animal.

The rest of the punishment passed in a red haze. Kelantan, dizzy with embarrassed pain, recognized nothing but the need to hold on, to stay upright until the ordeal was through. The punishment was worse if the victim fell.

Kelantan was not even aware of when it stopped. He came back to himself when he felt hands prying his clinging hands loose from the ropes. If the armsman hadn't held him, he would have fallen to the floor. He swayed, tasting blood from where he'd bitten the side of his mouth, feeling cold tremors run through his body again and again; and he knew that he could not walk.

Shafan Kiumira put Kelantan's arm across his shoulders, as did the armsman on Kelantan's other side. Kelantan leaned on their strength, and was half-carried by them to the infirmary.

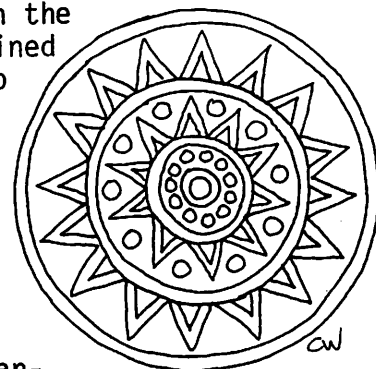
Two days later, the doctor let Kelantan get up off his stomach. He pronounced Kelantan free to go on duty, warned him about breaking open the newly formed scabs, and wished him well.

Kelantan went slowly to his quarters. It hurt to move; his back notwithstanding, his arms and shoulders ached from muscle strain. But what hurt most of all was the knowledge and the memories inside him. He walked heavily, face down-cast, refusing to greet the crewmembers he passed in the corridors. He could not face them, any more than he could face his conscience; he was dishonored, outcast, and marked with a shame that would never quite go away.

Upon reaching his quarters, Kelantan collapsed gratefully on his bed and slept for a while. He awoke, feeling worse rather than better, and looked over at the ship's clock. It was only half an hour until his watch, but Kelantan was neither prepared nor willing to go on duty. He sat up on the edge of his bed, still fully dressed. He felt half-inclined to report for sick call--but he didn't want to go back to lying in a sickbed.

He sat and thought for another few minutes, troubling it over in his mind. Finally, with a grunt of frustration, he switched on the commnet and punched in a number.

The third-in-command's office came into view, and then Shafan Kiumira's face appeared on the screen. "Kelantan," he said in surprise. His gold-hazel eyes were alive with





intelligence and good humor.

"*Kftax* Kiumira," said Kelantan hesitantly, "would you come to my quarters? Or, if you are too busy, I suppose I could come to your office. . ."

"You're on duty in twenty minutes," commented Shafan, frowning, and appraised the look on Kelantan's face for what it was. He suggested, "Shall I tell the Executive Officer that you won't be on watch?"

"I don't know yet whether I'm able to carry out my duties," said Kelantan truthfully.

The look of apprehension on Shafan's face indicated he'd caught some hint of Kelantan's difficulty. "I'll warn the Second," he said quickly, "and I'll be down immediately."

Shafan walked into Kelantan's quarters a few moments later. He paused on the threshold of Kelantan's personal space. "Comrade?" he said softly.

Kelantan got up stiffly, looking at his friend. Shafan Kiumira was a Komethe, from that race of kilingau that lived in the far southlands of the Kilingarlan. His skin was ochre, rather than red, and his black hair gleamed with blue. As was custom in his domain, his mustache hung long, its ends reaching below his chin.

"My apologies for calling you down here," Kelantan said awkwardly. "I--I impose on our friendship, I think."

"But you haven't done anything---" Shafan began, sharply, then cut himself short as Kelantan drew back.

"You've stirred the Commander's anger by standing with me. An obligation of honor between us," Kelantan said seriously.

"It was the least I could do for you." Shafan asked gently, "How is your back?"

Kelantan grimaced. "Itches."

"Did they give you anything for it in the infirmary?"

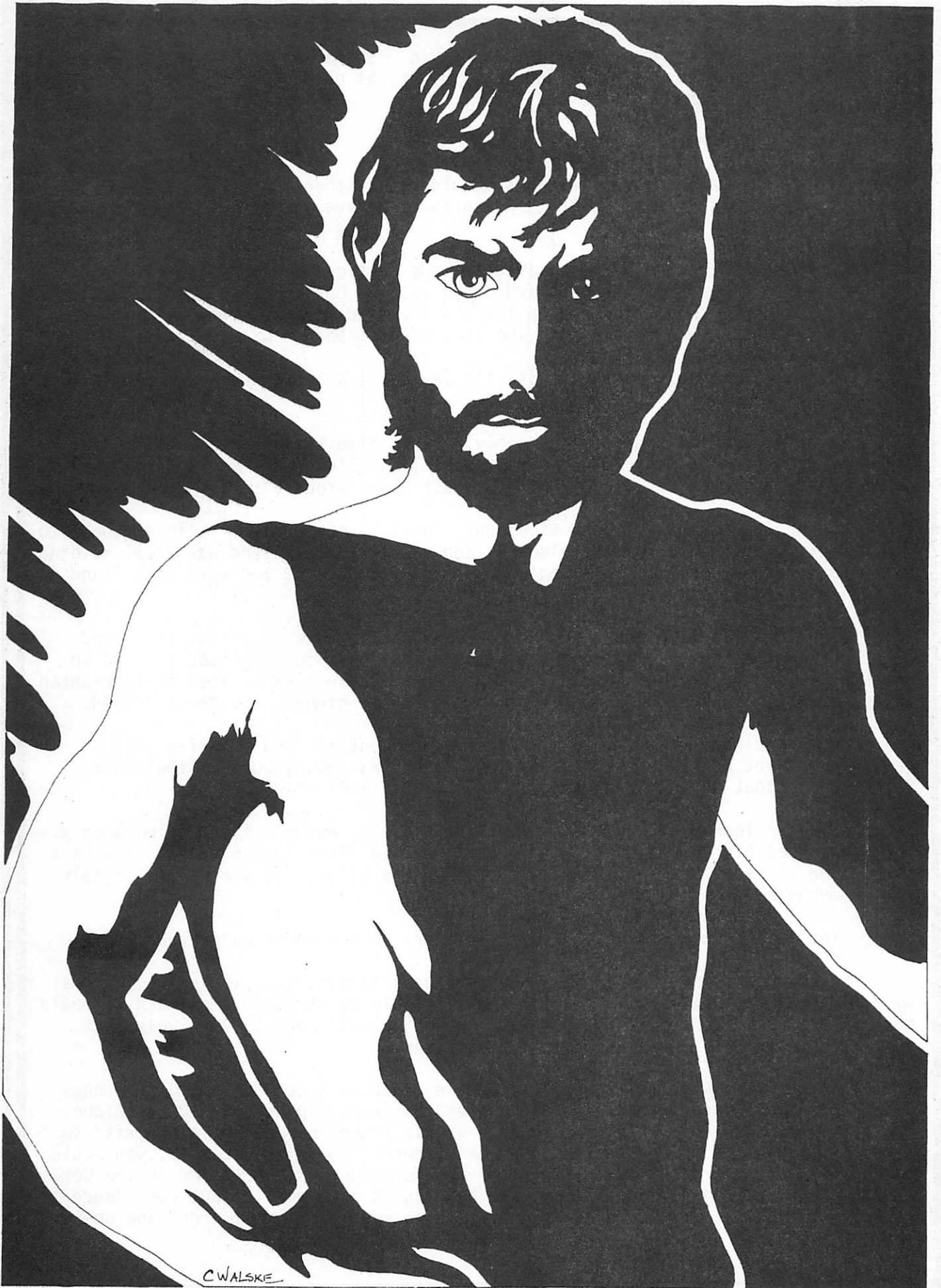
"Some salve."

Shafan saw the fear and trepidation in Kelantan. Not knowing how really to help his young friend, he offered the only tangible assistance he could. He said firmly, "Take off your tunic and lie down, Kel'tan, and I'll put some on your back."

Kelantan protested, but not strenuously. He lay, stomach down, on the bed and relaxed into its firm comfort.

Kelantan told Shafan where the salve was. Shafan got it, and sat down on the edge of the bed. He grimaced at the sight of the whip-scars: they were red, swollen, and barely healed. "The doctor shouldn't have released you yet," he said, frowning. He pulled the cap off the jar of ointment and took a generous daub of it.

Kelantan's voice was muffled by the pillow. "I think I wanted to go more than he wanted me to stay. . . oh. Ayah, that feels good, Shafan."



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The salve was very, very cold to the skin. Shafan rubbed it in gently along each stripe. Kelantan lay quiet under his hands, as obedient and relaxed as a young *maksat* under the hands of its rider.

"Thank you," he said, warmly.

Shafan laid a hand on Kelantan's shoulder, and then leaned forward to look more closely at his friend's back. "Kelantan. . . have you. . . were you ever whipped before?"

"No," said Kelantan, almost savagely. He cautiously pushed himself up, slid his legs over the edge of the bed, and stood up. He pulled a loose shirt over his head. He tried to smile, to make up for his uncalled-for harshness. "My *akra* would punish me, but he did it with the flat of his hand or with a book."

"Considering who your father is, I'd say he usually picked one of the books of the *Orashathnavi*."

Kelantan nodded, and grinned feebly. "What else would you expect from a Judge of the Codes of Honor? He said that at least I'd get something from the *O'navi* that way. Besides, they're the biggest books around."

Shafan laughed briefly and stood up. "Well, I can see you're in no shape to go on duty. . ." He looked at Kelantan, and saw that his friend was still holding back some trouble, some fear. "Let's go sit at your table," he suggested, "and talk, if you don't mind."

Kelantan hesitated, then nodded. He and Shafan took chairs at the round table just by the entry-door. Shafan noticed that the young officer perched on the edge of his chair and avoided leaning back. Shafan also noticed that Kelantan wouldn't meet his eyes, which was a new trait in his direct, courteous friend.

"I didn't know that this was a first punishment for you," Shafan said gently. He went on, lightly, "I knew your record was good, but not that good. It's hard to look at your crew and comrades, isn't it?"

Kelantan looked at Shafan in something close to wonder, then smiled openly. It transformed his copper-dark face, bringing vivid light to his eyes. "You know everything already, Shafan," he said ruefully. He added, "It's a relief to talk, when someone else understands."

"You're important to me, Kel'tan, so I try very hard to understand."

Kelantan was moved to candor. He said uncertainly, in a low voice, "It was my first beating, Shafan. . . I didn't realize, in my strength, how much it would hurt. I am. . . ashamed of my weakness, and--" he swallowed convulsively and looked down suddenly, "--ashamed that I was seen."

"It was *Kfar* Rifolorin's desire to make a public spectacle out of the chastisement," said Shafan harshly. "She shares the *Ormen*'s penchant for conspicuous cruelty." Kelantan only had time to gape at his friend before Shafan hurried to cover his outburst. "She ordered us to be witness. On any other ship, you would have gotten five strokes--administered by the Commander or the Second in the Commander's office. On rare occasions, the beating is made public, but attendance is always voluntary. . . You have a right to think your punishment cruel and unwarranted."

"No," said Kelantan strongly. He managed to smile and grimace at the same time. "As much as it hurt, and still hurts, I accept the penalty."

Shafan's retort was almost savagely intense: "Then why for Chaos do you continue to torture yourself?" Kelantan stared at him and said nothing. Shafan went on, his expression and tone very near to anger. "You made a mistake, and you paid for it. So put it aside. No further payment is asked of you: no further suffering, no humility, no shame. Stop giving in to your shame. There's no reason for any of it."

Kelantan looked at him, uncertainly, questioningly, almost yearningly. "But I can't change how I feel," he said plaintively.

"No one's telling you to forget it. You'll remember, the next time you're in a similar situation, and won't make the same mistake. Like teaching an *astaloth* not to chew on your sword-harness--you spank it."

Kelantan smiled at the analogy. "Then no one will think. . . well. . . less of me?"

Shafan almost snorted. "Of course not. Would you think less of your pet *astaloth*?"

Kelantan surrendered to laughter; the analogy had become almost ridiculous. "I suppose you're right. But it is very hard to bear."

"It was your first time," said Shafan, as if that explained everything.

"By Maraku, I certainly don't want to go through that again!"

"No," said Shafan wryly, "certainly not." Once again, he gave Kelantan a brief scrutiny. What he saw pleased him. "You look a lot better," he remarked. "Say, would you like to get some food? I haven't eaten since early this morning."

"I'm sorry," said Kelantan automatically. "I'm not hungry, but I won't hold you back."

"My courteous friend, do you want me to stay? Would you rather not be alone?"

"Since you're being so direct, Shafan--no, I don't want to be alone." Kelantan grinned ruefully. "I'd rather burden you with my thoughts."

"No burden." Shafan made a move as if to rise. "What do you say to some wine, some bread-and-honey and some dried crystalfruit? I've got a private cache, and I'd be willing to share it, provided you don't tell anyone, of course."

Shafan's 'secret' cache of food was legendary. Kelantan gulped. "You do me too much honor, Shafan. . . thank you very much."

"I'll be right back."

While Shafan was gone, Kelantan leaned back--carefully--and looked fixedly at a wallhanging across from him. It was a pretty piece of work, mythical beasts, a hunt, all done in improbable colors--but he wasn't paying any real attention to it. He was thinking about the revolt on Ursha, and his actions there. He had done some thought-searching, and knew now why he had acted with negligence and poor

judgment.

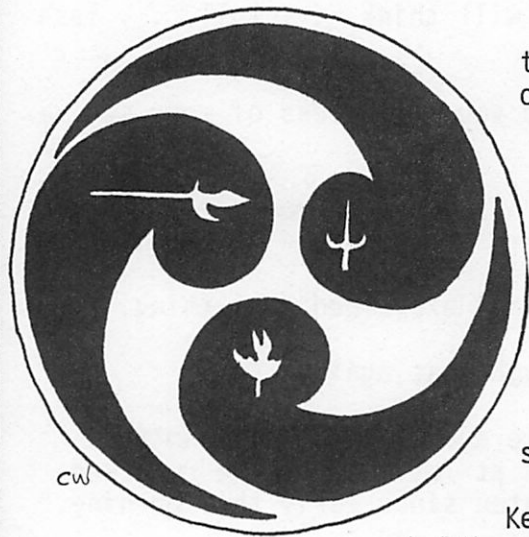
He wondered if he could trust Shafan with his feelings, then decided he probably would. Of the few good things about the *Kalimnos* and its crew, Shafan's friendship was probably the best.

Shafan returned shortly, carrying an unbelievable array of delicacies. Kelantan found his lost appetite and willingly joined Shafan in an utterly enjoyable feast.

After a hasty cleanup, in which nothing was left behind but the crumbs, they settled back again.

"Shafan, did you hear much about the uprising on Ursha, and my part in it?"

Shafan shook his head. "Not in my area. Heard some rumors, of course, but not one of them agreed with any other."



Kelantan smiled briefly. "No one knows anything. By the time it was all over, there were only three witnesses--me, Lieutenant Rastok, and an armsman."

"The Lieutenant was the one who betrayed--ah, I mean told the Commander about your mistake?"

"Yes. I went to the infirmary first, with the wounded. I was going to see the *Kfar* anyway, but. . . well, Rastok got there first."

"Rastok and the Commander have a . . . friendship," commented Shafan, dryly.

Kelantan looked at Shafan questioningly. "You don't much like *Kfar* Rifolorin, do you?"

"I've been under better commanders on better ships," Shafan answered brusquely.

"Then you're used to keeping your feelings to yourself, since making them known wouldn't earn you any friends?"

Shafan inclined his head at Kelantan's insight. "That's very well put, and, is also, regrettably, true."

"Then may I say something to you that you must also keep to yourself?"

Shafan was suddenly alert. He said guardedly, "If you ask it."

"Thank you." Kelantan took a deep breath and summoned forth the memory of the battle on Ursha. "Ursha is an Arkishen planet. None of the two companies under me wanted to go down to Ursha--they complained about the Arkishen, calling them 'stinking, overgrown swampgreen lizards.' So, from the first there was trouble.

"We found kilingau among the Arkishen--by Chaos, I swear it--fighting with them, kilingau and Arkishen working side by side. It was then that we realized that we'd stumbled onto an important center of the revolution." Something in Shafan's face made Kelantan stop. He raised his eyebrows at Shafan, who frowned, but

then indicated Kelantan should go on.

"I won't trouble you with all the details of the skirmish. What matters is the talk I had with one of the rebels, a killing who spoke to me as I was about to kill him." Kelantan's look was distant. From the look on Kelantan's face, half rage and fighting fever, half turmoil, Shafan guessed that Kelantan was back on Ursha, reliving the scene.

"He stopped me by crying out, 'You vulture, I'm for Alkarin! How can you kill me and still be true to honor?'"

"I stared at the rebel. He was crouched, one arm half-upraised to ward off the blow. I was completely taken aback--at the time I didn't know why, but now I realize it was because he mentioned that name, the mysterious name of Alkarin."

Kelantan stopped, finding it hard to go on. His eyes flickered over to Shafan's. He said, with a slight laugh, "Do I shock you?"

"Not at all, my friend. The *Ormen* Alargor calls Alkarin a traitor, a rebel, a blackhearted world-raper, and other names too tedious and obscene to mention. But one thing I say: that Alkarin is a superb fighter and strategist, and that his dreams, while insubstantial, are at least dreams of honor and glory."

It was Kelantan's turn to be surprised. "Shafan, you're not supposed to talk like that. What if--"

"Who's here to listen but you?" interrupted Shafan forcefully. "Do you deny my words? Do you intend to carry them to other ears?"

"No, no," said Kelantan hastily. "I just didn't know your feelings were so strong. I think you're right, though." Kelantan looked down, his expression somewhat grim. Knowing that Shafan was right about Alkarin didn't sit well. New feelings were rising strong inside him, and he didn't know how to cope with them.

"But you were telling me about the rebel killing," Shafan remarked.

"He asked--no, he ordered and exhorted--me to join the revolution. He asked me to stop, and think about what I was doing in service of the *Ormen* Alargor. He said--well, he went on and on, passionately, about honor and independence and strength of will."

Kelantan shrugged. "I know I'm not telling this very well. At the time, it seemed like a timeless conversation; the revolt might as well not have existed. We were alone, separated from the others by wreckage and drifts of dusty smoke. It's hard to remember, now, exactly what he said; then and there his words seemed to fit, all full of righteous wrath and fearlessness."

"Like one of the Wargod Maraku's avenging legion," interjected Shafan.

Kelantan gave him a sidelong glance. "Exactly. He was fierce, he was powerful, and he seemed to blaze with an intensity of love when he spoke of Alkarin."

Kelantan was startled at the sound of his own words; they smacked of heresy. Something of his feelings must have shown in his face, for Shafan was looking at him appraisingly and was smiling widely, as if in secret amusement.

"What are you grinning at?" Kelantan asked indignantly.

"Fate," said Shafan cryptically. "Go on; tell me what happened. Did you kill him?"

"Y-yes. I did. But his words slowed me down, clouded my reason. Instead of leading my patrol, I was away from my position so long as to allow a group of rebels to slip right in and ambush my team."

"It's no wonder the Commander was so upset. She probably thinks you're for Alkarin"--Shafan paused as Kelantan made an exclamation--"and you're probably on her danger list by now."

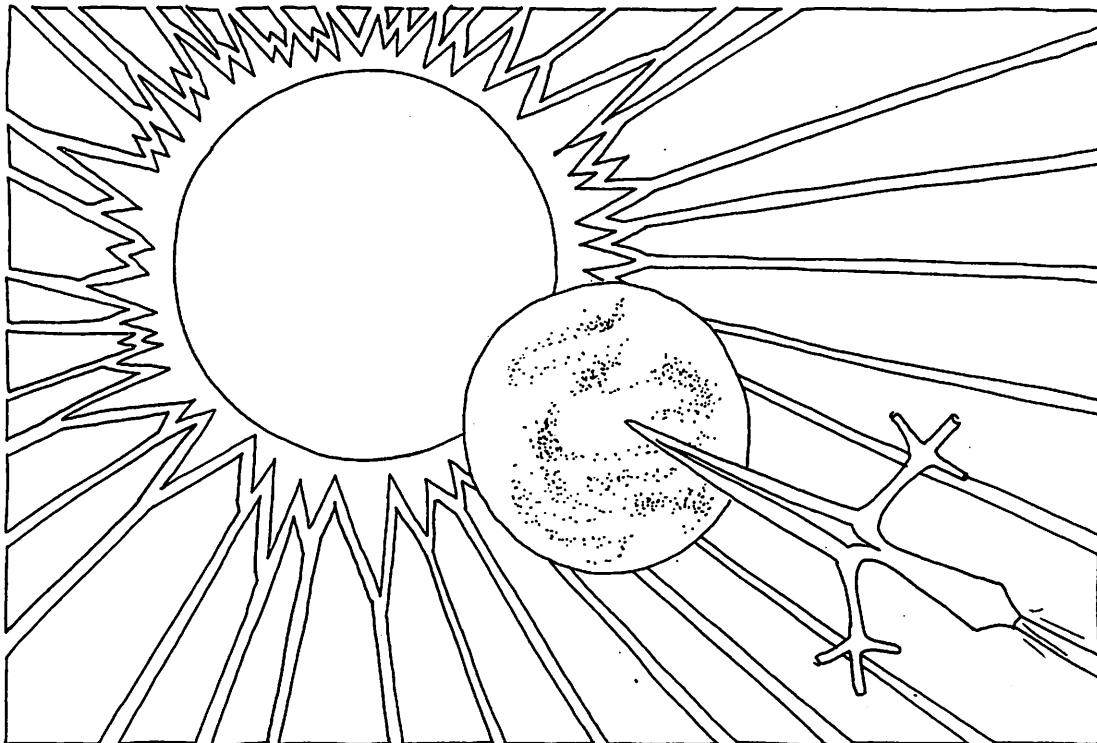
"And what about you?" Kelantan said, almost angrily. "You seem to imply, with every word and look, that you sympathize with the rebel I killed. If your feelings are so strong, Shafan, why aren't you fighting for Alkarin?"

"I am," said Shafan calmly.

Kelantan looked thoroughly startled at that, and frowned at all of its implications. "So, you confess to treason," he said, feigning malevolence. Then he laughed for pure heart's ease and joy. "At last we speak freely and truly. You are a rebel. And I--well, I find that my blood stirs at the mention of Alkarin. What does that make me?"

Shafan leaned forward. He spoke, almost in the tones of one administering an oath. "Would you fight for Alkarin? Would you work with us to destroy Alargor's rule of infamy, and help restore the *Oxmenel* to harmony and honor?"

Kelantan took a deep breath. He felt like a man about to plunge into ice-cold water. He controlled his rising wonder and fear and said, firmly, "Yes, I will."



C. WALSKE

## MARCH TO HONOR

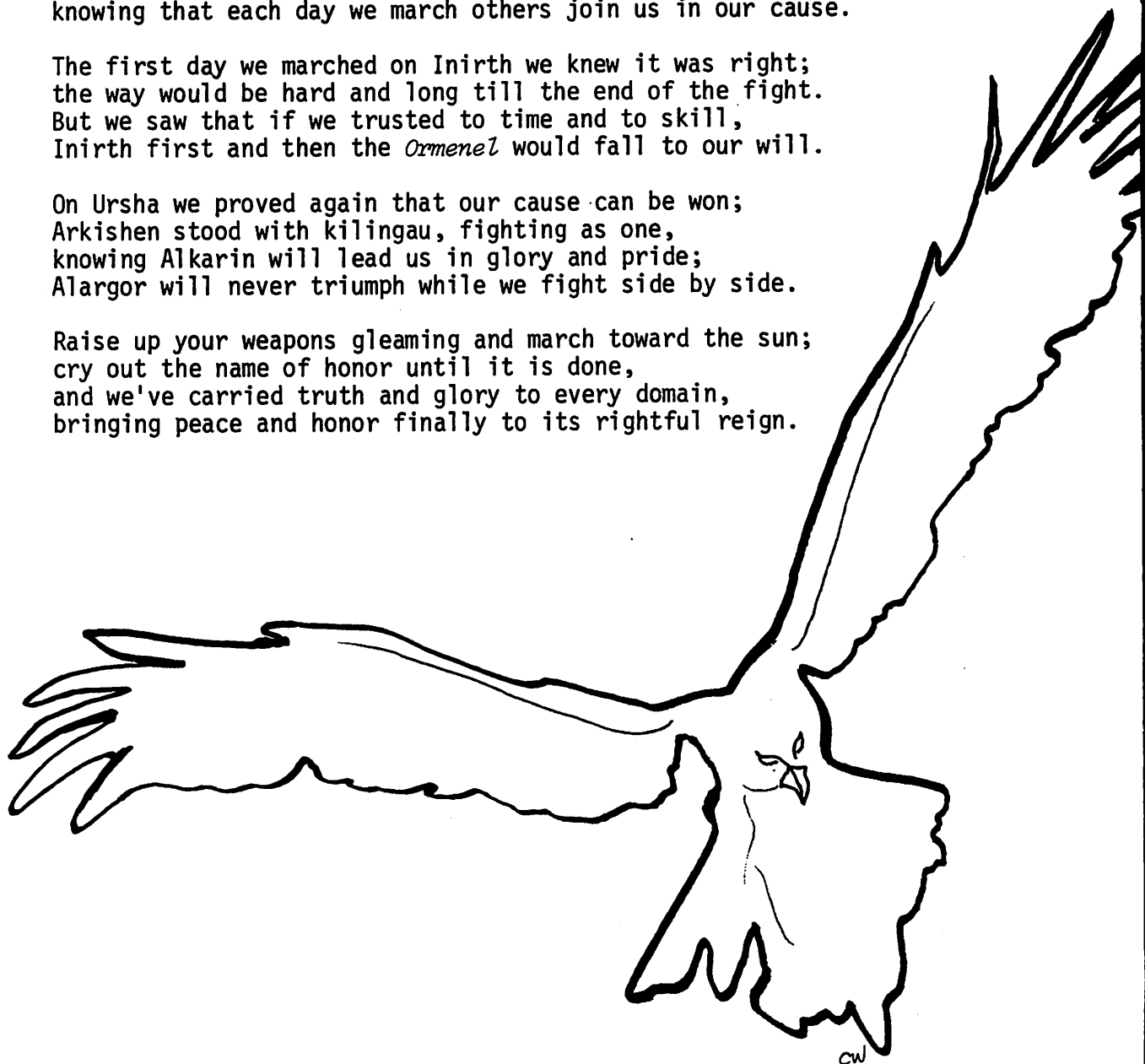
Each day a march to honor and glory begun;  
each day a victory to meet till we have won  
the war Challenging our foes on the land, in the sky;  
never resting, we will fight on for honor till we die.

Swords drawn and banners flying we head for the skies;  
our goal to make the Kilingarlan once more our prize  
and home, fighting for the honor of yesterday's laws,  
knowing that each day we march others join us in our cause.

