



CHAPTER

1

Kyria and Mica both watched Sartir as he opened *The Shard of Time* and glance up at them. They had used the mystical gem to travel back in time so that Kyria could try and learn as much as she could about Zoldex by seeing him face to face, but her future nemesis had startled them, and they lost the Shard.

Now, trapped in time, both girls wondered how a reference book about the mystical artifact they had used could possibly help them with their current predicament. After all, the Shard was gone, most likely returned to their room in the present—right where they had attempted to go before the Shard fell and vanished before shattering on the rocky shore.

“Um, Sartir, how will that help?” Kyria asked, hoping that the sabrenoh had some kind of plan that would help them.

“I checked this out of the library,” Sartir said. “It explains everything about the Shard. Not only how to use it, but also about its history.”

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“Its history?” Mica asked, exchanging a perplexed look with Kyria.

“Its history,” Sartir said with a reassuring grin.

“How will its history help us?” Kyria asked. “I don’t get it.”

“We may have lost the Shard,” Sartir said, “but it is still here.”

“Say what?” Mica asked as she shook her head and fluttered over to land on Sartir’s shoulder. “We searched the beach. It’s gone.”

“The one we had, yes,” Sartir replied with a lopsided grin. “But the *original* Shard, *before* it was discovered, is here.”

“If it hasn’t been discovered yet, then how will that help us?” Kyria asked, still not certain what he was hinting at.

“It’s simple,” Sartir shrugged. “We’ll discover the Shard and use it.”

“If *we* discover it, how can we have used it in the future to go back in time?” Kyria asked, a headache coming on as she tried to think about the intricacies of time travel.

“We can discover it, use it, and then return it so that it is discovered again,” Sartir boasted triumphantly.

“I hear the words, but all I’m getting is ‘blah, blah, blah,’” Mica groaned. “Do you understand what he’s getting at?”

“Not at all,” Kyria said. “How can we return it to be



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discovered again? We'll still be trapped in the past!"

"Not if we recover the Shard we just lost," Sartir said, glancing back and forth between his friends to see if they understood what he was suggesting.

"This is giving me a headache," Mica moaned.

"I'm right there with you," Kyria said. "The next time I suggest going back in time, someone please stop me."

"The next time?" Sartir asked, one eyebrow lifting as he regarded her. "I'd hope that you would learn from this little debacle."

"Moving on," Kyria said, ignoring Sartir's little lecture. "So what does the book say?"

"It tells us everything," Sartir replied. "Including where it was discovered."

"So don't keep us in suspense," Mica growled as she flew over to Sartir and flicked his ear. "Fill us in."

"In 2321 AM, a group of Mage Masters set out on an archeological expedition to the Mourning Mountains to uncover the remains of Sharletiskanor, a fabled Frost elven city that had been inexplicably lost near the end of the Dark Ages."

Kyria frowned and stared at Mica. "You *had* to ask; now he'll give us a history lesson that would have made Master Forales proud."

"Nobody made Master Forales proud," Mica shook her head.

"Do you want to know or not?" Sartir asked impa-



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tiently.

“Fine,” Kyria conceded. “But do you have to go into so much detail?”

“I’m actually paraphrasing,” Sartir rebutted. “The details about the expedition last several chapters.”

“Great,” Kyria sarcastically replied. “Go ahead.”

“Anyway,” Sartir continued, “they found Sharletiskanor, but also uncovered a large opening in the mountains. It showed signs of a cave-in, but had also been hidden by thousands of years of snowfall and ice. They explored the opening and found several tunnels that went underground. The tunnels themselves were smooth and had signs of prior civilization, or at least signs that someone else had been there.”

“What do you mean?” Kyria asked.

“Torches were frozen to the wall, some clothing—appearing dwarven-in-nature—was discovered and perfectly preserved in the ice, and a few other items were discovered, including the remains of a Frost elf and some kind of snow-lion, called a smilodon.”

