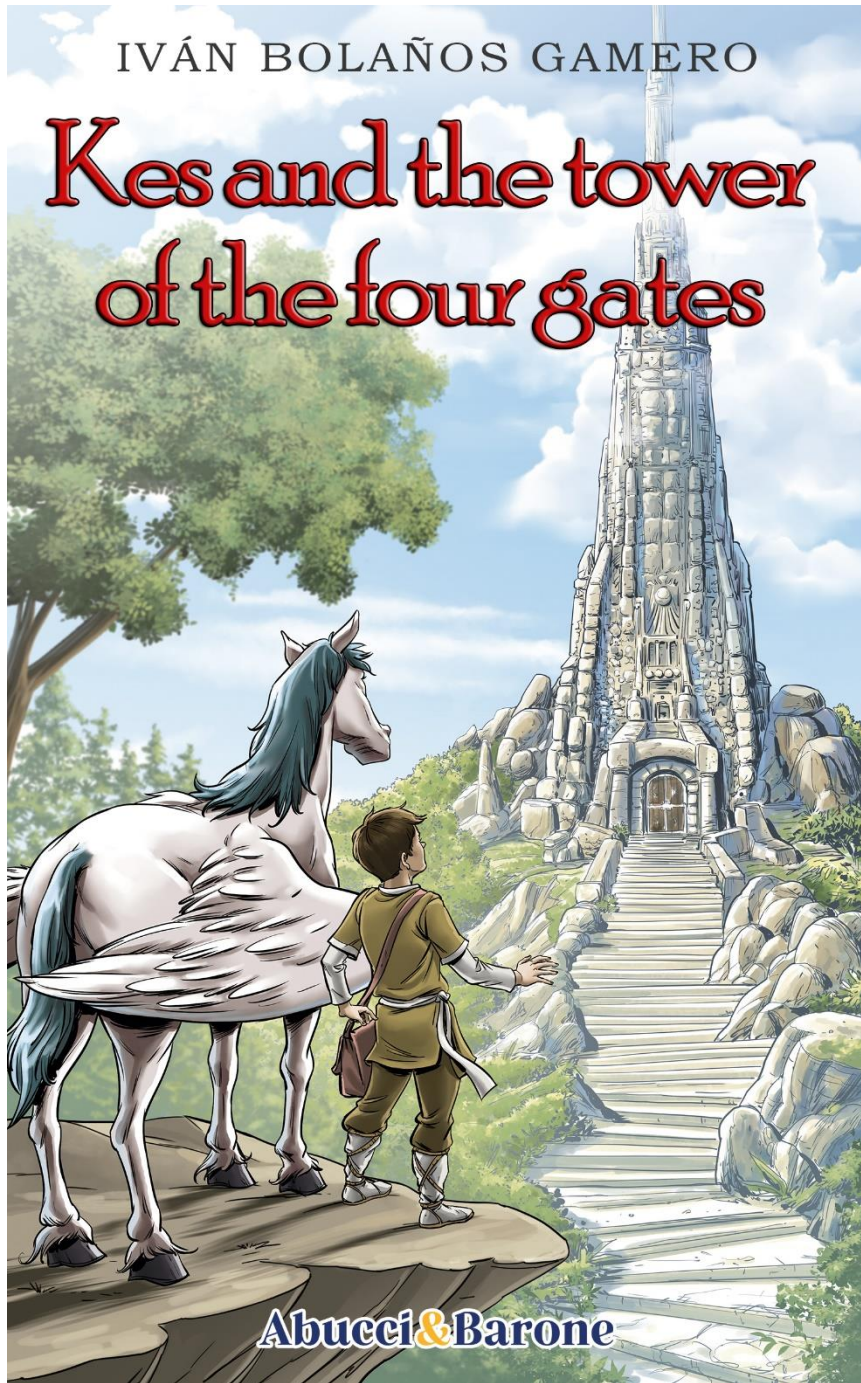


IVÁN BOLAÑOS GAMERO

# Kes and the tower of the four gates



Abucci & Barone

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### III. KES AND THE TOWER OF THE FOUR GATES

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## I. GUARDIANS OF THE TOWER

Everyone got up earlier than usual that morning. The sun had not yet illuminated the base of the tower when Lyda prepared to prepare breakfast. She hadn't been able to sleep well the night before. Worried about her husband's imminent departure, she also didn't pay much attention to what she was doing in the kitchen.

—Mom? Mom! You're spilling the milk! —exclaimed the girl.

—Ah?! Thanks, Yali. I don't know what I'm thinking about.

—It's because of Dad, right?

—No, no. It's just that I haven't rested well. Tell them to come and come back to help me set the table.

The spacious place, which also served as a dining room, was arranged on an intermediate tower level, which also housed the magnificent guardian's armory. There, Molen trained to perfect the advanced combat techniques that he had not had the opportunity to practice against a real enemy until now.

The bedrooms were located a little higher, along with a comfortable living room that served so that the family could rest and share their experiences of each day.

An elevator provided access to the top of the tower, «the observation room,» where the guardians had looked after the four kingdoms for centuries. From that imposing height, they could be aware of the most important events of those vast territories.

The magical barriers to access these realms were found on the first floor, where the «hall of four gates» was located. You had to use another elevator to get there, which could only be operated by a secret mantra, known only to Molen and his family. That way, any potential intruder would be unable to climb.

For generations, the tower's powerful magic had allowed the guardians to watch over the four realms from above, but the only way to reach them was through the hall. The impregnable gates could only be opened from the inside, so if any of the kings wanted to visit the tower, they first used the magic trumpet and announced themselves before the guardian.

## II. THE DECEIT

Molen said goodbye to his wife with a kiss. He hugged his two children lovingly and stood on the elevator.

His invincible Armor of Light, blazing to the beat of his heart, made him look like a mighty warrior sent by the gods. He carried the Silver Spear in his right hand, and the key to the shadow realm hung from his belt.

—I've never seen you wear that armor, papa —the girl exclaimed.

—This is the first time your father has visited such a dangerous realm —Lyda explained—. In that place, he will need his best defense.

—How long will it take you to get back? —asked the restless Yali.

—I'll be back soon. In my absence, you will have to take care of your mother and your brother.

—I will do so!

—Don't forget what I've taught you —Molen said when only the upper half of his body was visible. The elevator was descending.

—I must not attempt to go down to the lower level, much less open any of the gates.

—Very good, daughter. Now go to Gosel. He should already be in the observation room.

The first-born of the guardian, sixteen years old, stood by the railing from which the narrow strip of wasteland that preceded the kingdom of the shadows could be observed. Moments later, his mother and sister appeared.

—Look, there he is! —Yali yelled. The girl couldn't hide her concern.

Molen's resplendent figure was dwarfed from the impressive height. Soon he was lost in the shadows.

—Mom, he'll be back soon, won't he?

—Yes, daughter. As he always has.

—How many times has he visited the other kingdoms?

—Before you were born, he did it frequently. But something changed a long time ago.

—What, Mom?

—The kings became suspicious of each other. Some even thought that your father could be conspiring against them. They stopped using their magic trumpets. They didn't call again.

—Mother, but this is his first time entering the Shadow Realm —Yali exclaimed.

—And there's a good reason for it. But this is not the time to talk about it. Let's go to the kitchen to see what has come.

The tower's magic regularly stocked the guardian's family pantry with food.

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As Molen advanced through the shadows, he could see how his armor had ignited like never. When he cleaned and polished it inside the armory, it glowed with beautiful white and blue sparkles, but now, in contrast to the dark-dominated land, its brilliance seemed much more intense. The Silver Spear had also acquired an unusual luminosity.

The Tower Guardian was still unsure of the shadow king's true intentions. He requested that he accompany him to each of the other kingdoms. In the letter, the monarch assured that he intended to get the four territories to sign an agreement of mutual trust and perpetual peace. It was truly unexpected.

It had been years since the other kings had blown their trumpets to request to meet with the guardian, and this tense calm seemed the prelude to a dangerous outcome.

He remembered very well what was written in the ancient records of the tower. These counted as almost five centuries ago, a predecessor of the dark sovereign, based on deceit and betrayal, nearly led the four kingdoms to war.

He was meditating on all of this when a carriage stopped right in front of him. No horse was pulling the vehicle. The wheels seemed to almost float off the ground. The door opened as if inviting him up.

Molen feared almost nothing, nor anyone. From an early age, he had been trained by his father not to be swayed by the appearance of things, be they hideous or beautiful.

—«The important things are almost always out of sight. » —he had repeated on more than one occasion.

He entered the carriage without hesitating for a second, and immediately it was in motion, taking him along increasingly dark and rugged roads.

The guardian would not see any of the King of shadows' subjects during the journey. He remembered reading something about it in the records: the dark lord's servants hide from any visitor, especially if he carries any light.

By the strong winds that hit his face, and by the silhouettes that he could barely deduce, he calculated that he had reached the highest point of that rugged terrain. He was not wrong. The carriage stopped abruptly, and after he got out, he was able to contemplate, with some difficulty, a building of imposing size.

The structure could never rival in height the Tower of the Four Gates, which almost reached the clouds, but its gloomy appearance for a moment made him wish he did not enter.

A hunched figure approached him with surprising swiftness, stretching out a slender arm and a bony hand, inviting him to follow.

—My master awaits you, Guardian of the Tower —the voice seemed to come from a place other than his throat.



Molen walked right behind the mysterious guide, entering the menacing building. His Armor of Light illuminated the way enough to prevent him from bumping into an obstacle.

A tall figure was waiting for him at the castle gate, taller than him, who revealed a rather peculiar face when illuminated by the light. He looked like any other man's, but he lacked all expression. A morbid pallor contrasted with the darkness of the place and that of his clothes.

—Welcome to my humble abode, Guardian of the Four Gates —he greeted him in a deep, guttural voice.

Molen returned the courtesy by replying: — I couldn't ignore such an unusual call. The sovereign of the kingdom of the shadows seeking to create ties with the kings of the sands, ice, and the forests, is something without precedent. It is not in the tower records.

—Yes, I imagine your surprise must have been great when you received my letter.

—It was the first time in many, many years that the black trumpet had been heard.

—This meeting must have taken place long ago. But there is a good reason for the unintentional delay. I had to make some changes in this realm before I was ready to visit the others.

—What kind of changes? —asked the guardian, intrigued.

—My subjects are not like those in other places. You must not forget that the life energy we need here comes from the darkest corners of the souls of the other lands you watch. That is now going to change.

—I find it hard to believe that they can get to live without encouraging all the negative things that people are capable of.

—We are not going to feed that darkness anymore. We have found a way to live without that energy.

—Are you telling me you're going to destroy the papyri? That the names of each newborn will no longer be written on them to write down later the acts of evil that you hope they will comment on when they grow up? It's hard for me to believe that. This kingdom was disappearing.

—You must trust my good intentions, guardian —said the King of darkness—. As proof of this, I invite you to join us in the red bonfire that we will light tonight. In it, we will throw the papyri that correspond to the inhabitants of the three kingdoms.

Molen couldn't quite believe what he had heard: —What is the real reason for this change?

—I see you are reluctant to believe my words. I understand it. It has been many centuries in which the darkness haunted each of the hearts of men and women. Now the other kings would like to attack our land and annex it to their kingdoms. That way, they would put an end to evil in their own homes.

—That's impossible! —Molen exclaimed—. Everyone knows well that the only way would be for me to open more than one gate simultaneously.

—Soon, your son will grow old enough to replace you. It has been like this since the tower was built by higher forces. During the transition, the gates will be weak. That moment is the one that others would like to take advantage of to end our kingdom.

Molen stopped to meditate on all that the dark king had said. Despite coming from a being he couldn't trust, he had to admit that his offer was too tempting to ignore.

—Very well. The burning of the papyri will be a clear sign of your intentions. Tomorrow we can leave for the tower.

—Nothing will please me more than passing the good news to the three kings, accompanied by the guardian himself.

Molen couldn't hide his enthusiasm. That the shadowy ruler of the kingdom of darkness offered him a future without the influence of the shadows was a reality he never imagined possible.

That night, around a bonfire of red fire, the only light that did not hurt their eyes and damage their bodies, thousands of subjects of that dangerous land were present, each carrying a papyrus. On them were written the names of the inhabitants of the kingdoms of forests, ice, and sands. Next to them, which inevitable fate, the weakness or sin that had marked their lives.

Despite the papyri's terrible influence over many hundreds of years, most people did not succumb to their dark power, winning the internal battle between good and evil. But

some were not as strong, and when they were carried away by weakness, they produced energy that nourished and strengthened the subjects of the dark realm.

When the guardian saw that all the papyri had been burned, he smiled with satisfaction. A joy that no one had anticipated during his visit to that place flooded his heart. Perhaps that was why he forgot that he shouldn't be guided by appearances so easily. He decided to put aside his Silver Spear and remove his Armor of Light in a terrible carelessness.

—Now! He no longer has protection! —yelled the king.

A dozen guards, who were mingled with the place's shadows, fell on top of the guardian.

Molen was fast and well trained in hand-to-hand combat, but the coordinated and surprising attack ended up overcoming his defenses and defeating him.

—You are a traitor! You have no honor or word! —he shouted with all his might.

—Did you really think I'd give you peace, and in that way? The papyri you saw are those of people who died long ago. The new ones are very well kept, in a place that only I have access to. Hahaha! You are not worthy of your ancestors; they would not have fallen into such an innocent trap.

