

Blessings of a Curse

Book One
of
The Nexus Of Kellaran Series

By
Wayne Edward Clarke

With Metric (SI) measurement units

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And coming in 2015;
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Maps

Be sure to check out the full-color video of the globe of Kellaran rotating in space on my Facebook Author's page, and soon at my website. These greyscale maps are not all to the same scale.

Kellaran Maps Key

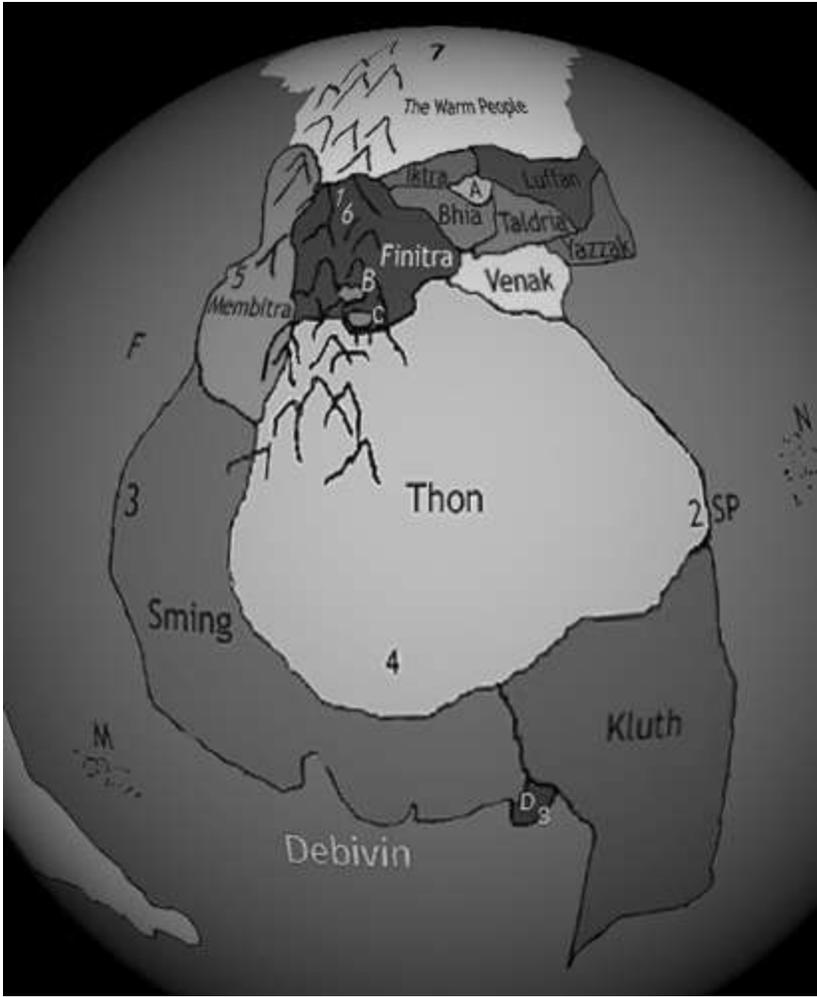
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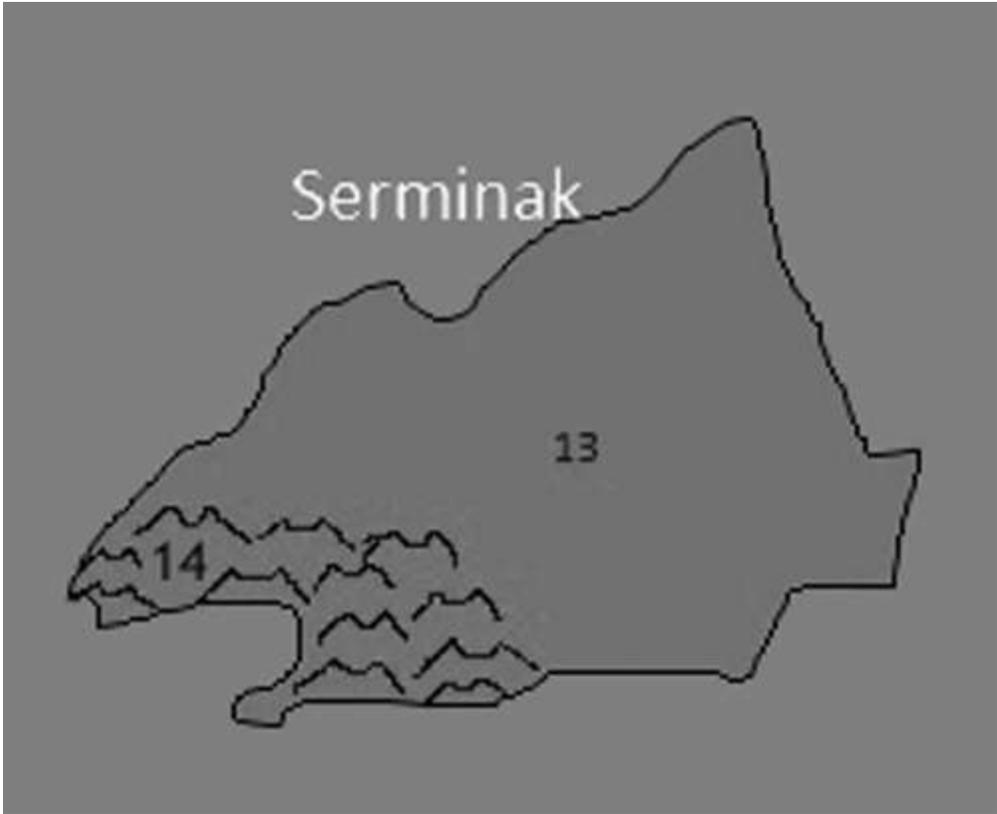
Debevin



