

The tales of the Lost North

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Echoes of the past

By I.M Acora

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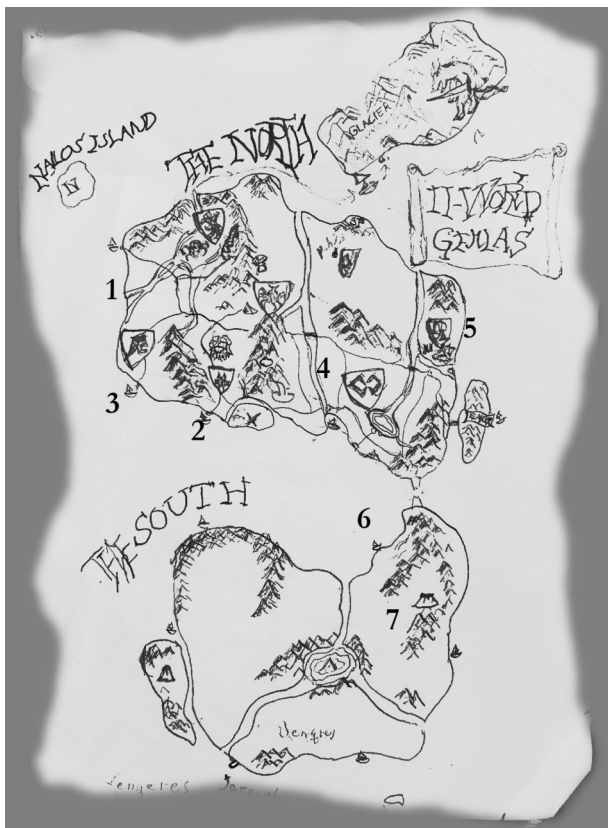
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Map of The Second World

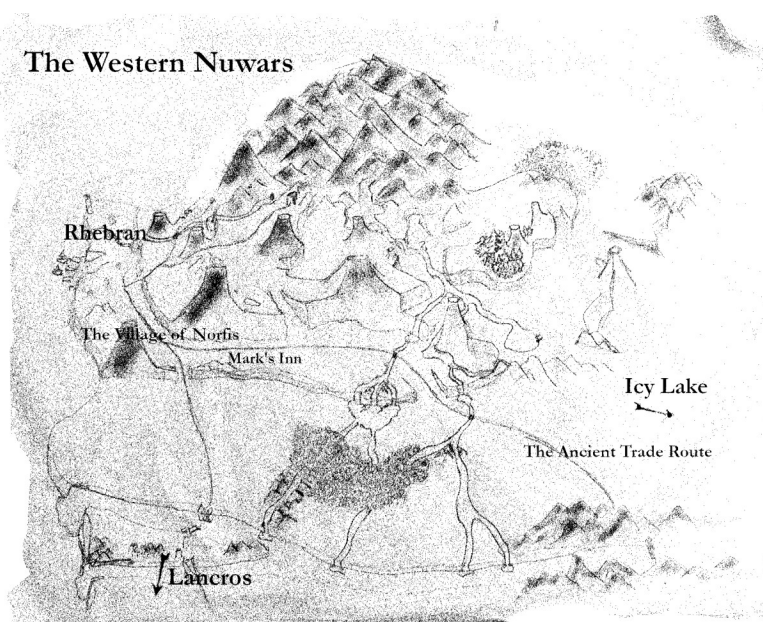
1. *Nuvars*
2. *Mindoros*
3. *Lancros*
4. *Iscros*
5. *Beirnas*
6. *River Lands*
7. *Dusty Lands*



CHAPTER 1 – The Legendary Sword

Imagine Nuwars, one of the most beautiful lands in the Northern world. Its snow-capped mountains reached the clouds. Their slopes are covered with vast pine forests. Its endless, ancient spruce woods stood like sculptures from a forgotten age. Moss-covered, lush little forests are scattered around, surrounded by those mighty coniferous trees.

The air was fresh and crisp like early autumn all year round, blowing from the massive, Icy Lake, situated in the heart of the land. Countless beautiful waterfalls flowed down from the mountains.



Mysterious caves are hidden behind many of these waterfalls.

