

The Warriors: Crimson Chaos

Chapter 1

'I must find them. They are the only ones who can stop Tutock.'

Chinook shivered as a cold blast of unnatural wind swept through his indigo kimono the moment he stepped off the subway train onto the platform in the San Francisco subway station. He tightened his hand around his staff and took his knapsack from the attendant.

Several travelers quickly passed him, heading toward the stairs leading to the street several feet away. He shivered again. No one seemed to notice the unnatural cold, but simply carried on with their business as usual. This was Tutock's way. Subtlety was one of his many weapons.

Chinook hurried toward the stairs. Ahead of him four teenagers dressed in black leather jackets ascended to the upper levels of the subway station. He did not pay attention to them, lost in thought about his mission.

The life of an auiarar Mystic was never easy. Chinook had been given the responsibility not to only find them, but to train them too. A tightening grip in his gut proved the task was not going to be easy.

'He may already be moving ahead with his Guardians in preparation for the upcoming war,' he thought to himself. *'I fear though that if I do not train the Warriors properly, they will fall shadow to his evil.'*

Across the street a man and a woman were in a heated argument. Chinook hated arguments, and to everyone else arguing was a simple fact of life, but the Mystic knew better.

'Unfortunately, many have already fallen victim to him and they know it not,' he thought sadly.

He looked for a taxi. Ah there was one. He walked toward it when a lead pipe swept across his chest.

He blocked it with his staff as four teens surrounded him. He hooked the lead pipe and wrenched it out of the first's hand. Another swung at him with brass knuckles. A quick strike with his staff to the gut brought the boy to his knees and Chinook quickly struck the boy in the chest with the heel of his palm. The boy went down and he quickly turned to the next one. A two-finger thrust to the neck knocked him out. He thrust his left arm out sideways to block the third attacker, and then sent the teen tumbling back with a strike under the chin.

The last pulled a Beretta M9 and aimed it at his head. Chinook sighed. "How foolish you are," he said.

"Shut up, you freak!" the teen snarled as his index finger trembled against the trigger. Sweat trickled down his forehead. His hand trembled. If Chinook didn't move fast, he would be shot and this crime would only add to the prosecutor's list of convictions.

Chinook took a step back when the gun started smoking under the teen's hand. The teen dropped the gun with a cry of pain and held his hand. The gun fell on the ground and went off. Chinook dove out of the way, narrowly missing the bullet that went through a metal trashcan and struck the concrete corner of an office building.

The teen bolted.

Chinook climbed to his feet and looked around, but all he saw was a teenage girl with shoulder length brown hair walking away with a gargantuan white wolf-like creature by her side.

A little while later, Chinook stared up at the temple that stood high above atop a long set of steps. It was here he had been told he could find some information about the documents he had in his possession. He hurried toward the building, but stopped abruptly when a greasy haired teen boy wearing a bandanna above his brow suddenly tumbled out in front of him.

The teen leaped to his feet, skidded over loose shoelaces and bolted away before Chinook could ask what was going on, but as the short, black haired girl came into view and stormed by him, he did not need to ask.

He sighed heavily. Violence was not something abnormal to him, but Tutock was increasing its overall effects to a sheer soul shaking horrific. He entered the building and climbed a flight of stairs that led to a narrow hallway with offices on each side of the hallway. At the end a connector branched off and led him through a wide, elaborately designed office door.

The door opened automatically and he went inside. The door closed behind him with a silent click.

A short man, wearing a cloak similar to Chinook's cloak but brown in appearance, bowed in greeting. The familiarity was polite, but strictly official as he was told to follow. Chinook still did not know what the Mystics had in mind, though it wasn't for him to question.

The man, who called himself Yamamoto Kobi, briefly explained the proceedings in English to Chinook. "We have reports that Tutock has not yet made much of a move thus far, but you are aware that his power and presence is felt even from his realm Tophet. We believe the Warriors will make their presences known soon too, if not in the next few days."

"Do we have time to wait a few days?" Chinook asked solemnly.

"The head believes Tutock will want to usurp the Warriors in order to crush them under his own hand or bend them to his will," Kobi said.

"Then he will wait until they pose an actual threat to him," Chinook said.

"Yes, he will wait," Kobi said. He paused outside a door and knocked three times. The door opened a half-minute later to a wide circular room where a half moon table accentuated the far back wall. Four elders dressed in black striped kimonos with hoods covering their heads rose from their chairs and bowed in greeting to one another. All six sat down.

"Chinook, do you have your scrolls?" asked the Elder in the middle chair.

Chinook handed the scrolls over and waited as they were untied and painstakingly read by the four Elders, their lips moving in sync. He remained patiently waiting while Kobi, whom he now realized was an acolyte, seemed eager to get the proceedings going. Such was the way with youth.

At last the lead Elder carefully rolled the scrolls and passed them back to Chinook. Chinook tucked them away under his kimono and they regarded one another for a moment. "Time is critical," the lead Elder finally said, his voice grave. "We expect Tutock to strike soon, but we do not have a set time frame. This is why you must find the Warriors and train them swiftly."

"I understand they will have respective attribute symbols that will shine in their foreheads," Chinook said.

"Yes. That will be your key sign that will indicate who they are. Only the true Warriors will bear these symbols."

The Elder turned to Kobi, who retrieved a small glass bottle with curved handles. Inside Chinook could see a swirling gas like substance of various colors and wondered what the intention of the bottle was for. Kobi handed it to one of the Elders who passed it to the middle Elder. The Elder set it on the table and uncorked the bottle. The three Elders held hands.

Chinook did not understand the linguistics of the language they spoke, but as he and Kobi watched, the gases inside the bottle swirled together in blended colors and rose toward the top. The bottle shook from the pressure and as the Elders finished in unison, the blended contents shot out of the bottle, knocking it backward off the table and into Chinook hands. The individual colored rays of lights shot through the skylight ceiling and then separated into eight individual color rainbow arches of light.

The Elders opened their eyes, and one said, "It is done. Go quickly and find them."

Chinook bowed and quickly departed.

Flash Dawn Michaels and her wolf-like companion arrived at the quiet Apple Gate Community. Her house, a small Italian Renaissance styled mansion was the last down the long street, further apart from the others. She had always admired the tall black iron fence that bordered the property.

Approaching her home, she used her key card to get onto the property and the little automated voice box welcomed her home by name and opened the gates. She walked through with Blaze and up the long asphalted driveway lined with cobblestone and bordered with dwarf hemlocks and holmstrup arborvitae.

It was rather quiet as they approached the four column front porch and walked up the six wide circular steps to the chestnut wooden front door with its brass knob. On both sides, a crystalline window accentuated the front porch, and it was through one she noticed a small shadow arching its back.

"Looks like Muffy knows we're home, Blaze," Flash murmured as she unlocked the door. Blaze snorted and trotted into the house. She followed and closed the door behind her.

Muffy hopped down from the little dark oak phone table and proceeded to rub his head affectionately against Blaze's long legs while ignoring the fact that Blaze barely regarded him.

Flash smiled whimsically and walked further into the living room. "Dad?" she shouted. "Susan? Sammy? Cammy?" Only silence greeted her.

Shrugging her shoulders, she walked to the kitchen and made a chicken sandwich and grabbed a lemon lime soda from the fridge. From the backyard the dogs barked from their kennel.

