

**Translating Portuguese fantasy fiction  
for the international literary market**

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Especialização em Inglês**

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## RESUMO

O presente Trabalho de Projeto tem como objetivo analisar os principais aspectos de tradução do romance português de fantasia para o mercado literário internacional. Através da experiência pessoal de tradução de dois capítulos do livro *A Profecia*, escrito por António Costeira, visa-se demonstrar os mecanismos envolvidos na tradução comercial, no contexto de obras pertencentes ao género de fantasia. Parece crucial realizar uma análise do género, antes de desempenhar a tarefa do tradutor, a fim de desvendar as características, e conseqüentemente as dificuldades tradutórias. A estratégia implementada no presente projecto baseia-se na teoria de *Skopos*, nomeadamente no modelo de análise proposto por Christiane Nord, e complementado pela tipologia textual de Katharina Reiss. Os capítulos traduzidos para o presente projeto vão ser apresentados como uma proposta para uma editora britânica. Portanto, parece necessário ajustar o texto de chegada às convenções da cultura de chegada. Os problemas encontrados foram cuidadosamente analisados, e subseqüentemente as propostas de soluções, que podem ser aplicadas nos contextos semelhantes.

## ABSTRACT

This project aims to examine some major issues of Portuguese *fantasy novel* translation for the Anglophone literary market. On the basis of the personal experience obtained by rendering into English a part of the book *A Profecia* ("The Prophecy") by António Costeira, it explores the main mechanisms of commercial translation in the context of fantasy productions. Before performing the translation task, it seems essential to carry out research into the fantasy genre, in order to disclose its characteristics and, in consequence, translation difficulties. The strategy implemented is based on *Skopos* theory, particularly on Christiane Nord's pre-translation analysis model, complemented with Katharina Reiss' text typology. The purpose of the chapters translated for this project is to serve as a proposal for the British publisher. Therefore, it seems necessary to adjust the target text to the target culture conventions. The translation problems encountered have been scrutinized and the solutions applied in the target text are expounded here, together with suggestions regarding procedures that can be used in similar contexts.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: tradução de fantasia, tradução comercial, mercado literário internacional,  
*Skopostheorie*

KEYWORDS: fantasy translation, commercial translation, international literary market, *Skopos*  
theory

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## Abbreviations

SL	source language
TL	target language
ST	source text
TT	target text
SC	source culture
TC	target culture

## 1. Introduction

In 2016, in Lisbon, a new fantasy book was released on the Portuguese literary market: *A Profecia*. The story resorts to classic fantasy motifs. It narrates the journey of a young elf, Na'Akano, to become a wizard and discover his full magic potential. He has to prevent the dark sorcerer, Davdak, from taking over the world. The key to salvation is hidden in an ancient Prophecy. Meanwhile, Carlos, a Portuguese Physics Engineer, living in the mimetic world, has to face inexplicable events and discover how he is bonded with the magical land and the words of Prophecy.

The book was self-published by a novice writer, António Costeira, via the publisher Edições Viera da Silva. It was received warmly among the enthusiasts of the genre: the initial run of 300 copies was sold out in a few weeks, and the author gained popularity among the local press. Neither did it pass unnoticed in the social media, since positive reviews appeared on thematic blogs. However, the writer was convinced that a wider propagation was improbable, because of the biased attitude of the Portuguese audience towards the fantasy genre. The public response to fantasy publications tends to be more enthusiastic, when the literature already enjoys an international standing. These developments led to the subsequent step – the attempt to reach a broader readership by expanding into the international literature market.

The translator's core task consisted of translating the novel in question into English for the Anglophone readership. The selected language variety was British English due to, among others, numerous cultural similarities, historical and contemporary relations between the countries, and the increasing interest of British society in Portugal's affairs and its culture (as shown by numerous articles in *The Guardian*). For the purpose of this project, only two chapters are presented: *The Desert* ("O Deserto") and *The Island* ("A Ilha"). The former contains 8,529 words and describes the evolution of one of the protagonists of the story, also in terms of his supernatural abilities. The latter, containing 6,825 words, is considered by the author one of the most emotive and vivid, due to a "visualization" effect. These translated chapters, along with a synopsis of the whole work, will later serve as a proposal for an English publisher.

To accomplish the aforementioned task, it was necessary to undertake prior preparatory measures such as background research, translation-oriented ST analysis, formulation of the translation norms of the TT in the context of a profit-oriented publication, together with determining the target readership's expectations. After collecting this information, it was possible to make choices the translation strategies. During the process of translation, certain problematic issues were identified, which will be discussed in the consequent parts of this commentary.

## 2. Translation of the chapter "O Deserto"

### The Desert

The sky map of the stars had always fascinated Na'Akano. However, now in the desert they seemed to glow differently. Or, perhaps, these days he could see them in a new light. 'The stars were not brought forth here by the whim of the gods,' Astrid had once said to him. 'They are part of the creation and, among other things, they show us the way whenever there are no other references, for instance, as in the desert.'

And such was the case now. After answering the desperate plea of Edgard, the Duke of Deerhurst, Drellias was asked to help him as his new military commandant. Upon accepting the challenge, he had gone on his way.

Na'A was pondering over these matters, while the cold nocturnal sand was sliding, inertly, from beneath his horse's hooves. The sparse, yellow city lights had fallen behind a long time ago. He passed through the last thorny acacias and dun bushes which marked the beginning of the arid desert vegetation. As he set foot onto the extensive tract of sand, he tucked himself into a warm blanket and eyed the star he should always keep on his right side. He did not know why, but it was the only star remaining still, always in the same place while the others drifted past. It was the Mansion Star - the place where the spirits of ancestors rested and helped travellers in finding their destiny.

The lacy sky was woven from myriads of stars. Some of them created bizarre senseless shapes; but others, such as the constellations of Aurochs or the Bear, mirrored in the sky the



patterns that gave them their names. There were many of them; yet, the Sceptre, which spread out in front of him, was at that moment the most important.

Astrid had instructed him to follow it as long as it would be necessary. 'Once in many, many years,' she said, 'the gods send Eòlas, a giant star with a tremendous tail. It positions itself between the Mansion Star and the Constellation of Sceptre so as to overshadow all the rest of the celestial bodies.' According to her calculations, Eòlas would appear in the upcoming weeks, a once-in-a-lifetime event. When noticed, it should be followed until it reaches halfway between the Sceptre and the Mansion, at the precise spot above his head. But it had not come up yet. The reality was, however, that in the darkness of night he was the one who was being followed. He sensed it just as he crossed the bridge of Deerhurst, even though the sun had already set, and despite the precautions he had taken. He could not tell how many of them there were, yet he was certain they knew about their meeting with Edgard.

The flickering light of the stars started to fade until it vanished together with the cold, utterly outshone by the first rays of the sun that burst into the desert day. He dismounted and watered his horse, saving a sip of water for himself, while peering over the saddle in the direction from which he came. The horse's hoofprints were clearly visible. Aside from that, he could see nothing more beyond these vast golden dunes, which started to absorb the heat, thereby promising a difficult day.

Still, he knew he had company. He would not be the only one to notice the traces he was leaving in the sand.

Na'Akano put on a large dark robe and tied a turban on his head, leaving only his eyes uncovered. Out of his satchel, he took an apple and gave it to the horse. After remounting, he let his steed choose the pace. He would not drive it too much and, since in the daylight there were no stars to orientate him, he had no other option but to walk forward in a straight line, based on his own trail left behind.

After two suffocating hours of riding, the horse started to slow down. The implacable sun promised no mercy. And it was just his first day here. Na'A slipped slowly off the horse and continued on foot holding the animal by reins. His throat was dry. He climbed up to the peak of

the dune until he had to go down the steep slope; his horses' hindquarters almost grazing the scorching sand, which permeated everywhere.

The landscape, though barren, was different now. After a night and some hours of a tiring march through the sand without any sleep, he finally reached firm ground. Although he had made adequate preparations, following the advice of his old mistress, the fact was that he had never been in the desert before, which he imagined to be a hot strip of sand without end, where nothing grew and nothing seemed to serve a useful purpose. Nonetheless, the soil had turned stony now, though equally inhospitable, raising more dust than the sand. Here and there, nature had sculpted the rocks into the shapes of great tables and needles of different colours. Still, the heat continued to challenge his endurance. Far away, some arid hills outlined on the horizon, stood before him and his destination.

He calculated that it would take approximately one hour to arrive at the first rock formation, the needle-shaped one, which could offer him some shade and rest until the end of the day. Yet, the horse was already showing signs of fatigue. By the time he arrived there, the sun would be at its height, taking away any chance of shade. He decided to camp nearby, at a safe distance from the dune – so as not to be taken by surprise.

He drew the waterskin out of the saddlebag and filled his mouth with water, slowly swirling the precious liquid around in his mouth before swallowing. He did it once again and gave the rest to the horse, together with a handful of the oats he took out of a small bag.

He freed the animal from the weight of the saddle, and then he skilfully lifted its left leg, at the same time pulling at the reins. The horse lay down compliantly. Na'A covered him with a rug and lay down alongside him, after taking a sip of the nourishing potion prepared for him by Astrid. He was soon fast asleep, lulled by the dreams brought on by the touch of the amulet that he was carrying on his chest.

When he awoke, the sun had already passed him and was inclining firmly westwards. He cast his eye over the top of the golden dune he had descended and, unless it was a mirage, thought he glimpsed a slight movement he associated with the feeling of being watched. Whoever he was dealing with, they were still out there somewhere. Nevertheless, he instantly

understood one more thing. He was aware that if somebody wanted to attack him, they could have done so already: this meant their aim was only to follow him - which he could not permit.

The forthcoming days confirmed his suspicions. The rise and fall of the dune had been left behind a long time ago. Now, there was only an enormous arid expanse stretching around and it did not allow the three silhouettes following far behind to hide - Na'Akano's pursuers were spotted, despite keeping a safe distance and riding as slowly as the scorching desert permitted.

In the warm, multihued gloaming of the tenth day, when the sun's torrid influence was fading, Na'Akano rose from between the sea of rocks and dust for one more night on the road. The three pursuers patiently waited for him to set out, confident given their strength in numbers. However, he always began his journey only after identifying the thirteen stars composing the constellation of Sceptre. Let them wait! They wouldn't lose anything through the delay.

Those infernal days had left their mark on the horse, which Na'Akano now led by the reins more often than mounted. He had also lost some weight, but the real problem was that the day before he had emptied the waterskins.

He dug a hole in the ground with his dagger, and filled it with small stones. Afterwards, he needed some moments of deep concentration. Through his cracked lips, he managed to murmur: 'Nên'. The tiny pebbles started, very slowly, to release the water from their molecules, which he soaked up with a rag. He repeated the process until he had two waterskins completely filled. Finally, he muttered the magic incantation for the last time and let the horse drink greedily, while he lay down on his back in the dirty dust, recovering from the effort, with a wet cloth over his face.

When Na'Akano opened his eyes, the Mansion Star was shining at him so brightly as never before. He stood up, indifferent to the cold which was starting to descend upon the desert night. Then the horse moved between its owner and the star. Na'A, with increasing anxiety, quickly stepped aside. He was appalled by the probability of losing sight of this small bright star, strongly glowing, which appeared a few inches lower down. No, his mind was not playing tricks on him, though it had been tormented by the merciless desert sun. He shifted backwards and sought the

Sceptre, finding it without any great effort. It was clearly outlined against the sky, outshining all the other stars - some of them much brighter in the past days. *It was beginning!*

Suddenly, the cold invigorated him. He wrapped himself into a warm night blanket and went over to his horse. From his meagre saddlebags he took out a small strip of dried fish which he started to chew mechanically, and two plums, dried as well, which he gave to the horse, as he soothed it with some words of comfort. There weren't many provisions left now; however, his pursuers should be facing this problem as well. He thought that it was high time to confirm it. He had previously made an attempt, but always when he started towards them, they withdrew. Nevertheless, now he had to solve this problem once and for all. Astrid had not explained to him what would happen at the rare moment of the astral conjunction - sharing it with a possible enemy was not part of the plan though. He had been careless. Thus tonight, as soon as the opportunity arose, he would have to remedy the situation.

This time, 'contrary to what he usually did when he set out, he led his horse by reins at a swift pace, fighting off the cold with more energetic movements. The light of the broad full moon, relentless for his enemy's intentions, allowed him to discern over his shoulder that the three figures on horseback, keeping a few feet between each other, had not given up on their quest. They were far away, yet he could see that they were riding much further apart than usual. Warily, he detached his bow from the saddle and moved it to his left hand, uttering the words of protection. In the sky, the little gleaming point seemed to be a bit closer than it had been three hours ago when he had first spotted it; and he kept asking himself whether his pursuers had noticed it as well, or if they were merely interested in their goals. Still, the fact that they had been following him in the desert, under those dreadful conditions, implied that they suspected something - they could not be ordinary opponents of the Duke. Na'A slowed down and looked back again. In the ashen dark only one figure now remained visible. They had split up and it meant action.

The bizarre sinister shapes of some limestone formations offered him a perfect place for a shelter. For a split second, he forgot about observing the stars and headed towards that labyrinth of spires of various heights.

An arrow, cold as the air of the night, cleaved through the darkness and pierced his horse which, with a loud neigh, reared and hurtled between some of the smaller pillars and, all of a sudden, halted moribund a few feet ahead. The second arrow, coming from the opposite side, gashed its neck, knocking him down with a squeal of death, which in the desert was nothing strange.

'*Damn it!*' he thought. He had let them overtake him and now he was surrounded. They had decided to get rid of the horse first, thus hindering his escape. Yet, this strategy gave him time to seek shelter. He did not intend to run away, but he no longer had the initiative, which gave his enemies the advantage. Luckily, the bow was already in his hand. Squatting, he stepped into the middle of the spires, zigzagging around them, without stopping. He tried to edge around behind the place where he believed the first arrow had appeared.

The sound of the cold nocturnal breeze that had sprung up, whistling through the limestone formations, gave both sides a few moments for a strategic observation. Na'Akano took full advantage. Gliding downwind, he completed a semicircle and distinguished a crouching silhouette, facing away from him. The elf prepared the bow while the figure changed position, just sixteen feet in front of him. '*Great,*' thought Na'Akano, '*He still believes I'm between him and the others*'. This presented an opportunity. The moonlight was very strong, so he had to be quick. He put down his bow, then moved swiftly. While the attacker started to make another move, Na'A was already behind him. He covered his pursuer's mouth with his left hand and held the man's forehead with the right one, twisting sharply, breaking his neck. Then, he picked up his bow and took over the place of his dead enemy.

Without any time to mourn, after taking someone's life for the first time, Na'Akano moved to the next pinnacle, as the slain attacker would have done, he supposed. He lifted his head above the column and scrutinized the land. On the other side, the moonlight exposed the figure of the second pursuer, who was trying to tighten the cordon; though it was the other one that started to trouble him. Na'A was able to distinguish that the man was much further away. From there, he was giving the others orders to attack, pushing the prey towards him. He had to be the ringleader. Na'Akano squinted and made out that the man was entirely hooded, with his arms crossed before him. A wizard!

Na'A chose an arrow from the quiver and fitted it onto the bow. On his left, the second attacker was changing position, moving slightly towards him. He stood up and aimed carefully, seeking a straight line between his left shoulder and the hidden figure. He could not fail. He began to draw the bowstring back, slowly and cautiously, until it rested upon his right cheek. He counted some seconds in his mind and then released the arrow. It set out fast and lightly, piercing the cold air before hitting its target in mid-move. He had eliminated the second enemy, but was himself exposed.

The obelisk in front of him burst into thousands of pieces when a wave of energy struck it violently. Na'A was tossed several feet backwards, losing his bow. He hurtled down with a great impact into a limestone pillar which crumbled above him. Blinded with pain he could not do anything more but to look at the countless number of little arrows that descended upon him, stemming from a single projectile. One of them succeeded in penetrating the protective ring he had raised around himself, and pierced his thigh.

The only sound which interrupted the silence of the desert night was the wailing wind arising from between those small limestone formations. Lying on the ground, unable to move and suffering from immense pain, Na'A was clearly disadvantaged compared to his powerful enemy. Still, the fact that the dark wizard thought he was eliminated was in his favour. His left arm was buried under a pile of stones, but he managed to release his right one. From his inside pocket, all torn, he took a small flask with the mixture for infections and pains. Esth er had once told him it was a formula made from Neem oil and poppy essence, to which she added crushed garlic and onion. One should not consume more than half the flask at once. This was what he did, after removing the piece of wood serving as a lid. Yet, when he looked down at the half full flask, he took the rest in one gulp, letting it fall down, resting his head against the pillar base.

The wizard had not abandoned the idea of seeking him, and was carefully approaching, rummaging every single inch of the terrain, just few feet before him. Eventually, he would stumble upon him. Na'Akano began to lose hope of finding a way out, when he heard from the other side a moaning voice, wailing in pain. It was the second man he had struck, now approaching with an arrow still stuck in his arm. The wizard swung back to his companion, shouting and waving his hands. Na'A seized the opportunity. With his right hand, the only free

one, he grabbed a little piece of a nail-sized stone and raised it in the air. The pain was beginning to be replaced by a pleasant torpor, but it was blurring his vision and confusing his mind. He blinked with determination and shook his head in the cold air, achieving a few more moments of lucidity. For a split second, the memory flashed into his mind of Astrid's battle in the hall of Duke the Fat. With a huge effort, he murmured the words learned in the magic language, taught by the witch. Na'A grasped intensely threads of the moonlight that, with the aid of words, he deflected towards that piece of inert matter which responded by starting to glow and heat up, between his thumb and forefinger.

His opponent, who had drawn closer in the meantime, was no longer heeding the wizard, but gaped flabbergasted at that tiny point of very bright light above him, stepping back loudly with fear.

When the wizard turned back towards the noise, a little star was already piercing the air in his direction, trembling and struggling to maintain all its accumulated energy. The sorcerer raised his right hand instinctively and started to cast spells, but his attempts were futile: there is no defence against the energy of light. This is why the projectile passed through his hand and pounded into his chest with an explosion that completely consumed him and heated the desert.

A rain of million particles covered the air and fell upon the dark ground, illuminating the burnt fingers and motionless body of Na'Akano. Then, a perfect silence fell.

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A slight blink of the eyes made the inert scraps of white dust glide down Na'A's left cheek. He shook his head back and forth, and some small stones slid apart. He coughed, expelling a remarkable quantity of dust from his mouth, which provoked a terrible dryness under the ruthless desert sun. He tried to squint into the radiant light and let his head fall back onto the ground, with his right arm protecting his sight. His leg hurt and he could not feel his other arm. From on high, a constant strident screech drilled into his brain, bringing him back from the torpor

in which he had fallen many hours before. When he finally opened his eyes, dozens of griffins were dancing banefully around him. He remembered what had happened.

With his free hand, he started releasing the trapped arm from under the rubble, moving away stones, one by one, until he felt the pressure ease. He leaned against the remains of the pillar, gasping from the effort. He rubbed his lifeless swollen arm resting on his lap, fixing his eyes on a tiny projectile buried in his thigh. Further away, the griffins were feasting on the horse's carcass, shrieking with satisfaction.

When the tingling in his left arm subsided, he pulled out the dagger from his belt, and cut the black fabric of his robe surrounding the arrow. Dark blood had coagulated around the metal. He had been unconscious for many hours. Unconscious or asleep. He should not have taken all the liquid from the flask, despite the horrible pain.

He put down the dagger and placed his hands on his thighs, palms up, focusing on the sacral chakra. A pleasurable heat began to run through his legs as the energized blood flowed to the wound site. As the pain stopped, Na'A grasped the dagger again and lacerated the flesh surrounding the arrow. Then, he put two fingers of his left hand around the metal, thrusting them against the thigh, and pulled the arrow with his right hand. Blood spurted from the open gash, immediately stemmed by pressure from his fingers. A healing incantation helped the wound to close, though a dark red halo remained, few inches in diameter, still considerably swollen.

The sun was already low when he dared to rise, with an enormous effort. His entire body was sore and dehydrated. He needed water. '*Blast*,' was all he could think, seeing the devastation of the limestone formations. It was quite an explosion. If the stone he had picked up had been slightly bigger, he too would probably have gone to the Mansion. And that is where he would go indeed if he did not get some water urgently.

Na'A was not strong enough to extract it from the elements, but he still managed to mentally call the wizard's horse that was observing the griffins' frenzy from a distance. He drew the waterskin, bound to the saddle, and solemnly drank, his parched body greedily demanding each drop as if it were the last one.



The wound site was burning insistently. He washed it with a drop of water, but the purple skin discolouration did not disappear. His clothes were all ripped and he felt more dirty than he could ever have imagined. He took off the rags and put on a clean garment, which he kept rolled up on the saddle. As he unfolded it, he realized, astonished, that on the back was embroidered the same symbol that he had seen many years ago on the mantle of Rasel - the wizard defeated by Astrid at Duke the Fat's court. So after all these were not common soldiers, but wizards sent by Davdak. Did Davdak know about his quest? Were they here for the same reason? Well, right now it did not matter anyway. He put on the cloak, grasped his sword and bow and, limping along, seized the reins, leading the animal out of that labyrinth.

He had no difficulties finding the Mansion Star in the firmament, and saw that the small celestial body he had seen yesterday continued its prophetic journey and had already moved a bit closer. It was different from the other stars. Nevertheless, he was not able to distinguish its shape well. He looked at the Sceptre and estimated, based on the distance covered since yesterday, that he still had one week left of travel. He was getting ready to mount when someone behind him called out in a slurred voice of suffering:

'Master, help me'.

He swung round and made out, in the moonlight, the shape of the man that he had struck with his arrow, and who had ended up saving his life. The soldier was sitting on the ground, leaning against a half pillar that was still standing. He looked terrible, greatly debilitated, yet, still alive. '*Was he made of iron?*' he thought. His pursuer had had an arrow in the arm for dozens of hours; he had been caught in an explosion, then by the cold of the night, and... he was still alive? Na'A wanted to ignore this cry for help and continue his journey, when it occurred to him that this soldier was confusing him with his own master. He pulled up his hood and turned towards the wretch. By speaking mentally, he aimed to avoid being betrayed by his voice, therefore trying to imitate the harshness of the words that he remembered the wizard had used before:

'*Aren't you dead yet? I don't have any time to waste - the star has already appeared,*' he ventured. He did not notice any sign of surprise in this man, neither for using the mental voice, nor for the allusion to the star. The man responded out loud:

'It will take only a few minutes, Envoy. Heal me and after you can follow your path. I can still be useful in the future.' Despair in the face of imminent death degrades the human condition indeed.