Caves filled with giant mushrooms, some reaching up to a grown man's waist, their caps glowing with a dim light. They shimmered like gemstones, hues of violet, red, yellow... and blue. The blue ones were the most precious and sought-after mushrooms found in the North.

Sobocara was a highly coveted, bluish, glowing mushroom that grew as tall as the knee. Many travelers and hunters longed for them in hopes of earning great rewards, for the kings of

the Northern realms paid generously for them. In the royal kitchens of the kings' courts, they were used to make a delicious, blue mushroom soup. A rare delicacy reserved for the wealthy. Beyond its exquisite flavor, Sobocara was believed to offer numerous health benefits, such as sleep support, muscle strength, and many more. And beyond all, it was holding the secret to a long life.

One testament of longevity was the High King of Nuwars, Vicor. Even though he had lived one hundred eight years, he had lived far beyond the average human lifespan. Yet he did not appear nearly that old. Almost seven feet tall, broad-shouldered, with light hair and piercing sky-blue eyes. A long white beard framed his strong jaw. He was a highly respected man, one of the rare kings in the history of the North who was admired even by the poor farmers in eastern Nuwars.

This was not the case in most other Kingdoms, where the impoverished were treated as little more than enslaved people. And in some Kingdoms, even worse, such as in Mindoros. Many had fled westward, seeking a better life in Nuwars.

Vicor's strong and charismatic reputation stirred admiration, envy, and fear among other rulers. His name had traveled as far as the distant Southern Lands, where, according to rumor, great unrest was brewing.

Tyrannical King who ruled the majority of the southern regions with an iron fist behind the vast sea, separating North and South. Ships escaping the restlessness arrived from far-off lands from the South more frequently, sailing into the North.

But they never reached Nuwars itself. Instead, they docked in Fedreim, a huge harbor city and capital city of another once-great Kingdom, Lancros, which had lately gone through tough times as well. The trouble was spreading there. Once it stood as great as Nuwars along the biggest lighthouse in the Second-World. The Kingdom of Lancros was located far beyond the southern border of Vicor's realm.

People who managed to make their way all the way to the North beyond the sea didn't talk much about what was happening on the other side of the sea. They were traumatized and reluctant to talk about the events of the South.

Something horrible and dreadful, people weren't likely to share. Folktales about the refugees who had distrust of corrupted leaders who had ties to the Northern World kept the survivors quiet. The only little pieces of news reaching the North were about the terrible stone mines in the desert, where people were starving to death from lack of water and food.

The royal family of Nuwars resided on the eastern shore of Icy Lake, in a majestic, ancient castle that rose into the clouds, Skycastle. It was built between the lake's edge and the mountains that marked Nuwars's eastern border. From its high balcony, the King observed his Kingdom, a realm he longed to protect. Vicor was both compassionate and a daring warrior, brave even to fall by the sword. He had three children, all now grown. Two sons: Visas, the eldest, and the youngest of the children was little brother Yabir. The one daughter, next to Visas, was Norbel. She was beautiful, slender, with fair hair and her father's striking blue eyes.

It was almost the middle of Summer, and the sky was clear, and the afternoon sun was shining on the balcony. Norbel stood on the balcony, watching westward, where the distant land could just barely be seen on the far side of the great frozen lake.

She was an intelligent woman. And she admired the ancient tales of Nuwars and the lineage of its mighty kings. She respected the history of the place. Since childhood, she had read and listened to the stories of the glorious times of Nuwars.

"What are you looking at, Norbel?" a calm voice asked as Norbel drifted into deep thoughts. She flinched slightly, but the peaceful, almost magical aura of Vicor calmed her at once.

"Nothing, Father," Norbel replied, blushing. But after a moment of silence, as Vicor stepped closer and leaned against one of the beautifully carved stone pillars beside her, she continued,

"Well, actually... I was reading some ancient history about Nuwars. About that 'Fork', as you call that cliffy, rocky place far in the west of here. Where Icy Lake splits into two great rivers flowing all the way to the west, and at the end, they flow into the ocean. Nearby the surroundings of the 'Fork' lies the ancient city of the Dvuongor, hidden deep within the mountains and cliffs between the streams of rivers."

Vicor looked at his daughter, puzzled, but kept listening. The topic had clearly caught the King's attention.