'At least Dumb and Dumber were put outside,' she thought.

She quietly ate her sandwich at the table and sipped her soda. Playing basketball seemed like a better idea. She grabbed her basketball from the sports closet, mindful of Sammy's baseball bat and Cammy's roller skates.

She headed out the door, but didn't get far when a blue colored ray struck her in the center of her forehead and sent her crashing back inside. At the same time her power leaped from her and the draperies caught fire.

Ignoring the burning in her forehead, she grabbed the fire extinguisher on the wall behind her and put the fire out. Well, that was something else she had destroyed with her pyrokinesis. Lovely.

But what the heck struck her in the first place? Her forehead tingled uncomfortably and she rubbed it. She didn't feel anything, but the rubbing didn't make the tingling go away. She spun on her heels and dashed across the living room and through the side corridor to the bathroom. She flipped the light on and gaped at herself in the mirror. *'What the...'*

Flash's reflection stared back at her, eyes wide with shock and disbelief as a flame brightly glowed in the center of her forehead.

"Fifi, stop that!"

Chilie Lei Davids lowered the magazine to peer at an older woman with silver hair and a large wide purse who was busy trying to get "Fifi", a west highland white terrier, to sit still in the Passion Animal Medical Care waiting room. But Fifi was scampering back and forth, yipping and yapping excitedly.

"Fifi! Please be a good girl for Mummy!" the woman begged and gave the leash a tug.

Fifi ignored her.

It wasn't easy watching people with their out of control animals. Fifi had likely never been properly trained And this new client likely gave Fifi everything she did not need and refused her things she did need, like positive reinforcement training.

She set down the magazine and walked around the desk, her long copper red hair swishing around her hips. When the woman caught sight of her, her face turned a shade of pink and she squirmed uncomfortably in her seat. "Oh dear. I am so embarrassed. I will take her elsewhere until our turn, dear."

"No, it's all right," Chilie said in an accented Middle Eastern voice. She knelt down to Fifi's eye level. *'You're causing quite a ruckus here. What's the trouble?'* Fifi stared up at Chilie, panting and wagging her tail a mile a minute. She jumped in the air twice.

'Fifi,' Chile warned.

'Squirrel!'

Chile looked briefly outside at the tree and scanned its trunk and branches quickly for a sign of life. A squirrel sat on the upper branches, nibbling an acorn. Fifi barked and wagged her tail, her tongue lolling out of her mouth.

Chile looked back down at Fifi. *'Yes, it's a squirrel, but there's no need to have a fit like that. You settle down and behave yourself. Besides it's almost your turn.'*

'Squirrel!'

'Fifi...'

Fifi gave a little whimper, but turned and lay down at "Mummy's" feet. The woman's eyes widened. She leaned forward and whispered, "How did you do that?"

Chile tucked down her blouse and focused her green eyes upon the woman's inquisitive expression. "I just gave it a calming look," she said, not exactly telling the truth but not exactly lying either.

"Oh thank you so much. I must learn how to do that someday."

"It's very helpful," Chile said and smiled. She turned and headed back to the desk.

Sometimes it wasn't easy dealing with people, but she never had backbone to tell a person they needed to learn to control their pet. Her brother Ahab never understood why, because in his opinion a person who let the animals get out of control had no business with animals. Her other siblings were slightly better in regards to animals, but it was she who felt the passionate and loving pull toward them, even if she did have to give them a firm rebuke at times.

At a quarter to five, Chile and Aunt Isobel locked up the veterinarian office and headed out to the parking lot.

"Well, what did you think of your first time here?" Aunt Isobel asked as she unlocked the car doors.

"I enjoyed it very much," Chile said. "I would like to actually work with you hands on with the animals."

"Hm... Your mother said you were adept at helping animals back in Israel when they were sick or injured," Aunt Isobel said, musing. "And my receptionist is coming back next week."

Chile's eyes sparkled with hope. "So may I?"

"I don't see why not," Aunt Isobel said as she unlocked the car. "I'll allow you to shadow my tech vet and myself for a month and from there we'll see."

"Alright." Chile got into the car. As she watched the scenery go by, a vivid ray of purple light struck her in the forehead, bringing forth a glowing heart that she saw only with her heart.

Chapter 2

Scorpio Adam Lapine coughed into his palm as he stood under the awning of a hotel. Next to him was a large duffle bag jammed with all of his clothes and what food he had packed. But now he had a problem. He was out of money.

It was quite embarrassing.

He watched two vehicles pull into the side parking lot. At least they had money for a hotel room. He had no idea where he was sleeping tonight; maybe a park or an abandon building.

He definitely could not stay here.

"Out of the way!" A large rotund man dressed in a business suit pushed Scorpio aside and made his way in to the hotel.

Scorpio rubbed his shoulder and scowled. He looked through the window, glaring at the man.

A bellhop led the man toward the elevators. As they passed the water fountain, the water fountain's spigot suddenly burst. The man cursed, and the bellhop staggered back to avoid the man's flailing arms. When the man spun on his heel to get away from the water splashing in his face he stumbled to the floor and knocked the bellhop down with him.

Scorpio ran away as fast as he could until he came to a park. He took a drink from the fountain. Around him, several pigeons converged on food crumbs. One of them pecked his foot.

"Stop that!" He shook his foot to scare the bird off.

Something struck him on top of the head. He yelped and covered his head, only to be met in the face with an elderly woman in her seventies who was getting ready to deliver another blow. "Don't you dare hurt my birds!"

"Ow! Lady, stop hitting me!"

"You hit my birds!"

"I did not!"

"Don't you talk back to me!" She whacked him again.

The water fountain's spigot exploded, drenching the woman. The woman screamed and shielded her face as several onlookers ran over.

"I'm being attacked!" she screamed in hysterics.

'*Self defense*,' Scorpio thought.

"You're not being attacked," a man said. "The water fountain broke. Come on, we need to get you dried off."

Scorpio mumbled and decided it was best to find some place to sleep for the evening, a place without pigeons and crazy old ladies carrying purses filled with bricks. He left the park as quickly as possible and walked down a jogger's path. He didn't know where he was heading and the map didn't indicate any plausible good sleeping places. He snorted.

"Gimme your money, man!"

Scorpio's eyes widened. An older boy held a gun to his head. He quickly raised his hands in the air and quietly started to say he had no money when he was suddenly struck in the forehead with a colorful ray of orange light.

The boy fired. Scorpio hit the pavement. Through dazed eyes he saw the robber running away while his forehead tingled unfamiliarly and blood trailed down his abdomen. Someone screamed. All lights went out.

Thunder Kioto Copiel shifted his duffle bag to another shoulder as he walked past several food concessions in the San Francisco International Airport. The smell of American food hit his nostrils and he was sorely tempted to grab a bite to eat. But what if his grandparents were waiting for him? They could be somewhere in the airport, wondering where he was, expecting him any moment.

Two months ago, he didn't even know he had grandparents. But Raamstand München Academy had put forth a search after his fifteenth birthday. It took three weeks to locate Charlone and Eva Copiel who lived in San Francisco. After a few more weeks of communication by phone, Thunder was released to his grandparents with a Visa card and passport.

The flight had been long and uncomfortable in Thunder's opinion, and he felt nervous about meeting his grandparents for the first time. But that wasn't only it. He had questions. Why hadn't his parents ever mentioned them?