Felion



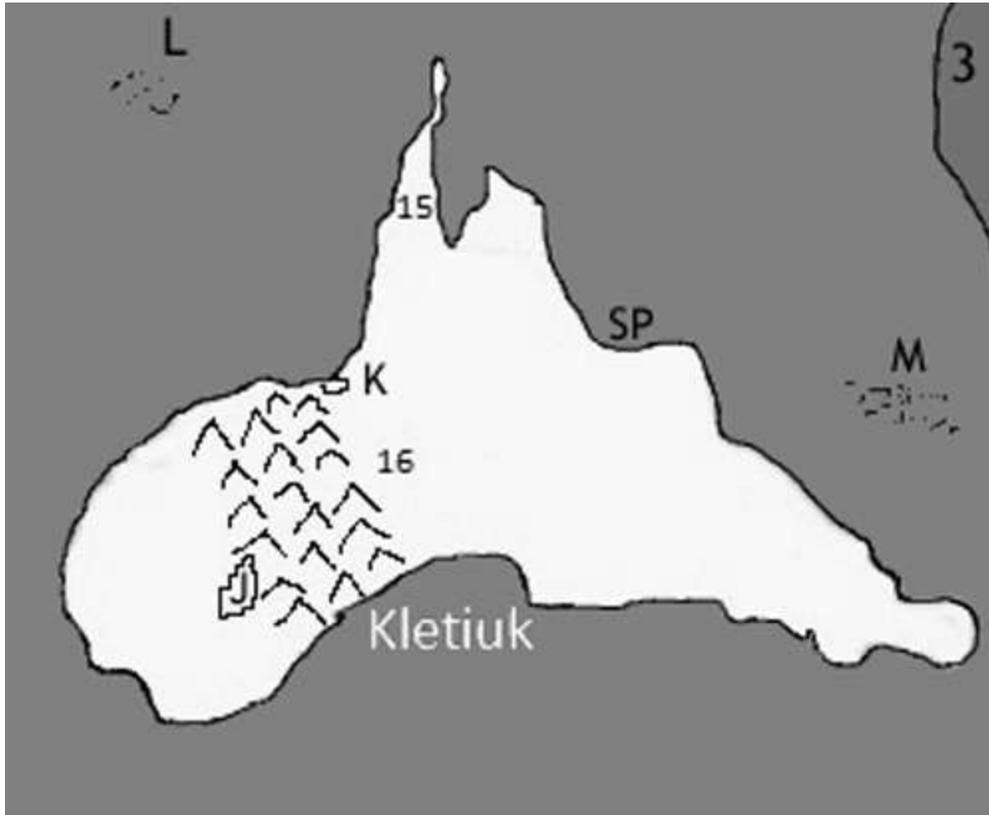
Serminak



Xervia



Kletiuik



Foreword

This is the Metric Edition, which uses Metric (SI) units of measurement. A USA (Standard units) edition is also available.

This is a very big book, bigger than most three-book trilogies, yet most of my readers tend to blast through it in the shortest time possible and then search for the sequel, which is now available.

With this edition, we've gone to great lengths to produce the very finest possible version of this book, but it's impossible to make it perfect for everyone.

Many who liked the book otherwise complained that there was too much detail, but even more complimented me for including as much rich detail as I have, so I haven't changed that.

Those who read fantasy primarily for the action should be aware that there's enough action sequences in this novel to fill most paperbacks by themselves, but most of them take place in the last third of the book.

In order to give each character a distinct personality, often it's necessary to have each of them speak with their own individual manner. Often this doesn't conform perfectly with Proper English, especially in the cases of children and those speaking a second language, though it's always easily understandable.

