

From Realm to Realm

~ ~

August 15, 2010

“Mongke!”

“Creator, my Lord!”

“Time has come!”

“Well, it is about time!”

“That it is!” A chuckle.

“Where am I going and to whom?”

“The hills of Wales.”

“Josias or Merlin?”

“Neither, but to their hills. The year is 2010.”

A vision appears before Mongke. The green foothills of Wales bathed in late Summer finery.

“Beautiful!” Mongke.

He hears a voice - a woman's voice, Welsh by the lilt in her voice. She is carrying on a monologue about Merlin - combining many of the legends written over the centuries. She appears, toiling up a path, deliberate strides helped by a stout staff. She's wearing good hiking boots, knee-high gartered socks, khaki walking shorts and a long-sleeved shirt, a light day-pack is strapped to her back. He can't see her face for a floppy-brimmed hat pulled down over her head.

“Who is she?”

“Do you remember Gwendydd Trahern?”

“Yes, I do! She looks so young! But the clothing is all wrong for that period!”

“Remember this is the year 2010. This is her Granddaughter, Dillwyn Llewellyn.”

“Dillwyn Llewellyn?”

Time Has Come!

“Are you paying attention, Mongke? I said, this is the year 2010. Dillwyn holds a Doctorate in Archaeology with Minors in Anthropology and Ancient History. She is currently working at a site near Pumsaint.”

“Who is she talking to? I cannot see anyone else.”

“One must assume it is the birds and the rabbits.” Creator, with a sigh.

“Of course, many books have been written based on the legends about him. My favorite is Mary Stewart’s The Crystal Cave. As a young lad, Merlin discovers a cave in these hills where he spends much of his youth learning from a hermit.” She stops to look around and up the hill.

“What if?” She stops to study the hillsides lining the gully below.

“She is passionate about Merlin and has read almost all that has been written about him. When she eventually meets him it will be a pleasure to see her response.” Creator.

“She wrote that the cave was almost invisible to the naked eye. The only identifying object was a small bowl carved out of the cliff with a stone cup sitting beside it, an invitation for the weary traveler to stop and rest a while.”

“Does she remember -”

“Time to go down, Mongke. Observe only! She won’t be able to see you yet.”

Tired and hot, Dillwyn drops down into the grass, her back resting against the rock cliff. She closes her eyes and listens to the trill of a lark, the babble of finches and sparrows and the stream below.

Mongke quietly steps behind the rock above her and leans over it to watch her as she pulls her hat off, runs her fingers through wavy, auburn hair and leans back, turning her face to the sun and the gentle breeze.

“Beautiful!” Breaths Mongke.

“Be careful, Mongke! Remember what your choice was.”

From Realm to Realm

“You mean when I chose to return to the timeless realm after I was healed? I remember.”

“You have faced this many times in the past and the consequences were dire. The temptation will increase. And, there is much danger. You must keep your head about you!”

Mongke doesn’t respond. He’s absorbing the beauty before him.

“Now I understand her coloring! She’s a true Red Welsh by the color of her hair. Strong chin. Still a sweet, good-tempered mouth. The color of her eyes -”

Dillwyn’s eyes fly open and she looks straight at him.

In panic, he steps back, slips and tumbles down the slope, colliding with a tree and landing in a bush.

“What on earth was that?” Dillwyn stands and peers over the rock and gasps, forgetting about whatever it was crashing through the bushes.

Hidden by ferns is a little pool in the top of the rock, a trickle of water dripping into it from above.

“That’s what I heard!” She whispers. *“The dripping of the water. OH! Look! A little cup hewn from rock. Just like Merlin’s - Ah! Could it be? Have I found - could it be?”*

Dillwyn rounds the rock face, searching for the mouth of a cave. All she can see is another cliff, half in deep shade from an overhang.

“Thank goodness I brought my cameras with me.” Mongke hears her thoughts as she pulls out first the still camera, snapping shots of the glade and little meadow cradled between two ridges. She switches to the video camera, returning to the larger valley to record her location.

Mongke watches a little way off from her as she approaches a deeper shadow within the shadow on the cliff on the western edge of the glade.

With the video camera running she approaches the shade, commenting as she does.

Time Has Come!

“There appears to be a cave hidden in the shadow of the cliff.” She says as she steps into the shadowed entrance, the camera light revealing a low-ceilinged cave not much bigger than a normal living room.

As the beam sweeps the cave, she sees a floor swept clean, a ledge deep enough and almost long enough on which a person could possibly sleep.

“*Men were shorter in Merlin’s time.*” Mongke explains to unhearing ears.

The camera light continues to travel around the cave, picking up a ledge beginning about knee high and running up and along the wall until it reaches about chest high, then it flattens out and above it, Dillwyn sees another opening.

“A second cave!” She cries aloud, stopping the video to take stills of the opening. She returns to videotaping as she approaches the mouth of the smaller cave, light sparkling from within.

“*She has found it!*” Mongke.

“Something in the cave is picking up light, but what the source is, I cannot see.” She steps to the ledge, leaning her elbows on it and turns the camera into the opening. Brilliant light flashes, cascading in a million, dazzling colors, bleaching out the camera and blinding her. She almost drops the camera as she squeezes her eyes shut and steps back, losing her footing.

Mongke is close enough he steps behind her, stopping her fall. Thinking she’s leaning against the wall, she rests against Mongke with her eyes closed.

“What on earth’s in there? I’m not sure if it damaged the video camera.” She runs the tape back and sees no damage to the existing recording. She steps away from the ‘wall’ she’s been leaning on - much to Mongke’s relief - switches the camera back on, running it for a few seconds, then checking to make sure it was recording as it should.