"There used to be a massive stone statue of Nores there, nearly seven hundred feet tall. The Dvuongor used it both as a sacred Temple and a fortress to defend against threats from the South. A long time ago, a dragon was shot with a great metallic arrow from that statue. The legendary arrows

crafted by Dvuongor's, not even the hardest plate armor, could save a warrior from these deadly metallic arrows. A dragon sent by Eres, the evil God of the South, to destroy these beautiful natural lands." Norbel recited it as if quoting a history book.

Vicor interrupted her gently:

"No... Eres didn't send the Dragon to destroy our forests. He sent it to wipe out the Dvuongor entirely. But fortunately, he failed..."

Vicor's gaze now also wandered to the distant, rocky division of the lake, where the ancient battle once took place. A shadow of concern crossed his face—a rare expression from the King.

"How do you know that? In the Grand Library of the Northern Wing, there are old parchments that say otherwise," Norbel asked, her curiosity fully awakened.

Vicor paused, considering whether to answer. Finally, he spoke.

"Those parchments were written by men. A great ancestor of ours passed down through generations, stories with many discrepancies. But..." He stroked his long beard thoughtfully before continuing,

"But you know, Okar, don't you? That old man who visits here from time to time."

"What about him? He's just some old guy who learnt a lot of history," Norbel interrupted.

"Well... not quite. Old, yes. But let's put it this way, surely you've read about Wizards, Chieftains, Elves, and the other races." Vicor now looked Norbel in the eye, and she stared back, her thirst for knowledge unquenchable.

"One of the last true Wizards..."

Vicor continued, turning his look again towards the far horizon, as if remembering some long-lost, terrible event.

"Okar is a Wizard?" Norbel asked, stunned. She was both confused and fascinated.

"Yes. I am old. But Okar... he has witnessed the entire harsh history of the North. And because he is a close friend of mine, during our long private talks, he has told me things that the parchments never speak of."

A shadow of worry returned to Vicor's face. He was about to say more. Perhaps something secret, but in the end, he chose to keep it to himself.

"No... I don't want my daughter burdened by the ominous news Okar shared last winter. The nameless horror spreading in the South. The one that gave Okar a panic attack."

Vicor thought to himself, his eyes fixed towards the south, where the Kingdom of Lancros was located, at the southwestern corner of the Northern World. A once-beautiful region and long-time ally with Nuwars, the downfall of Lancros, which Vicor was highly aware of. The continuous slipping deeper and deeper into ruin had made the King more and more careworn.

But it wasn't Lancros's decline that sent chills down Vicor's spine. It was something else, something he didn't want to think about.

His hand instinctively tightened around the hilt of the ornate sword hanging from his waist. And then, his mind drifted backward to a distant memory. He could hear the clanging...

Kling, kling, kling...

The pounding of iron being forged. All around him, massive forges and smithies roared, where the Dvuongor were crafting something monumental.

A secret city inside the mountain, with an entrance so well hidden it was almost invisible, impossible to locate for others who had no idea about the exact location.



And this underground forge was not for everyone's common knowledge, but highly secret information only known to a few influential figures.

Vicor marveled at the architecture as he walked through the cavernous tunnel into the city, its walls had been polished into a perfectly symmetrical cubic shape, like a massive nut carved from stone.

Next to him walked an old, slightly shorter, bearded man with thick eyebrows and a robe woven from deep blue fabric. He had pulled the hood over his head and looked extremely shady. As if he was hiding something... Or someone...

"We're almost there, Vicor. Now is the time to do it," the old man said thoughtfully, glancing around at the dozens of glowing blue rooms lining the hallway.

"I know. I've waited a long time for this. But... I'm a little nervous. Okar, are you absolutely sure the creature you talked about has been strictly subdued?" Vicor asked, equally serious. Okar didn't reply as his eyes kept wandering into the rooms.

"So this is where all the Sobocara have been brought and planted? Or do the Dvuongor have some sixth sense for finding glowing blue mushrooms? Hey Chief, why haven't you ever mention that your Dvuongors have a secret mushroom farm?"

Okar laughed and elbowed a mustached creature walking on his right, the Chief, that respected title among the Dvuongorians' traditions, given only for the best craftsmanship within their tribe. Chief, whom Okar poked, was shorter than an average man, with pointy ears and strange goggles, which looked like they could resist the heat of a volcano.