The guardian recognized that he was careless for not having studied the history of that kingdom further. Since it was the land of darkness, he had simply preferred to put it aside. He didn't remember, or simply didn't know, that its inhabitants could be so close to him and be virtually invisible. Now he would pay dearly for his mistake.

—Bring me his weapon!

The dark king knew that the Armor of Light could not be destroyed, but the Silver Spear was not that strong: —Today, I will show you some of my immense power, naive guardian.

The monarch of the shadows took the spear in his hands and, after repeating a few verses in a language that damaged Molen's ears, slowly began to bend it until it broke. At that moment, a powerful beam of energy shot out in the direction of the Tower of Four Gates.

—As for your armor and the key to the tower, you will never see them again.

—Don't do it. If you attack the tower, everything could be destroyed.

—That is what I hope will happen.

—The tower maintains the balance of this world. No more than one gate must remain open at a time. The darkness of this kingdom would try to impose itself on the other territories. It would spread everywhere, suffocating and destroying everything.

—You have only just realized the dimension of my ambition. Guards, take him to the dungeon!

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Lyda and her two children were resting in the family room when a very bright flash almost blinded them. It wasn't long before they realized that the tower seemed to be surrounded by a strange light.

They quickly ascended to the observation room. When they arrived, they witnessed how that energy circled the building a few times and projected upwards, producing a ring of light that completely illuminated the night sky.

—What is that, Mom? —Yali asked.

—I'm not sure, daughter. It seems like the entrance to another place.

—Somehow, I know it has to do with our father! Something has happened! —exclaimed Gosel, with great concern.

—I feel something too. Let's ask the gods so that he is well —Lyda said, hugging her children tightly.

### III. UNEXPECTED ARRIVAL

The boy opened his eyes, and the first thing he recognized was Kalya, who was sleeping with her face covered by her long red hair.

Kes's body was aching. He felt as if he had been beaten. Without getting up from the ground, he looked for the rest of his friends but saw no one else.

—Alit, Alit? Where are you? —with much effort, he managed to get up.

Standing, he was able to contemplate the landscape. It was vital and beautiful. The small hill on which he was located allowed him to discover that he was in the middle of a forest of very tall and leafy trees.

Although he was not an expert in plants like Alit, it did not take him long to realize that these species did not resemble Bernia or those of Terralan.

—Where have we fallen this time? —he wondered aloud, trying to remember what had happened.

The image of him and his friends being swept away by a mysterious force was still spinning in his head. Everything was so confusing.

Sensing that Kalya was in a safe place, lying on the soft grass, he decided to take a short walk. Birds sang incessantly in the distance, and the sound of many small animals digging, and climbing trees accompanied him in his exploration.

Kes had always had a keen ear, and it didn't take him long to see that someone was following him.

—«You won't surprise me » —he thought, hiding behind a tree. The footsteps were getting closer and closer.

When he figured the moment was right, he leaped with his drawn sword. King Landor had insisted that he keep the weapon he used in the battle against the three-headed hydra.

—Hey! Don't you recognize your best friend?

—Alit! You almost made me hurt you. Why did you follow me like that? You look different.

—I wasn't sure it was you. Something strange is happening here.

—Yes, we seem to be in a new land.

—That is not all. Look at your clothes.

Kes just noticed that what he was wearing was short and tight: —It must have shrunk for some reason.

—It is too small for me. I can't explain it, but somehow, we've grown. That's why I didn't recognize you. I thought someone had stolen what you were wearing.



His friend's words sounded strange to Kes, but it was right. He felt different.

—Come. I'll prove what I'm saying.

—Where we go? —Kes asked.

—You must see yourself.

Alit led him to a nearby spring. There, he could contemplate his reflection. His face, his arms, and legs. There was no doubt that it was him, but he did indeed look older. Now he looked like a fourteen-year-old teenager.

—How is it possible? Have we slept for so long?

—I don't think so, Kes. I think that maybe we wandered through space and time before falling on this earth.

—Through space and time? What could cause something like this?

—Do you remember the force that caught us when we were about to reach the portal to Terralan?

—I had almost forgotten! But yes, I remember something.

—Perhaps the fall to this place was longer than we can imagine.

—I wonder where the pegasi are. There's no trace of them.

—Not from Kalya either. Maybe they're together —Alit exclaimed.

—No, she is with me. I left her asleep near here, in that direction. Let's find her.

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The girl slowly woke up. She pushed her hair to the side and immediately noticed something odd.

—Wow, I didn't remember it being that long.

Her arms and legs felt numb, so it took her a while to get to her feet.

She hadn't finished stretching her body when she heard the sound of something flying by, very fast. She did not have time to react, and by the time she heard it again, she was only able to discover that it was a pair of bolas, which now prevented her from moving her legs. Unable to walk, she fell to the ground, hitting the side of her body.

She preferred to wait quietly and calmly for her attacker to reveal himself in such a disadvantageous position.

—What do we have here? —she heard a deep voice.

—She's not from here —seconded another sharper. It sounded like a woman's.

—You're right. Her clothes are different.

—I'd bet she's a spy from the Kingdom of ice or the sands.

—Don't get ahead of yourself, Cila. Maybe she's just a lost girl. You shouldn't have thrown your bolas at her like that.

Suspecting that she was not among malicious people, Kalya decided to speak: —Who are you? Where am I?

—So, you're lost! —exclaimed the distrustful woman.

—I don't know where I am. But I can tell you my name and where I come from.

—We listen to you —said the man.

—I am Kalya, and I come from Bernia.

—Bernia? What place is that? Perhaps a city on the ice? —the woman asked—. Maybe it is one of those oases in the middle of the sands.

—No, it is a kingdom, with forests, lakes, and mountains, which I certainly cannot distinguish here.

—Mountains? What are mountains? —the woman asked again, a little confused.

—Before you continue with your questioning, allow us to introduce ourselves —the man said—. My name is Agaer. Many consider me the best tracker in the forest. She is my sister, Cila.

Kalya replied with a smile and then asked: —You really don't know what a mountain is?

The answer was mute but obvious.

—They are elevations of land, very steep. So big that they sometimes defy the clouds. Is there nothing like this in this forest kingdom of yours?

Cila looked at her even more suspiciously: —Look, her clothes don't even fit. They look like those of a smaller person. Maybe she stole them from some unsuspecting traveler.

At that moment, Kalya realized that what the woman said was true. At first, she thought her clothes had just shrunk, but then she noticed something else. She felt different, taller. Then she remembered that her hair was also much longer.

—Something tells me you're not making all this up —Agaer said—. But either way, we can't risk it.

—What will we do with her? —Cila asked.

—We'll take her to Erbos. There they will know what to do.

Kalya sensed that she was not in real danger and offered no resistance. Either way, she couldn't break free from the strong bonds.

Before starting the march, Agaer sniffed the air, looked in all directions in silence, and motioned for Cila to follow him.

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—What do we do now? —Alit asked, who, along with Kes, had witnessed what happened with her friend, very well hidden in some bushes.

—We cannot lose them. We must be quiet.

—That’s my specialty!

There was no time to laugh, and Kes gestured for his friend to behave according to the circumstances.

The boys had to make a great effort not to lose the pair of trackers. Despite taking a prisoner with them, they advanced incredibly fast through the thicket. At times it seemed as if the trees were speaking to them, showing them the way.

—Where do you think we are, Kes?

—I don’t know, but let’s try not to speak. Something tells me those two could hear us at a great distance.

Alit nodded.

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They advanced for a long time until Agaer made another signal, this time to stop.

—Here we will rest. Cila, give our prisoner some water.

—Could you loosen my bonds? My wrists are hurting —Kalya asked.

—Very well. We’re going to take them back, but don’t try to run away. You would soon find out that it is useless —the tracker warned.

The girl from Bernia appreciated the water and being able to rub her wrists, which were somewhat swollen and sore.

—Thank you! —was all she dared to say.

Cila took some seeds out of her bag, gave half to Agaer, and then offered a few to Kalya: —They taste good and will help regain your energy.

The young tracker seemed to be a little friendlier now.

In that place the trees rose high. The thick canopy filtered the sun's rays in irregular and capricious forms, highlighting the forest's vitality, much lusher and more imposing than those Kalya had known in Bernia.

—What is this kingdom called? —she asked, thinking she had forgotten the name.

—It's the forest kingdom, that's what we call it —Agaer replied—. The city we are going to is Erbos. That is all you need to know.

Kalya ate the last of her seeds, confirming in no time that her energies had almost replenished. With this new vitality, an idea began to settle in her head.

—Let's keep going. I don't want to be late —Agaer pointed out.

To the surprise of the prisoner, her captors resumed their journey advancing in front of her. With her hands free and with no one to watch her from behind, she felt confident enough to try to escape. It seemed as if she was being invited to do so.

—«It can't be that easy » —she thought suspiciously, but the possibility of running away was irresistible.

When her captors seemed focused on the path, Kalya decided that the opportunity had come. She ran with all her might, always trying to stay in the opposite direction.

She turned back repeatedly, hoping she wouldn't see them running after her. Suddenly, everything began to go dark. It seemed as if the sunlight no longer penetrated to the forest floor. She looked up and thought she noticed that the treetops were approaching each other. That couldn't be happening. Kalya knew that trees could not move at will.

—What kind of magic is this? —she wondered, and when she wanted to take the next step, she couldn't find a place to put her foot down, falling into a deep pit.

The bottom was covered in a thick bed of leaves, which cushioned her fall. She didn't understand where the hole had come from. She could have sworn that just a moment, it wasn't there.

She waited for her eyes to get used to the low light of the place, and then she could make out two figures who were looking at her in silence.

—Kalya? Is it you? —asked a voice that sounded somewhat familiar.

—How lucky to find you! —added the other one.

—Step back! Who are you? Why do you talk like Kes and Alit?

—Because we are Kes and Alit —the first voice answered, drawing closer, allowing the girl to observe his features finally.

Kalya was impressed. It was indeed his friends, but they looked different. It wasn't just that their clothes were too small for them, like her, but their faces didn't look the same as before. It was clear that they had both grown up.

—You're older too —Kes said, guessing what her friend was thinking.

—How is it possible? I remember we were falling, with the pegasi. Then I saw something like a very tall tower. After that, I can only tell you about this forest that seems endless. And where are the pegasi?

—We don't know either —Alit replied.

—As for your captors, we were following you, trying not to be discovered, when suddenly this pit in the earth opened, and we fell into it. It's as if the forest has a will of its own —said Kes.



#### IV. THE CITY OF ERBOS

—As I expected —the woman exclaimed.

—You were right, Cila. His friends came following us.

Kalya, Kes, and Alit were silent, deep in the pit, when a rope was thrown at them.

—Come on, we don't have all day —Agaer urged them.

With this man's help, who possessed great physical strength, the three boys emerged one by one from the hole.

—Now we will resume our march —said the tracker—. You won't want to run away again. The next trap could be deadly.

To the surprise of the foreigners, clarity had returned to the forest. The trees again let in many of the sun's rays.

—Where we go? —Alit asked—. Because I'm starving.

—Here, this will calm you down, —Cila said, offering him some of her seeds.

Alit looked at them suspiciously: —I think I'll go through this time.

—Come on, they're not bad —Kalya encouraged him.

—Are you sure? I would not like to fall asleep again, as in your land.

—I've already eaten them. They are very good and will replenish your energies very quickly.

—Do they also have the power to heal? —Kes asked.

—No, and that's why we have other abilities —Agaer replied—. Now I ask you to keep a moment of silence. Someone has fallen, and the forest asks us for respect.

—I've also heard the voice of nature —Cila exclaimed—. A disturbance is coming from the direction of the tower.

Kes, Kalya, and Alit didn't understand those words, but they kept walking behind the trackers. They didn't dare to ask them about Elan, Elis, and Alena. They believed that the situation and the moment were not suitable ones. The vigilant Cila closed the line.

After a long march, they reached a great arch, carved out of what they recognized as a gigantic tree. They never imagined that one of that size could exist. It was thick enough to have dwarfed the most imposing gate of any castle or fortress they had ever known.

—Finally, we arrived. The city of Erbos —Agaer announced.

—That's just a tree! —Alit exclaimed.

Kes and Kalya let him know with a gesture that he should not be so impertinent.

It seemed that the arch was just one more waypoint on the road out of its spectacular size, but when they passed through it, something surprising happened. A beautiful and very extensive city appeared before his eyes. The arch was a kind of magic gate, the only way to access that fantastic place.

In the distance, you could see a palace, built on what was once the roots of trees as big as the one that served as the city's entrance. The houses were arranged between winding roads, projecting beauty and harmony.

They stopped in a kind of central square, where more than one stared at them, full of curiosity.

They had not finished leaving their surprise when a tall and thin man approached them, who, after blowing a small trumpet to attract the attention of those present, announced: — His Majesty immediately requests the presence of the foreigners.

Agaer and Cila thought it very strange that their prisoners were required in the palace so soon.

—As the king orders —the tracker replied.

—What do you think this is all about? —his companion asked in a low voice.

—I don't know. But it is not up to us to question His Majesty.

Kalya approached Kes and whispered in his ear: —When we are in front of the king, we will ask him about the pegasi.

They were led through the curvy roads, which could easily mislead any visitor.