“So how do I find out what’s in there?”

From Realm to Realm

“*Merlin would walk up the ledge and crawl in.*” Mongke explains. “*I wish you could hear me! You would be thrilled with what you have found if only you knew!*”

Dillwyn pulls out her cell phone and turns its light to the main cave.

“I remember a ledge - yes! There it is.” She crawls up it, stopping close to the mouth of the cave her side facing into the mouth of the little cave. She switches off the light and waits for her eyes to adjust to the ambient light of the phone’s face. Carefully, she turns the phone’s ambient light toward the cave mouth. Once she’s sure she won’t be blinded again, she turns the video camera on to night vision, noting that it shows the time and date, then, on her belly, squeezes into the opening of the little cave.

“*Be careful!*” Mongke attempts to catch her arms. “*Bother! Forgot I cannot go through rock!*”

She wiggles her way into the opening, holding the camera in front of her. Her little finger connects with the sharp edge of a crystal, the camera giggles.

“Ouch!” She steadies the camera, examining the night vision display. “Of course! The crystals! I know better than to put my hand in anything without looking first!”

“I’m in the mouth of the smaller cave. It looks like the inside of a geode.” She focuses the camera on a dark spot in the center of the cave.

“That must be solid rock.” She moves the camera back and forth watching the shadows shimmy across the crystals. “It’s too uniform. Can’t be rock. Looks like a rectangle, like a box, or something. I’ve got to get a better look at it.”

“*Close your eyes, turn the camera to daylight and aim it for the center of the object.*” Mongke. After a moment. “*What is the use, you cannot hear me!*”

Dillwyn withdraws the camera, fiddles with it and the lights come on. She closes her eyes and turns the camera into the cave, centering it on the dark object and holds.

Time Has Come!

Gingerly opening her eyes, Dillwyn stares at the Camera's back screen, zooming in closer to the object.

"It appears to be an old, rusty, iron chest, fastened with what must have been leather straps, decayed with age.

Dillwyn turns the camera off and picks up her cell phone with just its ambient face light on. She takes several pictures with her still camera, sans the flash. With her eyes closed, she takes several more using the flash - at least as far as she could reach in either direction, her arms often coming in contact with the crystals.

Before squirming out of the cave mouth, she studies the crystals on the floor and the placement of the box.

"How long have you been hiding in this crystal cave?" She muses. "And how on earth did they get you in the center?"

She wriggles out and retraces her steps to the open hillside, climbing higher in search of a cell signal and sends the best of the pictures to Gareth, one of her teammates. In less than a minute her phone rings.

"What's this? Where are you?"

"I'm on a hill above the Cothi."

He snorts. "Which bloody hill!"

"I followed the Cothi upstream until I found a small tributary heading east - the second one I think."

"You think -"

"Tiny stream. Covered by brambles in an oak copse. Turn your tracker on."

"Right. . . Us'll start now." In his excitement, he drops back into his boyhood slang.

"Oh! - Gengi!" Dillwyn cries, "bring the truck up the road as far as you can and bring your climbing gear and some padding."

"Why?"

"It's in a geode."

"A geode? Bloody hell! Why -"

From Realm to Realm

"Stop whining and get your butt up here!"

Dillwyn makes her way back to the little basin and uses the stone cup. She sinks to the ground in the lee of the rock to absorb the sunshine and sounds around her.

Mongke leans beside the little basin and studies her. She glances his way, looking him right in the face. He freezes, then remembers she can't see him and looks into the greenest eyes he'd ever seen. He sinks down on the grass nearby.

A slight frown crosses Dillwyn's face. She glances round a little nervously.

"*You can sense my presence, can you not?*" marvels Mongke. "*Do not be afraid of me. I am here to help and to protect you.*"

She sighs and rests her head back against the stone, dozing in the warm sun.

Mongke hears it first, then Dillwyn raises her head to listen, too. Sounds of someone coming quickly up the slope.

"Jeez, Gengi, could ya make any more noise?"

"Wyn! You're hurt!" He cries as soon as he sees her. Rushing the last few steps, he drops his gear and squats in front of her.

"Where's this blood coming from? These cuts. Your hands -" he grabs her wrists, pulling her hands closer for a better look.

"Gengi, I'm fine! Just little scrapes, that's all! Honestly!"

"*They need attention, man! Do not ignore them!*" Mongke.

"There's a lot of blood for just scrapes, Wyn." He grabs his rucksack, pulling out his first aid kit, and sits beside her. He removes the plasters she'd haphazardly put on her fingers, cleans the cuts and re-tapes them.

"Thirsty?" She asks.

"Could do with a drink. How about you?" He reaches for his canteen, but Dillwyn points up with a bandaged finger.

"On the top of that rock is a little pool. Fresh spring water."

He stands and parts the ferns. His gasp is audible. A moment later

Time Has Come!

he hands her the little carved cup. She empties it and hands it back. He sits with it filled again and drinks it slowly.

“Just what have you found, Wyn, love?” He whispers.

“A Crystal Cave,” Dillwyn whispers back. He’s still for a moment, then raises questioning eyes to hers.

“Merlin’s a myth, lassie.”

“I know, Gengi.” She turns away with a sigh. “But it was just so very - I was thinking about Lady Mary Stewart’s book and her description of the crystal cave, thinking about the little stream, the bowl hewn in the rock. . . And there it was, the little cup and all! And then. . . Then the cave.” She looks up into his eyes, pleading for understanding in her own.

He squeezes her hand.

