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THERA

Fourteen distinct countries make up the world of Thera and one of the greatest countries is called Creole.. Vast and majestic, Creole is roughly the size of the northern portion of the Pacific Ocean. In the middle of Creole, lies the capital known as Vestrin. Vestrin is thought to be the most extravagant city in Thera, and is home to over half a million residents. The aristocratic societies of Vestrin live in a time resembling that of Europe's Middle Ages. They reside under the supreme rule of the Ickova Dynasty. The people of Thera live in what some would consider a crude world of romance and tradition. Unlike the people of modern day Earth, Therians know no technological advances, because magic and science do not mix. There are no cars to pollute the air, no factories to dump waste into the water supply, and no electricity. In a world without machines and abuse of natural resources, the key to survival is to understand magic and the laws that govern its use.

In Thera there is one central government known as the Dynasty, and it rules over all. Many, many years ago there were twelve separate Dynasties that ruled over the lands of Thera. War after bloody war shifted the powers that be until only one Dynasty remained. The Ickova Dynasty rules over the monarchs throughout the Therian globe. The monarchs rule the different regions and territories and their rule supersedes the beings of the lower castes.

Thera is systematically broken down into three castes: the Sovereigtene, the Mezzontene, and the Edontene. Within each caste there are different factions and races of people and their lives are preordained for them by a system of laws that how they are to live. Insurgence against any of the laws is high treason to the crown and is punishable by death. The Ickovian rule is absolute.

The crown jewel of the Vestrin city is the extravagant Castle Trudo. It is famed as the most elaborate castle Thera has ever known. Not only is it the largest castle, it is the tallest and it towers over Vestrin city. In front of the castle moat and battlements, Vestrin College surrounds the castle in all its splendor and glory.

Deep within the strong castle walls, the Queen of Thera is sitting at her

desk hurriedly writing in a thick book. Her Majesty, Queen Persephica Ickova is the most beautiful, the most powerful and the most vicious ruler that has ever governed Thera. Her demeanor is as cold as her midnight black eyes and as unfeeling as her heart. King Lukas Ickova the First, her late husband, died eight years ago, leaving her to rule Thera until her son became of age to assume the throne. Her newly anointed son, King Lukas Ickova the Second, had taken the throne on his 16th birthday. With his crown, he inherited absolute rule over Thera. Although he is the youngest King Thera has ever known, Lukas is just as powerful, ambitious and ruthless as his mother.

Down one of the most ancient corridors of the castle, just around the corner of the new King's bedroom stands a massive metal vase. Intricate enamel illustrations gild the vase, which depicts a golden pear tree in a grove surrounded by two bowing peacocks—a symbol of divine Therian nobility. Just beyond this enormous vase, lies the entrance to the secret chambers of the Queen. There is no key for this room because only the Persephica's magic can open it and there are very few servants who know that it even exists.

The Queen's secret chamber is where she spends most of her free time concocting deadly poisons, and crafting her mystical ways. It is where she keeps her private and most precious collection of divination artifacts. One of these artifacts is a medium cannonball size blue glass sphere filled with shimmering blue sand, known as the Fateor Sphere and it rests on a golden pedestal beside a bubbling cauldron. Immense bookcases adorned the walls from the floor to the domed ceiling above. The shelves were cluttered with dusty books, ancient scrolls, mysterious and foul smelling potions, and an assortment of magical instruments from all corners of Thera. Persephica is presently trying to compose her thoughts in a massive leather bound book filled with spells, incantations and celestial diagrams. Each page looks as though it took days to illustrate. Every time the wick of her quill touches a page the letters looped animatedly in and out of each other and illustrations magically appeared upon the page.

Pausing to think, she held the tip of her quill above a beautifully decorated page on the celestial observation of Orion. Lost in thought, Persephica stares out the tiny window above her. The crushing silence pressed in on her every nerve like a vise and her thoughts were scattered and forgotten. Unable to concentrate on her task, she reaches for some seeds that are sitting in a small dish spilling out of a half-



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eaten pomegranate. Nibbling on them, she looks about the room as if trying to regain inspiration from her grim surroundings before writing again. The chamber is dimly lit with the dull light of over a dozens candles and the fractional daylight coming through her tiny window high above.

All is silent except for the bubbling cauldron that crackles and pops as it simmers over a gently burning fire. Persephica took in a deep breath through her nose and inhaled the sweet musty aroma of burning incense. Everything felt oddly still and out of place even though everything seemed to be in order. Still something wasn't right and she didn't know what it was. Her dark eyes flickered casually downward when something caught her eye. Persephica's face suddenly became alight with intrigue and apprehension. The blue Fateor Sphere beside the cauldron suddenly demanded her undivided attention.

