Kingdom of Istrylia

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In the world of Atra, in a country names IStrylia, and group of Sorcerers took over the land. They called themselves the Consilium Duodecim, Council Of Twelve. They established an Empire and long ago sentenced all those who use magic to death. Now a a rebellion is rising but many doomed it to fail. The only hope left is the prophecy: â When the world has reached its point of darkness, it will turn to sin, and the angel will come to rescue it.â Many believed no such darkness would ever fall across the land But now war is eminent, and the darkness is more powerful then ever. Many cling to the hope of an angel sent from God.

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Kingdom of Istrylia : Chapter 1

He ran through the crowded streets at top speeds, pushing people aside and dodging others. The citizens were shocked, but not as much as when the burly guards behind him came crashing through. His slim figure gave him the advantage on the streets; It allowed him to maneuver in and out of crowds, unlike the heavy men behind him.ï¿½ With one quick sidestep he slid into an alleyway he knew well. For Nikolas Schriner, the streets were his home. Each alley was like a hallway and each rooftop a bed. Here the troubles of the world seemed nonexistent, and he was free to wander as he wished. He was quickly reminded, however, that he had a home when a particular oafish giant happened upon his little hideaway.

"Now, now" he said, easing away from the man in the army uniform "No need to resort to hostility here"

"Is that true?" The man replied in a low voice, making sure to emphasize true "Well I'm quite prone to violence, so I suppose I don't have many options" and with a punch toward Nik's face the game was again, afoot. Nik ducked the punch and ran through the guards open right side and back into the crowd. Nik loved the crowd, the bustle and flow of people. How easily one could blend in and seem to disappear from the world. It was especially easy for the scrawny 12 year old kid caked in dirt and standing at 4 feet tall. No one looked at him, no one bothered to turn their heads and that is exactly how Nik would prefer it. With a quick sidestepï¿½ and an acquired knowledge he slipped into another hidden alleyway. Unfortunately for him, an urchin kid can only know so much of a constantly developing city. Thus Nik found himself staring face to face with a ten foot brick wall.

"Tsk, Tsk Nikolas" a high feminine voice said from the other side of the wall "And here I though you knew this city better than anybody"

Despite his desperate situation, Nik smiled "This wall is new" he replied to the stranger "any chance of acquiring some help?"

"What's in it for me?"

"A chance to help out a dire friend in need?" he replied with a false air of hopefulness

"Those guards could round that corner any moment now..."

"Okay!" He replied urgently "I'll share, just don't run off with it."

"Nik! You know me!"

"Promise?"

"Hurry!"

Nik grudgingly tossed the package that he had held onto so firmly in his left hand over the wall. After hearing he catch it safely, he assessed his situation. The wall was only ten feet high. He, however, was much smaller. He smiled, spotting a small trashcan from a vendors shop sitting neatly next to the wall. Taking a running start, Nik ran straight at it, hitting the top with his right foot and using it as a spring board. It didn't launch him over as he had expected, but got him close enough toï¿½ grab the top and pull his body to a seated position.ï¿½ Just as he was about to make his descent, two rather large men with a certain gold patch on their arms busted into the alley.

"There he is!" One shouted

"Sorry boys, errands to run, rain check?" Nik replied, and with that, slid off the wall on the other side. "Now, about the package" He turned around to catch nothing but the tail of a cloak and a flash of bright white hair whipping around the corner. With a deep breath, he began another chance. This time, however, he was the pursuer.

As he, himself rounded the corner he noticed his target had quite a lead on him. Breaking into a full run, Nik began to gain on her. He was close enough now that he could see the white as snow, shoulder cut hair that he knew so well. "Syn!" he shouted "You promised!"

"I did no such thing!" She said with a high laugh that Nik knew so well. He watched her round a corner and sped up, she would soon have to stop. Not everyone had the endurance of a street thief. He followed round the corner and stopped. The alleyway was dark, but not a soul to be found. Instead, on the floor was a familiar paper wrapped package. Ever wary, Nik reached down to pick up the package and instead was immediately hit by something small and feminine. The object pinned his arms at his sides and stuck it's tongue in Nik's face.