“Well then, Wyn, let’s take a look, shall we?”

Dillwyn picks up a flashlight and starts for the cave. Gareth grabs his video camera and begins to film as he follows her. Mongke follows them. Dillwyn heads straight to the ledge.

“In here, Gengi. But don’t-”

“Bloody hell!” He mutters almost dropping the camera. “Ya’ coudda warned us!”

She pats his shoulder. “When you can see again...”

After a moment or two he grunts and raises the camera.

“Wait! Turn off your lights.”

“It’s dark!”

“Not in the geode. Rest your cell phone facing into the cave. That should be enough light.”

He complies. Resting his elbows on the ledge he gingerly turns the camera into the mouth of the cave and peers through the lens.

“Dear God in Heaven!” He breaths as he pans the cave, eventually stopping with it focused in the center on the box.

“How the hell’d they get that in there?” He whispers.

From Realm to Realm

“My question, too!”

“How you plan to get it out?” He hasn’t moved.

“The padding I asked you to bring. Lay it over the floor crystals and I’ll crawl in and put the rope around it. Then we’ll pull it out.”

Gareth switches off the camera and straightens, shaking his head as he points to her arms.

“They’ll cut the padding to shreds before you get halfway to the box. They must’ve shoved it in with a pole or stick or something.”

“My staff? Or yours?”

“Mine has a crook on it.” She scurries off and returns with the staff, the rope and his rucksack. He’s leaning on the ledge again and reaches back for the staff without turning.

“*You two have worked together for a long time.*” Mongke muses. “*I think I am jealous!*”

Using the staff, Gareth attempts to hook a corner of the iron box. But the trunk slithers one way, then the other and disengages.

Dillwyn makes a large noose in the rope and hands it to him. “See if you can drop this over the trunk with the hook.”

His grunt is half frustration and half appreciation. Several tries later he manages to drop the loop over the trunk and jimmy it into place, pulling it tight. And a few minutes later they stagger out of the cave and gently set the iron trunk down.

“Heavy bugger!” Gasps Gareth as he sinks to his knees beside it. Dillwyn flops on the grass, too out of breath to speak.

“Where’s my camera?” He asks, eventually.

“In the cave. Rucksack, too.”

Gareth retrieves it.

“Losing the light. Need to get this recorded before.”

Dillwyn kneels by the trunk as the video begins to roll. She repeats the date, general location and time, then records the measurements and its condition, pointing out the remains of the leather straps.

Time Has Come!

“By its design and construction, and the leather straps that once held it shut, I believe this was a Roman trunk. There are some markings on the top of the trunk, which, with careful cleaning may substantiate that. The rust that ate through the hinges has, unfortunately sealed the sides and lid. We will not be able to get into it until we have it in a clean, secure environment.” She sighs. “We can’t do any more now.”

Gareth switches off the camera as he glances up at the sky.

“Better head back to camp, Wyn. Storm’s coming in and it’ll take a good hour.”

“The trunks awfully heavy, Gengi. It’s all we could do to get it out of the cave.”

He shakes his head. “We can’t manage it. We’ll put it back in the cave to keep it dry and I’ll stay here with it and you can bring a crew up in the morning.”

“How about if we made a sling, hung it from your staff and carried it on our shoulders?” Dillwyn, hopefully. Gareth shakes his head again.

“I’m a good eight inches taller than you. The load would be on you.”

“I could put your rucksack on my shoulder?”

“That’s not going to work, lassie!” Gareth on a sigh.

“OK, then how about if I stay here the night and you bring a couple others back with you in the morning.”

“Don’t like that. I’ll stay.” Gareth.

Dillwyn glances at the darkening sky, then down toward the river. Already the woods look dark and menacing. She suppresses a shiver.

“*You are afraid of the dark!*” Mongke is surprised. “*You seemed to have no fear in the cave. Why the forest?*”

“Lassie, how ‘bout we both stay up here? I’m that tuckered out...” She studies his face.

“Did you guess?” But his face is gray with fatigue, the lines etched deeper than normal.

“It’ll get cold up here tonight. Did you, by chance, bring a sweater or maybe a blanket in that rucksack?”

From Realm to Realm

He grins, his tired face brightening as he snatches it and tips it with a shake. Out fall several prepackaged meals, some warm clothing and more than a few space blankets along with several other objects of necessity.

“All the comforts of home, Gengi!” Dillwyn laughs.

~ ~

They’d had a meal and tidied the little cave and are now stretched out on and under space blankets, one on either side of a cheery little fire. They chat about the find and what secrets they might discover inside. Gareth is silent for a while and Dillwyn is beginning to doze off when he speaks softly.

“Wyn, you ‘wake still?”

“Umph.”

“I’ve been thinking.”

“Danger!”

“No,” he chuckles. “This find - the trunk and whatever it might hold. It’s your find.”

“Yeah,” she sits up.

“It isn’t part of the dig. If we don’t take it down to the site, it doesn’t have to be reported as part of the find of the dig.”

“What difference does that make?”

“Well, I was thinking, you should get credit for the find.”

“And I won’t if I turn it in to the site?”

“Well,” he hesitated. “It’s Fitzwilliam.”

“He’s the benefactor of our dig!”

“You know how he loves the limelight. He’ll register the find and take the credit.”

“*What is this about registering the find?*” Mongke.

“You think he won’t give me the credit for the find?”

“You’ll get nary a word, an afterthought, a jot or a tittle.”

Time Has Come!

“Who is this fellow? What has he got to do with it?” Mongke.