Na'A quickly probed the man's mind. It was Krieger, the general of the Royal Heron's army, who had betrayed his King to ally with the Envoy. Because of the importance of this desert mission, planned long ago, he had accompanied the wizard. He had set up a spy network in the Nubian Kingdom. The Royal Mining Company was a cover for his subversive activities.

For a moment, Na'Akano presumed that the Envoy was Davdak himself, but since he was not, Na'A became troubled by the power the dark wizard should have achieved by now. He had defeated the Envoy almost by accident, so the fact that they had been following him was surely a coincidence. Yet, they were seeking the same thing, without any doubt, and Davdak must have been behind it. Astrid herself had devoted a big part of her life to secretly decoding the significance of the Eòlas's appearance. Davdak had apparently done the same. The dark wizard was more powerful than he could ever have imagined, the Envoy as well – for Davdak entrusted him to go after the comet, just as Astrid had done with him.

Na'A hesitated over whether to ignore the call for help or to continue his journey, but - that man over there - he saved his life, albeit unintentionally, and he would pay him back in kind.

After all, the soldier had been lucky. The arrow had passed through his arm without touching the bone. Still, that type of wound was certain death in the desert. In silence, Na'A broke the arrowhead and pulled the projectile by the shaft, which was followed by a brave cry of pain. He ripped off the end of the injured man's tunic and made a quick sling.

'Your horse?' he asked.

'It's somewhere here. If it's still alive,' answered the man, shivering with cold.

*'If you endure until the morning, get onto your steed and start the journey back. Go directly to the Royal Heron. We will meet there after I fulfil my mission.'*

The elf stood up, freezing and limping, and mounted with difficulties. Krieger would not likely make it through the night. Not only was his arm wounded, but there were also some burns

visible on his face along with several abrasions. Besides, he still had to bear the night's cold. Na'A did, however, what he thought was the best. If the soldier survived and managed to get to the Royal Heron, he would spread a rumour. Looking up, he measured the distance between the Mansion and the Sceptre high above, and directed the horse towards the middle.

He rode slowly through the night and the ensuing ones. It was getting more and more difficult to withstand the cold of the night and the heat of the day. In the wizard's saddlebag, he had found some small flasks with potions that he was now rationing, but none of them seemed to produce any effect on the scarlet gash on his leg, which was spreading outwards and disabling him. It was quite swollen, and showing marks of infection. He struggled to recall the healing incantation, which turned out to be ineffective. The arrow must have been laced with some kind of poison that he did not know; the undulations of those arid hills that were in his way caused waves of pain to career through his whole body. The fever was clouding his mind. He rode bent in the saddle, with his arms hanging down, without any willpower, nor control over the horse. He was coming to an untimely end. Many times he almost fell off, but managed to hang on at the last moment. *It looked that the darned wizard always got his own way. Wizard? But what wizard? Ah, the one who wanted to kill him. But he was alive! Or was he already at the Mansion? No, it couldn't be the Mansion, it was too hot for that.*

*Yes, now he could remember - he was playing with Su'ni and it was a very hot day, that's why they decided to swim in the river, but when they arrived at the river it turned into the sea of flames that swallowed his sister.*

He tried to run away, but his steed was quite old and wouldn't move. When he spurred it on, the animal fell over onto its side, dragging him down with it.

The impact of the fall that dragged him a few feet down the hill, brought him back from the depths of delirium into which he had plunged. The dawn broke. He was cold, extremely thirsty and out of breath: but with his back glued to the ground he forgot for a while about his suffering. Right above him, where his gaze rested, there appeared printed on the sky the shape of half an egg with three rippling flames coming from it. It was the same symbol as that embroidered on the back of the wizard's tunic. It was a representation of Eòlas. *So Davdak knew as much or even*

*more than Astrid did! Still, it was he, Na'A, who was here at the right time, not the accursed wizard.*

He sat down with effort. Later, as the sun was trying to throw the first sunbeam of the day, he staggered to his feet, trying to put his weight on one leg only. He was extremely weak and when he lifted his head, towards Eòlas, he lost his balance and fell down again. Lying down, he looked at the sun breaking through the barrier of the horizon, shedding the light directly upon the comet and trying to cast it out of its space.

The explosion from the impact almost blinded him. Eòlas defended itself against the sun by deflecting its light towards the earth, creating a sort of light beam. Slightly below, at the point where two hills' met, an old dried-out bush started to burn, as the multi-coloured light reached it. Few people, or maybe even no one, had witnessed the titanic battle between those forces of nature. Na'A got to his feet with a great effort. When he realized that the sun would inexorably win that battle, he began to head towards the column of light, hopping on one leg and dragging the other one behind.

When Eòlas was nothing more than a blot in the sky and the beam of light a tenuous thread about to disappear, Na'A mustered the last of his forces to make one impossible leap, and threw himself in the midst of that patch of light. Suddenly, it went out. Na'A disappeared.

And the sun finally reclaimed the day.

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Suspended in the air, Na'A was plunged in total darkness. His dazed mind and lethargic body floated in the dimensionless space, in the undefined nothingness that stretched throughout eternity.

Without gravity, his body floated unconscious in that surreal environment – abstracted from the reality that had known. He saw it gently come to rest upon the stone altar in the centre

of an arched hall, naked and radiating colours of diverse shades which reflected the recent affliction. His leg showed a dark scarlet tone which posed a danger to the rest of his body.

He did not understand what was happening. Astrid had only instructed him to follow the comet - she had not prepared him for this. No one is prepared to see their own body from outside.

A gentle melodious music of a kind he had never heard before invaded that calm atmosphere very quietly, bringing his thoughts back to the present and to the purpose of being there. He saw a halo of white light involving his body, spinning and purifying. In the cardinal points there appeared, one by one, four small niches of variable sizes and increasing brightness, reflecting the colours of the precious stones that they protected.

As the mysterious experience started to fade, he floated northward. There was only one single gem within sight: bright and multi-faceted, the size of a quail egg, like a diamond. Looking harder he saw that it was vibrating, and had a single inscription inside. '*Wyrð, the Origin,*' he decoded. As the gem's vibrations of light were changing at different stages, Na'A was unfolding in his thoughts the meanings of the rune. *The blank rune, encompassing the past, present and future, representing this trilogy of predestination which cannot be avoided. Nothing and everything; that which is filled and void at the same time.*

Then, he moved to the second alcove, in the east, which reflected the red colour of the eight rubies forming it. The first showed Fehu, the creation of the world. Then,

all the other runes like Uruz, Thurisaz or Ansus, each one in its own ruby. Their vibrations induced Na'a into deep meditation about their meaning.

Time became relative. In the third alcove, in the south, where the dominant colour was sapphire blue, the rune Hagal revealed the forces of nature. Na'Akano, absorbed, examined it - '*Hagalaz, the hail. But also Jera, the harvest. Eihwaz, the yew. And all the others.*'

His head was seething with the impossible knowledge contained in that chamber. It was the sacred Pantheon, the site of the syncretism of all beliefs. The same origin of all the mankind, symbolized in that last alcove examined. The green emeralds taught him. '*Tiwaz, honour and justice. Dagaz and Laguz, day and water. And also, Mannaz, man.*

Then, very slowly, he was returned, reluctantly, to his body. He had so much to study, so much to learn. He could have stayed forever.

≠

Na'A woke up in the sand. He was completely naked, covered only by the shadow cast by the enormous leaves of a generous palm. He sat up, hugging his legs with his chin on his knees, contemplating the contours of the small pool in the centre of the oasis, with the tiny tufts of grass at its shore, almost completely surrounded by coconut and date palms. A horse - a beautiful speckled stallion - watched it curiously from the opposite bank. He sent a friendly thought, which the equine answered by tapping the ground with his hoof. Then, he concentrated back on himself.

Na'A felt different, as he had never felt before. His body did not show any signs of the leg wound, nor was it clamouring for water or food as it had done before. On the contrary, he was robust and healthy, as when he had run freely along the slopes of the Bear Stone Mountains, during the breaks in the Astrid's classes.

*He remembered now.*

The Great Witch had sent him to the desert to follow the trail of a comet - its name was Eòlas, she had said – and then he had been followed by three riders whom he had fought. Yes, one of them was a wizard with Davdak's symbol embroidered on his tunic, a representation of the comet. Afterwards, his leg had swollen and he had been unwell until the moment his memories were erased by the bright light streaming from the comet.

But something had clearly happened. How had he come to this oasis? Why was his mind teeming with thoughts that had never occurred to him before? Why was he able now to comprehend some of Astrid's metaphysic lessons, which before had seemed to be beyond his understanding? As he mused, the horse approached and was now nuzzling his back, as though encouraging him to find the answers.

For many days Na'A meditated about everything that he learned, in the light of the new perspective. He shared his thoughts with the horse, out loud. The matters that had concerned his old master all her life were now clear to him. He had found the lost link to the Prophecy. Finally, he understood why Astrid had devoted so much attention to him and why she had entrusted him with this mission. He was Alagosadhar! Like her, he would dedicate all his abilities to restoring the natural order of the world before Naur'Can until Davdak had so deeply corrupted it.

He looked at himself, completely naked like his horse (this thought made him laugh) while wondering how to get out of that desert, whose secret was now revealed. After a refreshing bathe in the small pool, he got out and collected some dates which he shared with the horse, sitting on the bent trunk of a palm tree. The sun was at its peak and the best place to be was in the shade.

The horse was the first one to notice them, shaking its head and tapping the ground with its left hoof. Na'A turned in time to see two small mounds of sand rising from the ground, until they reached almost forty inches in height. Two dwarfish figures, with huge feet, appeared in front of him. Their features were granulated like the sand and it was hard to distinguish the eyes in their round faces. Darker grains formed something like a nose without nostrils. Thick protruding lips surrounded a small mouth aperture. Instead of ears, two tiny holes. A long plait, sandy like their bodies, sprouted from the nape of their neck, and swung constantly about in all directions. It would be hard to make them out on the long stretch of sand.

Na'A stood up brusquely, surprised to find he was not alone. He made to hide his nudity, but the clumsy gesture frightened the small inhabitants of the oasis, who began to blend back into the sand.

'Wait,' almost shouted, 'Don't go away, wait. Who are you?'

The small creatures halted, reluctant, clearly shy. After evaluating the situation, they began to emerge again with their long plaits swinging, interweaving with one another. The one who seemed the boldest took a little step ahead, stretching out his short thick arms while looking upwards:

'We, Kiburtu, the oasis folk of desert. We see you many days ago. Kaliá asking who be elf that talk with horse. We curious.'

'The elf who talks with the horse is called Na'A,' he answered, politely but anxious, forgetting about his lack of clothes. 'The elf who talks with the horse is very pleased to meet you.'

'Kanizá wanting know why elf be here and why talk with horse that fled caravan,' the one who seemed to be the spokesman replied in return. 'Caravan staying one night and going away. You stay here forever.'

Only now did Na'A notice that another plait had joined the other two. It looked like they communicated through that long, ever-moving appendage. Suddenly, more than twenty plaits were swinging in the air from one side to another, touching each other, which evoked a dance, accompanied by the Kiburtus' whistling.

'Na'A talked with the horse because you hadn't appeared yet.' He wanted to be friendly: he would need help if he were to leave this place, but he did not have time to tell his story. He had only glimpses of what had happened after the explosion of light.

The airborne plaits started a frenetic dance, caressing each other, as the Kiburtus flipped their heads and made signs to each other, whistling shrilly.

'We being here now. Kamigá and Karingá and Kalifá and...' the spokesman said the names of them all and after he ended up as usual: 'Wanting know what you have to tell.'

Na'A prayed that no more would appear. They functioned as a whole and, in their simple understanding, the plural form in their replies encompassed the entire group as such. They answered collectively, but just the spokesman, the only one whose name he did not know, spoke. He had to start addressing him only, otherwise, he would still be here at the next new moon.

'I need help to leave. I don't have any clothes or horse tack, or even a waterskin. Without them, I can't cross the desert. Do you think you can help me, my friend?' Na'A had few expectations that this folk could aid him. They lived in the sand and he did not see any type of clothing or tools on them.



There was a new conference of sandy braids, much head motion and more whistling. Some minutes later, silence again. The spokesman moved a more step forward:

'We speak. Kerefá, Kunizá, Katiá, — ' he began the litany of the names of the tribe members anew. Na'A was not able to stifle a burst of laughter, but regretted it right away. The spokesman took a step back and his plaits stopped in mid-air soundlessly.

The elf joined his hands at his chest and bowed apologetically. Though he felt ridiculous without any clothes, this was an opportunity to hide his face and the smile which he could not suppress. He remained in that position until he heard, relieved, that the litany started once again. With some effort, he put his serious face on and rose anew, feeling like a giant.

'...Kerumbá, Kitumbá, Keretá and Kuriá want help. You follow we.'

In the twinkling of an eye, the Kiburtus disappeared in the sand. Na'A looked in all directions, but there was no sign of the small creatures.

Eventually, he detected the funny plaits some distance away, dancing in the air, outlined against the setting sun, near the slope of one of the hills forming the valley of the oasis. '*They have moved quickly through the sand,*' he noticed.

He mentally called the spotted horse (already named in his thoughts Speckle) which had been chewing some tender green sprouts near the waterside. It reacted immediately. It reacted immediately. He leaped onto the horse's back with a strange feeling, since there was no saddle between him and his steed. It was not comfortable at all, particularly as he had no clothes. However, the journey lasted only a couple of hundred yards.

On a flat stone six huge feet supported the weight of three Kiburtus, with the spokesman in the middle. The others had disappeared, he had no idea where. He jumped off the horse and fell on his feet. Suddenly the dwarves were at his level. Dazzled by the setting sun, though his chest was already in the shade of the hill, he put his hand over the eyes and waited.

'Kaliá and Kanizá inviting Na'A to enter the cave', said the spokesman while turning to face the hill.

Along with the spokesman, Kaliá and Kanizá must have been the most important members of the clan, since it was the second time they were mentioned separately. He climbed up towards them, feeling like a giant again. They waited some moments, all looking at the hill as their plaits touched each other.

Na'A could not see any cave, no matter how hard he tried. Suddenly, at the base of a knarled rock formation, an enormous granite stone began to move slowly, revealing the mouth of a cave. He could fit there if he held his head down. Out of it came several pairs of swinging plaits, accompanied by whistles and small jumps.

The tiny individuals started to push the stones away until there was a newly-opened entrance, enabling Na'Akano to step in. The creatures who had already scampered out of the cave, spread out around it, leaving only a small passable walkway. The elf's new friends invited him in, gesticulating.

When Na'A was about to enter, his patience was tested anew:

'Kuzará, Kimiá, Kiringá...' and all the other ones after, 'Inviting Na'A to choose what need. When sun come back, we come.'

With those words the last sunbeam of that unusual day in the desert disappeared and the Kuburtus vanished with it, as if by magic. The crescent-shaped moon softly illuminated the cold, which began to fall upon the desert, thrusting Na'A inside the secret shelter of the oasis folk. He did not know what he would find inside, but the temperature of the sun-warmed rocks was much milder. In the oasis, he had slept leaning against rocks on which he mentally focused the energy of the sun.

Once inside, total darkness prevailed. Once through the tunnel, he had the perception of larger space. He made a few tentative steps and his feet stumbled upon some piled-up objects. He lost his balance and fell forward, upon a disorganized heap of things scattered all around the floor. A terrible noise echoed around the walls. His hands touched a long metallic object, which he hauled along with him, making a scraping sound.

He sat down, holding his discovery in his hands. The vibrations he felt while handling it quickened his heartbeat. When he reached the grip he had no doubts. It was Glavar, his sword! But how was that possible? He stood up and skilfully drew it out of the scabbard, then focused on the sapphire mounted in the grip. It began to emit soft luminous vibrations until the bluish light was so intense that it lit up the whole cave.

He raised the blade above his head and his mouth dropped open as his eyes rested upon hundreds of items of all kinds. Rolls of fabric, ceramic pots, swords, daggers and knives, large and small bags, flints, saddles and harnesses, bows and quivers — everything you could possibly imagine. There were even bundles of keys and small chests, parchment scrolls and dozens of ornamented articles. His face broke into a smile, as he realised that the nice Kiburtus were in fact petty thieves, who entertained themselves with plundering caravans and collecting the objects lost in the desert. Surely, they had found his sword and brought it back here.

The dawn came and revealed the Kuburtus at the cave entrance, elbowing each other, curious, pushing one another around, with their plaits always dancing in the air. When Na'A appeared dressed in a long dark garment and with a turban on his head, there was a disorganised chorus of whistles and, once again, the plaits started to spin.

Before the litany of names began, he vanished inside the cave and started to bring out what he had chosen. The first thing was the saddle with the harnesses, which he placed in silence on the ground under the first hot sunbeams. He returned into the cave and then materialized with an excellent bow and a quiver full of high-quality arrows, which he put next to the saddle. Without any doubt, they had been pilfered from a merchant caravan. Then, he came out with saddlebags on his shoulder, the sword tied to his back and two waterskins in his hand. The friendly creatures were observing him with empty, though attentive, eyes.

Before Na'Akano could say anything, the spokesman began

'Kamisá, Kuringá...'

However, this time Na'A did not hear all the names of the tribe. The spokesman said only one name for each object that Na'A brought from the cave and put on the ground. Then concluded:

'... help carrying things to oasis.'

Having said that, each selected Kiburtu grasped one object and started to walk a few feet down to the tract of sand, as the others whistled. The spokesman looked on. Na'A understood how they pilfered things. After putting the objects on the sand, they sank in it, merging with its grains. A long plait appeared beside each item grasping it as well as it could, and thus making it appear as if all these objects were alive. A caravan of these inanimate things began to hover, some inches above the ground, moving smoothly towards the oasis. Sometimes they stopped, a round head appeared to confirm the direction and disappeared again.

When the bearers returned and blended with the others, the time had come to thank them:

'Na'a wants to thank the Kiburtus for helping him. He has also prepared a gift to offer in exchange.'

For the last time, he plunged inside the cave and shortly after he appeared carrying a chest, almost sixteen inches long, ornamented with beautiful and colourful sea motifs. He placed it on the ground. After removing the lid, dozens of precious gems were uncovered, which transformed the bright rays of the desert sun into the most glowing and colourful tones that the Kuburtus had ever seen. If the stones had been already enchanted when the desert folk stole them, it would have been a robbery of unconceivable value.

A chorus of whistles and swinging plaits filled the air, while Na'A mentally manipulated the sun's energy and focused on the precious stones, which started to respond with small vibrations. He could not saturate it too much, otherwise it would explode.

Then, squatting, he offered one to each Kiburtu, taking care to keep the biggest gem, a rosy diamond, for the spokesman.

The stones had their proper light now. Na'A stood up and said:

'My gift works only in the darkness. Every gem has its own light and it will allow you to see at night. I invite you to enter the dark cavern to see what will happen.'

The Kiburtus withdrew towards the cave, looking at the colour of their precious stone, wondering how it was possible that the gems had their own glow. They left Na'A alone, thus he felt free to call Speckle and happy for avoiding the long conversations one more time.

In the desert sky, the sun released ferociously its heat and suggested Na'A to head quickly towards shadow of the big palms of the oasis. The things he selected were piled up around a tree. He started to arrange them. His thoughts returned to Astrid and to the responsibility bequeathed, when she had chosen him for her apprentice. This adventure in the desert was a terrible ordeal, but the knowledge he acquired was priceless. As days went by, he remembered everything that had happened until the light explosion had distorted his perception of time. He had been meditating on that time lapse since he had awoken in the oasis. He saw the Prophecy in a different light now and he knew that it had to be fulfilled or else that the balance of life and nature would never be restored. Davdak had to be stopped.

When he had taken leave of Dellias, Drell had agreed to help the Duke regain control over Deerhurst, which had been losing economic power in recent years, undermined by corrupt stewards that came from the capital. Unbeknownst to him, Deerhurst's newest organizations were controlled by the Envoy, a powerful wizard, as he proved to be, and against whom Drell would have no chance. However, this issue was resolved and Na'A was certain that his friend, who now had no obstacles in his way, would be able to properly help the Duke.

With these comforting thoughts he decided to head towards Royal Heron this night, to discover how the capital of the most warlike kingdom of humans functioned. In the cave, he had found several rare parchments with detailed maps of various realms, located even in this desert. He would make good use of them. He chose one etched on auroch skin that represented Nubia. He bent over it for several minutes, then put it into the saddlebag that was still resting on the sand, next to a purse stuffed with golden and silver coins used by humans. He would saddle the horse only as he was about to depart. Then, he lay down in the shadow of his favourite palm, enjoying the heat of the day, perfect for a rest. He fell asleep, watching Speckle's tail swishing blithely. In the meantime, the horse was freely eating the tender plants which grew along the pond shore.

Na'Akano woke up about an hour before sunset. It was so hot that it might have been noon, were it not for the position of the sun. He washed in the warm water of the pond, relishing every single drop cleaning his pores. He had no idea when he would afford a luxury like that again. He filled the skins with water, and then called Speckle, who compliantly waited to be saddled, while he murmured calming words to him. He also realised that his daily routine was about to change. He had developed a very close relation with Speckle. It was enough to think about his steed to make it appear immediately. He had practised many commands and done a lot of exercises during those days in the oasis. He had learned how to ride bareback and to give orders to Speckle with one single word or by tapping its flank with his knees. The horse understood even mental orders.

Finally, when half of the sun was hidden behind the Kiburtus' hill, he tied a bag of dates to the animal's side and placed the sword on his back, wrapped again in leather, together with the bow, forming a cross. He put his head and right arm through the shoulder strap of a tiny pouch.

He was starting to put on the turban, when a small mound of sand appeared in front of him. It was the spokesman who, this time, appeared alone.

'You going away now. Kiburtu —', finally Na'A discovered that he shared his name with the tribe, ' — thank for present. All happy seeing at night now. We have thing for you.'

Kiburtu drew out a simple necklace made of a leather strap on which hung an amulet. Deferentially, he offered it to Na'A, who could not believe what he was seeing. It was the amulet that SuÄni had given him when he had left. But he was polite enough to not disclose this.

'Amulet give luck to Na'A. When Na'A needing Kuburtu, leave the amulet in the desert. We know and we come.'

He disappeared as quickly as he had appeared. Na'A mounted and headed into direction of the rising sun, fondling the amulet with a prophetic smile.

About three hundred feet ahead, for the last time he turned round again to look at the oasis. Dozens of small lights were moving from side to side in the air. A dance of lights - the only one in the desert.

3. Translation of the chapter “A Ilha”

## THE ISLAND

Since Na'Akano had returned to Royal Heron, a sensation of restlessness had invaded his heart, as though every single gesture he made was being observed or as if his every thought was under surveillance. Perhaps that was because of the imminent boat journey — a new experience he did not yearn for; or maybe because he had been so long away from Alagosadhar impelled by a destiny he still could not properly understand He wanted to leave as soon as possible.

