

Thomas Lita was scared to dream. Ever since his earliest memories he had spent every night having the most vivid, beautiful, and frightening dreams; dreams of a strange world that seemed so familiar to him, like memories seeping through his subconscious.

Tonight, a dream held him enthralled like all the others before. An air ship soared over an ocean of crystal blue. Like a plane it seemed but shaped like a great bird of metal. Its hull glimmered in the light of the sun that sat bright in the sky beside a moon that gleamed like silver.

He was nervous and excited by the journey he was taking. Before him a great island seemed to grow out of the sea. A vast mountain stood in its centre; its bare stone walls scorched by fire but upon it sat a gleaming spire of metal. The ship came to a halt beside it and in the manner of dreams, Tom soon found himself at the foot of that great spire. Upon the door, four symbols showed for the old four realms of this land. A great dragon stood with its wings outstretched, its vicious looking head facing towards a four towered church that seemed to make Tom shudder. To the left of the dragon two birds, one black and one white, battled each other. To the right of the church, a bird flew over a forest.

All around him sentinels stood. Images of men they seemed but different. They always occupied Tom's dreams. They were tall, with white skin that was crossed in many lines, giving the impression of scales. On some red scales were prominent, on others only a slight mark here and there. Most in his dreams had bright golden eyes, the same as his own but these had eyes of crystal blue. None seemed to acknowledge him but as his eyes went to stray to the top of the spire, shadowed golden eyes grasped him.

He had seen this figure before in his dreams, usually in the corner, pulling strings as though he was a puppet master. The figure was dressed in a brown, travel stained, cloak, and a hood that covered most of his face. The fire of his eyes illuminated cracked and blue lips, and a white face that seemed to be rotting. A smell of musky decay seemed to follow the man.

Desire filled Tom, desire for power and knowledge lost.

As the man spoke, the waves crashed violently against the mountains base, "Too long have you lived in the shadow of humanity." His lips did not move but the voice echoed in Tom's mind, "Events are about to come that will test your courage and break your bonds with man."

Tom nodded, no understanding coming into his mind, but he wanted to please the figure. He wanted to be the hero he knew the figure expected him to be.

"Vain ambition is a human trait." The figure said slowly, and waves crashed more violently still and Tom saw tendrils of fire creeping up the mountain side.

"Fire." He thought to himself, "*Fire is my plaything.*"

The figure seemed to read his thought and his cracked lips smiled, "You must let go of such thoughts or your world will turn to ash."

Tom gasped as the sea boiled. The sentinels fell to the floor and were consumed by a sudden fire that burst out of the mountain. The citadel glowed a violent red before it was replaced by a mountain, spewing poisonous ash into the heavens. Three of the four symbols were gone. The four towered church remained, and it seemed to Tom like it stood in great splendour. Beneath that a new image grew from tendrils of lava. A great burning tree appeared and as the world turned dark, that image remained, burned in Tom's mind.