Forty-three years ago a young blind soothsayer named Aisling Syntyche had a vision of a wall that foretold the future. Her vision had implicated the Last Dynasty. Aisling only told Jupiter Deo, the Goddess of Wade, and she warned her that the Last Dynasty would be a plague upon the land. Thera would be in the hiatus of two wars, and she said it would be a Dark Age for humanity, because all she saw was suffering and death. Just before Aisling tragically died at Jupiter's feet, she had a final vision of hope. Aisling said she saw a child born from a forbidden love and marked with the First Sign would free them from the Last Dynasty. In her last breath to Jupiter it is rumored that she said only this, "You must trust the sign. Only the sign can set you free. Believe to see, Jupiter. Believe to see! The magic is alive in you as it was in me..."

Years following Aisling's death, her vision became the whispered prayer for the people born into service to the Sovereigntene caste. As the Dynasties fell one by one in a reign of blood and war, a single all-powerful Dynasty remained: the Ickova Dynasty. Then less than fourteen years ago in Persephica's search for the sacred Keys of Thera, she learned that the wall described in Aisling's vision had been found. The rumors stated that it contained the prophecy that Persephica had feared would come to pass.

Although the prophecy was written in an ancient language that had existed thousands of years ago, Persephica learned that one of the archeologists was able to translate it. The translation was said to be just like Aisling's vision with additional details of things to come. The legend foretells that the Messenger of the First

Sign would be entrusted with the sacred Keys of Thera. The Messenger would be endowed with powers greater than the sun and would come to free the lower castes from bondage. The last line of the translation promised that should the Messenger succeed the Last Dynasty would cease to exist.

Persephica journeyed eastward to the location of the wall. Upon arrival she learned that the archaeologists were of Mezzontene ancestry, the middle caste of Thera, had discovered the one true prophecy. It was etched on a wall in a cave hidden high within the Phabian Mountains. The archaeologists were detained and viciously interrogated until one of them confessed that the translation mentioned Persephica's son by name and that he would die because of the Messenger. An advisor to the Queen informed her that the archeologists were a part of a lower caste uprising known as the Celsius. Fearful of her son's fate, she ordered the immediate disposal of the archaeology team. The other members of the Celsius were taken prisoner and were never seen again, but only one girl eluded capture and survived.

Persephica had done everything in her power to erase the memory of the legend, yet she herself had never forgotten. For years she has sought out ways of locating the missing girl who had managed to escape and Persephica was sure that she would lead her to the Messenger of the First Sign. Three years ago, Persephica learned of a rare unicorn that had been born with a blue horn, which is an uncommon trait among the species. According to Persephica's ancient scrolls and books, a blue horn could be used to locate divine secrets of the world if properly procured by the seeker. Persephica was convinced that this was the tool she needed to find and eliminate the Messenger. She had the poor beast executed and the horn removed. The horn was then grounded down into a fine dust and trapped in a sacred glass Fateor Sphere. For three years the dust had remained brilliantly blue without a hint of change, until today.

A pinch of the dust, the size of a dime glowed brightly and shot out rays of blinding light. The light then flashed and quickly faded away leaving a solitary spot behind in its wake. The spot had changed from blue into crimson red in a matter of seconds. Persephica knew all too well what this meant, the Messenger of the First Sign had surfaced.

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Just south of the Creole border, is the lush country of Acada. Acada



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is home to several factions of the Mezzontene and Edontene castes. In the northwestern region of Acada, in the valley of the Wade Mountains, the capital city Wade, is a rustic tribute to its humble lands. Nestled just southeast of the Nauplatic Ocean, the quiet town was just the opposite of Vestrin. Its buildings are simple and quaint and its population is few and far between. Wade is primarily home to the faction know as the Fae of the Edontene caste and the Cerebrate faction of the Mezzontene caste.

Many years ago Wade was known as the Kingdom of Wade when the late King Deloren Sollers of the Mezzontene monarchy had governed it. The Kingdom fell when King Deloren and most of his family were murdered during the Primet Maron War, the last great world war of Thera. Princess Damara fled for her life and that of her unborn child, and vanished without a trace. Ever since then, her elder brother Prince Demetrius had been taken as a prisoner of war to the Ickova Dynasty. In the years following the demise of the Deloren reign, Wade has stood silent waiting for the return of its rightful heirs.