"Got you!" She said smiling

"You did not! I noticed you were there the entire time."

"Did not!"

"White hair's not so good for hiding"

"Good enough to get by you"

"Regardless" he said, sounding exhausted "Can I have my package?"

"You said you would share!"

"I will! Just let me get up

"Not a chance. Meet me at the beach at sunset okay?"

"I suppose" He grudgingly agreed, looking at the sun and noticing it was only midday.

Syn got up before picking up the package and walking to the end of the alley "The place where we met" she said "Remember?"

"Nik smiled, "I remember. Make sure you didn't eat any of it by then."

"No, I'll save it" she replied "For us" and with that she again whipped around the corner with her ground length cloak and for a second, Nik could swear a faint pink tinge to her hair, but with that she was gone and he was again, alone.

He began the long walk home, warily making his way through the streets. He took alleys and side streets, as to avoid the lumbering brutes the town called guards. He knew they wouldn't be too pleased he had gotten away...again. He passed the time with his favorite activity: people watching. Nik loved to stare at the different people; tourists, nobles, rich people from out of town, even the more common people just a head above Nik.

They were fascinating. Maybe it was because he had never lived their life, but for whatever reason he found their lack of concern for the very struggles that made Nik's life so hard intriguing.ï¿½ The way one woman rushed down the road, eager to get to the glass smith before he had extinguished his fire for the day. No doubt she needed a new center piece for her kitchen table. Nik watched a man with black hair and radiant green eyes shuffle down the road. He was carrying a large stack of papers and was constantly looking all around him, concerned almost, that he was being watched. As the man grew closer, Nik noticed the top paper bore a family crest, a familiar crest. Cleverly, Nik made his way into the cloud, making an intricate line until. BAM! He collided straight into the man. Confused, the man had dropped all of his papers on the ground. Nik quickly snatched the one he had been eyeing off the ground and with a turn preceded on his course home.

Not twenty paces from his collision, Nik felt a firm, ice cold hand on his shoulder. "That letter is not for your eyes, boy" said a voice as cold as his hand. Sneering he continued "I would give it back, less I be forced to call the guards."

With the quick thinking that comes only from living where Nik has, he stepped on the foot behind him was hard as he could. The man yelped in pain and began screaming for guards as he dropped the entire stack of papers again on the ground, giving Nik a chance to slip out of his grasp. Then, as fast as he could, Nik ran towards the only safe place in the city: Grutch's Fish Shop.

Grutch was an older man, who had run the same fish shop near the outer layer of the city since before Nik had been born. The place was a beaten down old shack made of cheap metal and thrown out wood, but to Nik it was one of the most beautiful places in the world, a place he truly knew as his second home. The shack was built right along the beach, with the sand stretching up to the back door. Grutch was, to Nik, the nicest man in the world. A beach bum who had acquired some money, Grutch set up the shop so he could be near the beach. He was not interested in profit or success, he just wanted to survive the last of his years in relative peace. This benefited the poor all across the town, as he would sell his fish for nearly half the price as anywhere else. As long as he paid the bills he was content. He would also allow Nik and his little group of friends to hang out there anytime the brutish guards were after them, sometimes giving them food for free and letting them around his fire to be warm.

As Nik closed his distance to the shop he felt calmer, almost as if the weight of the world grew lighter the closer he got. He was so in bliss when he could see the shop that he slowed to a walk, and a big smile grew on his face. He was so happy to be near to his second home that he didn't see the twin pairs of gigantic hands reach out to grab him as he passed an allyway.

The hands pulled him swiftly into the ally and threw him against the wall. Nik fell to the ground, feeling the pain in his back flame as he fell to his knees, looking at the ground.

"Well look what we managed to find" said a burly voice that instantly made Nik regret his decision to tease the guards earlier.

"You know it's just my luck that I'd find a little punk like you in my off hours" Said the other to him

Nik looked up at the two hulking figures above him; the first stood a massive 7 feet tall, with wide birth to match and a pair of hulking arms rippling with muscles on each side. He had bright copper hair cropped in the traditional army short style. His skin was tan and reflected a weariness from being in the sun all day. His eyes a fierce brown and his mouth in a horrific scowl as he stared at his prey.