The first day we marched on Inirth we knew it was right;  
the way would be hard and long till the end of the fight.  
But we saw that if we trusted to time and to skill,  
Inirth first and then the *Ormene* would fall to our will.

On Ursha we proved again that our cause can be won;  
Arkishen stood with kilingau, fighting as one,  
knowing Alkarin will lead us in glory and pride;  
Alargor will never triumph while we fight side by side.

Raise up your weapons gleaming and march toward the sun;  
cry out the name of honor until it is done,  
and we've carried truth and glory to every domain,  
bringing peace and honor finally to its rightful reign.





## GIFT OF FEALTY

At the height of the revolution, when the fires of war flickered and blazed, when fortunes went this way and that, when every battle was both victory and defeat, Warlord Alkarin knew, with a strategist's certainty, that he could not win without help. He sent out a call to all his friends and allies, telling them that they needed to touch minds and hearts, to strengthen their ranks, to bring a new warrior for each one already fighting.

The request was a demanding, nigh impossible one. Though many had joined the ranks of the revolution, Alargor's forces remained unbroken, undaunted, and seemingly numberless.

And Alkarin's call was answered: by armies, by small groups of aliens eager to fight, and by lone kilingau wanting some small part in the deeds of the revolution.

One morning, a young, tall kiling strode into Alkarin's camp. Alkarin was then on Riflond, gathering his forces, waiting a short time before striking again. Alkarin no longer hid; he had Challenged the *Ormen* Alargor openly, inviting him to come meet rebel Alkarin if he dared.

The young kiling was stopped in front of the building that housed Alkarin and select friends and advisors. A guard lowered his sword across the entryway, and looked the stranger over. "Your business here, beardling?"

The young kiling stiffened at the term, but the guard was smiling, and there had been no rudeness in his voice. The young man tried to appear very dignified. "I serve the Lord Harimau of Ikomhai-on-Evveruen. Lord Harimau sends a message for Kor Alkarin."

The guard gave him a sharp, considering look, then nodded. He took a small oval commlink from his belt, and spoke softly into it. He waited for a few moments, then listened as a voice answered him. "You may go in," the guard said to the youngling as he replaced the commlink on his belt. "The Watcher inside the door will show you the way."

Once inside, the young kiling was directed to the two great carven doors that led to where Alkarin held power. His heart beat more strongly; his breath came quickly. He was all at once awed and frightened by the thought of going before Alkarin. So many tales were told about the warlord that no one really knew how he looked or acted, and the young kiling was afraid to know the truth.

He took a deep breath, summoned his pride, and thrust the doors open with his right arm. Perfectly balanced, the doors swung away lightly. The young kiling walked in, half-expecting to see Maraku, the Lord of Light, playing with balls of sunfire.

He was not at all prepared for what he did see: a room holding a great, round

council-table, and beyond that, one man carelessly seated on the ledge of a window, looking out.

As he paced slowly forward, the visitor noticed a litter of maps and papers on the table, and, hanging on the wall, a black and red banner, emblazoned in gold with the figure of a hawk. He was reminded that one of the names given to Alkarin was Alkarin *Taraiiki*, Alkarin the Hunting Hawk.

The man at the window turned his head as the youngling approached. "Come forward," he said gravely, his eyes looking the young killing up and down.

The youngling's breath caught in his throat. Maraku, with all his light and fire, was not to be found here, but power of another kind was. It was embodied in this man, this man in a plain black uniform who sat so nonchalantly on the windowsill. The young killing made a very deep bow, and hoped he would not stammer. "I greet you in honor, Lord Alkarin. I am Kirdan Harimau, eldest son of Arthos Harimau."

Kor Alkarin looked with interest at the son of Lord Harimau, a bold leader who commanded a domain of arrogant warriors. He saw dark Kendari eyes and brows in a burnt-red Agaven face. The youngling's age was difficult to judge, for he stood arrow-straight, his face strong and shaped by a fighter's will. But from the beard just beginning to grow full on Kirdan's chin, Alkarin guessed the youngling to be about twenty.

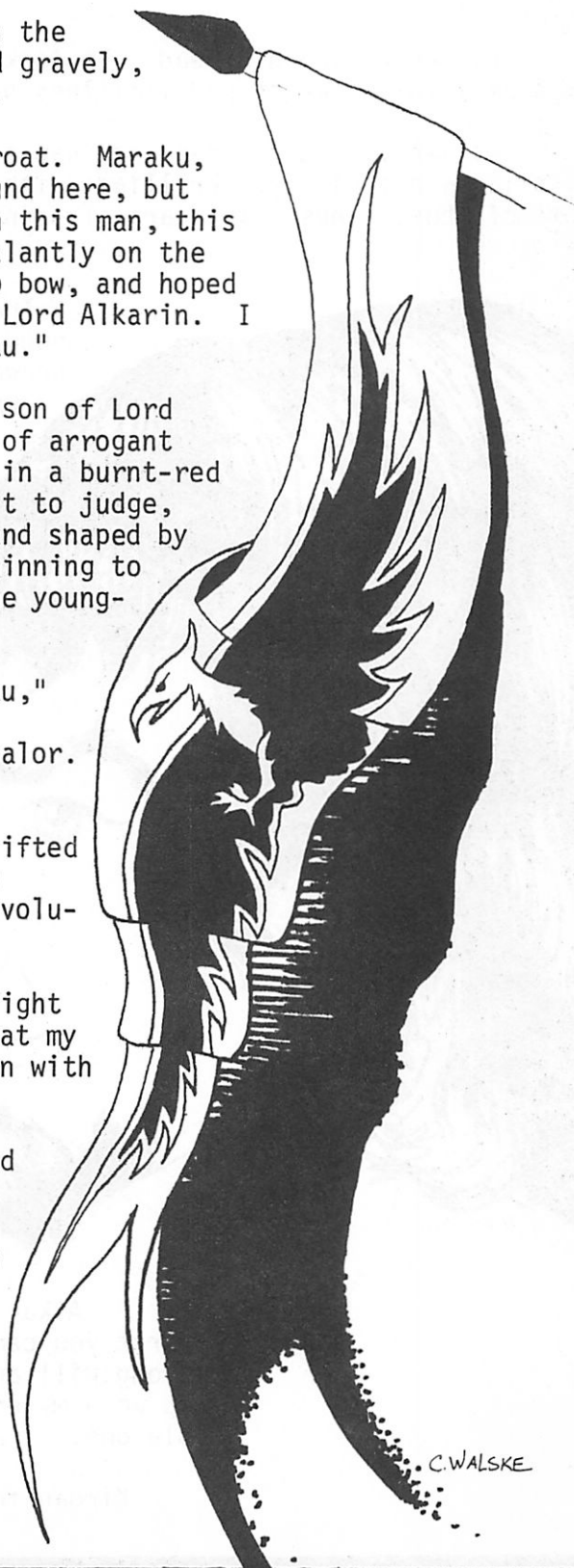
"You are welcome here, *Emistarkan* Harimau," Alkarin said courteously. "Lord Harimau is a strong fighter, well known to any warrior of valor. His son has the look of him."

Kirdan's eyes brightened, and his chin lifted up. "Thank you, sir. My Lord Harimau sends a message to you: he recognizes you, and the revolution's rightful cause."

Alkarin rose from his seat, a flare of light in his eyes. "Now there's a sword and shield at my back! He sides with the revolution rather than with Alargor?"

"Yes, Warlord. In fact, because he would not declare for the *Ormen* Alargor, our domain is now beset by enemies. Lord Harimau could not come himself, because of the fighting, but he said that once he has done with the barbarians, he will bring himself and a whole domain of fighters. . ." Kirdan stopped, and swallowed hard. "For now, he sends me, and hopes that you may have some use for me."

Alkarin brought all his attention to bear on Kirdan. The youngling tried to meet



his gaze, that brilliant focus of will, but it was very hard. He looked away.

"But what use am I to you, *Emistarkan* Harimau?" asked Alkarin.

For a moment Kirdan was hardly sure he'd heard right. "My lord?"

"Do we share a common path, a common purpose? Does your heart follow your father's?"

Kirdan raised his head. He looked at Alkarin, seeing the power in him, the look of awful strength and limitless purpose, the touch of greatness.

Kirdan looked further, and saw a man neither young nor old, his face marked with lines but his eyes brilliant with vitality. Kirdan realized with a shock that some of those lines were scars of pain, and that the eyes were also dark with old pain.

Then the youngling found himself dropping to one knee, feeling a love and joy of fealty he'd never known, not even for his father. Here was a man who carried both glory and pain in his heart, and who was stronger than either one.

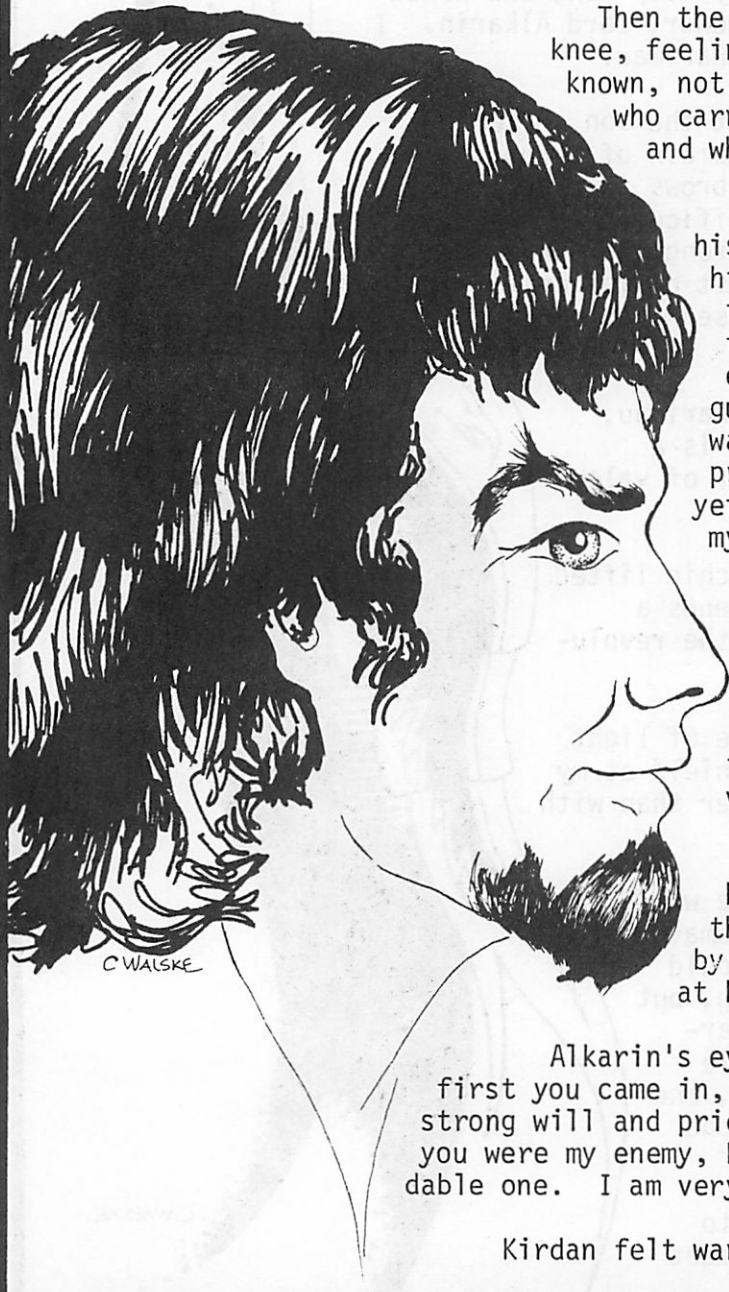
He took his knife from its sheath at his belt and held it out on the palm of his hand. "Take my knife, and the arm that wields it, my lord," he said, his face lifted to gaze at Alkarin, his eyes bright. Kirdan realized with a gulp of astonishment and fear what he was saying, that he was giving up his proud selfhood for this one man. And yet he continued, "I would serve you with my life."

Alkarin's left hand reached forward to clasp Kirdan by the shoulder. With his right hand, he took Kirdan's knife, made a formal gesture of salute with it across his breast, and handed it back. "Well done," he said, his voice low and deep.

Kirdan rose, feeling strengthened by Alkarin's touch, and proud to know that his knife had been accepted and held by the Warlord. He stood silent, looking at his liege lord.

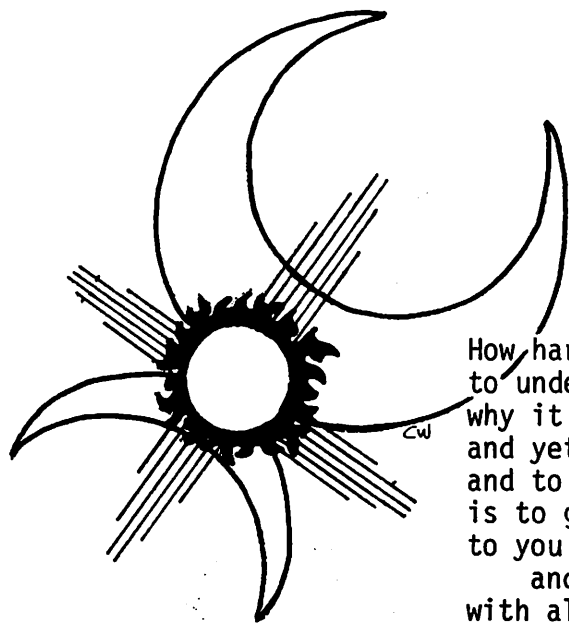
Alkarin's eyes moved over him, measuring. "When first you came in, I saw that you were a young man of strong will and pride," said the strategist directly. "If you were my enemy, Kirdan Harimau, you would be a formidable one. I am very glad to have you at my side."

Kirdan felt warmed, and was moved to return Alkarin's



sword-sharp honesty. "My lord, I never before found anyone I wanted to serve," he said simply.

And so the muster of the revolution grew, as kilingau pledged themselves to the Warlord and his cause. There lay the strength of the rebellion, in the loyalty of warriors choosing freely to stand to battle with the forces of the enemy.



## FEALTY

How hard it is, my lord  
to understand  
why it is you fight so hard;  
and yet to see your favor,  
and to trust in your heart  
is to give myself  
to you

and to your cause  
with all my will and being.

And so, my lord,  
I give to you my hand,  
my sword, my heart--  
to serve you as you would,  
and to guard you from all ill.

Your cause is that of honor,  
and yet what is honor  
if not loyalty and heritage.  
You fight for the right  
of tradition,  
and yet a thousand years of history  
will fall to your success.  
You seek an end to tyranny,  
and yet, you move to war;  
my lord, I hear your words  
and wonder at your direction.

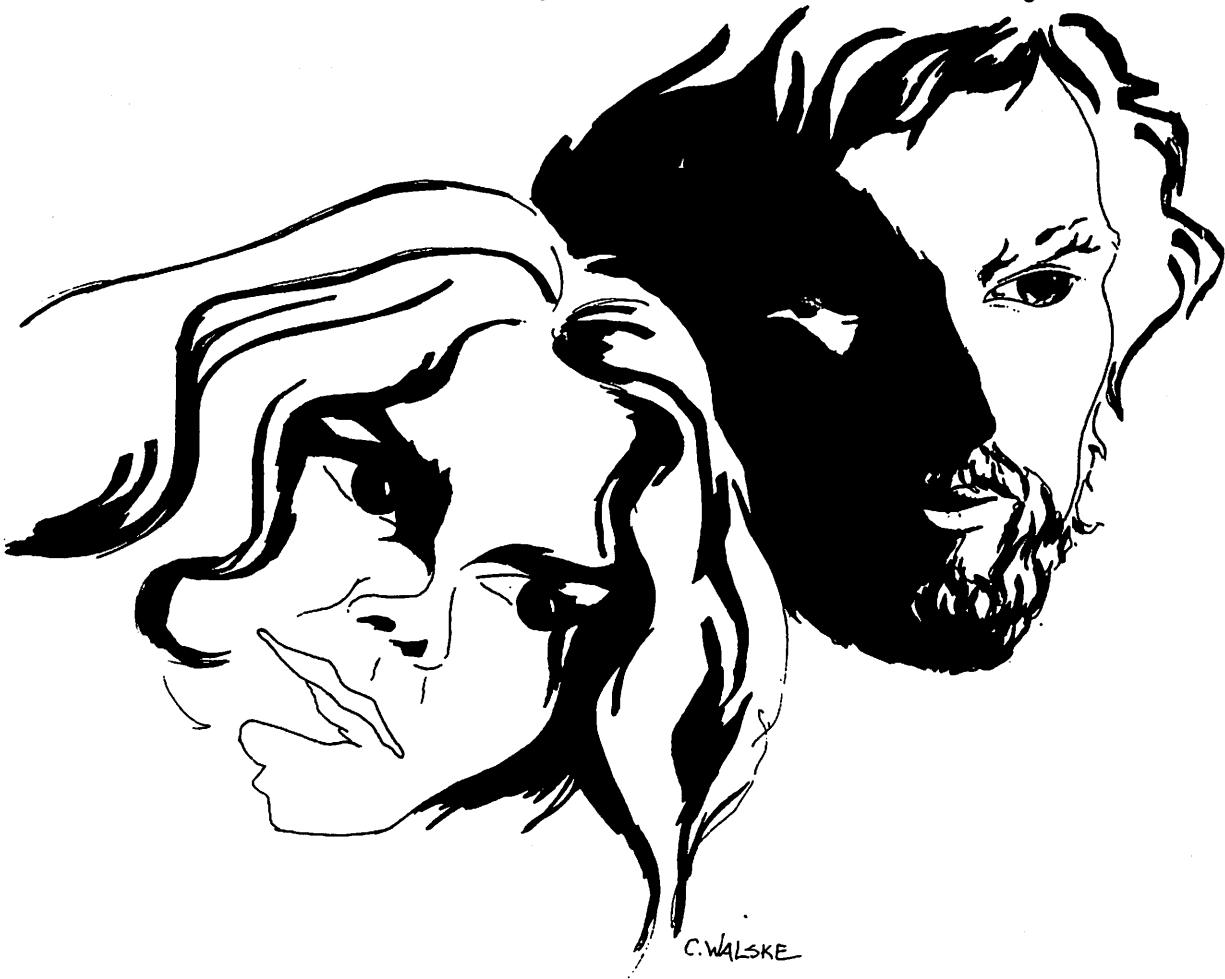
But Maraku burns within you,  
and noble is your heart;  
I see in you a fire  
that can only light our fortune.  
Honor is a tradition  
that brooks no tyrant;  
so long as you serve honor,  
I am yours, my lord.

## WHERE ARE YOU, MY LOVE?

Where are you, my love?  
Why can't I find you?  
Why did I not through this day  
better mind you?  
Where are you, my love?  
How did it happen?  
Why did I not to my side  
ever bind you?

We set out early this bright morning;  
the battle called and we met it with pride.  
Our forces marched to face the attacker;  
it stirred me to watch you fight at my side.

The fury of the encounter grew quickly;  
I moved to stave off an angry foe.  
He fell and then another came toward me;  
my sword hardly knew where the battle would go.



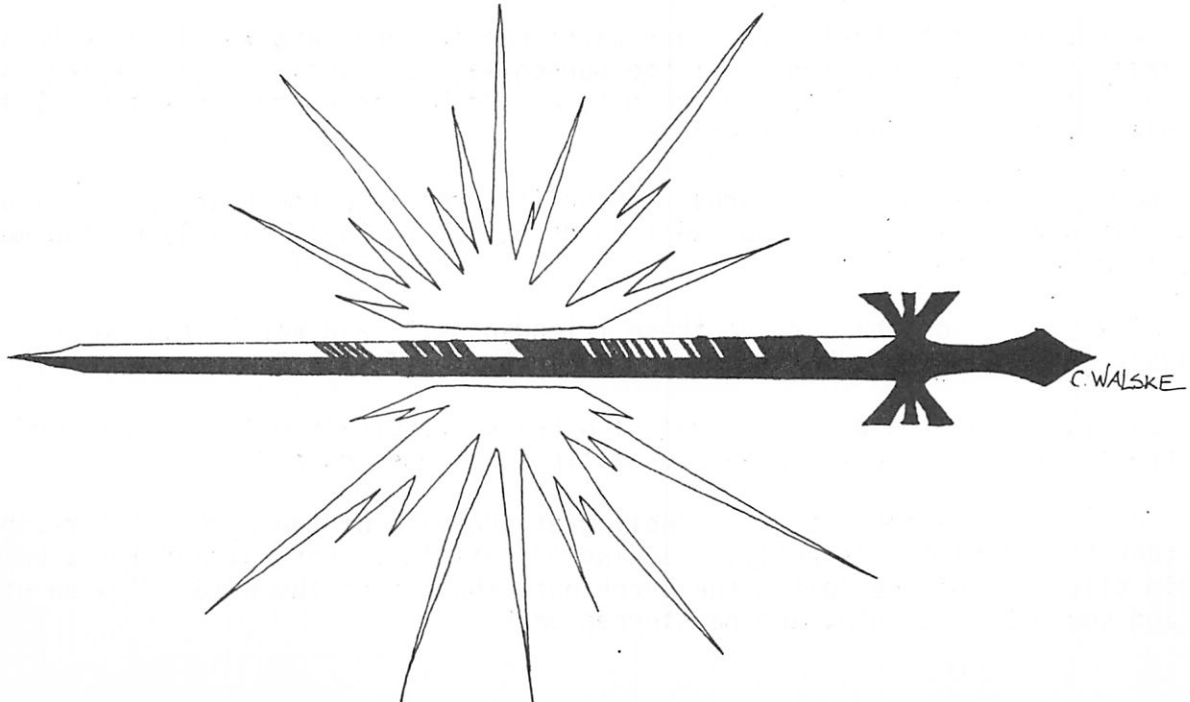
Hundred to hundred, then hundred to fifty;  
we finally saw them fall to our stand.  
In weary joy we saluted our victory;  
I turned and sought your comforting hand.

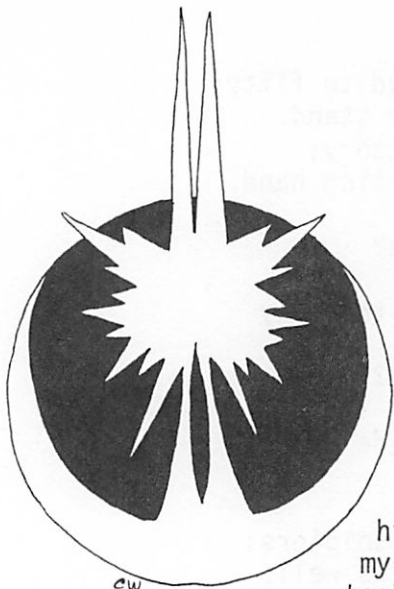
Where are you, my love?  
Why can't I find you?  
Why did I not through this day  
better mind you?  
Where are you, my love?  
How did it happen?  
Why did I not to my side  
ever bind you?

I searched amongst the milling soldiers;  
I searched amongst the wounded as well.  
I learned that none of our troop had been taken,  
and slowly I reasoned what no one would tell.

I found your sword where it had fallen;  
I held it next to my heart for a while.  
I'll sit for your vigil till the fight again calls me;  
I'll remember your strength; I'll remember your smile.

Where are you, my love?  
Why can't I find you?  
Why did I not through this day  
better mind you?  
Where are you, my love?  
How did it happen?  
Why did I not to my side  
ever bind you?





## THE RED GRASS GROWING

Kor removed the insignia of his rank from his tunic, and threw it on the pyre. "I dismiss my status," he said formally, "for my leadership took you to death."

He took the knife from his belt, and broke it under his boot. He picked up the hilt and the snapped-off blade, and added them to the pile. "I cast away my weapon, since it did not serve to bring us victory."

He stared into the unlit pyre, unseeing. "In the far past, a warrior would give his blood, to recognize the sacrifice of his fellows. My blood will not serve you. I cannot think of anything that will serve you, my friends, save a final victory. When our forces triumph, then finally will the debts of your deaths be paid."

Behind Kor, the piping sounds of the *firka* and the poignant sounds of the *okol*-reed merged in a complex, lilting melody for the dead. Kor felt the bitter sting of tears in the corners of his eyes. It would be very easy to surrender to those tears, but he had a task to fulfill.

Behind Kor stood Karth Keorl and Katni Koerin, and Kang Keorl and others who were leaders of the rebellion. But the burden was Kor's, since his strategy and actions on the field had directed the battle. He had accepted the responsibility for this their most grievous defeat.

Kor's hands shook as he thrust the unlit torch into the heart of the flaming brand that Karth held. "I do not want to do this," Kor said bleakly. "Too many of my friends lie here."

"Then do it for the sake of those friendships," said Karth, his voice curiously gentle. "It is both gift and honor to the fallen."

Kor looked at the pyre. It had been heaped carefully with the dry wood of fruittrees. They gave off a sweet, aromatic scent when burned.

He touched the torch to the kindling at the base of the pyre. The resinous wood took to the flame instantly, cracking and hissing. Kor watched for a moment in grim silence, then he tossed the torch onto the top of the pyre. A wave of heat and smoke blew to him, and he stepped back.

One by one, Kor's companions came by him, reaching out to touch his hand, or to bow to him in compassionate respect. Katni Koerin hugged him quickly, then looked down as she walked away.