Other elements of my style that the reader should note are my use of *italics* to indicate quoted sentences that are telepathically or psionically communicated. For example;

"It's wonderful to be able to think with you, mind-to-mind." she responded.

I use the same MS Word files for both eBooks and paper books, and paper book printers don't like bold or underlined text, so I also use italics occasionally to indicate words that are spoken with intensity. For example;

"You are absolutely out of your mind!" he growled.

If a sentence is already italicized because it's a telepathic communication, any words in that sentence that are communicated with extra intensity will be indicated by being non-italicized, for example;

"That's all a bunch of crap, and you know it." she psionically reprimanded him.

I use ALL CAPITALS occasionally to indicate yelling or great loudness, whether the words are spoken or telepathic; volume and intensity being distinct qualities.

In this story, many common words are also the names of magic spells, such as Sending, Flight, and Speaking, or have traditionally had highly religious connotations like The Source, and those words are capitalized to indicate this.

Since languages began, they have constantly changed and evolved. The advents of written language, printing, and language standardization all slowed language evolution, but it still goes on. Sometimes the resulting conventions that make up 'proper English' don't make a lot of sense, and they are slightly different in every English-speaking country. In most of these cases I've caved and used the conventions anyway in order to avoid irritating my readers who are sensitive about these things, like writing 'seven thousand, three hundred and fifty-five'. It makes no sense that the compound words for numbers up to one hundred are hyphenated, like fifty-five, and the others aren't, like three thousand. But I go with it anyway.

However, there is one English convention that I absolutely refuse to follow because it distorts the emotional connotations of the writing. I'll point it out one here so that you'll know that it's not a mistake; I'm doing it on purpose.

If a quoted sentence is a question or an exclamation, it is conventionally written as a complete sentence within quotations, for example;

"Get down!" she yelled. Or;

"Is that right?" he asked.

However if a sentence that would normally end in a period is a quotation, correct English says that it should be ended with a comma. For example;

"I live here," he said.

But the comma makes it a sentence fragment rather than a complete sentence, and leaves the reader hanging, giving a different emotional feel to the writing compared to the way I would write it, which is;

“I live here.” he said.

I only use a comma to end a quotation if it truly is a sentence fragment, because the sentence was interrupted where a comma would normally go. For example;

“I live here,” he said, “And you’re not welcome.”

I suppose in that case I shouldn’t capitalize the word ‘and’, since it’s not really the first word in a sentence, but it bugs me if I don’t.

It’s hard to change what is considered Correct English, but I hope that other writers who read my books will agree with me about these points and do the same in their own writing, and that eventually doing it our way will be considered correct.

Wayne Edward Clarke, January 21, 2015.

Blessings Of A Curse

Chapter 1

(If you are reading this account in a language other than Grand High Draconian, you might consider making a contribution to the Translation section of your local Magic Users Guild. XVD)

Yazadril watched the huge human walk blithely through the border Wards of The Nine Valleys like they weren't even there, and his breath hissed in between his teeth. The ancient mountain elf was stunned with surprise for the first time in decades, and he nervously tugged his long white beard in consternation. Nothing could pass the Wards unless a Warder had admitted it, nothing! And since he was one of the Warders, he knew with certainty that no such admission had occurred! He felt a moment of fear, an emotion he had not experienced for centuries, and quickly cast Unseen upon himself with a quietly hummed note and a practiced gesture.

Then his intellect re-asserted itself. He reasoned that since the human had been completely unaffected by the Illusions, Force Barriers, and other magic defences of the border Wards, he may also be unaffected by the Unseen spell. That thought gave him another fright, and he carefully moved behind a tree, then peered around it at the human.

'By the Source, it is the biggest one I have ever beheld with these eyes!' he thought to himself. 'He is the size of a great plains bear, and just as shaggy as one!'

He forced himself to calm, and considered what he knew that was pertinent.

Only fourteen times had human wizards managed to see through the Illusions of the Wards in Yazadril's exceedingly long lifetime. Five of them had openly camped before the Wards, since they had come to speak to the mountain elves, to peacefully trade in knowledge and goods. Six wizards had sought to sneak into The Nine Valleys to steal objects of power, and only two of those had passed the Wards. And three wizards had come with armies, and had attacked the barriers seeking to conquer the valleys beyond, and usurp the more concentrated power available there.

They had all failed. The High People did not trade with human wizards, neither for knowledge nor for goods. The two thieves who made it past the Wards had used masterfully subtle spells of disguise and distraction to pose as resident High People, only to be caught by the hidden Sentries at the top of the pass. And none of the three would-be conquerors had survived their attempts, since all three were brute-force types, and the defensive spells of the Wards had transduced the massive power of their attacks and sent it back at them in unexpected forms.