The second, while not as strong sure had weight on his size. While he was only 6 feet tall, he set at a good four hundred pounds and had wide brawny arms. His hair was a bit longer and black, but his brown eyes were just as fierce, and his mouth fitted the same scowl of a predator looking upon his dinner.

"You guys have no need to mess with me since you're not working right?" said Nik, though he knew his words would not influence them in the slightest, he needed only to not make them angrier.

"See normally" replied the stronger one "I wouldn't care aboutï¿½ you. Who are you but a lowly urchin on the streets?"

"But-" the second one interrupted "You Nikolas Schriner have gotten away from us one too many times, and I think today was the last straw for us both."

Niks first reaction when he began talking was to make a run for it. He dashed to the left, hoping to make it out of the ally. He misjudged how fast the guards were though, and the fat one caught him by the back of his shirt, choking him as he pulled him back and slammed him into the wall again, making him double-over as the cobblestone rocks knocked the air out of him.

"Not so fast, we gotta have a little fun first" the strong one said taking him by the front of his shirt. Nik had only time to look up before a gigantic fist knocked into the side of his face. He felt saliva shoot out of his mouth laced with red. Before he could pick himself back up from the ground however he felt a foot to his back, as his stomach slammed into the ground and more blood rushed from his mouth. Nik's vision grew hazy as he looked towards the end of the alley, hoping, wishing someone would round the corner to save him. No such luck came, however and he was picked up and thrown deeper into the alley, scratching himself on the rocks and broken glass that lay there.

"that should teach you" said a voice, though he couldn't tell who it was from. All he heard was the two pairs of gigantic feet shuffling off until it was silent. He looked at the end of the alley...perhaps he could crawl his way out and then someone would find him. He reached his right arm out to pull himself and felt an unbearable pain. It was immovable, possibly broken. A tear fell from Nik's eye as he looked at the setting sun beyond the end of the alley. Would this be where his pathetic poor life came to an end? Fitting that he would be punished for his wrongs before he died. Just before he closed his eyes to let the pain ebb away he saw a figure dart into the alley. It was hazy, but it seemed to be an all-white blur as it raced towards him. It knelt down next to him and suddenly it began changing color, from the top down, the blur emanated blue, a fierce rich blue that wasn't of it but seemed to be around it, like it secreted the color.

'An angel' he thought, '*come to take me home'*

"Nik" was all he heard before he slipped away into darkness.

Shana Zehron woke with a start. She sat up in her tiny bunk and looked around the small cabin. It was dark, so much so that she couldn't see a thing in the small space. She could feel the pressure surround her though. The familiar cramped environment calmed her. Her heart slowed, she had just realized it's rapid beating. As she lay back in bed she realized how bad her dream must have been, her bed and skin were drenched in sweat, another bad dream, another nightmare. She closed her eyes, wishing the bad memories that came away, this only made them stronger of course and she had to wince from the pounding headache that was pervading her from thinking on it any more. As she stood up from the bed, she tripped and fell to the ground. No matter how long she had been sailing, she could never get used to the rocking of the boat immediately after waking. As she stood up her eyes began to adjust to the dark, she found her way to the nearest lamp and lit it.

On the wall near Shana's bunk was a looking glass that stood tall. She surveyed herself, though as usual could make no opinion on how she looked. It's not that she didn't like them, in fact to many people she would be gorgeous, even without trying. She just figured that spending too much time staring at yourself made you

conceited, and she had met far too many conceited people to fall to that level. She grabbed the remainder of her clothes from the bag on the floor and finished dressing. When she was done, she looked at herself again. This was a bit better. She examined her outfit...the same as usual really. She wore short denim shorts with a fat belt that helped hold the cutlass strapped to her left hip. She shorts were small enough that they showed her long tan legs. Sweat still clung slightly and made them shine in the light. She wore high strapped sandals, she had learned long ago that it was useless wearing socks and shoes on a boat, they only got wet in the end. Looking up she admired her v-neck top. It had short sleeves which made it easy to move around in, and was cut low exposing her slender stomach. The shirt itself clung tight to her body exposing her tall and elegant frame.