For the past two days, Na'A was waiting in Trynio's house for the best tide, to set sail. Saleno's brother, commonly known as Old Salt due to his sailing experience, had served as an intermediary to hire the crew for *Hurricane*. It was the same vessel that had anchored there with Davdak as a passenger a few months before. Yet, the monsoon and the headwinds had obliged them to postpone the journey to the following spring. This was why Na'A had spent the winter on the smallholding, rekindling the lost memories of the Prophecy, training the men in archery in which he was an expert, and in sword combat. Karan turned out to be an excellent apprentice in that. With his nimble mind, he would be an excellent Guardian. However, their ways would probably never cross again.

The oil lamps were lit a few minutes before the appearance of the first stars. The fisherman's wife had just put on the table some fish baked in the fireplace and everybody was preparing for the last meal of the day, as the sound of someone knocking on the door in a pre-arranged code echoed.

'Go and open the door, son,' the matron commanded to the youngster who was already stretching out his hand towards the tasty sea bass. 'Judging by the knocking, it must be your Uncle Saleno.'

'Saleno and Karan!' commented the fisherman. 'At meal time the darned tide always brings one more stomach to feed. In this case - two. Long live Saleno! We were not expecting you till dawn.'

'I could smell baked fish from afar!' the newcomer answered with some kind of joviality, which contrasted with his appearance. 'Karan insisted on coming along. But what do we have here! Your wife's food looks always delicious! The tide is truly unfavourable and it has brought some setbacks - but first we shall eat. Where's Na'Akano?'

Trynio nodded towards the darkest and furthest corner of the chamber.

'He's been sitting there on the floor for hours, with his hood up. May a wave carry me away if I had known that someone was able to withstand so much time without moving.'

'I suggest we don't interrupt him. Na'A has already taught me the benefits of meditation. He always does it when he has a problem to solve,' Saleno cut in, taking his seat at the table. 'Besides, he doesn't eat much.'

The meal passed in a tense atmosphere, particularly because of the news brought by the guests. Since the murder of Krieger, the soldiers had been circulating around in large numbers. They had yet not given up trying to find the person responsible, and were arbitrarily arresting anyone that looked suspicious. There were spies everywhere so going out at night was quite an adventure; the owner of *Sea Fury* had been hanged and the prostitutes had been brought to the soldiers.

Saleno did not manage to wait until the end of the meal, as he had promised:

'There are many soldiers in the city. Apart from that, the Captain of the ship says it's a bad omen to sail without knowing where you're going. He won't leave the harbour till he knows the route. The sailors are superstitious, so the crew is on his side.'



'For tempest's sake!' shouted Trynio, 'I've already warned you about it. The gold we paid him only postponed his decision. If the elf wants to set sail at dawn, as was agreed, —' Saleno said, indicating Na'A with his chin, '— it would be better to talk with Weever. I know where he lives, yet at this point I wouldn't trust a word of that freshwater Captain. He's had a lot of time to ask us for the route. Why does he need it now, on the eve of the departure?'

'Black clouds are surrounding the castle,' Karan broke in. 'In the last two days the number of patrols has been increasing. A black figure has been seen passing through the battlements on the bay side. Even getting here without being spotted was a true adventure.'

Everybody was looking at Na'Akano - after all, they could not make any decision without him. If he really wanted to leave, he had to make up his mind quickly. However, no one was brave enough to call him, and no one knew the course either.

In the corner, the young elf had been struggling for hours with the bitterness that had taken over his soul. It had been months since he had felt such strong vibrations, mental emanations like those he had felt among his folk and which Astrid had taught him how to harness. But he could find no harmony in these new signals: they were distorted, sinister even, and were striking him without any mercy.

He stood up, strained, attracting the eyes of all present. Everyone saw him shoulder his bag and strap the bow to his back. However, when he reached for his sword wrapped in auroch skin, they all noticed the torment that invaded his body. He uncovered his sword's hilt, showing to everyone an enormous sapphire glowing with such a blue intensity that it looked as if it were about to explode.

'This is Glawar,' the elf announced, turning round so everyone could see it, 'the sword forged in the workshops of Naur'Can, at Davdak's request. There's nothing like it. It was created from a star sent to the earth by the gods. And now, its previous owner has felt its presence. Do you still think you're able to steer a boat, Trynio?' Na'A asked, looking decisively into Old Salt's eyes.

'By the white whales of the southern seas! No one knows these waters better than me,' the old man answered with a twinkle in his eye. 'Cursed be the hour I sold my vessel to Bijago!' Bijago was Old Salt's former first mate.

'But, —' Trynio remarked, looking at his son, '— the lad has no flair for sailing.'

'Davdak feels the sapphire's energy but he doesn't know who is carrying it. This could give us an advantage. I'm not sure if I can defeat him, so we should hurry. He'll do whatever it takes to get the sword back.'

'One doesn't play with the sea, matey,' Old Salt cried, using his wisdom, hardened by years of storms. Do whatever you please, but never set sail before the tide.'

'Do you think you can convince Bijago to come with us, even if he doesn't know the course?'

'May catfish whiskers grow on me! That boat was mine. I'll cast a curse upon him, to never have favourable tides again.'

'Then go and talk to him. Try to hire one of *Hurricane's* sailors as well. I need to know where they took Davdak. Ah, and send someone to Weever — to give him a false destination, maybe towards the Kingdom of the Southern Cross. It's likely that he has betrayed us. We'll meet at the boat when the tide turns.'

Hardly had Trynio and his son left when Karan, gripped with fascination for the sword, blurted out:

'How come you have Davdak's sword? A man loses his sword only when he dies, that's what Saleno told me. And why haven't you shown it before?' asked Karan, as his friend looked on, supportingly.

'I've already told you everything you need to know, Karan-Su, son of Che-Karan. Davdak is no ordinary man. He was spawned from the union of man and elf and has become a very powerful and ambitious wizard. Your main concern as the Guardian is to recover the Diamond and take it to the place marked on the Mountain. When I leave, move away from here, train your people and, believe me, the moment you're longing for will come.'

There were still some hours left until the tide and they had to await news from Trynio. Na'A placed his sword on the table and focused on the hilt, abstracting himself from the rest of his fellows. The sapphire's gleam was intense, interrupted only by a few minuscule black points that, looking more closely, turned out to be microscopic runes meticulously carved around the equator of the precious stone. Running his eye over them, he gradually drifted into a hypnotic trance, as it had happened when he had entered the portal in the desert. When he had examined all the runes around the stone, a beam of indigo light captured him and took him into its universe.

*The images passing through Na'Akano's mind were blurred, as though he was looking through a wall of water: a small piece of Eòlas which had plummeted to the earth thousands years ago; the hammer and the anvil that gave it the shape of a sword; the mounted sapphire and, finally, the hilt protecting it.*

*Then, in a secluded chamber, above a table, a craftsman working on the hilt of the undulating sword. He was scrutinising the blade, carving something on the sapphire with inch-perfect precision. His robes were black and dishevelled; his resolute and sagacious face hidden under the protective hood. The figure was guiding the chisel, engraving the runes which avidly absorbed his emanations emitted by the craftsman, fixing his impressions inside the jewel.*

*The sword, now powerful, extended the arm of its owner, obeying him, seeking power and control. It sowed discord, ambition and vengeance. Then, among shaky images filtered through the water wall, Na'A saw a battle between wizards for the possession of the Book. A slim silhouette with long silver hair that seemed to him vaguely familiar was raising a coarse staff and uttering mighty words, arms outstretched towards the sky. The Dark Wizard was expelled, but the harm had been done and the gods were displeased.*

*Through the sword's eye, becoming more and more uneasy in his hypnotic torpor, Na'Akano saw, from the heights of a scalding dune, Naur'Can being devoured by the desert sands. He saw the end of a civilization, its people scattered to the four winds, while the sword, attached to the belt of its master astride a colossal Wyvern, was flying away, promising vengeance, till it finally came to rest on a rock in the middle of the sea.*

Saleno and Karan were watching Na'Akano's trance expectantly. The violent tremors and the sweat dripping down his face did not seem to stop. For almost one hour, he was in a world incomprehensible to them. They saw that he was dangerously close to physical exhaustion.

Unaware of his friends' concern, Na'A, anguished, had plunged into an apocalyptic vision of the destruction of a civilization that had been his.

*The sword left the ground again, soaring into the air. The hand wielding it was slashing its way to regain the Book, eventually coming to the desert ruins. Mute cries were issuing from the spectres, imprisoned in that accursed place until the day of their judgement. They joined forces with the Guardian in his fight against the wizard. When the battle seemed to be lost and the sword almost triumphing, in the north appeared dragons belching fire. They reclaimed the sword and tossed the wizard into the void of the desert.*

A noise brusquely awoke Na'A from his trance. Hard knocking on the door, the same rhythmic cadence that helped to identify an ally. He slipped onto the floor, unconscious of exhaustion.

When he came round, he was lying in the crude cot of Saleno's nephew. A wet cloth in some woman's hands was wiping his face and cooling his excessively sweating body, in throes. He sat up, recovering from the trance. Saleno and Karan, were seated at the table, questioning the youngster who had brought the news from Trynio.

'My father talked with Bijago. At dawn, he'll cast off to fish. He doesn't mind taking a few more passengers along. Weever was very nervous when we gave him the false course and hurried off to the vessel with his crew. My father followed him and sent me to pass this message. He wants everybody on the boat in one hour from now.'

'Do you know if there are soldiers at the dock?' Saleno inquired anxiously. He did not know Na'Akano's destination either and was afraid that his presence in the city had been discovered. After all, it was him who had killed Krieger. If it came to light, his brother and whole family would also be in danger.

Yet, it was Na'A who replied, approaching the table, already recovered:

'The soldiers want to expose the bearer of the sword. The sapphire mounted in the hilt is a powerful source of energy. Davdak has etched his impressions here, it's his soulmate. He's after me, though he doesn't know who I am. He must be desperate because, at this moment, he's alone. He must have already realised that the Envoy is dead, and this will have delayed his plans once again — but the knowledge engraved in the sapphire could help him to recover more rapidly.'

'If that's the case, then we have to move right away. From what you've said, he won't stop until he finds the sword. We only have to find a way to get to Bijago's ship without being seen. If Weever has betrayed us, the soldiers should be hidden near his vessel,' remarked Saleno.

They all went out into the cold sea breeze that could still be felt. Trynio's son was heading the group. He knew those narrow streets that crisscrossed this neighbourhood inhabited by dark-skinned fishermen. In silence, they ran through the darkness of the night, broken solely by the twinkling stars and the occasional oil lantern glowing in a naked window.

That zone of the city was flat. The dock was situated in the west part of the bay which began at the castle cliff. It was the most sheltered place which in wintertime protected the vessels from the sea's onslaughts.

Na'A did not share Saleno's opinion as to the simplicity of the process (for him it was just a matter of getting to the boat) and recited words of protection for all four of them. He wrapped them in an energy halo that would ward off stray arrows or any direct attacks of the soldiers' blades. Still, his biggest fear was that the Dark Wizard would feel his presence.

After edging around the neighbourhood on the east side, they came to the large sandy beach where the fishermen, during breaks in labour, repaired their fishing equipment. They followed the ropes stretched between the posts buried in the sand, on which people dried fish. Then, they walked through the surf towards the place where the pier entered the sea. Thorn, Trynio's son, might have no flair for sailing, but he was brave and agile on dry land. He swiftly shinned up the pier, indifferent to the breaking waves, and signalled the others to wait. 'Climb only when you hear a whistle,' Thorn whispered down to them.

Once up there, Thorn uncovered his head and blithely strolled along the stone pier in the dawn light. From the other side, where the bay was sheltered, came the hustle and bustle of the fishermen preparing to set sail. The pier was about one hundred yards long and the ship he was looking for, the *Swordfish*, was more or less in the middle. He drew closer and stopped near the bow anchor chains where Bijago was shouting some commands next to his father. Trynio was surprised since he had expected to see him coming from the land side.

'Where's Na'Akano?' he asked. 'Everything is prepared for our departure. Weever's betrayed us. His boat is full of hidden soldiers.'

'They are waiting for my sign', Thorn answered, pointing back in the direction from which he had come.

'So call them. In a while the day will start. We are fishermen, not soldiers.'

Thorn did not wait for him to repeat the order. He took a few steps back, put two fingers inside his mouth and whistled shrilly. Three shadows emerged from the pier's edge, and he made a sign for them to move forward. However, only Saleno and Karan ran to the vessel. Na'Akano, standing atop the pier, was looking up towards the castle wall on the other side of the bay.

Everybody followed his gaze. Between two battlements, a dark figure was standing, lit up by the first rays of the rising sun, in dreadful contrast with the black clouds that were thickening overhead. Na'A, hooded, slowly raised his sword in his left hand, holding it just below the guard, with the point facing down, and the sapphire up.

The two wizards were sizing each other up, challengingly. Suddenly, among the battlements, the Dark Wizard raised his arms to the sky and then began to lower them gradually towards the bay, as he recited an incantation to control the elements. The black clouds above him started to move forward in an overpowering swirl, as a powerful hurricane stirred into life. A deluge of thick raindrops battered by strong winds began to fall upon the sea, which became troubled.

The storm was edging towards the bay intensifying its violence, stirred up by the figure high up on the battlements. Two boats which had already set out were carried off, as a feather carried by a breeze. Panic set in amongst the fishermen as two tornados began to take shape, moving down from the black clouds.

Na'A slightly swung backwards so as to have the storm on his left side. He crossed his arms, raised them, and bowed. On his right side, the rising sun was falling upon the tornados, bestowing on them an appalling beauty. The wizard held out his right arm towards the sun and his left, with the sword, towards the winds:

*'Le suilon sú naur ná, no dirweg dí na alago ál ah cofn có i gwaew gáw<sup>1</sup>'* Na'A shouted, looking directly at the sun.

Atop the pier, Thorn and Saleno were loosening the anchor chains, watching Na'Akano anxiously, as he continued to utter unintelligible words. Trynio, at the helm, was shouting a command to Bijago, while the crew members were dashing around the deck in a wild stampede to leave the port. Suddenly, everyone halted, and their eyes fixed on Na'A. The elf brought his hands together and started to weave a web of blazing light, as though all the power of the sun was compressed between his fingers. He tossed the light into the centre of the storm, roaring: *'Dosta dó alago ál<sup>2</sup>'*. At his waist, the sapphire in the sword hilt was gleaming intensely.

In the middle of the bay, the elements of nature, powered by the wizards, began a titanic battle. Tiny, yet endless strands of sunlight enveloped the whirling force of the hurricane, giving it an intensive glow and forming a thermal field which began to progressively weaken the force of the winds and deflect them to prevent the vessel from smashing.

Na'A took full advantage of the blockade created by the destructive forces: he ran towards the ship and placed himself on the bow, facing the stern. The others, at the same time, pushed off with the help of oars, moving the ship away from the pier against which several vessels, hurled by a strong wave, had already crashed.

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<sup>1</sup> I greet you, Sun. Protect yourself from the storm and clear the winds.

<sup>2</sup> Burn, storm!

The elf's counter-attack opened a corridor between the tornados that enabled *Swordfish* to escape. Yet, the winds were still too heavy and the sail, - unfurled in the meantime by one of the sailors - was shredded. A powerful wave started to push the vessel backwards.

In the bay arena, the elements kept on fighting, positioning themselves between the two wizards, making their direct confrontation impossible. Meanwhile, the sailors, were rowing furiously, trying desperately to avoid a collision with the pier – towards which the ship was being dangerously pushed.

Suddenly, Na'A had an idea. He leaned over the ocean in front of him and captivated mentally hundreds invisible life forms below the surface of the troubled sea. The effort that he had to expend on catching and controlling such a great number of minuscule brains was tremendous. Gradually, an enormous shoal of fish of all species and sizes started to band together under the ship's hull. They began to tow it, first slowly, then speeding up towards the open sea.

The chaos into which the marina had sunk was left behind— with the boats destroyed and the city invaded by the colossal waves. From high up on the walls, Davdak watched powerlessly as the *Swordfish* sailed away towards the open sea, carrying his mysterious arch-enemy aboard.

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They had been sailing eastward for almost a month and had long left the familiar waters behind. Everybody looked at Na'A with a greater respect now. It was thanks to the sun's energy stored in the sapphire that he recovered so quickly. Nonetheless, he had never been so close to physical exhaustion as after this battle — not even in the desert when he had been at the threshold of death. It was not surprising that Davdak had tried everything to retrieve the sword. However, at this moment, the person who was truly suffering was Thorn. Indeed, he was not born to sail. He spent the days alone, sitting on the stern struggling with seasickness He could not keep anything down. Only thanks to the nourishing brew the elf prepared for him regularly did he manage to stay alive. He was getting better very slowly, but eventually he managed to adapt.



During the first weeks, they hugged the coast, where, during short breaks, they replenished their supplies. Their last stop took place in Mire – the land forgotten by the gods. It was an authentic labyrinth where it was rather easy to sink into quicksand or be attacked by a crocodile (a common species in this region) or by a poisonous reptile with a deadly bite. Still, the nests were bountiful, built by birds between the reeds and the undergrowth. Wherever he looked, the landscape was constantly the same and hardly appealing.

Thorn was always the first to disembark and the last to come back. However, on this last break, judging from his recklessness, one would say he lost his mind: while the others were filling the barrels with water, he ventured into the reed fields. All of them had already despaired of his return, but no one was willing to go deeper into this labyrinth of traps. At last, Thorn appeared. He escaped his father's severe reprimand, after showing him a bag filled with eggs and three colourful ducks.

Trynio had not managed to hire any member of Weever's crew. However, Na'Akano, during his delirium sparked by the sapphire in Old Salt's house, had seen a rock in the middle of the sea., which, he had guessed, must have been an island. In the maps found in the Kiburtus' cave, someone charted in the middle of the sea, to the east, something that might have been a land. He pointed it out to the *Swordfish's* captain.

Trynio and Bijago spent their days poring over the map. People told legends about a distant land in the middle of the sea which sheltered monsters – nobody had seen it though.

'Perhaps Weever has seen it —' Saleno said at one point.

'Or a mate from his crew,' added Old Salt.

'When I tried to talk with them about it, they looked like they had seen the devil.'

They took notes about the coastline during the day; at night, they mapped the sky.

For the second time, the moon rose splendidly full. It was the moment to start rationing the supplies. Half of Bijago's crew had fled as the storm settled over Royal Heron's bay - but the rest had remained loyal. And even though it implied more work for everyone, it also meant fresh water and food for more time. The sea provided fish for their nets to catch. There was, however, no available source of water apart from the barrels — from which this precious liquid was vanishing quickly.

When the night arrived all the crew were already feeling demotivated. Since mid-morning the wind had not blown and everyone was pacing to and fro, doing and redoing the same tasks, to the sad sound of the drifting ship. The sun was implacable during the day and morale was low.

'If we don't find land in the next two or three days, we will have to turn back,' observed Trynio, addressing Na'A.

'If we end up with no wind, we won't go either forwards or backwards,' answered Bijago. 'Once I had no wind for a week and —'

'We don't need such stories right now,' Old Salt interrupted. 'We've both studied Na'Akano's maps and, if they are correct, we should have seen land by now. Unless their author wasn't accurate enough. That's why I think, with a tailwind, we can continue eastwards for two or three more days.'

'And that's what we'll do. Weever took Davdak somewhere and we'll discover where exactly.' Na'A spoke with conviction, leaving no doubt about his intentions.

But the fishermen intervened, manifesting their dissatisfaction with the difficult situation in which they found themselves. They had believed they would be fishing and did not know the reason for being there. With all the difficulties and uncertainties about the purpose of their journey, the protective aura they had seen in Na'Akano now seemed to dissipate. They were simple people and fishing was the only thing they knew. Returning empty-handed would mean that they would have no means to sustain their families.

The elf rose and went to the cabin where he kept his belongings. From the bag with coins brought from the desert, he removed several coins and came back outside. Before, however, he fondled the amulet carried upon his chest. It reminded him of his life's purpose.

Once outside, he approached every fisherman in turn and offered each one a gold coin, and another made of silver. Sitting against the rail, they accepted the gifts unmoved, until eventually they realised, in the dim dusk light, that these were not the ordinary copper coins they knew so well.

'When our mission comes to an end, you will receive two more coins, just like the ones lying in front of you.'

That payment was worth almost two years of their work and offered a strong motivation for those for whom hard labour was the reason for living. These men in fact had different values from those of Na'A's race. They depended much more on material goods. Anyway, he had earned unconditional allies and that night would bring them dreams of a better life, kindled by the nibbling of the coins to confirm that the discs were truly gold.

Dawn was breaking when the men were woken by a dull thud of a shy wind beating against the triangular sail. A good night's sleep, with the prospect of a more decent existence, breathed new life into the crew, speeding up the process of putting the bustling vessel on the right course.

Na'A had positioned himself at the bow, in Karan and Thorn's company. Bijago was holding the helm with Saleno, while Trynio was shouting commands to the fishermen. And he was right to do so. The wind brought by wayward fate was rapidly picking up speed. Suddenly, the *Swordfish* was barely touching the water.

'Stretch this line, son of a pilchard! If this sail rips me apart, I'll throw you to the sharks!' Old Salt yelled to one of the mates, while holding the helm. 'You over there! Set the boom! Five degrees to starboard! Tell the others to go into the cabin, it will get ugly,' he said to Saleno.

The waves were striking the deck mercilessly and one of the sailors almost slipped overboard when trying to loosen the halyard to lower the sail. Luckily he had tied a rope around his waist.

It was no use of shouting orders any more since no one could be heard because of the noise of the raging storm. At these moments, it was experience that mattered. The fisherman that earlier almost had fallen into the sea now started to gesticulate frantically towards the cabin, pointing to an enormous mass of water moving in the direction of the vessel. Two others seized the sail, harnessed just a second before, and bound it to the mast, using the ropes to hold on while waiting for the clash.

Inside the cabin, Bijago was struggling to point the bow at a gigantic wave which was dragging black clouds behind it. Yet, it was difficult to undertake this manoeuvre because they constantly lost contact with the surface. Thorn had fully regained his fear of the sea and was swearing he would never set foot on a ship again. Saleno hid a secret fear as well — triggered by the appearance of Karan, the new Guardian. He started to wonder how life after death would be.

Na'A was aware of those intimate thoughts, but there was nothing he could do. A giant wave went past them, lifting the ship up to its peak and letting it fall down back onto the water with a terrible impact. They could hear the sound of breaking wood. The vessel tilted dangerously. The mast broke in two and fell on the cabin, shattering it with the force of the impact. Only Bijago was still tied to the helm — everyone else was tossed to the deck, clinging on to anything they could.