They had all obviously been human Master Wizards, gray or white of hair, wrinkled of face, clad in ornate clothing and festooned with signs and objects of power.

This huge human was another matter entirely. His long black hair and beard covered most of his face and stuck out in all directions, making it hard to judge his age, but his muscles bulged beneath the bushy hair on his chest and along his arms and legs, and his movements were smooth. He wore a tattered kilt of dark gray plaid, the remains of a gray cotton shirt with the sleeves ripped off that hung open and untucked, and he carried the remnants of a black cloak gathered as a bag and slung over his shoulder, stuffed with unknown items. Crude leather sandals whisked quietly through the deep grass as his long and seemingly slow stride carried him upslope almost as fast as Yazadril could run.

He appeared to be a simple peasant, and for him to have simply walked through the Wards, apparently without even realizing they existed, was almost inconceivable! He walked with his head down, watching the ground, and there was a slump to his shoulders.

As he passed within six meters of Yazadril's hiding spot the elven wizard caught his scent, and realized that the human was surprisingly clean, given his generally unkempt state. Which might indicate that his appearance was a disguise.

As Yazadril began stealthily following the human upslope another thrill of rare emotion raced through his old heart, this one composed equally of fear and a burning intellectual curiosity.

A moment later his quarry stopped beside the path to dig a wild onion with a small knife, scrubbed most of the dirt off with a handful of dry grass, and stood to stow it in his cloak. He stretched hugely, then looked to the right of the path. He noticed the Clearing of Contemplation where Yazadril had been meditating until he'd heard the human's distant approach up the scree slope outside the Wards.

The big human ambled into the small meadow and sat himself down on Yazadril's favorite sitting log, and looked out on the great untenanted valley beyond the Wards, enjoying the very view the old elf so often enjoyed. Or so it seemed at first.

He surprised Yazadril again when he put his head in his hands and began to cry, softly at first, then with great wracking sobs of utter despair. It sounded very strange, as his voice seemed unnaturally deep to elven ears.

After ten minutes of that he seemed to have cried himself out, and gradually calmed. He looked to the setting sun, then began to set up a crude camp beside the log. Having finished that, he set up some small snares around the perimeter of the clearing, then returned to his camp to relax against the log and eat some wild berries and roots he withdrew from his cloak. After eating, he drank deeply from a waterskin, hid his possessions in the hollow end of the log, and rolled himself in his cloak before lying down in the grass beside the log. He soon appeared to be asleep.

Yazadril watched all this from the cover of a clump of bushes ten meters beyond the clearing's edge. He watched a half-hour longer to be sure the human truly slept, then silently made his way back to the path.

He hiked halfway up to the top of the pass before he cast a careful Speaking to the sentinels there.

"Dilimon, it is I, Yazadril! Bring three others of the Sentries, some food and drink, and a warm cloak. Meet with me on the pathway down to the border, move most silently, and do not cast the power in any way! As well, bring your hunting weapons! And before anything else is done, call to duty every Sentry we have available, have them equip themselves with every mundane weapon that they own, and post them in defensive formations about the top of the pass!"

"I hear you Yazadril! Myself, three others, food and drink, a warm cloak, mundane weapons, in stealth down the path, all Sentries to defend the top of the pass! We follow your instructions!" Dilimon's mind-voice rang in Yazadril's head with youthful excitement, and Yazadril could tell that Dilimon was relaying the orders and taking efficient action to carry them out, even as he continued the mental conversation. *"What is it Yazadril?! A basilisk?! A dark dragon?!"*

"It is a human, Dilimon. He is camped and sleeping in my Clearing of Contemplation, two hundred paces inside the Wards!"

"By my soul! Shall I alert the other senior wizards?"

"Do not wake them if they are already sleeping. This human does not appear to be a wizard. If any are still awake, have them informed, and tell them that I will speak with them about it in a few hours. Beyond them, and the eight members of your squad, none must know of this! Tell the extra Sentries that they are there on my order, as a precaution only, that there is quite likely no danger, and nothing else!"

"Yes Yazadril. But... If he is not a wizard, how did he pass the Wards?"

"I am not sure. He did not so much defeat the barriers, as simply ignore them! He did not appear to even realize that they were there! I have kept myself concealed from him, and I doubt that he even knows that he has trespassed onto our lands!"

"By my soul! He must have elven blood in him, somehow!"

"He doubt that such is the case!" Yazadril chuckled. *"He is the biggest, hairiest human I have ever seen! He must be two and a half meters tall, and weigh as much as any six of us!"*

"He must be a giant, or partly one!" a female voice said.