At last, they reached the palace gates, which were made of many branches and leaves. The messenger repeated a few short words, and they opened wide: —Follow me.

Soon, they came to a large hall, which let in daylight through a series of large openings between the trees that made up the building's main structure.

At the opposite end of the room, a man with a short beard sited on a vegetable matter throne.

—Don't keep His Majesty waiting —the messenger told them.

They were about to continue when the distinguished emissary said to the trackers: — You may now withdraw. The king wishes to speak to foreigners in private.

Agaer and Cila could not hide a new surprise.

—As His Majesty disposes —Agaer said, after a small bow.

The doors of the hall closed, and the boys were led to the throne.

When they were close enough, they found that the king was a middle-aged man, dressed in fine clothes, made of leather and cloth. His gaze was penetrating, and a severe expression dominated his face.

Kalya was about to speak, to introduce herself when the sovereign rose to his feet and advanced toward them. After surrounding them, looking at them from head to toe, he asked: —Where do you come from? Where are the others?

The inquisitive way in which the king asked them made them realize that they were not well received. Kes preferred not to say anything about the pegasi.

—Others? Who are you talking about, Your Majesty?

—I know very well that six spies came from beyond the tower.

Kalya decided to intervene: —Your Gracious Majesty, it's just the three of us. We are not spies. Maybe your informants are wrong.

—Where do you come from? Speak up! —asked the king, who seemed to lose patience quickly.

—We come from Terralan —Alit replied.

—I've never heard it. What place is that?

—Well, actually, we came from Bernia, but we were heading home when something inexplicable happened, and we ended up in this kingdom.

By the time Kes reacted, it was too late to shut up Alit, who might have already spoken too much with his always long tongue.

—I don't know that Terralan, or Bernia, of whom you speak. Instead, I think that you three are spies from the kingdom of the sands or the ice.

—Your Majesty —the messenger interrupted respectfully—. Look at their clothes. They are nothing like those used by the inhabitants of those lands.

—Evidently, part of a costume. They want us to believe that they don't come from one of the enemy kingdoms.

Kes realized that the situation was getting more complicated by the moment. He chose to try to assert the truth.

—You must believe us. We don't know anything about those places you mention.

—Hush, spy! You will be taken to the dungeons, and there you will remain until, by hunger and thirst, you are forced to speak.

## V. NEW ALLIES

Elan could barely move, but with one last effort, he stood on all fours. He looked around, and after checking that strange vegetation surrounded him, he observed a very tall building that brushed the clouds in the distance.

He was disoriented. Never in his long life as Lord of the pegasi had he felt like this. He tried to remember what had happened, to no avail. Then he made out two figures in the air that were approaching him flying with great elegance.

—Father, we finally found you —Elis exclaimed—. We thought that maybe you would not have come to this world.

Alena accompanied him.

—I'm happy to see you. How are you? —asked Elan.

—Outside of a few bruises, nothing serious. However, we cannot remember what happened.

—Yes, it is strange. I don't know what happened either. Have you seen the boys?

—We know nothing about them, Father.

The Lord of the pegasi made another effort to remember what had happened but to no avail. Only of one thing could he be sure. They were in a new and unknown land.

—Do you think this is Terralan? —Elis asked.

—I don't think so —his father replied—. There are no mountains in sight, just that strange tower that seems to challenge us from a distance.

—You're right —Alena intervened—. Kes and Alit told us that there are majestic mountains on their land. I think they call them the Moaskif Range.

—The vegetation, it looks odd too —Elis interjected.

—Yeah, but it's not just its looks, son. This forest seems to be aware of itself, in a way that I would never have believed possible.

—What do we do now? —Alena asked.

—We'll go to that tower. Something tells me that maybe there we will find the answers we seek.

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The impetuous and courageous Gosel could hardly contain the urge to go out in search of his father. Unfortunately, the only way to open the gate to the Kingdom of darkness was through the black key, and this was in the King of shadows' possession.

—Mother, we must do something!



—Son, I want to know as much as you do what happened to our beloved Molen. But we can't help him. We must not open that gate.

—There has to be a way —Gosel insisted.

—At this time, we must be strong. Your father would like it that way —Lyda exclaimed—. All we can do is wait in the observation room. Perhaps we will find a clue that will allow us to know what has happened to him from there.

—Come, brother. I'm sure that together we can find out what happened to our father —said the loving and always optimistic Yali.

—Let's bring something to eat. I think we'll spend long hours up there —Lyda added.

They were soon installed by the railing, from where much of the Realm of darkness could be seen.

Using his father's magic spyglass, Gosel scanned the horizon. From time to time, his sister asked him for it, and he kindly lent it to her, taking advantage of those moments to quench his thirst or eat something.

To make the wait less tedious, Lyda related stories of Molen's early travels to the other realms. He even told them about the guardians who had come before him.

—Mom, was Dad's grandfather a guardian too? —Yali asked after handing the spyglass back to her brother.

—Your grandfather was the first in our family. Sometimes it happens that a guardian doesn't have children. In those cases, when it's time to resign from his post, he must enter one of the realms to search for a successor.

—So, where did Grandpa come from?

—He was a son of the kingdom of ice.

The girl seemed to like the revelation.

—Now that I think about it, it's funny. This is the first time we've talked about it — Lyda exclaimed.

—Mother, my father did tell me about grandfather on several occasions, —said Gosel—. He was an honorable and courageous man, and that is why he was chosen from among many other candidates who stood before the tower.

Gosel was excited about the idea of succeeding his father one day and becoming the third generation of guardians in his family.

Lyda smiled at her son: —Your father will be happy when he knows how you think and feel about your grandfather.

They both closed in a warm embrace, which was only interrupted by Yali, who has just returned from the railing overlooking another realm.

—I think I've seen something —the girl exclaimed.

—What do you mean, daughter?

—There, in the forest kingdom.

The three approached the observation point, where Gosel used the spyglass again: —  
In which direction, little sister?

—Over there —Yali pointed with her finger—. They look like flying horses.

—Horses that fly? That doesn't exist —Lyda said.

—Your daughter is right, Mom. Three horses with wings approach and at great speed.

Still skeptical, Lyda took the spyglass and pointed it in the same direction. Her surprise was capital: —First, the strange light from last night, and now those creatures. Something is happening.

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—I don't understand —Alena said—. No matter how much I flap my wings, I can't move forward.

Elan realized that none of them could go on. The enigmatic tower was very close, but for some reason, they could not reach it.

—It must be some kind of powerful magic. I don't feel like it's evil, but it won't let us get any closer.

—We must find a way to contact its occupants —Elis said.

The Lord of the pegasi shared the idea of his son, but no matter how hard he looked, he couldn't find any door or window that would indicate where they could try.

—Look! Up there —Alena warned them.

At an overwhelming height, the pegasi noticed a disk that surrounded the tower, like a balcony. Elan knew they would have to get there.

—We cannot advance, but we can fly upwards.

Elis and Alena fully trusted their leader and followed him without hesitation. They soon found that their objective was higher than the top of the Mountain of Eternal Winds in their native Bernia. This did not discourage them, and with a test of determination, they continued to flap their wings. However, shortly afterward, their strength seemed to be starting to leave them.

—I don't know if we can make it —Elis confessed—. It is too high.

—Don't give up, son. I can already see a kind of observation deck, and on it are three people.

Those words brought renewed courage to his son, and so, along with the brave and determined Alena, they finally achieved their purpose. Now they would only use their strength to stay at that height, considerably less effort than continuing to rise.

Elan noticed the oldest of that people and spoke in a firm and clear voice: —We need help. We are not from this earth and have fallen here by accident.

The woman looked at them in amazement.

—Who are you? What do you want?

—We are pegasi, my name is Elan, and they are Elis and Alena.

Gosel, who was also fascinated by that apparition, spoke up: —I am the son of Molen, the Guardian of the Tower. Do you know anything about my father?

Elan felt the boy's sincere concern. He believed he was among the righteous.

—I'm sorry, but we don't know who you're talking about. We are looking for our friends. Three boys, some years younger than you.

Somehow, Gosel also thought he found sincerity in the strange creature's words.

—Mother, I think we should open the gate for them.

Lyda agreed and authorized her son to take the key to the forest kingdom from the chest in which Molen kept it: —Go, son. Let them in.

The pegasi seemed unable to hold themselves any longer at that height when Gosel told them: —Go down to the tower's base. I'll be waiting for you downstairs.

Elan thanked the offer, and together with the young pegasi, he let himself be carried, gliding in a spiral, back to the ground.

The boy who had spoken to them was waiting for them next to an imposing gate. It had not been there before. They were encouraged. Perhaps the magic of that tower would help them after all.

Gosel could not hide his amazement either, seeing such majestic and magnificent creatures up close. With a friendly gesture, he invited them to enter. It was the first time that someone who did not belong to that world entered the Tower of the Four Gates.

Moments later, everyone was gathering in the family room.

—Allow me to introduce myself properly —said the Lord of the pegasi, noticing that Lyda and Yali were watching them speechless in wonder—. I am Elan. Together with my son Elis and one of our sisters, Alena, we have fallen into their world. We come from the Kingdom of Bernia.

—I am Lyda, and they are my sons Gosel and Yali. My husband is the guardian of this tower, responsible for controlling who enters and leaves the four kingdoms. You said you were looking for some guys outside. Are they also pegasi?

—No, they are people, like you. Their names are Kalya, Kes, and Alit. They fell with us, but now we don't know where they are. Perhaps they took another path while we were unconscious.

—Well, something is for sure —Lyda said—. They must be in the forest kingdom, where you also appeared. They couldn't have gotten anywhere else, not without going through this tower.

After the timely revelation, Elan thought that the chances of finding his friends increased considerably.

At that moment, Yali exclaimed: —I think I know how they arrived and why they are here.

They all looked at her full of curiosity.

—Last night, a strange light circled the tower and then shot upward, making a very bright disk in the sky.

Lyda looked at her daughter with a smile, proud of her little girl's vivacity: —We think something terrible may have happened with my husband last night. He recently entered the realm of darkness, which represents a danger, unlike the one you already know.

—Yali and my mother are right —said Gosel—. Last night we thought we felt that my father was in trouble. Maybe you guys fell here to help us.

Elan thought for a moment in silence, and then he sentenced: —Your hospitality has given us new hope, and your words ring true to my heart. We will be happy to do everything in our power to help you.

Gosel would have wanted to go to the shadow realm first, searching for Molen, but he was perfectly aware that he had no way to open that gate. Also, something inside him told him that he could reach his father if he helped his new friends first.

## VI. THE ESCAPE

—Kes, can you get the keys? —asked Kalya, who remained locked in a cell just in front of the boys. The girl had realized that their guards seemed to have forgotten them too close to them.

—I don't like this —Kes exclaimed—. Remember what happened to us in the forest.

—Looks suspicious to me too, but I think we should try anyway.

— Your arm is the longest —Alit said—. If you don't reach them, no one else can.

Kes nodded and immediately stretched out as far as he could.

—I'm very close, but I can't reach them!

At that moment, Kalya seemed to remember something: —I've got it!

Alit and Kes looked at her silently, waiting for her to tell them what she was thinking.

—They didn't check me as well as they think. I still have it with me —the girl congratulated herself.

Kalya took two short wooden sticks from a secret place in her boots. Kes knew what they were: —Your thunder sticks!

—I'm going to direct it directly at the padlock. I don't know if it will be strong enough to break it, and the noise it makes will alert the guards, but I think it's our only chance.



—Alit, cover your ears —Kes warned.

Kalya firmly grasped the two magic sticks and proceeded to strike them with all her might.

Alit, still with his ears plugged, exclaimed: —They don't seem that strong. I hardly heard anything.

Kalya gestured at him, then exclaimed, obviously dejected: —That's because it didn't work. Its magic doesn't seem to work in this place.

Kes said then: —Throw one of them at me. There is magic that they can do.

The girl with beautiful red hair looked at him intrigued, realizing soon after her friend's idea. Using the stick now, Kes could indeed reach the keys.

Alit remarked proudly of his friend: —We must not forget that an agile mind is sometimes as effective as the most powerful magic.

Trying not to make noise, the three boys climbed the stairs that led them out of the deep dungeon. But when they reached the upper level, they thought their escape attempt had been too short: a dozen men guarded the room that preceded the exit to a vast courtyard.

Everything seemed lost when the loud sound of a trumpet was heard. The guards marched orderly outside, leaving the place empty.

Kes and his friends didn't understand what had happened, but after making sure that no one was watching, they advanced to the door. From there, they could count many soldiers in formation. They tuned the ear.

A man who looked like a general was standing in front of the king.

—Your Majesty. Our men on the outer perimeter inform us that the winged creatures have been seen heading this way. They will be arriving at Erbos very shortly.

—My orders are clear, General. I don't want those spies alive. Let the archers lead their ranks.

—As you order, Your Majesty.

Kes and his friends were enthusiastic about what they heard. It was probably the pegasi.

—I had thought our best chance would be for us to flee the city, but now I think it would be better for us to stay hidden in this place —Kalya exclaimed.

—You're right. If Elan and the others are on their way, we should wait for them here. Alit, do you agree?

—Yes, but if we're not careful, they'll find us out. I think I already know where we can hide.

—Where? —asked Kes.

—In the king's palace.

—Are you crazy? It's the most dangerous place —said the girl.

