

CHAPTER 1

The Dream

Even in the darkness of the cave, the darkness of the night, the darkness of deep sleep, Nemo felt the shadow pass over him; a momentary evil that briefly stirred him in his sleep and then was gone. By the light of his fire's glowing embers, Nemo quickly surveyed his small shelter. Everything seemed to be as it should be, and yet something was wrong. He could feel it.

Silently, Nemo put on his shepherd's cloak and took up his staff. He was thin and tall for his sixteen years. From a distance, he might almost be mistaken for a full grown man, but manhood had not yet fully come to Nemo. When it did, he hoped his beard would be as dark and curly as the hair on his head.

Nemo slipped out of the cave to interrogate the night and to protect his flock. Instinctively, he knew he was already too late. When the morning counting was completed, Nemo was sure more of his sheep would be missing. It was not uncommon for a shepherd to

lose a sheep or two. After all, protecting the defenseless fluff balls against attacks by wild animals was a big part of what shepherds do. But this was different.

Normally, evidence of a kill was easily found. A shepherd would find tufts of wool caught in the brush or bushes crushed by panicked sheep. There might be the trail of a dragged carcass, the paw prints of the attackers, or perhaps even blood. It all spelled death to a shepherd. Even the youngest shepherd could follow such trails to the remains of an unfortunate animal, and there were always remains. Even in the worst famine, some parts of the carcass could still be found. Leg bones, hoofs, and bloody wool were never consumed, even by a starving wolf pack. Now, however, things had changed.

When these new disappearances first started, Nemo thought of thieves. Very good thieves, he had heard, could steal an animal without making a sound or leaving a trail. But after checking with others in the area, he was sure it was not the work of ordinary thieves. Many ranches had lost sheep; all had vanished without a trace.

Thieves would have to make a mistake at some point, but none had been discovered thus far. No one had yet found their trail. No unfamiliar horses had been seen. No one was selling unaccounted for sheep. No extra wool was in the marketplace. No strangers had been seen in the quiet township for months. And perhaps the greatest mystery was the number of animals missing, and the distance over which the crimes had occurred.

Nemo and his best friend Quasar had each lost sheep, many sheep, so together they began checking other flocks. At first, the boys imagined some plot against them by the adult owners.

“Maybe somebody’s jealous,” Nemo had wondered out loud as they rode to a neighboring ranch.

“Jealous!” replied Quasar. “Of what?”

“Well,” Nemo had said, trying to put words to his thoughts. “We’re young and we already have ranches and flocks of our own.”

Nemo had laughed out loud at the thought and then said, “They can have the sheep, just give me back my family.”

It was true that no one had ever owned ranches and flocks at such a young age, so

perhaps someone did begrudge them their success. The fact was, Quasar and Nemo had paid dearly for their land and livestock. They each had lost their families and had each survived, alone, to inherit the land. There was no plot against them. There just couldn't be.

When their families died, the others in the valley had been kind. Many had given them food; some had even given them lambs and, more importantly, knowledge. Years of experience had been passed on to the boys who now had no fathers to teach them. Why would these same kind friends steal from them?

"Besides," Nemo reminded himself as he stepped outside his cave, "every shepherd around here has lost sheep."

The fact was, dairy farmers had reported cows missing. Villagers had reported horses missing. Everyone was missing animals, all with the same report: The animals disappeared without a trace.

Nemo wrapped his cloak tightly to block the pre-dawn chill. He stood outside the little cave, listening, trying to hear anything that would warn of danger. Nothing. All he could hear was the bleating of his sheep.

Slowly, Nemo walked down the steep rocky trail to where the sheep were sleeping — or should be sleeping. Already he could see they had scattered. Some had found their way up the trail almost to his cave. But why? What had frightened them?

Again, he stopped to listen. All was quiet; very, very quiet. The night sky was clear, dotted with a tapestry of starlight. The Ancients said that stars sang. If only these stars would sing him a song and tell what they knew of this danger.

Unexpectedly, the hairs on Nemo's neck prickled. A shiver ran its course down his spine. Nemo's crystal blue eyes flashed left and right looking for anything that would explain his sudden fear.