The storm lasted several hours and, when it ended, nature presented them with a torrential rainfall, so strong that whoever stayed at the bow was not able to see the stern. With nightfall, the rain gradually eased until, late at night, the first stars began to appear in the clear and calm sky, and the sea became smooth. Everyone started to inspect their wounds.

When dawn broke and the darkness abandoned them, they could see the chaos reigning on the ship. Nobody could sleep. Their soaked clothes hurt them to the marrow. The sea salt was burning in their wounds, which were ugly in some cases. Old Salt stood up between the ropes, holding his arm that he had broken when the mast had fallen. He was gritting his teeth to muffle the pain. He looked at Bijago sitting on the floor of the cabin, with blood dripping from his nape - but still holding the helm with his left hand:

'By the guts of the swordfish! I've never seen a storm like that in the whole fifty years of my life as a sea dog!'

Bijago could not help smiling. He had never had a knack for imitating those raffish expressions that slipped out of his old master's mouth, despite his attempts.

'How are the others?' he asked.

Trynio did not have time to reply - the vessel, seriously damaged, unexpectedly stopped, stuck in a sandbank. Those who had already got up were tossed onto the floor once again, while the others let out louder whimpers of pain

Gradually, all the fishermen (apart from one with a broken leg) approached the bow in whatever way they could, examining the bay on which they had stranded.

'May a moray bite me!' roared Old Salt. 'So the island really exists!' A groan suppressed his joy as he tried to raise his broken arm.

The aftermath of the terrible squall was painful. Saleno had disappeared. The fisherman that had run to gather up the sail had died with a broken neck. Na'A astonished everyone once again by healing broken bones and soothing the pain of the serious injuries suffered by the survivors. Trynio's grief was the one thing he could not soothe. Saleno had been very close to his brother.

Karan was sorrowful as well. After burying the fisherman beneath the first tree of the long palm field, Na'A moved closer to the Guardian.

'Saleno knew what lay ahead and he also realised that his death was soon to come', Na'A said to try to comfort the youth.

'But why?' Karan retorted with a question. 'He didn't have to die just because the chain flickered at me. This adornment is nothing more than a trinket! Perhaps, it would have fitted better on his neck.'

'This is one of your first lessons. No one knows the day nor the hour of his death, but the Guardian must bear this burden. The chain doesn't choose just any one! From this moment, you are bound with the future of humanity. Always when a new Guardian appears, it's a sign that the previous one is going to die. Haven't I taught you anything during these months? You have a mission!'

Indeed, Karan had learned a lot. But Saleno had replaced his murdered father in his affections which was why he mourned him. He moved far off to meditate on everything that had happened during the last months, blaming himself for letting grief overshadow his good sense. He had already had proofs that the collar was not just a simple adornment.

In the following days, the fishermen devoted themselves to repairing the vessel and Na'A invited Karan to explore the island with him. If it were the island he was looking for, the place which Davdak covertly visited, he needed to know the secret it hid. Having in mind the threats he could encounter, it was with reluctance that he invited Karan to accompany him; still, he believed it would be the best way to forget about the heart-breaking disappearance of Saleno. They would set off the next morning.

The half-moon formed by the bay was hidden behind a huge cliff, the end of which, in the south-east, had been sculpted by the sea into a lattice that tossed thousands of foam drops into the air. A palm field lying between the beach and a huge round stone wall enhanced the beauty of this place/beautified the place. In the north, the wall gradually lowered until it smoothly entered the sea again. The water was coated with a green carpet of freely growing grasses, forming the only entrance to the creek. In the middle of the stone wall, a crack allowed the jet of water to escape, forming a stream that filled a small lake, surrounded by rocks, and then flowed on to the sea.

Na'A was walking with Karan beside him. The youth was about his height but over the last months he had visibly gained some maturity. Their immediate aim was to climb to the top of the cliff to get a view of the interior of the island, but trying not to be noticed if it were inhabited. When they were ready to leave the shelter provided by the palms, Karen warned that they were being followed.

'Yes, we are,' Na'A replied smiling. 'It looks like you have a bodyguard.'

Karan understood what the elf meant when he surprised Thorn bending two branches of a palm and appearing in front of him. In his youthful irreverence, he had decided to follow them.

They continued all three together. However, Na'A decided it would be better to move along the coast instead of climbing to the top of an unprotected plateau. After walking round the cape, a wide bay (a hundred times the size of the one from where they had embarked) extended before them. It was covered with golden sand forming a beach and turquoise water of the sea.

The dunes were compressed between the crashing waves and the palm plantation, growing on both sides of the gentle hills spread out in front of them, apart from the central zone, where, despite the distance, they discerned two tremendous columns and something that looked like a small boat moored to a wharf.

They made their way to the shore, unnoticed in the shade of the palm trees, and arrived there at dusk. The storm must have spared the bay since there were no signs of destruction. The two pillars they had seen from afar were separated by thirty feet and marked the beginning of the wharf, which extended no more than twenty feet into the water, about the size of the boat. All they could see were two banks, one on each side of the small mast. The oars were lying above the causeway.

From between the stone columns a flagged path began. It stretched landwards, through the middle of a huge clearing, until it disappeared among the palm and coconut trees which thrived there in abundance. Yet, the slabs seemed strange because of the chaotic drawings covering their surface, almost as if someone or something had scratched on them randomly.

'There are some inscriptions on this column, but I can't understand a thing,' Karan said, peering closely at one of the pillars. It was bigger than him. What intrigued him the most were the bizarre letters etched around the column in a perfect circle, on various levels.

'They are runes,' the elf explained. He drew closer to the pillars to see them better. 'Whoever engraved them had to have some purpose.'

'There are more on this one,' said Thorn.

But Na'A had no time to decode the rune pattern, for there was suddenly a tremendous bellow/wail, followed by another which burst into a total cacophony. Everyone turned towards the sound that was precisely coming from the end of the path.

Karan was about to draw his sword, but the wizard stopped him:

'We didn't come here to fight. The sun has already set and it doesn't seem to me that the creature which made this noise came here to bathe. We shall hide among these palms and wait until the night becomes deeper. Let's eat something and then you wait for me here. I will see what's at the end of this path.'

The night was already dark when Na'A rose.

'Wait for me until sunrise. If I don't come back, wait one more day and return to the ship the same night. There, wait for me two more days. Then raise the anchor. Do not wander around here in daylight.'

Thorn was about to suggest that he should take a bow with him, but the elf had already disappeared.

'Since you've seen him fighting, you should know he has no need of the bow. Have you forgotten what he did at the bay of Royal Heron?'



The stone path continued a few dozen feet inland. On both sides, Na'Akano made out the ruins of houses with the remains of walls and bulky stone blocks that had been invaded by vegetation and attacked by creepers. Na'A remained alert, despite his conviction that whoever lived in this place did not expect visitors. The half-moon overshadowed by thousands of stars gave the stones a copper shade, creating an eerie allure. Nonetheless, it helped the elf to blend in with the background.

At a certain point, the path passed through a wall, about seventeen feet high and four feet wide, which extended in both directions until blocked by rocky walls formed some kind of a large arena. The top of the wall created a step at the place where it met the rock. Above it, one could see shadows of what seemed to be dozens of caverns carved intentionally. On the wall, more or less at man's height, there were torches burning at fifty feet intervals. Na'A focused on finding forms of life. He felt he was not alone. He had an excellent night vision as a matter of fact — like almost all elves — but he was unable to detect the source of the life traces he perceived. Instead, on the other edge of the arena, he saw a gigantic stone façade of what seemed to be a building. Whoever lived on the island must be inside. On both sides of the portal, there were torches, whose dim yellow light illuminated the contours of a large closed gate with a knocker in the middle. The stone floor before it was covered with the remains of animal shells and stains of some viscous liquid that looked like blood.

Na'A crept along the wall silently, his senses alert. He tried to understand what made the noise he heard, which was like wind slipping between the cracks in rock. But there was *no* wind. He sharpened his hearing and noticed that the sound was coming from above, from many different directions. At that moment, as though confirming his suspicions, a greasy liquid fell on his head. He reached up to touch it, and then recoiled in repulsion.

In one of the recesses in the stone wall there was a half-opened muzzle lying on its side, dribbling through its enormous teeth. Suddenly, he understood. The sound he heard was the air passing through the nostrils of the beasts sleeping in the wall niches. They must have been huge animals. Probably, the shells scattered everywhere had been their dinner. It explained the roars he had heard on the beach.

He approached the entrance noiselessly. Three steps led up to a solid wooden door. Two side columns supported the tympanum, which protected the great portal. To Na'A's astonishment, the knocker was in the shape of a dragon's head. By looking more closely at the pillars, he made out a pattern of runes. However, they were engraved in a way unfamiliar to him. Their tips were curved — to boost the magic effect of each one of them. The fact that they were twisted and not straight endowed them with evil properties. The runes he knew were not curved. At the bottom of every column he found the engraving he feared to find: a half-egg with three rippling flames coming from it. There were no longer any doubts. Davdak had adopted the symbol representing Eòlas and had etched it here as well. But Na'A was also now certain that the beasts in the niches were not dragons, but rather Wyverns, which the Dark Wizard had used to attack Naur'Can, centuries ago. But if Davdak had stayed in Royal Heron, then who was controlling the beasts? What kind of allies could he have made, that were powerful enough to master Wyverns?

His thoughts were interrupted as he realised that the night was approaching its end. He did not want to be found here, but he would not leave before seeing who controlled the beasts. He looked around and noticed some broad steps on either side of the door which led to the top of the wall, giving access to the caverns. Without a second thought he dashed off/rushed into that direction as the first sunbeams began to pass through the stone cracks. He started to climb up, with a racing heart. Every single step was followed by the sound of the slowly waking monsters. He was now leaping up the stairs, looking around for a shelter. A faint noise from behind the portal forced him to concentrate. Suddenly, he noticed one recess that was not occupied. He sneaked inside the very moment the gate opened. The huge winged creatures began to rise for a new day, as a person passed through the portal. What Na'A saw, shook him to the core.

#### 4. Background information and pre-translation analysis

Before translating, the first phase of the project relied on the ST analysis. As translation is not merely a linguistic process, it was fundamental to gather more information about the context of the text production, publication and reception (Nida, 2000: 130). The model implemented in

this project was conceived by Christiane Nord (Nord, 2005). Its comprehensive nature consists of delineating the most relevant aspects that, according to the author, have to be taken into account in the pre-translation process. It is a Functionalist approach, which develops Reiss and Vermeer's *Skopos* Theory. Therefore, the main focus is placed on the functions of the ST and the TT performance in their cultures. Notwithstanding its functional character, it also considers both communicative aspect (distinguished through the external information survey), and linguistic properties, combined with text composition and semantic analysis. Several "checklists", composed of auxiliary questions, helped to collect the relevant data about extra- and intratextual features. The first type of information encapsulated the details regarding the sender, the sender's intention, the receiver, the medium, the place, the time, the motive and the function of the communication. The source-text oriented survey casts light on the content, presuppositions, composition, non-verbal elements, lexis, sentence structures and suprasegmental elements of the text in question (Nord, 2005). However, the information obtained from the different above-listed factors may overlap, which can be ascribed to the fact that the same issues affect more than one factor.

In this project, the focus was placed on four main strands: the text function; the external factors influencing the text production/propagation; the nature of the text and its form; and the content. Nord's model was complemented with Katharina Reiss' three-phase framework (Reiss, 2004: 168), which takes into consideration the text type, the text variety, and the style of the text, visible in text composition and linguistic features.

#### 4.1. *The Prophecy* – the pre-translation analysis

As a result of the implementation of Nord's model, it is feasible to provide the background information about the ST, along with an overview of its inner characteristics. By this means, the context of the text production and publication can be delineated, together with its influence on the text content and functions. Subsequently, the data regarding external features will be compared with the results obtained through the TT analysis (→ Translation problems).

##### 4.1.1. Extra-textual features

The first fundamental factor to be examined is the sender of the text. This role is attributed to the text producer, António Costeira, and to a lesser degree to the publisher *Edições Vieira da Silva*. The author decided to self-publish his book through the referred company. Nevertheless, its interference in the author's vision was minimal, and focused primarily on the book composition (for instance, they requested from António two glossaries, one describing the magic runes, the other introducing all the characters).

António was born in 1957 in Angola, as a child of primary school teachers. At the age of ten, he immigrated with his family to Porto, Portugal. A year after they set up home in Coimbra, where he finished his pre-university education. Forced to start his professional career, he began to work as a medical sale representative. He is divorced and has, already grown-up, children from his marriage.

Since his early years, António enjoyed writing down his thoughts and to read books. He was raised among British fantasy novels, and in his adult life preserved this interest in the genre. Yet, he did not receive any professional training in text production. Publishing his prose was to some extent motivated by a desire of being recognized as a writer, and commencing his novelist career.

His first writing attempts were based upon his personal experience, but they remained in draft form. After his mother passed away, by chance he found, among her belongings, a draft of a story that gave rise to the fantasy novel in question, *A Profecia*. Therefore, the book was partially intended as a tribute to his mother. Still, the principal writer's intention coincides with the one associated with the genre and its function: escape, recovery, and consolation (Tolkien, 2001: 18). In the era of digitalization people seek an escape from the daily routine, they want to experience magic in the bosom of nature, and find hope, following the protagonist on his quest against evil to restore peace. The general genre intention, relies on these factors; however, any literary commercial production is intended to be a best-seller.

*A Profecia*, was written for the Portuguese audience, as it can be deduced from the initial chapter describing the university canteen in Coimbra. The anticipated reader is a late teenager or adult fantasy enthusiast, of at least basic education. The content could be considered not

appropriate for children (as suggested by the thread of the romance between Carlos and Rowana resulting in a child; and his cynical-pragmatic attitude towards Rowana). It is also advantageous to have a basic knowledge of physics, given the many science fiction motifs (cold nuclear fusion, Carlos' inventions), though not too much (the theoretical framework of the aforementioned inventions may not stand up to specialist scrutiny).

The book in question was published in Lisbon in 2016, in the form of a fantasy fiction book. The second edition contained: synopsis (back of the cover); information about the author, coloured map of the magic world, and positive reviews (inner part of the cover); one glossary about the runes, and another containing a list of the characters-. There are sixteen chapters in total.

#### 4.1.2. Intra-textual features

According to Reiss (2004: 170), if a situation occurs in which the ST function differs from the one of the translation, it should be rather adjusted to the new purpose of the text. *A Profecia* in the SC fulfils the purposes of the fantasy genre, but in the TC it is also meant to accomplish commercial success. Contributing to this fact, the classification considering the text type has been replaced with Nord's one, encompassing the functional reasons.

*A Profecia* represents the referential text type, *id est* refers "to the objects and phenomena of the world or of a particular world, perhaps a fictional one." (Nord, 2006: 136). Fantasy settings are based on the real world, deviating from it on account of the presence of magic and its implications (Mendlesohn, 2008: 59). Moreover, the factor of credibility of the fictional world manifests itself through the accumulation of details recognizable for the reader (Idem: 7). *A Profecia* fulfils these requirements.

As a literary production, the book in question represents the expressive type of Reiss' classification, corresponding to "the communication of artistically organized content". The text intends to fulfil the author's "artistic and creative intention". Thus, the translator is advised to strive for the preservation of the "artistic" dimension to the greatest possible degree (Reiss, 2004: 162-163).

*A Profecia*, as indicated above, is a fantasy fiction novel. Since the text variety reflects “specifically structured sociocultural patterns of communication” (Reiss, 2004: 165), the language and structure of the book in question should correspond to the target culture conventions considering the aforementioned genre translation. In other words, the TT should be “recomposed” having in mind the target audience expectations, linked to the target culture translation norms for fantasy novels. Not only is British fantasy tradition rich and long, but the genre also enjoys considerable popularity among English-speaking readers (Chadbourne, 2008). Interestingly, the marketability of this type of literature, stemming from the imaginative scenery full of exotic, bizarre, and unfamiliar elements, suggests that the fantasy texts should be subject to a foreignization policy. Notwithstanding this fact that, it seems that they are mainly translated according to the prevailing practices, e.g. domesticated. For this reason, the reproduction of the author’s style (i.e. the composition of the text, together with lexical, semantic, syntactic and pragmatic features) is contingent upon the norms accepted in the United Kingdom.

The subject matter is linked to the genre, more specifically, to the classical pattern of the quest fantasy. It is composed of three main phases: an evil interference disturbs the existing peace; then a protagonist sets out to discover his fate and dormant capacities, to finally restore the previous order (Medlesohn, 2008, 60). Apart from introducing this model, the story combines fantasy and science-fiction elements, intertwining the chapters that took place in the magical land (equivalent to the world in the mythological past), with the ones set in the near future. The realistic setting displays at first ordinary traits of the real world, showing the city of Coimbra and a Portuguese engineer Carlos, with the culture-specific information. In the consecutive part of the book, Carlos moves to a mountain village, located somewhere ‘in the north of Europe’ (Costeira, 2016). With a nearby forest, it constitutes a universal and symbolic space, into which magic starts to permeate. Due to this mixed composition, the novel brings together several fantasy sub-genres (such as the immersive, portal-quest, luminal and intrusive types<sup>3</sup>) and shows

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<sup>3</sup> Sarah Mendlesohn (2008) in her book *Rhetorics of Fantasy* proposes a classification applied only to fantasy as the commercial genre. She distinguishes four main sub-categories on the basis of the appearance of the magic factor: the portal-quest fantasy (1-58), the immersive fantasy (59-113), the intrusive fantasy (114-181), and the luminal fantasy (182-245). The first sub-category, the portal quest fantasy describes a story departing from the mundane life (mostly set in the realistic background) which changes drastically by an event, or by entering a portal. The plot is constructed around the hero that has to restore the lost peace. The magic land is often corresponding to the

certain marks of originality. The composition also reveals characteristics of the concept denominated by John Clute (1997) 'thinning': magic diminishes with time, e.g. the past is immersed in supernatural elements, and while approaching to the present times. gradually loses fantastic features.

A number of styles are employed in the novel depending on the chapter and the characters appearing in the book (sailor's speech stylization, language simplification used by Kuburtu tribe, etc.). However, António Costeira also uses poetic and unusual expressions, as he sometimes introduces words from the medical terminology, while the sentences are complex and complicated, constructed *inter alia* in order to emulate orality.

This analysis has enabled a more profound understanding of the different text layers, as well as a more far-reaching interpretation of the work. It also helped in distinguishing the major problematic axes as well. Nevertheless, the main function of the TT rests on the profit-oriented aspect. Therefore, the strategy had to be adjusted to this purpose (Reiss, 2004: 170).

#### 5. Profit-oriented character of the publication

If someone investigates the best-selling lists of all time, four different fantasy novels occupy the top twenty positions, respectively, *The Lord of the Rings* (150 million copies sold), *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* (107 million), *The Hobbit* (100 million) and *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* (85 million) (Griese, 2010). Proceeding with the analysis, if whole series are taken into account, the interest in the genre is on the increase. The sales figures enjoyed by the Harry Potter series by J. K. Rowling (450 million), *The Chronicles of Narnia* by C. S. Lewis (120 million) and by the not previously mentioned Terry Pratchett's *Discworld* series (80 million) or George R. R. Martin's *Game of Thrones* (58 million) show its great popularity throughout the world (Page, 2016). Without any doubt, readers are interested in fantasy novels. However, only

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"real-world" in the mythologized past. The immersive fantasy takes place in the fantastic world, and the structure is constructed as if the reader were familiar with the rules governing it. The intrusive fantasy is set in a realistic fictional world, and the magic enters through an intrusion, that turns upside down the world of the protagonist. It is based on the gradually constructed tension, and feeling of threat. The luminal fantasy encompasses the stories which "feel" like fantasy. It is founded on Barthes' concept of *knowingness* (shared code). The fantasy appears in the mimetic world as a normal element.

since the 1970s has it been recognised as “adult fiction”. For a long time the supernatural factor was almost considered an exclusive matter of interest for the child-juvenile market. Nowadays, it seems difficult to lump Martin’s works together with Winnie the Pooh stories. Nevertheless, old fables, belonging to the same tradition as the original Grimm brothers’ tales, had much in common with the modern fantasy novels.

Nowadays, there are publishers specialized in this area: in the United Kingdom alone we can name more than twenty of them (e.g. Gollancz, Orbit, Grimbold Books). Fantasy books are mentioned in the top ranks of the most awaited books (Runcie, 2016). It seems that the fantasy genre occupies a stable position on the English market. In consequence, encouraged by the increasing interest, many authors started to make spin-offs or publishing stories based on the successful books, constructing the plot on this pattern. After the emergence of *Discworld* series, public opinion understood that the writer of fantasy novel can be a witty person with a brilliant sense of humour.

While significantly fewer literary translations are published in the British market comparing to the other countries, the domestic books are exported outside the United Kingdom in a great number (Venuti, 2008: 11; International Publishers Association, 2016: 16). In the twentieth century it was already considered a powerful empire, influencing politically and economically other countries (Venuti, 2008: 5). Consequently, its entertainment sector started to widen, and dominated, together with the United States, the international market, especially its literary branch (Rüdinger, 2012). This process was also correlated with English language becoming *lingua franca*. However, recently the book industry started to lose its predominance, in a great part to the video games production (Kinding, 2017). Still, fantasy is one of the most popular genres in almost every English-language entertainment field, as one can judge from by the movie, TV series, video games, or mentioned literary statistics (Barett, 2017; Berg, 2017; Brevet, 2016). In Portugal, fantasy also holds some popularity, but the readership appreciates much more either fantasy books recognized internationally, or translations of the foreigner authors. A certain prejudice is still present, which reduces fantasy to children’s fiction (Mendes, 2009).



The import of foreign books into British literary market is significantly lower than the production of domestic ones (Rüdinger, 2012; International Publishers Association, 2016, Venuti, 2008: 11). This implies that the publisher is driven by a set of motivations, which demonstrate themselves in *inter alia* repertoire choice. Nowadays, the companies without special donations need to operate a cost-effective business. Therefore, the books published, including the renditions, have to be profitable (Barslund, 2011: 144).

It seems that there are three main reasons why translations are published in the Anglophone market: firstly, when the writer is very famous and successful abroad (this is the case with authors like Haruki Murakami, Camilla Läckberg, Ryszard Kapuściński); secondly, when the text has a certain exotic appeal (as with the recent wave of Scandinavian thrillers known as Scandi noir); and finally, in cases where the provenance of the work is not significant and the translation strategy is the one of complete TC naturalness. For the first two factors, the corresponding strategy would be the one of foreignization. Its main aim lies in preserving the alien, and thus, exotic features, counting on the background knowledge of the target readership, or on the translator's explanation in the form of introduction, epilogue, glossaries, or footnotes. The last factor suggests the appliance of domestication, ergo erasing the distance between the cultures, adapting it to the TC norm and expectations so that the translation cannot easily be distinguished from a book originally written in the TL. In such cases, the reader does not care whether or not it was written originally in their own language (Barslund, 2011: 145).