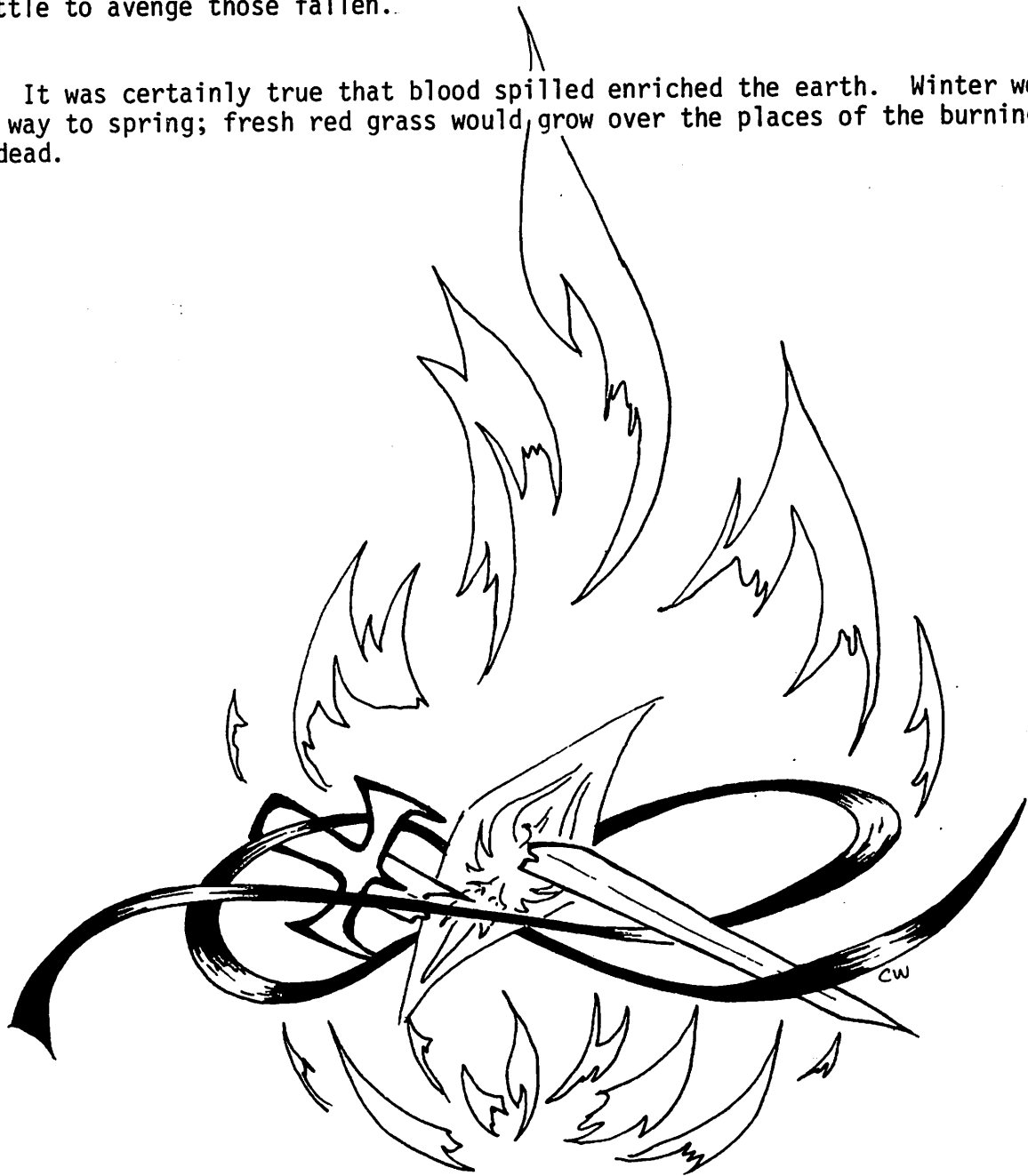
Then Kor was alone, standing vigil for the deaths of his warriors.

"How many more of your followers will die for you, Warlord?" he asked himself bitterly. "Will you take possession of a ruin? Will you become the Lord of Death?"

The prevailing wind was carrying the smoke of the fire away, but tendrils of breeze occasionally brought to Kor the heat and smell of the blaze. He shuddered.

The pain of all those deaths for the revolution's cause would last forever. But only so much time could be given up to grief, before the body and mind rebelled at its own woes. It was only a brief time before Kor again took up weapons to lead a battle to avenge those fallen.

It was certainly true that blood spilled enriched the earth. Winter would give way to spring; fresh red grass would grow over the places of the burning of the dead.







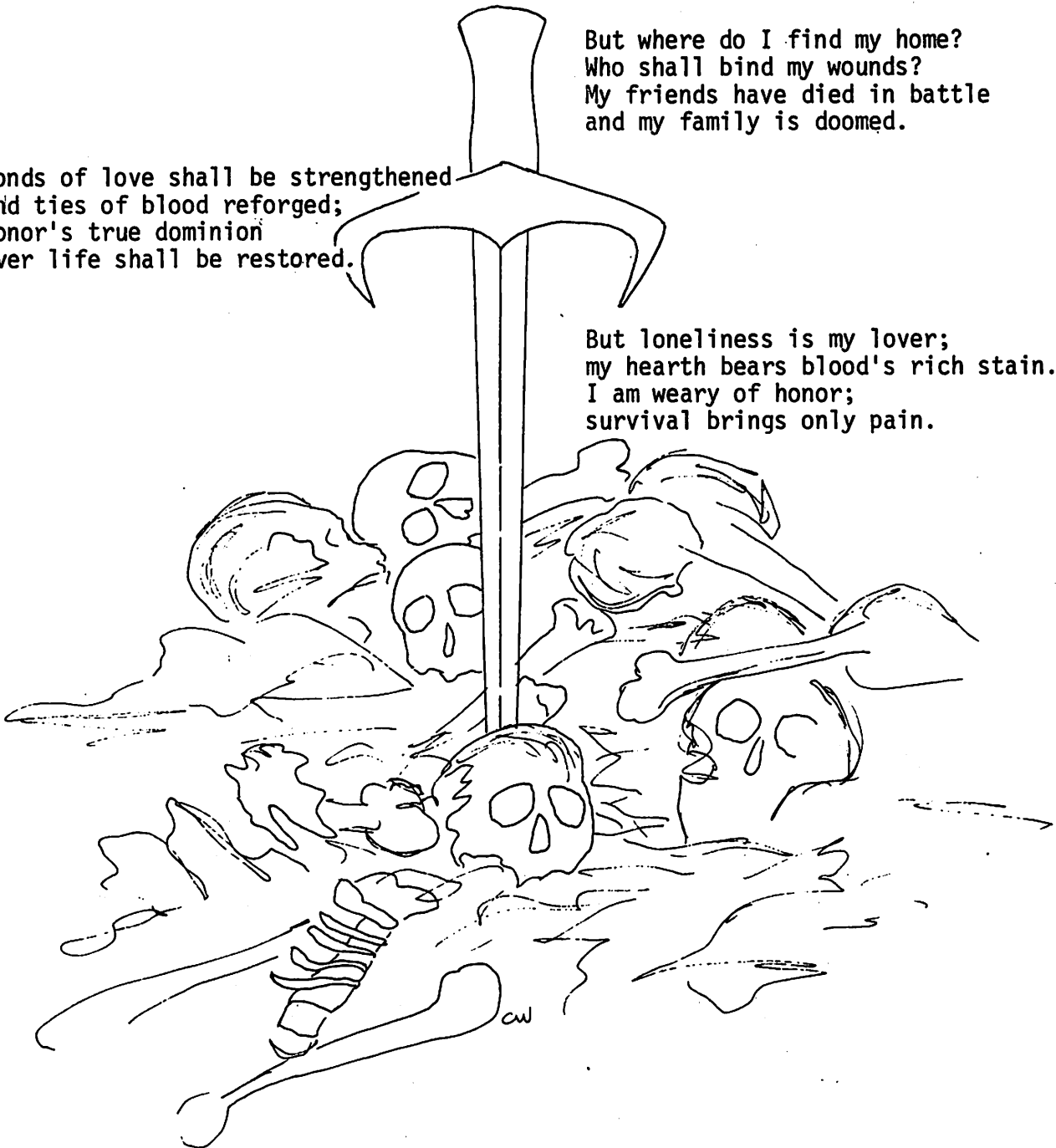
## LAMENT

The homeless shall find shelter;  
the wounded shall grow strong;  
friends shall join together  
and families be reborn.

But where do I find my home?  
Who shall bind my wounds?  
My friends have died in battle  
and my family is doomed.

Bonds of love shall be strengthened  
and ties of blood reforged;  
honor's true dominion  
over life shall be restored.

But loneliness is my lover;  
my hearth bears blood's rich stain.  
I am weary of honor;  
survival brings only pain.



## A DRAGON ON THE WIND

Kor stormed out of his tent to find out what the commotion was. He could hear Theremir Keorl screaming at someone, who was screaming back; the two of them were surrounded by interested onlookers. Kor pushed his way through the crowd and saw that Theremir's foe was. . . Kor didn't quite believe his eyes. The man, a match for Theremir's tall stature, had long, curly, red-blond hair.

Kor spoke quietly, his tone a command. "That's quite enough from both of you."

The stranger spun around to look at Kor--through deep blue eyes. And yet, the fiery color of his skin and the shape of his features made it plain that the man was a killing.

Unlike the others who gaped at the intruder's looks, wondering what he was, Kor was wondering what a Haura wanted here. Kor was perhaps the only one in the entire camp who would know a Haura, from one of the tribes of the deep desert, when he saw one. What in Chaos was a Haura doing way out here on Aristoth?

The Haura sprang at Kor, but was restrained by two of the onlookers. "Keep to yourself," the Haura spat. Then he quieted abruptly, staring at Kor. A look of recognition showed plainly on the Haura's face. He bowed with such elegance and formality that the furious intruder who had stood there a moment ago was suddenly replaced by a proud, courteous warrior.

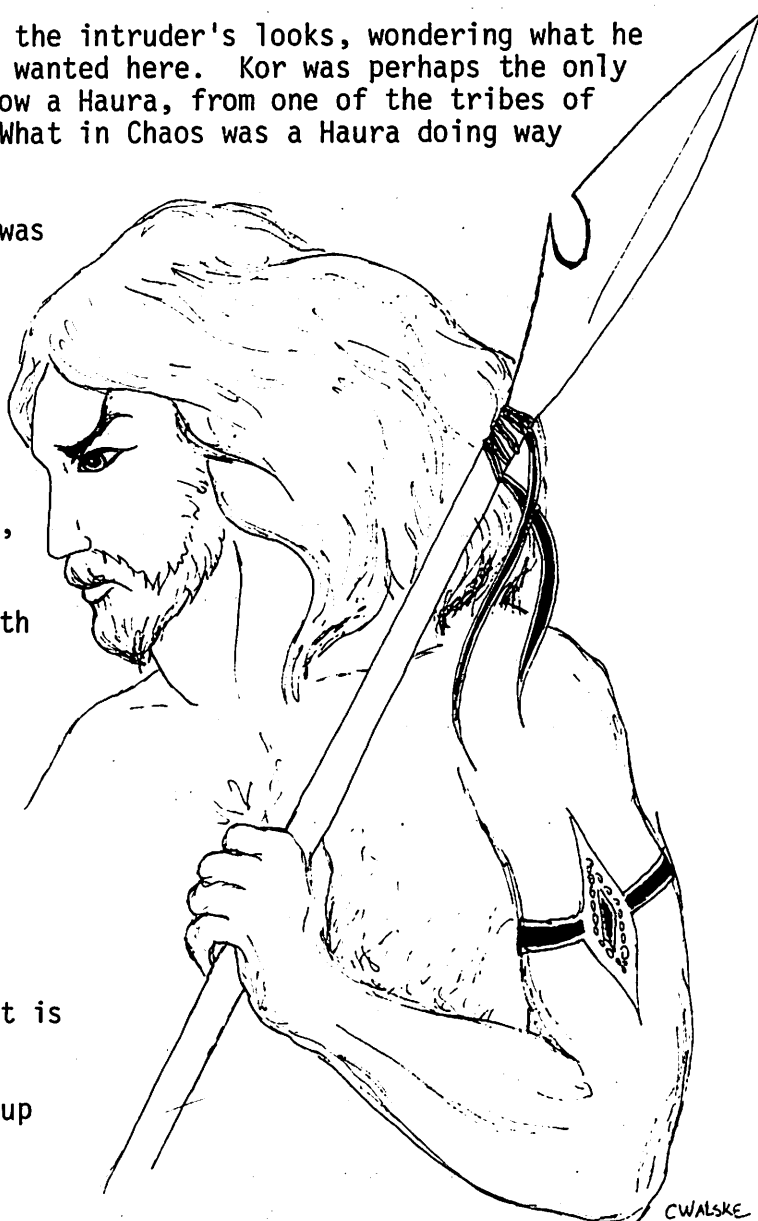
"My lord Alkarin," he said with deference.

A murmur went through the crowd. How could this stranger recognize Kor Alkarin at first glance, when most of the troops who fought for the rebellion didn't even know who Alkarin was?

Kor, choosing to acknowledge the formality, bowed in return. "I greet you, wanderer from afar. What is your errand here?"

The Haura again drew himself up haughtily. "I would speak with the Warlord Alkarin in privacy."

Theremir, always security-conscious, bristled. "No!"



Kor silenced him with a wave of his hand, as the Haura turned in quick anger toward Theremir. Kor commented, "Perhaps if we knew your name, sir, my security leader would be more at ease."

The Haura raised a fine-lined bifurcate eyebrow at Kor, recognizing the Warlord's ploy. "I am Tayarak Makhiri ir-Tayarak ina Elu-Haura."

Remarks of "That's some name," and "But what do you call him?" could be made out from the crowd. Kor smiled to himself, and decided that it was best to enlighten his troops. He said dryly, "I welcome Makhiri, Lord of clan ir-Tayarak of the tribe of the Elu-Haura."

With that, Kor gestured for the Haura to follow him. Over Theremir's protests, Kor and the outsider made their way through the group and into Kor's tent.

Once inside, Makhiri leaned his spear against the foot of the bed, and disarmed himself of his short sword. He kept only his knife. He looked at Alkarin, and Alkarin gave a slight nod of satisfaction.

Kor thought about the Haura, the mysterious people who were kilingau, yet who seemed so alien to the Kilingarlan he knew. He studied the Haura and asked, "How did you know my face?"

His visitor almost smiled, but not quite. "I know not only your face, sir, but also your heart."

Kor was not in the mood for riddles. "Speak plainly."

"I know that you are Kor Kothir. That is why I am here."

At the mention of his birth-name, Kor's hand went to the knife in his belt. "Do you come as friend or as enemy of Kor Kothir?"

"If I came as enemy, you would be dead already," Makhiri said imperiously.

"You will forgive me if I don't choose to believe that."

Makhiri did not respond, enjoying the verbal sparring.

"Why do you think I'm Kor Kothir?" Kor asked cautiously.

"I know it as fact. Seeing you before me only confirms what I knew when I set out from the Kilingarlan." Makhiri enjoyed the feeling of power as he toyed with, and annoyed, Kor.

"You say you are a friend, and yet you are obviously in league with one who has betrayed an oath of silence." Kor very deliberately drew his knife.

This sobered the Haura quickly. The charge was a serious one, compromising his honor. And the last thing he wanted was to face a Challenge with Alkarin. He held his arms away from his body, away from his long knife. "No wrong has been done you, my lord," he said carefully. "I owe you an explanation."

"You do indeed," replied Kor, still holding the knife. He motioned for Makhiri to sit at a small table at one side of the tent. The Haura went to it and sat down. Kor himself remained standing.

"I'm listening," Kor said.

Makhiri began to tell about himself, how, two years before, at eighteen years of age, he had risen to the place of power among the Tayarak clan. Unlike the majority of his people, he had an interest in the lands and peoples beyond the desert in which he lived. "I had two reasons," Makhiri explained. "First, if we are ever to throw off our Agaven oppressors, we must learn how they think, and fight them on terms they can meet." Makhiri's reference to those who had stolen the little fertile land once owned by the Haura tribes--mostly stolen by family friends of the *Ormen*, and mostly Agau--was not lost on Kor. "Second, I have a kinship with the neighboring Kendari peoples."

"Oh?" said Kor with sudden interest. Domain Kothir had welcomed a few such adventurers; Kor's mother was half Haura. His mother had sometimes talked of the desert tribes. The Haura were the 'People of the Wind,' Kor knew.

"My father's mother wandered from our tribe before my father was born. She lived a time among the Kendari; she left children among them when she returned to our clan."

Kor couldn't contain his curiosity. "You traced her to *krasaia* Kothir?"

Makhiri picked up the thought, "And learned that one of her half-Kendari daughters--your mother--had given two sons of the *Emis* of the domain." Makhiri looked up at Kor. "Will you not put away that knife now, my distant cousin?"

Kor had almost forgotten that he was still holding the dagger poised in his hand. He slowly returned it to his belt and, finally, sat down opposite Makhiri at the table. "Go on," he said. 'Makhiri' meant 'dragon'--some people claimed that there were dragons in the deep desert, but Kor had never believed that. Now, as he looked at the intense, fiery Haura across from him, he began to believe in those tales.

"You will forgive me if I speak rather frankly about matters which are personal to you?"

Kor nodded.

"I became interested in stories of the younger son, Kor Kothir. His warrior's prowess was much in keeping with his Haura heritage, and his honor and knowledge of honor was admirable."

Kor lifted an eyebrow and smiled wryly, especially at the thought of his 'Haura heritage.'

"And then, just as suddenly as I had learned of his existence, I learned of the treachery committed against him by the *Ormen*. I learned that he had died for his beliefs. It enraged me that the *Ormen* would so casually destroy one such as Kor Kothir. He had not the right!"

"From whom did you learn all of this?" Kor asked.

"I met one Kithiran Kothir, who claimed to be your cousin."

"He is," Kor replied. "He was one of the first of my domain to join me."

"We talked about the revolution. He said he had come back to the Kiling-arian from the battle to try to persuade others to join Alkarin. I was skeptical about any war for honor led by a phantom Kendari and a number of powerful Agau." Kor winced at the description, but said nothing.

"I told Kithiran that if Kor Kothir were leading the rebellion I would pledge the spears of all my people to him, but as it was, I could not. Kithiran said that, under those circumstances, he believed that you would release him from his promise not to reveal your true name."

Kor nodded slowly. "Kithiran is a wise friend." He looked directly at Makhiri, a half smile on his face. "You promise your support to me, Tayarak?"

"Better than that," answered Makhiri obliquely. "My lord of war, will you accompany me over the long hill to the west of your camp?"

Kor hesitated, wondering about traps. But risks in the name of battle were meant to be taken. . . He studied the Haura, admiring his sun-bright pride and strength. Makhiri was very young to have come to so much power, but he bore and wielded it well.

"I will come with you," said Kor.

The hill rising before them was like a long ocean wave, captured and frozen in space and time, covered with grasses and wildflowers that looked like the flecks of spray on the wave's curl.

They climbed the long hill, keeping a respectful silence. The hill had been there forever, and would be there forevermore, compared to the fleeting lives of the two men who dared to climb over it.

They came at last to the top. The yellow clouds had broken above, and the sun's rays streamed through. The shadows of clouds lay on the land; colors waxed and waned as the clouds broke and gathered.

Kor looked down into the broad valley beyond the hill, and drew in a breath of astonishment. The valley was filled with a myriad of sounds and movements as the host grouped there made their camp.

They were setting up tents, and building corrals for their livestock; others were working on delving a waterwell. The camp was full of color and life.

"My people," said Makhiri, with more than a touch of pride.

Kor turned to face the Haura. His expression struggled between bafflement and incredulity. "All of them yours, Tayarak?"

"My family," answered Makhiri simply. "I have brought them here to serve you, Warlord Alkarin."

"How did you get them here?" Kor exclaimed.

Makhiri tossed his head at the sky. "We stole a warship; it waits in orbit."

"You stole a warship? You got away with the theft of one of Alargor's warships and sneaked aboard several hundred Haura men, women, and children, with

baggage and *siyi*?"

Makhiri's carefully disciplined expression began to crack. Despite himself, his mouth slowly widened and curved into a grin, and his eyes gleamed. "Yes."

Kor stared at the young leader, nonplussed. The idea of sheep aboard a warship overwhelmed him. He erupted into genial laughter. "Welcome to the rebellion, 'cousin'!"

"Come join my tribe for an evening," said Makhiri courteously. "I'd be pleased if you joined us for dinner, Lord Alkarin."

"Thank you."

They sat around a small fire neatly contained in a brazier. Makhiri and several Haura had ceremoniously slaughtered and cooked a *siyi* for Kor, and the remnants of it were all over.

Kor wiped his fingers on the edge of his cloak. "That was superb. You have no idea how long it's been since I had fresh meat. . ."

Makhiri smiled. "Now that we have shared meat, Warlord, we are ready for further talk."

Kor crossed his legs under him and rested his hands on his knees. He noticed that Makhiri's servants had discreetly removed themselves out of earshot. But Kor was aware of the tribe, standing and sitting, their eyes intent on the campfire and their lord's conversation with the Kendari stranger. "I listen, Makhiri," he said.

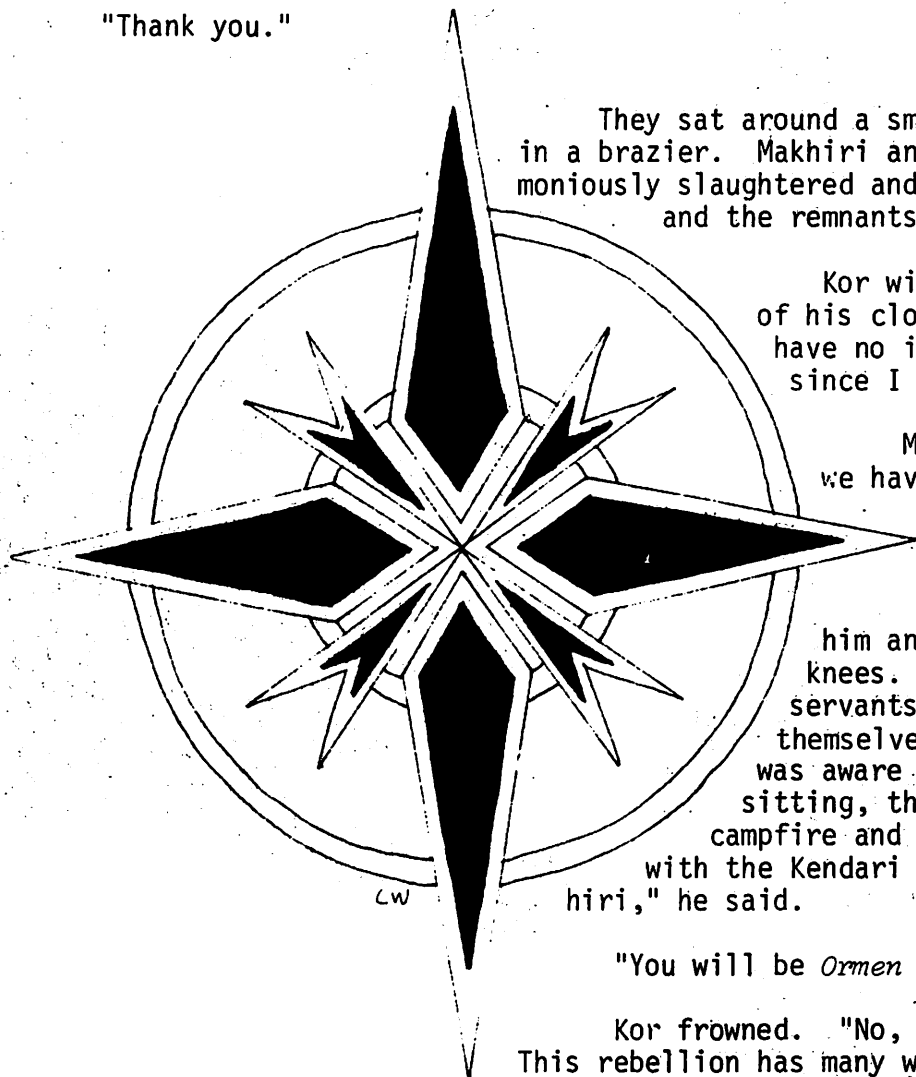
"You will be *Ormen* at the end of this war."

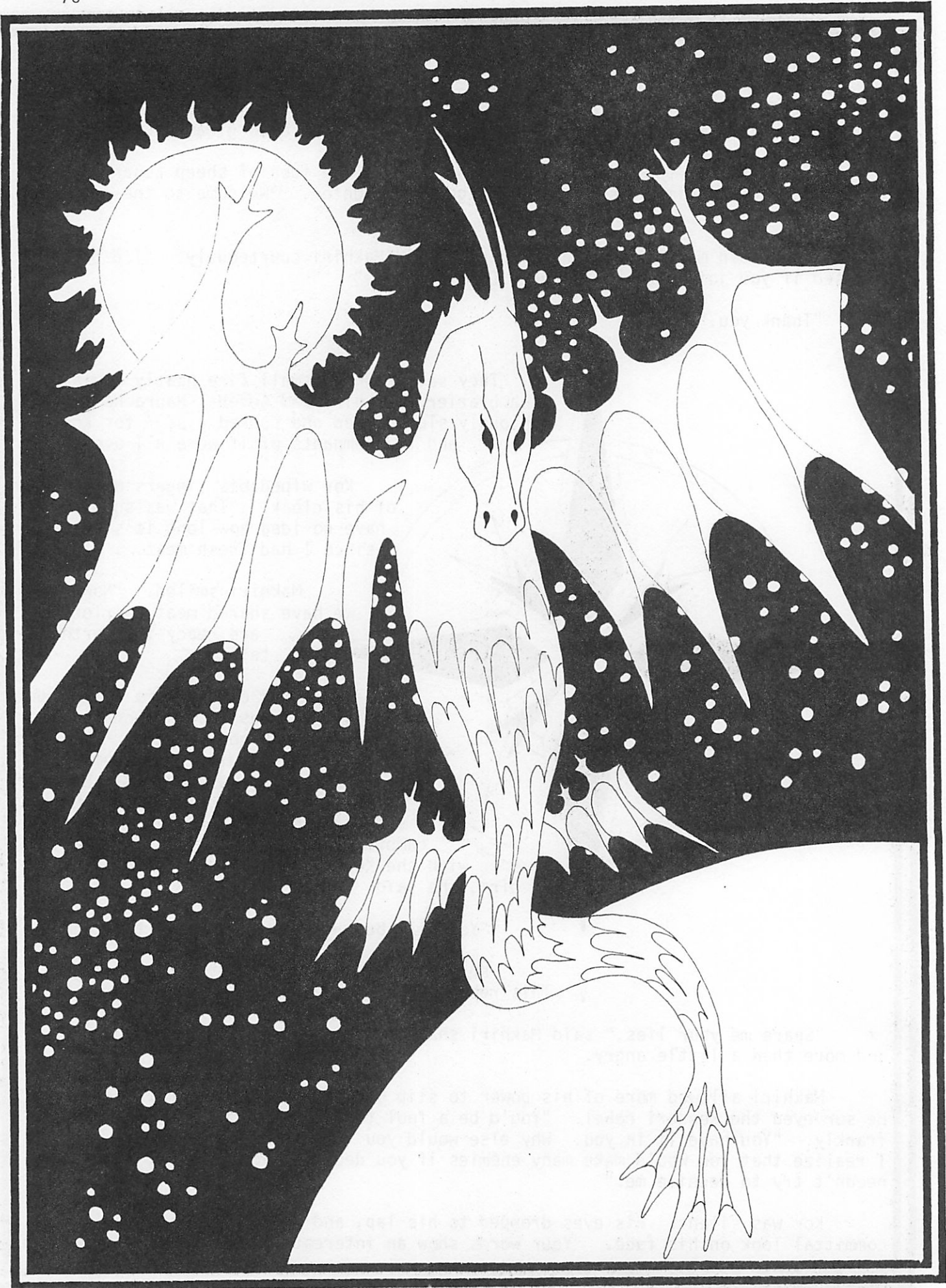
Kor frowned. "No, I do not seek to reign. This rebellion has many worthy Leaders---"

"Spare me your lies," said Makhiri sharply. Kor stared at him, astonished and more than a little angry.

Makhiri allowed more of his power to slip out, and take over this meeting. He surveyed the Kendari rebel. "You'd be a fool to deny the power," he commented frankly. "You have it in you. Why else would you fight for such a mad cause? Oh, I realize that you would make many enemies if you declared your intent, but you needn't try to deceive me."