—No, Kalya. Alit is right. It is the place where they would least expect to find us. The dungeon guards also left their posts. For now, no one has noticed our absence.

—Maybe you're right —she admitted.

—We just have to dress like them, and I think I've already seen where we can get such clothes.

Nearby they saw a building next to which stood a pile of fabrics.

—It looks like a tailor's workshop —Kes said.

—They make their clothes there —Alit added.

Considering that the streets were almost empty since the people accompanied the soldiers to the city gate, the three braves appropriated clothes that fit them well. They no longer looked quite different from any other inhabitant of Erbos.

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—How does the tower work exactly? —Elan wanted to know.

—My father is in charge of watching over the four kingdoms —answered Gosel, who was riding on his back—. If any of the kings want to enter to speak to him, he must blow his magic trumpet near the tower. There is one for each kingdom. The yellow one for the sands, the blue one for the ice, the green one for the forest, and the black one for the shadows. When the legitimate sovereign of each kingdom blows the trumpet, the magic gate appears in front of them, but only the guardian has the key that allows it to be opened.

—It has always been like this?

—For many centuries. It's written in the tower records.

—Now I understand the great importance of your father's role. His absence will cause many problems in this world. Is it a long way to go to Erbos? —asked the pegasus.

—I remember well the stories they told me when I was a boy, we're almost there.

Elis was flying right behind them.

—Don't worry about your mother and sister. Alena will know how to take good care of them —Elan encouraged him, who had noticed that at times the determined young man seemed absent—. She is a very brave and capable pegasus.

—Thank you, friends.

The tower keeper's son had explained that the Lord of the forest kingdom was not an enemy and that he would surely hear from his friends. Gosel was excited. It was the first time he had left the tower.

—Erbos is invisible from the air, and even from the forest path we couldn't notice it, but my father taught me long ago to interpret certain signals —the boy explained.

Accustomed to magic, Elan understood that some kind of cloak camouflaged the city, hiding it from prying eyes: —What signs are those?

—Birds don't fly over Erbos. Although they do not see it, they feel its essence, its energy, and surround it.

—Why do they avoid it? Is it negative energy?

—No, but if they absorb too much of it, the mantle that covers the city could weaken and fail. Birds are allies of Erbos's men.

—I understand, then we'll focus on those signals —Elan said.

It didn't take long for them to notice what Gosel had explained to them. In front of them, the sky seemed not to be crossed by any birds. The city must be just below.

They were preparing to descend when a surprising shower of arrows shot through the air, too close to them.

—Hey! What a welcoming committee! —exclaimed Elis, who, like his father, was forced to perform demanding evasive maneuvers.

—I don't understand why this attack —said Gosel—. The King of the forests is not an enemy.

—Maybe it has to do with your father's disappearance —Elan intervened.

Even though they were in a different realm than the one Molen had entered, the forest dwellers' strange and surprising behavior made the boy think that the pegasus might be right.

—What do we do now? —Elis asked.

—We will descend elsewhere. I have an idea —answered Gosel.

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The forest army had formed a ring around the city. The archers had fired the first volley of swift bolts, managing to drive away their enemies.

—General, there is no sign of the winged horses.

—Very well. Those spies now know who they are up against. Prepare the crossbows. If they appear again, they will not have a chance.

Crossbows fired their arrows at a much higher speed than bows, making them much more effective weapons.

—One of the flying horses carried a rider, General.

—Yes, we think we know who it is. One of our lookouts claims to have recognized the tower guard's son. As the king suspected, the one in charge of guarding the four gates is an ally of the enemy.

Very few knew that thanks to the King of forests' excessive jealousy and fear of his neighbors, the King of darkness had managed to establish a powerful mental connection with him. In this way, using his dark arts, he had influenced him, making him believe that the Guardian of the Tower was on the side of the men of the ice and sands and that together with them, he was preparing an offensive to conquer their territory. For this reason, he didn't hesitate to accuse Kes, Kalya, and Alit of spies. Then it was not difficult for him to convince his people that they should find a way to penetrate the tower and go to war against the other kingdoms.

Now, confident that his dark ally would find a way to capture the guardian, he believed that the moment to attack was near. He seemed not to care about the warnings of his advisers and seers, who had warned him of the true intentions of the King of shadows.

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The pegasi managed to descend into a place in the forest that would keep them hidden from their enemies, at least for a time.

Nature, which would have acted in favor of the forest kingdom's inhabitants, had done nothing to attack or betray them because Gosel carried the magic key with him. The spirits of the forest welcomed the guardian's son.

—We have a great opportunity. The trees are talking to me —the young man revealed.

Elan was a foreigner in that land, but those spirits immediately recognized his essence as a just and noble creature.

—I can hear them too, Gosel. It is an honor to share this connection with you.

—There is another way to reach Erbos's heart. They will show us the way.

Thus, the forest was guiding them, slowly but surely, through paths hidden among the vegetation.

The pegasi made a great effort to keep their wings close to the body. At first, it seemed that their larger size would hinder their progress, but to Gosel's surprise, they displayed incredible agility.

—We have managed to surround their ranks —Elan said.

The boy was still unsure of his new friends' abilities, but something in the pegasus's voice convinced him of his words.

—In that case, we must be very close by now. My father once told me how to enter the enigmatic Erbos.

In front of them, he could recognize the natural arch carved into the gigantic tree.

—It's over there. Let's be vigilant. As soon as we cross it, we will be inside the city.

—Won't guards be waiting for us on the other side? —Elis asked.

Gosel looked at Elan and asked: —What do you think?

—The forest tells me to continue.

The three crossed the arch with determination.

They immediately experienced all the magic and wonder of seeing a beautiful city appear before their eyes. By order of the king, the men had withdrawn from the entrance, standing on the palace's perimeter. People had gathered in the main square, interested in learning more about the surprise army mobilization.



Gosel reacted quickly and took from his bag thin but large enough blankets, with which he covered the wings of the pegasi.

—Remain with your wings together and don't say a single word. We will try to make you go through horses.

Elan welcomed the idea and gestured for Elis to do as the boy had asked.

The Tower Guardian's son tried to remember his father's teachings as much as possible. He knew that the people of that kingdom were hospitable by nature and that while many of its inhabitants lived in Erbos, many others were scattered in towns and villages a few days away. He tried to act like a traveler.

—We must get as close to the palace as possible. There we can find out about his friends.

From that moment on, Elan and Elis would not open their mouths. They just nodded, mimicking the movements of the horses.

Suddenly a man approached them, and after greeting Gosel politely, he exclaimed: —  
What magnificent animals! How much do you sell your horses for, boy?

—They are not for sale.

—Are you sure? Because I can pay you very well for them.

—I brought them to shoe them. In my town, we don't have as good blacksmiths as here.

—I see. But if you change your mind, don't stop looking for me. I am the owner of the tavern, just down this road.

—I'll keep that in mind, thank you —said Gosel.

—Before you go, could you tell me what town you come from? I'd be interested in visiting you soon, to see if I can get horses as good as yours.

Once again, the boy made use of his prodigious memory. On his head was engraved the names of some cities and towns in the kingdoms his father cared for: —Lasea, we come from Lasea.

—We come? Who else are you traveling with? —the man asked strangely.

—Our animals are very dear to us. They are like family. That is why I consider that there are three of us who have made the trip to Erbos.

—I see... well, have a nice day.

Elis smirked while Elan made noises and movements typical of an ordinary equine.

They continued advancing until a little further on they saw the main square. It was full of people, who, sitting at long tables, shared a sumptuous lunch. Each had brought something to eat or drink, and now they shared that feast happily, waiting for the news of their army.

—Be alert and open your ears very wide —said Gosel—. Let's see if we find out something to take us with his friends.

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—Look! In the square —Kalya exclaimed.

—What thing? —Kes asked.

—Look at that boy who stands at some distance from people who are eating.

Kes, Kalya, and Alit had managed to enter the palace without being seen, and in their attempt to discover something that would take them out of that strange land, they had managed to climb one of the main towers.

From that height, through a small window, the girl from Bernia believed she had recognized her friends.

—What's the matter with that boy? —Alit asked.

—Look who's with him —she replied.

She couldn't be sure, but the girl was encouraged by the idea that it was the pegasi who were waiting in the square: —It's Elan and Elis. They have covered wings. I would bet my thunder sticks it is them.

—In that case, we must find a way to warn them —Kes said.

—I have an idea —Kalya exclaimed—. Listen carefully.

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Gosel and the pegasi had been observing the inhabitants of Erbos for a long time, not being able to learn anything that told them that their friends were indeed in the city.

Then Elis touched his father lightly with his paw and made him look up to a high point on one of the palace towers. A flash of light appeared and disappeared intermittently before his eyes.

—«It's not possible » —thought Elan —«it's about the pegasi call for help.»

Besides his winged brothers, only one person knew it.

When no one observed them, they notified Gosel, who verified that the flash came from a window where he thought he could distinguish three people.

—The time to act has come! —Elan exclaimed, opening his wings to free himself from the blanket that concealed his true nature. Elis did the same, motioning for Gosel to climb on top of him.

Some people noticed the strange creatures' presence, but by the time they finished reacting, the pegasi were already in the air.

In the tower, the boys had recklessly perched on the thin ledge, waiting for their winged friends.

—You were right, Kalya. Good thing you were right! —Kes exclaimed.

—Get ready! —said the girl with the beautiful red hair.

The people in the square were dumbfounded. They had never seen a pegasus.

Elan was the first to reach his young friends: —Kes, Alit, I'm going to pass again, as slow as possible. Be ready to jump. Kalya, you will go with Elis.

The ledge did not provide enough space for the pegasi to perch on it. It would have to be a moving rescue.

With all the hubbub outside the palace, the king leaned out of a window: —Cannot be! How did they get out of the dungeon?

His gaze wild and his eyes injected with fury; the sovereign could only watch helplessly as the beautiful and majestic creatures passed once more by the tower, allowing the boys to climb on them.

—Archers! —yelled the king.

—There are none left. They all marched to meet the spies, Your Majesty —a servant reminded him.

The pegasi flew carefully around the palace, checking that they would not be targets of an air attack, and then headed for the entrance arch.

The inhabitants of Erbos did not quite understand what had happened. Their king had told them about spies from neighboring kingdoms, and his army had marched out of the city, but now two strange creatures, winged horses, had picked up some youngsters from the palace tower and were leaving the city.

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—Elan, Elis, what a joy to see you again! —Kalya exclaimed.

—Allow me to introduce you to Gosel —said the Lord of the pegasi—. He is the son of the Guardian of the Tower of the Four Gates.

—It's an honor to meet you. Despite the rugged way you came to my world, let me welcome you —the boy greeted them.

—Thank you! It's nice to meet you —Kalya said quickly.

—Do you know why we went to fall here? —Kes asked.

—I'm not sure, but I think it has to do with my father's disappearance. I'm pleased that we could get you out of Erbos, but now it's him who worries me. He has not yet returned from another realm, which he entered two days ago. It's a dark and dangerous land.

—Don't worry. We'll see a way to save him —Elan said—. Once we are in the tower, we will find a way together.

—I appreciate your words. With your help, it will be easier —Gosel encouraged himself.

## VII. THE TAKING OF THE TOWER

Yali ran to her mother, excited and happy.

—Mom! Mom! Dad has returned.

The woman pointed the spyglass in the direction of the gate that led to the Kingdom of shadows.

Sure enough, Molen was standing next to it. He stood motionless, watching the tower.

—What do we expect? Let's get him.

—One moment, Yali. Something's not right.

Lyda noticed that her husband was not wearing the Armor of Light, nor was he holding the Silver Spear. Even Alena noticed the woman's obvious concern.

—Your father has the key with him. Either way, we can't open that gate.

—Let's receive him! —the girl exclaimed, activating the elevator.

—No, Yali! Wait!

By then, the man in front of the tower had used the key and had just opened the gate.

When Yali reached the family room, she could hear her father's voice: —Daughter, I need you to send me the elevator.

—Dad, have you forgotten what to call him?

—I'm very dizzy, daughter. Confused. I was barely able to escape my captors. I have been seriously injured.

Lyda had heard everything from the observation room, and with a shout, she warned Yali: —Don't recite the mantra! He is not your father!

With the concern of knowing that her father was injured and with the emotion of seeing him again, the young girl seemed not to hear her mother's words and spoke the secret words aloud.

—Yali, quick! Close the hatch! —Lyda hoped the thick wooden door covering the elevator shaft would prevent the intruder from reaching them.

Alena, also powerless, only managed to ask: —What can we do?

From the shadows that bordered the narrow strip of land in front of the tower, hundreds of dark warriors appeared. The disguise was no longer necessary, and the King of shadows abandoned Molen's appearance.

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—We're coming —exclaimed Gosel, who could hardly wait to hug his mother and sister.



The pegasi descended to a place the boy indicated. He got out and, taking the green key from his pocket, summoned the magic gate. To his surprise, nothing happened.

—I don't understand. The gate doesn't appear.

—Do you think this also has to do with everything that has been happening after your father's disappearance? —asked Elan.

—I don't know. Although I am not the guardian, I carry his blood, and I am authorized to use the key.

—Look! Up there! —Elis yelled.

Using their powerful eyesight, the pegasi made out Alena's shape, flying with two people on top of her.

—It's definitely about our sister. Your mother and sister must be with her —Elan said.