*A Profecia* was received in Portugal rather warmly, as demonstrates by the fact that António Costeira already signed a contact with one of the biggest fantasy publishers in the country, Editora Saída. On the other hand, he is still a 'peripheral' writer, not known by the wider audience. His text is constructed around the well-known fantasy motifs and generic story frame. However, the whole genre draws on inspiration from the set of ideas deriving from folktales, myths, legends, denominated by Tolkien "Pot of Soup" (2001 [1964]: 9). The originality of fantasy rests on the writer's approach: he "rewrites" these recurring themes in a new manner.

António Costeira reveals marks of originality in the text composition, and in the features of certain characters (Old Salt, Kiburtus, Carlos). For all these reasons - and bearing in mind the future function of the chapters (proposal for a publisher) - the chosen strategy relied on adjusting the ST to the TC expectancy norms.

In the context of localized parts of the text which contain Portuguese cultural references, the decision whether to domesticate, or foreignize them has not yet been made. If they become the subject of foreignization, they will preserve the exotic allure for the target readership (Portugal is perceived as a desirable holiday destination among the British readers). If domesticated, the text will turn more fluent, and readable in the TL, but deprived of certain characteristic elements.

### **Translation Problems**

The reason behind the translation of the book in question, *A Profecia*, is to release it on the British market. In order to do that, it has to be profitable for the English publisher, hence comply with the translation conventions of the fantasy novel.

During the translation process, the recognized fundamental problems were assembled into three principal categories: (1) adaptation of the source text to target culture conventions; (2) language varieties; (3) proper names.

#### **5.1. Adaptation of the Source Text to Target Culture Conventions**

The translator serves as intermediary between author and target public. However, it is important to remember the fact that the TT is made for the reader in the TC, who is different from the reader of the original text. For this reason, the translator has to fulfill two functions: first of a reader, and second of a “rewriter” (Lefevere, 1992:).

The translator’s interpretation of a literary work is the one that is passed on. In the context of literary productions, the transmission of the artistic value seems highly relevant in view that its aesthetic dimension can be involved in the conveyance of the meaning. In a fantasy text, as *A*

*Profecia*, this thesis can be illustrated by evoking the process of world creation, the gradually built tension, the emotive and appealing factors, etc.

In agreement with the *Skopos* theory the TT should be produced in such a way that it is internally coherent. This prerequisite is considered to be hierarchically more significant than the coherency maintained with the ST (Vermeer, 2003: 223). For this reason, where there are reasons to assume that the internal coherence is jeopardised due to the preservation of certain constructions of the ST in the TT, some adjustments have been applied (Pym, 2005). The final effect has to comply with the target reader's notion of what is 'appropriate', or 'acceptable in the particular genre (Chesterman, 1984: 66).

Regarding the TT function, a similar strategy has been implemented in the segments that could be perceived as flaws according to the target culture conventions. As Venuti (2008:4) points out, the TT is evaluated a non-translation, and when it deviates from the TC norms, in the strong British literary market, it is exposed to criticism.

The adjustments made in order to adapt the ST to the TC conventions have been divided in two main categories: (1) coherence of emotive and emphatic distribution; and (2) ambiguities and confusing logical sequences. There are other aspects that could be included in this classification, yet they did not present significant difficulties in the process of translation (as redundancy and clichés).

#### 5.1.1. *The Prophecy* – Coherence of emotive and emphatic distribution

Fantasy fiction, besides exercising the functions attributed to the genre, serves the same purpose as every literary production: of entertainment. The reader's choice of the book can depend on such elements as the plot or, the aesthetic dimension (visible in *inter alia* syntactical constructions, sharp metaphors, or accurate lexis). However, it is important to bear in mind the other factor that influences text reception: the text construction, which keeps the reader suspended in tension. To achieve this effect, it is important to distribute emphasis accordingly to the situation.

In the book in question, the syntactical constructions are long and complex, and cumulate a great deal of events and details. In certain cases, this strategy produces an unintentional effect of tension loss. These fragments depict quick events, when the characters have to move rapidly. The reader should feel the threat and approaching danger. Due to the aforementioned construction the action extends over the sentence, and thus loses its impact. The final paragraph of the chapter “A Ilha” vividly illustrates this. The marked parts of the fragment represent the main problems (the colour coding will be discussed in the analysis that follows):

Os seus pensamentos foram interrompidos **pelo alerta** de que a noite se aproximava do fim e não queria ser encontrado ali, mas não iria embora sem ver quem controlava as bestas. Olhou em toda a volta e viu umas escadas largas que, em cada um dos lados, levava ao topo do muro e ao acesso às grutas. **Constatou enquanto subia** que nem todas estavam ocupadas e em boa hora se introduziu dentro da primeira, pois as enormes aves começam a despontar para o novo dia, no preciso momento em que também a porta se abriu deixando passar um personagem que abalou Na’A.

The chapter “A Ilha” is partially set on the eponymous island. Na’Akano discovers the place visited secretly by Davdak, where Wyverns (dragons’ relatives serving the dark wizard) are bred. Na’A stays too long in the monsters’ settlement, and, before the dawn breaks in, has to quickly find a shelter to not be found.

It is difficult to develop the emotional strain in such short space, especially if the only contrast in the fragment, appears at the end. In the moment, when the protagonist has to act rapidly and the panic rises, the chapter ends. The reader does not feel the rush of the protagonist. For this reason, the last sentence from the ST has been rewritten into eight smaller sentences in the TT:

His thoughts were interrupted **as he realised that the night** was approaching its end. He did not want to be found here, but he would not leave before seeing who controlled the beasts. He looked around and **noticed** some broad steps on either side of the door which led to the top of the wall, giving access to the caverns. Without a second thought he dashed off as the first sunbeams began to pass through the stone cracks. He started to climb up, with a racing heart. Every single step was followed by the sound of the slowly waking monsters. He was now leaping up the stairs, looking around for a shelter. A faint noise from behind the portal forced him to concentrate. Suddenly, he noticed one recess that was not occupied. He sneaked inside the very moment the gate opened. The huge winged creatures began to rise for a new day, as a person passed through the portal. What Na’A saw, shook him to the core.

The protagonist had to hurry, and thus to both take quick decisions, and move rapidly. Therefore, the final sentence of the ST has been cut into short sentences, which have increased the tension. The temporal expressions (highlighted in pink in both source and target texts) were reduced in number in favour of the verbs of movement (yellow). They were complemented by the expressions like 'racing heart', or 'sneak inside', and as a result the pace of the narrative accelerated. Waking Wyverns (green), representing the ever-present peril, have appeared during the protagonist's desperate run to find a shelter, and when he already managed to hide himself. The danger has been emphasized via the senses: sight (sunbeams passing through the walls, looking around for a shelter), and hearing (a faint noise, the sound of monsters). To make the action more dramatic, the number of recesses was reduced to just one, which saved Na'Akano. The order of sentences has been generally preserved; however, the additions are linked to the core points distinguished in the ST (realising the danger, running to hide, looking for a shelter, eventually succeeding, while noticing the Wyverns waking up, and seeing the gate opening). Furthermore, the underlined text is related to the senses, and the rush, while bold green font corresponds to the thread of waking monsters.

The other issue worth mentioning is linked to the coherence connectors. In some fragments, it seems that impact in the sentences is smaller, when the connector indicates a transition of ideas different than what can be deduced from the semantic level. As a result, the relations between the clauses are not preserved, and they seem to be less emotive. It is visible in the fragment of the utterance in which one of the characters explains the difficulty of arriving to the port unseen, and of setting off without revealing the destination:

Há muitos soldados na cidade e o Capitão do barco diz que não é bom augúrio partir sem saber o destino.

The conjunction 'e' joins two arguments together, though without any emotional charge. Bearing in mind the nature of the event, and the oral character of the sentence, this conjunction has been replaced in the TT with the expression 'apart from that', in order to mark the second clause as a subsequent argument of reasoning, aiming to convince the interlocutor about the problems occurred:

'There are many soldiers in the city. **Apart from that**, the Captain of the ship says it's a bad omen to sail without knowing where you're going.

The analogous procedure can be observed in the following sentence: "Os marinheiros são supersticiosos **e** a tripulação está do lado dele." Two parts of the sentence were joined together by the conjunction 'and'. As two main clauses, the information they conveyed seemed to be unrelated. Therefore, the second main clause has been modified into a subordinated clause in the TT, by a conjunction expressing consequence: "The sailors are superstitious, **so** the crew is on his side."

Modifications have also been applied at the lexical level, in order to change the overtone of the expressions, creating a specific connotation in the target reader. This procedure has been implemented due to various reasons. For instance, the expression in the ST could not bear any connotation at all, but in the TT it gained a fantastic overtone ("algumas palavras de cura" – "a healing incantation"). The inversion situation also occurred, and a specific connotation of the ST has been substituted with the neutral one in the TT. This case can be illustrated with the scientific terms appearing in descriptions of landscape or action in the ST. In the TT they have been simplified to their neutral equivalents (e.g. "vegetação xerófila" – "arid desert vegetation", "decompressão" – "pressure ease", etc.). Under some circumstances a positive connotation in the ST could be transformed into a negative in the TT, as in the fragment about Davdak's provenience:

Ele é **fruto** de uma união entre homem e elfo.

The reader is aware that Davdak is a depraved, evil wizard, and thus any positive word referring to his person could may be contradictive to his character. 'Fruto', which has a positive overtone, lost it in the translation, gaining the negative one, adjusted to the context:

He was **spawned from** the union of man and elf.

The expression in question, in the TL is a pejorative term when it refers to the human beings. Moreover, it is associated with unpleasant slimy creatures, such as frogs, snails, or demons.

All these adjustments serve the purpose of creating a more emotive, and thus captivating narrative. The main aim relies on adding emphasis in the parts that had neutral emotional charge, but the content of the sentences suggested that it should have persuasive character, construct gradually tension, or show the contrast. In the quoted fragments the coherence relationship between the syntactical parts of the sentence were adjusted to their semantic level, according to the translator's interpretation.

#### 5.1.2. *The Prophecy* – Ambiguities and confusing logical sequences

When António Costeira began to write the story, he did not follow any plan. The characters and events were appearing in his mind gradually, and thus he did not work on the linear plot. Once intrigued with one thread, he tried to develop it, abandoning the others. Shortly before publishing his novel, he began to organize the text into a coherent structure. Although consequently the composition gained more originality, certain fragments manifested traces of ambiguity, which can impede the comprehensive understanding of the text.

Particular parts seem confusing due to the lack of text formatting. This seems relevant since *A Profecia* contains fragments which describe the metaphysical experiences of the protagonists. In the chapters in question there are three main visions that reveal traces of ambiguity, and can present some difficulties in the interpretation. The first one depicts Na'Akano's delirium. While crossing the desert, the protagonist, wounded and dehydrated, developed high fever which triggered hallucinations:

Por várias vezes ia caindo dele abaixo, mas segurava-se no último instante. Afinal parecia que aquele maldito mago sempre tinha conseguido os seus intentos. Mago? Mas qual mago? Ah, aquele que o tentara matar. Mas ele estava vivo! Ou já estaria na Mansão? Não, não podia estar na Mansão, estava demasiado calor.

Sim, agora lembrava-se, estava a brincar com SuÃni e estava muito calor, por isso decidiram ir tomar banho ao rio, mas quando lá chegaram o rio transformara-se num mar de chamas que engoliu a sua irmã. Ele tentava fugir, mas o cavalo que montava era muito velho e não andava. Quando o incitou, ele tombou para o lado arrastando-o consigo na queda.

The delusions experienced by Na'Akano are not separated from the main narration. The external description of the events all of a sudden converts into a subjective, chaotic current of thoughts. The end of the internal monologue is not marked, and therefore the reader can overlook the fact that Na'Akano falls from the horse not in his vision, but in the real-time narrative.

The delirium contains orality markers: informal register, short questions (some in the form of noun clauses), sentence connectors at the beginning of a clause, a repetition, an onomatopoeia, and a sentence constructed of a few main and subordinated clauses. In the TT these markers have been preserved:

Many times he almost fell off, but managed to hang on at the last moment. *It looked that the darned wizard always got his own way. Wizard? But what wizard? Ah, the one who wanted to kill him. But he was alive! Or was he already at the Mansion? No, it **couldn't** be the Mansion, it was too hot for that.*

*Yes, now he could remember - he was playing with SuÄni and it was a very hot day, **that's why** they decided to swim **in the river**, but when they arrived **at the river** it turned into the sea of flames that swallowed his sister.*

He tried to run away, but his steed was quite old and wouldn't move. When he spurred it on, the animal fell over onto its side, dragging him down with it.

Without altering the punctuation of the ST, it is difficult to distinguish which part of the fragment is narrated by the third person omniscient narrator, and which one represents the indirect internal monologue of Na'Akano. To differentiate the protagonist perspective from the description of the action, the former has been marked in italics. The translation preserves the oral speech markers, and verb contractions have been implemented. Apart from this, an additional paragraph has been added, in order to visibly highlight the return to the real-time action; more precisely: the passage from the internal monologue to the narration.

The second listed fragment outlines Na'Akano's transcendental travel through the portal of knowledge. The protagonist is displaced to a chamber with four alcoves in which magical gems repose. Inside, they conceal runes that Na'A starts to memorize:



Uma única gema era visível, brilhante e facetada do tamanho de um ovo de codorniz, muito parecida com um diamante. Uma observação mais atenta mostrou-lhe que vibrava com uma única inscrição no seu interior. Wyrð, a Origem, descodificou. A runa em branco, o passado o presente e o futuro. A trilogia da predestinação que não pode ser evitada. O que está prenhe e vazio ao mesmo tempo, À medida que as vibrações se produziam em diversos estágios, Na'A ia discorrendo sobre o seu significado.  
(...)

O tempo tornou-se relativo. No terceiro nicho, a sul, onde a cor dominante era o azul das safiras, a runa Hagal revelava as forças da natureza. Na'Akano estudou absorvido Hagalaz, o granizo, mas também Jera a colheita, ou Eihwaz o teixo e todas as outras.

The metaphysical descriptions of the runes are not marked by the text formatting, and thus the real-time narration interweaves with the protagonist's vision, as in the previous excerpt. The fragment specifying that the runes are changing and appearing sequentially is placed after the rune description, impeding the immediate understanding of this part. The runes are also mixed together, which makes an impression of chaos. It can be associated with Na'A's mental state at that moment. However, the readability of the text turns limited. In the translation a few adjustments have been made:

There was only one single gem within sight: bright and multi-faceted, the size of a quail egg, like a diamond. Looking harder he saw that it was vibrating, and had a single inscription inside. 'Wyrð, the Origin,' he decoded. As the gem's vibrations were changing at different stages, Na'A was unfolding in his thoughts the meanings of the rune. *The blank rune, **encompassing** the past, present and future, **representing** this trilogy of predestination which cannot be avoided. **Nothing and everything**; that which is filled and void at the same time.* (...)

Time became relative. In the third alcove, in the south, where the dominant colour was sapphire blue, the rune Hagal revealed the forces of nature. Na'Akano, absorbed, examined it - 'Hagalaz, the hail. But also Jera, the harvest. Eihwaz, the yew. And all the others.'

To clarify the developments, the whole process of decoding the runes has been treated as if it occurred in the protagonist's mind. Therefore, it had been marked in italics. Additions have been applied ('encompassing', 'representing', 'nothing and everything') in order to make the ambiguous part more explicit. The explicative sentence regarding the rune vibrations has been moved near the fragment in which the gems are mentioned for the first time in the excerpt. In the second paragraph every newly introduced rune has been separated from the other by a

period, instead of a comma. In the last sentence, in the place of ‘Hagalaz’ has been introduced the object pronoun *it*, and ‘Hagalaz’ appears just after as a part of Na’Akano’s scrutiny, and not as the category which encompasses all the other runes enumerated after it.

Similar measures have been taken in the translation of the third aforementioned excerpt. It delineates the trance into which Na’Akano falls, invoked by the sapphire from Davdak’s sword. The whole fragment is compacted with abounding information and quickly passing pictures. Its final part is quoted below:

A espada tornara a levantar voo e a mão que a empunhava digladiava-se novamente pela posse do Livro nas ruínas do deserto. **Dezenas** de gritos mudos de espectros presos ao seu juramento, juntavam-se ao esforço **do cavaleiro** na luta contra o mago. Quando a batalha parecia perdida e a espada vencedora, **do norte, fortalezas voadoras apareceram, vomitando o fogo do Dragão**, reclamando a espada e projetando o mago no vazio do deserto.

The sense of this fragment without the previous knowledge of the second chapter of the book is hard to grasp. Bearing in mind the fact that the chapters have been translated as a proposal to a publisher, it is necessary to make them more explicit. The ambiguous character of the fragment also relies on the clauses, which are not efficiently linked between each other to provide a coherent, chronological background. There is also a confusing expression ‘fortalezas voadoras apareceram, vomitando o fogo do Dragão’. In the TT it was simplified:

*The sword left the ground again, soaring into the air. The hand wielding it was slashing its way to regain the Book, **eventually coming to** the desert ruins. Mute cries were issuing from the spectres, imprisoned **in that accursed place** until the day of their judgement. They joined forces with **the Guardian** in his fight against the wizard. When the battle seemed to be lost and the sword almost triumphing, **in the north appeared dragons belching fire**. They reclaimed the sword and tossed the wizard into the void of the desert.*

The sentences have been divided into smaller ones. The addition ‘eventually coming’ indicates a temporal dimension of the event. In the ST the time distance between the actions is blurry, or does not exist at all. In the context of the entire novel, the reader knows that these two situations have been separated by hundreds of years. Instead of rendering ‘cavaleiro’ into a corresponding word in the TL, ‘knight’, or ‘horserider’, it has been translated as ‘Guardian’,

making this fact explicit for the reader and publisher. The controversial expression has been simplified to ‘appeared dragons belching fire’.

The explicitation was also applied in the other fragment referring to the function of Guardian, for example, when Karan asks Na’Akano about the reason explaining why he has Davdak’s sword. Na’A retorts:

A tua preocupação e a **dos teus seguidores**, é recuperar o Diamante e levá-lo para o local marcado na Montanha.

The part “dos teus seguidores” can be non-understandable without previous knowledge of the book events. For this reason, in the proposal for the publisher these expressions have been made explicit:

Your main concern *as the Guardian* is to recover the Diamond and take it to the place marked on the Mountain.

The ambiguous fragments which were translated in a more explicit way have been mainly identified as the author’s mental shortcuts. As an illustration, the fragment depicting the battle between the wizards, Na’Akano and the Envoy, can be cited. It describes the moment, when the protagonist starts to weave a ball of light to strike his enemy, he is noticed by a soldier who, albeit wounded, is still alive:

O soldado, que entretanto se aproximara, já não ouvia o mago mas fixava, atónito, aquele ponto de luz muito brilhante para além dele, recuando com medo.

Quando o mago se voltou **intrigado** (...)

The reader has no explicit information why the wizard turned back, and spotted Na’Akano. The word “intrigado” collides with the description of the situation, since the Envoy knows that in the desert there is only him, Na’A, and the soldier. In the TT this fragment has been complemented with missing information, based on of the possible interpretations, explaining that it was a noise that intrigued the dark wizard:

His opponent, who had drawn closer in the meantime, was no longer heeding the wizard, but gaped flabbergasted at that tiny point of very bright light above him, stepping back **loudly** with fear.

When the wizard turned back **towards the noise** (...)

Another case of the author's mental shortcuts is the passage depicting powerlessness of the sailors while watching Na'Akano's trance:

Todos olhavam para Na'Akano, **presos da sua imobilidade.**

The group had to leave in a rush, but they could not decide on whether setting off to the boat and sail away, or hide on the land, without Na'Akano. In the TT this fragment could be misunderstood if translated literary, so the functional approach was implemented:

Everybody was looking at Na'Akano - **after all, they could not make any decision without him.**

The aforementioned examples were referred in order to outline a few ambiguities type encountered during the process of producing the TT.

## 6. Language varieties

In the chapters in question the author of the ST employs two varieties other than Standard Portuguese dialect. A variety is 'a set of linguistic items with similar social distribution', simplifying: the 'way of speaking' (Eifiring & Theil, 2005: 4). It is characterized by peculiar 'phonological, lexical, syntactic and sentential features', which can be a source of information, connotations, and stereotypes about a determined cluster of its users (Harvey and Higgins, 1984: 116, 125). The term 'variety' being, considered as non-judgemental term for language encompasses all the speech patterns used by a language user. It includes, among others, dialect, sociolect, jargon, register, or idiolect. While 'language' is usually associated with the standard variety, 'dialect' is considered to be the one deviating from it. Gunganese (or Gunguan Basic), a fictional dialect created in 1999 for the prequel *Star Wars* series can serve as an example. It derives from Standard English (in the movies denominated *Galactic Basic*), and is spoken by a limited group of people (the Gungans), occupying a specific geographic location (the swamps and the underwater city on the planet Naboo) (Williams, 2008: 466).<sup>4</sup> It presents similarities to English

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<sup>4</sup> After the first movie premiere, *The Phantom Menace*, the big scandal broke out. The main Gungan character, Jar Jar Binks, was, although warm-hearted, an extremely silly creature. The association between him, and the users of Caribbean English seemed understandable, also knowing that the voice of Jar Jar was dubbed by Ahmed Best, an African-American actor. However, George Lucas (the inventor of Gunganese) refuted the accusations, explaining that in the process of the language creation he only tried to reconstruct the speech patterns used by his six-year old son. (Snyder et al., 1999).

pidgins, as it also developed through the process of the simplification of the language. The tactic employed by António Costeira while inventing the dialect of Kuburtus was analogous.

In the literature, the employment of a nonstandard variety can constitute an important credibility factor (Hervey and Higgins, 1984: 128). This is due to the fact that many social groups are ascribed to a fixed way of speaking. Therefore, their speech patterns evoke a vast array of associations, linked to *inter alia* political, economic and cultural aspects. Variety translation, in consequence, presents a hazard of passing altered connotations, and thus modify the overall message of the ST (Ashley 2010: 124).