"What nonsense are you spouting, Okar? Sobocara doesn't grow in the bowels of the earth. If you're interested in mushrooms, good luck finding any. The exit's that way, the same path we came in."

Chief pointed back towards the long, cube-shaped tunnel with a frustrated sigh.

But Okar grinned and continued,

"Then come escort me. I'm not walking back alone. That Elf near Nores's shattered statue's toes nearly gave me a heart attack. I never expected wood Elves to transform into talking pine trees!"

He laughed, but Vicor and Chief remained serious, continuing forward. The roar of a powerful underground current echoed from nearby. In the glowing blue rooms, Magra was being processed, the most valuable precious metal known to man.

As Vicor passed one of the rooms, he glanced inside, and he felt as if lightning had struck beside him. A short, mustached creature with odd metal goggles was holding a small glowing shard no larger than a pebble.

Vicor felt an odd, magnetic-like pulse in the air. He said nothing, but Chief noticed his reaction and wisely remained silent. Okar, however, kept joking,

“Soon, Vicor, you’ll strike like lightning yourself. Those Goblins, Barbarians, and Cromos who’ve been raiding the small villages of Nuwars for years will definitely regret it after this. Finally, they’ll get a taste of their own medicine. Just a bit stronger one, like that whiskey shot I accidentally ordered at the tavern when we were talking about this. It was horrible; my throat still hurts. These folks from the South are crazy when it comes to brewery”

“Huh? What do you mean?” Vicor turned to look at Okar, who chuckled, then suddenly turned solemn as stone.

“You don’t get it?” Okar whispered, glancing around, “They want the Sobocara, of course. Why else come so far north?” Chief let out a dry grunt, but Vicor wasn’t in the mood for humor.

“Turn left here, down the stairs. Then from the suspension bridge, take the spiral staircase down,” Chief instructed.

The trio turned into a massive tunnel, its staircase descending at least five hundred steps deep into the lowest levels of the underground city inside the mountain.

“What’s that orange glow?”

Vicor asked and pointed to one of the chambers in the flat halfway down the stairs. He was staying alert, hand on his sword, ready to battle if some unknown, untamed underground monster was about to attack.

“A replica of the Dusty Lands altar, where Eres sacrifices his own wizards,” Okar laughed, but quickly realized he had gone too far and fell deeply quiet. No need to fear. It’s not dragon fire, my lord,” Chief reassured Vicor, who looked ready to battle a fiery beast.

“No, no. It’s just Fleros giant fire-spider,” Okar quipped, a slight grin showing beneath his blue hood.

“Are you drunk, Okar? A courage shot before the big moment?” Vicor teased, once he noticed the orange glow was coming from large forges, burning hot.

“Gentlemen—Okar, and King Vicor,” Chief began solemnly, “You know our current state. We’re in deep trouble. Our forges burn day and night as we prepare for the worst...”

He sighed, and the thoughts of the wise Dvuongor wandered into the shadows of the past.

“Just like over a thousand years ago, when Nores’s statue was finally destroyed. Whoever pulling the strings behind the Southern King. It must be Eres’s heir, this unknown threat... It clearly wants to wipe out our people completely.”

Chief felt every hammer blow on the forge as if it were a giant knight’s mace pounding into his skull. He was visibly burdened and wanted to reach their destination as soon as possible.

Okar raised his eyebrows at Chief's words, they clearly struck something profound in him as well. Now, the three walked in heavy silence down the seemingly endless stairs. The air grew warmer, and Vicor heavily armored, began to sweat. But he was physically strong and did not complain. Okar, too, was sweating, wiping his forehead against his robe. They finally reached the end of the stairs and turned left, where the orange glow dimmed, but was still faintly visible.

"Are these steps on the bridge safe?" Vicor asked suspiciously. Chief laughed, "Oh, please. These were here long before your great-great-great-grandfather was even born. Not a single scratch on them. Precision work of our people."

Vicor hesitated before stepping onto the metal suspension bridge. He couldn't see the bottom - only blackness. But he heard the sound of water rushing far below. Suddenly, Okar darted forward like a rabbit, nearly pushing Vicor over the railing.

"Okar, what the heck?!" Vicor barked.

The Wizard didn't answer, he was already catching his breath on the far side of the bridge. When Vicor and Chief finally crossed, Okar began to explain.