Thunder paused to read a sign on the wall and walked in the direction to Waiting Area B, once again easing his way through the heavy crowds. He came to the end of a wide corridor that led to a wide flight of stairs. Down below the stairs was another expansion of the airport filled with gift shops, vending machines along the walls, an ATM machine, and several varieties of little stores, gift shops and eateries. Not far off were waiting areas. One of them said Waiting Area B.

Thunder's visible, light-blue right eye sparkled. Vaguely he saw an elderly couple seated on two of the hard backed chairs; one of them with a cane, the other with a large, flowered handbag. They were talking, but from this distance he couldn't make it out. Feeling a twinge of nervousness in his gut, he swallowed.

Time to go meet the grandparents he never knew about.

Thunder walked down the stairs and continued on toward Waiting Area B. A teenage girl stared at him and shook her mother's arm.

"Mom, do you see him?"

"Who, honey?" the girl's mother asked, quite distracted by her watch.

"That gorgeous hunk that just walked by!"

Thunder cringed and hurried away as fast as he could, maneuvering around crowds of people.

"Thunder!"

He turned his attention to the short, plump woman and his eyes lit up. He immediately headed to her. She had a large smile on her face and her light blue eyes sparkled with joy.

Thunder found himself immediately pulled into her embrace. She nearly crushed him with a bear hug, causing him to choke down a wince. He returned the hug, feeling an odd peace.

His grandma released him and he found himself seized by his grandpa. His grandpa was slightly taller than his grandmother, nearly at Thunder's height of six foot, if not a foot under. He had very thin, white hair on his head. His hug was not as crushing as Grandma's.

"I am happy to finally meet you, Thunder," Grandpa said in German. "We are both happy you have come."

"Thank you, Grandfather. I am glad to finally meet you both, too." He could have gone to live with them long ago instead of living for the past seven years at the boys' academy if he had known about them prior. He had many questions, but all those would have to wait.

During the ride home, Thunder learned that his grandparents were the parents of his father Frank. His father also had a sister Haila who married her American husband Patrick. He had a cousin, Channa, who was a year older than he was.

"I think you'll like her," Grandma said, not noticing Thunder's apprehensive look. "She is hyper active a lot, and it takes a while to understand what she's saying."

"Can she not speak German? Or English?" Thunder managed to ask. He remained tensed, looking out the window,

"She can speak both, but she talks speedily," Grandma said. "But don't worry. You'll learn to understand her in time."

If Thunder had his way, he wouldn't speak to her at all. "All right..." he said uncertainly. He leaned back and closed his eyes for a moment. A humming sound caused him to reopen them, and at that moment, a bright red colored ray of light suddenly struck him in the forehead.

In the rear view mirror, Thunder saw a red lightning bolt glowing brightly in the center of his tingling forehead.

Snow Akins Thornton shifted his backpack filled to the top with quantum, biochemistry, and physics textbooks as he walked through the Golden Gate National Park, hoping he'd find Ashiyanna's doll.

A toddler ran by and his mother quickly chased him. "Devon, get back here!" she shouted. Snow smiled with a small chuckle. He continued walking, heading right toward the slides where Ashiyanna last had her doll. If he were lucky, it would still be there.

It wasn't.

Perhaps they had turned it into the lost and found.

Snow imagined Ice snorting at that. No one turned anything in these days. Lost items were always someone else's. Finders keepers. But something nagged him that someone might have had the heart to turn the one eyed doll in.

At least that was his hope.

Snow found a path shortly after he left the playground and followed it toward another part of the park. A woman's scream caught his attention. Ahead on the path members of the Notorious Reapers gang hassled a woman. One of them knocked the poor woman down and raised a bat over his head.

Snow had enough.

He walked toward them. The air turned cold and frost settled over the grass. Just when he focused on the bat and it started to freeze with ice, an arrow suddenly struck the wrist of the Notorious Reaper.

Snow halted and stared wide eyed as the teen punk screamed and flailed about. The punk tore the arrow out and ran off with his buddies. The woman ran too. He started after her until he was hit in the forehead by a ray of orange light. He dropped down to the ground next to a tree and blinked several times.

Ashiyanna's doll sat against the trunk like she had been deliberately placed there. He seized the doll and hurried out of the park.

Ice Keaton Thornton threw garbage into the outside garbage cans, muttering under his breath. So he had come home with a couple of D's on his report card yesterday. Why couldn't his pa just let it go, and let him try on Monday? Weekends were for having fun.

He wiped his hands on the thighs of his jeans and started to go back in when a big man wearing one earring in his left ear came out of the front door. Tau was a very dark skin man with deep brown eyes that appeared black and stern. He was a big and muscular from years of working in Nairobi, Kenya, North Africa.

It was just one year ago when he had decided to move his entire family: wife Akilah, sons Snow and Ice, and seven year old daughter Ashiyanna to San Francisco, California. Ice would never forget the day his father announced they were moving, and knew from Snow they were moving because of their powers and constant recurring dreams.

Snow had attributed it to nonsense, but even he couldn't figure out why they kept having the same dream other than twin phenomenon of which could not be scientifically explained. Ice simply did not care.

"Ice, what is taking you, boy?" Tau demanded.

"Sorry, Pa," Ice mumbled. He threw the garbage into the cans and walked back toward the house. "Pa, how come Snow doesn't have ta help? It's not fair."

"You're going to find life isn't supposed to be fair. Nothing is truly rewarding unless you work hard for it," Tau said. "Snow is looking for Ashiyanna's doll."

"He's takin' foreva," Ice grumbled.

"And you complain too much. Finish your chores, boy." Tau turned and walked back into the house.

Ice mumbled under his breath. At the same time, a black ray of light struck him in the forehead and knocked him on his back. He gasped several times. What just happened? Was he okay? He staggered to his feet and looked at his reflection in the side kitchen window. His mouth dropped. Why was there a picture of the earth with a crack in the center in the middle of his forehead?

The coolness of the creek felt pleasant to T-boz Moon Rabbiel as she allowed her arm to submerge to wash off her arrows from dirt, debris, and blood.

'I wonder if he survived my arrow,' she mused. She shook water off the broken arrow and examined it closely. The wood was still good; she only needed to replace the arrow tip.

The Notorious Reapers weren't winning any points in T-boz's book. Uncle Jordan had warned T-boz about the Notorious Reapers and to be cautious always. Of course she was always cautious, except during those times when she'd accidentally go invisible.

In the beginning, T-boz had trouble with her gift. Whenever she was upset or sad, she would simply disappear from sight, but could not figure how to become visible. Her disembodied voice was the only thing that helped her mother find her and guide her back to visible form. It took several months before T-box learned how to use her gift.

Of course being blessed with a gift didn't mean you abused the gift, which was something T-boz had learned many times from her grandmother's switch.

T-boz looked up at the sky with its azure colors and the bright pale yellow sun peeking through some clouds.

She stood up, intending to go home when a white ray of light caught her attention. Before she could blink or dodge, the white light hit her in the forehead. She fell right off the bank and into the creek with a loud splash.