Leszek Berezowski (1997) scrutinized the different approaches to the dialect translation, distinguishing ten procedures:

- (1) *neutralization* – reduction of the ST variety to the standardized TL model. Some markers of the SL dialect can remain, but there are not relevant from the statistical perspective (49-52);
- (2) *lexicalization* – reduction of the ST variety to the standardized TL model; however, compensating the loss of connotations on the lexis level. The employed lexis can be used in a particular region (*rural lexicalization*); among a particular social group speaking with the low register of formality (*colloquial lexicalization*); by a person revealing features characteristic of a very young or very old speaker (*diminutive lexicalization*); or by a fictional and futuristic language user (*artificial lexicalization*) (52-59);
- (3) *partial translation* – certain parts of the TT are translated according to the lexicalization strategy, whereas the others are the preserved fragments of the ST, in the SL (59-60).
- (4) *transliteration* – phonologic transcription of the ST (61-62);
- (5) *speech defect* – preservation of the deliberate phonological “defects”, representing a ST social deixis (62-66);
- (6) *relativization* – reduction of the ST variety to terms of address and honorifics (66-71);
- (7) *pidginization* – full translation of the ST morphologic and syntactic elements into the TC pidgin structures. The effect of this rendition procedure is intelligible to the people of limited dominium of the TL, due to the restricted contact with other language users (71-75);

- (8) *artificial variety* – full translation of the ST invented dialect (consistent with the phonologic norms of the SL, but not necessarily with the other linguistic categories) into the TL invented dialect, its functional and linguistic equivalent (75-77);
- (9) *coloquialization* – full translation of the ST dialect into a TL colloquial variety (77-81);
- (10) *rusticalization* – full translation of the ST dialect into a TL regional variety (81-87).

In this project some of these procedures were implemented in the translation process. The varieties present in “The Desert” and “The Island” which will be discussed below are, respectively, the dialect of the desert tribe Kuburtu, and the idiolect of the warm-hearted fisherman, Old Salt.

#### 6.1. *The Prophecy*: Simplified dialect of Kuburtus

In the chapter “The Desert” Na’Akano encounters a desert tribe of petty thieves, living in isolation from the world. The small creatures, moving through the sand, constantly rob caravans, and afterwards scatter the loot in a hidden cave. Although they communicate between each other by whistling and swinging their plaits, they are able to use a simplified form of Portuguese/English to talk with Na’Akano. Their capacity of speaking in a foreign language can be explained by the fact that while preparing to the theft, the Kiburtus wait patiently for the right opportunity, and probably listen to the discourse of caravan’s passengers. Their dialect is based on a simplification of the grammatical structures. Its creator has stated (in personal communication) that it was formed according to children’s speaking patterns, but without specifying any general rule. In the ST dialect, the infinitive form prevails (including *infinito pessoal*); however, the Kuburtus use verbs conjugated in the past and present tense (3<sup>rd</sup> person). They do not use the indefinite articles. The recreated dialect in the TT has similar features: the predominant verb forms are the infinitive and the gerund. In the fragment when in the ST a verb in the past form appears, it is translated in the TT into the incorrect past form (the inflection ending *-ed*, typical for a regular verb). The syntax and lexis, nonetheless, complies with the norms of the standard variety in both ST and TT.

- Kanizá querer saber porque elfo estar aqui e porque falar com cavalo que fugiu de caravana – respondeu por sua vez, o que parecia ser o porta-voz. - Caravana fica uma noite e vai embora. Tu estar aqui sempre.

('Kanizá wanting know why elf be here and why talk with horse that fleed caravan,' the one who seemed to be the spokesman replied in return. 'Caravan staying one night and going away. You stay here forever.')

The Kuburtus behave as a single organism. When they start to talk they introduce all the individuals involved in the event. For this reason, Na'Akano tries to address the spokesperson in a singular verb form:

**Tinha que começar a falar no singular**, caso contrário ainda estaria ali na próxima lua nova.

- Eu preciso de ajuda para sair daqui. Não tenho roupa, nem apetrechos para o cavalo nem um odre para a água. Sem isso, não posso atravessar o deserto. **Será que me podes ajudar?**

**(He had to start addressing him** alone, otherwise, he would still be here at the next new moon.

'I need help to leave. I don't have any clothes or horse tack, or even a waterskin. Without them, I can't cross the desert. **Do you think you can help me, my friend?!**)

The literal translation is impossible, since there is no difference between the second person plural and singular in English (both are 'you'). The plural form inflection is the same as the singular form inflection as well. For this reason, it is impossible to produce the same effect in the TT on the linguistic level. As a literal translation is impossible, a functional approach has been implemented. The first ST expression ("falar no singular") has been substituted by an expression with the corresponding meaning, but not referring literally to the singular form ("addressing him alone"). The second translation problem ("Será que me podes ajudar?"), lying on the identification of the number of the addressees through the verb inflection, has been resolved by a compensation procedure, that is by adding at the end of the sentence the term of address identified with the spokesperson in the context (relativization) ("Do you think you can help me, **my friend?**")

## 6.2. *The Prophecy*: Nautical jargon and Old Salt's idiolect

The other varieties worth mentioning in the context of this project are respectively 'jargon', 'slang', and 'idiolect'. The first variation, jargon, is defined in the *Routledge Dictionary of Language and Linguistics* as "language which is inaccessible to non-specialists" (Bussmann, 1996: 245). The vocabulary includes professional terminology. Besides its main features are: the

compound nouns, foreign words, metaphors and technical terms. The jargon users implement often impersonal constructions. However, it generally derives from the standard variety.

In the chapter “A Ilha” of *A Profecia* the author introduces nautical jargon into the narrative. In the description he mentions, for instance “rebentação” (“caminharam junto à rebentação em direção ao local onde o extremo do molho entrava no mar”). In English the zone in which the waves start to break is called “breaker zone”, or “surf zone”. In the TT it was simplified to “surf” to turn the text more fluent (“they walked through the surf towards the place where the pier entered the sea”). Other expressions belonging to the nautical terminology referred to, for instance winds (“vento de feição” - “tailwind”), or parts of the ship (“proa” – “bow”).

In the book in question, traces of slang are present in Old Salt’s speech patterns. Slang refers to a “colloquial language with explicitly social and regional variants”, whose distinguishing trait rests on “innovative use of common vocabulary, as well as newly coined words” (Idem: 437). In the meanwhile, idiolect is described as “language use characteristic of an individual speaker”, “personal manner of expression (Idem: 216). The pronunciation is peculiar to the language user, as well as syntax and vocabulary.

Old Salt’s idiolect entails colloquial exclamations, with peculiar grammar structures, which contrast with the standardized language of the other characters in the chapter. They also add a vivid, humorous tinge to the story, especially if are associated with the pirate slang.

The examples from Old Salt’s idiolect, together with the propositions of translation are presented in the table below:

ST	TT
À hora da refeição <b>a maldita maré traz sempre mais um, neste caso dois. <u>Viva Saleno!</u></b>	'At meal time <b><u>the darned tide</u> always brings one more stomach to feed. In this case - two. <u>Long live Saleno!</u></b>
- Pela tempestade!	'For tempest's sake!'
- <b>Pelas baleias brancas dos mares do sul!</b> Ninguém conhece estas águas melhor que eu	' <b>By the white whales of the southern seas!</b> No one knows these waters better than me,'
- <b>Maldita a hora em que</b> vendi o meu barco ao Bijagó (...)	' <b>Cursed be the hour</b> I sold my vessel to Bijago!'



o miúdo não tem guelras para andar no mar	the lad has no flair for sailing.'
- Pelas entranhas de um espadarte, que nunca vi uma tempestade assim nos cinquenta anos que levo de mar.	'By the guts of the swordfish! I've never seen a storm like that in the whole fifty years of my <b>life as a sea dog!</b> '
- Eu seja mordido por uma moreia!	'May a moray bite me!'

## 7. Proper Names

In fantasy fiction, proper names are prominent elements, largely on account of the concept of 'true name'. In magic worlds, the 'true name' contains the essence of its holder (Langford, 1997). For this reason, before translation process a presupposition was established, that in *The Prophecy* most proper names can be classified as *loaded names*, namely they bear a certain denotation or connotation (Hermans, 1998: 88). In the context of adult fiction, and fantasy in particular, a proper name can be the key to understand the gist of the story. Nevertheless, its meaning does not have to be necessarily important to the main thread, but constitute a hidden treasure to discover for more avid readers. Despite their other purposes, they also comprise "recognizability and memorability" factors, as they perform the referential function. (Tymoczko, 1999: 225).

Lincoln P. Fernandes (2007) analysed the procedures applied to the translation of proper names. Drawing on models created by Hermans, Newmark and Chesterman, he produced his own taxonomy. The categories relevant to this project are: (1) copy, (2) rendition, and (2) recreation (Fernandes, 2007: 147-148), and will be further explained below, together with the examples from *The Prophecy*.

### 7.1.1. *The Prophecy*. Proper Names: Copy

This strategy consists of preserving the exact proper name of the ST in the TT. The majority of the proper names in *The Prophecy* have been kept unchanged. The interference in the character's names, without a justification, would entirely change the associations in the book. Before deciding on modifications, the name etymology was verified in among others an online Encyclopaedia of Names, *Behind the Name*.

The motivation behind the preservation of a name was various. One of the reasons behind it was to maintain the ST connotations. For instance, 'Edgard' is a French variant of the name Edgar, which is formed from words meaning 'wealth' and 'spear'. For this reason, one could assume that a person bearing this name is a brave knight. Edgard was a human governor who was ousted from power by rival corrupt governors. His character has a comic overtone, visible even in his nickname (Duque o Gordo -Duke the Fat). In this context, the ironic connotation serves its purpose. Another example is the case of Rasel, one of the evil wizards. His name is a Bengali form of Arabic name 'Rasul', 'prophet, messenger'.

The names Thorn and Esthër were preserved as they are because they are associated with the fantasy genre. Thorn is a late Anglo-Saxon designation for the rune, which has its origins in Thurisaz, the Furthark Rune from Norse Mythology (Oswald, 2005). Meanwhile, the name Esther (without the accent on the second 'e') derives from Babylonian goddess Ishtar, presumably having the significance of 'star' (Campell, 2017). Other names are phonetically important to the plot (e.g. Na'Akano, given his link to Naur'Can); phonetically or orthographically exotic, even in Portuguese (Bijagó, Drellias); or they could not be replaced by a similarly sounding name with the same functional meaning (Davdak, Alagosadhar).

#### 7.1.2. *The Prophecy*. Proper Names: Recreation

This procedure rests on the reinvention of a name, usually not corresponding to the one from the ST linguistically. There are two main examples illustrating this method.

##### Example 1: Meteus → Eòlas

'Meteus' is the name of the comet which flies towards the Earths so rarely that it is a once-in-a-life-time opportunity to see it. It deflects the light of the sun, and thereby creates a magic portal of knowledge. The author denominated it with this designation, due to aesthetic reasons (he was fond of the sound of it). However, it does not carry any signification. The comet and the portal are some of the most mystic fragments of the book, and have a great impact on the protagonist. Since Celtic myths still remain popular as a source of inspiration for fantasy novels, and the Celts influenced the culture of the United Kingdom the name 'Meteus' has been replaced with a word in Scottish Gaelic, Eòlas. According to Scottish Gaelic online dictionary, *Am*

*Faclair Beag*, *Eòlas* corresponds to “knowledge, science, spell”, which in the context of opening the door to illumination, seems to be a reasonable option.

Example 2: Unhais → Deerhurst

In *A Profecia* Unhais is a human port town, governed by Duke the Fat. Unhais also exists in the real world, as it is a village in Portugal. On the website of thy city council of Pampilhosa da Serra, it is possible to find information regarding the parish called Unhais-o-Velho. The origin of the name is probably related to deers (‘uhantes’) who lived in that territory (*Pampilhosa da Serra. Câmara Municipal*). In the TT, the name chosen is based on the same core, the word ‘deer’, to which an ending has been added, corresponding to the meaning of '(wooden) hill' - 'hurst/hirst'. By this means, Unhais has been replaced by the lexical equivalent, Deerhurst. Just as Unhais is an existing place, Deerhurst can also be found on the map: it is a real town/village located in the United Kingdom.

7.1.3. *The Prophecy*. Proper Names: Rendition

The names translated with this method are rendered by the sense-by-sense technique, when their significance is explicit. They describe the roles of certain characters (Duque o Gordo - Duke the Fat, Enviado - Envoy), character’s personality or peculiar features (Peixe-Aranha – Weever, Pintado - Speckle), places (Reino Núbio – Nubian Kingdom, as montanhas de Pedra do Urso - Bear Stone Mountains), companies (Real Companhia Mineira – the Royal Mining Company), and stars and constellations (Estrela da Mansão – the Mansion Star, a Constelação do Ceptro - the constellation of Scepter). They generally transmit contextualizing information about the magical world, and thus they have to be ‘reliable’ and comprehensible.

7.1.4. *The Prophecy*. Proper Names: Additional category – Adaptation

Some names have been slightly altered, as to adapt them to the context in which they occur. The first reason was to adjust the ST name to the TL equivalent (Astride - Astrid), or to TL orthography (Kuburtu’s – Kuburtus, Wyvern’s - Wyverns). Regarding the orthographic adjustments, the author probably wanted to add a tinge of exoticism by the means of apostrophe, a common procedure in the fantasy genre (Fogarty, 2013). However, the apostrophe was used in the plural form only, a procedure that, if preserved, would be considered an

aberration from the point of view of the English target reader. Moreover, in the case of Wyvern(s), the word in question is actually an English term, which was used in the ST with the added apostrophe.

The other argument pertained to the text transparency is the lack of coherence regarding the gender of the name bearer. The female name Karin was attributed in the ST to a male character. Therefore, in the TT the name has been modified to make it seem more masculine (Karan). The last example worth mentioning considers the nickname of Trynio, Old Salt. 'Velho Mestre' would be translated literally as "Old Master". Nonetheless, it does not correspond to the character of Trynio, owing it to the lack of association with the nautical background. To pass the connotation of experienced sailor, the expression was replaced with the functional equivalent from informal register, 'Old Salt'.

## 8. Conclusions

Translating Portuguese fantasy fiction for the Anglophone market is determined by the factors applying to any literary work in this context, as well as by the genre-specific peculiarities. As the statistics show, the number of translations published in the United Kingdom and the United States is extremely low, especially compared to other countries (Venuti, 2008: 11). In compliance with the Functionalist approach implemented in this project, it is crucial to realise that if the translation is intended to fulfil its purpose, namely to enter the English literary market, it has to comply with the TC conventions, and the expectations of the target public. On the basis of the personal experience obtained by translating two chapters of the fantasy novel *A Profecia* into English it was feasible to outline the translation process, and the procedures which enabled the translator to create the final text that will serve as a proposal to an English publisher.

In the United Kingdom there is a number of publishers specialized in the fantasy genre. In the context of publication of *The Prophecy*, two of them seem to be especially interesting: Grimbold Books, and Gollancz, as the book in question complies with their guidelines submissions.<sup>5</sup> They accept unsolicited manuscripts, and do not exclude the authors that already self-published their books. Grimbold Books allows the inspirations in other authors, yet if it is marked in the cover letter, highlighting that the traits of originality can be visible on other levels. Gollancz is open for not specifically English authors, on the condition that the submitted text is written in English.

It is also important to be aware of the fact that the study case of this project is a first text published by the author. António Costeira is not known internationally because of a non-literary reason (e.g. he has had other careers as an actor, football player, etc.), therefore his name carries no inherent appeal and cannot be used in the advertisement process. However, regarding the book in question, the fantasy motifs derived from famous works like *The Lord of the Rings*, or *Eragon*, can serve this purpose.

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<sup>5</sup> Available at their websites: Grimbold Books - <http://www.grimboldbooks.com/submissions/submission-guidelines/>; Gollancz - <https://www.gollancz.co.uk/submissions/>

The approach selected for the translation of the novel in question is based on *Skopos* theory, precisely on Christian Nord's pre-translation analysis model, and Katharina Reiss' text typology. Bearing in mind the intra- and extratextual features, some adjustments have been applied to the ST as to adapt it the TC norms. The main problematic strands encountered pertain first to the issues connected to the referential function of the text, *id est* to the matter of explicitation/implicitation and coherence of emotive and emphatic distribution. The other difficulties are related to the rendition of language varieties (e.g. fictional dialect, nautical jargon, idiolect) and proper names, which bear a meaning in the fantasy genre. The translator's choices highly rested on the text function, therefore the TT should comply with the profit-oriented character of the future publication. The procedures that have been applied in the translation process can indicate an array of solutions to the similar translation problems in other fantasy stories. It seems also important to mention the creativity factor involved in recreating in the TT the effect of the ST (as shown by the example of proper names, and Kuburtus dialect).

Venuti (2013: 159), in his analysis of the British book market, remarks that the repertoire choice of the publisher is substantially contingent on the commercial aspect of the production. He mentions the factor that can be called the *expected sales result* which conditions not only the first foreign author's publication in the United Kingdom, but also the subsequent possibility of being published. If the sales statistics are not satisfactory, then the writer's future performance on the TC market is put in question, even if her or his productions gain recognition in other countries (Idem: 160). For this reason, it is important to comprehend the implications that the TT publication entails. Therefore, it can give a rise to a controversial hypothesis regarding translator's ethics, basing on the situation in which the TT do not fully, or insignificantly satisfy the target reader's expectations, and thus endangering the author's position on the target literary market.

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## Apêndice A: *A Profecia* - “O Deserto”

### O Deserto

O mapa das estrelas sempre fascinara Na’A, mas agora no deserto elas pareciam ter um brilho diferente. Ou talvez agora olhasse para elas sob uma nova perspectiva. As estrelas não estão ali por capricho dos deuses, dissera-lhe uma vez Astrid, fazem parte da criação e, entre outras coisas, ensinam-nos o caminho quando não há outras referências, como por exemplo no deserto.

E era agora o caso. Depois de terem respondido ao apelo do desesperado Edgard, Drellias tinha aceitado o repto que o Duque de Unhais lhe lançara para o ajudar como seu novo comandante militar, e ele seguira o seu caminho.

As esparsas e amarelas luzes da cidade há muito tinham ficado para trás, e as noturnas areias frias daquele deserto deslizavam inertes sob os cascos do seu cavalo, enquanto meditava nestes assuntos. Quando entrara no extenso areal, passando por entre as últimas acácias espinhosas e arbustos pardos que marcavam o início daquela vegetação xerófila do deserto, envolvera-se na quente manta que trouxera e procurara aquela estrela que deveria manter sempre à sua direita, ligeiramente a fugir na direção da sua orelha. Não sabia porquê, mas era a única estrela que se mantinha fixa, sempre no mesmo sítio enquanto as outras passavam por ela. Era a Estrela da Mansão, aquela onde os espíritos dos antepassados repousavam e ajudavam os viajantes em busca do seu destino. O rendilhado do céu era tecido de miríades de estrelas, algumas formando formas bizarras sem sentido, mas outras, como a constelação do Auroque ou do Urso, espelhavam no céu o modelo que lhes dera nome. Havia muitas, mas a constelação do Ceptro, que o olhava de frente, era neste momento a mais importante.

Astrid instruíra-o para a seguir durante o tempo que fosse necessário. De muitos em muitos anos, dissera, uma estrela gigante com uma enorme cauda enviada pelos deuses, chamada Meteus, interpõe-se entre a Estrela da Mansão e a Constelação do Ceptro, ofuscando todas as outras. Pelos seus cálculos, deveria aparecer durante as próximas semanas e era a oportunidade única de uma vida. Quando a visse, deveria passar a segui-la até ao momento em

que estivesse a meio caminho entre Ceptro e a Mansão e precisamente sobre a sua cabeça. Mas ainda não tinha aparecido. A realidade do momento era que ao abrigo da noite escura estava a ser seguido. Tivera essa percepção mal atravessara a ponte de Unhais, apesar de o sol já se ter posto e ter tomado precauções. Não sabia quantos eram, mas ficou com a certeza que teriam sabido da sua reunião com Edgard.

A luz trémula das estrelas começou a diminuir de intensidade até desaparecer, juntamente com o frio, totalmente ofuscada pelos primeiros raios de sol que explodiam para aquele dia no deserto. Desmontou e deu de beber ao cavalo, reservando também para si um trago de água enquanto espreitava por cima da sela na direção de onde vinha. As pegadas do cavalo eram bem visíveis, mas era só o que via para além das extensas dunas de areia dourada que começavam a absorver o calor, prometendo um dia difícil. Mas sabia que não estava sozinho, não era só ele que via aquele rasto que ia deixando marcado na areia. Vestiu um traje amplo e escuro e colocou o turbante na cabeça, deixando apenas os olhos à vista. Da sacola, tirou uma maçã que deu ao cavalo e montou novamente, deixando à cavalgadura a escolha da velocidade da marcha. Não podia puxar demasiado por ela e procuraria seguir uma linha reta baseada nos rastros deixados, pois de dia não tinha estrelas para se orientar.

Ao fim de duas sufocantes horas de marcha o cavalo começou a abrandar o passo. O sol, implacável, prometia não dar tréguas e ia só no seu primeiro dia. Desmontou com movimentos lentos e a boca seca, e continuou com o animal pela rédea pelo cume daquela duna, até que teve que descer o declive acentuado com o cavalo quase a bater com os quartos traseiros naquela areia escaldante, que se infiltrava por todo o lado.

Embora ainda desértica, a paisagem agora era diferente. Após uma noite e algumas horas a caminhar cansativamente na areia sem dormir, encontrava finalmente terreno duro. Embora se tivesse preparado, seguindo os conselhos da velha mestra, nunca tinha estado no deserto, que imaginava ser um pedaço quente de areia sem fim, onde nada crescia e sem utilidade aparente. Quanto à utilidade, ainda não a tinha vislumbrado, mas o solo agora era pedregoso e igualmente inóspito, levantando um pó pior que areia. Aqui e ali, a natureza esculpira as rochas em forma de mesas e de agulhas de uma altura impressionante e de um colorido diferente, mas o calor

continuava a pôr à prova a sua resistência. Ao longe, áridas colinas intercetavam na linha do horizonte o seu destino.

Calculou que levaria cerca de uma hora até chegar àquela primeira formação rochosa em forma de agulha, que lhe proporcionaria sombra e descanso até ao final do dia, mas o cavalo já dava mostras de cansaço e, quando lá chegasse, o pique do sol já teria eliminado qualquer possibilidade de sombra. Resolveu acampar ali, embora a uma distância segura da duna, a fim de não ser surpreendido.

Tirou o odre do alforje e encheu a boca de água, revolvendo lentamente o precioso líquido na boca antes de o engolir. Repetiu o processo e deu o resto da água ao cavalo, juntamente com um punhado de aveia que tirou de um pequeno saco.

Libertou o animal do peso da sela e, habilmente, alçou-lhe a perna esquerda ao mesmo tempo que puxava a rédea e o equino deitou-se obedientemente. Cobriu-o com um pano que trazia para o efeito e deitou-se a seu lado após um trago numa poção nutritiva que Esthër lhe tinha preparado. Adormeceu profundamente, embalado pelos sonhos transmitidos pelo toque no amuleto que trazia ao peito.