"Well, I've got a bit of a fear of heights. Sorry about that," he said, breathless, but with a crooked grin.

"We're almost there, by the way," Okar added cheerfully, wiping sweat from his brow and beard with his robe. Suddenly, he turned pale - as if he had seen a ghost.

"What is it now?" Vicor asked, confused, no longer in the mood for jokes.

"It's behind that door... I need a moment to prepare," Okar said, pointing at a massive metal door. Behind which a deep, furious breathing echoed. The breath of some great beast.

Chief began rummaging through his pocket, pulling out a bundle of large, heavy golden keys. He examined them for a moment before finding the one he sought.

Vicor and Okar watched, terrified, as Chief quietly approached the door. Just as he was about to insert the key into the lock, Okar lunged at him, ripping the keys from Chief's hand.

"Are you insane?! We're not seriously going in there. The whole thing was just that one drunken night back at that western tavern... with really good ale, by the way."

Okar smiled briefly, reminiscing about the taste of the beer. Then his demeanor switched to impulsive, and he began wrestling the keys back from Chief, who resisted.

Vicor stepped in between them, his large, strong build easily separating the two.

"Alright, Okar, calm down already!" Vicor commanded sternly. Okar mumbled under his breath for a moment.

"Now, let's go in and do what we came here to do," Vicor said firmly. Chief nodded. Vicor handed the keys back to Chief, who unlocked the heavy metal doors.

A faint orange glow spilled out through the opening, and the aggressive breathing inside now felt even stronger.

"Chief, lead the way," Vicor said calmly. Chief obeyed and stepped into the hot, secret chamber.

Vicor followed, asking as he walked,

"Okar, you do remember what you're supposed to do, right? ...Okar?"

No answer came.

Vicor turned his head and saw the blue-robed Wizard sneaking back towards the exit.

"Hey! Okar, come back here!" Vicor barked at him. The Wizard turned, shook his head, and reluctantly followed.

“Alright... let’s do this. It’s time,” Okar said neutrally, walking nervously behind Vicor into the chamber, where Chief was already waiting. The orange light glowed from the smelter furnace at the back of the room. Aside from a few torches, the chamber was dark. The heavy breathing now turned into a low, aggressive growl.

Whatever waited there, all three were highly alert. Paranoid even. Especially the Wizard who wished he had stayed at the tavern.

Chief grabbed a torch and led them down a spiral staircase descending towards the furnace. Vicor could feel something lurking in the darkness - an angry creature, ready to kill them all.

“Chief, can we get some more light in here?” Vicor asked. “Y-yes, hold on,” Chief replied nervously, walking to a dark corner to fiddle with something.

Then, one by one, several unlit torches ignited in a chain, each flame lighting the next - leading directly towards the corner from where the unknown threat lurked.

Vicor flinched as the final flames burst to life.

In the corner of the chamber stood a massive cell carved directly into the stone wall.

It had thick steel bars, and behind them lay a small, twenty-two-foot-tall dragon., chained tightly with heavy metal shackles.

Between its scales glowed fiery orange streaks, like molten lava. Its eyes were a deep golden hue, burning with ancient memories of freedom.

A metal muzzle was locked around its mouth to prevent it from making any sound. All three felt the dragon’s furious breath and its burning gaze - it clearly hated where it was. It wanted freedom. But the bars forged by the Dvuongor were too strong, even for a massive creature like this.

“Well, what are you waiting for? Shall we begin?” Okar asked, staring at Vicor and Chief, who stood frozen, petrified with fear. Even Vicor, known for his courage, was now silent and cautious.

“Chief! Over here!” Okar commanded. Chief approached him carefully, never taking his eyes off the dragon, who in its rage seemed ready to tear itself free even from the Dvuongor’s unbreakable chains.

“Fetch the reinforcements... now, immediately,” Okar whispered.

Chief ran out of the orange-lit chamber.

Vicor stood speechless, unsure what to do, as Okar began muttering strange words. Despite being a wise man, Vicor didn’t recognize them as any known language, not from distant lands nor fallen Kingdoms.

Gradually, Vicor felt the temperature in the room drop significantly. He no longer felt the slow, heavy breathing or the growl that rumbled like a rabid beast. The dragon had fallen asleep as Okar had cast a spell.