Kor was silent. His eyes dropped to his lap, and there was a carefully non-committal look on his face. "Your words show an interesting turn of mind," he said





coldly.

"Warlord, we are much alike, and I know what I would want in your place."

Kor raised his head and gave the Haura a long, steady, calm look. "You certainly possess an abundance of arrogance," he observed sardonically.

"I said that we were alike, didn't I?"

"I will not brook insolence," said Kor with sudden harshness.

The Haura leader boldly met Kor's commanding gaze. For several moments they sat locked in a silent battle, the golden Haura and the dark Kendari, young warrior and seasoned warlord; and it was Makhiri who first dropped his stare.

"Put talk of my future aside," said Kor briefly. He thought to turn the conversation to other matters, before Makhiri reacted to his own loss of face. "I have not thanked you properly for your gift of arms, Tayarak. It is quite without precedent for a Haura to fight in a non-Haura battle."

"If you can make allies out of the untameable Arkishen, then you can call anyone to your side," said Makhiri immediately. "Besides, it is a Haura battle."

Something in the way he said that made Kor look at him more closely. "Are you saying that our victory will be a gain for the Haura, or do you mean something else?"

"A reign of honor will certainly help the status of the Haura," said Makhiri with some irony. "But you're right; I do have something else in my thoughts."

"Warlord, in our coming to fight with you, you benefit, and so do we. Skill of arms, new weapons, experience of different strategies. . . and perhaps, when a warrior who has served you well asks you for help, you will treat him favorably."

"You'll forgive me if I say that I was expecting that," remarked Kor. "What favor can I do you, Tayarak?"

"When victory looks sure for the rebels, and I am no longer needed at your side, I would like to return to the Kilingarlan," said Makhiri. He leaned forward, and the firelight made his eyes gleam with liquid fire. "I would like to take with me my clan, and other troops, and weapons. . . Warlord Alkarin, like you, I seek power. . . I seek to become *Valhau*--Windlord of all the Haura tribes."

Kor sat stock-still and didn't bare his shock. "There has not been a *Valhau* of the Haura in seven or eight centuries," he said, his voice carefully neutral. His thoughts were racing ahead with the idea Makhiri had shown him--could the young Haura do it, what were his aims, how would that fit into Alkarin's *Ormenel?*--and he studied Makhiri closely.

"And in that time the Haura have not taken even one step forward," said Makhiri with savage heat. "I want more than the taste of sand and the feel of sun and wind-burn! I want the Haura to move ahead together, into a future when the word Haura will mean something. I want change as badly as you do, Warlord."

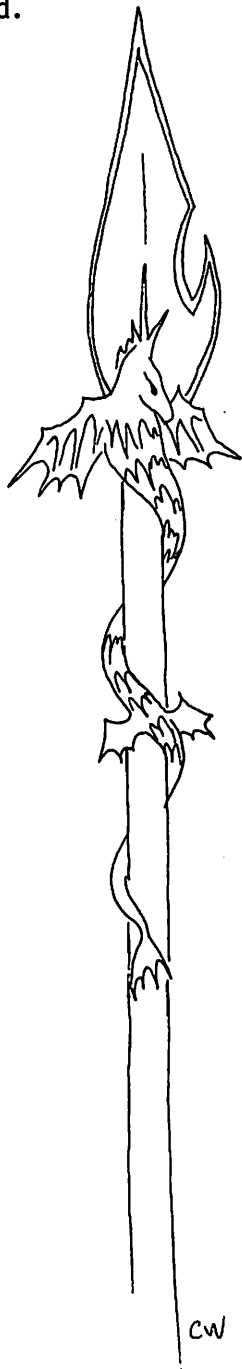
"I will help you get it," replied Kor without hesitation. He looked at the young, dangerous leader who sat across from him. "That makes your obligation to me quite staggering. And I will hold you to it, Tayarak."



Makhiri grinned with the first real pleasure Kor had seen in him. "It is a delight to work with one so worthy of loyalty," the Haura said. "I acknowledge you as my Warlord, for now and when I am *Valhau*, and for all the time of my heirs and yours."

"No one can ask for greater allegiance than that," said Kor. They looked at each other and smiled in mutual respect and pride.

Kor reflected that he now knew what it was like to own a young, wild dragon for a pet. The only trouble was, such a pet was dangerous, and was liable to prove stronger than its master. But, for now, Kor needed all the dragons he could command.



CW

### MAKHIRI

Makhiri who is gentle,  
a winged dragon  
made tame by his noble spirit;  
killing and yet somehow not,  
he is lord of his people  
and my heart.

Makhiri who is troubled,  
torn by what is  
and what he would have be;  
free and yet not free,  
destiny holds the key  
to his bonds.

Makhiri who is Tayarak,  
he must follow  
what heritage and status decree.  
Makhiri, Makhiri,  
will the winds ever blow you  
to my side.

## ON THE BATTLEFIELD OF DREAMS

The battlefield was dark and shadowy. Light from a yellow moon gave a whisper of substance to the scene.

The fight had brought devastation to both sides. No victory here. The ground cried out under the burden of weight. Countless warriors, weapons, and the trappings of war were scattered carelessly over the terrain.

Some mighty giant might have done this, playing with soldiers in a mock battle, setting them against each other, mixing up the pieces, then sending them all helter-skelter with a blow of his hand.

Nothing stirred. The wind, cold and insidious, touched not a limp banner nor curl of a uniform. The warriors' eyes were all open. Cold, staring, lifeless---puppets' eyes.

Over the field strode a figure. He didn't bother to pick his way through the destruction; he walked over the bodies and broken weapons and all the wreck and ravages of the battle. His strides were long and sure; his head was held high.

In the middle of the waste he stopped and picked up a banner. It unfurled gracelessly. It was blood-red and unmarked by any design.

The death-strider raised it high as if in salute. The hood of his cape fell back, but no face could be seen; no eyes glinted out of the deep shadow. He thrust the shaft of the banner into the ground effortlessly. "I am Alkarin," he declared defiantly.

\* \* \*

Kor awoke, straining for deep breaths of air. His eyes were open, but he couldn't see, and for a paralyzed moment he thought that he was still on the field of death. But vision slowly returned, and with it his calm.

He sat up on the edge of the bed. "Don't visualize such dreams, Kor," he told himself in a hoarse voice. "You do quite well enough in real life." He shuddered as a breeze chilled the sweat on his back.

It was dark in his room, a moonless dark on a cloudy night, but somehow this dark seemed comforting. There was warmth, and life to it.

He looked down at himself for reassurance. The dream had been so real, and the shadowy figure so menacingly unreal. . .

"All this time, and I haven't even recovered from Salao," he murmured, looking at his still-angry scars, and the bones jutting under his skin.

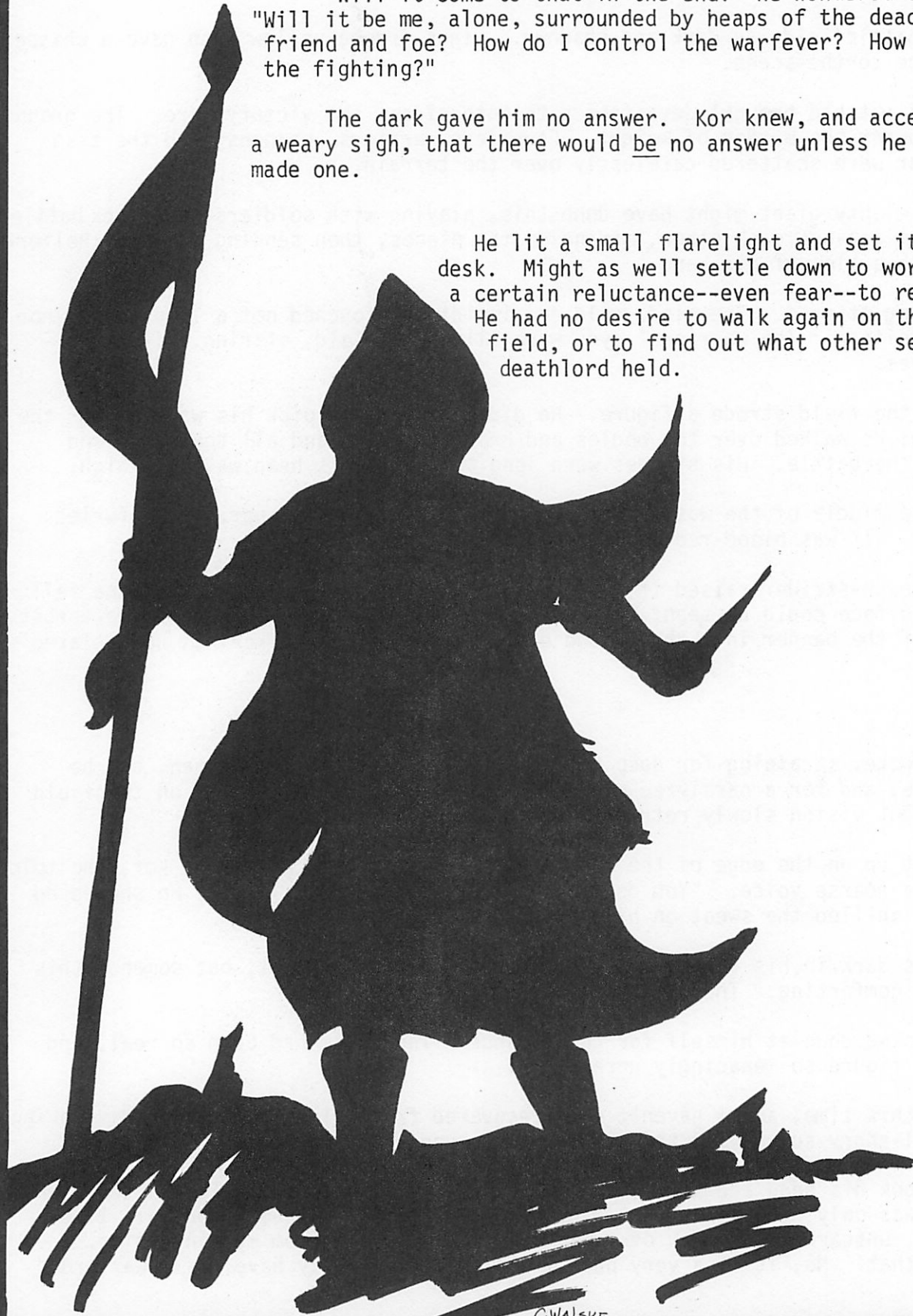
He shook his head and smiled wryly. It was good to hear a voice in the dark, even if it was only his own. "What kind of warlord am I? I should be tall like Karth Keorl, unscarred, perfect of form, able to hurl fire from my fingertips. . . I'm hardly that. No, it is a very poor mixture of a man they have for a warlord."

He stood up and paced. The image of the deathlord standing amid the bodies, his standard in hand, was too powerful for Kor to dispel.

"Will it come to that in the end?" he wondered out loud. "Will it be me, alone, surrounded by heaps of the dead, both friend and foe? How do I control the warfever? How will I stop the fighting?"

The dark gave him no answer. Kor knew, and accepted with a weary sigh, that there would be no answer unless he himself made one.

He lit a small flarelight and set it on his desk. Might as well settle down to work. He felt a certain reluctance--even fear--to return to bed. He had no desire to walk again on that battlefield, or to find out what other secrets the deathlord held.





## FIRESIDE SONG

As usual, Kor Alkarin and his four closest friends were seated around a small woodfire, drinking, gourmandizing, and telling various improbable stories. Theremir Keorl had just finished telling a crude joke about 'the virgin and the Arkishen,' and, quite overcome by his own jest, was rolling in his own laughter. Kor handed him a full tankard of *akai*, which Theremir gulped as if the fiery liquor were water.

"I have a suggestion," said Kor firmly. The others looked at him attentively. "The next one who tells such a bad joke gets thrown out of this circle!"

"*Sa shai!*" agreed Kelantan Tarolorin fervently. Seated next to Theremir, Kelantan had received Theremir's elbow in his ribs at the joke's punchline. "Now I know a much better one about an Arkishen---" He stopped, as a figure moved in the flickering shadows beyond the cheerful blaze of the fire.

"Yes?" prompted someone.

"Is that you, Dovi?" said Kelantan uncertainly. "Come forward into the light. No worry; we're harmless."

The visitor came forward out of the shadows. It was a woman, about Kelantan's age and looking very much like him, with hair dark as ebon-wood and skin that glowed copper in the firelight. She carried a much-worn and obviously well-loved *akiol*, a five-stringed instrument with a very sweet, resonant tone. She smiled charmingly, a little shyly, at the company, and bowed to Kor Alkarin. She said, "I have no wish to intrude on your party, my lord---"

"Dovi's my sister," interrupted Kelantan eagerly. "Sit down, Dovi, and have some wine."

Alkarin chuckled at Dovi Tarolorin's expression of dismay at her brother's lack of manners. "Please be welcome to our fire," Kor said amicably. "Ours is a very informal gathering."

Kelantan moved over to make a space for his sister. Dovi smiled, and sat down neatly, tucking her legs under her. Her golden-wood instrument rested in her lap. Kelantan quickly made introductions all around and then went on to tell his story. It was rather long, but worth a roar of laughter and approval at its end.

Kelantan, obviously pleased with his coup, looked reprovingly at his sister, who had sat rather quietly through it all. "What's the matter, Dovi? Don't you like my joke?"

Dovi started, as though jarred from a dream. "Kel'tan?" she said.

Throughout the story, Dovi had found it hard to keep from staring at Alkarin. Kor, in turn, found his own gaze drawn to the young woman about whom he had heard

a great deal. Their eyes met any number of times, only to cause one or the other to look away quickly.

Kor spoke up now. "I think your sister has other things on her mind besides your humor."

Dovi shifted a bit nervously, but was glad for the chance to finally release her thoughts. "It's an honor to meet you at last, Warlord Alkarin," she said softly. "Your deeds are the fire and power of my songs."

Kor lifted his eyebrows, impressed by her words. "I've heard some of those songs. In a thousand years, I doubt if I will be even a memory. But your songs will live on forever, *Evronnir* Tarolorin."

The title 'Song-Master' brought a smile to Dovi's lips. "I thank you for the compliment, my lord. I would not be an artist if I didn't ask: which song of mine do you remember best?"

It was Kor's turn to be embarrassed. "You'll forgive me if I can't think of the title."

There was a murmur of laughter from the others, who expected Kor to leave it at that. To their surprise, he looked down, and then into the fire, and softly, hesitantly, began to sing. His voice was very rich and deep, and gave a subtle range of mood and tone to the lines of the verse:

"Each day a march to honor and glory begun;  
each day a victory to meet till we have won the war  
Challenging our foes on the land, in the sky;  
never resting, we will fight on for honor till we die."

There was complete and respectful silence as he finished the verse. His friends had never heard him sing before, and they were moved by the power of his voice.

Dovi was gazing at Alkarin with wonder and joyous awe in her eyes. "My lord, had I known that you could sing so well, I wouldn't have dared come near this fire!"

Kor shook his lowered head. He seemed to be staring into his tankard of wine. "No. I am no singer," he murmured. His voice was very distant and filled with a strange note--almost a note of pain.

But his expression was cheerful, his eyes bright, as he raised his head to look at Dovi again. "I don't remember the other verses of the song. Would you do us the privilege, *Evronnir*?"

Dovi ducked her head in shyness. "My normal stage is the center of a tavern or the middle of a town street," she said ruefully.

"Is there some difference between us and the residents of a tavern?" Kelantan wanted to know.

She regarded him thoughtfully. "Well. . . yes. The people in the bar are usually more sober."

There was laughter from everyone, and even some applause--from Alkarin. Completely at ease now, Dovi hesitated no longer. "The song, Lord Alkarin, is

called 'March to Honor,' and I wrote it thinking of you." Kor had the grace to look sheepish as everyone stared meaningfully at him.

Then Dovi began her song, and all attention focused on her, the brilliant play of her instrument, and the mellifluous sound of her voice. She captured their minds and hearts, and played on their emotions as deftly as her fingers picked and strummed the *akiol*'s strings.

When she finished the song, she did not stop; instead she carried the ending notes into another song, and then another and another. Her words were painful and troubling, joyous and inspiring, compelling and alluring. She moved her listeners first one way and then another, and they came to feel as if they were like the weightless, formless notes, soaring on a fresh wind.



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Dovi the Song-Master stopped at last, laughing for joy, reveling in the emotions of her audience. She gratefully accepted the cup of wine that Alkarin handed to her, and took a long swallow to relieve her throat.

"In the manner of Kendari kings of old," said Kor Alkarin, "I would ask you to name your desire, and I will grant it if I can."

Dovi shook her head. "You have already fulfilled my desire," she said. "Seeing all of you, and sharing in what you felt. You have no idea--I am drunk with joy."

"All right," said Alkarin, laughing.

"One more," said Kelantan. Dovi hesitated. Her brother smiled his most winning smile. "Please?"

Dovi, who'd never been able to refuse her little brother, gave in. "I do have a song that I've just started work on," she said slowly. "Normally I would leave it unsung until finished--but I think this company will appreciate the song better than most."

She took another sip of wine and put the cup down carefully. She arranged her *akiol* again, letting her fingers play very lightly over the strings. "You see, I write my songs in response to a person"--she bowed her head to Alkarin--"or to a deed or a feeling. This song is for Kor Kothir, for whom I fight in this revolution."



Kor Alkarin's look was very intent. Kelantan and Theremir were also suddenly alert. "You fight for Kor Kothir?" asked Alkarin.

Dovi matched his serious tone. "Yes, sir. His death gave reason for many to join the fight.

"I thought of what it must have been like for him--the loneliness of strength and brilliance, his unswerving passion for honesty and valor and honor. And so I have started a song for him, a sort of elegy."

"I should like very much to hear your song," said Alkarin gravely.

Dovi took one more sip of wine, and then began.

"All my thoughts are lined with shadows;  
all my dreams are dark with pain,  
as I stare into the fire  
wondering what I have to gain.  
And yet I must keep on striving  
for all my heart holds right;  
though the Challenge last forever,  
I cannot renounce my fight.

Will the day ever come for me to know  
time to rest and to watch my children grow?  
Will the dawn ever bring a day for me  
to know honor and peace and to be free?

When she came to the end, she whispered, "I only wish he had lived to finish his fight." Then she laid her head down on her *akiol*, drained, exhausted beyond words.

Kor moved first to help her. He made sure the *akiol* was tucked securely in her arms, and then helped to lift her to her feet. Dovi swayed uncertainly, and then leaned on his strength. Kelantan looked at her, anxious, but saw that Kor had her well in hand.

"Let me take you to quarters," said Kor gently. "I think you've more than earned a night's rest."

She murmured her thanks. Alkarin's company rose as one, thanking and honoring Dovi for her songs.

Kor and Dovi walked off together, into the moonless dark, feeling a strange bond of shared sorrow. Dovi did not know why the Warlord's heart was so much in accord with her own, but she accepted it, taking comfort from that sudden, bitter-sweet sharing.

As for the Warlord himself, his mind and heart were very full. Her words had touched him deeply--into that part of himself which he kept locked and guarded. He did not know how to respond, and knew even less what to say to her. But he knew that, since she had reached so far inside him, she deserved to see more of his heart and to share in the secret that it held.

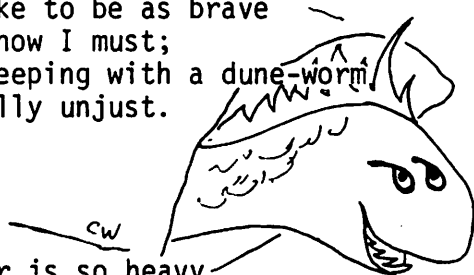


## PIECE OF MIND

I've got eeps in my boots  
and sand in my hair;  
I'd like to eat my dinner  
but I really don't dare.  
If only the rain would stop  
I wouldn't care  
about the tree-crawlers living  
in my underwear.



My sword's getting dull  
and it's starting to rust;  
the wind has covered  
my uniform with dust.  
I'd like to be as brave  
as I know I must;  
but sleeping with a dune-worm  
is really unjust.



My gear is so heavy  
I could leave it behind;  
so what if my nerve gun's  
dead I don't mind.  
Alargor's forces can  
have what they find:  
an empty canteen and  
a piece of my mind.

Our noble leader  
was born to command;  
he rules his troops  
with an iron hand.  
But sometimes things  
don't go as planned;  
he just fell into  
a mess of quicksand.



Karth Keorl  
is as big as a bear;  
it's hard for him to find  
clothes big enough to wear.  
His tunic only goes  
down to. . . there;  
match him in a knife-fight  
if only you dare.

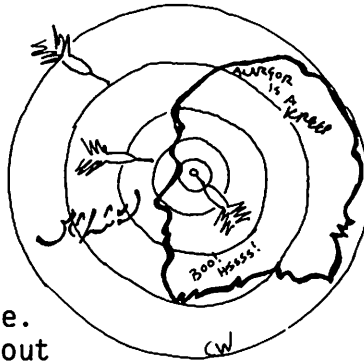
Kang has a mouth  
as big as a cave;  
he certainly is  
a wily knave.  
He may be strong  
and he may be brave;  
but if he doesn't shut up  
he'll dig his own grave.

Theremir's sneaking;  
he's looking around  
trying to find the softest  
spot on the ground.  
When he finds it,  
you'll know by the sound  
of him and his wench  
both thrashing around.



Makhiri the Haura  
has pretty blue eyes;  
what a lovely asset  
for *Federen* and spies.  
But if you look close  
you'll get a surprise;  
he's really Alargor  
in disguise.

Katni looks like  
Kerrekurasarm;  
you know she'll keep  
her troops from harm.  
If need be she'll lead  
them by the arm  
through the enemy camps  
bewitched by her charm.

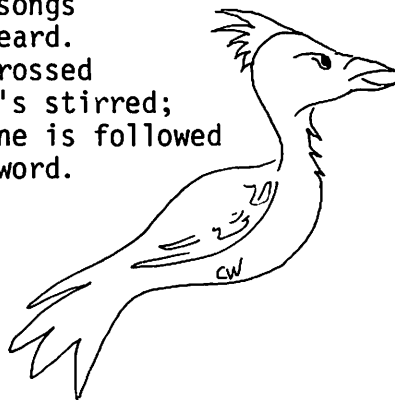


Alargor is a  
bastard at heart;  
they couldn't have picked  
a better man for the part.  
His temper's the only thing  
blacker than his heart;  
if I ever get close enough  
I'll tear him apart.

Kelantan Tarolorin  
thinks he's great;  
he likes fine wine  
and he sets a fine plate.  
But if he doesn't look out  
he'll seal his fate:  
they'll send him an Arkishen  
for a bedmate.

There's lumps in my soup;  
there's lumps in my bed;  
there's lumps on my *ufkil*  
and lumps on my head.  
But I've got to remember  
what the commander said:  
if I keep on bitchin'  
I'm gonna be dead.

Dovi sings  
like a little bird;  
the sweetest songs  
you've ever heard.  
Until she's crossed  
and her anger's stirred;  
then every line is followed  
with a dirty word.



!##\$!&

\*!@!#?#\*\*!

So hear me, my friends  
and mark what I say;  
you'll never get rich  
on a dissident's pay.  
But if you keep your head down  
and don't waste away,  
you may even live  
to see home some day.

## TIDE OF THUNDER

Kor Alkarin had never felt so powerful; his sense of presence had never been more vivid. The fire that had carried him all the way through the revolution was blazing now, through every nerve and sinew of him.

"It's finally come," he said, with almost savage delight. "By Maraku and Kisu, we're going to win!" He threw back his head and laughed for pure proud joy.

His exultation was too great to be contained. He strode out of the war-room, passing swiftly through the stronghold, and came at last to the gates. A gate-watcher stood there, holding a long hunter's bow; a quiver of arrows was slung at his back, and a hunter's horn hung at his belt. Kor seized the horn from the startled killing and ran up the stairs to the parapet above the gates.

He filled his lungs, raised the horn to his lips, and blew. After a moment, the ancient call came easily, and the notes of triumph and wild joy came tumbling out of his hunter's horn.

Warriors, some throwing on shirts or grasping naked weapons, came running forth. In moments, the summons had been answered, and a swarm of kilingau, Arkishen, Dursahnit, Kederkin and other alien rebels filled the courtyard before the gates of Alkarin's stronghold.

Kor spread his arms wide and gave a mighty shout:

*"Harak harai!  
A hai rak harai;  
hamarai arkannai;  
nu kirsai santarashai!"*

It was an old Kendari war-cry, and even those who didn't understand the words were stirred by the power of Kor's call.

Kor, aware of his supremacy as never before, looked down on his band of friends and followers and laughed. "The last barrier is gone," he cried, knowing that the crowd was spellbound to his will. "Alargor's ships are now ours. Alargor's armies have swelled our ranks. We hold all the planets of the Central Suns"--he paused for greatest effect--"save one." The rebels stirred expectantly.

"My friends, will you march with me? The Kilingarlan is ours for the taking!"

Uproar. Those holding weapons raised them high; those without reached for one another, clapping hands on backs and grasping arms. Kor watched, delighted, from his vantage-point.

Then, as the initial shock died down, a single voice from the crowd was heard. In a deep, resonant, solemn tone, it spoke one word: "*Thakinu.*" Agreed.

One by one, each warrior repeated it, pledging every life to the taking of the Kilingarlan.

At long last, they were going home.



C.WALSKE

## FIGHT FOR GLORY

Fight for the day when our lives  
 are ours to live;  
 strive for the day when our hearts  
 are ours to give;  
 honor and glory will rule again as we  
 march to the Kilingarlan and win--  
 Alkarin's battle to begin.

Look at the sky and believe that  
 it is ours;  
 touch the land and know  
 we have the power;  
 we will advance till we're home in triumph;  
 we'll march to the Kilingarlan again--  
 Alkarin's *Ormenel* to win.

Hold out your hands and accept  
 the Challenge  
 that every man faces who stands  
 for honor;  
 at last we will come to our hour of glory;  
 we'll march to the Kilingarlan and win--  
 Alkarin's *Ormenel* to win;  
 we'll take the Rasethi Sarin;  
 march to the Kilingarlan and win;  
 Alkarin's *Ormenel* to win.



# TIES OF BLOOD

## PART 1: THE CONQUEROR

"Are you for Alkarin or for Alargor?"

The man stared in disbelief at the invaders. Then he set his mouth in a resolute line and drew his knife. "I serve Alargor!"

With one swift, vicious lunge, Kor Alkarin felled the enemy. "You won't serve him anymore," he muttered, weighing his hunting knife in his hand.

The intruders stopped in a well-shadowed archway. Kor looked at his comrades. "Which way next, Farhan?" asked Kor. "You know the Rasethi Sarin best, since you worked here."

The warrior looked at the walls around them with loathing. "We've cleaned out most of this level--the third and highest--by now, sir. Alargor's rooms and another office are up here; also some of the family's rooms."