“Is it possible that if we go there, we’ll find people living there? People that might try to stop us from getting the Shard?” Kyria asked.

“That’s a good point,” Mica nodded enthusiastically. “How do we know that the Shard will just be waiting for us? How do we even know that it’s there now? Someone may not have put it there for another thousand years!”



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Sartir bit his lip as he considered this possibility. “This is the only suggestion I have. If either of you has a better one, I’m all ears.”

“No,” Kyria reluctantly admitted. “This is our best chance. Go on.”

“The Masters found the Shard in one of the tunnels. It took them a while to find out what abilities it had; but after they had done so, Masters would use the Shard to travel back in time for research purposes. Many of the authors of our History books have visited the past by using the Shard.”

“How long will it take us to get there?” Mica asked.

“It’s not a short journey,” Sartir replied, hoping to not have to answer the question.

“*Sartir*,” Mica said with an expectant edge to her voice.

“On foot, we’d be lucky to make it within a year,” Sartir said. “I’d wager that it would be closer to two.”

“Two years?” Mica gasped. “We’re dead.”

“Everyone will know we stole the Shard,” Kyria said, knowing exactly what Mica was thinking.

“Not really,” Sartir said as he fumbled through the book. “It says here that one of the powers of the Shard is that people will remain the proper age in their proper time period.”

“Say that again,” Mica said, putting her finger in her ear and rubbing it to make sure she heard properly.

“There’s an entire section on an elf that spent four



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hundred years studying creatures that had become extinct during The Age of the Dragon. He returned to the Council with his research completed and several volumes of text written, and found himself emerging from the past at the same age he had been when he left.”

“That’s uncanny,” Mica said. “So we could be here for a decade, and still return to the Academy as we were when we left?”

“Exactly,” Sartir said.

“Would we still remember everything that happened to us?” Kyria asked.

“We would,” Sartir nodded.

“What if one of you learned magic?” Kyria asked. “Would you return with gold on your robes?”

Sartir’s eyebrows narrowed and he shrugged. “Guess we’ll find out, won’t we?”

“To be on the safe side, it would probably be best to try and not use magic,” Kyria suggested.

“Agreed,” Sartir said.

“Well, what are we waiting for?” Mica asked.

“Not so fast,” Sartir cautioned. “There’s more that we should understand before moving further.”

“There always is with you,” Mica moaned.

“We’re in the Dark Ages right now,” Sartir explained. “It’s a time in the history of the realm when nobody was safe. There were no laws or governments that ruled the land. The Seven Kingdoms were divided up by areas of conquests—territories ruled by warlords



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and tyrants. We must be very cautious, because anyone we meet could be a threat. In this time, people are probably more apt to kill us than talk to us.”

“He paints such an optimistic picture,” Mica shrugged.

“We’ll just have to be careful,” Kyria agreed.

“One other thing,” Sartir said. “Our presence here could be disruptive.”

“Disruptive? How?” Kyria asked.

“We’re out of time and place,” Sartir said. “We don’t belong here. What if we did something that somehow altered the future?”

“Like letting Zoldex discover us as he was plotting to kill Pierce?” Mica asked.

“Oh my god,” Kyria gasped. “You don’t think we may have changed something already, do you? What if Zoldex thought Pierce knew of his plan and attacked early? What if we go back and find out that Zoldex beat Pierce? There wouldn’t even be a Mage’s Council!”

“I wouldn’t start jumping to conclusions just yet,” Sartir said.

“Maybe we should warn Pierce though,” Kyria suggested.

“*That* would change things,” Sartir said.

“How do you know that we weren’t *supposed* to be here, and that we didn’t warn Pierce, and that was why things happened the way they were supposed to?”

“My headache is getting worse,” Mica said with a



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sigh.

“We’ll just have to trust our instincts,” Sartir said. “Pierce defeated Zoldex when he and his followers attacked. The reference books of the time never mentioned anything about a warning.”

“We are here to learn more about Zoldex,” Mica pointed out. “Should we stay and watch the battle?”