"No, Yalla." Yazadril replied, recognizing the interjecting voice as that of the on-duty Sentry Wizard. *"I have had that thought as well, but there is no flavor of giant in his scent or his aura. I would certainly have sensed it. He is simply a very large human. I do not think he is very dangerous to us, but who can say?"*

"However, he is definitely a heretofore unique magical anomaly, with unknown abilities, perhaps including the ability to detect us Speaking right now! So, we end this conversation, and hereafter none will cast the power in any way on this side of the pass, until we have learned all that we must know about him!"

"We hear you Yazadril, no magic beyond the crest of the pass. We follow your instructions." Yalla responded, seeming worried.

"We see you, Yazadril. We will be with you in six minutes." Dilimon reported.

When they arrived, the four Sentries seemed to simply appear out of the darkness, exhibiting incredible stealth and woodcraft far beyond that shown by Yazadril, even when he'd had their youth.

"Well done. You made good time." he told them with quiet pride. "Give me the cloak, I am chilled to the bone. Thank you. Now food and drink. Thank you." He wolfed down a few huge bites of sausage and cheese, then took smaller bites so he could talk with his mouth full. It was an unthinkable performance under most social circumstances, but standard procedure on military operations where time was of the essence.

"I will need you to guard me while I perform a very deep Reading on him." Yazadril continued. "You will take no action unless you are *absolutely certain* that he is attacking us! If he does attack, we will retreat if we can, and you may have to assist me. However, he may move very quickly, so retreat may not be practical, particularly if I am incapacitated.

"Yalla, if you must defend against him, and your spells affect him, cast Binding and Sleep. If they do not affect him, cast Concussion on the ground in front of him. A few blasts of dirt in his face should discourage him. If it does not, tip a few trees down between him and us. Do not injure him unless absolutely necessary! Find a stone as large as your head, and if he is getting within five meters from us, you can cast Movement on it and break his legs with it.

"You three keep your hunting bows ready. If he actually gets his hands on one of us despite everything Yalla can do, then, and only then, you will kill him. Immediately. And thoroughly."

"We follow your instructions, Yazadril!" Dilimon stated. He and the other two males grinned eagerly with barely-suppressed excitement. Yalla's warm smile was a bit worried, but fully resolute.

"After uneventful decades guarding the pass, finally there is a chance for some action, you think young ones?" Yazadril asked with a smile. "Let us enjoy that feeling for a moment.

"Now, let us also remember how much we hope that things will remain peaceful. It is a painful thing to have a killing on your soul, no matter how justified, and seeing a comrade hurt or killed is worse. Let your training and your intellect guide you, no matter how intense your emotions become. What this human has done is completely unique and very dangerous to us all, I do not need to tell you that, so it is imperative that we learn how he has done it!

"Now, you know where the clearing is. When I am in position, I will take the Reading, which could last from fifteen minutes to an hour. Then we will return to the path, and I will tell you what I have learned, and we will decide on further action at that time."

With that, he turned and strode down the path, his old shoulders braced with determination.

He returned to his spot in the bushes, sat cross-legged on the turf, and immediately fell into trance. The three archers deployed themselves to advantage around him, while Yalla knelt beside him to monitor him and to lend him some power if need be, her eyes locked to the dark form of the sleeping human.

After almost an hour Yazadril began a strange humming unlike any they had heard before. Dilimon looked to Yalla with inquisitive concern, but she only shrugged. Satisfied that the elder was in no danger, even if Yalla did not understand what he was doing, Dilimon returned his attention to his vigilance.

Finally, over two hours after he had began, Yazadril rose and moved quietly back to the path. The four Sentries melted through the forest in his wake, and the five huddled closely on the path to hear Yazadril's whispered report.

"He poses no danger to us, not directly at any rate. I had to bring myself so far out of tune I could barely feel the power, to even get a basic analysis and a fringe Reading of him. And after two hours of effort, I was only able to learn a few things about him, including the nature of his ability. He is physically so perfectly attuned with the power field that it passes right through him, like light through clean water. He is... transparent to magic, and all magic is therefore transparent and invisible to him. That is how he passed the Wards. It means that though he is immune to magic, and our spells will not affect him, he also cannot attack us magically. The second thing I learned is that he knows nothing of this property in himself, or anything else about magic. If we have a conflict with him, it will be no more difficult to fill him with arrows than any fat boar."

There was a long silence as the sentries absorbed that with relief.

“As to his personality, I sensed no particular evil in him, and his soul is shattered.” Yazadril related, so quietly their keen hearing could barely make him out. “I could get no details, but he has lost his family, his home, everything, to some horrible disaster. Or... Or to a series of disasters.”