She quickly surfaced and coughed out water. She thumped her chest just below the ribcage to help expel more water and gasped air in. The water relaxed around her and she stood there, breathing in and out while her forehead pulsed and throbbed. She looked down at her reflection rippling in the waters and on her forehead shining brightly was a picture of a circle with a line running diagonally through it.

San Francisco wasn't what Shades Diane Thopho had expected, and she even wondered if she had made a mistake coming here in the first place. So far she had kept hidden from the local authorities, but how much longer could she get by without eating?

She glanced toward the window and stared longingly at the pastries displayed in the window.

'I should get out of here,' she thought.

She pushed herself off the wall and turned around to head up the street when the door to Mr. Andros' Bakery opened and a short rotund man stepped out. Shades stepped back and narrowed her eyes at him. He stared at her with small brown eyes above a large wide nose. His mustache bristled. What did he want? If he was going to yell at her, she wasn't in the mood. She would have no problem yelling back, or maybe crack him one while she was at it.

"You are more than welcomed to have a meal here," he said, kindly.

She stiffened. "I don't have any money," she said, keeping her eyes on him. At her four foot frame he might as well been a giant, but she supposed he was only 5'8 at best.

"No problem. You should eat something. Come." He turned to head back inside, but she hesitated.

"Sir, I don't take charity," she said.

Why was he offering her free food? People just didn't offer anything free these days, and when they did it was because they had a motive.

"Then I can have you do some work for me," he said. "Is that acceptable?"

Shades stared at him and thought it over. "What kind of work?" she asked. If it was anything stupid or work that made her feel uncomfortable, she wasn't taking it. She'd kill a wild rabbit and find a way to cook it before she did anything she would regret.

"Sweep my floors, wash my baking pans and utensils until they're all clean. Do you accept?" He waited patiently.

That didn't sound too bad. Fine, she'd take it. "I accept."

"Come then." He led her through the door. "I am Antonio Andros. I own this bakery. What is your name?"

"Shades Thopho."

Just before Shades went through the door completely she was struck in the forehead with a bright green ray of light. She seethed and slapped a hand over her pulsating forehead. She caught her reflection in the glass window and her eyes widened. Why was there a green question mark glowing in her forehead?

It was all very strange to Shades.

Chapter 3

Chinook tightened his hood and huddled his arms inside his kimono. A quick glance at a bank sign told him it was 73 degrees. He shivered as a foreboding cold wind blew. *'Tutock knows.'* The realization came upon him like a sharp dagger and he bristled with urgency. The Elders commanded him to find the Warriors, and he would do so by their symbol on their forehead. The symbol was a beacon of hope in the darkness cast by the Ar'nyk.

Chinook weaved in and out among other pedestrians all vying to get somewhere in the shortest amount of time possible. Of course it was all so very strange looking for teenagers who could have been anyone from anywhere.

He reached a corner. Traffic flowed steadily at this intersection of Turk and Webster for fifteen minutes due to the broken traffic light. He grimaced and tapped his foot impatiently. Such a shame for an auriar Mystic.

While waiting, he formulated a plan. It was likely the Warriors did not know each other, but there was a chance they could all go to the same school. That was something he could look into *if* he did not find any teenager with a symbol glowing in their forehead just walking about.

A long gap between oncoming traffic gave him time to cross. He entered a neighborhood that was relatively quiet and well kept. Lawns manicured, bushes and hedges trimmed, trees well pruned. It was a pristine community. Yet even here, he felt that ever-looming sinister darkness that promised to swallow everything whole.

A large wooden sign welcomed him to the Apple Gate Community.

The houses were large, picturesque, and no doubt had several spacious rooms with accommodations and entertainment.

One last house was further down the street and like some of the other houses was bordered by a security fence. The property was well maintained and the vegetation added aesthetic beauty to the landscape. To his left, there was a large dog pen, and lying down near it was a gargantuan wolf-like animal. '*The size of a Siberian tiger*,' he noted mentally.

One eye of the wolf-like creature opened and seemed to take him into its depths of sapphire blue. His mind whirled for but a moment. When he managed to come back to reality, the creature rose to its feet and sauntered away. '*I do not understand what just happened, but surely that animal is no ordinary wolf*,' he thought to himself.

He made his way along the iron fence and came to a secured gate. On the side of it was a security box. There was a speaker and a button beside it. Just as he was debating about pushing that button, a loud feminine voice reached his ears. "It wasn't my fault!" Smoke suddenly rose into the sky.

He touched the gate's lock with his staff. The staff glowed yellow and the gate unlocked. He pulled the gate open. He did not take time to appreciate the foliage planted along the side of the driveway, but headed straight toward the large house with the four columns.

He saw a man and his wife, and their three children. The man and the wife were visibly upset, each of them taking turns furiously reprimanding a teenager that stood just off to the side of two smaller children; a boy and a girl. It was the teenager he felt interested in. A bright blue flame glowed in the middle of her forehead. His heart leaped.

"I just don't know what we're going to do with you, young lady," the man said. Clearly he was at his wit's ends with her. The longer Chinook stood there, unnoticed and observing he realized it was a clear case of lack of control. Even from where he stood, he could feel the heat of the girl.

"It wasn't my fault!" the girl snapped again, looking just as bitter as they did frustrated and angry. In the woman's eyes there was some fear, but also something unreadable. Concern perhaps? '*It would make sense the parents are reacting this way, particularly the mother holding back*,' Chinook thought to himself.

"I know it's not your fault," the man replied. He rubbed his temples. "But your lack of control is getting far out of hand, Flash."

At this Chinook stepped forward. "Perhaps I can help."

Scorpio opened his eyes and found himself staring at the biggest woman he had ever seen in his life. He screamed and pressed up against the head of the bed, knees drawn to his chest.

She made a face and put one hand on her hip. "Now what is your problem?" she asked, raising thick eyebrows. "You got a problem there?"

'*English*,' Scorpio thought. Best to reply to it instead of Norwegian. "What were you leaning so close to me for?!"

"I was about to get your vitals until you woke up and freaked out on me," she said.

Scorpio glared at her, hmping about it all. "I'm perfectly fine. Heart is beating. I am breathing as you can see. I'm alert, and I have no physical pai.... OWWWWWWWW! WHAT ARE YOU DOING?!!!"

She smirked a little after she had pressed the tender area where he had been shot and gave him that uh-huh look with added triumph. "Not in pain eh? You were rushed in here with a gunshot wound. Took six hours of surgery to remove the bullet I heard. Doctor saved your life."

Scorpio's expression softened from anger to wonderment. Shot? Well, he certainly had remembered a popping sound, and then fiery pain that took his breath away.

For now, he allowed the nurse to check his vitals without further trouble, and even saw the doctor shortly after. The doctor checked him too -why did they perform multiple checks?- and then stood up. "I'd like to keep you here for another day for observation, and I'd like to get in touch with your parents or your guardian about your injury. And the police will want to talk to you as well. They're waiting outside in the hall."

'Figures,' Scorpio thought, mentally rolling his eyes. Why did it annoy him though? Physically he only nodded and when prompted, he gave the doctor his parents' information.

The doctor frowned. "Trondheim, Norway?" he asked dubiously.

"Yes, sir."

"Alright. I'll be back soon."

Scorpio let out a small sigh the moment the doctor left, then looked toward the door again when two police officers stepped into the room. They quickly introduced themselves, and prompted him with questions, which he answered as patiently as he could. He told them he knew nothing about the gang known as the Notorious Reapers.