“I’d advise against it,” Sartir said. “When they weren’t aware of our presence, we could observe without fear of discovery. Now, the eternal could see us, and who knows what would happen then.”

“Fair enough,” Kyria said. “So what’s our next move?”

“We’ll travel north to Lake Cupton, then cut through the Dartian Woods,” Sartir explained.

“I’ve been there,” Kyria reminded them. “There are many dangers in the forest.”

“But far more on the open roads,” Sartir said. “The trails north to Falestia will be fraught with peril. We must avoid them.”

“And you think coming up against giant spiders, lupans, and brooswars is preferable?” Kyria said, shaking her head in astonishment.

“If you remember anything about the Dark Ages from our joining, you’d agree with me,” Sartir said confidently.

Kyria had to pause at the comment, stunned. She was trying to influence the group because of her own



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experiences in the recent past with Kai, Atlija, and Jabrenn when entering the Dartian Woods. This was thousands of years ago though, far before anyone she knew and loved would ever be born. When she had joined with Sartir, learning everything that he had studied to prepare her for an impossible deadline that Master Forales set for her, she had retained information about the Dark Ages. The details were a little fuzzier each day, but she had to admit that the concepts of the Dark Ages were often accompanied by fear, loathing, distrust, thievery, betrayal, and outright conflict. It truly was a ‘dark’ time in the history of the realm.

“The Dark Ages were really bad,” Mica admitted, breaking Kyria’s thought. “I remember at least that much.”

“I’ll trust your judgment,” Kyria conceded. “Let’s just hope that we don’t end up regretting it.”

“We should sleep tonight and leave first thing in the morning,” Sartir recommended. “We’ll need our strength. It’s going to be a long journey.”

Kyria slouched down against one of the boulders that had fallen onto the beach and tried to move the sand around to pile it up enough to be comfortable. Sartir sounded so confident and sure of himself. She only prayed that he was right and that they could do what he suggested. It was her fault that they were in the past, and if anything happened to her two friends, she didn’t think that she could ever forgive herself.



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Knowing that they would be traveling through the Dartian Woods again, she wondered how they possibly could get through without something tragic happening. She accepted that they were in the past, and things could be different, but the Dartian Woods had history for her. A torogon had taken Atlija and Jabrem from her in the forest, and then she had lost both Kai and Grazlin there shortly afterwards. The memories were not good ones. If seasoned warriors struggled with the forest and ultimately succumbed to it, how could three children ever hope to survive? That, though, was a problem for the morning.





CHAPTER

2

As she opened her eyes, Kyria strained to see through a dense fog. She was not certain where it had come from, but she couldn't find her friends in it either. Panicking, she jumped up and called out for both Mica and Sartir, but received no reply.

She walked along the beach, hoping to spot them, and then felt a rumbling as if the entire beach was shaking. Tumbling to the ground, Kyria quickly leapt back up and strained to listen for any sign of her friends. In the distance, she heard an explosion and shouting.

Racing towards it, hoping desperately that her friends were all right, she slid behind a shrub when she spotted Master Zane on his knees, blood flowing from his scalp, with Zoldex laughing triumphantly above him.

"The Festagul are through," Zoldex growled as he returned his gaze to Zane.

"You'll never win," Zane said as he spat blood on the boot of Zoldex.

Zoldex kicked Zane in the head and knocked him

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over. “Pathetic.”

“Zoldex!” Pierce shouted through the veil of darkness.

Zoldex slowly spun around, a smile of anticipation creasing his lips. “Hello, my *prince*.”

“You have gone too far this time, Zoldex,” Pierce said.

Kyria watched as several other eternal emerged from the darkness, surrounding Pierce.

“The Festagul are done,” Zoldex said. “Your father was little more than an invalid when we left Eurillia. With your death, so dies the crown.”

“We have a higher calling than Eurillia,” Pierce said, no hint of fear or hesitation in his voice. “We found what we sought. We can end the Dark Ages. Together, we can restore peace and prosperity to the land.”