Alkarin nodded. "You think Alargor will be alone?"

"Probably. He usually worked alone in the evening."

"Then we split up here." Kor's harsh tone and sudden obstinate look quelled any complaints. "I'll go find Alargor myself. You three rejoin the others and make sure the palace has been secured. If you meet anyone, give them the usual choice: join the revolution's cause, or die."

by FERN MURDER AND CAROL WALSKIE

"I should like to see Alargor," said Karth Keorl mildly. He stared down at Kor. This was usually an intimidating action, since Karth was almost a half-meter taller than Kor. But Kor was in no mood to tolerate objection.

"You can see him when he's dead," Kor said curtly. "It's my privilege to Challenge him. We agreed on that long ago."

Karth growled down at him. Kor glared back. The bear and the wolf--only now the wolf was full of a rabid fury that cowed even the powerful bear.

This was Kor's triumph. His revolution, the four-year-old civil uprising that he had started, had finally come to culmination; Alkarin's forces held all the Central Suns and most of the Kilingarlan. With Alargor's death, the entire *Ormenel* would quickly succumb to the rebellion's might.

Karth looked away after a moment. "If there's anyone with Alargor, you may be the one killed."

"That's my privilege too," snarled Kor. He glanced at Farhan. "I'll take you with me, just in case someone has reached Alargor to warn and defend him." Farhan nodded. Karth glowered, but Kor ignored him.

"We're wasting time," said Kor shortly. Nervous, eager anticipation was building in him. "Let's go."

Alargor's rooms were empty and dark. Kor smiled savagely to himself as he approached the door to the corner office. He and Farhan paused for a moment, glancing at each other. Kor drew his sword and then quietly pushed open the door.

Kor looked back over his shoulder at his companion. "He's alone," he murmured.

Farhan wasn't about to come between Alkarin and his honor-fight. He merely nodded and stepped back.

Kor took in the room's shape and contents at a glance. Shelves and a fireplace were set in the wall opposite the door; a long, massive table stood a few feet away from the wall. A desk was set at a diagonal across the far corner. The room was lit with golden light from an overhead chandelier.

But what interested Kor the most was the man seated at the desk. Kalim Alargor, thirty-sixth *Ormen* of *Nu Ormenel nu Kilingarlan*, had dropped his pen onto untidy papers and was staring at his unexpected visitor. "Who are you?" he asked.

Kor, without turning his head, reached behind with his left hand and shut the door. He paced forward steadily, never taking his eyes off his enemy. He declared, "For making a mockery of life and honor, I Challenge you, *Ormen* Alargor."

Kalim Alargor showed neither alarm nor fear, only faint contempt. He rose slowly, planting his hands on the table in front of him. "What makes you think you have a right to Challenge me?"

Kor stood his ground, sword held at the ready. "I am Alkarin," he said arrogantly. "I am also Kor Kothir, whom you banished to Salao!"

Alargor tensed, his face hardening. A shadow of fear in his eyes showed that the bolt had hit home. "I should have had you killed then, traitor."

Kor allowed himself a smile. "Yes, you should have. Instead, *Ormen* Alargor, you gave me something to live for--revenge."

Alargor laughed harshly. "Revenge. Such a fine, noble word. Do you allow me a weapon, or do you strike me down where I stand?"

Kor made a small sign of deference. He was beginning to enjoy himself. For one thing, he found he respected Alargor's courage; he suddenly relished testing the *Ormen*'s strength as well. "Take up your sword," he said. "I want to kill you in fair fight."

"Noble fool," said Alargor calmly. He turned his back on Kor and purposefully walked away from him, toward the sheathed sword hanging on the wall. He took it down and turned to face his confident opponent. "I suppose there is no one left alive in all the Rasethi Sarin? Would anyone answer if I called?"

Kor, self-assured, was perfectly willing to revel in his nearly tangible victory. Relaxing a little, he grinned savagely and answered, "Everyone is either dead or fighting for me."

"My family--all dead?" Alargor inquired, moving forward.

"Yes."

The *Ormen* gave him a look that was both cold and grim. "Killing my children," he said. "So much for your honor." Kor made no answer.

"Who rules after me?" Kalim Alargor went on. "Surely not you. Not a traitorous usurper who dares to destroy the *Ormenel*'s order."

"We will create a new order," said Kor.

Alargor, a wily man who had succeeded for years upon years in his political games, surveyed Kor coolly. "A new order out of what? You kill everyone who stands in your way."

Kor shifted restlessly. "Most who once followed you have come over to the forces of the revolution," he commented. "They want independence. . . a return to honor."

Alargor smiled mirthlessly. "You think to give them that? Your reign will be very short, you idealistic upstart."

Kor shook his head, as if to clear it of the *Ormen*'s words. He raised his sword. "Until I kill you," he declared, "we can't even try to start anew. I Challenge."

There was neither fear, nor doubt, nor even any reluctance in Alargor's expression as he looked up and raised his own weapon. "Kill me or be killed by me, you should say. I accept the Challenge--not that I have any choice."

Kor smiled briefly and made the first attack. Alargor was ready for him;



their swords met, ringing.

Kor looked at Alargor's weapon and realized, with a touch of superstitious fear, that Alargor held the sword of Olorin, the first Emperor of the Kilingon Empire. The ancient blade, according to legend, would never let its master be defeated.

First blood was drawn from Alargor--who was forced to block a sword-slash with his left arm. It was not a serious injury, but the *Ormen* hissed and redoubled his attack.

Their fight took them behind the desk. Then, momentarily, Alargor's sword-mastery got the better of Kor, and Kor was made to back up all the way to the long council-table.

Kor kept glancing behind himself. When he was near enough, he abruptly yanked a chair away from the table and thrust it in Alargor's path. Alargor jumped aside, but by that time Kor was at the far end of the heavy table.

Kor and Alargor were both panting. Kor was surprised at how good a swordsman the *Ormen* proved himself. His image of Alargor had never included any allowance for prowess or talent. Now, Kor was wary and very respectful of Alargor's abilities; he knew that he'd met an opponent worthy of his Challenge.

Alargor edged along the table. His expression showed plainly that he wasn't enjoying the fight. He was no fool; he realized that death was his only future, whether at Kor's hands or someone else's.

They circled halfway around the table. Suddenly, Kor leaped toward the end of the table and reached across it with sword extended. Alargor whirled, and brought his sword down hard on top of Kor's. The two blades seemed to lock together. Kor gave a sudden surge of strength and pulled his weapon free.

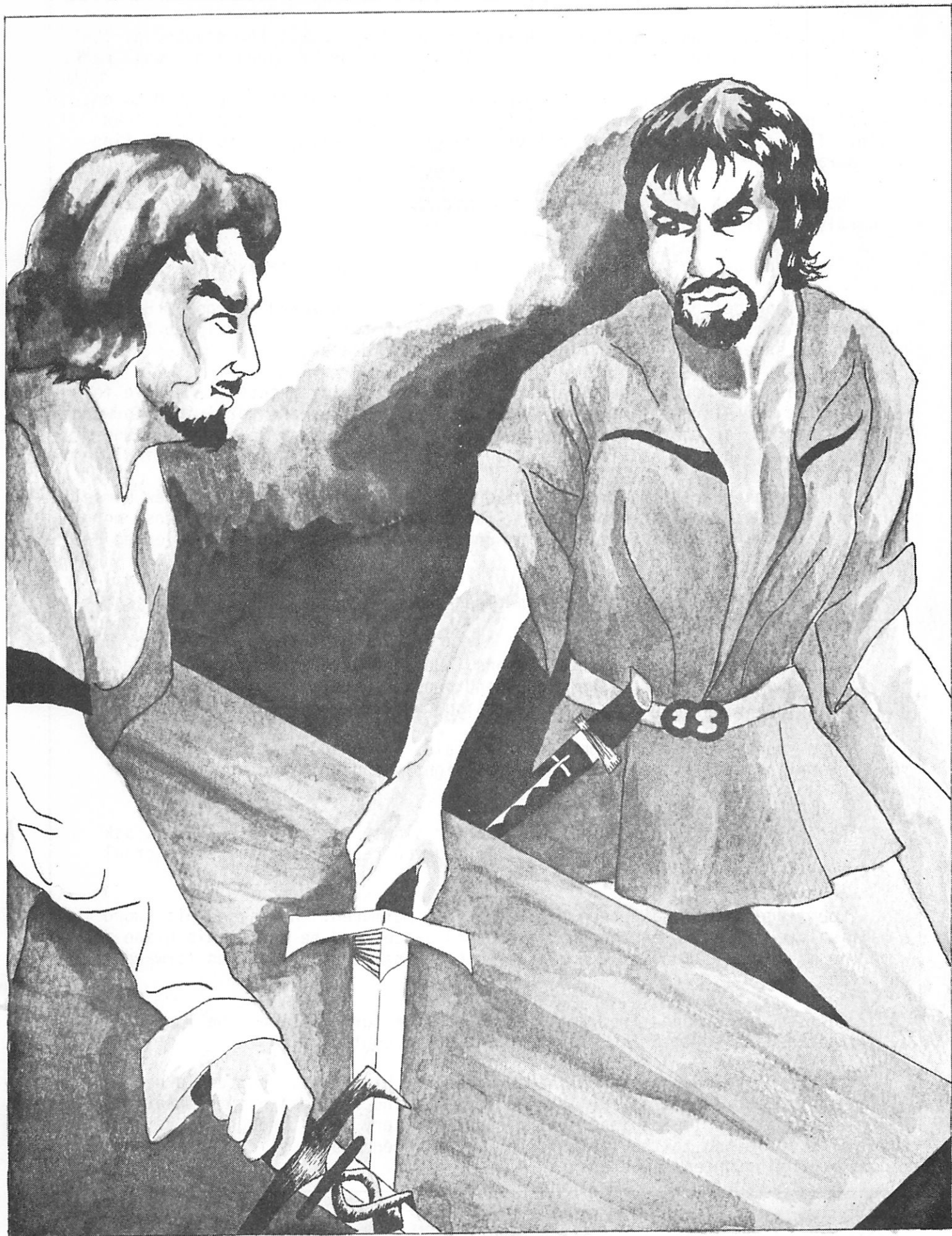
Both fighters sprang away from the table, and resumed their flashing sword-dance, in front of Alargor's desk. For several minutes the contest was evenly matched. It became a matter of seeing who would fail first--who would first surrender to weakness and exhaustion.

Alargor aimed a hacking stroke at Kor. Kor dodged, but not quite fast enough. The blow fell across his right shoulder and breast and bit deep. Letting out a cry of anger and pain, Kor dropped his sword, his hand suddenly useless. Alargor laughed brusquely; his voice held both mockery and exultance.

Kor jarred against the desk. With a sudden sweep of his wounded arm, he flung a mixture of papers, books and other objects off the desk at Alargor. The *Ormen* recoiled. As he did, Kor reached down swiftly and retrieved his sword with his left hand.

Among the things on Alargor's desk there had been buried an ornamental, but quite deadly, double-edged dagger. It now lay uncovered, and Alargor snatched it up. He was now twice armed, and doubly dangerous to Kor.

Kor backed away, giving ground rapidly. Blood was running freely from his wound. He held his right arm stiffly against his side, and tried to remember all that he'd once known about left-handed sword-fighting.



Kor leaped forward suddenly. Alargor's guard was weak; Kor stabbed at the *Ormen's* sword-arm and got him inside the elbow. Alargor grimaced and jumped back.

They eyed each other for a long moment. Neither felt that he could go on, but nothing had been settled. Their fight could not end in anything less than death. They took the moment to recover strength and breath, and to try to find new courage.

Kor stared at his foe. He noticed that the *Ormen* was holding his sword awkwardly, as if it hurt him.

"How long before you drop that sword, *Ormen* Alargor?" he asked.

"How long before you fall from loss of blood?" countered Alargor. He seemed in no hurry to take up the attack again. His mouth twisted in a grimace that could have been a sneer. "If you rule as well as you wield a sword. . ."

Kor laughed shortly, but Alargor's words left a bitter taste. He dove forward, aiming for Alargor's midriff. Alargor leaped aside, and Kor lunged forward again, watching for the smallest of openings. Their pace was relentless. One of them would fall in this battle, they knew, and both held on grimly to their lives.

Between one harsh breath and another, Kor saw his opening. He threw himself forward. Desperation lent him speed. Alargor could neither make a defense nor leap away swiftly enough; he choked in surprise and rage as the sword pierced deep under the lowest rib.

Kor withdrew. He glanced at his blood-splashed blade and was grimly satisfied. He gazed at his enemy.

Alargor had dropped both his weapons. He took several steps and leaned heavily against his desk. He held one hand pressed hard against his left side. His face was pale and haggard, his expression confused.

"Now your treachery is complete," he said. "You add an *Ormen's* death to your accomplishments." He closed his eyes tightly and grimaced at his body's hurts.

Kor stood uncertain, horrified. Alargor slowly raised his head. "I ask you for the deathblow," he said slowly, "or do you really want to see me crawl and writhe in pain?"

Kor winced as if he'd been hit. "No," he murmured. He raised his sword in a half-salute. Then, even though his muscles protested, he thrust his blade forward one more time. The *Ormen* surrendered one final cry and pitched forward to the floor.

Kor's sword dropped from his fingers, and he turned aside. He looked down at Alargor and tried to bring his trembling under control.

The room greyed; unfocused shadows obscured his sight. Kor could not see Alargor anymore. Exhausted, he lurched forward, and fell against the heavy table. He cried out at the impact that sent a shock of fiery pain through his right shoulder. Kor clung to the table for a moment, then slowly slid down to the floor, welcoming unconsciousness.



## PART 2: A DISTANT THUNDER

Karras Kothir stood beside his foster-mother's bed, his hands grasping a fold of the tawny furred blanket. "Koshira--sister to my father--you're the last one I had," he whispered softly, wretchedly. "All of my kin are dead. Why couldn't it have been me?"

Dusk was softly settling outside and in the room. Koshira Keorl seemed to be lying among shadows. Bandages covered half of Koshira's face, but her eyes and mouth held a peaceful expression. Death--from savage burns--had been painful, but no pain could touch her now.

Karras turned away, his head bowed. Freezing air came in a partially opened window. He went to shut the window most of the way, and then set a fire in the fireplace. He was warmly dressed in a thick brushed-wool shirt, pants, and fur-trimmed boots, but a chill spread like fingers down his back, and along his arms and legs.

After starting the fire, he stretched out his hands toward the small flames licking at the wood. He pulled a chair forward and sat down about a meter from the raised hearth. He could look straight into its glowing heart, and felt the comforting heat on his face. By turning his head a bit, he could see the bed and Koshira's face.

Karras sat the death-vigil for Koshira Keorl, once Koshira Kothir, his father's younger sister. He sat and thought about all he knew and felt about her; he sat and thought about how she had died.

Koshira and Kang Keorl--Karras' foster-father--had become hearthmates long ago. They both fought for the revolution, and, now that Alkarin's forces had come to the Kilingarlan, Koshira had come home, briefly, to defend Domain Keorl in battle. Here she had fallen, in the ugly civil struggle that had inflamed people's hearts and changed a way of life. Though the people of *krasaia* Keorl had won their fight, Koshira had died.

The fire was waning. The wind had dropped from a howl to a faint whisper that sidled in and out of the arched windows. Karras' head nodded forward; he slept fitfully for a while.

He was awakened by the sounds of someone entering the room. He stretched, grimacing a little at his stiffness, and rubbed his eyes.

His visitor came forward purposefully and placed a deep wooden bowl into his hands. "Eat," she commanded. She glanced at the fire and immediately moved to put fresh wood on it.

Karras came fully awake at the sight and aroma of the food in the bowl. A thick, rich stew, of grain and chunks of tender meat flavorfully seasoned, stirred his appetite.

The young woman settled back on the hearth and watched him silently as he ate. The light of the fire revealed her thoughtful brown eyes and a pensive, sorrow-marked face.

Karras finished and looked up. Their expressions were the same: the two, much alike, always friends and rivals, were now joined by pain.

"Thank you, Arika," said Karras quietly, setting aside the well-scraped bowl. He looked suddenly much older than his fourteen years. His long, dark brown hair fell in his eyes; he brushed the unruly strands away. "It's hard to remember food, or water, or anything else. It's good to have someone to share the vigil with."

Arika Keorl shook her head. "I wish I had been well enough earlier to sit vigil," she said. "When I threatened to Challenge the healer to a fight, she finally let me get out of bed."

Arika had gotten a knife-wound and minor burns during the mountain-battle. Fire, the attackers' weapon, had eventually turned against defender and attacker alike, turning the struggle into grim devastation.

Karras and Arika looked at each other and slowly began to speak of Koshira. They shared their memories together for a while, and it made the pain seem a little less strong. They talked about the battle, and how each of them had fared in defending their domain. Karras felt almost guilty about having escaped unharmed.

Arika changed the subject eventually, saying it was hard for her to talk about it; her mother's death still choked her.

"I've been collecting news," she said. "Have you heard yet? Alargor is dead!"

Karras stared at Arika in astonishment. "Who killed him?"

"War-Leader Alkarin," she answered. "He killed him in Sword-challenge."

"Does that mean the revolution's over?"

"I hope so," said Arika, but looked doubtful. "But I don't think it'll really be over until they declare a new *Ormen*. Maybe my uncle, Lord Karth, will be the next *Ormen*."

"I think it'll be Alkarin," said Karras.

"But nobody knows who Alkarin really is," Arika commented. She shrugged. "Maybe it'll come out at the council--the revolution's leaders are holding a War-Council to decide on a new ruler. I guess we'll know soon."

"I wish the revolution had ended a long time ago," said Karras inconsequentially. "Koshira might not be dead then."

All of Arika's excitement left her suddenly. "Please stop saying that, Karras; it's very hard to believe in the revolution with my mother dead."

"The revolution is the only thing that avenged my father's death," murmured Karras, bitterly.

Arika shook her head. "I wish there was a new child born for each fighter dead."

They both fell silent. Karras stared down at his hands, which were curling and uncurling around the hem of his shirt. His eyes were burning with weariness and unshed tears.

He rose from the chair and reached to put a split log on the fire. The wood crackled and roared. "I think I'll go to my room and sleep," he said quietly. "I can't stay awake much longer. Maybe I'll take a bath first--I stink."

Arika smiled a little. "I'll stay here for a while. Sleep well, Karras."

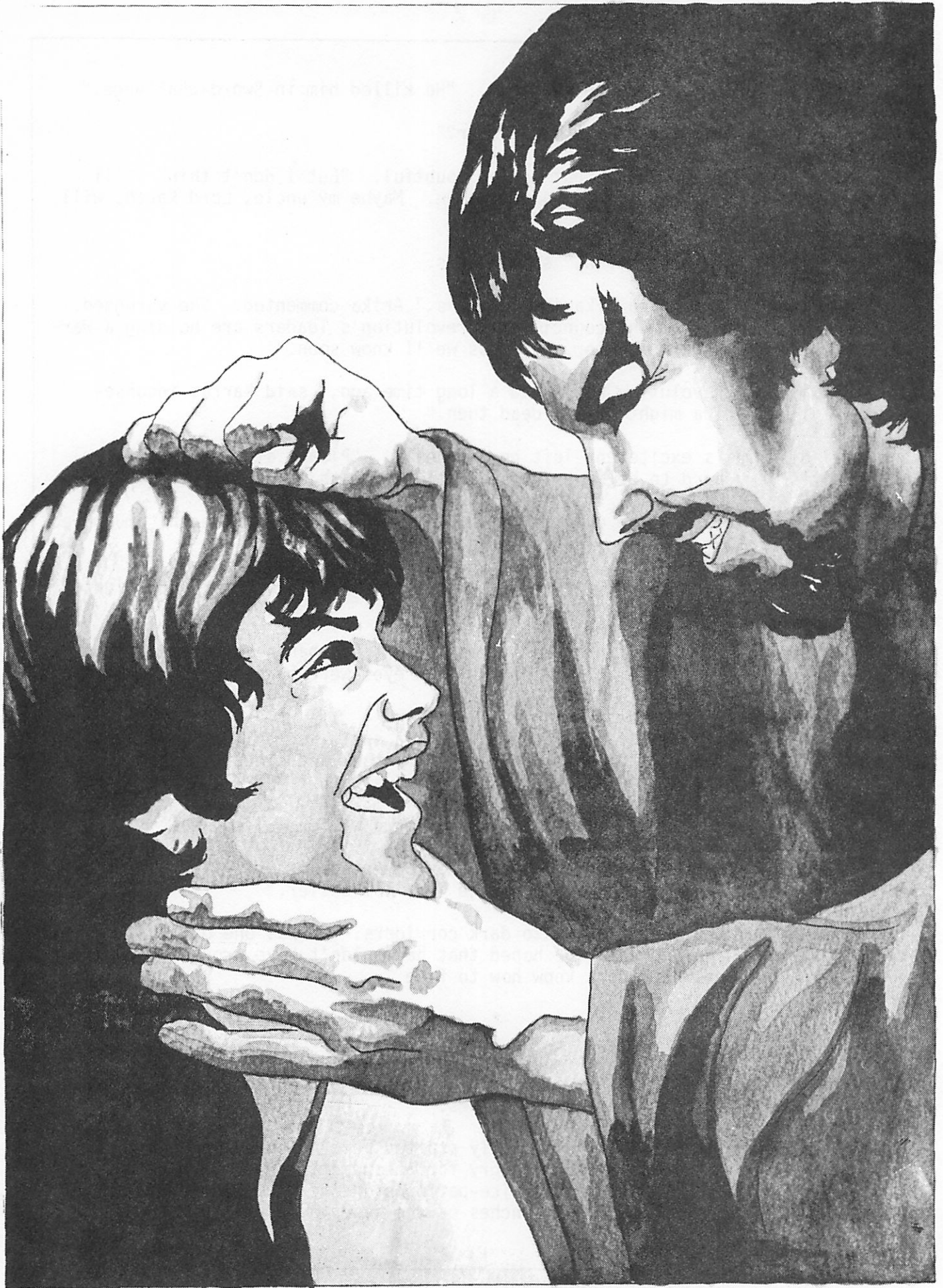
"And you." Karras looked at Arika. He commented wistfully, "It was nice to share part of the vigil with you. You make it a lot easier."

He left quietly, going out into dark corridors. He was one of the few still awake in the war-weary domain. He hoped that he wouldn't have trouble sleeping; there were nightmares he didn't know how to face.

\* \* \*

Karras slept late the next morning. He got up, and saw through his windows that an overnight storm had left ice on the ground. He groaned, and mumbled a curse about *krasaia* Keorl's freezing winters.

He yawned and stretched, then slowly started putting on his clothes. He moved listlessly. Not particularly hungry for breakfast, he went to stand at the window for a while. He stared at the ice-patterns on the ground and the way the ice hung, like teardrops, off the branches of the sleeping trees.



Karras turned around quickly at the sound of someone opening the door. His face lit with pleased surprise as he saw Kang Keorl, and then went blank with shock at sight of the other visitor: a man, dark and tall, well hidden in traveling cloak and mountain clothing, his face revealing an expression of self-conscious, embarrassed hope.

Karras took a step forward, his eyes held by the newcomer's. He managed to whisper, ". . . *Akra?*"

Then the man smiled, an open, warm, delighted smile, and everything was all right. Karras sprang forward and threw his arms around his father, burying his face deep in the cloak. A knot inside him, a tangle of unrelieved tension and bitterness, burst abruptly, and he wept from desperate joy.

A long time later, he pulled away, and looked up into his father's face. "You're not dead," he said on a note of bewilderment. "And you look different."

Kor put his hands on Karras' shoulders and looked at him gravely. "No, I'm not dead. I'm sorry, my dearest son, for not coming to greet you before. My 'death' was a lie that I myself spread throughout the Central Suns."

Karras drew back a little. Now he could feel some of the differences he saw in his father's demeanor. There was a harshness and a mark of bitter pain that had never been there before. Karras' eyes reflected his own pain. "*Akra*, why? Why couldn't you tell me you were alive?"

From off to one side, Kang's voice came with the answer. He was grinning. "Because your father is also Kor Alkarin, who had an *Ormenel* to conquer."

Karras stared, round-eyed and open-mouthed. Kor glanced down, embarrassed, and gave out a short laugh. He commented ruefully, "So you see, Karras, Kor Kothir is dead. Kor Alkarin came to take his place."

There was wonder and disbelief and admiration in Karras' gaze. "You're Alkarin? But---Alkarin just killed the *Ormen* Alargor and took the *Ormen*'s sword. And Alkarin--Alkarin is the incarnation of the Wargod Maraku!"

Kor laughed. "No, I'm not Maraku," he said, gently touching his son's head. "I'm just a man, Karras. A man who loves life so much he dared not give it up." Kor's eyes were full of fire. "I love honor and I love this land. I could not bear the tarnishing of our honor and the despoiling of our land, so I heralded a war of passion, a war to reclaim all that we once had."

Karras was listening to his father, entranced. He could see now how the hunter he had always admired had grown into a leader of supreme strength and valor. Kor Alkarin the Warlord stood before him, a man of great bearing and extraordinary ability to command.

Kor smiled at the look on Karras' face. He remarked, "But enough of me. What's happened to you? How did you get to *krasaia* Keorl?"

The youngling sat down on his bed. He kicked his feet back and forth. A little reluctantly, he started his tale.



"Well, first *Ama* helped me to get out of *krasaia* Kothir. . ." Karras looked up hesitantly. "*Akra*, do you know *Ama* Tharuna is dead?"

"I know," said Kor. He didn't trust his own voice, so he said nothing else. Tharuna, his lawyer, his heart-sharer. Her death, one of the first to his blame, had been one of the heaviest burdens for him to bear. He had entrusted to her to see to her own and their son's safety. She had succeeded--but for the child only.

Karras bit his lip. "It--it was like Passage. Being alone, without friends or family, thinking only of how to survive. When I went to Domain Kusseremi to hide, they welcomed me, but I was always lonely."

Kor sat down slowly on the windowsill. His son's words stripped him of strength and resolution, and filled him with a hurt more poignant than all of his war-sorrows.

Karras seemed to realize what effect his words were having on his father, because he tried to smile. "I learned a lot of things in *krasaia* Kusseremi, *Akra*. They made me a hunter because I got so good with a bow. I learned a lot about the forest and mountains, too."

He went on with his story. "But when the revolution started, the domain was split by trouble. Half wanted to go join the fight, and the other didn't. There were feuds all over the place.

"One night a friend came and told me to leave. She said that, because of my father, I was looked on as a traitor too. She said that somebody would kill me or sell me to Alargor if I stayed."

"A price on your life?" Kor asked, incredulous. "They dared put the mark of treachery on a child?" Karras just nodded, his teeth worrying his lower lip.

Kor understood now why Karras seemed so alien to him. Karras showed a maturity far beyond the six years' growth since Kor had last seen him.

