

THE WHITE WIND STORIES

THE
PHOENIX
TEARDROP

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Chapter One: A mission for a Crest Bearer

In a world far from our own, where time moves a little slower and the sun is just a little bit brighter, a young boy called Sim Saule set out on a journey from his home. Sim was around eleven or twelve years old and was very brave and wise for his age. Since only four years of age he had been trained to serve his nation and, more importantly, his king, the Great King of all Forria. Sim was a Crest Bearer, one of hundreds who had been given a powerful gift.

You see Sim's world, known to all who lived there as the White Wind World, was filled with an amazing thing - a powerful force that could change and shape anything that could be seen, heard, touched, or felt. The White Wind, or the White Wind force, as it was known, was a power that had helped to make all the nations of the world very strong. But in the White Wind World terrible wars were taking place.

As a student in the Crest Bearer Order Sim had been given a White Wind Crest, which was no larger than the palm of his hand, to which it was always strapped. But unlike other objects in his world Sim's crest was no ordinary thing. It was one of many vessels or containers of the White Wind force, and through it Sim could do powerful things. Like the rest of the Crest Bearers Sim had been trained to serve the Great King as a warrior and a defender of all that was still good and just in the world, and he had been taught to use his crest to do just that. His crest was silver and he was very

good at serving the Great King with its power to fight and defeat Forria's enemies. Because of this Sim had now been called to leave his homeland of Sheron Imotaval and journey all the way to capital of Forria, the great stone and glass city of Parr Serenity, where he would meet the King face to face for the first time and receive from him a mission of great importance in these terrible times of war.

Sim arrived at the grand stairway to the palace right on time, though he was a little out of breath for hurrying because he did not want to be late. Once he'd straightened out his silver tunic and brushed back his thick brown hair he was taken inside by one of over a thousand palace guards. Sim was very nervous. Being surrounded by so many knights and soldiers that were twice his size was quite intimidating, yet he was even more afraid of meeting the King himself.

The Great King had made all the worlds and ruled over all Forria since the end of the Twelve Black Days, when a terrible war between two very powerful races had burned almost everything to the ground. But the Great King had saved the people of Forria from death and had restored their land to a place of beauty and harmony. His love for this world of great mountains, silver streams, gleaming blue skies, and gloriously heavenly sunrises was only outmatched by his love for the people. It was the Great King's love for the people that had made him summon Sim to the palace today. Troubling times were afoot and the King had a special mission that needed the skill of a special Crest Bearer like Sim.

Sim bowed respectfully before the Great King as he sat upon his golden throne and seemed to shine with glory. Sim was very afraid but soon the Great King was smiling warmly. He stepped off of his great seat, his height more than twice that of the small boy, and knelt on one knee so that he could look Sim straight in the face. "Do not be afraid, young one," he said softly. "You are in the presence of one who has great love for Forria, great love for its people, and great love for you." All of a sudden Sim felt very calm, the Great King's words soothing him like a warm ray of light. The King held out his hand and gently placed it on the boy's shoulder. "I have much need for you and your skills, Sim Saule," the King said in a whisper. "Dark times surround the land of Forria and its people. The Great Wars against the evil Mitan Empire and their allies, the treacherous Dark Ones of Saruderos, have waged long and hard, but your people have remained strong. Now I call upon your strength, little one, for there is a mission that is in need of a Crest Bearer as young yet as powerful as you.

"Long have the Crest Bearers used their gifts to access the wonder and the power of the White Wind to defend Forria, and long has that service to this land kept it safe from harm. My father made the White Wind and now I need someone who knows its power to go on a perilous mission for me. There is a deep treachery to be undone. The Phoenix Teardrop, that ancient power that was stolen from these lands, must be reclaimed. I have chosen you to reclaim it, Sim." Sim did not quite know what to say. He was once again filled with dread and fear, but this time it was because of what the Great King was asking him to do.