"Alright," one of them said. "We'll run the report in with this information. Do you want to press charges?"

Scorpio hesitated. He should press charges. Teach the jerk a lesson. It would serve him right. But instead, he found himself shaking his head. "No. I'm going to forgive him." At that very moment his forehead tingled. He rubbed it with a grimace, while the two officers looked at each other.

"Kid, you've got guts," one said, looking back at him. "Someone had shot me like that, I'd press charges." His partner nodded in agreement.

"I guess that just makes us different, officer," Scorpio said.

The doctor returned, frowning deeply. He looked toward Scorpio. "Your confirmation was correct, but your parents told me you were suppose to find a place to stay while you were here."

"I haven't exactly had the best of luck here," Scorpio muttered.

"Say, Kevin, don't you have some friends, Catholics?" the other officer asked.

"I do actually. Charlone and Eva. They have a grandson living with them now." Kevin looked toward Scorpio. "He's about your age. I've not met him but I heard he grew up in an all boys' military academy in Germany."

Scorpio cringed.

"Well, it's better than staying out on the streets and Charlone and Eva will treat you like their own grandson," Kevin added firmly, not leaving much room for voicing an argument.

Scorpio didn't want to stay with strangers. Truth was he wasn't exactly doing well on his own either, and it was better than the streets. Well, why not? He could give it a shot. It would feel nice to sleep in a warm place and enjoy home cooked meals again.

"All right... I'll give it a try as long as they're all right with it. And my parents will need to know too," he said.

Kevin looked at the doctor. "I'm going to need his parents' information, and I'll give Charlone and Eva a call."

The doctor left.

Scorpio laid his head back down against the pillow with a small sigh.

"Something strange happened to me, Uncle Jordan and Aunt Sophia," T-boz said during supper. The kitchen clock hummed from the kitchen, indicating it was six o'clock in the evening. She had mentally gone over what had happened multiple times but still had not come to a conclusion what it was all about.

She had considered it to be some kind of vision, but the pulsing in her forehead had to mean something, perhaps something to do with her constant dreams of this city. She told them everything, leaving out no minuscule detail.

"Even now I can still feel my forehead tingling, but I cannot see the symbol any more. I could in the stream, but now, it's as if I have a muscle twitch," she said.

Uncle Jordan wiped his mouth with a napkin and placed it back on the table. His brother, Toby White Tiger Rabbiel, had been right. T-boz was an excellent cook. He had also heard of the dreams T-boz had, and was convinced she had a quest to fill. He did not doubt for one minute that T-boz's experience had something to do with her quest, but even he could not guess what it was.

"So, this experience of yours," Aunt Sophia brought up. "Do you suppose it entails what your dream is about?"

T-boz nodded. "I think so. The dream signified there was to be a great catalyst that would occur. I believe I will face it soon, and perhaps what happened today was in fact my preparation."

"I wonder what the catalyst is," Aunt Sophia said, tucking her chin into one palm.

T-boz looked toward her. Aunt Sophia was not Native American, but had bloodlines on the Italian side. She and Uncle Jordan had met in college back in their early twenties, both pursuing a degree in the Business Management. Now they were both managing their own businesses. T-boz admired hard work and dedication.

"The catalyst could be anything," Uncle Jordan said. He finished his meal and wiped his mouth with a napkin. "It could be political, physical, spiritual. Or a combination of all three."

"That makes sense," T-boz said, nodding thoughtfully.

Uncle Jordan smiled a little. "I think as you come closer to what's going to happen, you'll receive more clues. Remember to keep your eyes open most of all and listen well. Wakan Takan may send his messenger any time. You must always keep vigil."

"Just go away!"

Chilie frowned as her cousin Mariet slammed her bedroom door in her face. Sighing she walked away, deciding to give Mariet space. It wasn't easy when your parents decided a divorce was better.

Well, there was no sense in remaining depressed about it. Well, maybe pray.

She believed in the power of prayer and upheld the teachings of the Talmud and the Torah with reverence.

She knelt and murmured a prayer in Hebrew.

Squealing tires and a loud painful yelp alerted Chilie out of her prayers. She hurried to the window. In the middle of the street an injured dog lay on its side. She raced out of her room, and yelled for Isobel.

Some people were gathered around the dog, and a man kept shaking his head, moaning that he didn't see the dog in time. "Man. Dog came out of nowhere..."

Chilie knelt next to the dog and gently placed a hand on his ribcage, feeling for a heartbeat. It was faint. The breathing came sparsely.

'I hurt... No hurt. Help.'

'I know you hurt... I'm here to help you. I won't leave your side,' Chilie mentally spoke. She yelled for her aunt again. Aunt Isobel came out in a second with her supplies and quickly excused herself through the small crowd of people.

Chilie did everything her aunt told her and together they worked quickly. Chilie still kept a close watch on the dog. *'Can you tell me your name?'*

'Jax...'

'How old are you, Jax?'

'I'm...

'Can you guess?

'No... I hurt much... So tired.'

Chilie frowned. At the same time Aunt Isobel said, "Heart rate's dropping. We need to get him into the office now."

Chilie kept her hand on the dog's head. When they went to lift the dog up, the dog stiffened, soiled itself, and went completely limp.

Chilie stared in horror, disbelief, and in shock and trembled terribly. "No." She felt a hand on her shoulder and heaved a sob. "No," she whispered again.

"Chilie...." Aunt Isobel's voice was hesitant. "It'll be okay...."

"NOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOO!!!" Chilie threw her head back in a turmoiled scream. She collapsed and sobbed into the arms of her aunt.

Thunder wasn't sure what to think about his older cousin Channa Graham who had come for a visit with her mother, his father's sister. Meeting Channa face to face had caused him to clam up immediately and he had run back to his room and hid inside. Grandma had called it rudeness until Thunder explained his reasons. All his life, he had never met a single girl up close and personal, until his very first flight from Germany. They had harassed him, asking him questions he felt uncomfortable with, and almost caused him to miss his flight.

Grandma reassured him that Channa would behave. After all they were cousins by blood. "Besides, she's not like that, you know. She's just excited to meet you finally, Thunder. She must think she frightened you." Grandma frowned down at him, concern stretching the wrinkles beneath her light blue eyes.

"I am dreadfully sorry for my behavior, Grandma... But I will need some time before I can open up to her." Thunder turned his head and looked toward the window as if to say the conversation was over.

Grandma on the other hand gave a little sigh and backed off, but not before the door flew open. Channa burst into the room, her long blond hair swaying behind her from side to side, and her long legs propelling her through. She sprang forward and jumped onto his bed and gave him a tight hug.

"Sooo this is where you were hiding!"

She said it so quickly he could barely make out what she said to begin with. His grandmother had not been joking when she had warned him about Channa being a fast speaker. He tensed and desperately thought of ways to slip out of her tight grip. But she seemed to have read his thoughts because she suddenly said, "So my little cousin has a fear of girls, huh? I could tell the moment you ran from me. Silly goose."

Thunder blinked. What did she just say?

Grandma only smiled. "Channa, perhaps slow down your words, dear."

"Oh.... Okay." Channa pouted and at that moment she let go of Thunder. He quickly stood up and gave himself some distance between them. She cocked an eyebrow and said more slowly, "So...why so scared?" Her lips curved upward slightly into a smirk and her eyes twinkled mischievously.