“Huh. He is strange indeed.” Yalla stated thoughtfully. “I would have thought that with an hour’s effort, you could Read anyone so deeply that you would know what they had eaten for breakfast on every morning of their lives.”

“Yes. Anyone but him.” Yazadril nodded. “And the tiny bits of information I did get cost me as much effort as any spell I have ever cast.”

“What will we do?” Dilimon asked.

“We will wait until he wakes, and then I will speak with him. Perhaps something in his history will reveal how he came to exhibit this property.”

“Honored Elder Wizard Yazadril, Prince of The Nine Valleys of the High People, I hesitate to advise you without invitation, but you must sleep, while we will keep watch. You appear near exhaustion.” Yalla told him with a look of concern.

“I know. I will sleep while we wait. And as I say, he poses little danger without magic and armed only with a paring knife, so two of you may sleep as two guard him, or one of you can return to the top of the pass for relief.”

“We are the night watch for the south pass this year, Yazadril, and had arrived on station only a few minutes before your call.” Dilimon told him with a grin. “It will be no trouble for us to remain alert until dusk on the day after tomorrow, if necessary.”

“Excellent. Report to the wizards and Sentries that he is harmless, dismiss the extra Sentries, and inform everyone that I have taken this human under my protection as a study animal. Do and say no more than that, then return here.”

“A study animal? Like he was a rare butterfly you had never seen before?” Dilimon asked with a quiet chuckle.

“Exactly like that.” Yazadril replied, grinning. “I return to my place behind the bushes to sleep. Wake me when our guest first stirs.”

Awakening. Grass beneath him, scratching his neck. Then as always, the memories, the sadness, the despair, the pain. Weeping, weeping like a child. And why not? There was no one to see or to care.

But somehow it was not as bad this morning, and he forced it away with less effort. He sat up and rubbed the sleep-sand and tears from his eyes, and looked around. Perhaps it was this beautiful, magical seeming place, this little high meadow with the tiny brook and the perfect view of the valley below. It seemed to bring him a small measure of serenity, somehow.

He rose and crossed to the brook to wash, then checked his wire snares. Four of the simple traps held prey; three squirrels and a small rabbit, and in each case the snares had functioned perfectly, bringing death to the small animals almost instantly by breaking their necks. He was glad to see that; it made it easier when he respectfully apologized to their spirits for their deaths in a brief prayer.

Having done that, he moved all ten snares and reset them, then cleaned his prey on a flat rock by the brook.

After assembling a shallow bronze pan and three iron rods into a small tripod brazier and building a tiny fire in it, he roasted and ate his catch one by one.

He reflected that it was rare to harvest such a bounty. Generally, only one of the snares caught anything on every second morning, and the meat was only a supplement to his general diet of roots, leaves, berries and nuts. Those were plentiful here as well. Perhaps he would stay here, until a pair of weeks before the snows should fall.

Then he realized that it was the first time he had consciously thought about the days ahead since... Since he left Shinosa Valley.

Clamping down hard on his thoughts, he fiercely concentrated on the sensations of the moment; the taste and texture of the food he was eating, the heat of the fire on his face, the morning sun. In this way he managed to avoid weeping again.

Having finished eating everything but the cleaned skins and bones, he took those with him when he walked a hundred meters to visit the forest, and buried them with his spoor.

He returned to wash in the brook, then cleaned and disassembled the brazier and stowed it in the log.

He sat on the log to admire the view for a while before he set out to gather plants.

A voice called from over by the path, giving him a violent startle.

“Hello the camp!” was called, and it sounded like an old woman.

“Uh... Yes?” he stammered.

Yazadril, standing by the path, almost lost his train of thought. What a voice! Even raised a bit to call out, it was the deepest, lowest, richest voice he had ever heard! And its fundamental resonant frequency was exactly in tune with the power field!

He gave himself a shake to recall himself to the business at hand, and called out again in the Trade Common language. “I generally sit where you are, of mornings, and meditate while contemplating the view. May I join you? I have some very tasty apple pastry I would share, and some good bumbleberry wine as well.”

“Uh, sure.”

Yazadril walked into the clearing, whistling a happy tune as he retrieved the pastry and wine from his trail bag. The huge human was standing and staring at him strangely, then suddenly dropped to his hands and knees and bowed his head.

“Now now, no need for all that!” Yazadril told him in surprise. “I doubt you’ve seen one of The High People before, but you’ve nothing to fear from me!”

Slowly, the human’s startlingly bright dark blue eyes rose to look him up and down, taking in the fine doeskin boots, the loose satin breeches colored the same green as the grass, the silk shirt in the same gray as the rock of the mountain, the stout brown woolen cloak and matching trail bag. His gaze settled for a moment on gracefully pointed ears peeking through shining gray hair, before meeting Yazadril’s ancient eyes with a puzzled look.