“But, like I said, this has nothing to do with his dig. This could be a huge feather in your cap. Step you way up the ladder in our world.”

“Right! Gengi you are so right!” Mongke.

“So, you think we should force open the trunk before we go back? We might damage the trunk, then have to risk carrying it open. No, I think it’s better we do things the right way.”

“No! No! He is right. Do not let this toad get the find!”

“As you wish.” He sighs and closes his eyes.

“This can’t be! Creator! She can’t just give up her find like this! What can I do to stop her?”

“Talk to her as she sleeps. Work out an alternative.”

“What would an alternative be?”

“You have about seven hours before they wake. Find out!”

Dillwyn chuckles. “He is a toad, isn’t he?”

“Why because his manor house is called Neuadd llyffantod?”

“Toad Hall!” She laughs. “But then your place -”

“Castell Harddwch, Digonedd o Ddŵrr -”

“Beautiful Castle, near Plenty of Water.”

“At least it’s dignified!”



The next morning, Monday, before they’d started off for the dig, Gareth had called ahead and asked to have the word spread that Dillwyn had made a find and for the workers to meet them as they entered camp and that they were to watch for the truck and film its arrival at the dig.

With cameras rolling, Gareth stops the truck just outside the boundary line of the dig, and together he and Dillwyn carry the trunk into camp.

Mongke watches as they are met with cheers and a babble of questions.

From Realm to Realm

“What’ve you found?” Chorus.

“An ancient trunk!” Dillwyn.

“It sure does look ancient!”

“It’s all rusty!”

“Where’d you find it?”

“In a cave up in the hills.” Dillwyn

“Dr. Llewellyn found it yesterday afternoon and called me. By the time I got up there and we were able to get it out of the cave, that storm came up and we took shelter for the night.”

“What’s inside it?”

“We don’t know yet as it needs to be opened in a sterile environment.” Replies Dillwyn. “The rust has sealed it tight. We will be taking it to the Welsh Archaeological Society to register it and decide where and how best to open it.”

“But we both need hot showers and something to eat before we attempt that!” Gareth.



River Cothi Valley, Wales, UK

~ ~

September 9th ***Pumsaint Archaeological Excavation***

Work continues at its grindingly slow pace. The excavation is deep enough that the constant soft breezes through the Cothi River Valley pass right over the workers, and the hot sun beats down mercilessly, belying the idea that Wales is a cold and damp country.

With a groan Dillwyn rises from the cramped position in which she's been for far too long. One hand in the small of her back and the other holding her wayward hat on her head, she leans back and looks up at the azure sky, breathing deeply of the bracken-rich air.

"Cuppa'll put you right, love!" A hot mug waves before her face and the wonderful aroma of tea with milk and sugar fills her senses. She lets go of the hat and grabs the mug before it can pass her by.

"Ta! Umm. . ."

"Going's slow." Gareth stops close beside her near the edge of her trench, shoulders slumped, free hand in pocket, hat pulled down to his bushy white eyebrows, glasses on the tip of his nose fogging up from the mug just below them.

"Don't suppose we could hope for a find like that iron box in the dig itself." Dillwyn, morosely.

"That find was a once-in-a-lifetime thing!" He shrugs. "But you've done well at this dig with artifacts. Definitely was a villa belonging to nobility. Any word yet from the translators?"

Dillwyn shakes her head, not noticing the abrupt change in subject as that's where her mind is as well.

"Too soon, Gareth." She glances up at him with a grin. "Eatin' atcha, is it, Gengi?"

Pumsaint Dig

He snorts, glances side-long at her, and slouches over to his trench.

Not to put too fine a point on it, Dillwyn is just as curious as he is. With a sigh she returns to her own little patch of discovery.

~ ~

It is almost quitting time when the rumble of a large engine approaching brings Dillwyn upright and peering over the lip of the dig.

"A UPS truck!" She whistles to Gareth and points as she runs for the ladder out of the trench. Gareth catches up with her as the truck trundles to a stop. The door slides open and the driver waves a large envelop at them, grinning from ear to ear.

"Got here as quick as I could!" He yells, jumping over the steps and landing in loose dirt, his feet skidding as he hurtles toward Dillwyn.

Gareth grabs his arm as she, not realizing the imminent danger, snatches the envelop and heads for the canteen tent. Vaguely she hears the two men's exchange:

"Easy fella!" Gareth

"Thanks mate! Thought us was gunna take her out!"

A crowd surges through the open flaps behind Dillwyn. Mongke included, excited chatter filling the tent. She doesn't wait to get to the big desk, but rips open the envelop and, unfolding the papers quickly scans the first few lines.

A held-breath silence makes her glance up and grin at the excited faces. Mischievous gets the better of her as she begins to read slowly:

"It's the translation of some of the journals from our find. The journal. . . it would appear. . . was written by. . . a" startled, she looks closer, teasing forgotten. "A physician!"

Mongke peers over her shoulder. "Yes, he was a physician -"

"A physician? I didn't know they -" Gareth.

Time Has Come!

“No. Sorry. He was a Patrician, adopted by Titus Vespasianus Augustus - Wasn't he -”

“Emperor Titus!” Gareth.

“Yes!” Mongke.

“That's right!” Cries a History Major summer volunteer. “Titus' reign was short, 97 to 81 AD or CE if you prefer.”

Impatient, Gareth grabs the papers from Dillwyn.

“His given name is Josias Basilikos Titus Vespasianus.” The dinner gong sounds.

“Aw! Don't stop!” Several agree with the cry.