Shana was tall, about 5' 10" with a slender build that hid her muscles. She had flaming orange hair that hung shoulder length except for the bit that was tied back with a blue bandana. Being a protective woman, Shana constantly kept a diving knife strapped to her right calve in addition to her cutlass. Overall, a woman of twenty-nine Shana was fit and ready.

She didn't feel ready though. She felt tired, and she desperately wished she could sleep the rest of the trip. Things had to be done though. She began rifling through what meager belongings she had, merely stuffing them all into the one small bag she carried. She picked up a book off the ground and had almost started to throw it in her bag when she realized that it wasn't her. Instantly reminded that she shared a cabin, Shana looked around. He obviously was not here or she would have realized. Putting down the book she walked out the door of the cabin. Instantly several things greeted her. The first was the sound of waves crashing from the ocean outside. The second was a chilly breeze that carried salty water to replace the sweat that clung to her legs. The last was her strange roommate standing at the edge of the boat staring into the distance. He stood in the dark part where the light was not reaching.

"Its strange to see you outside" she said hoping to start up a conversation "usually you're inside cooped up with a book or something."

"You don't know me" he said in a calm, unwavering voice without turning to her.

"I've been roomed with you on this voyage for the past 3 weeks now, I think I know you well enough." She said smirking

Kahn turned to her; she could see his pale skin, even without the light on him. In contrast to her dark tan, it was almost luminescent. He stepped closer putting himself, if only dimly, into the light. Now Shana could see the medium length dark grey hair that ran slightly past his shoulders. She could how scary he truly was.

Again unlike Shana, Kahn was almost completely covered up. He wore high think black boots that went all the way past his calves. His pants were tucked into the boots. They were black, and seemed to cling to his legs and flow with them as he walked making Shana wonder where one could purchase such a fine fabric. Tucked into his pants was a skin tight shirt that exposed his skinny frame. One could see Kahn had muscle, but not very much, whatever clung to him seemed...almost natural. Above all of this Kahn wore a long trench coat that stretched to his boots and hung open, flapping in the wind. He stood with power, and confidence. Though Shana knew he was a calm individual it almost made her fear him, especially when she looked into his eyes. His deep maroon eyes that spoke of troubles far beyond her own and seemed to make you want to spill your secrets to the world. Looking away, Shana walked foreword and joined him in looking out at the ocean.

"You woke up" He replied, disregarding her earlier comment.

"Yeah...I don't know what it was" Shana said, now finally considering what it was that caused her to wake upï¿½ "I thought it was going to be morning, but it's pitch black out"

"You know, your people may not be gifted with magic, but your sense for danger is quite acute.

"Danger?" she replied, surprised at his comment

Kahn only responded by pointing into the distance

"Your eyes may not be as adept as mine at seeing in the dark, you may want to try and get higher-"ï¿½ he turned to look at her, but she was already climbing the ropes that lead to the mast. Once up high enough she leaned off, holding onto the ropes and peered into the distance. Not too far away she saw a beacon of light coming from a rather large ship.

"Shit." She said, climbing down

"A pirate ship" Kahn replied

"Worse, *my* pirate ship"

Nik opened his eyes slowly. It took him a second to adjust to the blinding light outside. He blinked a few times before sitting up. He felt warm, warmer then he should have been in the dark alley. He looked around, realizing now that he could barely open his left eye. He braced himself with his left arm, fully expecting pain to sting through his body but to his great surprise nothing happened. His arm felt strong as ever. He held his palms up to his eyes and looked for the scratches that should have been there. His skin, however, was clear of marks. Nik stood up, whatever had healed his injuries could not cure the soreness in his body. As he stood, his senses became more acute and he realized he was on the beach. The sun, in its final hour was setting and the tide was high.