"You've gone through so much," said Kor quietly. "So much that I couldn't share with you, so much that I'll never know." He took a deep breath. "So--after leaving Domain Kusseremi, you came here."

"Yes." Karras looked half shy, half proud. "I walked most of the way."

Kor rose abruptly and grabbed Karras by the shoulders. "You walked? A quarter way around the world?"

"Yes, *Akra*."

"And they call me the Wanderer," commented Kor. "I come back to find my young son an adult already, and a hunter, a ranger, and who knows what else. I am very proud."

Karras grinned up at his father. But he didn't want to talk about himself any longer. Unable to contain his inquisitiveness, he jumped up and demanded all the news from his father--his imprisonment on Salao, the escape, and all the battles of the revolution.

"All the battles?" repeated Kor with a laugh. "That'll take longer than my nearly empty stomach will tolerate."

"We have to fatten up your father," said Kang jestingly. "He lost a fifth of his weight on Salao."

"No loss," remarked Kor lightly. "I was getting fat, not to mention decadent. Too much strong wine and good food."

"You deserve all the wine and food you can get, now," murmured Kang. "A thousand feasts in your honor, Kor Alkarin." The two friends shared smiles.

"*Akra*--" Kor looked at Karras, and the youngling asked, "Why aren't you at the War-Council? Aren't they supposed to be choosing---"

"I was kicked out," interjected Kor dryly. "Yes, they are choosing a new leader. The choice is, obviously"--he glanced over at Kang, who looked non-committal--"between Karth Keorl and me. But, our presence created too much dissension, too much passion. We were asked to leave."

"I hope they make you the new *Ormen*," said Karras eagerly. "I didn't know who Alkarin was, but I knew that I wanted more than anything for him to win."

A short laugh came from Kang. Kor grinned at both of them. "I'm glad to hear that you support my cause, Karras. Not everyone does."

Kang was aware of Kor's gaze resting on him. "You're so tactful," Kang remarked. "Why don't you come right out and ask whom I choose--you or my older brother? You know I stand with you, closer-than-brother Kor, and that's what I'll say when I go back to the Council."

"I'll go get you some food," said Karras, changing the subject. "Then you can tell me all about your revolution."

Kor gave in. "All right."

So, between mouthfuls of a hastily put together breakfast of leftover meat and slightly stale bread, Kor talked of the long struggle. He and Kang told stories of some of their more famous and infamous battles; ones that were particular triumphs, and defeats that had cost them dearly. The memories were so fresh that images and feelings came tumbling out, full of color and vivid strength. They made Karras see the full scope of the revolution, and made him appreciate his father's skills and final victory all the more.

After a long while, Karras remembered what else of import had happened, and abruptly fell silent. The change was so great--from mirth to distress--that both Kor and Kang stopped their talk.

"Karras?"

Karras looked to his father, and then over at his foster-father. Neither of them had mentioned Koshira; obviously, they did not know. . . "I forgot to tell you something," he said unhappily, not wanting to mar this newfound happiness with misery. He felt his *Akra*'s eyes on him, silently questioning, and plunged ahead. "I'm sorry, *Akra*, *Sashakra*, for not telling you before. Koshira is dead. Yesterday."

Kor's sister and Kang's hearthmate--another death, one that struck so close and so deep it was like a piercing knife. Kor and Kang turned to each other, greying faces mirroring renewed, bitter pain.

"In my dreams, of all the faces of the dead, hers was never there," said Kang softly, shutting his eyes, his hands clenched tight. He cried out harshly, "Of all who died in my family, why her?" He turned a stricken, angry face toward Kor. "Are all your kin so cursed? Must my bond with you always bring pain?"

Kor's inward breath sounded like a gasp of hurt and rage. Visibly fighting for self-control, he stared at Kang. Finally, the anger in him died, and he bowed his head. "If you wish to blame all the deaths of this revolution on me, you may do so, Kang," he said, in a very low and dispirited voice. "I accept the charge."

A silence as deep as death fell. Karras sat uncertainly, glancing from one to the other in despair, fearing what he'd done and not knowing how to change it.

Kang drew in a deep, ragged breath and held it. He let it out slowly in a weary, frustrated sigh. "Curse me for a fool," he said disgustedly. He looked at Kor's averted face and his hand went out to rest gently on Kor's shoulder. Kor raised his head, an empty look in his eyes.

"I'm sorry," said Kang slowly. "How easy it is to hurt the one you should be grieving with."

There was a sour taste in Kor's mouth, and he felt a sudden gut-sickness. The reminders of death plagued him--the smell and feel of blood, the tangible pain and tension of battle.

How many had he killed? How many knife-lunges and sword-thrusts? How many of the wounded and crippled were by his hands? It seemed so futile. Blood-letting only inspired more blood-letting. His war of passion had brought nothing but waste and desolation.

"You spoke the truth," said Kor pensively. "I carry the burden for my sister's death, and for thousands of others who pledged to me. I am paying. All my successes in the revolution are but payment for those deaths." Kang found nothing to say that.

Kor's gaze went to Karras. He asked quietly, "Where is Koshira now?"

"I'll take you to her," said Karras. Both men stood up together silently and followed Karras out.

Their visit to Koshira's bedside was brief and wordless. The three went in together; Kang stood on one side of her, and Kor and Karras stood together on the other side.

Kor made his farewell to his sister, remembering all that she had given, all that she had been to him in her life. He thought about her faults and all the times she'd caused him trouble. He thought about their kinship, their common dislike of their father, their shared ambitions. Kor bowed his head in respect.

Kang's reaction to his hearthmate's death was a dull grief. He had flung his bitterness at Kor, and now he felt shamed and empty.

A part of him was missing. The closeness he had shared with Koshira had gone beyond love to an intimate awareness of all the other's moods, thoughts and desires. Fighters both, with strong wills and careful defenses, they had lowered their swords in surrender to each other.

"I'll stay here for a while," he said, finally. He looked at Karras. "Send my children to me," he said simply.

Karras nodded slowly. Kor put a comforting arm around his son's shoulder and led him silently from the room.

\* \* \*

The days lengthened, and the weather worsened. The purple of the Chak Ausinsaba's sheer peaks matched the shadowy purples and greys of the stormskies above. A damp chill, and electric tension, filled the air.

Kor's heart was filled with the storm-dark mood; he waited impatiently, wondering when the War-Council would send word of their decision. The storm's muster was fitting. Standing on the ramparts of the domain's great ring-wall, he laughed at the sky, and raised a fist high in the air, beckoning the clouds, inviting them to unleash fury on him. He wanted to feel the tempest's strife; he was a warrior, not a patient watcher, and he wanted the battle to be brought to its end.

"I must leave here for a while," Kor said. Karras came forward to join him on the ramparts. "I fret here. For several years I've been my own master, but now I wait for someone else to decide my fate."

Karras perched on the wall, looking up into his father's face. Behind Karras, the outer ring-wall dropped fifty meters to prickly-bushes clinging to a sheer cliff-face. "What are you going to do, *Akra*?"

"I want to see my eldest son and my father in *krasaia* Kothir," answered Kor, a little grimly. "I expect no welcome from either of them--but I must know how they will greet me. I must know if I. . ." Kor looked sadly at his son and amended, ". . . if we are forever outcast from our home."

At Karras' bewildered look, Kor shook his head, and briefly caressed Karras' cheek. "I itch," he said impatiently. "I have no future. Either one will be given to me---or I will have to make one. And, as a hunter, I'd rather be making my future."

Karras, for a moment, thought about his own brief history. Wandering from one domain to another, ending up in *krasaia* Keorl--homeless, bereft of parents, friends, and domain's kin. He said, almost desperately, "If you're not allowed to return to *krasaia* Kothir, and not chosen to be *Ormenel*, who then will you be?"

"I have not betrayed the *Ormenel* and caused a revolution for nothing. I will be victor." Kor's voice rose; he seemed to hurl his words at the cloud-filled sky. "All the deaths I have caused, all the devastation, was to force the *Ormenel* into a new pattern. The risk I took was of the highest order--not just the worth of my life, but the lives of everyone in the *Ormenel*. I want to build on the

past--I started this revolution, and now I want to be able to finish it!"

Karras thought, 'That's the father I used to know.' He was old enough to wonder what drove his father so, and what tore so deeply into Kor's heart. The revolution was not over, might never be over, for Alkarin.

"I'll be back," added Kor. "Or I'll send a message for you, Karras."

Karras nodded. He managed at least to give a proper farewell. "Go with honor, *Akra*."

Kor pulled Karras close in a fierce hug. He put him down, and gazed at him for a long moment. "Until tomorrow, my son."

### PART 3: LORD OF FIRE

Kilingau, at least one from each of the Three Thousand *Krasai'in*, marched toward the Rasethi Sarin. Alkarin led them. Twenty kilometers from the golden city of Orthonik up the winding river Alruen to the *Ormen's* domain.

Fighters, healers, old and young, all individuals strong, marched as kindred in the valley of the Foremost. Unsheathed swords glittered, and domain-banners waved; the host was an array of moving color and bright and noisy joy.

Within the Rasethi Sarin, the Highest Circle, several hundred chosen warriors gathered to do fealty to their new lord. The *Ormen's* oath was spoken into hushed silence. Then a roar broke out as the kilingau pressed forward to greet and honor the First and Foremost Warlord Alkarin. A thousand



vows were spoken, and promises made; instant friendships were formed that would last for generations.

Uncounted days of celebration and feasting began. The rebel warriors put aside all thoughts of battle and reveled in their well-earned triumph.

The Rasethi Sarin's halls echoed with voices. So many friends and war-comrades, come to wish Alkarin farewell. So many strangers, come to meet the *Ormen* and offer him allegiance. The First-Father's household, which in the final days had become a ruin, a charnel-house, was now full of people wanting to recover and rebuild the domain at the heart of the *Ormenel*.

Karras had come at Kor's summons, and had been overwhelmed at the thought of calling his father *Ormen*. He, too, gave up all memories of hardship and death to share with his father the glory and honor of these days of exultation. Karras was exuberant. It was so good to be with his father, and to realize that he had a home again. For the first time in many years, he felt that he'd found peace.

Kor was not as fortunate. During his first few days in the Rasethi Sarin, he wandered from room to room, never resting, feeling very uncomfortable in the palace's centuries-old walls. For so long he had been outcast and utterly free of house and possessions, that these halls seemed like another prison.

The Rasethi Sarin had suffered some damage, from fire and from fighting in its halls. And Kor had asked that much more of it be torn down, or stripped to the foundations. There was too much that reminded him of Alargor and his thousand-year-old Agaven Empire.

So Kor spent his days inside the Rasethi Sarin, and the nights outside. His son was with him most of those nights, and so were a few close friends of the revolution. They set campfires and sat around them, telling stories, drinking wine and eating fire-roasted meat, enjoying an intimacy that would be over all too soon.

The celebrants began to return to their homes, leaving the new *Ormen* to find his way among the ravages of his new domain. He had a new empire to tame--and a past yet to be resolved.

In the underground levels of the Rasethi Sarin, in a cell, was a man waiting for the *Ormen*'s judgment. The man was Kesan Kothir, Kor's sire and former lord of Domain Kothir.

Kor had put off the decision, hesitating to confront that darkness. But finally, on a wintry, blustery day when the wind tore through the halls and the air was full of a wild, invigorating scent of fresh power, he faced himself and knew that he could delay no longer.

Kor knew what he had to do. It was a deed more horrible, more grim, than all the terrible deeds of the revolution. He looked around himself and thought, 'No. No more bloodshed inside the Rasethi Sarin. . . especially not Kesan's. I will not make his blood the foundation of my new domain.'

Through the communit in his office, he called down to Security and asked that Kesan Kothir be escorted to the clearing between the forest and the riverside.

"To the Plain of Burning," Kor added, and heard fear in the guard's obedient consent.

Kor left the Rasethi, going out the main gates and turning to walk along the river's edge. The outlying trees of the approaching forest were brown and purple; their leaves, like old garments, nested softly amid the dead grass.

At the edge of the forest by the river, a great many trees had been felled. The ground of the clearing was broken and trampled; in the middle of the clearing was an immense area of scorched, fire-withered earth. Kor stood at the edge of the fire-mark and looked across it, thinking of the pyre that had been set here, a little more than a week ago. This afternoon, he would set the pyre again.

"A son Challenging his father?" Kor murmured. "Have I the right to kill him? Am I avenging his cruelty to me, or wreaking undue cruelty myself?"

He held an image in his mind: a young boy crouching behind a table, an angry father swinging a leather strap from one hand. The degradation and bitter rage of being beaten for no reason other than Kesan's pleasure.

Reversing those roles, now, was hard to accept. Kor would be denying the source of his own life. Even though Kesan's crimes were unpardonable, Kor's murder of Kesan Kothir might rank as the most heinous crime of all.

A voice intruded on his thoughts. "Sir?"

Kor turned. His gaze was first drawn to his father; then he looked at the woman who had spoken and at the nervegun in her hand. "Untie his bonds," he ordered, his voice and face as expressionless as he could keep them. "Then return to the house."

The guard hesitated only a moment. "Yes, *Ormen* Alkarin." Kesan Kothir, completely sullen, stood passively as she cut the rope holding his wrists behind his back. She edged away, backwards, looking at her charge and at the implacable warlord, and then she resolutely turned to head back to the Rasethi Sarin.

Kor slowly paced forward until he was at arm's length from his father. Their gazes met. Kesan Kothir was very old now, gnarled and ash-brown and bent like a desert tree. He was shorter and smaller than Kor had remembered him.

His father, who had shown only madness when last they met, now had a look of malevolent intelligence in his eyes. He also showed fear. Even though he was no longer bound, and beyond all walls, he was too afraid to try to escape.

Overhead, the clouds broke and regathered at the wind's mercy. A shadow of a fleeting cloud would fall upon them, and then the sun would break through again. It was bitterly cold in the wind.

'This is the enemy responsible for my public denunciation and conviction of treason,' Kor told himself silently. 'Were it not for Kesan, neither Alkarin nor the rebellion might ever have been born. Yet it is so hard, seeing him so close. . . .' Kor forced words out. "*Akra*, I claim your death."

Hatred joined the furtive evil in Kesan's expression. "Coward," he jeered.



Kor flinched at the malice in his father's voice; Kesan's savagery was unnerving. Kor was reminded of a fever-bitten dog that would not let anyone touch it, and that ran around snarling and biting at the air until it died. "Why cowardice?" he demanded.

"You don't have a right to kill me---you unnatural traitorous son!"

Kor's hand went to his knife and held there. He said evenly, "You had me falsely convicted of treason, *Akra*. You murdered Tharuna, mother of my son. You put scars on my back and in my heart that will never fade."

"May your new life bring you despair and weakness. You are not of my blood. Chaos take you!"

Kor could not reach his father; they could not understand one another. "There's no way of dealing with you sanely," Kor said slowly. "There's nothing either of us can say."

Kesan hawked, and spat at Kor. Kor stared at his father grimly, lifting his hand absently to wipe his cheek clean. Without a word, he struck Kesan in the face. Kesan's head jarred back, and he took an involuntary step to one side.

Kor felt tainted, contaminated. All his meetings with his father had always ended in pain and conflict. As a youngling, he had come to fear his father's hand and harsh temper, and that had never changed. Now, the struggle was neatly reversed: Kor was the predator and Kesan the victim. Suddenly, Kor was filled with an overwhelming desire to flee, to hide, to forget that he had ever had a father. He could not accept the executioner's burden.

"*Akra* . . ." Kor waited. Kesan lifted his eyes to him; his expression was sulky, trapped. Kor said painfully, "*Akra*, why was it always hatred? Why can't I call you my father without feeling disgust? Why wouldn't you let me love you?"

"You whimper like a sick child," said Kesan scornfully. His attitude--dominant, arrogant--was the same as Kor had always remembered it.

Kor stared at him, wondering how he seemed to slip so effortlessly from furious unreason to chilling reason. He said, very honestly, "I am sick--sick with loathing and doubt. I don't want to kill you."

A stealthy look, of fearful hope and cunning, crept into Kesan's face. He took one or two steps backward. "I was right in calling you craven and soft." He took another pace. His eyes were lit with a strange, fierce gleam. "Why don't you let me live? You shouldn't kill your own father, you know. I sired you."

The words, like poisoned darts, were a mocking repetition of Kor's own thoughts. Kor stood irresolute, caught between fire and Chaos, held helpless by his own battling desires. He watched his father edge away and for a moment was powerless even to speak.

With an effort he regained control. "There's nowhere you can go," he said. "You cannot outrun my knife."

Kesan's face was sly. "If you can't stand to kill me, why don't you set me free?"

"I could not tolerate it if you still lived," answered Kor very simply.

"You're afraid of me," commented Kesan, with an abrupt, sardonic laugh.

Kor could not give an answer that was less than the truth. "Yes, I am. Afraid of you, and afraid of what I feel when I look at you." He felt degraded, shamed, looking at Kesan and realizing that this was the man who had raised him.

Kor's face twisted with pain and grief. Uttering a low, harsh cry, he lunged forward at his father.

Kesan Kothir stumbled backward, staring at Kor with an involuntary snarl of rage and terror on his face. Kesan had never before felt the impotence of defeat; he had never acknowledged that his son could someday be stronger than he.

Now that the fight had begun, it was easier for Kor to face. He caught Kesan by the shoulder, and held him fast by the power of his arm. The older man struggled, but couldn't match Kor's strength and will.

Kor glanced at his father's face; it was ashen and wide-eyed in apprehension. Doubt welled up once more in Kor's heart, but he fought it down. He snatched his knife out of his belt and, in one fluid move, brought it forward and down.

"My revenge for a thousand crimes committed," he said grimly.

Kesan clutched at the knife-hilt. His back arched in pain and he fell among the grass and dead leaves. Eyes still brilliant with hatred, he strove to reach for Kor, but his strength deserted him. He sank back.

Pain welled up inside Kor, until it became too great to bear. He turned away, choking out loud as his breath caught in his throat. Involuntarily, he glanced back at Kesan, and the tears he'd fought so hard to keep away came to his eyes. For so long he'd lived with that pain, the unbearable conflict of hatred and longing. The anguish was still there, unresolved.

He put his hand to his eyes and tried to wipe away the streaks of pain. Even in death, his father would torment him. Now, for all his lifetime, he would have to live not only with the memories of his father's cruelties, but also his own deed of murder. He wept, from horror and pity and despair.

## PART 4: THE REAWAKENING

As the days went by, Kor grew increasingly restive. It seemed as if he were waiting for something, but he wouldn't say what.

Karras wondered at his father's anxiety. "*Akra*," he asked one day, "why do you act like you're in need? The spring's weeks away."

Kor, surprised, turned to face Karras. Despite himself he grinned wryly. "My son, if you're beginning to notice my needs and desires, you'd better start thinking about your own. *Kisu!* To think that my son, only fourteen, could soon be a father." Karras smiled, looking both pleased and shy at the prospect.

"Actually," Kor continued, "you're not far from the truth. I was thinking of Katni Koerin, and, well, I. . ." His hands moved in the air, but he couldn't find the words.

Karras already knew how Kor and Katni, fellow prisoners and fellow warriors, had grown close during the years of struggle. "Is she going to be my new *Ama*?" Karras asked, with disarming frankness.

Though taken aback, Kor matched Karras' directness. "I've thought about it," he admitted. "I'm waiting for Katni to arrive. I didn't want to say before, but she's bringing our young daughter here."

"I have a sister?" exclaimed Karras. "*Akra*, when?"

Kor looked troubled. "I have my fears, Karras, and so I didn't tell you about my three-year-old daughter. The planet she was on was hard hit in the last days of the war, and I do not know if--if she is even alive."

Karras sobered immediately. "But, *Akra*--"

"I asked Katni if she would go and bring the child home to the Kilingarlan," continued Kor gravely, "and I think they should have arrived before now. So, forgive me if I pace, my son; I love and worry about them both."

Karras nodded. All his gaiety had disappeared. Kor just looked at him. After a moment, he said quietly, "I haven't done very well in providing a family for you, have I?" Karras looked down and didn't respond.

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The sun was warm on Kor's bare back. He was perfectly content to lie on the low stone bench, unmoving.

The rock and water garden at the highest level of the Rasethi Sarin had escaped damage. In this secluded, private place, the wind was a caress and the sun a comforting warmth. The sounds of running water and other small, natural sounds provided a gentle unpatterned music in the background. Kor had retreated to this private place, to rest and to think.

Three weeks had passed since the revolution's end. The winter, which had been rather mild in the valley of the Rasethi, was nearly over.

Kor heard someone approaching, but he was too relaxed to bother to turn his head or open his eyes. The visitor stopped at his side. A moment later, Kor felt fingers gently touching his shoulder; then the fingers moved across his back in a half caress, half scratch.

Kor let out a small sound of pleasure, and hoped that the backscratcher wouldn't stop. "Who's there?" he asked.

"A wench to serve you, my lord *Ormen*."

Kor winced at the words and the tone of the voice. He knew who it was, but decided to pretend that he didn't. "Continue," he said imperiously. "It pleases me."

The woman's nails dug into the small of his back, and he let out a small yelp. "Sorry, my lord," she said, with a complete lack of sincerity.

Kor turned his head and opened his eyes. As he had thought, Katni Koerin was standing beside him, grinning impudently. She reached out and let her fingers lightly trace a line up the middle of his back.

He tried to repress his sudden shiver at her feather-touch. "How nice of you to come," he said dryly. "I've always wanted a live-in backscratcher."

"Is that all you like me for?" asked Katni in a scathing tone.

He pushed himself off the bench and stood up leisurely, stretching his muscles. He gave her a long, speculative look before he answered. Katni was richly dressed in a travelling cloak of a deep green, thick-woven fabric, embroidered in amber and red. The half-open cloak showed her light grey uniform underneath.

Her hair was short, and framed her face with curls. Her eyes were dark and very large; though her face showed lines of weariness, her eyes danced with the pleasure of seeing him.

He commented, "You're good for a few other things."

Katni made a small sound of laughter, hastily stifled. She was looking him over. Her eyes were drawn to the long, barely healed scar down his right shoulder and side. "That sword-wound is beautiful," she said casually. "Looks like one of your bed-mates got mad at you."

Kor regarded her with quiet amusement. "My reward for playing with the wrong end of Alargor's sword."

Katni stood looking at Kor for a minute, then reached out to put both her hands on his chest. "You carry such scars, Kor my love. Inside and outside."

Seemingly changing the subject, Kor remarked simply, "I've missed you." He hesitated. "Do you bring good news?"

Her eyes gleamed as she smiled. "Not only news, but a warm burden too."

Some of the strain disappeared from Kor's face. He bent down to retrieve his tunic, and took Katni by the arm. "Where is she?"

She continued to grin. "Come with me."

The little girl staring out the window of the guest-room turned as she heard footsteps approaching. Looking at the strange sights was exciting, but she really wished her *Ama* would come back. As Katni came in the door, the child ran to her, arms outstretched. "*Ama!*" she squealed. Then, as she noticed the second figure enter, she fell silent and looked wonderingly up at the tall man.

Kor stepped forward and squatted down on his haunches. He seemed to want to take her in his arms, but refrained.

The youngling looked at him, wide-eyed. "Are you my *Akra*?" she asked.

Kor grinned. "Yes, little one."

She reached out hesitantly and touched his face. Kor, unable to bear it any longer, scooped her up in his arms. He stood up and held her high over his head, then clutched her to him. He glanced over at Katni, his face alight. "She's beautiful! She looks like you."

"But she has your eyes," said Katni.

Kor looked at his daughter and rubbed noses with her. She giggled. "*Akra*,"



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she said in delight. She tangled her fingers in his hair, and tugged at his curls.

The father winced, but said nothing. Without looking at Katni, he asked, "Would you like to stay with me, little one?"

His three-and-a-half-year-old daughter looked a little blank. She glanced uncertainly over at her mother. "*Ama* stay too?" she asked hopefully.

"If she will," Kor said gravely. Both of them gazed at Katni.

Katni took in a deep, unsteady breath. She avoided giving a full answer. "After the long journey, I'd like to stay and rest for a while." She couldn't meet Kor's gaze. "If, of course, the *Ormen* Alkarin will have me as a guest."

Kor's gaze remained fixed on her. He said softly, "If I had my way, I'd move you and the little one into my bedroom, and keep you captive forever."

Their daughter was looking from one to the other. She made a small inquiring noise in her throat. "Unngaah?"

Kor gave Katni a glance, indicating that he wasn't dropping the subject, merely postponing their discussion. He shifted his daughter to the crook of his left arm and gave her his full attention. "What's your name besides 'Little One'?"

"Katnil," answered the youngling.

His lips twitched in a smile. "Of course. 'Little Katni.' They had no other name to call her." He gave Katni a glance. "It's time she had a name of her own."

"It's your privilege to suggest one, Kor."

Kor looked down at his daughter. "I had a sister named Koshira," he said. "She was very dear to me. Would you like to be named for her?" The little one cocked her head and tried to puzzle out what he'd just said.

Katni flinched at Kor's use of the past tense. "I didn't know your sister had died, Kor," she said gently. "Yes, I would like to honor her."

"May I call you Koshira?" inquired Kor formally of the child.

She looked up at him, then pointed a finger at her chest. "Koshira?" she said wonderingly.

Kor stroked her hair gently. "Koshira," he murmured, and touched his lips to her forehead.

When he looked up again, his eyes were shining. "This is the best part of the end of the fighting," he said. "Many reunions, and time for new joys."

That evening, Kor and Katni held a small, very informal naming ceremony for their child. Little Koshira, who was enjoying herself immensely in her new surroundings, laughed and giggled through it, infecting her parents, for a short time at least, with her spontaneous joy.

After it was over, Kor told his daughter that she could explore the Rasethi Sarin, but that she shouldn't leave the building. Koshira, delighted, bounced off his lap and ran out of the room.

Kor looked after her with a smile of gladness, remarking, "There's one good thing come out of the revolution. I'm glad to see her so well and happy."

"We left her in good care," said Katni.

"And, of course, you visited her when you could," agreed Kor. "I had not that freedom," he added wistfully. "She doesn't even know me."

"But I've told her so much about you. And Umil Kosseren, who was like a father to her, would always tell her stories of her parents, and how important and exceptional they were." Katni grinned deprecatingly. "She knows that her father is the *Ormen*, and that her mother is the new leader of one of the largest domains on the Kilingarlan."

Kor smiled. He rose, and walked around the room they were in. It had just lately been refinished. It held little furniture as yet, just some chairs and one long, low table. Near to one of the council-rooms, it was to be used as a room for resting and thinking, for study and quiet contemplation.

Kor paced to a window and looked out at the westward sky, and at the lengthening shadows left in the wake of the setting sun. He opened the window, and then turned back to face the room. He perched on the window-ledge, gazing at Katni with an abstracted air.

"I was worried about you," he said finally. "How was it out there, among the planets of the Central Suns?"