But Gareth closes the report. “Go get washed up for supper. Can't keep Cook waiting, can we? We'll get back to this after we've eaten!” He hands the report to Dillwyn. “You, too, Wyn!!”

~ ~

The crowd reassembles around Dillwyn's desk, swollen with the spreading news. They whisper together speculatively. Gareth calls for silence, then begins reading aloud. The crowd is transported to another time - visualizing the Powerful Roman Empire, an Empire that had reached its zenith, and was beginning to wane.

August 24th of the 79th year of our Lord.

At about an hour after midday, Mount Somma erupted.

We were staying in the villa of Pliny the Elder, close to his naval station at Misenum, near Neapolis on the Gulf of Naples.

Pliny the Elder's sister and mother of the Younger, came to find the Elder. With undue excitement, she demanded that Pliny go with her to see an “amazing cloud” in the sky.

Upon seeing the cloud – very dark and spitting fire, Pliny was determined to explore, ordering several ships and a cutter to prepare for sail. At the same time, a message came from a friend of his begging him to rescue her in her villa outside of Herculaneum on the western slope of the mountain, for all land

Pumsaint Dig

routes were cut off.

However, we were not able to reach Herculaneum due to the fall out of the volcano. Not only burning cinders and ash, but also massive flaming missiles falling into the water. We lost one ship and after rescuing those we could, we continued south to Stabiae where we found Pomponianus who took us to his villa. Alas, Stabiae was not to survive the volcano, and neither were Pomponianus or Pliny the Elder.

Those of us who did survive, found a ship relatively seaworthy and attempted to leave the harbor. But the wind, blowing into the volcano from the ocean made it impossible to get away. Our ship was caught finally in a southerly current and we were swept away to the south. Once in the lee of the southern arm of the Gulf, we were able to take advantage of the wind, tacking back and forth until we arrived at the naval harbor in Misenum.

- Josias Basilikos Titus Vespasianus.

“So, he was a Roman.” Dillwyn “Josias. His mother must have been Jewish.”

Gareth begins reading a second transcript, but Dillwyn's mind wanders until Gareth lays down the final page.

“Gareth, I missed that last part.” Dillwyn reaches for the papers.

“It was the best part!” He stops to look back at her. “Early start tomorrow. Don't stay up reading too late, love.”

She nods absently, waving him off as she settles to read.

Mongke has been relaxing in a chair opposite, listening, and now enjoys watching her as she begins to read:

August 24 of the 79th year of our Lord.

I have written of the eruption of Mount Vesuvius in my report to Rome. As for us, it was a subdued homecoming when we all met back at Pliny's villa, thankfully greeting each other with hugs and

Time Has Come!

whispered blessing. Pliny the Younger took the news of his Uncle's death hard, as did his mother. When it was safe to return, we brought Pliny's body back for the proper internment ceremony.

Emperor Titus wasted no time appointing another Fleet Commander to the Misenatium Fleet. A man of the Equestrian Class as was Pliny the Elder. Captain Flaccus was furious that he had been passed over and did not bother to hide it. Needless to say, the new Commander had him transferred within days of his arrival.

Titus also quickly re-assigned Pliny the Younger. He and his mother packed up all of the Elder's belongings with their own, sold the villa to the new Commander and left Misenum. We saw them off with a rousing party and promises we would all meet again one day.

As for the seven of us?

We continue to help attend the survivors of the eruption. I could happily use ten more men with my skills to help with the injured. Haziël works with me, and Wajih stays close, wide-eyed and curious, asking questions constantly.

Jonathan, Eldad and the Cousins are working with the Roman soldiers and local men to salvage what they can, bury the dead and rebuild shelters and homes. Over the evening meals, exhausted as we are, we discuss our plans. Tempers flare, arguments ensue, options rehashed, ad nauseam.

Before the eruption, the cousins had expressed a desire to settle in the Campania region north of Mount Soma. They still express interest, but perhaps further away – close under the mountains to the far north of the valley.

Jonathan and Eldad wish to return to Dan where we left Jonathan's mother and sister, and I must confess I would like to go with them.

Haziël and Wajih will go wherever I go.

In the days just before he was killed, I promised Grandfather

Pumsaint Dig

I would settle the family near the Cotton Castle – Pamukkale, in Greece. I will do this. I do not know what the others will decide, but I promised Grandfather, and I must keep that promise. My preference is the beautiful Meander River Valley just west of Pamukkale.

As for Mongke, we have not seen him for some time. I hope to meet him again someday, but God only knows when and where.

*- Josias, Grandson of Basilikos,
Family of Balthazar, Clan of Madjid.*

Dillwyn lays the final sheet down.

“Is this the same writer? It's less formal, but it could be,” she muses. “Who are these people he mentions. The names are Jewish, Greek and possibly Persian, except that one, Wajih. And what of this Mongke fellow? He's only mentioned at the very end. Wonder who he was?” She glances at the clock. “Tomorrow is already here!”

“You are inquisitive as well as intelligent, and I think quite brave. You are certainly a worthy one to take up this mantle!” Mongke. “You have no idea how involved you are going to get both now and in the past!”

~ ~

September 23rd

Dillwyn is alone in the canteen, nursing a cup of coffee. The short summer season is nearly over and they'd begun to pack the gear and secure the site for winter. The word had leaked out about their findings and the curiosity seekers and thieves had been crowding the site. So bad that they had to employ extra security guards.

She hadn't slept well. Strange dreams kept waking her, and that morning she felt a foreboding - a dark shadow hovering just over the horizon. And a migraine was developing.

Gareth enters the tent, hand holding the flap open.

Time Has Come!

“You comin’ to work today?”