Quando acordou já o sol tinha passado por ele e inclinava-se decididamente para ocidente. O seu olhar percorreu o topo da duna dourada que tinha descido e, a não ser que fosse uma miragem, pareceu-lhe ver um ligeiro movimento que associou à sensação de estar a ser observado. Quem quer que fosse, continuava ali, mas agora sabia mais alguma coisa. Sabia que se o quisessem atacar, já o poderiam ter feito o que significava que o objetivo era segui-lo, o que não podia permitir. Os dias seguintes confirmaram as suas suspeitas. O sobe e desce das dunas há muito tempo ficara para trás e a enorme e árida extensão não permitia aos três perseguidores esconderem-se, por isso mantinham-se visíveis, embora a uma distância segura e cavalgando lentamente como o escaldante deserto impunha.

No quente crepúsculo multicolorido do décimo dia, quando a influência tórrida do sol baixava de intensidade naquele mar de pedras e pó, Na'A ergueu-se para mais uma noite de caminho. Mais além, os três perseguidores esperavam pacientes que iniciasse a marcha, confiantes na sua superioridade numérica, mas só costumava iniciar o percurso quando

identificasse as treze estrelas que compunham a constelação do Cepetro. Eles que esperassem que não perderiam pela demora. Aqueles dias infernais tinham deixado marcas no cavalo, que agora seguia mais vezes pela rédea que montado. Ele próprio tinha perdido peso e a água dos odres tinha acabado na véspera. Fez um buraco no chão com o punhal, que encheu de pequenas pedras. Depois exigiu-se alguns momentos de profunda concentração e, por entre os lábios gretados e a língua inchada, conseguiu murmurar: “Nên”. Muito lentamente, os pequenos seixos foram libertando a água das suas moléculas que um pano preparado para o efeito absorveu. Repetiu o processo até ter um dos odres cheio. Finalmente, repetiu a magia uma última vez e deixou o cavalo beber sofregamente, enquanto se deixava cair de costas naquela poeira suja, recuperando do esforço despendido com o pano húmido a cobrir-lhe a face.

Quando abriu os olhos, a Estrela da Mansão fixava-o com um brilho que não notara antes. Levantou-se indiferente ao frio que começava a descer sobre a noite do deserto, quando o cavalo se interpôs entre ele e a estrela. Deu um rápido passo para o lado com uma ansiedade crescente e o receio estampado no rosto de perder de vista o pequenino rasto luminoso, muito brilhante, que aparecia cerca de um palmo mais abaixo. Não, não era nenhuma partida da sua mente martirizada pela inclemência do sol do deserto. Procurou o Cepetro, nas suas costas, e nem precisou de grande esforço para o encontrar. Recortava-se nitidamente no céu, ofuscando as outras estrelas, algumas delas bem mais brilhantes nos dias anteriores. Estava a começar!

De repente, despertou para o frio. Envolveu-se na quente manta noturna e aproximou-se do cavalo, tirando dos magros alforges uma pequena tira de peixe seco que mastigou mecanicamente e duas ameixas, igualmente desidratadas, que deu ao cavalo enquanto lhe fazia uma festa acompanhada de palavras de conforto. Já não tinha muitas provisões, mas os seus perseguidores também deviam estar com problemas. Pensou chegada a altura de o confirmar. Já o tinha tentado, mas sempre que invertia a marcha eles afastavam-se, mas agora tinha que resolver o problema de vez. Astrid não lhe contara o que aconteceria naquele raro momento da conjugação astral, mas partilhá-lo com um possível inimigo não estava nos seus planos. Fora descuidado e agora tinha que resolver a situação esta noite, mal a ocasião se proporcionasse.

Contrariamente ao que fazia quando iniciava a marcha, desta vez levava o cavalo pela rédea em passo ligeiro, combatendo o frio com o movimento mais enérgico. O luar, grande e

redondo, inclemente para com as suas intenções, mostrava-lhe por cima do ombro que os três vultos a cavalo, separados por alguns metros, persistiam na sua demanda. Estavam longe, mas dava para ver que costumavam cavalgar mais juntos que a distância que agora mantinham entre si. Cautelosamente tirou o seu arco da sela e passou-o para a mão esquerda, enquanto pronunciava palavras de proteção. O pontinho luminoso lá no firmamento parecia-lhe um nadinha mais perto do que há cerca de três horas quando o tinha detetado, e perguntava-se se os seus perseguidores também tinham reparado, ou se estavam apenas interessados nas suas intenções. Mas o facto de o terem seguido no deserto, sob aquelas terríveis condições, é porque desconfiavam de algo, não seriam simples opositores ao Duque. Abrandou o passo e voltou a olhar para trás. Com mais atenção, confirmou naquela cinzenta escuridão que apenas um vulto se mantinha visível. Tinham-se separado e isso significava ação.

As formas bizarras e sinistras de algumas formações calcárias das quais se aproximava, forneceram-lhe o lugar ideal para se acoitar. Esqueceu por momentos a observação astral e encaminhou-se para aquele labirinto de pináculos de várias alturas, mas a sua intenção ficou mesmo por aí. Uma seta, fria como o ar da noite, sulcou a escuridão e cravou-se no seu cavalo que, com um relincho se empinou e encetou uma tosca corrida por entre alguns daqueles pilares mais pequenos e estacou moribundo uns metros mais à frente. Uma segunda seta, vinda do lado oposto, atravessou-lhe o pescoço, derrubando-o com um ruído de morte que o deserto não estranhou.

Maldição pensou, deixara-se ultrapassar e agora estava cercado. Optaram por eliminar primeiro o seu cavalo, impedindo-o de fugir, mas essa estratégia deu-lhe tempo para procurar abrigo. Ele não pretendia fugir, mas perdera a iniciativa, o que dera vantagem aos seus inimigos. Felizmente que já tinha o seu arco na mão. De cócoras, internou-se pelo meio dos pináculos, ziguezagueando entre eles, sem parar, procurando com uma volta larga e silenciosa colocar-se atrás do local de onde lhe pareceu ter surgido a primeira seta.

Os sons da fria brisa noturna que se levantara, assobiando por entre as formações calcárias, deram a ambos os lados uns momentos de observação estratégica que foram melhor aproveitados por Na'A. Movendo-se a favor do vento, completou o semicírculo e conseguiu descobrir o vulto agachado de um dos seus inimigos de costas para si. Preparou o arco no

momento em que ele mudava de posição, colocando-se a escassos cinco metros à sua frente. Ótimo pensou, ainda julga que estou entre ele e os outros, e isso deu-lhe uma oportunidade. A luz do luar era muito forte, pelo que tinha que ser rápido. Pousou o arco e moveu-se com agilidade e rapidez e, quando o atacante se preparava para mudar de lugar novamente, já Na'A se encontrava mesmo atrás dele. Tapou-lhe a boca com a mão esquerda e, com a direita, segurou-lhe a fonte que rodou num movimento enérgico, partindo-lhe o pescoço. Depois, recolheu o seu arco e assumiu o lugar do inimigo morto.

Sem tempo para lamentar a primeira vez que tinha morto alguém, deslocou-se para o pináculo seguinte, como supôs que o atacante eliminado teria feito. Levantou a cabeça por cima da coluna e perscrutou a área. Do outro lado, o luar mostrou-lhe o vulto do segundo atacante apertando o cerco, mas era o outro que começava a preocupá-lo. Conseguia distingui-lo bastante mais afastado, dando aos outros a iniciativa do ataque, empurrando a presa para si. Devia ser o cabecilha. Apurou o olhar e verificou que estava totalmente encapuçado, com os braços cruzados à frente. Um mago!

Selecionou uma seta da aljava e colocou-a no arco. À sua esquerda, o segundo atacante mudava novamente de sítio, aproximando-se mais um pouco. Levantou-se e apontou cuidadosamente, procurando uma linha reta entre o seu ombro esquerdo e o vulto escondido. Não podia falhar. Começou a retesar lenta e cuidadosamente a corda até a encostar à sua face direita. Contou mentalmente alguns segundos e libertou o projétil que partiu rápido e ligeiro, sulcando o ar frio até atingir obedientemente o alvo que mudava novamente de posição. Eliminou o segundo inimigo, mas ficou exposto.

O obelisco à sua frente rebentou em mil bocados quando uma onda de energia o atingiu com violência. Na'A foi projetado uns metros para trás perdendo o arco no movimento e embatendo de costas com um forte impacto num pilar calcário, que se desfez por cima dele. A dor cegou-o com as lágrimas involuntárias que os seus olhos libertaram, e mais não pode fazer do que olhar quando um sem número de pequenas setas, oriundas de uma maior disparada para o ar pelo mago, caíram sobre ele. Uma delas conseguiu perfurar o anel protetor que tinha levantado em seu redor e cravou-se-lhe na coxa.



O ulular do vento por entre aqueles pequenos obstáculos calcários, era o único som que impedia que o silêncio dominasse aquela noite do deserto. Deitado no chão sem se conseguir mexer e cheio de dores, Na'A estava em clara desvantagem face ao seu poderoso inimigo, mas tinha ainda a seu favor o facto de ele pensar que o tinha eliminado. O braço esquerdo ficara soterrado sob o peso das pedras, mas conseguiu libertar o direito e, do bolso de dentro do traje, todo rasgado, tirou um pequeno frasco com um preparado usado contra as infeções e dores. Esthër dissera-lhe que era um composto feito à base de óleo de Neem e essência de papoila, a que juntara alho esmagado e cebola. Não devia tomar mais de meio frasco de cada vez. Foi o que fez depois de tirar o pedacinho de madeira que servia de tampa com a boca, mas depois olhou o frasco meio cheio e tomou o resto de um trago, deixando-o cair de seguida com a cabeça encostada à base do pilar.

O mago não desistira ainda de o procurar e aproximava-se cautelosamente, vasculhando cada centímetro de terreno e, apenas mais alguns metros, acabaria por esbarrar com ele. Começava a desesperar por uma saída, quando do outro lado ouviu uma voz lamentosa gemendo de dores. Era o segundo homem que tinha atingido e que se aproximava ainda com a flecha espetada no braço. O mago voltou-se para ele, gritando e gesticulando e Na'A aproveitou a única oportunidade que teria. A sua mão direita, a única livre, palpou um pedacinho de pedra do tamanho de uma unha e levantou-a no ar. As dores começavam a ser substituídas por um torpor agradável mas que, no pior momento, lhe toldava a visão e baralhava o pensamento. Piscou os olhos com força e abanou a cabeça naquele ar frio, conseguindo mais uns momentos de lucidez. Murmurou com grande esforço palavras aprendidas na língua mágica, que Astrid lhe ensinara, vindo-lhe à memória, por instantes, a luta da maga no salão do Gordo. Captou com intensidade a luz do luar que, com a ajuda das palavras, desviou para aquele pedacinho de matéria inerte que reagiu começando a brilhar e a aquecer entre o polegar e o indicador.

O soldado, que entretanto se aproximara, já não ouvia o mago mas fixava, atónito, aquele ponto de luz muito brilhante para além dele, recuando com medo.

Quando o mago se voltou intrigado, uma pequena estrela sulcava o ar na sua direção, vibrando e lutando para manter dentro de si toda a energia acumulada. Levantou a mão direita instintivamente e começou a lançar feitiços, mas a energia da luz não tem defesa e o brilhante

projétil atravessou-lhe a mão e estourou-lhe no peito numa explosão que aqueceu o deserto e o consumiu até à exaustão.

Uma chuva de milhões de partículas cobriu o ar e caiu sobre a terra escura, iluminando os dedos queimados e o resto do corpo inanimado de Na'Akano. Depois o silêncio foi absoluto.

Um ligeiro pestanejar fez deslizar algumas migalhas de um pó branco que escorreram inertes pela face esquerda de Na'A. Um abanar de cabeça provocou um deslizamento de pequenas pedras que a mão esquerda não conseguiu afastar. Tossiu, expelindo uma quantidade assinalável de pó pela boca, que lhe provocava uma secura terrível sob o inclemente sol do deserto. Entreabriu os olhos por entre os radiosos raios luminosos e voltou a deixar cair a cabeça no chão com o braço direito protegendo a vista. Doía-lhe a perna e não sentia o braço e, lá no alto, o um estridente e contínuo piar martelava-lhe a cabeça trazendo-o do torpor em que caíra muitas horas antes. Quando finalmente abriu os olhos, dezenas de grifos num bailado funesto recordaram-lhe o que acontecera.

Com a mão livre começou a libertar o braço preso sobre os escombros, afastando as pedras uma a uma, até sentir o alívio da descompressão. Encostou-se aos restos do pilar arfando do esforço, esfregando o braço inerte e inchado pousado em cima do regaço, com o olhar fixo no pequeno projétil enterrado na coxa. Mais à frente, os grifos banquetevam-se com o cadáver do seu cavalo soltando grandes pios de satisfação.

Quando o formigueiro no braço esquerdo abrandou, tirou o punhal da cintura e cortou a túnica preta à volta da flecha. O sangue, escuro, coagulou à volta do metal. Devia ter estado desmaiado muitas horas. Desmaiado ou a dormir. Não devia ter tomado o líquido todo do frasco, apesar das dores horríveis.

Pousou o punhal e colocou as mãos de palmas para cima sobre as coxas, concentrando-se no chakra de energia pélvica. Um agradável calor começou a percorrer-lhe as pernas e a confluir o sangue energizado para o local da ferida. Quando deixou de sentir dor, agarrou novamente no punhal e lacerou a carne à volta da seta. Depois, pôs dois dedos da mão esquerda à volta do metal fincando-os contra a coxa e puxou a seta com a direita. Um jacto de sangue saiu do buraco aberto, imediatamente estancado pela pressão dos dedos. Algumas palavras de cura

ajudaram a fechar a ferida que, apesar de tudo, mantinha uma auréola vermelha escura, com alguns centímetros de diâmetro, e ainda bastante inchada.

O sol já estava baixo quando se atreveu a levantar com enorme esforço. Tinha o corpo todo dorido e desidratado. Precisava de água. Caramba, conseguiu pensar ainda ao olhar a devastação das formações calcárias quase todas destruídas, foi uma explosão e tal. Se a pedra que recolheu fosse um nadinha maior, provavelmente também ele já estaria na Mansão. E era para onde iria se não conseguisse arranjar água com urgência. Não tinha forças para a extrair dos elementos, mas ainda conseguiu, mentalmente, chamar o cavalo do mago que observava de longe o frenesim dos grifos.

Tirou o odre, preso à sela, e bebeu solenemente, com o seu corpo a reclamar sequiosamente cada gota como se fosse a última.

O local da ferida ardia-lhe insistentemente e lavou-o com duas pingas de água, mas a cor purpura da pele não desapareceu. Tinha as roupas todas rasgadas e sentia-se sujo como nunca pensara um dia estar. Despiu os trapos e vestiu um manto lavado que estava enrolado na sela. Quando o abriu, verificou surpreendido que nas costas tinha bordado o mesmo símbolo que vira há muitos anos no manto de Rasel, o mago que Astrid vencera na corte do Gordo. Afinal, eles não eram soldados, eram magos enviados por Davdak. Será que ele sabia da sua demanda? Estariam ali pela mesma razão que ele? Bem, agora tanto fazia. Vestiu o manto, recolheu a espada e o arco e agarrou nas rédeas a coxear, levando o animal para fora daquele labirinto.

No firmamento, não teve dificuldade em encontrar a Estrela da Mansão e verificar que o pequenino astro que vira na véspera, continuava a sua viagem profética e já se aproximara um nadinha mais. Era diferente das outras estrelas, mas ainda não conseguia distinguir bem a sua forma. Olhou para o Ceptro e, com base na distância que tinha percorrido desde a véspera, calculou que teria pelo menos mais uma semana de viagem. Preparava-se para montar, quando alguém atrás de si o chamou com voz arrastada e sofredora:

- Mestre, ajuda-me.

Virou-se e distinguiu à luz do luar as formas do homem que atingira com a seta, e que acabara por lhe salvar a vida, sentado no chão encostado a um meio pilar que ainda se mantinha

no ar. Estava com um aspeto desolador, bastante debilitado mesmo, mas vivo. Seria de ferro aquele homem? - Pensou. Tem uma seta no braço há dezenas de horas, apanhou com uma explosão, com o frio noturno e ainda está vivo? Ia ignorar o pedido de ajuda e continuar o seu caminho, quando lhe ocorreu que ele o estava a confundir com o seu mestre. Colocou o capuz na cabeça e dirigiu-se ao infeliz. Usou a fala mental para a voz não o trair, procurando imitar a rigidez de palavras que se lembrava que o mago utilizara anteriormente:

- *Ainda não morreste? Não tenho tempo para desperdiçar, a estrela já apareceu* - arriscou. Não notou no homem surpresa pelo uso da fala mental nem pela alusão à estrela, mas ele respondeu falando:

- Apenas uns minutos Enviado. Cura-me e depois segue o teu caminho. Ainda te posso ser útil no futuro – o desespero da morte iminente baixa de facto a condição humana.

Sondou rapidamente a mente do homem. Era Kruger o General dos exércitos de Garça Real e que traíra o seu Rei para se aliar ao Enviado. Devido à importância desta missão ao deserto, há muito planeada, acompanhara o mago. Tinha montado uma rede de espionagem no Reino Núbio e a Real Companhia Mineira era a capa das suas atividades subversivas.

Por momentos, supôs que o Enviado era o próprio Davdak mas, não sendo, ficou preocupado pelo poder que este deveria ter. Tinha sido quase por acaso que vencera aquele mago. Então o facto de o terem seguido tinha sido coincidência, mas não restavam dúvidas de que estavam à procura do mesmo que ele e que era Davdak quem estava por detrás daquela informação. A própria Astrid dedicara muito da sua vida, em segredo, a decifrar o significado do aparecimento de Meteus, mas afinal Davdak também o fizera. Era mais poderoso do que alguma vez supusera e o Enviado também, uma vez que lhe confiara a procura do cometa, tal como Astrid a ele.

Na'A hesitou entre ignorar o pedido de ajuda e continuar a sua viagem, mas aquele homem salvara, embora involuntariamente, a sua vida e pagar-lhe-ia na mesma moeda.

Acabara por ter sorte. A seta atravessara o braço sem tocar no osso, mas uma ferida daquelas era morte certa no deserto. Em silêncio, partiu a ponta e puxou-a pela haste no que foi

acompanhado por um valente grito de dor. Rasgou a ponta da túnica do infeliz e fez uma rápida ligadura.

- *O teu cavalo?* – Perguntou.

- Está algures por aí, se ainda estiver vivo – respondeu tiritando de frio.

- *Se aguentares até de manhã, monta e volta para trás. Vai diretamente para Garça Real. Encontramo-nos lá quando terminar a minha missão.*

Levantou-se, com frio e a coxear e montou com dificuldade. Kruger não deveria passar daquela noite. Além da ferida no braço, apresentava queimaduras na cara e várias escoriações e ainda teria que suportar o frio da noite, mas tinha feito o que achava melhor. Se sobrevivesse e conseguisse chegar a Garça Real, espalharia um boato. Lá no alto, mediu a distância entre a Mansão e o Ceptro e apontou o cavalo para o meio.

Cavalgou lentamente nessa noite e nas seguintes. Cada vez lhe custava mais suportar o frio da noite e o calor do dia. Encontrara nos alforques do cavalo do mago alguns frasquinhos com poções que foi racionando, mas nenhuma parecia produzir efeito sobre a vermelhidão da perna que cada vez alastrava mais e o incapacitava. Estava muito inchada e com sinais de infeção. Tinha dificuldades em se lembrar das palavras de cura que se revelavam ineficazes. A seta devia estar impregnada de alguma espécie de veneno que ele não conhecia e o sobe e desce daquelas colinas áridas que se intrometiam no seu caminho provocavam-lhe pancadas de dor em todo o corpo. A febre roubava-lhe discernimento e cavalgava curvado, com os braços pendentes, sem vontade nem controlo do cavalo, ele próprio já muito perto do fim. Por várias vezes ia caindo dele abaixo, mas segurava-se no último instante. Afinal parecia que aquele maldito mago sempre tinha conseguido os seus intentos. Mago? Mas qual mago? Ah, aquele que o tentara matar. Mas ele estava vivo! Ou já estaria na Mansão? Não, não podia estar na Mansão, estava demasiado calor.

Sim, agora lembrava-se, estava a brincar com SuÄni e estava muito calor, por isso decidiram ir tomar banho ao rio, mas quando lá chegaram o rio transformara-se num mar de chamas que engoliu a sua irmã. Ele tentava fugir, mas o cavalo que montava era muito velho e não andava. Quando o incitou, ele tombou para o lado arrastando-o consigo na queda.

A violência do trambolhão que o arrastou alguns metros colina abaixo naquele romper de aurora, trouxe Na'A das profundezas do delírio em que tinha mergulhado. Tinha muita sede e frio e faltava-lhe o ar mas, de costas coladas ao chão, esqueceu por momentos o seu sofrimento. Bem na direção do seu olhar, mesmo por cima de si estampada no céu, a figura de um meio ovo com três ondulantes chamas saindo de dentro aparecia. O mesmo símbolo bordado nas costas da túnica do mago que vestira. O símbolo era uma cópia de Meteus. Davdak afinal sabia tanto ou mais que Astrid! Mas era ele quem estava ali no momento certo e não o Mago Maldito.

Sentou-se com esforço, e depois levantou-se cambaleante numa só perna, no preciso momento em que o sol ameaçava lançar o seu primeiro raio do dia. Mas estava muito debilitado e quando levantou a cabeça ao alto, na direção de Meteus, perdeu o frágil equilíbrio que conseguira e caiu novamente, vendo deitado o sol romper a barreira do horizonte e incidir diretamente no cometa procurando bani-lo do seu espaço.

A explosão resultante do choque quase que o cegou. Meteus defendia-se do sol desviando a sua luz para a terra e, um pouco mais abaixo, na confluência das duas colinas, uma sarça velha e seca começou a arder quando a coluna de luz multicolorida a atingiu. Poucos, ou mesmo ninguém, tinham sido testemunhas de uma luta titânica daquela natureza e Na'A, com grande esforço, levantou-se novamente e começou a dirigir-se saltando numa só perna e arrastando a outra, em direção à coluna de luz, quando se apercebeu que o sol iria inexoravelmente vencer aquela batalha.

Quando Meteus já quase não era mais do que uma marca de água no céu e a coluna de luz um ténue fio que ameaçava desaparecer, Na'A reuniu as últimas forças num salto impossível e atirou-se para o meio daquela aguarela de luz, desaparecendo ambos do dia que o sol fatalmente reclamou como seu.