—They are under attack! —Gosel yelled—. The black gate has been opened, but not by my father. The dark king has taken the tower!

—Are you sure? —asked the Lord of the pegasi.

—There is no other explanation for them flying like that. Just as you couldn't get too close to the tower, they can't get away either. The narrow gap in which they can move will not be enough for them to be safe if they are attacked from the observation room.

—Is that why your key doesn't work? —asked the ever-curious Kes.

—The dark gate must still be open. It is the reason why I cannot open the green gate from the outside.

—Can he open it?

—Not this gate. But if he already has my father's other keys, nothing will stop him from opening the ones that lead to the realms of ice and sand and launch an invasion.

—Do those kingdoms have a way to defend themselves? —asked Elan.

—They have their own armies, and they will not shy away from combat... but they will be at a great disadvantage.

—Explain yourself, please —Kes exclaimed.

—If the dark lord keeps the gate to his realm open, and enters the other two, then the most terrible shadows from his land will lash out at his opponents. It will be a very uneven fight.

—We must do something. Sooner! —exclaimed Alit, who by then knew enough to feel fully identified with Gosel and his family's dramatic situation.

—Kalya, do you bring your thunder sticks with you? —asked Elan.

—Yeah, but they don't work in this place. I tried to use them before, and nothing happened.

—Something tells me that it will work. Come on, let's fly to the top one more time. We must try, said the pegasus.

—I don't know what Elan is thinking, but I trust him —Kalya said.

After a great effort, because each pegasus was carrying two people, they managed to reach the observation room's height. Alena was flying in circles in the narrow strip that separated the tower from the invisible barrier that prevented her from moving away. An army of dark soldiers had just breached the makeshift barricade with which Lyda had tried to stop them.

—Quick, Kalya! Use the thunder sticks. Strike them with all your might.

Somewhat skeptical, the girl did as instructed. To her surprise, the magic item did work very well this time. It had been a gift from the pegasi of Bernia, and being in that foreign land had not worked before. But now, being so close to Elan, the thunder sticks had regained all their magic. The shock wave breached the powerful barrier, allowing the pegasi to enter.

Alena could no longer resist the flight with two riders on top of her, but for an instant, she felt revitalized after the brief contact with her brothers.

—Let's go where we came from! —Elis yelled, watching as the dark soldiers readied their bows.

—No! If we don't get the tower back, everything will be lost! —Gosel yelled.

At that moment, the King of shadows appeared. He carried a very wide and long sword with him, which he wielded with energy, pointing it towards the pegasi.

—You will not interfere with my plans —he asserted, and at that moment, a bolt of lightning shot from his weapon striking Elan. The pegasus was thrown backward until leaving through the hole through which they had entered.

—Let's run! We can't do anything! —Elis yelled.

—We must not abandon the tower! —Gosel was resisting.

—If we stay here any longer, we will all be struck by that ray —Kalya exclaimed, after verifying that the soulless king was about to use his sword again. They had no alternative but to leave the place.

—I'm starting to feel very weak —Elan said as the others approached him. He could hardly move his wings anymore, and it was only thanks to his gliding ability that he was able to land moments later.

—Father, your skin is changing color —Elis exclaimed.

—My body feels more and more rigid. I can't move —the Lord of the pegasi couldn't say anything more. To everyone's horror, it had become a stone statue.

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As Gosel feared, the King of shadows was preparing to open the gates that led to the realms of sands and ice. By keeping his kingdom open, he would allow darkness to enter the unsuspecting lands. The invasion had begun.

—Now nothing can stop us! Move forward, my loyal subjects. The shadows will be a blanket that will make you stronger against our enemies. Lash out with all your fury and have no mercy.

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Many looked beyond the white walls in the city of ice, attracted by what has just appeared on the horizon: the blue gate had opened. The signal was immediately heard that alerted everyone in the palace.

—The guardian is visiting us —exclaimed the old king.

Soon the initial warning turned into one of alert when the lookouts confirmed that a terrible shadow began to advance towards the city. Just moments later, countless dark figures emerged from the tower, marching menacingly toward them.

—It's an invasion! All to arms! —they shouted from the battlements.

Soon hundreds of soldiers had already left the city, lining up in tight formations. They wore their armor of ice, which no ordinary arrow or sword could penetrate.

With determination and courage, they marched at a rapid pace towards the enemy.  
They would try to have the battle take place as far away from Helom as possible.

## VIII. THE INVASION OF THE LANDS OF ICE

The army was soon complete, occupying much of the vast plain that stretched between the tower and the City of Helom.

In charge of controlling the elements and producing ice and snowstorms, the captains were in front of their men, riding their wolves of war. Beautiful and strong white canids, with the size and strength to carry a man on his back with great agility.

They would soon discover that their enemies wore shadow armor, partially hiding their bodies. Furthermore, they were capable of summoning fear in its purest form, making their adversaries hesitate to hold their positions.

—General —said a captain—, the enemy hides behind the shadows, but the elements will find him either way.

—Very well. Let's summon the first storm —ordered the top leader of that army—. The old king has not been able to accompany us. He is very ill, but today we will all fight for him and our beloved land.

—Sir, our lookouts report that enemy soldiers have ceased to emerge from the tower.

Indeed, the King of darkness had led only half his forces, saving the rest for the attack on the sand-dominated lands. His offensive to both kingdoms would be almost simultaneous.

With more than one gate open, what the guardian of the tower had always feared began to happen. The very essence of the dark realms penetrated the white lands.

The first captain of the ice had his power significantly affected. The storm he summoned was no more than a light blizzard: —Something wrong is happening!

—The enemy is corrupting our land. We need the giants! —exclaimed the general.

—Very well, sir —another of the captains hurried back into the city, reaching an exceptionally large and heavy door set in the ground, in the middle of a large plaza. With the help of several men, he drew the bolt and then blew his war horn long.

The answer was immediate. Soon a series of thunderous growls began to be heard. Something had been awakened.

From that deep pit, giants began to emerge, similar in appearance to the men of that kingdom but three times taller. Their faces were fierce and covered by beards that appeared to be made of frost. Like their smaller brothers, they wore armor and ice blades.

Once they were all assembled, the captain spoke to them in the following words: —The time to fight has come. We have awakened you from your hibernation sleep to defend the kingdom.

The giants raised their swords in obedience.

—Follow me! —yelled the captain, riding on his white wolf at the same speed as them, taking strides three to four times as long as a normal-sized man.



By the time they reached the battlefield, the dark soldiers had already decimated half the icemen. Unable to summon the elements, the captains also fought hand-to-hand alongside their soldiers, holding out as long as possible. Their ice blades were reputed to be the strongest, but now, they were weakened by the shadows.

—Now you’ll see! —exclaimed the general, encouraged by the presence of the giants.

The black soldiers stopped their attack for an instant, in awe of the size and strength that such imposing warriors projected. But they did not feel fear. The hosts of the kingdom of darkness dominated the distressing disturbance of the mood so common among ordinary people. They were incapable of feeling fear as it was known to the inhabitants of the kingdoms of forests, sands, and ice.

—Giants, attack! —the general ordered, marching on his snow wolf’s back, at the head of this extraordinary force.

The black soldiers waited for them motionless. Some even seemed not to want to defend themselves from the crushing attack. Many lost their lives under the ice blades, but even that didn’t cause them to leave the trance they had fallen. The general of the ice tried to imagine what a macabre ploy that might be.

The dark king followed the battle from the Tower of the Four Gates. With Molen’s magic spyglass, he could observe in detail the advance of his hosts. When he noticed the giant warriors’ presence, he ordered his men through telepathy: they must stop attacking ordinary soldiers and concentrate on the new enemy.

—«Invade the minds of the giants. Infuse them with the most terrible fear. Let fear dominate them » —was the message he conveyed to his army.

The warriors of the kingdom of ice took the opportunity to kill as many dark soldiers as possible. Many barely moved, even though they received the deadly attack from the still dangerous ice swords.

A new hope flooded the hearts of the defenders of the white lands, but by the time they believed that the balance of victory was tilting their way, they realized that now a new enemy threatened them.

Seized by the most heinous terror, the giants fell to the brink of madness, and now they did not distinguish between friend and foe. With their unparalleled strength, they crushed and broke the bodies of many men on their own side.

The general of the ice could not quite believe what his eyes saw.

—Cannot be! Our giants are slaughtering us —he exclaimed in dismay—. Captain, order the retreat. We will defend ourselves at the gates of Helom.

A messenger sped off. The city would defend itself with its most powerful artillery.

From the observation room of the tallest structure ever built, the dark king smiled with wicked satisfaction. Soon his forces would conquer the capital of that land of perpetual ice. Then the shadows would spread to the rest of the kingdom.

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A few meters from the barrier that surrounded the tower, the brave ones who had barely escaped the black soldiers' attack were beginning to regain their strength.

Elis still stood in a state of shock, silently watching his father, now turned to stone.

—There must be something we can do —Kes exclaimed, full of his characterizing energy—. We must reverse the magic that transformed Elan into a statue.

—I don't know what we can do —said Gosel—. Now it's impossible to enter the tower, and what is worse, I am afraid that soon we will receive a visit from the army of the forests.

—Then we must convince them that we are not their enemies. Together we will find a way to enter the tower and stop the dark king —Lyda chimed in.

—I don't share your optimism, Mom. Not even with the strength of the entire army of the forests could we break down the green gate.

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A few leagues from there, General Bir, the highest military leader of the forest kingdom, led his men through the path that linked Erbos to the Tower of the Four Gates.

—Hurry up! We must get there before dark.

Bir brought the green trumpet with him, and thanks to an authorization from the king written on a scroll, a magical scroll, he now had the power to use the wind instrument that would make the gate appear.

The King of the forests remained in his palace's safety, waiting for the unprecedented raid result. The dark king had assured him that the gates were not entirely invincible: —«The tower is not impregnable, at least not without the presence of the guardian.»

It was time to find out if those predictions were right.

Not much later, a captain announced: —Sir, the tower's base is already visible.

The Tower of the Four Gates was so tall it was visible from almost anywhere in the four kingdoms. Once they left the forest's dense foliage, they could finally see the esplanade on which stood the most imposing structure.

—General, the men are ready to build the war machines.

—Very well. Get to work immediately! Only when they are done will I proceed to blow the trumpet.

—It will take them all night.

—I want them ready before dawn, Captain.

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Kes and the others had camped in the clearing next to the tower.

—Someone must find the army of the forests —said Gosel—. Mother, if you agree, I'll go.

—It's very dangerous, son.

—Yes, but it's what my father would do in this case.

—Our beloved Molen... you're right, we can't just sit idly by. Your father must remain a prisoner in the Kingdom of shadows, and our new friend remains petrified.

—I will accompany you —Kalya added.

—And I'll go with you. I'll carry you on my back —Elis put in—. From the air, we can find them in less time.

—I appreciate your offer very much —exclaimed Gosel—. You are very brave —he added, still looking into Kalya's beautiful eyes.

Kes couldn't hide some annoyance, as if the fact that his friend left with Gosel made him uncomfortable.

—Are you jealous? —Alit asked him quietly.

—Don't yell at me! —Kes demanded, his face flushed.

—Yes, you are.

—It’s already decided then —said Gosel—. We’ll go to meet the men of the forests and let them know that the dark king has deceived us and started the three kingdoms’ invasion.

While Kes, Alit, Lyda, Yali, and Alena would stay to take care of the petrified Elan, the brave and determined son of the Guardian of the Tower would try to get new allies. Somehow his mother was calmer, knowing that Kalya and Elis would accompany him.

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What was left of the army of the ice had completely withdrawn. The last defense would take place at the gates of the fortified City of Helom.

Dozens of trebuchets were ready for action. They could shoot their deadly charge several hundred feet into the air. The icemen had perfected the technique that allowed them to operate them with an extraordinary aim.

The dark forces continued to approach but suddenly stopped, at a distance from where they would measure the magnitude of the new weaponry they were about to face.

—They seem not quite sure of going forward—a soldier of the ice said animatedly to his companion from the top of one of the towers.

—Let’s not get overconfident. Remember what they are capable of. The giants could not with them. Some even ended up killing each other.

After a few moments of tense calm, the army of shadows began to move again, in a strange and peculiar formation.

—General, the enemy is approaching—a captain reported—. They have formed a very tight circle.

—It doesn't make sense. It's like they're inviting us to destroy them with our weapons. Trebuchets ready!

—Sir, we must seize this moment. We may not have another chance.

—There is something I don't like. Our enemy is cunning. They may not know our terrain as well as we do, but I'd bet anything that they would never commit such a tactical blunder.

—They are getting closer and closer, General. You must give the order to actuate the trebuchets.

The seasoned military man, who had led his men in remembered victories against the eastern steppes' nomads, was not yet sure that they should attack.

He picked up his spyglass and peered at the black soldiers once more. There was something uneasy about the strange wave of death that was about to overtake them.

—Captain, observe the enemy. Don't you notice anything unusual?

—Unusual, sir?

—This is the first time we have been attacked by black soldiers, whom we only knew from drawings and paintings by our sages and artists, but I could assure you that I remembered them being similar in size to ours.

—I still don't understand, General.

—Take a benchmark and tell me how big they look.

After a moment in which the captain observed the enemy, he finally exclaimed: —Sir, they are the size of our giants!

—They are our giants! The enemy's magic has disguised them as black soldiers.