Nothing. All he could see was the familiar shapes of brush, boulders and trees, muted in the star-lit darkness. As he carefully surveyed the hillsides, he felt he was being watched. He knew he was not alone.



“And what about ‘nother for me?” wheezed the old man as drinks were passed

around. "C'mon," he whined, when no one answered, "how 'bout juz one more?"

"Not if you're not paying for it," growled the innkeeper. "You've had enough if you have no coin."

The old sailor looked around the small dark room. No offers came for another free drink, only laughter, curt snarls and jeers.

The light of the fireplace and from the few small lanterns that graced this closet of an inn was not enough for his old eyes. Yet, he knew their faces. He could smell their grins, feel their pity. It was time to leave. Turning away he stumbled for the door.

They fed him and gave him drink each night because he was an old sailor and they all were seamen, too. But they had never sailed with him, never fought with him, never mourned with him. The food and drink was a limited fraternity. He was a sailor, but not a shipmate.

"I don't need you, you sea filth," he cursed.

"Get out of here then," shouted the innkeeper, with practiced rage.

It was the same each night. He gently grabbed the old man, slipped a potato into his

vest, and feigned throwing him out the door. A man needed pride as well as food and drink.

Slowly he picked himself up from the hay and mud. "Always a soft landing, God bless 'im," mumbled the sea dog.

Slipping his hands into his vest, he warmed them on the roasted gift. It was the last warmth his hands would know tonight, for he had no gloves.

Blending into the fog, he walked seaward. Home was a driftwood shanty, cold, drafty and damp. He would eat his feast alone and in the dark. A blanket made of discarded sail canvas would keep him dry and reasonably frost free.

Stopping at the alley that led to his hut, the old man turned his head and listened. Icy fog whipped his crevassed face, and the air was heavy with sea-salt. He took a burdened step or two and stopped again. Ear inclined to the sea, he heard, no, felt the danger.

His back stiffened as he turned from home and ordered his feeble legs run to the jetty. "Cursed old bones," he panted as his feet shuffled to the water's edge.

By the time he reached the rocky barrier that protected this town from sea-rage, the old

man was faint and breathless. His heart drummed an irregular tattoo. Onward he pressed, over the boulders near shore, onto the slick moss-covered breakwater.

“I’m in luck; tide’s out,” he said as he smiled to himself.

The old man’s sea legs took him farther out than many a younger man would dare in daylight. Finally, he stood still and listened. Waves crashed dangerously near. Spray soaked through to his skin and fog encased him in a gray shroud. There was nothing, but still he waited. He knew. In his bones, in his blood, in his feeble heart, he knew.



“More lard,” ordered the first mate.

His whispered command was immediately obeyed. Each oar-joint was greased, wrapped in cloth and greased again. With the oars thus muffled, the oarsmen pulled in silence. Even the drummer’s cadence was canceled.

“They’ve done this long enough,” ordered the first mate. “The beat should be in their heads by now.”

So it was, and they pulled silently as one.

“Where’s that lard,” hissed the first mate.

“Coming, Mr. Schooper,” answered the cabin boy.

He struggled from the galley with the hot iron pot. Being the youngest and smallest cabin boy in the whole fleet, he always worked the hardest.

He started below, his arms aching from the weight of the pot. But in his haste he slipped and fell. The pot clanged against a metal bar, spewing hot grease on deck and below. The poor lad tumbled into a row of oarsmen.

Their rhythm broken, the men released the oar and helped the boy stand. It was a mistake. Their great wooden oar crashed against the one from the row ahead of them as the rowers pulled a new stroke. The men groaned, the ship creaked.

“Clean up this filth,” ordered the first mate, holding in his temper. “And grease those oars,” he added, needlessly. He shook his head and looked to shore, trying to hide the embarrassment his son had caused him.



The old man's head jerked toward the sound of the iron pot echoing across the water. Then he heard the sound of oar upon oar, wood crashing, cracking.

"Thar be no mistakn' it," he cried, and redoubled his vigilance.

He heard a young voice cry out in pain. And then, as if by command, the fog lifted for a moment, and he saw them.