“Peace? Prosperity?” Zoldex spat. “Only a fool craves these things.”

“We shall never survive in this state of anarchy,” Pierce declared.

“I have no intention of merely *surviving*,” Zoldex returned. “I shall conquer the realm. The strongest of the warlords will become my generals, and those that defy me shall die.”

“There must be a better way,” Pierce said. “We *will* find a better way—a way where *all* of the creatures of the realm can reclaim that which they have lost.”

“You and your idealistic dreams,” Zoldex said with a

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shake of his head. “A *fool’s* dream.”

“Better to be a fool than to become worse than that which we oppose,” Pierce said. “The magic has corrupted you.”

“The magic has set me free,” Zoldex said. “I see my destiny so clearly now: I was meant to rule—I *shall* rule—and there is nothing that you can do to stop me.”

“I would not be so certain of that,” Pierce replied, challengingly. As soon as the words escaped his lips, more eternal emerged from the darkness to face-off against those siding with Zoldex. “You may have defeated Zane and some of the Festagul, but you face more than just me.”

“I would face all of Eurillia if I must,” Zoldex growled.

“Is there need for more bloodshed?” Pierce asked. “Or could we come up with another solution?”

“Such as?” sneered Zoldex.

“Hand-to-hand combat; just you and me,” Pierce offered. “The victor shall remain here and follow the path that they think is right. The loser—and all of his followers—shall forevermore be banished from this realm.”

“You are even more foolish than your father,” Zoldex laughed. “You shall never beat me.”

“Then you accept?”

“I accept,” Zoldex said. He unfastened his scabbard and tossed his sword to one of his men. “If anyone interferes, your fate is sealed.”



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Kyria watched as both Zoldex and Pierce circled around each other, sizing each other up. The rest of the eternal's clustered around them, making it harder for her to see. Moving to try and get a better view, she was blinded by a flash of light and an eruption from the two combatants.

Crawling back to her hiding place, she rubbed her eyes to try and clear them, but her vision was a blur. She could hear the crackling of fire, the howling of wind, and the electrifying jolt of lightning. The two combatants were hurling everything that they had learned in such a short time at each other, neither willing to give their opponents an inch.

“Kyria.”

Kyria snapped backwards, staring into the darkness. The voice seemed to travel on the wind, a slow moan that could or could not have been there. As she searched the darkness, she wondered if it had been her imagination. What, or who had called out to her?

In the distance, she saw a dark outline, as if a shadow was watching her. As she focused on it, a pair of stars glowed where the man's eyes should have been. Studying them, she got the distinct feeling that the individual was familiar.

Then it hit her, Master Balfour! He must have known that she stole the Shard, recovered it when it returned to her room, and then came back in time to save them. She could hardly hide her excitement, and only



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wished that Sartir and Mica were with her so she could tell them. Perhaps he had already found them.

Leaving the raging battle of the two eternal behind, Kyria crawled towards Master Balfour, and stood up only after she felt she was far enough away to not be seen. As she ran towards her History professor, he turned and fled himself.

Risking discovery, she cried out: “Master Balfour!”

“Master Balfour?” Mica asked. “Where?”

Kyria was startled by Mica’s voice, and jumped up. She was lying in the sand by the boulder where she had gone to sleep. Mica was staring at her with an odd expression on her face.

“I’ve been here the whole time?” Kyria asked.

“Yup,” Mica said. “Sound asleep. I had to fight off Sartir from waking you.”

“Did you hear explosions?” Kyria asked. “The battle between Pierce and Zoldex?”

“I didn’t hear anything,” Mica shrugged. “We can ask Sartir when he gets back.”

“Where is he?” Kyria asked.

“You’ll never believe this,” Mica snickered. “He’s feeding the horses.”

“Horses?” Kyria asked, not certain that she heard the fairy correctly.

“When he woke up, he said he found two horses tied up over there,” she said as she pointed to a fallen limb from above. “He also said that there were baskets