"Nik" shouted a concerned voice, running from further down the beach

Nik turned around and saw an angel for the second time in the day. Bathed with sunlight behind her and wearing a white tanktop with a bright white skirt to match was Syn. She was 5' 2" with a thin wirey frame. Her skin had the perfect tinge of white that went with her snowy shoulder-cut hair. Her eyes were a light, deep blue that captured Nik for a second and delayed his response.

"Syn...I'm sorry, I was late." he said struggling as he walked towards her

"Shut up." She said running to him and supporting him as she sat him back to the ground. "How are you feeling?"

"Uhm...better I suppose" he replied as he re-examines his body "I swear, I had cuts all up my arms and hands, and my arm...it hurt, it was definitely broken."

"You looked like this when we found you" said a gruff voice emerging from the shack not too far away from him. "Someone must of brought you here, and if they healed you up they didn't do a good job. You look a mess."

"Thanks Grutch" He replied as he looked up at the older man smiling down at him.

Grutch kneeled down slowly and put down the bowl of water he was carrying. Syn quickly kneeled next to him and took the cloth from Grutch, dabbing it in the water before beginning to wipe down the cuts on his

face.

"I wish I could do more to help" she said, as the worriedly looked at the cuts on his face

Nik laughed "I don't think you've ever cared this much about me being injured

She smiled slightly "That's because they're usually from me"

"True"

When she was finished cleaning his wounds she carried the blood water and rag into the shack.

"Maybe we should get you inside" Grutch said looking at the sun "It'll be night soon, plus we wouldn't want sand to get into those cuts of yours, and you may want to regale us with the story of how you came to be in this state."

Nik stood up with difficulty and limped his way into the shack. He sat down on a free chair behind the counter. The shop was closed at this time so no costumers would bother them. Syn and Grutch each pulled up stools and sat eagerly waiting the story. He told them everything from bumping into the man with the papers up until his encounter with the guards and the mysterious person who had found him

"Oh and Syn!" he said, reminded of the encounter with the man, "The man had a paper...it had-" but he stopped, he could not seem to find the paper in any of his pockets "It...it's gone" he said giving up on checking.

"Maybe your savior took it" Grutch said looking out the window of the shack "a mysterious person indeed"

"Oh...I suppose, but it had your family crest Syn!"

Syn stood up and looked out the window "I have to get home! It's past sunset" She started running to the door before turning around and looking at Nik "You're going to be okay right?"

"I'll be fine Syn. Go." And with that she ran out the door.

"Now, I think you need to take it easy the next few days off from thieving" Grutch said as he finished closing the shop "I can feed you well enough as long as you work here"

"Thanks Grutch, wake me in the morning so I can help you open."

"Will do small one."

As Nik lay is sore and injured body on the ground he couldn't help but smile as he thought of the kind way Syn dabbed at his wounds and helped heal him.

_____-

Syn ran out the shop with as much speed as she could, she looked around, hoping to not find any sign of the guards, they would surely give her trouble if they found her past curfew. She stopped only once to pick up her cloak from its hiding spot near the Grutch's Fish Shop. A cloak of pure white, decorated ornately at the top and worn at the bottom where it had spent much time trailing the dirty streets it was her favorite item in the world besides the conch that hung around her neck. She donned the cloak and continued her streak towards

home. As she neared the edge of the central marketplace, Syn slowed. Now, more than ever was time for caution. Guards would be patrolling this area twice as much since it was owned by nobles. She took her first left and began to survey her surroundings carefully. The walls, she could see became steadily nicer. The floor went from dirt to cobblestone and things in general seemed to be getting cleaner. The shops tailored silk and the fine clothes as well as nice jewelry. Syn was just beginning to question the absence of guards when she heard footsteps coming from the alley above. They echoed in the night, and made her wonder how quiet she had truly been. She quickly ducked behind a barrel that stood at the entrance of a fine restaurant. In the time two guards, carrying pikes and clothed in the red and silver of Argonautia walked out.

"And they want us to be here during that?" the one said to the other

"Apparently, not that we could do much about it even if we wanted to try"

"What's he looking for?"