Ship upon ship, upon ship, upon ship. Warships all they were and fully armed. An armada greater than the ancient mariner could ever have imagined emerged from the gray mist. From the mast of the flagship there flew a mighty flag; twin black hawks on a field of gold.

The shock of it caught his breath. Then the vision was gone, fog again cloaking this silent floating threat.

"Alarm," he cried with the voice of his youth. "To arms, to arms."

The old man turned to shore. He alone could sound the warning; he alone could save the town. He must save Mecenas.

"Hurry, hurry."

Then one foot caught on a rock, the other slipped and he went down hard. The pain came

suddenly like thunder. Grasping at his chest he tore open the soggy tattered vest. He willed himself to stand, pulled at his foot, now locked under wet stone, and collapsed again.

Pain. Monstrous, hideous, all consuming pain.

“Catch yer breath,” he told himself. “Jus catch yer breath.” The ragged seafarer pillowed his head on a seaweed covered slab, and watched helplessly as his small spud of a meal rolled out from his vest and bounced off the rocks into the chop.



Nemo pulled up the sleeves of his cloak to free his arms, and tucked the lower parts into his belt to free his legs. If danger was near, he wanted to be ready to fight or maybe flee.

Without warning a strong hand reached out from behind and grabbed him by the shoulder. Twisting violently Nemo tried to strike with his staff, but too late. Strong arms pinned him from behind. In vain he struggled against the rock-hard muscles of his captor. Sheep bleated

their protest and scattered in fear of this abrupt commotion.

“Be quiet,” whispered a voice. “You’ll wake the dead.”

“And you will join them, if you don’t let me go!” returned Nemo.

He tried to strike, again in vain. Rocks and a small cavalcade of dirt plummeted from the path to the fields far below as two sets of feet struggled savagely near the edge of the cliff.



The ships, fifty in all, slipped silently past the harbor. Only one pair of eyes had caught a glimpse of the armada and they now saw no more. High tide would be in by dawn. Before anyone missed him, the old man’s body would be washed out to sea. In a few days, perhaps a week, the inn keeper would notice his absence. Some inquiries might be made. No one would know his fate. In time, oh so little time, a squall would claim his hut for the sea, his face would be forgotten, and none would remember his name. Few knew it even now.

Rounding the point just past the harbor entrance the ships caught favorable winds. The flagship, *Fyrmatus*, unfurled her mainsails and shipped her oars. The sails caught and filled, the mast groaned, the bow wave grew and churned white. Soon she was streaming under full canvas. Each ship in its turn followed suit.

“Mr. Schooper,” shouted the captain from the quarter deck.

“Sir?” answered the first mate, glad to be under sail again.

“Please order the crew on deck and tell the oarsmen to rest.”

“Very well, Captain,” answered the first mate and turned to go below.

“Mr. Schooper.”

“Sir.”

“How is your son?” asked the captain, failing to hide the concern he felt.

Captain Lewis was kind and fair. He treated his men well and expected excellence in return. The crew never failed him; never. Like his father and his father before him, Captain Lewis was a fine sailor, an exceptional captain, a good man.

Standing like this, on the quarterdeck, with a stiff wind and full sails, he could still hear his father's voice.

"You can control men by fear and a dose of the whip or you can lead men by example and a dose of praise. The whip is faster and easier, but remember this: men will do greater deeds for honor, love and respect than they will ever do out of fear and pain."

In this, as well as in everything else, Captain Lewis rowed in his father's wake.

"My son, sir?" asked the first mate with calm detachment. Too calm. His heart quivered. He had hoped no trouble would come to the lad or to himself. But if it came, he knew he would have to take the punishment for his son.

"Don't be a fool," he reprimanded himself. "The captain's a good man."

Still he was afraid. He had served other captains whose tongues could cut as deeply as any whip, and whose whips were never still for long.

"How are the burns, Mr. Schooper?"

Captain Lewis had looked in on the boy just moments before coming up. He was more concerned for his new first mate than for the lad. He needed Mr. Schooper to trust him,

unconditionally. Such trust is earned, not ordered. "It takes time," the captain reminded himself. "Be patient."

"They're not as bad as we first feared, sir," he replied, breathing a long low sigh. "Thank you for asking. My son will be just fine, sir." The first mate looked up intently at the captain, waiting.

