

## CHAPTER 21

### YUSEF THE FREEDOM FIGHTER

Jolariel has obviously profited from his profession, as he has a beautiful home and can even afford to build a seagoing vessel of his own design. The prow resembles the head of a mythical beast, decorated with a curious array of esoteric symbols.

The captain is a man in his early thirties with short cropped hair, glistening green eyes and the physique of an athlete. Yusef wears nothing other than loose-fitting pants, a leather vest and a chain of gold around his neck.

He looks them over and is obviously trying to decide if they are the sons of wealthy merchants looking for a free ride.

“Who are you and what do you want?”

“We are guests of Jolariel,” Addric says. “He said that we might like to go sailing while he operates on our young friend.”

“In that case, come on up.”

“Can we do anything to help.”

“If you cast off, we can be underway in a few minutes.”

“What does that mean?” Addric whispers to Reuben.

“That means we have to detach that rope from its moorings.”

They are expecting the sail to unfurl before they set off, but it doesn't happen. The ship heads off for the horizon, and not long after, Yusef invites them up onto the quarterdeck.

“Gentlemen, perhaps you would like a goblet of wine,” he says.

Yusef is a bit of a chatterbox but they are surprised to hear that this is the first time that a sailing vessel has ever been powered by crystals.

“I am testing out an idea that has never been tried before. Unlike other vessels, this one has the power to travel long distances in a very short time.”

“And it can even circumnavigate Lemuria in less than ten hours. That would normally take two weeks, but not in this vessel.”

Yusef is overly generous with the wine and encourages them to help themselves. The barrel is connected to a reservoir below the deck and it very quickly loosens his tongue, but it is apparent that this is a man on a mission.

They are not about to reveal any more information than they agreed upon. But when Yusef discovers that Sabu is a master horseman, and Addric and Dheago are trained warriors, he is impressed.

“In that case, I would like to show you something very interesting,” he says. “I have a task to complete and to ensure that it is successful, I will require your assistance.”

They are intrigued but have no idea what he means. They pass many ports and cities but don't get to see them at close range. Even though he doesn't say so, it's apparent that Yusef is a member of the dissident army that has been waging an on-going battle against the priesthood for the last three hundred years.

Thirty minutes later, the ship comes to rest at an uninhabited cove, and in the distance, is one of the bell towers they saw earlier in the day.

"That is one of the transmission stations for the crystal network," he says. "And if it could be deactivated the system would fail to work."

"Many have tried and failed, but with your help we will be successful, but you will need a weapon as guards patrol these areas."

The first sign that something is wrong is when Yusef provides them with a crystal wand. Addric is immediately concerned as this is not their business. This was supposed to be a simple sailing expedition, but he didn't expect to be hijacked by a green-eyed pirate and plunged into the middle of an ancient skirmish.

"Temple guards patrol these towers," Yusef says. "But beware of the temple dogs, because they are even worse than the guards."

The bell tower is at least fifteen meters high and rests on mammoth stone legs, and even from a distance, it is a masterful creation.

"See that beam of light emanating from the top of the tower," he says. "That is our target and all you have to do is direct your wand to the top of the tower."

"Stop right now," Addric says. "I demand to know why we are doing this."

"Because I need the assistance of men such as you."

"What do you mean by that?"

"You are not just simple travellers, are you?"

"And how did you arrive at that conclusion?"

"I can see what you are. I have the sight you know."

Addric is a little worried now. So far, no one has seen through their disguise.

"Anyone trained by a temple master can see what others cannot," Yusef says. "I was once a student of the Temple of Rejuvenation and that is no ordinary temple."

According to Yusef, Jolariel also trained at the Temple, a school in which it is possible to study esoteric wisdom. Over a seven-year period, a student learns to amplify their energy system by engaging with the power of universal energy.

"Once we have completed our studies, we acquire the ability to do many things, and one of those is the ability to see the energy field of any living thing."

“In your case, I know exactly what I am looking at. You are immortals, are you not?”

“I have studied energy fields and yours are far more complex than any I have ever encountered, even more so than that of my master.”

Addric is not sure how to respond and throws his wand to the ground.

“Yusef, let’s have this out, here and now.”

“Tell us more about this situation,” Reuben says.

“My people have suffered, and we have barely achieved anything after centuries of trying. We fight a daily battle for our independence.”

“The people of Lemuria have changed but the priests will have nothing of this.”

“They are the masters, but they belong to the old world and we belong to the new.”

“And if we do not destroy this bell tower, they will consume us forever, and I for one will not tolerate such a thing.”

“So, what do you expect us to do?” Sabu says.

“It is my belief that you have the power to destroy this bell tower and change our future.”

Lemuria is about to disappear into the depths of the ocean, with or without their assistance, but this is a cry for help. This is just one man who represents thousands of others, and he is begging them to do the very thing that the people of Lemuria have never been able to do.

“Please help me to destroy this tower.”

“If we did,” Dheago says. “Would it make any difference?”

“For the first time ever, we would have an opportunity to bring our oppressors down.”

The words of the Divine Portia, Lord Ragule and those of Sentirion are ringing in their ears. This is an issue of conscience and they must weigh up the pros and cons before doing anything at all.

“You clearly want this to happen,” Dheago says. “And you would do so yourself, if you could.”

“This world is doomed,” Sabu says, “and we didn’t come all this way to listen to the ravings of a desperate man.”

“You can assist us in this battle,” Yusef says. “If we aim our wands at the primary crystal, we would neutralise the entire system.”

“It is essential that we do not miss our mark. If we did, it would all be for nothing.”

“Yusef, we cannot do this,” Addric says. “We are not permitted to do so. We must act according to our conscience in this matter. We have no other choice.”

“If we made a wrong decision and we were found wanting, we would disappear before your very eyes, and our fate would be sealed for all time.”

“We would have to explain our reasons to the highest court in the land, and if they decided that we had broken the rules, then we would face the worst of all possible penalties.”

“That is something much worse than death, Yusef. That is permanent exile from everyone we know and love and a long lingering death that will never end.”

“I think we need to talk this thing through. Do you hear what I am saying?”

It was just a few powerfully delivered words but it was enough to stop Yusef in his tracks.

The return journey is very uncomfortable for the first half hour. But before the ship docks, Yusef asks if he can express his thoughts openly and honestly.

“I would like to apologise,” he says. “I understand that you cannot always do what you want to do.”

“For ones so young, you have shown that you are indeed men of conscience, and that is a rare thing indeed, a quality I consider to be of the highest standard.”

“Jolariel is like you in so many respects. And yes, it would be wise if we dwelt on this matter. I would hate to be responsible for a fate such as you described.”

He offers the hand of friendship and they willingly accept, and a few minutes later, Yusef is back to his swaggering self.

“I would like to drink to a very long friendship,” he says. “This is the first time our paths have crossed, but it may not be the last.”

“I would prefer to fight alongside friends and brothers, rather than someone I do not trust.”

Yusef’s words are those of a sincere and passionate man, one who is determined to win freedom for his country at any cost. He is no doubt aware of the prophecies, but probably imagines they refer to a distant future. Addric is not about to tell him that in less than two weeks’ time the prophecies will come true.