The general's experienced eye had not been so easily fooled by dark sorcery.

The King of shadows could not continue affecting so many giants' minds. Such magic was very exhausting, especially at the distance he was. He decided to change his strategy. With the last wave of terror he had implanted in their minds, he managed to make them run in retreat toward Helom. With a less demanding enchantment, but at the same time highly effective, he was making them look like his own black soldiers in the eyes of the men of the white city.

The general of the ice was not sure what to do. There was a possibility that the giants disguised by magic, in panic, would attack the city as soon as they entered its gates.

—Sir, what do we do? —asked the captain, on the verge of despair.

—We have no alternative. Shoot the trebuchets.



Immediately the mechanisms were activated that released the enormous and heavy ice blocks, capable of crushing even the giants.

The damage to the first wave that was almost reaching the outer perimeter of Helom was considerable. Knowing that the innocent giants were coming under attack from their own people, the general's heart sank. He had no alternative.

—This is the way the dark king attacks us. It weakens morale and then destroys hope. But it won't be so easy to defeat us!

When there was no load left for the trebuchets, the general gave a new order: — Everyone in front of the city gates. To fight!

This time it was the black soldiers who reached the walls. It didn't take long for Helom's men to discover what the mighty men of the first front, as well as the giants, had already experienced. If they looked their enemy straight in the eye just for an instant, they would begin to fall under their dark and terrifying influence. In that way, petrified with fear, they were easy prey for their steel.

Although by nature, the icemen were among the bravest of all the kingdoms around the Tower of Four Gates, they could do little to avoid falling under an enemy who was attacking them so cunningly and cowardly.

From the observation room of the tower, the dark king laughed inside. Pleased by such a forceful result in his first attack, he ordered the rest of his army to invade the Kingdom of the sands.

—Soon the City of Artea will also fall under the shadows!

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After Helom's unconditional surrender, the flag of the dark kingdom was hoisted on the main pole. A smaller detachment was in charge of the city while the rest of the army began returning towards the Tower of the Four Gates.

The old and ailing monarch would remain a prisoner, within his palace, while his bound general was brought before the dark king.

—Sir, we will soon be ready to invade those filthy deserts —his first lieutenant informed the shadow king.

—Very well! Let me know as soon as our illustrious prisoner arrives. That general of the ice will wish he had never been born.

## IX. THE GUARDIAN'S PRISON

Confined to the shadow realm's darkest corner, a cold, stifling dungeon, Molen tried to keep his mind focused on how to escape.

He knew that his enemy must have already conquered the tower. His instincts and his heart told him so. He was well aware that his magnificent weapon, the Silver Spear, had been destroyed. His only hope now focused on getting through the locks and retrieving his Armor of Light.

He thought he observed strange shadows that slid silently through a small opening that communicated with the gloomy structure's upper level. He seemed to hear the grinding of wood on more than one occasion and even sounds like a faint breath right behind him.

—«It must be the enemy's dark magic, attacking my reason. »—thought the guardian. Despite being weakened by lack of food and water, Molen didn't lose hope that higher forces would intervene on his behalf at this fateful moment.

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—Vaz, I've felt a new call.

—A call? What do you mean, Diruk?

—I'm not sure, but it's warm energy, much like the one I felt when Unir contacted me before Kes and Alit left.

—Could it be the Lord of the unicorns again?

—I think not. This voice inside me is much more powerful. It seems to originate from an even higher consciousness.

—And what does it tell you? —Vaz asked.

—That evil is winning the battle.

—The boys, does it tell you anything about them?

—No, old friend —Diruk answered doubtfully—. But it seems to warn me that the time to participate again in the fight for good is near.

—Is Bernia in danger? Are they still there?

—It is difficult to interpret the message. At times, the voice overwhelms me.

—How could we intervene? We are ordinary men now —Vaz exclaimed.

—I don't know. But, just as Kes and Alit left Terralan to fight in a distant and unknown land, perhaps our lives still have a higher purpose.

The great friends looked at each other in silence for a moment. They felt something in their chests that they could not explain, like a fire of justice and hope that began to burn in all their interior.

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—I must concentrate more! —Molen exclaimed, channeling all his energy into giving his arms the strength they needed to escape. For the third time, he tried to separate the bars that kept him locked in the depths of the dark dungeon.

The images of his wife and children in grave danger forced him to keep trying with every fiber of his being. Although his family had managed to escape the king of shadows' hatred, the guardian knew that there would soon be no place in the four realms to hide.

Completely exhausted, he found that the separation between the bars was not yet sufficient to allow his large figure to pass through. He sat on the ground, leaning his back against the stone wall, and took several deep breaths.

—«I have to get out of here. I need someone to help me » —he thought on the brink of despair.

Suddenly a diffuse, ethereal shape appeared in front of him, emitting blue and white light. As tired as he was, it took Molen a moment to notice his presence. The strange apparition approached him, making no sound, and floating gently. It stopped close to his face.

—What is this? —he wondered, still confused—. My strength seems to have returned.

The luminous shape became more precise, and Molen observed two figures that he couldn't identify, giving him a deep sense of calm. He was invaded by hope.

—They look like horses... but they are something else—he exclaimed.

In the form of two of the most powerful spirits in Terralan and Bernia, the higher forces were granting him a wonderful gift to fight evil.

Confident, Molen approached the gate once more. He grabbed the bars firmly, and without any difficulty, he was able to separate them until he created a space large enough to escape.

## X. DEATH AMONG THE DUNES

The sands lay calm and bright, from the outer edge to the outskirts of Artea. In the most important city of the kingdom, nobody imagined what was about to happen.

A merchant, commanding a caravan of camels, was about to announce himself at the outer checkpoint, a couple of leagues from the city, when something powerfully caught his attention.

A very bright light, which rivaled the sun, began to take on a very peculiar shape.

—Cannot be! The yellow gate has appeared, and the king has not summoned the Guardian of the Tower —he exclaimed aloud.

His wife, also in charge of the caravan, added: —I had a dream last night, one that didn't bode well for our people. The appearance of that gate is the beginning of the end.

A wind coming from the place where the magic gate was now clearly visible began to blow with more and more force towards the east, even reaching the walls of Artea.

The guard in charge of the checkpoint was forced to dispatch a messenger hawk with an alarm call. In no time, the main army would be assembled in the main square.

What the merchants and the lookout saw next would leave them speechless: an army began to emerge from the gate, one that advanced very compactly and at a steady pace,

dominating in a short time much of the irregular esplanade surrounded by dunes of different sizes and shapes. The shadows had begun to challenge the Kingdom of the sands.

From the safety of the tower, and through his magic, the most twisted and evil being gave an unusual order to his general: —Put a few dozen prisoners in the front row. Tie them to the battering rams.

—Your Majesty?

—We'll use them as a warning of what will happen to anyone who opposes us.

The general of the disappeared army of the ice, still bound to one side of the dark king, shouted with rage and helplessness: —My men will not withstand the intense heat of the desert! Many will die of heatstroke before even reaching the battlefield!

—I count on it. In the end, they will become a ram of corpses. The men of the sand will quickly get the message.

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Unlike the King of the ice, the ruler of the sands was healthy and young. He would command his armies.

—General, send all master blowers to the forefront. The counselor has already warned us of the magnitude of this invasion.



Indeed, the wisest man in the kingdom used his magical arts to see beyond the obvious. He could not know the entire plan that the dark king had drawn up, but he could see that the army of black soldiers would stop at nothing and have no compassion for the fallen. No prisoners would be taken.

—They will soon know the power of blowers! —the general exclaimed, encouraging his men, who by then had already formed at the gates of Artea.

—We will also use mirages —said the king.

—Your Majesty? Blowers and infantry will suffice.

—The enemy is more powerful than you imagine. We have news that they have already conquered the ice, and Helom fell under their sword. Mirages will increase our chances of winning this battle.

—As ordered, Your Majesty. Masters of illusion to the battlements!

They were warriors of the sands who had mastered the art of creating mirages, illusions that could confuse the most trained eye and the sharpest sight.

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A good part of the day had passed, and the black army was still at a considerable distance from Artea when the dark general asked one of his captains: —Why are we advancing southeast?

—Sir, it is the direction in which we must go.

—What nonsense is that! The city is to the northeast, directly behind those dunes.

—But sir, our scouts confirm it's in that direction.

The general of the black army could barely bear the burning desert sun. Protected within his bunk, he had been slow to notice the change in the direction of his forces.

—We have wasted precious time because of your stupidity! Don't you realize that your scouts have fallen prey to a mirage?

The general pierced his captain's chest, taking his life in that instant and right there, showing that he had no compassion. As the dark king's first lieutenant, he possessed some power of clairvoyance, which allowed him to discover the deception in which his men fell. The black army had tried a dose of their own medicine. With that advance in the wrong direction, they had lost a lot of time, and now they were more tired than expected.

—The king will not be pleased with this mistake. We must speed up the march —the General ordered.

—Sir, what do we do with the prisoners? —a second captain asked nervously.

—The men of the ice will be tied to the battering rams as soon as we see the walls of Artea. For now, they will continue to advance to the forefront. Give them water.

—Has your heart softened? —asked the captain sarcastically.

—Don't be stupid! If they die now, they will not serve our purpose. They must be alive at the time of being used as human battering rams.

Still at a considerable distance, the army of the sands waited ready. The confrontation was imminent.

—Your Majesty, we have just been informed that the enemy has already corrected its course. They're headed straight here.

—They will be in for a great surprise —the king exclaimed—. It is known that our master blowers are much more powerful than their peers on the ice. They will not be able to withstand the onslaught of our sandstorms.

He was the only sovereign who had entered the Tower of Four Gates in recent times. Shortly after his coronation, he asked Molen to let him visit the Kingdom of ice. He was a just ruler who sought to get closer to the other territories' inhabitants from the beginning of his reign.

He came to know well the strength of the army of ice, and for that reason, despite knowing that the enemy was powerful, he felt confident of having one who could emerge victorious from the tough battle that was coming.

—Order the master blowers to wait in the towers. I will march with the infantry —he ordered his General.

—Your Majesty is not a good idea for you to take part in the first offensive.

—My destiny will be the same as theirs... To war!

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—You are a coward! You shield yourself in this tower instead of fighting alongside your men.

—Hush, snow rat! —cried the dark king—. I have not permitted you to speak. Cut off his tongue!

The general of the ice could not utter any other words. He had to use what was left of his energy to cauterize with the cold the terrible wound that one of the lackeys of the shadows inflicted him. Weakened, he could barely stand.

—Now you will listen in silence. ¶My victory over Artea and the forest kingdom is imminent!

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The shadow army was finally visible from the city. The heat had affected them significantly, but like marionettes handled by a puppeteer's strings, they continued to

advance, without fainting. Magnified by the tower, the power of their dark king had caused them to regain some of their energy.

—General, the master blowers must attack as soon as the black soldiers are within a quarter of a league —said the King of the sands.

—Yes, your Majesty!

—They must have mastered some very powerful magic if they think they can defeat us —the sovereign tried to cheer himself up in his own words. He was fully aware that if the dark king was invading them, it was because he had managed to breach the Tower of the Four Gates.

The invaders continued to advance. They were not within arrow range yet, but the start of the battle could no longer wait. From the two main towers, located at the front of the city, the masters raised their arms and invoked the desert spirits' power.

In just an instant, a deadly combination of wind and sand began to blow in the direction of the enemy.

The black soldiers in the vanguard received all the sand propelled's abrasive fury at that incredible speed. Despite his great power, the dark king had difficulty maintaining his warriors as devoid of will. Some seemed to partially abandon the trance and began to scream in pain after the skin of their bodies began to be torn off. Their clothes were already gone, after the first contact with the swift grains of sand. The dark magic was forcing them to keep moving forward, but it did not protect them from physical suffering this time.

The general of the black army had dispensed with the prisoners of the kingdom of ice. They had fallen prey to the heat long ago, and their bodies were left in the middle of the dunes. They would no longer be used as human battering rams after all.

In the Tower of Four Gates, various dark king subjects would pay unjustly with their lives for such an outcome. The general of the ice found some consolation. His men would suffer no more.

The tower usurper knew that the master blowers would not be able to maintain their power for long. He decided then to use a new and macabre strategy. Employing a new spell, he momentarily brought his fallen warriors to life. Those corpses, which were missing much of the skin from their bodies, served as a shield for the next ranks of black soldiers, who were thus able to continue advancing without receiving further damage.

—What demonic power is this? The dead march before the living —exclaimed the sovereign of the sands.

In that sinister way, the invading army was located a few hundred steps from the walls of Artea. Just as the dark king had foreseen, the master blowers were unable to continue their attack any longer.

—General, the men prepare their swords! —the King of the sands ordered.

—Your Majesty, many are in a panic. They never imagined that they would fight the reanimated bodies of dead soldiers.

—Dead or alive, our enemies cannot cross those walls.

Seeing the iron determination of his king, the General harangued his men: —Today, no one will take a step back! We will win the battle and drive out the invader, or we will die in front of our beloved city. Swords and blood!

—Swords and blood! —yelled many hundreds almost in unison.

The black soldiers had drawn their swords and were almost on top of the first row of Artea's defenders.

The clash was terrible. The invaders were driven from the Tower of the Four Gates by a sinister force, while the warriors of the sands fought defending what they loved most: their families and their land.