"He's a good lad, Mr. Schooper."

"Aye, sir. That he is," he said, chancing a smile.

"How long 'til the fleet is in position?" asked the captain.

"With this wind, about an hour, an hour and ten, at the most, sir."

The first mate spoke as accurately as he could. No need to pad the estimate, as he might have done with other captains, lest he be caught short.

"I shall inform Lord Norrom, if you are certain," said the captain quietly.

"Aye, sir. About an hour, if the wind holds, sir."

"Carry on, Mr. Schooper. And please give the oarsmen my compliments. They worked hard."

“Aye, sir,” answered Mr. Schooper and he disappeared below.

Within seconds crew members began taking their positions on deck. All knew their jobs; all knew what was expected of them. They went to work, immediately, without a sound.

“They’re a good crew,” Captain Lewis said to no one. The quarter deck is a lonely place. Then, taking a deep breath, he prepared to give his report to Lord Norrom.

“He’s young,” he said to himself as he passed his temporary quarters and stood before what normally was the captain’s door. His cabin was now occupied by a man less than half his age.

“Young Lord Norrom has not had time to learn all that his father wants to teach him. But,” he reminded himself, “Young Lord Norrom is the Admiral.”

“Come,” came the cracked voice in response to his single knock. It was the voice of youth. “Come,” came the voice again. This time deeper, louder, with practiced assurance. Captain Lewis took a deep breath and opened the door.

“Yes?”

The captain was surprised to find Lord Norrom smartly dressed in full battle gear, save

for his weapons, dark blue cape and cap, which were normally stowed in a tiny closet near the door. He was sitting at the captain's large oak table, on which were spread numerous charts and maps. The room blazed with light. Every oil lamp was lit and he had two extra lamps anchored to the table itself. The captain noticed that the portholes were darkened and sealed with thick black cloth. Not a single ray of light escaped.

"What is it Captain?" asked Lord Norrom, quietly. He did not look up from his work.

"If the Admiral pleases," began Captain Lewis. "I'd like to report that the fleet will be in position in about two hours, sir."

Lord Norrom slowly set down the calipers that he was using and raised his head. Piercing blue eyes, not unkind, seemed to search the captain's very core. He brushed his ample blond hair back away from his face.

"Please come in, sit down, Captain," said Lord Norrom smiling politely. "May I offer you a drink?" he asked, taking a flask and two small crystal glasses from a nearby tray.

"Oh, no, please, Lord Norrom," answered the captain with equal politeness. "I don't want to disturb the Admiral."

“Let us toast to a safe landing,” said Lord Norrom pouring a thick reddish liquid into the glasses. The crystal sparkled bright red. He stood and handed a glass to the captain.

“To a safe landing,” intoned Captain Lewis touching the lip of his glass to the lip of Lord Norrom’s. An incredibly clear, pure tone filled the room.

“To a safe and silent landing,” smiled Lord Norrom and then downed the drink in one fluid motion. The captain did likewise.

He was surprised at the taste. It was full flavored, but neither strong nor overpowering. It had no bite and was lightly sweet with a kiss of exotic fruit.

“This is delicious. If I may say so, sir,” said the captain, unconsciously running his tongue over his lips. Lord Norrom smiled slightly. “I have never had it before. May I ask what it is, sir?”

“No, I would guess you have never even seen it before.” replied Lord Norrom casually.

A momentary shadow passed behind the captain’s eyes.

“Captain, I meant no insult,” continued Norrom with a warm smile. “It’s just that few,

outside my family, have ever seen it, much less tasted it. It's a family secret, made only for the House of Hiram by the House of Hiram."

"I wasn't insulted at all, sir," answered Captain Lewis, quickly.

"In the old tongue it is called "Saine Tourkue," said Lord Norrom, watching the captain carefully. "Enemy's Blood," he added with a grin. "We only drink it before battle. It is a tradition."

"It is an honor to drink with the Admiral," declared Captain Lewis, loudly.

"Please Captain, sit down, won't you?" Lord Norrom motioned to a chair opposite his own. "I was just looking over these charts. Perhaps you would be good enough to show me exactly where we are."