Thunder did not answer but he did stare. Channa was a just a few inches shorter than he was, but slightly bigger. Her long golden hair with black tips was held back by barrettes. She wore several bracelets on her left wrist and a leather watch on her right. She wore a handkerchief around her neck.

"Whatsamatter?" she asked in a rush. "Cat got your tongue?"

"Channa, dear... Let's give your cousin some time. I'm sure he'll come around when he's more comfortable." Grandma gave Thunder a well meaningful look and ushered Channa out the door.

Aunt Haila suddenly poked her head into the doorway. "Mother, Lieutenant Brown is on the phone for you downstairs."

Grandma's eyes lit up and hurried out the door, raising Thunder's eyebrows in surprise. For a woman in her early eighties, she was quick.

Aunt Haila turned and smiled warmly at Thunder. "You look exactly like my brother. But I can see some of your mother in your features too."

Thunder regarded her silently.

Aunt Haila sat down beside him. He tensed a little, but stayed where he was and looked down. "I haven't seen you since you were just a baby," she mused thoughtfully. He glanced at her. She folded her hands together, long fingers intertwining above her knees below a white blouse. Her blond hair, slightly darker than his own, was cut in layers just beneath her shoulders. Her wedding ring glistened under the light.

"Your mother and father. They adored you so much. You were their pride and joy, and they named you Thunder because, well it's silly, but when you were born it stormed heavily. And the minute you were, a loud clap of thunder sounded. Your father thought it would make a great name." Aunt Haila chuckled a little. "I saw you a few times when you were a baby. You were so fussy! You never wanted to be held, but always wanted your mother. Oh she was the only one who could dry your tears. And how it was that when you cried, it stormed!"

Thunder's heart skipped a beat.

"Of course, I told them it was just coincidence," she added on.

Thunder remained silent as Channa bounced back into the room.

"Mom, Grandma wants you and Thunder to come downstairs, especially Thunder," she said altogether like breathing one long word very quickly.

Thunder blinked several times and frowned.

"Well, it must be important," Aunt Haila said. She stood up. But Thunder remained sitting and did not get up. "Thunder, you're wanted downstairs, dear. Come on."

And so he went downstairs with his aunt and cousin with more questions on his mind than before.

"You two look terrible," Akilah Thornton said during dinner. Tau Thornton sat at the head of the table, silently eating. He gazed at Ice and Snow with a lingering look.

Snow and Ice did not look up. Their meals were less than half eaten. Ice, who normally would have been on his fourth plate by now, poked at his mashed potatoes.

"What is it?" Akilah asked. She set her fork down and sternly looked at them, waiting for an answer. Akilah was a patient, strong woman but did not hold a dime to her sons' well being. If there was one thing she was getting out of them it was the reason for their troubled behavior.

Snow sucked in a breath and fumbled with his napkin. How did one talk about a supernatural experience that happened to you that science could not explain? *'There's no saying that what we both experienced is one of a particular mystical force. It has to be something logical. Perhaps a twin experience or something,'* he thought to himself. If that was true though why did they have different symbols on their foreheads?

It was asinine he could not figure it out.

Ice fidgeted under his mother's gaze. When she placed a hand on his arm he jerked away from the table.

"Ice! What has gotten into you?" Akilah demanded. Tau looked up from the table. Akilah frowned and waited for Ice to answer.

Ice did not answer. It wasn't like they were going to understand. Only Snow could relate but even he was confused by what happened to them. But Snow didn't venture an answer, only finished his meal and asked to be excused. He left the table shortly after. Ice followed him without a word.

Tau stared at Ice and Akilah frowned.

"Something's wrong with them," seven-year-old Ashiyanna quipped.
"They're both acting weird."

Ice sat on his bed and watched Snow scrutinize a website on the Internet. Briefly, he glanced at the subject heading- Legends and Phenomenon; stuff he didn't understand really. "What's dat?" he asked.

"A website devoted to the kind of occurrence we had earlier," Snow said and kept on reading. "Paranormal, psychic energies, kinetic abilities." His eyes went left to right in fluid motion and the page scrolled up the further he read.

Ice wrung his hands together. Snow was always like that. He would take to research when something outwardly didn't make sense to him. The first to put in more hours just to answer those difficult questions that no one else could. Not even two years ago Snow had researched geokinesis and cryokinesis to understand their powers.

"Do ya think dat our powers have something ta do wit what we experienced?" Ice asked.

"I'm positive that is the case," Snow said. "But I won't know until I find all the dots and connect them together."

"Oh." Ice dropped his head and stared at his shoes.

"Whoa... hold on!" Snow's abrupt exclamation lifted Ice's head back up quickly. What was he going on about? Ice walked over and looked at the screen. He didn't understand a word of what he read.

"I don't get it," Ice said.

"Legends, prophecies!" Snow exclaimed. "There was a prophecy connected to a legend that spoke of a god who came centuries ago and defeated the armies of the west. It goes on to say that the Mystics, a group of clandestine fighters came together to defeat the god, but they couldn't fully defeat him. He escaped from his prison and created a different world and fled to it with the promise that he would return and destroy those who opposed him."

"Whoa... heavy stuff, bro," Ice said. "Guy sounds like he got issues."

"There's more," Snow said. He clicked on a link. "It says that just six months before the god rises again, there will be a stand against him. Special children with kinetic abilities would wage war against him."

"What? Do ya think dat means us?"

"I think so... but we won't know unless we find the others."

Ice's brows bristled. "Wait, othas? Whatdayamean?"

"Well, it says there are eight who will oppose this god," Snow answered. "They have powers like ours. But each one of them will be born on the same day, same month, same time."

"So? A lot of people are born at da same time. Even I know dat, bro." Ice shook his head, disappointed.

"They'll also have symbols on their foreheads," Snow replied. "Similar to ours."

Ice shut up.

Chinook watched as Susan Michaels, Flash's stepmother, placed a well-prepared chicken wing on his plate next to the mashed potatoes, rice, and the green beans. His flowered printed glass was filled to the rim with tea. "Thank you."

"Were you serious about helping me?" Flash questioned. She sat to the right of the table, halfway through her own meal. It had been alarming when this man who looked like he was in his seventies had come to them and claimed he could help her. He had introduced himself as only Chinook and gave no surname. Of course, Susan had assumed his first name must be Chi and his surname was Nook. After all, he was Chinese right? Chinook had corrected her and had said he was from Kyoto, Japan.

"Yes, I am quite serious," Chinook said. He bowed his head and clasped his hands together. "Itadakimasu," he muttered. He cut into the chicken with his knife. "As I mentioned before I am from an organization that researches gifted children with supernatural abilities. I intend to help you understand those abilities and how to control them."

"She set myinja urtles on fiyour," Sammy said in between mouthful of chicken and rice. His mashed potatoes remained untouched.

"Sammy, it was an accident," Susan said gently with a small smile on her face. She sat down and placed her napkin on her lap.

"Nu-huh! She stepped on them and got mad." Sammy looked quite pleased with himself as he twirled his fork on his plate.

"Shut up, you little tattle-tale!" Flash said through clenched teeth.