It was a lovely fall day in Wade and the weather was crisp and fragrant with the smells of fall and the smoking chimneys of its inhabitants. The skies were partly cloudy without the slightest chance of rain and it was a perfect season for festival and elf cider. The town center of Wade is very rural with dirt roads and old wooden buildings. Locked in time the shops and cottages of Wade resemble the architecture of Earth's Middle Ages. Most of the shops had their doors and windows open to entice aristocrats to shop and purchase their eclectic wares. The village was alive with the season and music filled the air. Faery and Elfin children played by an ancient stone wishing well in the village center. Commerce flourished and all was at peace for the time being.

Practically every major city in the world is watched over its own Immorti. The Immorti are commonly referred to as the Gods and Goddesses of Thera. They are a small group of people who were ship wrecked over 2,000 years ago on the northern shores of the country Jesma. The fifty-two survivors came upon a pear tree that glistened like gold in the sun. All who ate from the tree obtained an immortal life span. This means that they would age so slow that their lives would appear to go on forever. An Immorti is not fully immortal because they can die or be killed. There are three ways an Immorti can die; to be killed by an their own, age exceeding 100,000 years or more, or if they give up their immortal life-force to

save another. Upon their council they decided to care for Thera and each of them founded the cities they looked after. As of now there are only twenty-six remaining Immorti in existence. One of the greatest Immorti alive today is the Goddess Jupiter of Wade. Jupiter is known for her kindness, intelligence and her constant protection of the sanctity of Wade.

Unlike Vestrin, there are very few stone monuments in Wade. Abandoned for over thirteen years, the castle of Wade known as Caperwhite Castle has lain forgotten behind a thick wall of overgrown thorny bushes. Jupiter's Temple shadows the empty castle in a grand structure of marble and granite. The Temple houses and protects the Goddess, but it is also her eternal prison. Over two hundred years ago, Jupiter was imprisoned in her own Temple by a cruel spell. Her sister Ceres, who was also an Immorti, was distraught by a love feud. In a fit of jealous rage, she placed a curse upon Jupiter, hoping to keep the love for herself and none other. Jupiter was trapped forever underneath a vast crystal dome resembling a gigantic bell jar. Ceres has remained elusive ever since, though there is a rumor that she is secretly providing services to the Dynasty and is hiding out in the country of Wren. Sadly, Jupiter has never been able to leave her crystal prison or lift the curse that keeps her there.

Peaceful as the times had come to be, the inhabitants of Wade have lived under the oppression of the Dynasty. Living out their lives under a commune government, the people of Wade are shadowed by the laws of the Dynasty. Slavery is common for those who live in Wade. From time to time many of them have been bought and sold to the Sovereigntene castes of Thera. The people of Wade are like so many others of the lower castes in that they are servants to the rich, and bound to poverty.

Unlike the Edos (the Edontene caste) who have been routinely sold into slavery, the Mezzos (the Mezzontene caste) have a different plight to endure. Their lives are decided for them based on their lineage and faction. Everything from their marriages to their very occupations is prearranged for them. This is the Dynasty's way of insuring *proper breeding* amongst the commoners and to prevent unlawful and forbidden unions that might jeopardize the Dynasty's prosperity. Resistance to the laws often resulted in permanent imprisonment, or even in some cases... death. Fear has kept the lower castes in line for hundreds of years, but in this bleak era of desperation, *hope* still remains.



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A secret faith held by Edos and Mezzos, has kept them going for many years that some day, the royal heirs of Wade would return to restore freedom to their kind. In the darkest of times, when all seems lost, a secret whisper lifts their weary spirits, “...*the Messenger was coming.*”

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Pamada of Vandimon, a Fae and mother of five, lived in a small hut with her family in the mountains of Wade. She was on her back porch washing a load of laundry in a large wooden tub filled with soapy hot water. Pamada stood up to retrieve rose petal powder for her washing when the wind suddenly changed. Her deep turquoise eyes darted around the scene looking at how the wind brushed up the dead leaves on the ground. Every fiber of her being told her that something was about to happen but she was unsure as to what it could be. Nothing but the wind blew and no true danger seemed eminent. The silence was deafening as she perked her pointed ears up to listen but still nothing came. The only sound she heard was the rustling of leaves from the thick forest around her.

Perhaps my nerves are just being overly sensitive, she thought as she tended to her washing. She brushed back her short curly strawberry blonde locks away from her face as the steam from the tub made them stick to her forehead. Pamada sat back on her stool and began humming to herself as she stirred the laundry. Her fleshy wings painted to resemble the wings of a monarch butterfly flapped gently behind her to the beat of her tune.