"Yes, of course sir," answered the captain.

Perhaps I have misjudged the young admiral, thought Captain Lewis, pleasantly. He scanned the charts and quickly pointed out the location of the fleet.

"I believe we are right here," he said pointing to a place on the chart. "We'll arrive within two hours, sir. "

Lord Norrom picked up the calipers he had been using when the captain first entered the cabin. He inserted one end directly under Captain Lewis' finger and proceeded to walk the instrument across the chart to a place where a star was drawn.

"Two hours, Captain?" asked Lord Norrom dryly as he looked up from the chart. "By my calculations, we shall be there in no more than one hour. One hour, Captain."

"Yes, sir," replied Captain Lewis immediately. *How could you be so stupid*, he chided himself. *You misjudged him all right.*

"Our mission is critical, Captain. Landing these troops quickly and quietly will complete the first phase of my father's plan. Long has he labored for this moment."

The young admiral stared intently at Lewis. Beads of sweat glistened on the poor man's forehead.

"When all is ready Captain, the House of Hiram will move against an evil more terrible than you can possibly imagine. There is no time to waste. We have much to do, Captain Lewis," continued Lord Norrom.

The captain quickly stood. "Aye, sir. Much to do, and one hour in which to do it, sir."

"The long boats must be made ready and the troops fully armed and on deck before we arrive. I want the first wave launched the moment the tide turns. Is that clear, Captain?"

"Aye, sir. Very clear, sir." *The young Lord Norrom can teach you a few things, you old fool*, thought the captain.

"Signal the other ships. All must be ready in one hour. We shall have two hours of darkness after that in which to land. Then, the fleet must sail for the horizon. By sunrise, we all must be gone, with no visible trace on land or sea. Do you understand, Captain? No trace on shore or sea."

"Yes, sir. I understand, sir," answered the captain.

Only his long years in training kept his voice from trembling. *How could you be so stupid?* he thought, again.

"Look at this, Captain," ordered Lord Norrom quietly. "We have thousands of men already in place here," he said, proudly.

Pointing to the chart he continued, "It has taken months to get the men in place. They traveled overland in small groups, posing as

merchants, peddlers, and tradesmen. Their wagons were full of the provisions and equipment we will need.”

Captain Lewis stared at the chart as if he could see the secret troops.

“The hardest part was disguising the war horses,” continued Norrom. “Anyone can tell a charger from a wagon-puller. That’s why we landed the cavalry by sea.”

Lord Norrom noticed the captain’s surprise at this last revelation. It had the desired effect.

“Yes Captain,” said Lord Norrom, smiling. “We have landed here before. I know you understand, Captain, that secrecy is of the utmost importance. I captained those voyages myself.”

“Yes, sir. Of course, sir,” answered Captain Lewis somewhat lamely.

Pointing to the coastline on the chart and drawing a line inland Norrom continued,

“The men have cut a path from this bay to this valley. The lines of defense are already in place around it. The main tents are already erected. Everything is ready. Our army will disembark and disappear in two hours. High tide will even wash away our footprints in the sand.”

“Admiral, I was not informed,” began the captain.

“No, you were not,” interrupted Lord Norrom.

He was pleased with the captain so far, and didn’t want the man to damage his career with a careless word under pressure.

“You were told to sail the fleet to a certain position by a certain time and a certain day. You have carried out your orders perfectly. Well done, Captain.”

“Thank you, sir,” answered Captain Lewis. Forty years at sea and that was the only thing he could think of to say.

“The fleet will harbor here, Captain,” continued Lord Norrom, pulling out a chart from a wooden tube that lay next to his chair.

He pointed to a small island about an hour away from their current position. “This island is not on your charts, Captain.”

Captain Lewis, speechless, blinked hard as he examined the new document.

“Please, don’t be offended, Captain,” said Lord Norrom as he poured another round of Saine Tourkue.

“Knowledge of this island, like the rest of our plans, is a tightly guarded secret. Apart from the House of Hiram, you are the third to know of its existence. Plus, of course, the men who are stationed there.” Lord Norrom handed the glass to the captain, who still stared at the new chart.

“We have men there, too?” asked Captain Lewis as he accepted his drink. “Thank you, sir.”