“*Bad news coming, Dillwyn. Brace up girl!*” Mongke stands beside her chair longing to comfort her.

“Migraine.” Dillwyn mutters as she slips a pair of dark glasses on. Her phone rings.

“Hello?”

“Dillwyn Llewellyn?”

“Ye-yes,” Dillwyn stammers. “*No one uses my full first name. American accent, too.*”

“Ms. Llewellyn, this is Nurse Baker, your mother’s nurse?”

“What’s wrong?” Dillwyn jerks to attention.

Mongke steps out of the tent and grabs Gareth’s arm hard enough that he feels it and stops.

“Ms. Llewellyn, I’m sorry to have to tell you, but. . .but your mother. Well, she’s had a stroke.” The last on a rush of breath.

Dillwyn drops the phone. Gareth hears the clatter and runs back into the tent picking up the phone and squatting beside her.

“What gives?”

“Mum,” tears well in her eyes.

“Hello?” Gareth responds to the voice quavering on the phone.

“What’s happened? . . . No. Colleague. . . How bad? . . . Right. . . Us’ll have her on the next plane.” He ends the call.

“Sarah!” He bellows as he taps in a number on the phone.

“Yeah, Gengi? S’up?”

“Pack a bag for Wyn, please. Put out a clean set of clothes for her to travel in.” He turns as his call is picked up. “And hurry!”

“*Time has come, Mongke! You will be a fellow passenger. No more for now. Remember who you are and the decision you once made. You are held to that decision, remember that!*”

~ ~

Second Alarm!

~ ~

Late evening of November 5th

“It’s Wyn.” Dillwyn.

“That’s what my phone tells me! Where are you?”

“Miseno, in an adorable little hotel overlooking the Gulf. I’m enjoying the local vino on my own tiny balcony. Life is bliss!” She sips noisily at her wine making Gareth chuckle. “Where are you?”

“Cairo.” The disgust in his voice makes her laugh. “Actually, Monk’s secretary has put me up in a rather posh hotel! I had to dress for dinner!”

“How delightful. Mmmm.”

“What?”

“Just picturing you in an evening tux.” Sigh. “Not working too well. Keep seeing the Pyramids behind you and you with a pith helmet on!”

“Auch! I do clean up quite well, you know!”

“I know! You are one of the handsomest men I know.”

“Only one?”

“Sorry. You’ve been usurped by our dear Mr. Monk. Have you noticed how blue his eyes are?”

“Oh, lord! I’m hanging up!”

“Good night love!” She hangs up, pours more wine and settles comfortably into the deck chair.

“*I thought Mount Vesuvius would be much bigger. Looming and brooding over the Gulf. I think it would be easy to forget there’s a live volcano so close by.*”

“*I must confess, though*” she muses. “*I’ve always been interested in Mount Vesuvius, almost as much as the Merlin and King Arthur stories, the difference being that you,*” she nods toward the distant mountain. “*Mount Vesuvius were- and are - very real.*”

“*Everyone’s heard of Pompeii and those who were interred in*”

Time Has Come!

the ashes of your eruption of 79. But you don't read much about Stabiae and Herculaneum, both mentioned in the reports we discovered as also being destroyed. I'm eager to start exploring.

~ ~

And next day that's just what she does, exploring the inner harbor where, tucked between shipyards and dry-docks, shops and cafes abound, along with historical markers and ruins of days and centuries gone by.

That evening, having planned to take the first bus of the day around the Gulf to what was once the city of Herculaneum, Dillwyn goes in search of an early supper.

As she is discussing her plans with the proprietor, practicing her terrible Italian, and making him laugh, the conversation turns to the Roman fleet that was bivouacked in the ancient city of Misenum, now Miseno. And of a giant cistern dug out of the cliff-side close by.

"How did I miss that?" Astonished.

"Perhaps your Italian is not too good," followed by that beautiful Latin shrug and a grin. He beckons her to follow him and leads her into his office, offering her a chair. He rummages in a closet for a bit, then with a grunt of satisfaction, comes out with a short cardboard tube. He puts on white gloves before popping off the top. Gingerly he withdraws an ancient parchment and unrolls it on his desk. He hands her a pair of gloves. As she puts them on, she is already studying the map. There is an inscription.

"Latin! What does it say?" Frustration.

"A faithful copy numbered 1,110 of the map of the Gulf of Neapolis as drawn by one called Basil Josias Basilikos Madjid Titus Vespasianus. Original drawing dated Spring of the Year of Our Lord 80." The proprietor quotes from memory.

"The map!" Dillwyn sinks into the chair, staring at the map. "Why have you hidden this away like this?!" It comes out more accusingly than she intends.

Second Alarm!

"It is only for a few to know these things."

"So why are you showing it to me?"

"You are one."

"Why?" He points to her hand clasping Ruby.

"You know of this?"

"I saw it earlier as we talked. You are the one for whom we have been waiting."

"I don't understand." He taps the wording on the map.

"It's in Latin! I can't read it!"

"You have a laptop with you? Good. I could tell you what it says, but it's better if you can use a translator to work it out." He studies her as she studies the map.

"But I must warn you, clear your browsing history when you are done. Also turn off your Internet connection when you are not using it. And keep the map and the laptop with you at all times." He carefully rolls up the map and replaces it in the tube.

As he goes to the door, he hesitates with his hand on the knob.

"We have waited a very long time for you." He pulls the door open for her. She starts to speak, but he interrupts her.

"Good night Doctor."

~ ~

Once in her room, she steps out onto the balcony and leans against the railing, looking over the dark water to the shadowy mound of Mount Vesuvius.