"Dunno, but whatever it is must be important, worth destroying so much"

Syn shuffled her feet a bit and the guards stopped

"You hearï¿½ something?"

"Nah, must have been my mind, all this talk of *them* has got me jumpy"

Syn sighed in relief as they continued to walk away in silence. She pondered however, on what they could have been talking about. What was coming that would scare even guards of the army that much? And what could this little port town have that anyone could want? She moved faster into the neighborhood where most of the nobles dwelled. Vines, trimmed intricately decorated the walls, and the houses stretched higher than anything else in the area.

She had just turned onto the street that would lead her home, when she caught sight of a man running along the road. She placed herself flat against the wall and drew her cloak over her, a rather poor hiding space but she was counting on his hurry to not notice her. As he drew closer she noticed the man was donned in purple and gold and carrying a familiar leather satchel at his side. '*Now what is a courier from Istrylia doing here?* ' she thought to herself. Looking down the street, she saw her house. No lights were on so it was possible they still didn't know she was missing. Cursing her curiosity, Syn sprung from the wall, and in silence began keeping pace with the stranger on the street. *'clearly'* Syn thought *'he isn't worried about anyone catching him for curfew. In that case why is he running'* realizing she was falling behind, she picked up her pace. He took so many turns, that soon Syn was afraid she would lose him, but as she rounded a corner there he was. Standing still at the gate of a Noble house staring at the tall window. Seeing that the house was obviously closed he pulled a letter from his satchel. It was on nice thick paper and sealed with wax. He pinned it to the gate and looking around, began to walk quickly towards his next destination. After Syn was sure he was gone she ran up to the gate and snatched the letter off of it. The wax seal was a pentagram surrounding a pyramid; above the pentagram were twelve dot with twelve triangles pointing to the end of the seal. It was obviously pressed with dignity and it almost felt taboo to break it. As she did and opened the letter she felt a chill through the air. As if something forbidden was happening, she looked around and spotting no one glanced at the letter.

She quickly realized that reading the letter would not be easy. It was written in the language of old, and she knew but a few phrases. Her father would know, but for now she had to leave this there. Plus she had a sneaking suspicion this wasn't the only noble house with a letter like this. She reached into the pocket on her robe and withdrew the letter she had taken earlier. It was sealed the same, and marked with the crest of her

family. She reached to break the seal, when she felt a firm hand on her shoulder. An icy voice whispered in her ear.

"Where did you get that little missy?"

Syn whipped around to find herself closer than she would like to be to the courier she had been following. She felt his warm breath and saw his fierce eyes pierce into her, questioning. Ever nerve in her body screamed for her to run, she knew it's what Nik would have done, but she knew she would never outrun him and if he decided to call the guards she would be in even worse trouble. Instead she stood up straighter and looked straight back into his eyes.

"I would get your hands off me if you don't want to be demoted from your already menial job of courier"

"And who are you to order me?" he said defiantly, but releasing his grip on her and taking a step back

"Synthia *Tierce*" she replied emphasizing her last name and flashing the clasp on her cloak emblazoned with the shield of her family.

"Oh, my apologies" the man said bowing "I did not realize I was speaking to one of nobel birth"

"Yes indeed, and you will see that his letter is addressed to my family and that I am of age to receive it."

"Of course Ms. Tierce, I'm sorry for stopping you"

"It is nothing, I appreciate your concern for my property, now get to your runs"

"Thank you" he said backing away and continuing on, but not before looking back at the open letter on the fence. She eyed him thoughtfully, not sure that he was entirely gone. To be safe she stuck the letter back in the cloak and began the journey back home.

The twists and turns were easy to navigate, she was always adept at directions and she knew this neighborhood well. Finally she stood at the gates to the mansion where she lived. It was embarrassingly large and Syn shamed to look at it. With a quick jump she was over the wall that bordered the house and into the intricate garden. She quickly found the path to her room and followed it to the window she left propped open, the only light on in the house. She pulled herself over the edge of the window and tumbled in, careful to not crush the letter. As she stood up she felt a presence at her door.

"Welcome home Synthia" it said in a smooth, low voice.

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