Once again, the dark magic propelled the aggressors into an attack almost devoid of all consciousness. The steel blades of their opponents pierced many, but they didn't seem to care too much. Only those who died stopped fighting.

The King of the sands didn't take long to understand the terrible reality. His men were being defeated by an army that at times seemed insensitive to pain or even death. He witnessed the supernatural way as his enemies stopped at nothing. One of the black soldiers, whom he almost cut the throat with his sword, caught him off guard and seriously wounded him in the chest, close to the heart.

—General, order the withdrawal. We will hide behind the walls —the king exclaimed, bloodied and gasping for air.

Two brave soldiers helped him return to the relative safety of the city. With the survivors of the battle still overpowered by the momentum of the fight, the heavy gates of Artea granted a brief truce to their exhausted bodies.

The dark king then ordered to use the battering rams, heavy trunks of black trees, carved with hideous figures of beasts and deformed men, ending in solid pieces of iron. The massive gates were strong, but the number of invaders, and the vehemence with which they charged and pushed the heavy beams, were already beginning to destroy them. The hinges were giving way.

—Your Majesty, they are about to enter—a demoralized general alerted his king.

—Gather whatever strength you have left. We will not die without giving up our last breath.

It was not courage that the soldier who would fight to give his life was lacking, but in the face of an enemy who seemed to feel no pain or fear, he believed he saw the end of his beloved city.

The gates finally fell and released an unstoppable wave of death and destruction. Unlike Helom, where most of the Kingdom of Ice subjects were able to save their lives after surrendering, the inhabitants of Artea would suffer all the hatred of the dark king: the black soldiers did not even spare the lives of women or children.

The King of the sands was spared his life. He'd be a valuable prisoner of the darkness.



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—We must approach carefully —said Gosel, who was behind Kalya, on Elis’s back.

The agile and swift pegasus had flown silently, under cover of night, to a small clearing near the army of the forest’s camp.

—What are they doing? —Kalya asked, unable to see the soldiers’ movements clearly from the air.

—They are building war machines. With them, they will try to knock down the green gate.

—But the tower is impenetrable, isn’t it, Gosel?

—The dark king controls it now. He must have opened more than one gate. It is possible that what we always believed to be the most impregnable structure ever created has now been seriously weakened.

—How can we get close without being pierced by an arrow? —Kalya asked—. They must have had archers around the perimeter.

—I have a trick —exclaimed Gosel, after smiling at his new friend.

The son of the Guardian of the Tower of the Four Gates knew that the forest kingdom inhabitants worshiped the owl, an animal that represented for them wisdom and justice.

Gosel had a remarkable ability to imitate birds, and now he would have the opportunity to put it to the test.

Kalya couldn't stop laughing at her companion's initiative, but then she kept quiet and very attentive after hearing the magnificent imitation. Together with Elis, they both remained well hidden behind the bushes.

It didn't take long for two soldiers, charged with guarding that part of the forest, approached to investigate the origin of that hooting.

—The sound comes from around here —said one.

—I can't see anything —said the other—. Are you sure it was an owl?

—Of course! What else could it be?

The thought of meeting one of the revered birds just before the battle filled them with courage. It seemed like a promising divine sign.

With their guard down and feeling special tranquility, both soldiers saw a magnificent creature appear before their eyes. Flanking it, two youngsters with outstretched arms, showing their open hands as a sign of peace.

—We are not your enemies —said Gosel—. We want to talk to your general —he added in a clear, slow voice.

The soldiers' first reaction was to raise their bows.

—Who are you? —asked one.

—My name is Gosel, and she is Kalya. We are accompanied by Elis, the son of the Lord of the pegasi.

—You must have been setting us up —the second soldier exclaimed.

—No, someone else has set a trap for us all. The three kingdoms are in danger —exclaimed Gosel.

—What do you mean?

—The King of shadows has taken the Tower of the Four Gates, and he is sure to hold my father the guardian prisoner.

—You are spies! Our king warned us of your plans to conquer us. He also told us about your new winged allies.

—My father has fallen victim to the power of the dark king —Elis said to the surprise of those men. The winged creature that so amazed them at sight had a voice that penetrated deep.

—How can we believe you? —asked the first soldier, who seemed wiser than his companion.

—Come with us. We will show you what that dark magic did to the Lord of the pegasi —. You can take our weapons if you wish.

—Very well, we'll give you a chance —said the forest man.

Gosel showed them the way: —Come on, it's this way.

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In Erbos, the King of the forests was the victim of terrible torment.

—You must fight, Your Majesty! —his advisor encouraged him. Focused on attacking Helom and Artea, the dark king had neglected the influence he exerted on his mind.

—I can't. It's too strong! —his voice reverberates in my head and forces me to obey him.

—You are the king. You cannot give up! Have another sip of this magical preparation. It will help you free yourself from that demonic mental yoke.

After a new attempt, in which the monarch had to get on his knees, haunted by a terrible pain that broke his body, he was finally able to shout: —Get out of me! You are no longer my master.

The counselor came over and helped him up.

—Now I see it. The dark king's plan. Those whom I accused of spies are our friends.

—Your Majesty —a messenger entered—, I bring news from the front.

The letter brought quickly by a hawk allowed the king to know Elan's condition, petrified next to the tower.

—Get my horse ready. I will march to war!

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At the top of the tower, the dark king could feel how his former puppet had been released from his mind control.

—I've lost a servant, but it doesn't matter. The Kingdoms of sand and ice have already fallen under my immense power.

—Your Majesty, what shall we do now?

—The forest army waits by the green gate, I will not risk my forces in an attack in which we have such a significant tactical disadvantage."

—What do you order then?

—We will leave the tower. The time has come to destroy it.

—How can we carry out such titanic work, Your Majesty?

—It's time to use the book!

In the center of the Hall of the Four Gates, within a glass cube that would have been indestructible with Molen's nearby presence, were the tower records. The history of the four kingdoms was written in that legendary book. It was a very ancient manuscript, said to have even greater power than the tower. Its magic was what kept the cloud-defying structure standing.

Once in his hands, the dark king looked at it with contempt and then ordered his lieutenant: —Call our armies in the realms of ice and sand. Let them wait by the blue and yellow gates.

Then the evil sovereign opened the black gate and walked away from the tower, accompanied by fifty soldiers.

—What will you do with the book? —asked his lieutenant.

—I will destroy it. You, come closer —he ordered one of his subjects.

When the poor wretch tried to tear off one of the pages, he was struck down by a ray of white light. A moment passed, and no one even came close to the body lying on the ground.

—I've already given an order —the dark king claimed.

Another tried to use his dagger to cut the pages, suffering the same deadly fate. The book could not be destroyed.

In silence, the sovereign pondered a moment, trying to remember everything he knew about the legendary object.

Finally, he thought he knew what to do: —Bring me pen and ink.

He turned the pages of the book until he came to one that was completely blank. He dipped the tip of the pen in ink, and after making a twisted grimace, he began to write: —  
«The foundations of the magnificent Tower of the Four Gates began to weaken.»

At that moment, still with the black gate open, the dark king and his subjects heard stone splitting and wood breaking.

Then he continued: —«A strong, constant and growing wind beat incessantly at its upper end, above the observation deck. »

As it had just been written, an unearthly current of air began to hit the top of the tower. The weakened foundations and the enormous lever force exerted by the winds produced at that incredible height were defeating the structure's integrity.

## XI. THE FALL OF THE TOWER

The army of the forests, now led by their king, had positioned themselves close to where Elan still stood petrified.

Free from the spell, the monarch had the opportunity to speak with Kes, Gosel, and the others. There was no time to lose.

Then the green trumpet was blown, and the gate appeared before his eyes.

—What will we do now? —Kes asked.

—We will charge against the gate —replied the king.

—The tower has been severely weakened since my father's absence —exclaimed Gosel—. I think we have a chance to beat it.

—We must hurry —said the once puppet of the dark king—. I fear that our enemy is close to reaching his goal. The realms of ice and sand have fallen under his power. But now it is much worse: great darkness will be present everywhere, taking on more force. In no time, he will become invincible, total.

The catapults of the forest army were ready to attack. They would drop their heavy load in an attempt to defeat the green gate.



Suddenly the unthinkable happened. To everyone's surprise, the tower began to wobble, faster and faster each time, until its foundations finally gave way. The structure broke in more than one place, causing giant stone blocks to fall from a colossal height.

Everyone had to cover their ears when the huge rocks hit the ground, pulverizing into much smaller pieces.

A strong wind ran from South to North and from East to West. With the tower collapsed, the landscape began to change surprisingly. Many were slow to interpret what their eyes showed them: now the four kingdoms were one.

Kes and the others observed two armies at a distance hard to calculate, marching towards each other. They were the black soldiers who had waited at the gates of the realms of ice and sand. Now they advanced to join their master.

Then Kes felt something extraordinary. A conscience that he did not know but that identified itself as just and benevolent.

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In the darkest corner of the shadow realm, Molen experienced excruciating anxiety that seemed to shrink his heart.

Without being able to specify what had happened, he sensed that it had to do with the tower. He could sense that the very nature of the four realms had been damaged. But then he

felt something else, that sudden energy that made him get up and have the necessary strength to overcome the bars that imprisoned him.

Guided by that same inexplicable force, he was able to defeat, without carrying any weapon, dozens of enemies that guarded the castle of the dark king. Using his advanced mastery of hand-to-hand fighting techniques, Molen could advance through each room of the menacing and treacherous structure until he reached the main hall.

In the center of the cold room, surrounded by four gigantic guards, he found his Armor of Light, which shone with all the luminosity it was capable of. Those charged with guarding it glared at him fiercely, filled with hatred, and invited him to confront them.

The Guardian of the Tower of the Four Gates did not hesitate to advance towards them, checking as soon as he was within a few steps that they were twice his height. However, the superhuman strength that he had gained since escaping from the dungeon would show up once more. Agility impossible for his opponents to comprehend also accompanied him during combat.

With his slow movements, the giants could not reach him, and when Molen struck them, he inflicted damage they would never have imagined receiving from such a small being.

Eventually, the four were defeated, ending up unconscious on the ground. Without taking a moment longer, the guardian donned his Armor of Light, immediately feeling its extraordinary power in every fiber of his being.

To his surprise, the Silver Spear awaited him by the door of the hall. Floating in the air, it glowed like never.

He took it with his right hand, and at that precise moment, a disk of light appeared above his head.

—I'm ready! —he yelled with his spirits alight.

## XII. THE REBIRTH OF THE AURE

—What is it, Kes?

—I don't know, I feel strange. But I think it has to do with those clouds that start to spin over us.

Alit worried about his friend: —Do you think it's the magic of the dark king? His power has grown enormously. Maybe he already knows that you were once an aure and thinks you are a threat to him.

—You're right, the aures! I can feel them.

—What are you talking about? I don't understand you.

—The clouds. They are forming a portal!

At that moment, the strange phenomenon took the form of an inverted cone, the wind ceased, and an unearthly silence flooded the earth in all four directions.

A bright light then appeared at another point in the sky. The silhouette of a tall and strong man became sharper, more precise. It didn't take long for him to reveal his true nature.

It was Molen, who wore his armor and spear. The Guardian of the Tower of the Four Gates descended gently until his feet rested on the ground, a few feet from his family, who watched him speechless and full of emotion.

—How is this possible? We left you for dead —Lyda exclaimed.

Gosel and Yali ran to hug him. Tears of joy didn't stop bathing their faces.

—I'm so happy to see you again —exclaimed the guardian—. The time for the final battle has come.

—Who...? What magic has brought you with us? —his son asked.

—One as strong as the one that created the tower. One that is about to bring into our world new, powerful allies.

—Who, father? —Yali asked.

—I know who —Kes exclaimed, beginning to levitate by then. A beautiful blue light surrounded his body.

Alit couldn't believe what she was seeing: —Have you ever...

Kes just smiled and looked up at the sky invited everyone to greet those about to arrive.

The cone of clouds and light spread towards the earth, almost touching it, and from within, the silhouettes of various men and women began to appear. They were enveloped in a bright light, which took a while to dim.

The first of these figures approached Kes, who by then had stopped levitating. Behind him waited the pegasi, Kalya, Molen, and his family, all surrounding Elan's petrified body.

—Diruk! It cannot be. It's you! —shouted Alit, who soon recognized his friend.

—Hello, brave friends. You need help?

Behind Diruk came the other ten aures: Vaz, Mia, Gaslan, Nerus, Dulak, Nuryl, Zanys, Hove, Nutas and Elkos.

Elkos spoke then. Whoever was once the wisest, most respected aure in the golden city of Ukaris said with great firmness: —The higher forces have once again bestowed our powers on us. The aures of Terralan have been called to fight alongside the Guardian of the Tower of the Four Gates.

—And not only that —Diruk added—. The Lord of the unicorns is coming in this dark hour too. Unir and his brothers are yet to come.

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In the distance, the dark king's army halted at the command of their master.

—What is it, my Lord?

—Our enemies are receiving help from the higher forces.

—What forces are you referring to, Your Majesty?

—Ignorant! The forces that have created this world, and many others, beyond day and night. The ones I had to challenge to obtain the power that made me much more than just a king of the shadows, the most powerful being in memory.

The faithful soldier seemed not to understand his words.

—Those forces have decided to work against me now. Well, it is too late. My power has grown to the extent that I would not have imagined. Now I will conquer this world, and then I will absorb our enemies' magic to reach lands beyond the horizon. I will destroy everyone, everywhere!