"Bad," said Katni succinctly. She felt his questioning look, and went on. "About like it is here, on the Kilingarlan. We are at the turning point, the time just before dawn. We all know that war is over, but we haven't yet found the way to peace. There's much destruction under and around all of us, and we've only had time to begin clearing the mess; we've barely started to rebuild."

Kor nodded. "Our thoughts are the same. But my question was really more personal: did you have any trouble going to get Koshira and then bringing her back?"

"No, not really," Katni answered. "It was slow, mostly because I stopped often to give counsel or to spread the details of the revolution's end. I'm sorry I couldn't come any sooner."

"It's all right now," said Kor. "Seeing you and Koshira made the wait worthwhile."

Katni's smile was brief yet full, at his sincere gallantry. "Koshira was very glad to meet you at last. . . I'm sure she looks on you as if you were the Wargod himself."

"Aren't I?" commented Kor wryly. He grinned, but only for a moment; then his face resumed its intentness. He said, with just a hint of bitterness in his voice, "I'd wager she was even happier to see you. You are her *Ama*, and she knows



you best."

Katni rose and came slowly toward Kor. She held her hands together in front of her, right hand closing over the left. She stopped a meter from him and looked at him, almost searchingly. "What do you mean by your words, Kor?"

"I mean that I wish she were my daughter as much as she is yours," said Kor softly.

A silence fell between them. And in that space of time, the atmosphere changed. The mood was shifting, neither quite knew how, to rising tension.

Katni was aware of the danger, and chose her words carefully. "After the Council's decision naming you *Ormen*, you and I met and talked. You asked me then if I would go and fetch Koshira."

"Yes," interjected Kor.

Katni spoke again before he could go on. She tried to keep her voice free of accusation. "We never have decided on Koshira's future, Kor. Do you mean to do that now?"

"I've been suggesting that ever since you arrived," Kor said, perhaps more sharply than he'd intended.

"And what happened to your self-avowed directness?" retorted Katni irritably. She checked herself, grimacing. "*Ashavanau* Maraku, I've done what I was trying to avoid. Kor. . . Kor, my love, I don't want to get into a fight. I'm tired of battle."

"So am I," Kor remarked, unnecessarily. "But we must talk, Katni." He paused to take a steadying breath. "Now I will be frank: we both assumed that our daughter would go with you. . . if you decided to leave me. I will put the question to you directly: do you leave, Katni, or stay? And what of Koshira?"

Katni's hands twisted together. She looked at him unhappily. "My domain is in ruins. . . most of my people have died. My family needs a leader."

"At least you have a family," said Kor bitterly.

She stared at him. There it was, the point of conflict revealed. The mood of friction between them had grown and thickened into something close to anger. Yet, Katni still fought against going deeper into that web of frustration. She said calmly and gently, "I have no desire to start comparing woes, Kor. And, I think that if we go on, we will only add to them."

Kor stared at Katni. Something within him was pushing, willing him to go on, no matter what the outcome. But, as he gazed at her, seeing her weariness, recognizing his own mood's blackness, he could not. A few angry words, and their carefully built trust and love would be betrayed.

Kor came away from the window. He took her hands and covered them with his. Katni could feel the tension running in him, but she could also feel him fighting it down. "You're right, of course," he said tiredly. "I yearn for a resolution, and yet. . . yet it seems I cannot reach one without causing pain."

Katni could feel him turning his anger against himself, and her features softened in empathy for him. She gently pulled her right hand free, and touched two fingers to his lips. "Don't trouble yourself, my lord and love. We will reach a resolution." She tried to smile. "But we should not be arguing, Kor; we should be celebrating. We have Koshira to rejoice in, and the victorious end to the revolution, and our reunion."

Kor let himself be led by her words: they held promise, and a glimpse of happiness. There was still much trouble in him, but for the time being he locked it away.

With an effort, he smiled and seemed to shrug his turmoil away. He made a formal, almost courtly gesture. "Will you come to my bed, Katni?"

She gave him a long look, and her mouth curved into a slow grin. "I've never slept in an *Ormen's* bed before," she said lightly. "Is it truly as wide as the river Alruen?"

"Bigger," said Kor with a straight face. "I had a new one created for my tastes."

"Then it's probably lumpy with little, sharp, protruding rocks," she muttered. As Kor gave her an astonished look, she added snidely, "Well, what else did we get to sleep on during the revolution? Sand, or maybe knife-grass."

He laughed. "I think I can provide better than that." He put his right arm around her and squeezed her hard.

"I see that your shoulder wound no longer troubles you," she remarked.

They went out the door and started walking leisurely down the hall. Kor gave her a sidelong look, and grinned. "Well. . . I do try to avoid strenuous exercise."

Katni gave him a look. They reached the *Ormen's* private rooms, and Kor pushed open the door. "Well, Kor, I wouldn't want you to over-exert yourself. Perhaps we'd better not---"

Kor stopped on the threshold to stare at her. "Shut up," he said peremptorily, "or I'll drag you to my bed by the hair."

"Barbarian," declared Katni cheerfully. "Just because you conquered the Kilingarlan, doesn't mean I'll let you conquer me."

Kor pulled Katni inside the door, kicked it shut, and grabbed her forcefully. "Stop talking so much, wench, and come here." They held each other tightly, and all conversation ceased.

\* \* \*

They turned to each other out of need and love, not looking for rest or comfort. Now that the war was over and they were once again united, they rejoiced in triumph. They shared as they had after escaping from Salao, sharing victory of life beyond all hope.

Katni lay against Kor, savoring their closeness. Enjoying the feel of his warm skin, she let her hand caress his chest and neck. "*Ormen* Alkarin," she said softly, thoughtfully.

The light of the two moons gave the room a silvery, pearly hue. Kor, thinking she was calling him, turned to her. Katni shook her head at his inquiring look. "I was considering your new name, Kor. What is it like to win the highest honor?"

"It fills me with pride and arrogance," remarked Kor frankly. He sat up, straightened out his pillow and their soft *sivi*-fur blanket, and leaned back, hands clasped behind his head. "But then I think of the burdens of that highest honor, and I am suddenly humbled."

"Are you afraid? Of the *Ormen*'s power and responsibility, I mean?"

Kor regarded her directly. "Yes, truthfully, I am. I have no doubt of my worth as a strategist; the revolution proved that. But to lead, in times of peace and growth, prosperity and poverty, success and failure. . ." He paused. "That I don't know yet."

"You could certainly do better than Alargor," said Katni dryly.

Kor, surprisingly, shook his head. "I can't say that. I gained a lot of respect for him during our fight. And, after his death, I considered his history. In many ways, he was a strong and competent leader."

"Kor, you don't sound like yourself at all. You must be---"

Kor cut her off. "Hatred is like a black cavern. I couldn't see Alargor until I'd stopped hating him."

"You sound as though you've forgotten his dishonor and corruption, or all his cruelties! What about your own false trial? What about Salao?"

"I haven't forgotten," said Kor softly. He stayed silent for a moment, eyes fixed on a far distance. He returned to himself with an effort. "Know your enemy, Katni. Understand his strengths as well as his weaknesses."

Katni was looking at him with a strange expression--an air of respect and tenderness. "Kor, if you can change your feelings for one such as Alargor, then I think you can treat this *Ormenel* fairly."

Kor tried to match her smile of reassurance, but could not. "Perhaps, but my fear is deep--I don't even know how to admit how deep it is. I have killed thousands; death becomes natural, unforced, even welcome. I killed all of Alargor's children and other close relations lest they be a danger to my reign. That was not honorable, but it was necessary."

Katni looked a little puzzled. "Winning a revolution calls for strength and power above all things. . . sometimes even before honor."

"I know, and I can say that my aims were honorable. . ." Kor sighed. "But how do I stop the killing now? I am a warrior; my blood quickens at a fight; my hands clench, and reach for knife or sword; my blood-temper rises, and does not

cool until the battle is won."

Katni didn't answer him. She couldn't, for she, too, felt an emptiness, now that the fighting was done. After a little while, she turned over, and drifted into sleep.

Kor lay awake for some time. He thought about the last few months; the youngest days of the new *Ormenel*. He had always wanted the *Ormen*'s status; it had been the goal of all his hopes during the revolution. At the end of the fighting, though, he had waited for the Council's decision, not wanting to seize power lest all the *Ormenel* fear and hate him as an usurper. The power had to come to him as a gift from his warriors, and he could say that he accepted the burden at their command.

Had he not been named *Ormen*. . . Alkarin didn't allow himself much thought on so painful an idea. He probably would have taken his life, rather than bow again to another's leadership.

He lay, stiff and uncomfortable, while beside him Katni slept undisturbed. He envied her.

He remembered another night of pain, his first night in the *Ormen*'s palace. Wounded by Alargor's sword, weak from blood-loss, he had been helped by his friends to Alargor's bed. Two days of illness had followed: a bitter end to his triumph over Alargor and the *Ormenel*. The revolution's end seemed fraught with turmoil; he was not allowed to rest; the fight still went on. How long, Kor wondered, before he could make his dreams real?

Finally, his troubled mind let his body relax into sleep.

\* \* \*

When Kor awoke the next morning, just before dawn, he was dimly aware of being unable to move. He opened his eyes and realized that Katni was laying all over him, arm across his chest, head in the hollow of his left shoulder, one leg pinning his feet.

As he tried to pull free, Katni, too, woke up, and smiled at him sleepily. "Ummmh. . . *sinish*, my love."

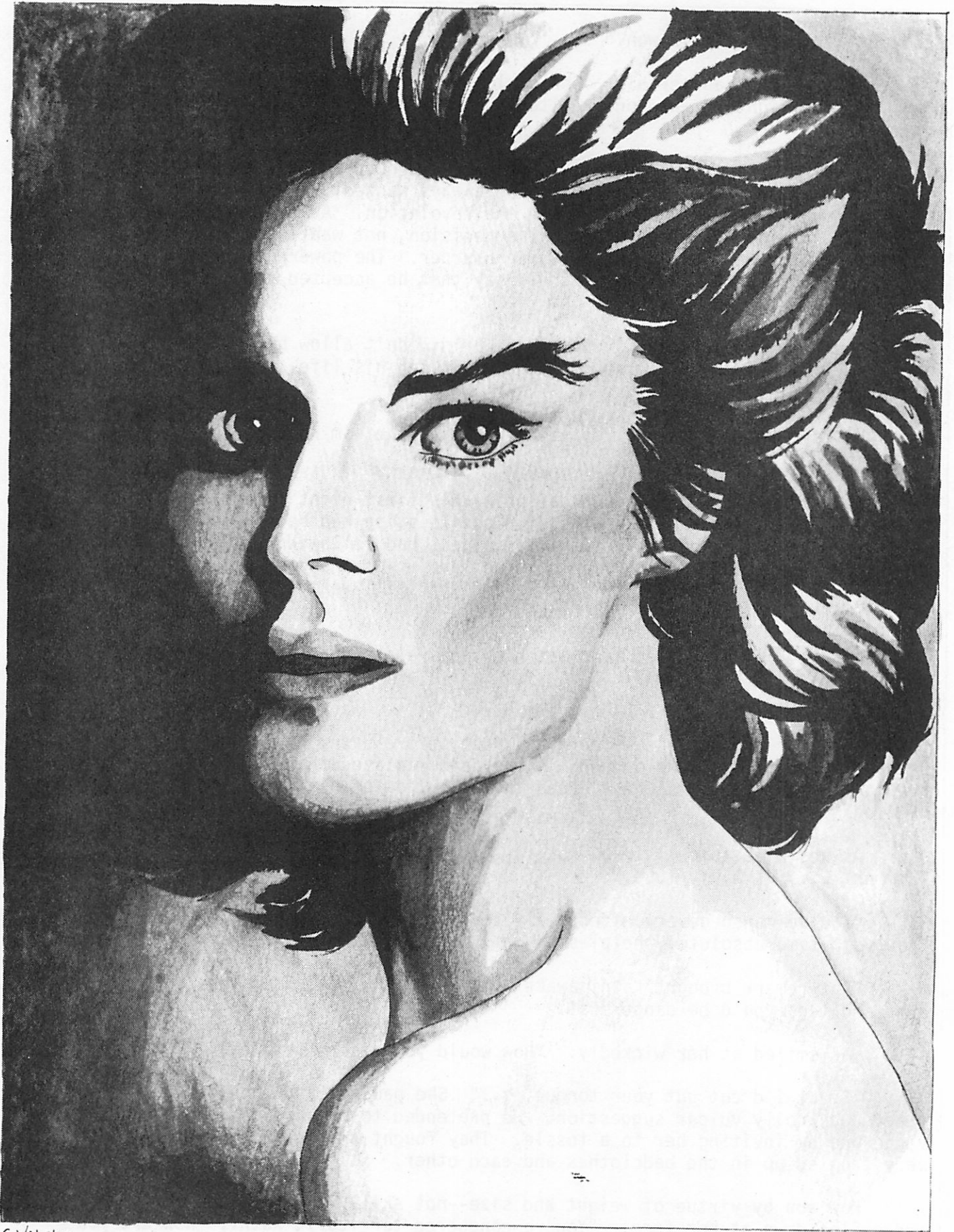
"You've managed very effectively to immobilize me," he said reprovingly. "You've got me absolutely helpless."

That remark brought Katni awake with a jolt. "You? Helpless? Even with no arms and legs you'd be dangerous!"

Kor smiled at her wickedly. "How would you disarm me then?"

"First I'd cut out your tongue. . ." She paused, and then made an indiscreet and wholly vulgar suggestion. He pretended to be shocked, and took his vengeance by inviting her to a tussle. They fought amiably for a while, getting very tangled up in the bedclothes and each other.

Kor won by virtue of weight and size--not skill. He lay half across her and smiled down at her face. "You're conquered territory, Katni. Now are you



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going to stay here with me?"

Her laughter disappeared as she took in a sharp breath. "That's not fair," she said, annoyed and hurt.

"I want you to stay with me, Katni. I offer you half the *OrmeneL*."

"Now that you've got it, I don't think you'd be able to give any of it up, Kor Alkarin!"

Kor frowned down at her, but without anger or rancor. He asked, in a very quiet voice, "Why won't you stay, Katni?"

"Kor, we turned to each other for comfort on Salao. We still do. But soon, very soon, both of us are going to recover from the war's sufferings. And then we're going to start fighting."

Kor's look held an unspoken question. She reached out with one hand to finger and caress the fur on his dark chest. "Look at us," she said. "Two arrogant, strong, proud leaders. You have your way of commanding, and I have mine. They conflict. My love, do I have to point out what happens when we disagree over decisions?"

Reluctantly, he shook his head. "I suppose I hold on too tightly to the things I love," he said reflectively, unwillingly.

"Yes, you do."

He looked at her sharply, a little irritated by her quick agreement. She was not smiling.

Seeing him so uncertain made Katni search for a way to reinforce her words. She commented, "Every time we worked together during the revolution, Kor, we fought. Only our common purpose kept us from becoming enemies."

"But I have all I want now," Kor said slowly.

"I don't," replied Katni vehemently.

Kor stared at her. "I have already offered you all you could want in the *OrmeneL*."

"Have you?"

Kor could only look at her, helplessly.

"You've gained what you fought for," she went on, with some urgency in her voice, "although Maraku knows what you're going to do with the *OrmeneL* now that you've got it. I'm still fighting, Kor; fighting for my family and domain and a better future."

"Do you forget that I fight for the same things?" he asked, almost harshly.

Katni didn't pay any attention to him. She said softly, "All I want is to go home, back to *krasaia* Koerin, and start working."

Kor turned on his side and buried his face in the pillow. Katni felt most of her anger melt. Tentatively she touched her hand to his shoulder, and stroked the warm skin gently.

When Kor finally lifted his head, Katni saw the haunted look in his eyes that she'd come to know too well, on Salao and during the revolution. Kor reached for her hands, and held them against his chest. "There's no 'going home' for me," he said, his eyes intent upon hers. "I have a young son who has come of age as an adult before most do, and I fear I don't know him at all. Too many bonds have been broken. . ."

Kor gripped Katni's hands tightly, and a rush of words that came from deep within welled out. "I have had to set aside the name and status I was born to. My eldest son refuses to recognize me--I may never be able to see my birthhome again, as he will not let me enter Domain Kothir anymore. I have killed my father . . ." Kor's eyes were dark with pain. "Sometimes I wonder if I dare begin again, lest grief and trouble find me once more."

Katni pulled Kor close against her, knowing that there was nothing she could say, nothing she could do. She let him bury his face in her hair and hold on to her blindly. In his strength, Kor's troubles were of a force and savagery she couldn't begin to share.

They were wordless for several long minutes. Kor's breathing was ragged; his hands moved on her aimlessly. He didn't seem aware of any sensation, only the feelings of his own body and heart.

He pulled away from her slightly. Some of his calm had returned; he spoke plaintively with a touch of bitterness. "In a war, each man carries his own wounds. But I--as leader--have my own wounds, and everyone else's, to bear. Also. . . it is strange to think that Alkarin, famed for making allies in the revolution, has very few real friends."

Katni felt as if he'd struck her in the face. But she could feel no heat, only sorrow, that things should have come to this. "I don't mean to add to your hurts, Kor--and I hope that we will always be close. I don't want to lose your friendship, even though I won't be near. . ."

Her voice trailed off, as she realized he wasn't listening. There was a bitter look on his face that instantly took her back five years to a night of torment on Salao. One night, after he'd been beaten and abused, no one, no fellow prisoner, would move to help him. When Katni had returned from the mines, and had learned of his need, she'd immediately gone to him. That night she had heard more of pain and tortured thought than she'd ever come to know before.

Katni placed her hand on the side of his face, and caressed his forehead and temple. Her voice was very gentle. "Kor my love, you know we have no choice in this. You could no sooner give up your place as *Ormen* than I could as leader of my domain."

Kor's head was bowed. He nodded reluctantly. "I know."

Katni realized that Kor was feeling only the pain and hardship. Then she knew suddenly what she could do to ease his loss. "Kor. . . look at me." Kor slowly raised his head. She smiled at him. "Even though I must leave, I'll give

you something of ours, a symbol of the revolution and all we went through. I give you our daughter Koshira to raise as your own."

The sharp breath he took seemed to send a shudder through him. His hands gripped her shoulders. "I had hoped she would grow up here with us both to teach her. . . you would leave her here with me alone?"

Katni touched her first two fingers to Kor's forehead in a rare gesture of love and shared dependence. "I would," she said simply.

Her depth of feeling was easily read. Kor was moved by her gesture; a selfless gift that he hardly deserved. His eyes searched hers; his were full of questions and doubt. Her expression answered his questions: she was calm, and determined, and utterly fearless.

"I will not even attempt to thank you with words," he whispered. He relaxed his grip on her shoulders, and encircled her with his arms. They drew close together for warmth and comfort. "Just let me repay your sacrifice," he said. "Let me give you another child."

She gripped him fiercely, and clutched him to her as she had that day they won their escape from Salao. When she spoke, her voice was throaty, and full of raw love. "Thank you. Only you could make so princely an offer, and then keep to it. A bond forever between us, and between our two domains. . . what's more, a new life to weigh against the burden of all those dead."

"In the spring, come back to me, and I will give you my blood," he said formally, sincerely, with a yearning expression on his face that made him seem twenty years younger.

She smiled at his look. She caressed him, and felt him respond, like a finely tuned instrument, to her touch. "I will certainly come back in the spring," she replied. "And may it be a bright and glorious Renewal for all the *Ormenel*."

"Life-Mother Kisu willing," he said, a laugh in his voice. Katni glanced at him, and saw with relief that he had recovered much of his strength.

Kor sat up. He propped up his pillow and leaned against the carved headboard of the great bed. He had caught Katni's glance, and knew what its quick scrutiny meant. "I should be angry at you," he said, a wry note in his voice, "for deserting me in time of need. Do you know what Alkarin does to deserters?" He looked at her. She met his fierce gaze with a smile and said nothing.

He went on, more seriously now. "But how can I be angry? You have held me, in comfort and selfless love, and you have given me a daughter. What can I do but wish you well, and hope that your future is joyful?"

"Call me here if there is trouble," said Katni. "Call me when you want me, and I will come. After all, how otherwise can I keep watch on our growing daughter?"

Kor tried to smile, but there was nothing in him that could make him happy about her leaving. "I'll visit you in *krasaia* Koerin, when I can," he said, feeling exactly like a host exchanging meaningless courtesies with a guest. "But, for a long while, my place will be here, in the Rasethi Sarin. . ."



"I know," Katni said quietly. She pushed away the blanket and got up. While they talked, the sun had risen, and was now creeping in the east windows. She picked up her clothes and began to dress.

Kor, still lying in bed, watched her with a gaze that was almost painfully intense. There was nothing left to say; they both knew it.

In several minutes, after she'd finished dressing, he got up stiffly and went to her. And so it ended like so many other recent meetings had ended: two comrades, warriors-in-arms, embracing, saluting each other and wishing each other a fond farewell. One more fighter taking leave of her commander. The troop had broken, the last links were severed; all the soldiers had laid down their weapons and were headed homeward.

Now, only the commander remained--standing lonely, bereft of all companions, knowing that if he was to start again, he would have to do it by himself.

Arrogance had led Kor to his high rank, and pride would carry him on. He hoped that he would find the strength, and the honor, to lead the *OrmeneL* out of sorrow to harmony.

All my thoughts are lined with shadows;  
 all my dreams are dark with pain;  
 as I stare into the fire  
 wondering what I have to gain.  
 And yet I must keep on striving,  
 for all my heart holds right;  
 though the Challenge last forever,  
 I cannot renounce my fight.

Will the day ever come for me to know  
 time to rest and to watch my children grow?  
 Will the dawn ever bring a day for me  
 to know honor and peace and to be free?

Forsaking all tradition,  
 abandoning my name;  
 I must fight to give some meaning  
 to the status I now claim.  
 But I know that as I've wandered,  
 I have shared my heart's desire,  
 with a people seeking honor,  
 and a cause alive with fire.

Will the day ever come for me to know  
 time to rest and to watch my children grow?  
 Will the dawn ever bring a day for me  
 to know honor and peace and to be free?

Searching for an answer  
 to all our father's wrongs;  
 we try to win a battle  
 against an enemy strong.

I lead a band of fighters  
with a will as keen as the sword;  
we strive for a new meaning  
to honor, law and word.

Will the day ever come for me to know  
time to rest and to watch my children grow?  
Will the dawn ever bring a day for me  
to know honor and peace and to be free?

We have won the hardest battle;  
we have seen the brightest flame;  
we have come home to a new world  
in honor, hope and fame.  
But with us comes destruction,  
and years of sad refrain;  
how can we claim victory  
in a world yet filled with pain?

Will the day ever come for me to know  
time to rest and to watch my children grow?  
Will the dawn ever bring a day for me  
to know honor and peace and to be free?

A fortress reaches upward,  
with its ancient walls of stone;  
and a river flows around it,  
keeping me apart, alone.  
But it's time now to build bridges,  
leading out and leading in,  
as we look into the future  
for a way to start again.

Will the day ever come for me to know  
time to rest and to watch my children grow?  
Will the dawn ever bring a day for me  
to know honor and peace and to be free?

# AND TRIBUTE GIVEN

by Fern Marder and Carol Walske

Alkarin the warlord was not finding peace to his liking. As the *OrmeneL* recovered from war, reverting to its traditional systems of communication, politics, and bureaucracy, Alkarin grew increasingly dissatisfied.

"What do you think the revolution was for?" he demanded angrily of a subordinate one day. "Merely to put a new group of people in power? Get out of my way; you're standing in the way of progress!"

Someone handed him a sheaf of papers--'Garbage,' Kor thought as he riffled through them. He held up the pile. "I'll keep these till winter," he said acidly, "then I'll get some use out of them--by burning them in my fireplace!"

He fought his way through tangles of law and stormed through eddies of political turbulence. Leaders of the civil government came to fear Alkarin the new *Ormen* as much as his military enemies had feared him as warlord. It came as a shock to everyone to realize that the revolution was, in fact, not over; Alkarin was merely carrying his battle onto different grounds.

But the greatest continuing battle was going on within Kor. Even the best days were touched, for him, with melancholy, as he was faced with constant reminders of the price of his war. He looked at his new domain and thought on all those who had no domain at all to turn to; he played with his children and thought on all those children whose parents had not returned from battle; he lay restless on his bed and thought of all those who slept forever.

Finally, one morning he strode into a meeting room to which he had summoned his closest advisors and announced: "I will be leaving the Rasethi Sarin for a while. It's Girithron, the second month of spring, the time of the *Shemanka*." A few of the listeners shifted uneasily in their chairs. Kor went on strongly, and all there were reminded of the thousand war-councils the warlord had commanded.

"My--ah--predecessor considered himself above the law. If he killed, or was responsible for a death, he did not go to the family of the one who died to make reparation. But I have six years of *Shemanka* to pay. There is hardly a family in the *OrmeneL* that did not lose a life to the revolution. I must go to them." Kor paused, watching the growing concern and chagrin on the faces before him. "And, as is custom, I will go alone."

Clamor ensued as everyone simultaneously voiced their objections and dismay. "There are hundreds of people out there just waiting for a chance to kill you, Kor---" "No one man is responsible for those who die in a war!"

Kor waited, hardly listening. His decision was made. He spoke again, with heat. "I was the Warlord, I am now *Ormen*--the responsibility and the obligations are mine and mine alone. By foot, astride *maksat*, by windsailer and riverfloat, I will go among the domains of the Kilingarlan and pay my debts. I will go slowly, a few domains each journey, so as not to be absent from the Rasethi Sarin for too long--but I will visit them all even if it takes me the rest of my life to do it."

"My lord *Ormen*, you're insane!"

Kor hit the table with his fist. "Insane enough to start a revolution in the *Ormenel*! Insane enough to Challenge Alargor to a war of honor! Or have you forgotten what started all of this? I must go out and come to know the people of the *Ormenel*. If I am to restore honor to the *Ormenel*, I must also restore our people's pride and respect for the *Ormenel*. And for the *Ormen*."