Long ago, before the Great Wars that now rage, there was another war being fought. Two ancient races, the Dragons and the Phoenixes, were battling one another for dominion of the skies. If the Dragons won they intended to burn all the nations below to nothing more than ash, but the Phoenixes were fighting for peace and harmony with the peoples of the world. With fire and brimstone the conflict spread over all the world until only two from each side were left. When the last Dragon finally dealt the last Phoenix a deathly blow the Phoenix shed a single tear before its flames went out forever. The Dragon thought it had won but as it turned its evil, fiery eyes towards destroying all the nations a wise man, a mighty ruler sent from beyond the edge of the world, came to Forria and taught its people how to release power from the Phoenix's Teardrop. That man was the Great King. He knew that the tear had been shed out of sorrow, for the Phoenix had failed to protect the nations from a great evil. But the Great King showed the people of Forria how to use that same tear as a weapon to quench the fires and heal the land. In a stunning battle on the Mountains of Fire in Saruderos the Dragon was slain, its fire extinguished by the Phoenix's Teardrop forever.

But the story did not end there. After the Great King had come to rule over all Forria and keep its people safe from other powerful enemies that sought to take the place of the Dragons. The Steward of Saruderos, Shalek the Gale, who had been trusted to keep the Teardrop safe for Forria, chose instead to use it to make himself and all the people of Saruderos strong. They joined with the evil Mitans and used the Teardrop's power to gain

control the fires of the Dragons, which the Teardrop now had mastery over. And so the new wars began to rage. Now if there was any chance of Forria winning the war the Teardrop would need to be reclaimed. It seemed that Sim had been chosen by the Great King for that task. But he was terrified of the thought of it. "Fear not," said the Great King, "for you shall not fail in this task if your heart is pure and courage is your weapon."

Sim's small voice spoke softly and hesitantly. "Forgive me, Sire," he said, "but I fear that am too young and too small for this task. Perhaps someone who is older and wiser should be sent?" Sim was brave for his age but was afraid that he would not be brave enough for the King's mission.

The Great King placed his palm on Sim's cheek and smiled proudly. "Humble you are, young one. Yet because of this I know that you will not fail me." The King stood up and placed his own royal ring upon a string and around Sim's neck. "You carry with you the ring and signet of your king. Let it be a reminder to you that wherever you go my power and authority goes with you."

"Yes, your majesty," Sim answered with another bow, even though he could barely stand still because he was so afraid and was shaking. The King gave a slight nod of his head, as kings sometimes do, placed something secret into Sim's tunic pocket that he wasn't allowed to show anyone till later, and then sent Sim on his way. The young boy walked slowly and uncertainly from the throne room and out of the great marble doorways. As he went great and powerful men, knights, warriors, and advisors gathered about the

King's throne to watch him leave. It was their task to serve the Great King in continuing to plan and wage the war to save Forria, but it was now the task of this one young boy to help end that war forever.

Chapter Two: The Crest Bearer's Guide

Sim arrived on horseback at the outer wall of the palace and was lifted off the grey stallion by the knight also riding it. Once his feet were firmly on the ground Sim looked up at the knight, who only had one question for him.

"You know your way to the Teardrop from here?" he asked in a strong and firm voice.

"I do, sir," said Sim fearfully. The knight stared at the lad as though he were very concerned.

"You'll need more courage than that if you are to take back the Teardrop and save our lands, little one," he said.

"I fear I am too small for the task," said Sim sadly.

"Maybe so," answered the knight, "but you just remember that it was the Great King who put that signet ring around your neck. He could have chosen anyone. He chose you." Suddenly the knight reared up his stallion and went galloping off back towards the palace, leaving Sim standing all alone in the dust. Sim thought about what the knight had said and realised that it was true. The Great King, the one who made the Phoenixes, the one who ruled Forria and commanded thousands of knights and lords and soldiers, who were all far more mighty than young Sim, was also the one who had asked Sim to go on this mission. This made him feel just a little bigger than he really was and soon he decided that even though he was

afraid and many dangers would lie ahead he wasn't going to let the King down. He would be brave.

Sim quickly turned on his heels and began running away from the palace walls and towards the forest. He was very good at finding his way around the world. You had to be if you were going to be a Crest Bearer and defend the four corners of the land from evil. Soon Sim was inside the shadows of a hundred trees of the Jillrae Forest, darkness and dampness all around despite the fact that it was still early morning and the sun was shining high above. Sim was very good at running and had sprinted as fast as he could without pause towards the south end of the forest for at least half an hour. Any other boy would have been exhausted but not Sim. He was full of more energy than a dozen boys his age and had even outrun fully grown men before. He would reach the end of the forest before noon.