Okar walked closer to the bars, a slight smirk crossing his face, hidden under his hood. Soon, the sound of many hurried footsteps echoed through the chamber. Chief returned, accompanied by numerous highly skilled Dvuongor smiths.

‘Green Guild’ was inscribed on their chests, even though not in human language. It was foreign language of the Dvuongor, which only Okar understood. He never mentioned this to Vicor, instead instructing Chief and the others to prepare as the dragon was to be released.

Still, Vicor stood aside, feeling useless, not knowing what Okar’s plan was or what was going to come next.

Four Dvuongor opened the heavy bars, and Okar ordered them to pull on the chains around the dragon's neck as he began whispering his spells once more.

The dragon was pulled out; it seemed as if its weight had become light as a feather. The Dvuongor dragged it closer to the legendary anvil, glowing like the sunrise.

Vicor quickly stepped aside, wondering why he had even been brought here into this sweltering underground dungeon.

Multiple Dvuongor adjusted the chains, securing the dragon near the anvil.

Chief donned a thick metal armor suit, designed to protect against fire, even the melting heat of dragon fire.

Once he was fully armored and checked that everything was ready, he shouted to Okar, "Alright! The legendary anvil is ready. Shall we begin the task?"

Okar nodded. Chief drew a massive forging hammer from his belt, while other Dvuongor brought him various metals.

Some guarded the dragon, ensuring it remained restrained.

"Go on, Okar!" Chief shouted, inspecting the metals.

Chief - a title of great honor among the Dvuongor - was only given to the most excellent builders of their tribe.

Okar walked further back, up the stairs where Vicor waited, and began chanting again. This time, the words sounded ominous and dark.

The great dragon slowly opened its eyes, and many Dvuongor held it down as Chief, who had worn a fireproof armor, was ready for the dangerous mission. While he placed a helmet on his head, similar to armor, immune to flames, it was the signal that Okar could begin the work.

And so, the legendary anvil rang out, for the first time in decades, perhaps centuries.

Okar held the dragon in control with his spells alongside the Dvuongor's chains, while Chief began forging something mysterious.

They needed an intense flame, a dragon's flame.

The dragon breathed fire upon the metal alloy, as Okar commanded it. Gradually, something resembling the hilt of a sword began to take shape.

The pounding continued in the legendary forge for a long time, and everyone was drenched in sweat as the dragon unleashed blast after blast at Okar's command.

A great work, one that Okar and Vicor had discussed with the Chief many moons ago, had now finally begun.

Kling, kling, kling...

Vicor could still hear the strikes of the ancient forge's magical hammer echoing inside his mind.

Norbel looked up at his father, who stood tall beside him, eyes glowing with a strange flicker of flame.

Vicor's mind was immersed in that time, when the dragon was released and tamed to use its flame for forging the silver sword he now possessed.

"Father?" she asked, confused-perhaps even frightened-by her father's trance-like absence.

Vicor stared far into the horizon, over the thin mist rising from the freezing water of the Icy Lake. Norbel's attempts to bring her father back to the present were hopeless.

After a few frustrated pokes, she gave up and left his statue-like father to gaze silently into the distance. King didn't pay any attention after her daughter left for the Northern Wing of the Skycastle.

The young princess knew this state too well-when her father fell into his mysterious thoughts, he could linger there for hours. So, she decided to make her way to the grand library and study the history of her ancestors' Kingdom, which she loved.

As the princess walked towards the northern wing of the Skycastle, a short man came rushing towards her at full speed.

It was Frotaz. One of the King's most loyal servants and Vicor's chief advisor. Even though Frotaz was timid and small of stature, he was no man of smooth words, yet he always carried out his duties with honor and full resolve, even tearing his own flesh if duty demanded it.

He was a bald, middle-aged man with no beard. He wore a fine green tunic woven from costly cloth, its sleeves trimmed with small furs. Around his waist, he bore a light brown mantle that rose at the back to his neck, from which flowed a long cloak, fluttering through the halls of the castle as he ran, face flushed as it was on most days from stress. Upon his fingers gleamed precious rings, and a golden bracelet adorned his wrist. They were rewards for long years of loyal service.