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Kes and Diruk introduced the aures to Molen and his family, the pegasi and Kalya.

The beautiful girl was in awe of the power Kes was now projecting. Each of the other aures could again invoke the magic they once had.

—Can you help my father? —Elis asked—. He and Alena flanked Elan's petrified body.

—Kes is the most powerful of us. But it will be someone else who returns your father to normal —Diruk explained.

At that moment, the earth began to shake. The cone of clouds and light, which disappeared after the arrival of the aures, had once again become present. It touched the ground, and then it began to grow, opening a big mouth, from which swift creatures appeared.

As Diruk announced, Unir and his magical race were joining the battle. When the last of the unicorns finally emerged from the portal, and the light grew dimmer, everyone could see the astonishing spectacle. They were dozens of vigorous and imposing creatures.

—Greetings, brave friends. We have galloped for several days to get here.

—Where do you come from? —Alit asked.

Kes and Diruk looked at each other. They knew the answer well.

Unir looked at everyone for a moment, in silence, and then said: —From a place where our physical bodies did not exist. A place that allowed us to connect with the Acuantalis, but also with the minds of our friends. From a place where I could speak to a distant cousin whom we must now help.

Elis and Alena, still in awe of the presence of the unicorns, knew the time to return the Lord of the pegasi to his normal state had come.

—Elis, take me to your father —Unir said—. It is time to wake him up.

When the unicorn was next to Elan, a smile spread across his face. It was the first time he had seen his cousin. He wouldn't have expected it to be in that condition, but that didn't matter much.

They all watched in silence, filled with a mixture of wonder and respect for the spectacle of gazing at such beautiful, fair, and brave creatures. Elan and Unir were roughly the same sizes. The magnificence of the wings of one was offset by the wonder of the horn



of the other. Everyone's heart could barely contain the emotion. Something magical and special was about to happen.

Unir approached slowly, bowed his head, and gently touched one of Elan's wings with his horn: —Welcome back, Lord of the pegasi.

At that moment, a loud, dry noise was heard, like that of a stone breaking in half. Then a crack formed on Elan's head. Then a second, and a third, until soon, the imposing creature's entire body showed cracks.

—Elis, son of Elan, come closer.

Showing some shyness at Unir's powerful and piercing voice, the pegasus approached.

—Now you must continue. Flap your wings, release your father from his confinement.

Elis positioned himself in front of Elan's body and did as Unir told him to. He flapped his wings with all the force of which he was capable. The pieces of stone, now fragmented after the magical touch of the unicorn, shot out in all directions, exposing the body of his father, intact and full of life: The Lord of the pegasi had returned to life.

Elan looked at his son, full of happiness. Soon he recognized Kalya, Kes, Alit, Alena, and the others.

—I was far away. My memories are vague, hazy. But clearly, I heard Unir's voice calling me.

The unicorn approached and greeted his cousin: —Now we are complete. The battle awaits us.

Kes hugged Elan and then Unir. He looked at them silently but still seemed to tell them a lot. Both creatures nodded energetically. The youngest and most powerful auro of Terralan would command the forces that would face the dark king. The three of them would lead the army of their new ally, the King of the forests. The Lord of Erbos, who had barely managed to emerge from the dark king's spell, was still in no condition to lead his men.

Molen, Alit, Kalya, and the other aures would lead the rest of the unicorns, and together with Elis and Alena, they would form a second front, commanding the other half of the forest soldiers.

A small detachment would take care of Lyda and little Yali.

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The dark king decided that he would wait no more. He knew that his enemies had received powerful reinforcements, and he was also aware that if he allowed more time to pass, they would organize themselves and attack him more effectively.

—We will use their worst fears. Foreigners have also had nightmares, ghosts that have once paralyzed them. Like the men of the ice and sand, they will succumb to terror.

By then, the dark army was barely half a league from Kes and his friends.

With the clairvoyance that he once again possessed, the great little aure knew what his enemy intended to do: —Unir, Elan, although his army is still some distance away, the King of shadows has already begun to attack us.

—It's true —added Diruk, who had been silent up to that point. Elkos the sage had also calmly waited for the moment to act.

—I can't protect you all from his sorcery. It's very powerful —Kes warned.

—More powerful than Gorn, or the three-headed hydra? —Alit asked.

—It's different, dear friend. His magic makes one succumb to the worst fears, distrusting even your brother, attacking him for no reason.

—Unir, you and the unicorns are immune to that black magic —exclaimed Elkos, whose gift of clairvoyance rivaled that of Kes—. The pegasi won't be seriously affected either, but the men of the forest will soon become our enemies.

—We must attack the king of shadows from two fronts —Unir said—. My unicorn brothers will carry forest soldiers on their backs. That small group of mighty men will not fall under the evil spell.

—My cousin is right —Elan intervened—. Elis, Alena, and I will carry three brave soldiers into the air, opening the second battlefront.

—I'll take care of bringing a group to that very front —Nutas said, the aure capable of teleporting men and beasts almost anywhere.

Molen was amazed at the powers of the aures, powers that had returned in the most critical moment, the one that would define the destiny of that world.

—We are ready for anything —exclaimed the guardian of the missing tower.

However, the power of the dark king would not take long to act. Some forest kingdom soldiers were already beginning to show signs of having fallen under its terrible influence. They were attacking each other.

—Quick, Nutas! Use your skills at once. Elan, get going —Kes said, levitating a few feet off the ground, surrounded by a bright light.

Unir also started. Diruk rode on his back, and on the back of some of his brothers were four other aures. The rest had appeared at the plateau's far end, leading the attack by large numbers of soldiers from the forest, mounted on spirited horses.

A sum of powers never seen in Terralan, or Bernia, was about to explode on that battlefield.

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—They attack me from two fronts —the dark king exclaimed, after identifying the pegasi in the air and the sudden appearance of a powerful army just behind his rear.

—Sir, what do we do? Divide our forces? —asked a confused lieutenant.

—It's not necessary, I have a surprise for them too.

His soldiers continued to advance toward their encounter with the unicorns. They seemed to be not paying attention to the second front about to attack them from the opposite direction.

Just when his forces were overtaken by the forest soldiers led by the aures and the pegasi, something unexpected began to happen. Two tornadoes, one of ice and the other of sand, descended rapidly from the sky.

The king of shadows had absorbed the powers of the inhabitants of the territories he conquered, and now he could use them at will and with unprecedented intensity. Those tornadoes were real monsters, capable of destroying the greatest warrior's courage.

—Let's keep moving forward! —Kes yelled—. Diruk, maybe you can do something.

Kes's great friend, the first aure he met, prepared to use his magical rumble. On the back of one of the speedy unicorns, he was ahead of the rest of his friends. After reciting the verse invoking the power for his hands, he clasped them violently, directing that energy towards the center of the ice tornado.

On the other front, the sand tornado was about to hit the pegasi and the rest of the forest soldiers, but then Kalya received a hint from Kes. The communication had taken place telepathically.

—Elan, take me to the tornado. The others back off! —the brave girl screamed.

From the other end of the battlefield, Kes directed his energy towards the thunder sticks of his friend: —«Now! Now is the time! » —he communicated to her.

More confident than ever of her friend's power, as well as her magical artifact, Kalya struck the two sticks with all her might, directing the shock wave directly at the spinning sand monster.

The two tornadoes were no match for the combined magic of Kes, Diruk, and Kalya's thunder sticks, extinguishing almost as quickly as they had appeared.

The king of shadows could hardly believe his eyes. His secret weapon had been annulled by magic that he didn't quite understand, at the hands of foreigners who fought with all their soul and spirit to stop his evil power.

But his frustration would continue to grow when soon after, he realized that his dark influence was not affecting the forest kingdom's men. He did not understand at all what was happening.

As in Terralan before, the power that emanated directly from the heart of Kes seemed to have no limits. It had created a protective barrier in the minds of each of those who fought against the shadows. Unlike the battles that took place in the Kingdoms of ice and sand, this time, the black soldiers would face men who would not be prey to that irrational terror.

The dark army finished bridging the distance that separated them from the defenders of the territory that was once the Kingdom of the forest, starting bloody hand-to-hand combat.

The black soldiers attacked at a ratio of ten to one. Still, the magic of the aures and the speed of unicorns and pegasi made it possible to compensate for the overwhelming numerical difference.

Mounted on such magnificent creatures, the soldiers of the forest fired their arrows with an aim and precision they never imagined possessing. From the air, the men mounted on Elan, Elis and Alena helped to coordinate the defense against the invaders better.

The aures also made their great powers felt: the speedy Nerus could not be reached, and Gaslan did not hesitate to use his invisibility against his enemies, who didn't quite realize what was taking the weapons from their hands. The protective dome of Hove allowed many to take refuge from the fierce attack of the black soldiers.

The dark king could then feel the immense power coming from Kes. He realized that all the other beings fighting alongside him were connected in some unique and intimate way with him, and he decided to go directly to meet him. Deformed by all the evil he was capable of engendering, his face barely evoked traces of his former humanity.

Before attacking, he took the book from the tower, and on a new page, he hurriedly wrote: —«He who led those who opposed the dark king died pierced by his sword. »

Focused on healing many of the wounded, since the strength of the old aure Vaz seemed at times not to be enough to heal them all by himself, Kes didn't realize that he was about to be attacked by the enemy.

In just moments, advancing through shadows that prevented his exact location, the dark king reached him with his drawn sword.

—Now you will die, and then one by one your friends will also fall.

Kes turned to look at him and silently cracked a smile.

—What does that expression mean on your face? —asked the shadow king in confusion.

—I will not fight you.

—Will you die without a fight?

—Someone else will take care of you.

At that moment, the heartless king just realized who was right behind the boy. Donning his magnificent Armor of Light and Silver Spear, Molen leaped over Kes.

—The time for you to pay for this infamy has come.

—You think you're a match for me, pathetic guardian? Your tower no longer exists, and now all this land will be mine.

Without a moment's hesitation, Molen used his spear to pierce his opponent. The dark king was very agile, dodging over and over the guardian's attacks. His sword was mighty, but it also failed to make a dent in the Armor of Light.

—Kes, quickly, write in the book what I'm going to tell you.

—What book? —the young aure asked.



At that moment, Molen called to the book, which left the place where the dark king had hidden it, appearing in the hands of Kes. A pen tipped with ink also materialized within reach of the aure.

—Write, Kes —the guardian shouted, fighting back the enraged attack of his rival. Write the following: —«The usurper of the tower vanished, ceasing to exist forever. »

—No!!! —was the last thing heard, just before the body of the dark king completely disappeared.

—Where did he go? —asked Kes.

—He has been banished deep into the soul of every living being on this earth. Now he will be nothing more than a bad memory, a dwarfed dark force, which we can control with our honest decisions every day.

### **XIII. BACK TO TERRALAN**

After the power of the dark king was overcome by the magic book and his forces defeated, the new and immense territory formed after the tower's fall began to banish the supernatural shadows that had damaged it.

The King of the forest, fully recovered from the mental yoke, and that of the sands and that of the ice accepted Kes's proposal to reunite in a single great kingdom.

—Who will be the monarch of such vast dominions? —asked the Lord of the sands.

—It must be someone of great wisdom. Someone honorable and brave —Unir emphasized.

—We know well who it must be... the Guardian of the Tower —exclaimed the King of the forests.

They all seemed to agree. Molen had the virtues necessary to guide them in this unique process of unification.

—I receive this request with honor and enthusiasm. The three kings will be my voice in what was their original territories. The most important thing is that men and women from all corners are treated with justice and equality.

With the stones of the Tower of the Four Gates, a new palace began to be built. Now all the kingdoms would make up a single territory without borders.

The people of the forests, deserts, and ice learned many things from their once distant and almost unreachable neighbors. New landscapes surprised more than one, giving them the wonder of diversity.

After Molen's coronation as the new king came the moment that Kes and his friends had been waiting for: the return home.

The pegasi would return to Bernia, while the unicorns and the aures, Kes and Alit, would return to Terralan.

Among those brave ones, from so far away, there was a girl who wasn't sure what to do.

—Kalya, if you want, you can stay with us —said Gosel.

She could no longer hide her feelings for the son of the new king. She looked at Elan as if seeking his approval, and after finding a warm and affectionate look in him, she said with some shyness: —Part of my heart will always be in Bernia, but now I want to continue my life here.

—Someday, when my son succeeds me on the throne, our land will have the most dignified and courageous queen —Molen exclaimed with emotion.

Kes forgot his jealousy completely. He was happy for his friend and for the just and honorable Gosel, of whom he was sure would be a great sovereign in the future.

At that moment, without anyone having called him, the bright cone of light appeared again, descending to the ground and inviting them to enter it.

—It's time to go —Unir put in, explaining that the higher forces would not wait forever.

—It's time to say goodbye —Elan said, looking at his cousin Unir—. Before, I didn't have time to thank you for bringing me back to life.

—Thank you for taking care of the boys in Bernia —exclaimed the Lord of the unicorns in his powerful voice.

—I will always remember you, Elan —Kes said. Beside him, and overcome by tears, Alit could not utter a word.

One by one, all the foreigners entered through the mouth of the cone, which pulsed and shone with great intensity.

The pegasi would be in Bernia very soon. Kes and the others would wake up on the north shore of the Acuantalis.