Sim arrived at a small stream in the forest, where he took a quick break and knelt down to scoop up some water to drink. He was about to go running off again when suddenly he heard a familiar voice come from behind him. "You're not going to go without *me*, are you?" it asked. Sim turned around with a joyful look on his face and there behind him stood another little boy the same age as him. Sim rushed towards the boy, who smiled even more gladly than he did, and flung his arms around him to hug him. Yet as Sim hugged the boy the boy seemed to go partly invisible, like he was only half real and the rest of him was half spirit-like. The boy laughed loudly. "Careful, Sim, careful!" he said, "Or you'll fall right through me and hit the ground. I'm only half real you know!"

"You're real enough to me," laughed Sim, "and I've missed you dearly."

"You didn't think that I'd leave you to go on this mission for the King all by yourself, did you?" said the boy, "I'm your Crest Guide. How could I do such a thing?"

"You're more than just a Crest Guide to me, Lente," said Sim, for that was the spirit boy's name, "you're like a brother!"

"Well then," answered Lente with a great smile, "as brothers we shall do this thing together!" Suddenly Lente began turning Sim round and round on one spot and looking over him as though he was checking him for something. Lente could touch Sim just like any other real person just so long as he didn't try to hold on for too long. Lente was a Crest Guide, one of many spirits from outside this world who were sent to help Crest Bearers understand the powers that they possessed, but as a spirit it meant that Lente was partially transparent and not fully physical or solid. If you leaned against him for too long you would eventually pass through him and the same was true if he leaned on, pressed against, or touched you. Still Lente was skilled in finding the right balance, and soon had Sim spinning around as though he was on a pottery wheel.

"Hold out a minute!" Sim cried out while laughing, "I'll be dizzy as ever if I don't stand still!"

"I'm looking you over," said Lente in all seriousness. "I need to make sure you've got everything we're going to need."

“Okay, but can I please stop spinning?” Lente stopped spinning Sim around and for a moment Sim had to pause to regain his balance. But soon his legs were steady again and he looked back at Lente.

“Do I look okay to your eyes now?” he asked.

“Indeed, Sim,” answered Lente with an impressed smile. “Do you have your sword?”

“Yes,” said Sim, patting the hilt of his silver blade with his hand.

“Your bow and arrows?”

“Yes,” Sim answered again, tugging on the strap across him to his sheaf full of shining metal arrowheads that hung on his back.

“Your compass?”

“That too,” said Sim, pulling it out of his tunic pocket and revealing its golden hand, which spun towards the east. “Not that I need it,” he added.

“You might be able to navigate the lands in your sleep but compasses that don’t point north come in handy for other reasons too,” Lente said wisely.

“Have you got your dagger?” Sim lifted up one of his legs slightly and tapped a leather pocket that had been sewn onto the straps of his boots. Inside was a pure silver dagger. Lente looked up from Sim’s leg and over his shoulder. “Is that your Crest Bearer’s cloak?” he asked curiously. Sim seemed very glad that Lente had noticed it.

"It is indeed!" he said excitedly.

"So you're now officially a Silver Crest Bearer?" Lente asked with joy.

"Grand Master Eruuke gave it to me two weeks ago, just before I left for the palace," Sim explained. "He said he was glad to give me my commission, seeing that I am the youngest person to ever be made a Silver Grade Bearer."

"He was right," said Lente, placing his hand on Sim's shoulder just like the Great King had done. "You were a fine student of the Crest powers, Sim, and an even finer Bronze Crest Bearer. You'll make an excellent Silver Crest Bearer and one day a very powerful Golden Crest Bearer. I can tell already."

"Thank you for your kind words," said Sim gratefully. "I couldn't have done it without the blessing of the King and your help."

"And I see that the King has sealed you with his approval," said Lente, moving his ghostly hand from Sim's shoulder to gently touch the signet ring around his neck. "Do you know what this means?" he asked with a wondrous look in his shimmering, blue eyes.

"It's a great honour, even if it scares me almost to tears," said Sim very reverently.

"He's given you his authority, Sim," said Lente excitedly. "Not even the great knights have been given that!"

"Perhaps he meant to help me be more brave," said Sim. Sim was remembering how knowing that the Great King had chosen him for this mission had made him feel and as he looked at his friend Lente seemed to agree.

"I think he wants you to be very courageous," said Lente. "The signet ring should be a good reminder of his blessing on you." After smiling proudly at Sim again Lente turned Sim towards the south and the two boys began walking, their mission still awaiting them.

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