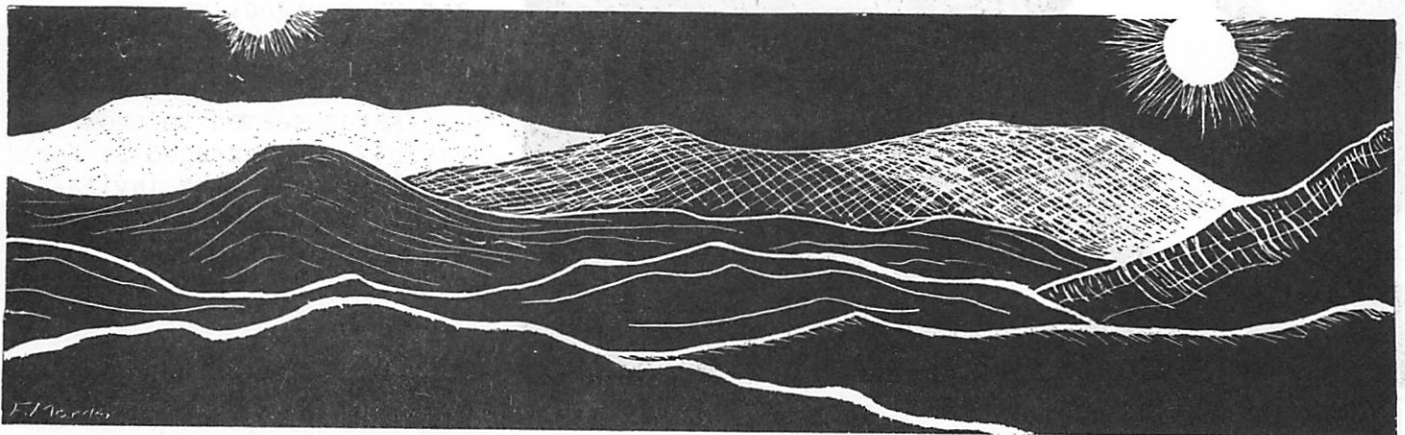
"I must show them that Alkarin is not just a name, but a man who cares about the *Ormenel* and all those who share in its future."

There was little to be said in argument, since the *Ormen*'s mind was so firmly set. In truth, many of the councillors present were glad to see the change in Kor, the return to the warlord they knew so well. The power was his, and he was wielding it well and strongly for the honor of the *Ormenel*.

Kor was glad of the chance to travel, to become reacquainted with the lands and people of the Kilingarlan. He had been absent from his homeworld for nearly seven years--a year and a half spent on Salao, then the long revolution--and so much had changed that he felt like a stranger to his homeland.

Now, the Kilingarlan was his to revel in. He saw the floating city of Kalesh, a town that had rivers for roadways and lakes for gardens and squares. Through the desert dwellings of Samarsa, terraces and towers and wide chambers carved into cliffs of red sandstone. The Kilingarlan was a world of rich and varied beauty.

The days held thousands of people, and a million moments of action. So much that was new and different that the eyes forgot to see, the mind forgot to wonder. And the emotions that Kor struggled with, surrendered to, or merely ignored, they were like a blazing, swirling mass of brightly colored leaves.



His face impassive, Kor walked up to the Watcher who was standing at the ferry to the island of Keserek. "Will you carry me across?" he asked. "I am on *Shemanka* to the *Emis* of Domain Kothir."

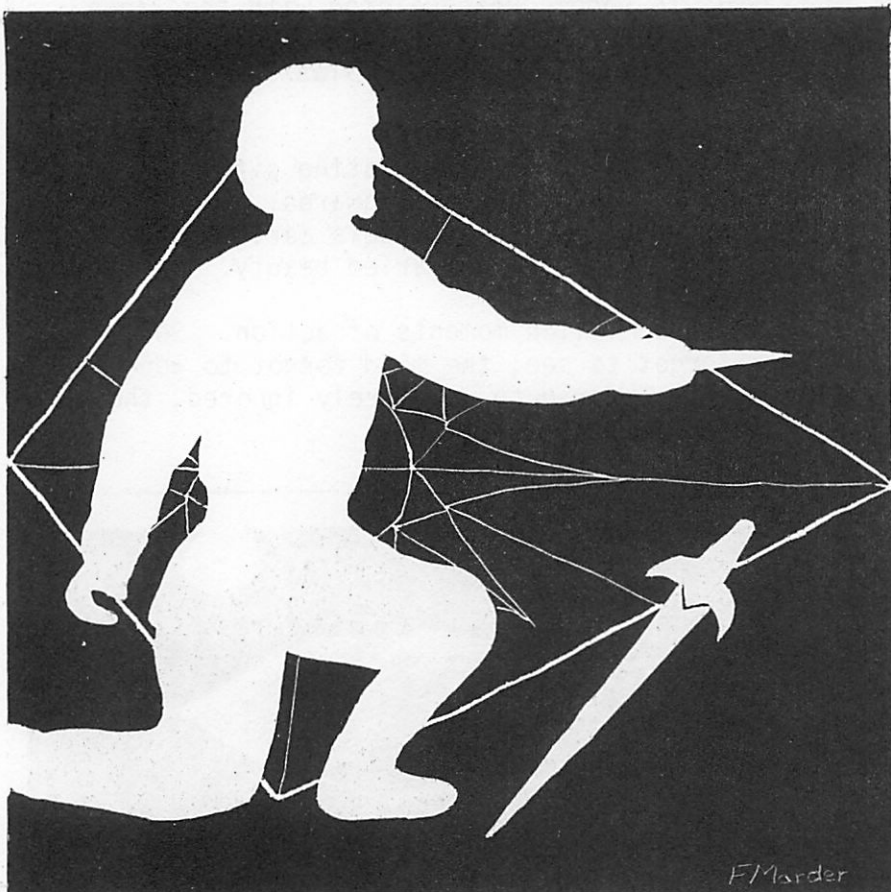
The Watcher bowed civilly. They both got into a flat-bottomed boat, and the ferryman rowed across to one of the small bays at the north of the isle. Both of them kept silence; Kor was too preoccupied with what lay ahead and the beauty of his birth-home to speak.

As Kor stepped out of the boat onto the rocky shoal, the Watcher looked at him sidelong. Finally, his curiosity got the better of his courtesy. "Excuse me. . . do I know you?"

"Possibly," commented Kor, off-handedly. "I was once Kor Kothir." Then, as the Watcher stared in wonder, Kor gave a brief, lopsided smile, and strode on up the beach.

When Karan Kothir, *Emis* of Domain Kothir, saw who had come on *Shemanka*, his face hardened and his eyes went cold black. "Perhaps I didn't make myself clear to you the last time we met," he began immediately as Kor approached. "I do not welcome you to this *krasaia*; I don't want you here, I don't need you here."

The pilgrim on *Shemanka* bowed, placing his sword and knife on the sleek wood floor, noticing as he did so Karan's suede boots and fine long robe. Kor straightened; at his full height; his gaze met Karan's exactly. "I wish to bring news of a death," he said softly, "a death of one close to you."



"Oh, stop it!" exclaimed Karan. He put his hands on his hips and his black eyes began to blaze. "You can drop the ritual. I know what you've come here for, and it isn't just to dutifully pay *Shemanka*!"

It struck Kor, as he looked at Karan, how much like himself his son was. "I have killed Kesan Kothir, former *Emis* of the domain and your grandsire, in Challenge."

Karan seemed to grow visibly more enraged as Kor calmly avoided the invitations to a fight. His hands dropped to his sides and curled into

fists. "Chaos, that's your father you're talking about!" he cried. "Are you going to make the circle complete and kill your first-born too?"

Kor closed his eyes for a brief moment, to take himself away from Karan's fury and his own. When he spoke again, his voice was still even, but there was now an edge to his words. "I come to pay death-price. What do you ask?"

"Just get out," snapped Karan. "You've killed thousands recklessly and without conscience, and now you hope to make easy reparation. But nothing will take away the war, Deathlord Alkarin, and nothing will ever change you!" An expression of gasping pain took over his face, and he lifted his head back and wailed, "Oh, I wish I could kill my father!"

For Kor, it seemed as if the world around him suddenly swayed; the air was dizzily rushing in through the windows of the room. "What stops you?" he asked, very softly.

"Fear of what your vengeful fanatics would do to me!"

Kor flinched at Karan's outburst. He was intent and grave and very alert. "Why do you want to kill me?" he asked quietly. "What wrong have I done you, *Emis Kothir*?"

Karan uttered an abrupt sound of scorn and distaste. Full of tense movement, he turned away. When Karan turned back to face his father again, his features were more controlled. "You haven't made me your heir," he said bitterly.

"I cannot," Kor retorted swiftly. "You don't merit it."

Karan's eyes narrowed, and he became a creature of malevolent energy again, longing to unleash violence on someone, anyone. "It's your own fault!" he cried. "I got more time, and lessons, and love from Grandfather Kesan than I ever did from you!"

Kor's proud stature seemed to sag as he inwardly acknowledged defeat. This meeting was as bad as his last one with Kesan, just as twisted and hopeless.

With a long inward breath of frustration, Kor returned to his quest. "I have killed Kesan Kothir in Challenge," he said again, wearily. "What would satisfy you, *Emis Kothir*?"

"Just leave me alone! And never come back to this *krasaia*!"

Kor bowed his head in the face of the ultimatum. He bent, picked up his weapons, and returned them to their sheaths.

"You may not believe me, *Emis Kothir*," said Kor heavily, "but I grieve. More than you'll ever know."

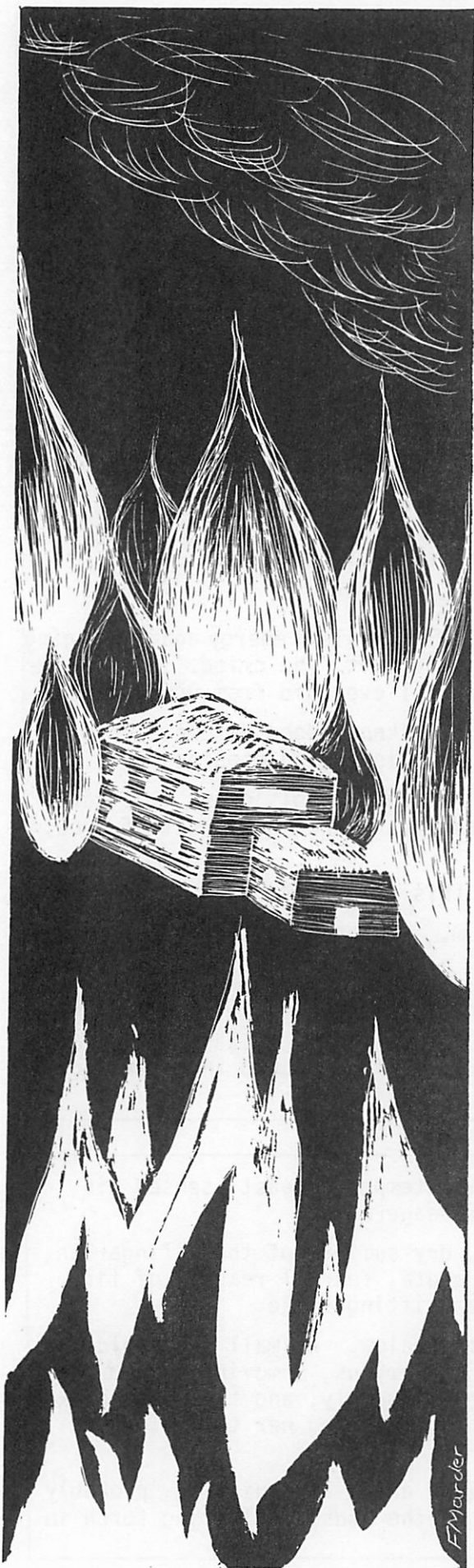
Then, as Karan stared at him uncomprehendingly, his face locked in anger, Kor silently turned and walked out.

Kor sniffed the air. Smoke. His *maksat*, a high-tempered beast, sensed his sudden tension; her ears went back and she pranced in eagerness.

Any killing who lived near a forest in the hot, dry summers of the Kilingarlan, and who had survived a summer of firestorms, had an acute, fearful respect of fire. Kor urged his mount forward, in the direction of the drifting smoke.

They cantered up over a rise and saw the burning below. A small household, nestled in the arms of a hill. Kor's *maksat* turned to nervous, unmoving iron at sight and smell of the fire; Kor cajoled and dug in his heels sharply, and the beast broke into a hard run. With hands and body he controlled her, pulling her to a plunging stop in front of the main building of the domain.

It looked as though a stable was already burning, and a low building, probably used for storage. As Kor dismounted, a man ran out of the house, a flaring torch in



hand, and threw the torch up onto the wood-thatched roof.

Kor leaped forward and grabbed the man. "What are you doing?" he shouted angrily.

The killing, just as angrily, threw off Kor's hands. "Mind your own business," he retorted,

"I will not! Are you mad? Where are the members of this household?"

The man drew himself up and inclined his head with a kind of bleak, self-mocking pride. "I am--no, I was a member of this household. Now go away and let me finish destroying it."

As Kor looked around in perplexed anger, he noticed that precautions had been taken against the fire's spread: a fire-break dug here, and a stand of trees felled over beyond the stable. . . if it was madness, it was carefully planned madness.

The killing had stepped back and was staring up at the two-level dwelling. The roof had caught, and flames could be seen inside.

There was something Kor had seen in the homesteader's eyes that hurt. "Why are you doing this?" Kor asked, in a kind of cry.

When the man looked at him again, Kor saw what it was--an expression of shuttered despair, of blind single-mindedness. "Because all of my household are dead," said the killing shortly. "Nineteen of us lived here. Every single one besides me taken by that war."

Kor flinched at the words 'that war,' but the other didn't notice. He was lost in his own thoughts.

"I survived--to come back to this. I had to sell the *maksete* because there was no one to take care of them. Same for our livestock." He looked around with an empty gaze. "My father always said this was good grazing land.

"I couldn't bear it here. I never knew loneliness could be so---so noisy and crowded." He spread out his hands toward the burning house. "This is my memorial to the dead. Let the domain die with them."

Kor watched the house steadily burn. The little wind there was took the black choking

smoke away. It was an odd scene, the two kilingau standing in a dusty clearing, looking at fires consuming the small domain.

Kor swallowed hard, but the lump of dismay and futility remained stuck in his throat. He knew better than to offer up platitudes, and urge the man to rebuild the domain by himself. "Is there some way I may help?" he asked quietly.

The homesteader turned accusing eyes on Kor. "What could you do?"

There were times when declaring his status gave Kor cause for great pride, but this wasn't one of those times. "I owe you for those eighteen deaths, I think," he said. "I am Kor Alkarin--and the creator of 'that war.'"

The man forgot his troubles momentarily, as he stared at Kor in silent astonishment. He said eventually, in a strained voice, "I don't understand."

"I am on *Shemanka* to the people of the Kilingarlan," said Kor. "I was traveling by when I happened to smell the smoke of the burning. I thought to come help put out the blaze, but instead I found you."

The man was looking Kor up and down, wonderingly, as if trying to match his image of Alkarin the Glorious with this plain-dressed, travel-dusty wanderer. "My kin died for you," he murmured. "I fought for you."

"And I owe you a debt of those lives. What were you going to do after finishing your. . . deed here?"

The man shrugged, still watching Kor in unbelief. "What place is there for one man to go? The cities."

"You were part of a household once," Kor said.

"Second son," interjected the homesteader grimly.

"Would you be willing to start over?"

The homesteader made a bitter gesture. "But there's no one left alive here!" he exclaimed. "Why do you taunt me?"

Kor felt the hurt return. "Please, let me finish," he pleaded. "The war left many without kin. . . children without parents, elders without homes, lonely lovers. I just left a camp of refugees, not one of whom was related to any other. Would you be willing to help create a domain of the homeless? To build a family, and then, eventually, come back here to settle on your lands?"

The homesteader seemed struck dumb with amazement. His features showed the change in him: from thoughts of death and hopelessness to wonder and hope. "I never thought of anything but destruction," he murmured. He looked around, as if trying to envision the domain once again busy with people.

"Don't regret what you've done," said Kor softly. "It was a proper memorial."

"I couldn't live here among all those memories," said the man. "But maybe someday. . . yes, someday I would want to come back." He looked up to Kor hesitantly. "A new *krasaia*?"

"Do you have the will and courage to try it?"



"I--I think so." All of a sudden the man seemed nervous of Kor; he ducked his head and shifted his feet. "I am sorry, *Ormen* Alkarin, for being so rude. . ."

Kor knew that, if the homesteader was worrying about courtesy, then he was a long way on the road to emotional recovery. "Forget it," he said.

The man went on, in a voice that seemed to be afraid of itself. "It really was a revolution for honor and change," he said uncertainly. "Thank you, my lord!"

"Let me go catch my *maksat*," said Kor. He looked around, and saw his beast not far away, her nose buried in a tall patch of flowering grass. Apparently food was an even stronger motivation than fire. He walked over to her, took the reins to pull her head up, and mounted.

The man followed him, and stood staring up at Kor. 'This isn't happening,' his eyes seemed to say.

"I'll send word of you to the Rasethi Sarin," said Kor. "Make your way to one of the nearby towns. Someone will contact you soon, I should think. . . then you'll be able to find friends and companions in plenty. I wish you good luck."

"I don't know what to say," said the homesteader. "A thousand thanks to begin with, I guess."

Kor smiled. He took the man's name, called a farewell, and urged his *maksat* into a trot.

Kor found the *Emi's* Keorl standing outside the east walls of his domain, staring at workers on a scaffolding as they labored to fill in a breach.

"A fine morning," said Kor, coming up behind him.

Karth's head turned. He stared. "What are you doing here?" he asked, almost belligerently.

Kor's response was quiet. "Do I get no welcome here, then?"

Karth frowned, and reached out to grasp his friend by the shoulder. "Of course you're welcome," he answered. There was a smile in his grey eyes. "I'm not going to let such a small thing as your being the *Ormen*, and me not, stand between us."

Kor's eyes widened at Karth's candor, and he smiled, although somewhat wryly. "Thank you."

Karth began to walk slowly away from the construction; Kor followed. Karth took a path that ran completely around the ringwall enclosing the great domain.

"You'll excuse me if I don't call you 'Lord Alkarin,'" remarked Karth sardonically. "But what brings you here, Kor?"

"There's no need for titles between us," replied Kor. "We know who we are." He paused on the steadily rising path to look out. Beyond the path were cliffs tumbling to a deep valley. Below, he could see bits of the main road as it wound back and forth up the mountain to the high domain.

"I have come on *Shemanka*, Karth."

Beside him, Karth shifted his stance and gave Kor a peculiar look. "*Shemanka?*" he repeated. "That's no way to celebrate your first spring as the *Ormen*."

"I am on my way to visit as many of the Three Thousand *Krasai'in* as I can manage," said Kor. "To many of those domains I owe death-debt."

"A pilgrimage of death," said Karth softly. He moved on a little ways, and Kor followed slowly. Karth sat down on the redlichen seamed face of a boulder. Kor thrust his hands into the deep pockets of his traveling cloak and stood nearby.

Karth was looking out over the valley. He gestured. "Look--birds circling. Too far away to tell what they are."

Kor looked at the dark specks soaring above a hill. "Circling over a kill, maybe,"

"Do the birds of prey bother to go on *Shemanka*, Kor?"

Kor frowned at the simile. "They hunt for food," he said sharply. "I have no such excuse. You don't believe I should pay for the killing I did during the revolution?"

"Death is inevitable in war," commented Karth.

"That's no justification." Kor's voice rose, and his expression changed to anger. "As a hunter, I give respect and thanks to every animal I kill. I owe the same respect for all *kitani*--kilingau and aliens."

"I'd like to see you go on *Shemanka* for the killing of an Arkishen," said Karth dryly. "They'd probably toss you to a brooding as an appetizer."

"By Maraku's Fire, will you show some respect for my words?" Kor roared.

Karth lowered both eyebrows and raised himself up to his full and quite imposing height. "Just as a matter of curiosity," he said evenly, "to whom should I go on *Shemanka* if I killed the *Ormen*?"



Kor stared at him warily. "Just as a matter of curiosity," he echoed, and then began to laugh as he realized that only Karth could say such a thing and get away with it. Mirth took all the anger from him. When he turned to look at Karth again, Kor's eyes danced. "Persuade me to throw myself off this cliff, Karth, and you won't have to go on *Shemanka* at all."

"Mmmh," said Karth. He added thoughtfully, "And I am your heir as *Ormen*."

Kor grinned but said nothing. He sat down on the rockface; after a moment, Karth joined him.

Karth smiled and shook his head. "A tantalizing thought, killing you, but perhaps I don't want to be *Ormen* after all. You've given me power enough." He spoke lightly, but there was serious intent behind his words.

"If there is anything more I can do for you," said Kor, completely grave, "just name it. As I have said, I owe you the death-debt of *Shemanka*, and many other debts besides."

"Don't keep bringing up those who've died," said Karth, almost sharply. "Better to care for those who live." He pulled up his knees and rested his arms on them. "I am content with the war's end, and your reign, and the gifts you have extended to me and my domain."

Kor looked at Karth with great respect and affection. "It would seem, in spite of all our rivalry and competition for leadership during the revolution, that we understand each other tolerably well," he remarked. "I'm very glad that we can speak of these things reasonably."

"I won't trouble you anymore with talk of *Shemanka*. But it has been a very rewarding visit for me, Karth; I thank you for what you've shown me."

"Will you stay for a meal?" asked Karth. "I believe I saw several hunters bringing in a fresh-killed boar."

"Thank you," said Kor warmly. They both stood up, and stood looking at each other for a moment. Then the two friends turned and walked back to the citadel of the domain.

Night had come; the moons were rising over the trees. Kor looked at the lone dwelling ahead and thought to ask directions to an inn or wayfarers' keep, and perhaps buy some water to fill his waterskin.

He frowned thoughtfully at the front door that hung slightly ajar. Inside he could just see and smell a fire burning low. He knocked and waited.

No answer came. Kor stood for several moments, torn between respect for privacy and a desire to probe further. Something was nagging at the corners of his curiosity--the dwelling was far too quiet.

He pushed open the door, and entered as cautiously as if walking into a bear's cave. He looked around at the dimly lit two-room dwelling. There was a fireplace at one end of the room; the low fire in it looked near to extinction. Several dirty woven mattresses lay scattered on the floor. There was a pervasive smell of disuse and decay, and a general feeling of cold loneliness hung in the air of the room.

Yet someone had lit a fire. Kor took a pace into the room. Something shifted

and creaked, and a shape hurtled across the floor and stopped in front of Kor, glaring and growling.

Kor stood very still, not moving so much as a hand. The red-brown *havrakshi*, the small, domesticated wolf of the Kilingarlan, was well known as a ferocious and loyal pet. The beast continued growling deep in its throat, and then gave out two short barks as if in summons.

A sleepy young voice answered. "Daherai?"

The *havrakshi*'s ears swivelled back at the sound of its name, and it barked again, imperatively.

"Okay, okay, I'm coming," said the voice, and a youngling, rubbing his eyes, came out of the second room. He saw Kor and stopped short, staring.

The youngling was dirty; his clothes were ragged and had obviously been slept in. He was perhaps seven years old. "Ah--excuse me for intruding," said Kor cautiously. At the sound of Kor's voice, the fur on the back of the *havrakshi*'s neck bristled, and he growled again in warning.

The boy came forward and looked up into Kor's face. "Are you a robber?" he asked.

"No," said Kor, resisting an impulse to laugh at the ingenuous question. Then he looked down at the fierce *havrakshi*, and realized that there was nothing to laugh about.

"Promise?"

"I swear it," said Kor gravely.

"Relax, Daherai," said the youngling. The *havrakshi* relaxed, but since its master hadn't said to go away, it remained where it was. "Who're you?" asked the youngling.

Kor didn't answer. "Where are your kin, young one?"

The youngling's expression turned stormy, as if he were fighting back a feeling he didn't want to show. "Are you for Alkarin or Alargor?"

Kor was quite startled at having that question put to him. "The war is over; I am for harmony."



The boy seemed somewhat relieved. "My *ama* and *akra* were both fighting for Alargor," he said sullenly. "I don't know what's happened to them."

Kor thought he could guess, but he didn't say anything.

"I miss my *ama* and *akra*," said the youngling plaintively. "No one will come near me, 'cause my parents were on the wrong side. How come if you lose everyone thinks you're bad?"

Kor looked at the youngling with increased respect. He was very young to have discovered such a basic truth: winners were always right. "It doesn't matter to me what side your parents were on," he said. "But how is it that you're alone? Surely your parents didn't leave you here like this."

The child looked uncomfortable. "They sent me to live with my uncle down in the valley, but I ran away."

"Why?"

"'Cause he kept telling me how bad my *ama* and *akra* were for going to fight for Alargor. So I came back here with Daherai to wait for them to come back. . . but they never came." He looked down and shifted nervously. "I tried to leave, but whenever I go beyond our land, people shout at me, and I got into a knife-fight with another boy a couple of days ago."

Kor was growing increasingly angered by the mistreatment the youngling had apparently suffered in Kor's name. Kor's followers in these mountains were obviously overzealous in their loyalty. He would see about that--immediately. Kor bent down and put one arm around the boy. "Where would you go, my friend?"

"Anywhere. I just want to go somewhere and. . . and. . . make friends and maybe learn to be a hunter like my *akra* was. I'm not gonna die because of what my *ama* and *akra* did!"

Kor smiled at the spirit of this bold man-child. "No one will touch you if you're with me," he said. "I'll take you wherever you want to go, and help you become whatever you want to be."

Kor bowed before Arthos Harimau, and then placed sword and knife on the floor in front of him. "Lord Harimau, I alone am responsible for the death of your son. . ."

Arthos Harimau's face was seamed with pain. His eyes tightened into a wince at Alkarin's words. He had heard how his son had willingly taken a sword-thrust meant for Alkarin; he did not want to hear Kor's words or be troubled by further thought of death. "No," he said. "I must believe that my son died to restore honor to our world. If you're here instead of my son, it's because he knew that you could better accomplish that goal."

Alkarin remained with his head bowed. "Your son Kirdan became very dear to me, Lord. In addition to whatever else you may ask of me, I wish to make a gift: in memory, I will name my next son Kirdan."

A glimmer of peace came to Lord Harimau's eyes as he thanked Kor. "What more can I ask of you than what my son asked: make us proud again to be kilingau of *Nu Ormenel nu Kilingarlan*."

Kor responded strongly. "I have often and do now again pledge that in your son's name."

Lord Harimau extended a hand toward Kor.  
"Then take up your weapons again and sit with me--  
Kirdan loved and honored you and would not have  
wished you to come here and do me penance. I ac-  
cept your tribute and free you of any further ob-  
ligation. Now, please permit my domain to welcome  
you properly and become again my lord and *Ormen*."

Kor was glad for the rest in comfort, but he  
was soon travelling again. He watched dawn and  
sunset from every part of the Kilingarlan, and be-  
yond.

Kor spent his days in castles and caves; he  
spent his nights in palaces and hovels. And each  
time he returned to the Rasethi Sarin, he wondered  
at his journeys, and the encounters and experiences  
from which he had learned so much. The *Ormen*'s  
place was among the people of the *Ormenel*, fighting  
the battle of life with them, meeting the warriors  
and sharing the victories and sorrows.



CWALSKE



## CALL TO MOURNING

Go to one  
who mourns and grieves;  
go and share  
in his sorrow.  
Fulfill your deeds  
of yesterday,  
before you look  
toward tomorrow.

Help him heal his anger and pain;  
accept his judgment's reason;  
trust to him your honor and name  
in the mourning season.

A Challenge was fought,  
a Challenge was won;  
and honor now  
must be ever strong.  
Reply must be made  
to those who remain;  
and tribute given  
for every wrong.

Help him heal his anger and pain;  
accept his judgment's reason;  
trust to him your honor and name  
in the mourning season.

