

## SYNOPSIS



Arron Grethsen, a Hjelmen soldier with a strange, rune-engraved token implanted in his chest, visits a flying galleass in a dream and finds out that some dreams are more than just creations of imagination. Captain Katrina Reushammer's Star Compass points in an unexpected direction where Arron is to find what he doesn't know he's seeking. In the Conqueror's Cape, the capital of Girania, where the Breeze Bitch takes him, an ancient augur tugs his sleeve and dictates a prediction to him.

In the waking world, the words of a wise, old woman met in a dream are soon forgotten, and Arron goes on with his plan to ride to the war raging in the western Kingdoms with his roommate. The enlisting day dawns like any other, except for a set of clothes and a fine saber Arron has somehow brought with him from Bruadduir, the Kingdom of Dreams. After recruiting, Arron and Raenn head to their haunt for lunch and share a table with two Sons of Stryader.

The younger of the sellsword, a shy and dour warrior mage, instantly captures Arron's attention, but he could never guess, when asking Jan to accompany him on the visit to his childhood home, that the encounter will overturn his life and notion of himself. After the trip to the moors, the two become all but inseparable, and on the eve of departure to the front, Jan asks Arron for a favor granting which leads them to the road from where there's no return.

The path to the battles in the Plains of Midathrir turns out bumpy, but Raenn's unfortunate attempt to take down a giant bear brings Arron and Jan back together. The feeling between them grows the more intense the closer to the front they get, and at the Scree Keep after the king's feast, Jan lets go of the rest of his reserves.

They march to the front side by side and concentrate on nothing but keeping each other alive through the chaos into which the battle at the border of Erephonia and Vadaskia has turned. A heartbeat of inattention would cost Jan his life, but Arron throws himself between his loved one and the death, receiving the Vadaskian poleax into his own guts. When he drifts into the darkness,

the Erephonians retreat, and as he comes round, nothing is left in the valley but fallen and dying men and Jan's voice repeating an incantation.

In a few moments, it becomes clear to Arron that he's too badly injured to survive, but Jan doesn't want to hear about granting him the mercy of shoving a dagger into his heart. He does all in his power to save the one who has become everything to him and summons the flying galleass to pick him up from the valley of death, knowing that onboard her sails the one person who holds power and skill to heal him.

When the ship mage, Grimwryth, revives Arron a few days after the battle and tells him what happened on the front, he believes that he's dreaming and resorts to the only way he knows to wake up with utter certainty.

In the Octower, the king's castle of Girania, a Hjelmen sellsword Toren Edesen takes up a charge as the bodyguard of Princess Miona, the youngest of King Waldhark Rofinnar's three daughters. He thinks it'll be easy money to idle in the court watching the back of a little girl, but the young lady in question soon turns out to be rather a handful.

In a matter of days, Toren finds himself considering breaking his word for the first time ever and sneaking out of the palace twenty golden deer richer as any western sellsword would do, but his honor as a Son of Stryader doesn't allow him to abort a charge. He sticks to his vow even after Lady Miona tries to get him imprisoned.

Not even an attempted assassination that Toren prevents improves the princess' attitude much, but the day brings Toren together with another lady from whom he'd do best to stay away. A masher that he is, he can't keep his hands off the charming Lady Bugglestan to whom he owes a great favor, besides. The lady helps him save the slaves of the court's sartor who lost his life in the attack attempted at the princess, and when she offers him a little more than a dinner, he says yes against his better judgment.

Toren's swift action in the sartor's workshops makes the ruling couple press him to join the convoy to escort Lady Miona to her elven betrothed, but Toren is reluctant to agree. He has come to the west to look for his lost brother and is eager to set out on the mission as soon as the princess leaves for Ilwn Flwthean. The king and his sage, the ancient Otmar, cajole him in turn, and after he saves the princess' life for the second time at the annual Spring Market, the queen joins in the chorus.

In truth, Lady Miona is in no danger that day. The assassin is confused by the decoy and aims the bolt at the princess' elven chambermaid, Awra, to whom Toren has grown a tat more attached than he'd like. Instead of the girl,

the crossbow bolt pierces Toren's upper arm. As the queen finds out that the princess has spent the day with Lady Bugglestan, she blames Toren for not doing his job well enough. The warrior is already on the edge of having found his missing brother's horse in the coper's paddock, and the accusation sparks his anger for real.

Toren also suspects Sage Otmar of foul play and refuses to let him stitch his wound. He gives the task to Awra and Tim, one of the former slaves of the murdered sartor who has asked to become his squire. That he makes Awra stitch the wound even though she can barely hold the needle infuriates Lady Miona. Toren is past the point where he cared about the displeasure of the royals, however. All he thinks about is finding his brother.

As Awra comes to him in the night with a grave warning to set out as soon as possible, he finds it almost impossible to stick to his promise. Fortunately, the king gets enough of his constant refusals to join the princess' convoy and kicks him out of the court. Toren leaves without hesitation and takes Awra with him as she has asked for it, claiming that she can't return home to Flwthean.

As Tim and he go to fetch her from the mouth of a secret passageway along which Tim has smuggled her out of the palace, she's nowhere to be found. With a heavy heart, Toren decides to come back for her in the morning, and should she be there or not, press on to search for his brother.

In the Emerald Point, Lady Irana Stemraon dreams about a monstrous deer creature that emerges from an emerald well in a garden besieged by the shadows. The monster morphs into a man, however, and blasts the garden gates open with magic. Despite her fear, Irana takes his hand and jumps into the nothingness.

When her father-in-law, King Hamar of Erephonia, tells her that she is to bed his appalling cousin to bring forth an heir that her boy husband hasn't been able to conceive, Irana begins to hatch an escape plan for real. She doesn't really think she could get away before she bumps into the man from her dream at the Spring Market. The man is shackled on the slaver's platform, and Irana buys him back his freedom without stopping to consider it.

The stranger doesn't remember much anything when he wakes up in the castle, not even his name. Neither is he especially thankful for having been saved from the slaver. He imagines that Irana intends to keep him chained and swears he'll make her life a misery if she will.

Gaining his trust and friendship takes a long time, but as Irana finally succeeds, she finds out she's gotten herself far stronger an ally than she imagined.

The man, who names himself Buck, is a mage and something even more sinister, and he promises to help Irana flee the court.

The king's cousin arrives at the court and tries to compromise Irana the moment he dismounts his horse. A young knight of Irana's Chamber Guard, Sir Righar, is the only one to intervene when he exposes steel in the presence of Irana and her prince husband. Irana demands the man be beheaded, but the king's counselors advise the prince to pardon him.

Profoundly betrayed, Irana keeps weaving her escape plan with Buck. There's only one problem. Buck cannot be in the presence of a virgin in the moons' conflux nights and tells Irana to get rid of her maidenhead before they'll leave the castle. She tries to seduce Sir Righar, whom she has fancied for a long time, but the knight turns out as easy to charm as a block of rock.

In the end, the circumstances force them to execute the plan regardless of Irana still being a maiden. Buck comes up with a foolhardy scheme that requires a spell-forged sword and perfect timing and leads to a bloodbath in the Council Chamber.