Sammy's chicken began to smoke and burn. He yelped and fell off his chair. The chair tipped over on him. Susan jumped up and quickly went to him. Keith stood up, tossing his napkin down on the table. "Outside, Flash. Now."

"Argh!" Flash snarled. The table centerpiece melted. She fled out the side French doors onto the back patio in the back yard.

Chinook watched it all in silence, giving no indication to what he was thinking. He stood up. "Your daughter is likely just as upset about this as you are. I will speak to her, if you do not mind?"

He went outside and looked for Flash. He found her seated on one of the patio lounge chairs. The same wolf-like creature sat by her side and he marveled at the size even when the animal was sitting down.

"I'm sorry..." Flash said quietly. She stared at the cobbled stone of the patio deck under her feet.

Chinook sat down beside her and allowed his gaze to roam over the in-ground swimming pool, the double dog pen enclosure, the few trees, the water fountain for the birds, and a child's play area. It was the perfect yard for someone who wanted a bit of everything and yet solitude.

"Sorry has many meanings to it," Chinook said. "It can mean that you regret what you did and you feel bad for it. It could mean you are sorry you embarrassed yourself and fear I was embarrassed too. And it can mean that you are sorry because you care for the sympathy you will get from it. Now which sorry are you?"

A small sigh escaped Flash's lips. She absentmindedly scratched the animal's head next to her. "The first. I shouldn't have reacted that way. And yes, it is embarrassing, so half of the second too. I don't know you really, so I can't care if you're embarrassed of my actions."

"I admire your honesty," Chinook said. "Flash, I very well understand your position, and your fears. No doubt you have many questions in the back of your mind. You are perhaps anxious too. I am here to help you unburden."

"How though?" Flash asked bitterly. "It's not like you can understand what's going on. There's much more going on than my pyrokinesis going haywire."

"If you mean the fact that you were hit by a strange blue light on your forehead, I understand far more than you think." Chinook smiled a little.

Flash whipped her head back toward him and stared open mouthed. Realizing it, she snapped her mouth closed, and then quickly said, "Who are you?"

"My name is Chinook as I have said. I am an auriar Mystic sent to gather the eight Warriors. You are the first one I have found, Flash Michaels."

Chapter 5

Chilie wrapped her arms around her and bit her bottom lip. Her shoulders quaked a little. Any moment now she was going to start bawling again.

The image of the dog pushed itself into her mind forcibly. Despite her struggle to think of something else - anything else for that matter- the image of him dying in her arms, his pleading eyes filled with fear, and the short connection she had made with him in his last few moments filled her with sorrow.

She suddenly seized the small angelic crystalline figure sitting on her nightstand and after looking at it for just a second she threw it against the wall. It shattered,

But Chilie didn't care. Instead, she threw open the front door and ran out, slamming the door behind her and took off. For several streets Chilie ran until it became dark. She quickly looked up. Ahead of her on her right was a white garage like building and to the left up ahead a deli business on the corner with a row of houses behind it. Just where was she any way?

She looked around for the street sign. "Guerrero," she mumbled. She had wandered a little further than she should have. *'Chilie, why did you even come this way in the first place?'*

A chink grabbed her attention and she whipped her head toward the sound. A lanky guy with an open leather jacket and several chains hanging from his neck came out from behind a building. He had blood on his shirt. The switchblade in his hand dripped with blood.

He suddenly looked right at her.

Chilie gasped.

He froze for a second and then leered.

Chilie turned left and ran across the intersection, her shoes rapidly pounding pavement. He ran after her, yelling threats and curses.

“Get back here!” he snarled.

Chilie did not stop, but kept running as fast as she could. In a short amount of time, she covered quite a distance and jerked herself to the left and climbed over a fence. She dropped to the ground and looked behind her. Oh great, he was coming this way.

A growl caught her attention. A brindle colored Pit Bull dog stood a few feet from her, staring directly at her, hackles raised, teeth bared.

‘My territory! Mine! Get out!’ the dog snapped at her and barked angrily.

‘Please... I can understand you. I need help. That guy back there. He’s bad. You smell the blood, don’t you? He hurt someone real bad. I don’t know who, but he saw me. Now he wants to hurt me too,’ Chilie mentally cried out to the dog.

The dog growled again and took a step forward.

Chilie’s heart skipped a beat. She heard rattling and looked behind her toward the fence. Her heart about stopped. The guy was climbing the fence.

“Man, dis is so crazy, Snow,” Ice said. He put on his baseball cap and zipped up his jacket. “How we gonna find anyone just like us?” It had been Snow’s idea to search the neighborhoods for anyone else that might have had a unique symbol.

Snow could not shake the feeling that one of them could be close. Perhaps they were just a couple streets away. “It is crazy, but what if we find even just one like us? It would be great if we could. We wouldn’t feel so alone.” He zipped up his jacket and stepped outside.

“I don’t feel dat alone,” Ice mumbled. He followed Snow and shut the door behind him.

It hadn’t been easy convincing their parents to let them take a stroll this time of the evening, but Snow had persuaded them the walk would help clear their minds. Before Ice knew it, Tau and Akilah had given them permission. They were to return no later than eleven. It was nine now.

“Where are we supposed ta look for dem?” Ice asked.

“I don’t know,” Snow said and shrugged his shoulders. “But we have the clues though.”

“Oh sure... two clues,” Ice said. “A weird symbol in der heads and some freaky power.”

“It’s all we need,” Snow said.

Ice kept his head down, eyes to the sidewalk as they walked up Oak Street. It seemed pointless to Ice to even try. Who cared any way?

Snow walked faster, certain something was drawing him somewhere. Maybe it was nothing at all, and he was just fooling himself. An urge had to have a logical explanation, but even he couldn’t explain it. They continued down several streets, sometimes crossing, sometimes going straight, and sometimes going around the next block.

“Dis is stupid!” Ice fumed.

Snow looked back over his shoulder and let out a sigh one might have with an impatient person. “Ice, is what we’ve experienced ourselves stupid? You saw the information too. They’re out there somewhere.”

“Yeh? Where? Maybe dere invisible!” Ice spat sarcastically.

Snow continued walking. “Maybe one of them is.”

“Ugh!” Ice followed him, but not willingly. Snow was going to get himself in trouble one day.

“Shhh!” Snow abruptly stopped and held back an arm to keep Ice from going any further. Just ahead of them a red haired girl behind a fence backed away from an unkempt man in chains and a knife climbing the fence.

“Da heck’s going on?” Ice said quietly.

“Think she needs help,” Snow said. He walked forward quickly.

“Man,” Ice said with a shake of his head. He followed.

A dog suddenly charged around the girl and leapt at the fence when the guy in leather made it to the top of the fence with one leg over. The dog sank its teeth into flesh and the guy screamed, tearing his leg away forcefully. He fell to the ground into Ice’s and Snow’s arms.

“Bad move, man!” Ice said with a nasty look in his eyes.
The guy snarled and slashed out with his knife.
Snow seethed when his shirt darkened with blood. He struck the back of the guy’s head. The guy dropped to the ground.

“Thunder dear, are you sure you are comfortable with sharing your bedroom?” Grandma asked, furrowing her brows. She had spent the better part of the evening discussing the matter with her husband, her daughter and grandchildren about a boy named Scorpio Lapine from Scandinavia, who did not have a place to stay but had been allowed to come to America under the impression of culture exchange.