“You... You’re not a god?” he finally asked, his voice rumbling even deeper and lower now that he spoke quietly.

“A god?! No no, don’t be silly!” Yazadril laughed as he sat on the log and spread his treats beside him. “I imagine your people would refer to me as a mountain elf. Why would you think me a god? I admit the beard gives me a somewhat dignified air, but...”

“You’re glowing.”

“Am I? How very interesting! But it is no sign of divinity, I tell you that for certain!”

“I am Yazadril of The High People of The Nine Valleys. Here, have some pastry.”

“Thank you. I’m called Markee, from... Shinosa Valley.” The huge human said as he sat a respectful distance down the log.

Suddenly he was struggling to contain his tears.

“Ahh, Markee, anyone could see that you bear a great grief.” Yazadril gently told him. “There is no cure for that except time, and living a good life. But I could lessen your pain a little, for a while, if you’d like.”

“Yes. Please help me.” Markee quietly sobbed as his eyes closed, and his tears spilled from them.

Yazadril hummed a short note and cast a mild Tranquility upon him. It passed through Markee like he didn’t exist, and dispersed beyond him a moment later.

“Oh yes. I’d forgotten about that.” Yazadril muttered in chagrin. He concentrated hard while humming a discordant air, and with great effort managed to bring himself and his intensified spell out of synchronicity with Markee, at least enough that the spell would adhere to the human a bit when the old wizard shoved it into him.

The effort left him gasping and shaking, and Markee quickly reached down to gently steady his shoulder, or he’d have fallen off the log.

“I’m... I’m all right. Just give me a moment to catch my breath.” the old elf gasped.

“I... Thank you. My sadness seems more... distant, now.” Markee mused. “Like it was a year older than it is.”

“You’re welcome. That was my intent.” Yazadril nodded as he regained his composure, and poured them each a goblet of wine. “It should last a few days. Perhaps a week.”

“You’re a wizard!” Markee stated in soft amazement.

“Yes, I am.” Yazadril nodded again, and took a deep drink. “That’s why I seem to glow to you, I suspect. You can see my power.”

“How is that possible?! That I can see that?” Markee asked in confusion.

“I’m not sure. Tell me, if you don’t mind my asking, how old are you?”

Markee was surprised at the question, and considered his answer carefully. “I’ll tell you, if you tell me how old you are first.” he eventually replied.

“Fair enough. I’m eight thousand, four hundred and seventy-six years old. I am the eldest of my people, by a wide margin.”

Markee gaped, and Yazadril sighed.

“Perhaps I shouldn’t have told you that, but you asked, and I’m a bit vain about it. I admit to some pride at having fought off the great darkness for so long, though of course it’s simply good luck, for the most part.” Yazadril grinned, combing his beard out with his fingertips. “Now, will you keep your part of the bargain? Will you tell me your age?”

“I’m sixteen.” Markee stated, still gaping. “You’re really that old? That’s... I mean, what you must have seen! You must know everything by now!”

Now it was Yazadril’s turn to gape. “Sixteen! I’d guessed from your manner that you were younger than you seem, but by the Source! Have you even finished growing yet?!”

“I might be seventeen by now. I’ve lost track of the date.” Markee said defensively. He turned away, mildly embarrassed, and gazed down the valley. “I doubt I’ve finished growing. This shirt fit me loosely when I left home, and I had to take the sleeves off a few weeks ago, because they were too tight around my arms.”

“Amazing! Well I have seen some things all right, and I know much, but I know a great deal less than everything! You’re certain proof of that!”

“How do you mean?” Markee asked, turning back to the old elf. He was suddenly reminded of the delicious scent coming from the pastry he was holding, and took a huge bite of it.

Yazadril considered him carefully, and decided to be honest. “You display some remarkable properties, young fellow. Your apparent ability to see my power, for one. For another... Tell me, as you came up here, when you passed the top of the scree slope a few hundred paces downhill, did you notice anything, ah, different, shall we say?”

Markee considered as he chewed, then shook his head.

“I thought not. That’s the border of the lands of The High People, and...”

Markee swallowed hurriedly as he stood. “I didn’t know, I didn’t mean to trespass! I’ll leave if you...”

“No no, my boy, I very much wish you to stay!” Yazadril assured him, interrupting in return. “Please, sit down, you are welcome here, and under my protection.

“You see, raw magic power comes from the sun, with the sunlight. But that raw magic energy is not useful, it is not in a form that elves and wizards can use. It passes completely through most things without affecting them, like sunlight through clean water, until it strikes the stone of the world. Some rock is completely out of tune with the raw power, and it reflects the raw power back into the sky. Some rock is partly in tune with it, like the rock of the Nine Valleys of the High People, and this rock absorbs the power, and slowly re-emits it at a lower frequency. Do you understand that?”