“More there than we have on board. But let’s not talk of them. Let’s drink to the brave men we have right here. Besides, if all goes well, by dawn you will be on the island yourself.”



Nemo glanced over the edge of the cliff. The darkened view of the rocks below gave him extra strength. He pushed mightily with both legs in a futile attempt to spring away from this human prison. Twisting his body back and forth, he tried to break free. He wildly thrashed about with his staff. It struck a boulder and vibrated painfully from his hand. Nemo groaned as he dropped it. “Now what?”

“Brother, forgive me. I did not... I did not mean... I did not mean to scare you,” a voice

whispered in his ear. It panted with the effort of restraining Nemo.

“Why then are you out here, hiding on my trail?” roared Nemo. His fear had turned to anger.

“I have come to help you,” the voice whispered. Slowly the vice-like grip that held Nemo relaxed.

“How, by stopping my heart?” Nemo turned to look full in his friend’s face.

Even in the darkness, Nemo could see Quasar’s mane of wavy blond hair and his dark eyes, wide with concern. Nemo’s anger turned to laughter as he saw his friend.

“I didn’t almost wake the dead, I almost joined them,” said Nemo, with a smile. But his smile was cut short as Quasar’s strong hand again clamped over his mouth.

“I did not run here before dawn just to scare you. Be quiet. Be careful. There is danger near,” Quasar whispered.

Nemo abruptly remembered why he himself was out so early. He remembered his sheep, the cows, the horses. He picked up his staff. Again he felt the danger.

“Why are you here?” asked Nemo in a voice so low that Quasar could barely hear him.

“I sensed danger, evil,” answered Quasar. “I could not sleep, so I climbed up to my roof to enjoy the stars and wait for morning. I was watching the stars over your lands when they seemed to disappear, like a dark cloud blocked them from my view. It was only for a moment. I thought perhaps I was dreaming. When it happened a second time, I knew you needed my help.”

The boys climbed onto a large flat boulder that jutted out over the trail and the pastures below. They sat and talked. The peaceful panorama of charcoal sky, deep purple mountains and grazing sheep contrasted with their mutual, unnamed dread.

“I, too, could not sleep,” said Nemo.

He told Quasar all about his dreams of the evil shadow. As Nemo spoke, darkness retreated from the dawn.

Quasar was a couple of years older than Nemo, broad shouldered and taller than his friend. He wore a green home-spun shirt, laced in front with leather strips, and full length britches. The pants, like his heavy black boots, were bought

in the village, something of a luxury he could well afford.

In years past, Quasar had bested Nemo in everything. Now, however, as they both navigated adolescence, the difference in age became less and less apparent. Quasar and Nemo often spent hours talking and working together. They had been good friends even before their families were killed. Then their hearts were woven together by common grief.

Quasar shivered as he listened to Nemo.

“It was dark and so big it blocked all the stars. There was this putrid smell, like a carcass left in the sun to rot. The smell of death. It was evil. I knew this thing wanted to kill me. Then I opened my eyes. I was in the cave, dreaming.”

Sunrise chased the morning dampness and warmed the still, frosted air of dawn. As he listened to Nemo’s dream, however, Quasar could feel only a cold, overriding sense of dread. Shadows remembered from last night’s sky surfaced in his mind. The more Nemo spoke, the more uneasy Quasar became. It was all much too familiar.

The amazing thing was that much of Nemo’s dream was somehow already familiar to

Quasar. Even before Nemo spoke, Quasar could picture what his friend would say.

“I know it sounds as cracked as Old Simon’s clay pots,” said Quasar with a forced smile, “But I saw part of your dream while stargazing from my roof. I saw what you dreamed. I, too, felt the danger. I too smelled the putrid scent of death. But I wasn’t sleeping.”

Nemo didn’t answer. He looked at his friend to make sure this was no joke. Quasar’s bright smile had dimmed, his laughing eyes were solemn. Quasar wasn’t joking. Anyway, it was too early for jokes.

“I have to get the sheep,” was all Nemo said.