"What's this all about? Why the secrecy?"

"*Danger.*"

"What? Where!" She glances up and down the street. Although it is almost ten the street is busy. Music and lights pour out of clubs, bars and restaurants along with people. A man leans against a wall opposite, one foot raised and resting against the wall behind him. Lazily, he glances around - and up. Dillwyn steps back into the shadow of the room - she hadn't turned the light on when she entered. Now she begins to feel anxious.

Time Has Come!

“Later.”

“Later? Later what? Ruby, what -?”

“Hush!”

Dillwyn turns back to the room, shutting the doors and closing the curtains tightly over them. Turning the lights on, she pulls her laptop out of its case and, with the gloves on, spreads the map beside it.

Dawn finds her bleary-eyed but content with all she has translated. She starts to close the laptop.

“Clear!”

“What? Oh, yes. I’m a little spooked by all this.” She clears her browsing history and turns off the Internet connection as instructed and falls on her bed, instantly dropping into sleep.

~ ~

November 8th

It’s midday, the sky clear, a gentle sea breeze nipping at Dillwyn’s nose. She is on the hunt, curiosity having gotten the best of her. Her target the giant cistern the Proprietor had mentioned. She had looked it up on the Internet. It was called “Piscina Mirabilis,” which translated as Wondrous Pool:

A massive cistern constructed by Augustine in the last century B.C. or very early in the first century A.D. It had been carved out of the cliff facing the Gulf and stood 49 feet deep, 82 feet wide and 236 feet long.

(That’s two-thirds as long as an American football field and half as wide!)

It’s roof had the precursor to skylights between the rows of 48 pillars, and in its heyday, it could store up to 445,000 cubic feet of fresh water channeled to it by aqueducts from rivers to the north. Its intended use was to provide fresh drinking water for the Roman Western Imperial Fleet stationed in Misenum - the one that Josias had mentioned in the scrolls they’d found.

Later it also served the large villas and a town that grew

Second Alarm!

around the fleet’s headquarters.

It’s now empty - and privately owned. But with special permission - which she had gotten by calling first - one can clamber down what’s left of the steps and wander through the *shadows striped with brilliant sunshine to their heart’s content.*

Dillwyn had packed the map, laptop and journals from the attic trunk in a satchel, thinking it a good idea to keep them all together, and in case she needed them. She also had tucked in the ample lunch the proprietor had insisted she take with her.

Once in the gate, she is faced with the long set of uneven steps, but at the bottom is well rewarded. She stops in amazement and reverence.

“A Cathedral of Light!” She whispers as disturbed dust motes dance in brilliant diagonals of sunshine that splash across and between the pillars making a wild mosaic of sunshine and shadow through which the dust motes played hide-and-seek. She follows them, moving deeper into the cistern, lost in awe.

Suddenly Ruby vibrates against her chest. At the same instant she hears stealthy footsteps, no more than a whisper of soft leather against stone.

“Surely just another admirer!”

But then she remembers the implied danger of having that map in her possession. And the chatter Monk had reported as they were leaving Heathrow. Her blood runs cold.

“I’ve laughed at people using that expression before, but now I understand it. I’m cold from the inside out.”

She melts into the shadow behind a pillar, then slides toward the next pillar in the overhang’s shadow.

“If I can just get to that deeper shadow near the wall.”

She waits, holding her breath to hear better. Hearing nothing more, she gathers her courage on the intake of a breath and lifts her foot to take the first step.

A hand clamps over her mouth. She’s pulled roughly back

Time Has Come!

against a very hard chest. Without hesitation, she bites a finger and scratches the hand with polish-hardened nails before the hand is yanked away on a hiss of indrawn breath.

“*Stop!*” Ignoring the command, she stomps on his instep and shoves her butt hard against him. With satisfaction, she hears him curse under his breath, but whimpers as he tightens his arm around her.

“Wyn!” He hisses. “Stop fighting me!”

She freezes. Then breaths his name through his fingers.

“Monk?”

“Yes!”

“Why -”

“Hush!” His words are a breath on her neck, raising goose bumps. “*Can you hear me?*” She nods. “*Sorry I frightened you. I am letting go now, all right?*”

She nods. He turns her to face him, then points to her shoes. She slips them off. He points to the back wall of the cistern. They begin to move.

“I thought it was you -” He spins around, clapping his hand over her mouth as the sound of leather against stone is heard again. Dillwyn turns to stone. He points over her shoulder to the wall at right angles to them and leans close to whisper in her ear again.

“*Do as I do.*” She nods.

He side-steps along the wall, being careful not to brush against it. One foot forward, toes touching first, then heel. Bring the other beside it and pause. Repeat. She watches his feet and moves with him, stopping to listen as he does. They bypass an old set of stairs and continue on down the far long wall - at a snail’s pace - Dillwyn stifles a giggle. Mongke glances back at her. She shakes her head and points forward. They turn the last corner and work along a short side wall. The steps to freedom are right in front of them. Mongke glances at Dillwyn again, then reaches a hand back and squeezes hers.

Second Alarm!

A spurt of dust just beside Mongke’s head, the ping of a ricocheting bullet and the thunder of a shot fired - deafening in the confined space.

“RUN!” Mongke hisses as he pulls her by the hand he still holds, propelling her almost faster than she can move. They race through sunlight and shadow, bent low, making it to the steps. He swings her around the corner and pushes her up the steps. She looks up at the dim light of the fifty-foot stairwell.