“I don’t think so.” Markee admitted. “In tune you said, like music?”

“Yes. The small strings on a harp vibrate much more quickly than the large strings, and they sound a higher note. The number of times they vibrate every second, that is, how frequently they vibrate, is called their frequency.

“Energy vibrates as well. Red light has a slowly vibrating low note, up to violet light which has a quickly vibrating high note, so to speak, in the order of the colors of the rainbow. The rainbow is like a harp of light, showing all the notes in order. You see?”

“Yes, I think I’ve got that.” Markee nodded.

“Good. So the completely-out-of-tune rock reflects the raw magic power back into the sky, like sunlight from a mirror, it just bounces off. Yes?”

“I understand.” Markee nodded again.

“Yes. Now if you take a poker and hold it in a fire, it gets hot as it absorbs the energy from the blue and yellow light of the fire, and when it’s full of it, and you take it out of the fire, you can see it glowing red. It has absorbed the higher frequency blue and yellow light, and it releases it as lower frequency red light.

“The rock of our land does the same thing with the raw magic power. It absorbs it during the day, and constantly radiates it at a lower frequency. That radiated energy from the absorbent rock forms the usable magic field of the world, it’s the energy that wizards and elves use. You see?”

Markee nodded.

“Good. I think there are others who could explain this more simply, but bear with me; we are almost to the crux of it.

“Now air, and water, and solid material like you and me, are made of invisibly tiny parts, and those are made of tinier parts, and those are made of tinier parts yet, and so on, and all of these tiny parts vibrate. How quickly some of those tiny parts vibrate, how *in tune* they are with the vibrations of the energy field of useful magic, determines how they are affected by magic. Objects of power are closely in tune with the magic, they resonate to it in harmony, so they may reflect, absorb, or transmute the energy.

“Some of the tiny parts that make up the bodies of elves and wizards, and the energy of their brains and nerves, also vibrate in harmony with the field of magic to varying degrees. So, we can use magic, and elves can see the magic field itself.

“Now to the point. Some of the most important tiny parts in *your* body, particularly your brain and your nerves, all vibrate at *exactly* the same frequency as the energy field of useful magic. Not in harmony with it, in unison with it!

“Because of this, you are transparent to magic. It passes right through you, like light through clean water. So you are, for the most part, immune to the direct effects of magic, both good and bad, harm and healing. This is why you were able to walk past the Illusions and Barriers of the Wards on our borders, though they’d have stopped a flight of dragons, and you didn’t even notice them.

“Somewhere in all that is the reason you can see my power, though unlike elves, you cannot see the magic field around you. I’ll have my finger on it in a while.” Yazadril mused, absent-mindedly scratching his chin through his beard.

“So you want me to stay here, so you can study me, so you can find out how to make the magic barriers not let me past?” Markee asked.

“Yes, that’s important, though my interest is far more general. I wish to understand the phenomenon completely for the sake of understanding, not just so we can bar you from our land. Though we must know that as well, in case some wizard ever learns to duplicate your abilities.”

“Huh. You’re right. I’m sure there are others who would have explained it more simply.” Markee chuckled, then suddenly sobered as he became a bit suspicious.

“And how long would you want me to stay here?” he inquired.

“Until I understand it, or failing that, for as long as I can interest you in staying.”

Markee stared at him intently. “This is important to you? How do I know you won’t hold me against my will, or trick me? Or that another of your people won’t do so?”

Yazadril’s brows drew together a bit. “I understand your concerns. But I’ll have you know that I am Prince of my people, and I have the right to speak for them, and to make commitments upon their behalf. And I do solemnly swear that none of my people will seek to harm you, or seek to impede you should you choose to leave.”

“Hold on a moment!” Markee exclaimed. “If I’m immune to magic, how did you do that thing for me earlier?”

“Ah, I was able to purposely make myself slightly out of tune with you, and with the power field. Then my spell could resonate within you and affect you, though not very strongly.

“Of course you must realize that everything I’ve told you about magic, including that, is an analogy that is a tremendous oversimplification of the rules of reality, but at least it gives you some understanding.

“If it makes you feel better, I can tell you that I probably couldn’t magically affect you enough to harm you, even if I tried. Though if I did try the reverse of that, I could make you feel a bit more depressed, which I assure you I would never do.

“I very much doubt that there is another wizard alive who could even affect you that much. I was only able to do it because of some rather specialized theoretical work I did a few centuries ago. And because I’m a pretty good wizard, to say the least. Believe me, no one else would have thought of it.”

“Huh. How long do you *think* it would be? Honestly?”

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