Pamada was not a Pixie by any means and she could argue vigorously about the difference. Rather she was just short of five feet tall; pleasantly plump with a fair complexion and rosy cheeks. Pamada is a good natured and nurturing Faery with a positive demeanor. Though she loves her children dearly she thoroughly enjoys a relaxing day casually tending to her home. Today had been a very good day too, because it was the first day in a long while that not one of her children whined, cried, shouted, bickered or fought; it was a rare day indeed. Her children had spent their day helping out their father Aver, in the family apothecary shop *The Dragonfly: Apothecary and Spirits*, down in the village. Surely a little odd wind wasn't going to disturb her quiet afternoon, and she went right on enjoying the silence and her humming. Suddenly, high above the canopy of the forest erupted the

strangest noise she had ever heard.

KA-BOOM! RE-EAAAAA-CHH! ZOOOOM!!!!

It was as though the sky had been torn open and the sound ripped through the air like a speeding arrow. The terrifying boom was so loud and so sudden, that it startled Pamada half out of her wits. In sheer fright she jumped up from her stool and accidentally knocked a large basket of dry linens on to the floor. More concerned about what had made that wretched noise, she ignored the mess and she looked around in every direction, but she saw and heard nothing more. Perhaps her children were racing home and flying too high, or even worse performing reckless stunts above the forest canopy. Surely their flight patterns would not have made that kind of noise. *No*, she thought, *it has to be something else. Are we being attacked? What could it be?*

Slowly she crept to the edge of the porch, looked around, but just as before she saw nothing. Pamada started to attend to the mess of linens, when she heard another strange noise above her. This time the sound was not remotely supernatural. Rather it was a terrifying screams of a girl high above her. It sounded as though somebody was falling from above and hitting every branch on the way down. Pamada's heart leapt with dread that it could be one of her daughters.

Then just as quickly as it had started, the noise stopped and whoever it was had crash-landed on the porch roof. It quickly buckled and broke and a girl that was not any of her daughters fell through the thatch. She landed squarely on the pile of clothes that Pamada had knocked over moments ago. As the debris and dust settled Pamada could see that it was not any of her daughters but a wingless girl. Suddenly something small and heavy hit the ground just beyond the porch. Pamada couldn't see what it was as it tumbled out of sight down the side of the mountain. Pamada looked back at the girl and hovered over her to see if she was alive and okay. She found herself staring back into a pair of dazed silvery eyes of a young girl wearing a bizarre green hat, a strange black cloak and unusual blue pants.

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Moments before, Mercury Brightman had been sitting in her room aboard the Nevermore, examining the mysterious medallion she had found in her mother's journal. When she touched it the room unexpectedly filled with an



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immense blinding spectra of light. Suddenly, a mighty invisible force pulled her inward and spun her like a top as her room disappeared. The next thing Mercury knew she was falling fast towards the canopy of a forest below. Time felt as though it had dilated and swallowed her whole. Poor Mercury had no idea what was happening and she had no idea how to make it stop.

As gravity pulled her faster and faster towards the trees below there was nothing she could do but scream. Mercury screamed and screamed and screamed! She watched as the textbook that had been in her lap spun away from her. As she fell away from it she broke through the top of the trees flailing her arms in panic. She desperately tried to grab on to something but was unsuccessful and managed to hit many small branches all the way down. Fearing that she was about to die and that all was lost, she came to an abrupt stop when she landed on a soft thatch roof. Just when she felt it was safe to open her eyes, the roof beneath her gave way and she fell through it landing face up on a soft, sweet smelling pile of linens.

Debris from the roof fell around her and she shielded her face until it stopped, sputtering and coughing in the dust. As she looked upward at the hole she had made in the trees and the roof above, the light from the sky blinded her. Then suddenly a person's head eclipsed the light. Mercury could just barely make out the face of a middle-aged woman with strawberry blonde curls and rather pointy ears. Mercury's head was spinning and she was beginning to lose consciousness.

Trying to fight the gray clouds that were blurring her vision she lifted her head just a bit to get a better look at the woman. There was something incredibly odd about her that immediately stood out at Mercury's steadily numbing mind. Behind the woman's shoulders was a pair of large fleshy butterfly wings. Mercury smiled vaguely at this and thought that it was a little funny. *Surely my mind is playing tricks on me*, she thought. Shrugging the notion off as a mere trick of the light she giggled dumbly and dropped her head. Struggling against the concussion she had received from striking all of those branches, she barely clung onto her consciousness for a brief moment before passing out for days.