“Move!” She starts up the steps as fast as she can. Another shot rings out and a bullet pings off the wall just above them. Dillwyn careens up the remaining steps as Mongke yells for the caretaker, speaking in rapid Italian. She unlocks the gate, throwing it wide as they dash through. Dillwyn hears the gate clang shut and the shrill voice of the caretaker.

Mongke wraps an arm around Dillwyn, lifting her off her feet, slips his other arm under her knees and almost tosses her into the passenger seat of a convertible before vaulting into the driver’s seat. The car roars to life, leaping forward like a racehorse out of its gate. It gathers speed as they race along Via Piscina Mirabile. Before she can get her seatbelt on, he pushes her into the foot well. The car drifts around corner after corner and slews around other cars, their angry horns blaring.

“Get back in your seat now and buckle up!”

He buckles his own seatbelt one-handed. She buckles hers, then looks at him, as he expertly spins the wheel and slips between two on-coming cars into a side street. He spins the wheel to the right and they drift around another corner. To the left around another, a slight pause to let an on-coming car pass, pulling in behind it, missing it by a whisker.

He glances her way, a grin spreading across his face, his eyes dancing.

“You’re having way too much fun!” Dillwyn growls. Mongke throws his head back and laughs, shifts gears and speeds up,

Time Has Come!

continuing to weave expertly through traffic, the grin still on his face as horns blare angrily in their wake.

The traffic thins and distances between houses lengthen.

The sun drops to the edge of the western sky - to their left - the sea is not visible.

“Where are we?” Startled out of her reverie and suddenly very frightened, she straightens in her seat, looking around for something familiar.

“I thought it might be wise to get out of town,” he says, the laughter gone from his voice. She turns to him. His jaw is clenched, his sensuous lips lost in a grim line.

“Why are we headed North? Who were they? How did you know where I was?”

He glances at her, at the rear view mirror, back at the road, slows and turns into a narrow side road, coasts between a couple trees, and stops, turning the motor off.

“Why have we stopped?” Panic edges her voice.

He turns in his seat, hooking one foot under the other leg, and leans back against the door. Dillwyn backs into the corner of her own seat.

“And who are you anyway?” Tears well. She turns away, swiping at them. “Why were they shooting? What’s going on?!”

He reaches into the back seat, rummages for a moment, and brings back a thermos and a cup. The smell of hot sweet tea reaches her. She turns to see him holding out the steaming cup.

She takes it, sipping thankfully at the hot liquid. He fills the cap of the thermos for himself.

He finishes his tea first, recaps the thermos, then takes her cup, stowing them back where they had been. He turns to study her.

“A little better now?” He asks, gently. She nods. They sit in silence as the sun disappears and the night pulls in around them. What little traffic there is swishes by, their lights sweeping over the car and gone.

Second Alarm!

“I had hoped things would not have progressed so quickly,” he begins. “I should have stayed with you, but...” He sighs, starts the car, and pulls out into traffic again.

“You know my given name is Mongke, son of Raamsal, of the family of Euphraino, clan of Xanthos.” He pauses to negotiate traffic. “Xanthos was murdered and Euphraino kidnapped. Raamsal was cursed by a priest who practiced the Black Arts. Basil, given name Basilikos, son of Balthazar of the clan of Madjid, Grandfather of Josias of whom you have read, saved my life, and broke the curse on my father, Raamsal - five hundred years after I was gored by a bull. I became what humans might call immortal.” He drives in silence for several minutes, giving her time to absorb what he’d just said, and him time to negotiate several turns onto different roads.

The moon rises ahead of them.

“Now we’re heading east!”

“Yes.”

“Why?”

A pause.

“We have picked up a tail again.”

“WHAT?” Dillwyn whips round to peer behind them and sees headlights about a hundred yards back. “How do you know they’re following us?”

“I have taken six turns in no specific order and they have kept with us.”

“Again?”

“Uh-huh. You buckled in?” She turns, checking the seat belt.

“Yes!”

“Hang on!”

The engine roars, the car settles for a second then leaps forward racing through the night. Dillwyn squeals, the adrenaline pounding in her ears. The car lurches sideways and begins to skid.

“You’ve lost control!”

But he spins the wheel the other way and they are going back the

Time Has Come!

way they'd just come. They flash by the following car. Dillwyn looks, but sees only the outline of four figures - and a flash of something metallic pointing out the window.

"Four - Gun!" Dillwyn.

"Down!" He spins the wheel the other direction and they are suddenly on another, smaller road.

Dillwyn dares to look at the speedometer. It reads over 128.

"Too fast!" She cries.

"Kilometers!"

"What?"

"Odometer. Kilometers. 80."

He suddenly flips off the headlights but doesn't slow down. After two heart-stopping minutes and about the time Dillwyn thinks she'll faint from sheer fright, she feels the car begin to slow. His arm brushes hers as he changes gears, slowing the car without using the brakes.

Dillwyn watches the advancing headlights in the rear mirror and is about to warn him.

"*Hush!*" Mongke. The car is barely crawling as he turns into a dirt side road and coasts, the engine now off, into thick underbrush. Two seconds later the chasing vehicle rips by on the main road.

The engine noise recedes, night sounds return. They sit silently, the engine ticking gently as it cools.

Fifteen minutes later, he restarts the car and pulls back onto the dirt road, still without lights. He drives slowly - thankfully - away from the main road. The evening is balmy, the night fragrances and sounds soothing.

Exhausted, Dillwyn begins to doze off when she suddenly remembers what he had told her just before the last adrenalin rush.

"You really expect me to believe that?"

"Not yet, no. But you will. Sleep now. We'll talk more in the morning."