"Frotaz! Why such haste? Are you searching for my father? Has something happened?" Norbel stopped the messenger, who halted as if he had run into a stone wall. The little man raised a hand to his brow and bowed before stammering out the words,

"L-Lancros. Our allies, our old friends. At last, after long years, they are coming here to negotiate with us about the unrest in the world."

The princess's fair cheeks flushed red, as though she had been cast back in time to some long-lost memory. Yet, gathering herself, she managed to ask,

"Is... hmm... is Zidar coming?" She hesitated to pronounce his name,

"Yes, Zidar himself," Frotaz replied proudly, chin lifted, though his face remained solemn.

"The elder prince is dead, slain in the southern harbor city, and Zidar has become the new chief envoy. He will travel here in two weeks' time with a small retinue, and we shall hold long councils concerning what is to come."

The short messenger rarely smiled. Norbel, turning pale at the news, jogged on towards the northern wing, unwilling to reveal his feelings to Frotaz, who knew nothing of the secret bond between the two young royals, a romance that had endured for many years, though now they barely see each other.

Long ago, the princes of Lancros had visited the Skycastle of Vicor, and vice versa. But with Lancros now plagued by unrest, the southern border of Nuwars had been sealed. Refugees had sought to cross northward from the turmoil and civil wars of the southern Kingdom, also called the 'Wild West' into the northern realm ruled by Vicor.

Yet the borders stood firmly shut, and the road to Lancros's capital and great harbor city, Fedreim, was long. Long and dangerous those days. By carriage, it took two weeks, and now Norbel's heart was troubled: would Zidar even survive the journey?

"Would you care to read this letter I have just received from a courier, freshly come from Lancros?"

Frotaz asked, standing stiff and upright as though a spirit level had fixed him in place. The hems of his brown cloak whipped about in the wind, sweeping over the high stone balcony of the Skycastle, but only Norbel's fair hair stirred in the cold northern breeze that blew from the height of the clouds.

Without a word, the princess hurried along the vast stone gallery towards the northern wing, her mind lost in thoughts of an old youthful love.

Her cheeks glowed like fresh apples, and her heart beat with excitement. She wondered if she should even go to the library, for now, with her stomach filled with butterflies, it would be hard to read the old chronicles of her father's reign.

"Two weeks... that is a long time," she sighed, gazing southward. Far away, she saw a dark, ominous cloud, like a shadow, hanging over the horizon. It loomed directly above the place where Fedreim, Lancros's greatest harbor city, is. The place where the princes of that Kingdom dwelt. The place from which the love she had long yearned for would soon set forth towards the North. Meanwhile, the lonely King was watching his Kingdom from the heights of the mountains with a darkened expression on his face.

But now the old King was hiding something. Something important. Perhaps a secret or even vulnerable, critical weakness he had learned, while leaning towards the balcony at the height of clouds.

The King's face, noble and wise yet weighed by worry, remained locked in grim thoughts.

You've helped me so much, old friend... Vicor thought, gripping the hilt of his sword, etched with narrow silver lines that shimmered in the sunlight like waves on a clear sea.

"But our shared journey is not yet over. I need you once more, now that the people of the entire Northern Kingdom face an enemy the likes of which has not been seen in these lands for thousands of years."

As he was gazing out over the massive lake nestled between the towering mountains, a lake that brought with it a flood of memories, both cherished and horrifying.

But now, more than ever, his thoughts wandered longingly to his old friend Okar, who had once helped him forge the legendary sword and establish diplomatic ties with the Dvuongor, a race dwelling on the western side of the lake.

Despite Vicor's reputation as a wise, trustworthy, and fearless leader, he felt deeply alone.

The cold, familiar breeze blowing in from the lake brought goosebumps to his skin and awakened a foreboding sense that something terrible was coming.

Not the same threat recently awakened from the depths, but something else. Something new. Something unknown, lurking beneath the icy waters, slowly terrorizing his Kingdom.

He tried to think, how could he lure and defeat such an enemy? Whatever creature hid in the frozen darkness below... how could it be overcome?

But his thoughts kept slipping back to Okar, whom he had not seen in years. Their lifelong friendship and the countless hours of conversation they had shared on this very balcony filled him with longing. Vicor now wished more than ever that his old friend was here to offer counsel.

"Where could that old Wizard be? I really wish I could talk to him, even at least one more time..."