Together the boys moved Nemo’s flock to the high pasturelands. This place was highly prized. It was said that spring came there first. Actually it was sunlight that came there first. The surrounding mountains sheltered the valley from harsh winter winds, yet let in the first rays of morning light all winter long. In summer, shadows from these same mountains gave shade from the hot afternoon sun. The early morning light helped the grass grow lush and green, even in winter. Frost seemed to leave there first in spring

and return there last in winter. Even in the driest summer, morning dew jeweled the pastures and kept them moist. It was called Silverglade.

Silverglade was envied by all who knew of it, loved by any who had visited it, and cherished by Nemo and his flocks. Best of all, hidden deep within Silverglade, at the very place where two mountains touched, was a translucent blue lake. Fed by mountain rivers and natural springs, the lake was always full and clear. In winter it rarely froze, in summer it was never dry, and in spring it filled with delicious migrating fish called pontá.

Even this morning pontá could be seen swimming upstream. Quasar and Nemo brought the sheep to the upper pasture near the lake. As the sheep began to graze, a welcome peace lulled the boys to silence. Nemo was the first to speak.

“About two years ago, a man came to my house. He said he knew my father.” Quasar noticed the tone in Nemo’s voice. It was a mixture of awe and anger.

“Who was this man? What did he want?” Quasar knew this was no idle talk. Nemo barely whispered the answer.

“He wanted Silverglade.” Nemo struggled to continue, his voice filled with emotion. “The man offered me gold, horses, anything I wanted.”

“Why didn’t you tell me this before?” Quasar was amazed. They had known each other since before they could talk. In all that time, Nemo had never withheld any secret from his friend.

“You do not understand,” said Nemo after a moment of silence. “This man is wealthy, very wealthy. He brought a leather bag full of jewels and poured them out on the table before me. ‘Just a partial payment,’ he told me.”

Nemo shuddered as he spoke. “The man had long white hair and cold blue eyes. He offered me more riches than I would have ever dreamed possible.”

The boys were silent, each afraid of what might be said next. Finally, Quasar faced Nemo.

“Well?” he said with feigned lightness. “Is my best friend, now, a wealthy man?”

“No, no of course not!” Nemo’s voice trembled. *How could you even think I’d yield?* His mind screamed, *Don’t you remember we scattered our parents ashes here?* But he only repeated, “Of course not.”

Nemo started pacing. He always paced when he thought he'd done something wrong.

"Don't you understand? The trouble I am having, the trouble we all are having, I have brought it upon us. The man said he would not rest until he had the land. He said my father had showed him Silverglade years ago and had almost accepted his offer then. I am sure, from that day on, the man purposed to have it." Nemo was almost shouting now.

"My father refused him, and now my father is dead; your father is dead; our families are dead! The man is killing the sheep, the cows, the horses. Perhaps next he will kill..." Nemo felt his friend's strong hand on his shoulder.

"He will kill no more." Quasar's voice was firm. "It is time to go to town," he said with quiet resolution. "If he is so great, someone there will know where we can find him."

Color Key To The House of Hiram

RANK IN FAMILY	NAME	COLOR	DUTIES	MARRIED WIFE NAME
Father	Hiram	Pure White – aka – The Service of Light	Head of the House of Hiram	Married - Elisa
1st son	Falcon	Blood Red – aka – The Talons	Elite Warrior Corps	Married - Cilantra
2nd son	Tulmar	Fire Orange	Armor, Weapons, Metallurgy	Married - Blanche
3rd son	Shank	Bright Yellow	Archers, long bows & cross bows	Married - Kami
4th son	Kyler	Shimmering Silver	Cavalry and Lancers	
1st daughter	Casandra	none	Help Queen Elisa at Court, engaged to Prince Aalon	
5th son	Herald	Sky Blue	Flag-men, signal-men, messenger birds	
6th son	Norrom	Dark Blue	Navy, shipping, transportation (land & sea)	
7th son	Ram	Deep Purple	Machines of War, Catapults, Ramps, Cannon	
8th son	Vine	Wine	Supplies, Food, Drink and Logistics	
9th son	Reed	Forest Green – aka – Green Eyes	Guards, Sentries, Spys, and Internal Security	
10th son	Gannon	Striped	Sciences, Medicines, History and Arts	

Layout of Lord Hiram's Camp