Thunder did not mind in the least, but he really had no thoughts about it. “I do not mind, Grandma.”

“Woow, he’s so considerate!” Channa quite quickly said with a grin. She sat across from him next to her mother. She popped a bubble out of her chewing gum.

“Yes, at least he is considerate,” Aunt Haila said. She cast her daughter a look. “Unlike someone I know.”

Channa grinned and settled back against the couch.

Thunder did not respond.

“He might very well be lonely,” Grandma said. “We’ll have to make him feel at home whenever possible.” Headlights suddenly shone through the front window and she stood up, peering out toward the driveway. “Oh Haila, I believe Patrick is here.”

“Yes!” Channa bolted off the couch and flew at the door. She threw it open and wrapped her arms around her father, a thick built man with a hairy face and vivid blue eyes. “Missed you, Dad!” she sang out like a canary on crack.

Patrick returned her hug and found it very difficult to walk into the house with Channa hanging onto him. Once he was inside, Channa released him, but wrapped one of his arms around her shoulders, a wide grin on her face.

Haila only sighed with a small smile. “Welcome back, dear. How was your trip?”

“Not bad,” Patrick said. “I’m glad you called me earlier. I would have gone straight home instead.” He walked over to Grandma and gave her a gentle hug. “Good evening, Momma,” he said with a sly grin.

“Oh Patrick, I am so glad you are back from your trip. I do not understand how you can stand to drive trucks,” Grandma said with a wistful look in her eyes. If anything were to happen to Patrick, Haila and Channa would be lost.

“It helps put food on the table?” He grinned at her and then looked at Thunder. “Ahhh. So there is my nephew I heard so much about on the phone!”

“Hello, Uncle Patrick,” Thunder greeted and offered his hand. Patrick shook it in a firm grip.

“They told me a lot about you, Thunder. How was your flight?” Patrick said.

“It was all right,” Thunder said with a small smile.

“Any turbulence?”

“There was some, but it passed quickly.”

“That’s a good thing!” Patrick said with a cheeky grin. At least now Thunder knew where Channa got her smile. Patrick looked at Haila and Channa. “Are you both ready to go home? I’m bushed.”

“Of course,” Haila said as she grabbed her purse. “Do you want me to drive?”

“Do you mind?”

“No.”

“Byeeeeee!” Channa swiftly hugged Thunder who managed to slip out of her grip and hurry toward the stairs. She snickered at him and gave Grandma a gentler hug.

“Behave yourself, Channa,” Grandma said with a smile. Channa winked while her parents said goodbye and Grandma hugged both Haila and Patrick. When they were gone Grandma locked the door.

Thunder turned and walked up the stairs to his bedroom. He closed the door behind him, unable to shake off the odd feeling he had. Something was calling him urgently.

"Oh dear," Chilie said, biting her lip. She hopped back over the fence and peered at Snow's deep cut that was bleeding profusely. She ripped off a part of her shirt and wrapped it around his waist, securing it over the injury. "We have to get him to a hospital," she said. "He's going to need stitches."

"Yeah.... Our parents ain't gonna like dis," Ice said and frowned. He looked at Snow. "Can you walk, bro?"

Snow put one hand on his wound to keep pressure and nodded. "I think I can manage. As long as I don't overstress, I won't lose too much blood. There's a hospital up three streets from this one. We can go there."

"And what about.... him?" Chilie asked as she looked down at the unconscious punk.

"We tie him up and tell da Police where dey can find him," Ice said. He put one of Snow's arms around his shoulders and helped support him.

"Who has rope?"

In just a matter of minutes, Chilie found some rope by a dumpster and secured the guy to the fence and quickly put one of Snow's arms on her other shoulders. "Thank you both for coming to help me."

"Not a problem," Snow said with a smile. "I'm Snow, and this is Ice."

"Mine is Chilie. And it's a pleasure to meet you both. Though I wish it were under better circumstances."

"Same, but c'mon now... or we neva gonna get dere," Ice said.

The trio walked on, Snow carefully supported by Ice and Chilie as they covered distance after distance. Each block they walked brought Snow closer to his knees.

Shades wiped off the last table and carried the trash outside. When she returned Mr. Andros was behind the register with an audit machine, mumbling in Italian to himself.

"Mr. Andros?" she said.

"Ah Shades, thank you very much for staying today. You earned more than I gave you," Mr. Andros said. He smiled at her.

Shades shrugged. "I'm a hard worker. I would have worked all night had you asked me." She nodded toward the register. "Sales count?"

"Something like that, yes. Something is wrong though. The accounts are not coming out right. I cannot find out where the mistake is." He frowned and tried to recalculate and muttered more.

"May I?"

He hesitated for just a half minute, but then stepped aside and quickly explained how to work the machine. Shades went through the cash first, making use of the audit machine, and then double counted by hand a second time. She looked over the figures written down by hand, and quickly went through it as well. In just five minutes, she circled a number. "There is your problem. Your cashier didn't charge the right amount for the second chocolate iced doughnut sold. A blunder."

"Oh goodness! How did I fail to notice that?" Mr. Andros looked over Shades' work with surprise. "I am old I fear. Shades, you are a godsend to me. How would you like to work here part time?"

"Well I..." Shades frowned. Suddenly she felt unsure of it all. "Mr. Andros, I don't even have a place to live. I'm not in school and I don't have anything but the few items I brought with me from Moscow."

"There is a small efficiency apartment above us, and it includes a working bathroom and an area you can heat up food. There is a mini-fridge up there too. I think it still works. We can get you enrolled in school too. I know the Principal and he's very kind." Mr. Andros certainly was making it sound quite convincing.

“Well, I do have my passport and Visa,” she said slowly. Her family was poor, and she used her ability to confuse and manipulate the minds of the employees at the Russian Federation, and beyond that her airplane ticket. Now that she was in America a twinge of guilt overcame her. She had basically stolen what she needed.

“Good, good!” Mr. Andros clapped his hands. “Take the efficiency tonight. Give it a try. I’ll even set out a cot for you and some blankets for you to use. Tomorrow, come down after you wake up. We’ll talk more about the school. I think you will like it there. Aridian High has a good academic standing.”

“I’ll think it over tonight,” Shades said. It was all she could give him. They finished the rest of the work and once everything was secured, she followed Mr. Andros through a closed side door that led upstairs to the efficiency apartment.

“Here is the key,” Mr. Andros said as he put the key into her palm. “I will return shortly with a cot and necessities.” He turned and walked back down the short hall and back down the stairs. Shades opened the door to the little apartment.

It was a bit messy, but nothing she couldn’t clean up. It had a bit of a musty smell. At least there was a window. She crossed over and broke off the latch and shoved it up. It opened with a slight creak.

That was better. She looked about the place. It had been exactly like Mr. Andros had said. “Heh. Small but cozy,” she murmured. She began to clean up the bit of trash left over and fluffed out the only rug outside the window. She coughed at the dust. “Gaaah! Who hasn’t heard of cleaning?”

She shook it once more and coughed a few more times. It would have to do. She pulled the rug back in when something caught her attention. Just up the street, three teens were hobbling up the sidewalk. One of them looked injured. She watched them hobble up the road, interest rising higher and higher. A knock at the door interrupted her moment. Mr. Andros had brought her cot.