Suspenso no ar, Na'A mergulhou num escuro absoluto. O pensamento torpe e o corpo letárgico flutuavam no espaço sem dimensão, numa extensão indefinida do nada que se prolongou por uma eternidade.

O seu corpo sem gravidade flutuava inconsciente naquele ambiente surreal, abstraído de toda a realidade que conhecera. Viu-o pousar suavemente num altar de pedra no centro de uma

sala ogival, completamente livre de qualquer indumentária, irradiando cores de diversas tonalidades que refletiam as mazelas de sofrimentos recentes. A perna apresentava uma tonalidade vermelha escura que ameaçava o resto do corpo.

Não compreendia o que estava a acontecer. Astrid apenas o instruíra para seguir o cometa, não o preparara para isto. Ninguém está preparado para ver o seu próprio corpo de fora.

Uma música suave e melodiosa como nunca tinha ouvido, invadiu muito baixinho aquele ambiente tranquilo, trazendo o seu pensamento de volta ao presente e ao propósito de estar ali. Viu uma auréola de luz branca envolver o seu corpo num movimento giratório e purificador. Depois, começou a olhar à volta, à medida que no lugar dos pontos cardeais, quatro pequenos nichos de tamanhos variáveis iam aparecendo numa sequência luminosa crescente, refletindo a beleza da cor das pedras preciosas que abrigavam.

Esqueceu o seu corpo e a misteriosa experiência porque estava a passar e dirigiu-se flutuando para norte. Uma única gema era visível, brilhante e facetada do tamanho de um ovo de codorniz, muito parecida com um diamante. Uma observação mais atenta mostrou-lhe que vibrava com uma única inscrição no seu interior. Wyrð, a Origem, descodificou. A runa em branco, o passado o presente e o futuro. A trilogia da predestinação que não pode ser evitada. O que está preche e vazio ao mesmo tempo. À medida que as vibrações se produziam em diversos estágios, Na'A ia percorrendo sobre o seu significado.

Depois, passou para o segundo nicho, a leste, que refletia a cor vermelha dos oito rubis que o compunham. O primeiro mostrava Fehu, a criação do Mundo. Depois, todas as outras runas como Uruz, Thurisaz ou Ansus, cada uma em seu rubi, cuja vibração induzia em Na'A profunda meditação sobre o seu significado.

O tempo tornou-se relativo. No terceiro nicho, a sul, onde a cor dominante era o azul das safiras, a runa Hagal revelava as forças da natureza. Na'Akano estudou absorvido Hagalaz, o granizo, mas também Jera a colheita, ou Eihwaz o teixo e todas as outras.

A sua cabeça fervilhava com o conhecimento impossível que aquela sala abrangia. Era um Panteão sagrado, local do sincretismo de todas as crenças. A mesma origem para toda a Humanidade, simbolizada naquele último nicho que estudou. As gemas verdes das esmeraldas

ensinaram-lhe a Humanidade. Tiwaz, a honra e a justiça. Dagaz e Laguz, o dia e a água, ou ainda Mannaz, o homem.

Depois, muito lentamente, foi encaminhado para o seu corpo ao qual não queria retornar. Havia tanto para estudar, tanto para aprender, ficaria ali para sempre.

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Na'A acordou deitado na areia. Estava totalmente nu, apenas coberto pela sombra das enormes folhas de uma palmeira que bondosamente lhe oferecia. Sentou-se abraçando as pernas com o queixo apoiado nos joelhos, contemplando os contornos da pequena lagoa daquele oásis com as margens repletas de pequenos tufo de ervas, e praticamente cercada de coqueiros e tamareiras. Um cavalo, um belo macho pintado observava-o curioso da outra margem. Dirigiu-lhe um pensamento amistoso a que o equino respondeu batendo com a pata no chão. Depois voltou-se para si.

Sentia-se diferente, mais diferente do que alguma vez se sentira. O seu corpo não apresentava vestígios da ferida na perna nem clamava por água e alimentos como se recordava de ter sentido. Pelo contrário, sentia-se vigoroso e saudável como quando corria livremente nas encostas das montanhas de Pedra do Urso nos intervalos das aulas de Astrid. Agora lembrava-se. A Grande Maga tinha-o enviado ao deserto para seguir o rasto de um cometa - Meteus era o seu nome, dissera - e fora seguido por três cavaleiros com os quais lutara. Sim, um deles era um mago com o símbolo de Davdak bordado na túnica, que era o desenho do cometa. Depois disso, a perna inchava e ficara doente até ao momento em que um clarão de luz muito brilhante vindo do cometa lhe apagou a memória.

Mas algo devia ter acontecido. Como viera parar àquele oásis? Por que motivo a sua mente fervilhava de pensamentos nunca antes ocorridos? Por que razão encontrava agora a solução de alguns dos ensinamentos metafísicos de Astrid que antes lhe pareciam acima do seu entendimento? O cavalo aproximara-se e roçava-lhe o focinho nas costas, como que a incentivá-lo a encontrar as respostas.



Durante vários dias Na'A meditou sobre tudo o que aprendera à luz de uma nova perspectiva. Partilhava em voz alta com o cavalo os seus pensamentos. Aquilo que toda a vida ocupou a mente da Velha Mestre estava agora claro na sua. Tinha encontrado o elo perdido da Profecia. Compreendeu finalmente o motivo da dedicação que a velha Mestra lhe dedicara e o empreendimento a que o votara. Ele era Alagosadhar! Tal como ela, dedicaria as suas capacidades ao restabelecimento da ordem natural que as coisas tinham antes de Naur'Can, até serem seriamente comprometidas por Davdak.

Olhava para si, todo nu tal como o cavalo – riu-se do pensamento - enquanto procurava uma solução que o tirasse daquele deserto, cuja utilidade finalmente descortinara. Acabou por acontecer de uma forma surpreendente. Tinha saído da pequena lagoa após um refrescante banho, e recolhera algumas tâmaras que partilhava com o equino sentado no tronco de uma palmeira que nascera torta. O sol estava no seu auge e o melhor local para se estar era mesmo à sombra.

O cavalo foi o primeiro a reagir abanando a cabeça e batendo com a pata esquerda no chão. Na'A virou a sua cabeça a tempo de ver dois pequenos montículos de areia começarem a elevar-se do chão até atingirem cerca de um metro de altura. Duas figuras anãs, com pés enormes, perfilavam-se lado a lado diante de si. Os contornos das suas feições imitavam o granulado da areia e era difícil distinguir os olhos no rosto redondo. Uns grãos de areia mais escuros formavam o que devia ser o nariz sem orifícios e os lábios salientes e grossos limitavam o pequeno orifício da boca. No local dos ouvidos, dois buracos pequeninos. Uma trança comprida da cor da areia, como todo o corpo, nascia-lhes da nuca e não parava de se mover em todos os sentidos. Seria difícil distingui-los no extenso areal.

Na'A levantou-se num movimento brusco, entre a surpresa de constatar que não estava sozinho e o desajeitado gesto de esconder a sua nudez, o que assustou os pequenos habitantes do oásis que começaram rapidamente a fundir-se com a areia.

- Esperem – quase gritou – não vão embora, esperem. Quem são vocês?

As pequenas criaturas estacaram hesitantes, tímidas mesmo e, após avaliarem a situação, começaram a emergir novamente com as longas tranças a abanar, entrelaçando-se uma na outra.

A que parecia mais afoita deu um ligeiro passo em frente abrindo os curtos e grossos braços olhando para cima:

- Nós, Kiburtu, povo do oásis do deserto. Nós ver tu há muitos dias. Kaliá perguntar quem ser elfo que fala com cavalo. Nós curioso.

- O elfo que fala com o cavalo chama-se Na'A – respondeu com um misto de delicadeza e ansiedade, esquecendo a falta de roupa. – O elfo que fala com o cavalo está contente por vos conhecer.

- Kanizá querer saber porque elfo estar aqui e porque falar com cavalo que fugiu de caravana – respondeu por sua vez, o que parecia ser o porta-voz. - Caravana fica uma noite e vai embora. Tu estar aqui sempre.

Só agora Na'A reparava que uma outra trança se juntara no ar às outras duas. Parecia que eles comunicam através daquele comprido apêndice sempre em movimento. De repente, mais de vinte tranças agitavam o ar de um lado para o outro, tocando-se entre si, fazendo lembrar um bailado acompanhado de assobios.

- Na'A fala com o cavalo porque vocês ainda não tinham aparecido. – Queria ser simpático, precisava de ajuda para sair dali e não tinha tempo para contar a sua história. Ele próprio apenas tinha vislumbres do que acontecera após a explosão de luz.

As tranças no ar entraram num bailado frenético, tocando-se umas nas outras com os Kiburtu a virarem a cabeça e a acenarem uns para os outros com os estridentes assobios à mistura.

- Nós agora estar aqui. Kamigá e Karingá e Kalifá e ... – o porta-voz disse o nome deles todos e depois acabou como de costume: - quererem saber o que tu ter para falar.

Na'A fazia votos para que não aparecesse mais nenhum. Eles funcionavam como um todo e, no seu simples entendimento, ao usar o plural na resposta, englobou todo o grupo, como tal, responderam em grupo, mas apenas o porta-voz, o único de que não sabia o nome, falava. Tinha que começar a falar no singular, caso contrário ainda estaria ali na próxima lua nova.

- Eu preciso de ajuda para sair daqui. Não tenho roupa, nem apetrechos para o cavalo nem um odre para a água. Sem isso, não posso atravessar o deserto. Será que me podes ajudar?

- Na'A tinha muito poucas esperanças que aquele povo o pudesse ajudar. Viviam na areia e não via qualquer tipo de indumentária ou utensílio.

Nova conferência de rabos-de-cavalo de areia, muita movimentação de cabeças e mais assobios. Minutos volvidos, novamente silêncio com o porta-voz a avançar mais um passo:

- Nós falar. Kerefá, Kunizá, Katiá... - começou outra vez a ladainha dos nomes dos elementos da tribo. - Na'A não conseguiu conter uma valente gargalhada, mas arrependeu-se logo. O porta-voz deu um passo atrás e as tranças pararam em silêncio no ar.

O elfo juntou as mãos à altura do peito e fez uma vénia sentida apesar de ridícula pela ausência de vestes, aproveitando para esconder a cara e o sorriso que teve dificuldade em dominar. Manteve-se nessa posição até começar a ouvir, aliviado, a ladainha novamente. Com algum esforço pôs uma cara séria, e ergueu-se de novo, sentindo-se um gigante.

- ...Kerumbá, Kitumbá, Keretá, Kuriá, ... quererem ajudar. Tu seguir nós.

Num ápice os Kiburtu desapareceram na areia. Na'A olhava para todos os lados, mas nem sinal das pequenas criaturas.

Finalmente descortinou ao longe as cómicas tranças a bailarem no ar, recortadas contra o sol poente e perto da encosta de uma das colinas que formavam o vale no centro do qual o oásis nascera. Moviam-se com rapidez por entre a areia, constatou.

Pela mente chamou o Pintado que mastigava os tenros rebentos verdes junto à água, que reagiu prontamente. Saltou para o dorso do cavalo com a estranha sensação de não ter a sela entre ambos. Não era nada cómodo, até porque também não tinha roupa, mas a viagem durou apenas uns incómodos duzentos metros.

Em cima de uma pedra rasa, seis enormes pés suportavam o peso de três Kiburtu's, com o porta-voz no meio. Os outros tinham desaparecido sabe-se lá para onde. Saltou do cavalo e caiu de pé num plano mais baixo, e de repente os anões estavam da sua altura. Com o sol poente

a incidir-lhe nos olhos, mas já com o peito na sombra da colina que avançava, colocou a mão sobre os olhos e aguardou.

- Kaliá e Kanizá convidarem Na'A a entrar na gruta – disse voltando-se para a colina.

Kaliá e Kanizá deveriam ser, juntamente com o porta-voz, os mais importantes do clã, pois era a segunda vez que os referia isoladamente. Subiu para o lado deles, voltando a sentir-se gigante, e aguardaram uns momentos com as tranças sempre a tocarem-se umas nas outras, todos voltados para a colina.

Na'A não via gruta nenhuma por mais que se esforçasse. De repente, na base da formação rochosa, irregular e cheia de falhas, uma enorme pedra de granito começou a deslocar-se lentamente, até deixar à vista uma entrada onde caberia baixando a cabeça. Por ela saíram uns pares de agitadas tranças acompanhadas por assobios e pequenos saltos.

Os pequenos seres começaram a pular de pedra em pedra até à entrada recém-aberta com Na'A no seu encalço, espalhando-se os que saíram da gruta em redor da entrada, deixando apenas um corredor por onde, com gestos, foi convidado a passar.

Quando ia a entrar, a paciência de Na'Akano foi posta à prova:

- Kuzará, Kimiá, Kiringá... - e depois todos os outros – convidarem Na'A a escolher o que precisar. Quando sol voltar, nós vir.

Desaparecia o último raio de sol daquele dia invulgar no deserto e desapareceram todos os Kiburtu's como que por magia. A lua em forma de crescente iluminava suavemente o frio que começava a descer sobre o deserto, empurrando Na'A para dentro do abrigo secreto do povo do oásis. Não sabia o que ia encontrar lá dentro, mas a temperatura mantida pela pedra aquecida durante o dia era muito mais amena. No oásis, costumava dormir encostado a pedras sobre as quais concentrava mentalmente a energia do sol.

Uma vez lá dentro a escuridão era total, mas teve a percepção de um espaço amplo após passar um pequeno túnel e as mãos perderem o contacto com a parede. Alguns passos tímidos e os seus pés esbarraram em alguns objetos amontoados desequilibrando-o e fazendo-o cair para a frente, em cima dum desorganizado monte de coisas que se espalharam no chão com uma

barulheira que ecoou nas paredes. As suas mãos tocaram um objeto metálico e comprido que arrastou consigo, fazendo o típico ruído de metal a arrastar.

Sentou-se com ele na mão e as vibrações que sentiu ao palpá-lo aceleraram-lhe o batimento cardíaco. Quando chegou ao punho não teve dúvidas. Era Glawar, a sua espada! Mas como é que era possível? Levantou-se e tirou-a da bainha com mestria e concentrou-se na safira encastrada no punho que começou a emitir pequenas vibrações luminosas, até chegar a uma luz azulada que iluminou toda a gruta.

Ergueu-a acima da sua cabeça e abriu a boca num gesto reflexo quando os seus olhos pousaram em centenas de objetos dos mais díspares possíveis. Rolos de tecido, potes de cerâmica, espadas, adagas e punhais, sacos grandes e pequenos, pederneiras, selas e arreios, arcos e aljavas, um amontoado de tudo o que se pudesse imaginar. Até molhos de chaves e pequenos baús, rolos de pergaminhos e dezenas de objetos de adorno. Esboçou um sorriso ao associar os simpáticos Kiburtu's a um pequeno povo de larápios que se entretinha a saquear as caravanas e a recolher objetos perdidos no deserto. Deviam ter encontrado a sua espada e trouxeram-na para ali.

A manhã chegou com os Kiburtu's a acotovelaram-se curiosos à entrada da gruta, empurrando-se uns aos outros com as tranças sempre a bailarem no ar. Quando Na'A apareceu vestido com um traje escuro até aos pés e um turbante na cabeça, um desorganizado coro de assobios fez-se ouvir e mais uma vez as tranças entraram em rodopio.

Antes que a ladainha de nomes começasse, voltou dentro da caverna e começou a tirar para fora o que selecionara. A primeira coisa que trouxe foi a sela e os arreios que colocou em silêncio no chão sob os primeiros raios quentes de sol. Depois voltou lá dentro e apareceu com um excelente arco que encontrara e uma aljava cheia de setas de grande qualidade, que colocou ao lado da sela. Não havia dúvidas que teriam sido surripiadas a alguma caravana de mercadores. Depois os olhares inexpressivos, mas atentos dos simpáticos seres, viram-no aparecer finalmente com os alforges ao ombro, a espada presa nas costas e dois odres na mão.

Antes que pudesse dizer alguma coisa, o porta-voz adiantou-se:

- Kamisá, Kuringá ....

Na'A desta vez não ouviu os nomes de toda a tribo. O porta-voz apenas disse um nome por cada objeto que Na'A trouxera da gruta e colocara no chão, e depois terminou:

- ... ajudarem a levar coisas para oásis.

Dito isto, os selecionados agarraram cada um no seu objeto e começaram a descer os poucos metros até ao areal, acompanhados pelos assobios dos outros e sob o olhar atento do porta-voz. Na'A compreendeu então como é que eles surripiavam as coisas. Colocaram os objetos na areia e depois fundiram-se com ela. Ao lado de cada objeto a longa trança emergiu do areal e segurou-o como pode, e depois até parecia que os objetos tinham vida. Uma caravana de coisas inanimadas começou a deslizar a alguns centímetros do chão na direção do oásis. De vez em quando paravam, a cabeça redonda aparecia, confirmava o rumo, e voltava a desaparecer.

Quando os carregadores regressaram e se misturaram com os outros, era chegada a altura dos agradecimentos:

- Na'A agradece ao povo Kiburtu pela ajuda e também tem uma prenda para oferecer em troca.

Voltou dentro da caverna e apareceu momentos depois com uma arca ornamentada com belos e coloridos motivos marinhos e cerca de quarenta centímetros de comprimento que colocou no chão. Abriu a tampa e deixou à vista dezenas de gemas preciosas que transformaram os brilhantes raios do sol do deserto, nas mais brilhantes e coloridas tonalidades que alguma vez os Kiburtu's tinham visto. Seriam seguramente o resultado de um furto do qual nem imaginavam o valor.

Um coro de assobios e agitadas tranças encheu o ar enquanto Na'A manipulava mentalmente a energia solar e a concentrava nas pedras preciosas, que começaram a reagir com pequenas vibrações. Não podia carregá-las demasiado, caso contrário explodiriam.

Depois, de cócoras, ofereceu uma pedra a cada Kiburtu, tendo o cuidado de reservar a maior gema, um diamante rosáceo, para o porta-voz.

As gemas tinham agora luz própria. Na'A ergueu-se e disse:

- A minha prenda apenas funciona de noite. Cada gema tem luz e permitir-vos-á enxergar de noite. Convido-vos a entrarem todos na caverna escura para verem o que acontece.

Os Kiburtu's abalaram na direção da caverna, cada um olhando para a cor da sua pedra preciosa e magicando como seria possível dar luz, deixando Na'A livre para chamar o Pintado e satisfeito por ter conseguido furtar-se mais uma vez aos longos diálogos.

No céu do deserto o sol libertava ferozmente o seu calor, e aconselhou Na'A a dirigir-se rapidamente para a sombra das grandes palmeiras do oásis. As coisas que selecionara estavam amontoadas à volta de uma palmeira e começou a ordená-las. Os seus pensamentos voltaram-se para Astrid e para a responsabilidade que lhe legara quando o escolhera para seu aprendiz. Aquela aventura no deserto tinha sido uma prova terrível, mas os conhecimentos que adquirira não tinham preço. Com o passar dos dias, foi-se lembrando de tudo o que acontecera até aquela explosão de luz lhe retirar a noção do tempo. Era nesse lapso de tempo que meditava desde que acordara naquele oásis. A Profecia tinha agora outra luz, e sabia que tinha que ser cumprida sob o risco do equilíbrio da vida e da natureza nunca mais serem encontrados. Davdak tinha que ser travado.

Quando se separara de Drellias, este aceitara ajudar o Duque a recuperar o domínio de Unhais, cujo poder económico tinha sido minado nos últimos anos por gestores corruptos vindos da capital. O que não sabia era que as novas organizações de Unhais estavam controladas pelo Enviado, um mago poderoso como ele comprovava e contra o qual Drell não teria hipóteses alguma. Mas esse assunto estava resolvido e tinha a certeza que o amigo agora, com o caminho livre, mesmo sem o saber, saberia dar ao Duque a ajuda necessária.

Com este pensamento reconfortante, decidiu que rumaria a Garça Real nessa noite para conhecer como funcionava a capital do mais bélico dos reinos dos homens. Encontrara na caverna alguns pergaminhos raros com mapas pormenorizados dos diversos reinos, e até mesmo daquele deserto e iria fazer bom uso deles. Escolheu precisamente esse, gravado em pele de auroque que representava a Núbia e sobre o qual se debruçou alguns minutos, voltando depois a colocá-lo no alforge ainda pousado na areia, junto a um saco bem recheado de moedas de ouro e de prata que os homens usavam. Só aparelharia o cavalo momentos antes de partir. De seguida

deitou-se à sombra da sua palmeira preferida, aproveitando o calor do dia para descansar. Adormeceu observando a cauda do Pintado a abanar despreocupadamente, enquanto o dono se servia à discrição das tenras folhas que guardavam a margem da lagoa.

Acordou quando devia faltar cerca de uma hora para o ocaso. Não fora a posição do sol, e juraria que o calor era ainda o do meio-dia. Lavou-se na água tépida da lagoa, gozando cada gota que lhe limpava os poros. Não fazia ideia de quando poderia voltar a dar-se a um luxo daqueles. Encheu os odres de água e chamou o Pintado que se deixou aparelhar obedientemente, enquanto lhe dirigia palavras calmas e meigas. Também ele se dava conta de que iria haver mudança do quotidiano. Desenvolvera com o Pintado uma relação muito próxima. Bastava pensar nele que aparecia logo. Treinara muitos movimentos e fizera muitos exercícios com ele naqueles dias que passara no oásis. Aprendera a cavalgar sem sela e a dar ordens ao Pintado com uma simples palavra ou toque de joelhos no flanco. Até mesmo ordens pelo pensamento o cavalo compreendia.

Finalmente, quando meio sol se encontrava escondido atrás da colina dos Kiburtu's, atou um saco cheio de tâmaras ao flanco de animal, colocou a espada, novamente envolvida em pele às costas, juntamente com o arco, formando uma cruz, e meteu a cabeça e o braço direito por entre a alça de uma pequena sacola.

Começava a enrolar o turbante quando uma pequena elevação de areia atingiu o metro de altura. Era o porta-voz, desta vez sozinho que aparecia.

- Tu ir embora agora. Kiburtu – finalmente Na'A soube que o porta-voz tinha o nome da tribo – agradecer presente. Todos contentes por agora ver à noite. Nós ter coisa para ti.

Tirou um simples colar feito com uma tira de couro do qual pendia, suspenso, um amuleto e ofereceu-o com deferência a Na'A que nem queria acreditar no que via. Era o amuleto que SuÄni lhe oferecera no momento da partida, mas teve a cortesia de não o revelar.

- Amuleto dar sorte a Na'A. Quando Na'A precisar serviços de Kiburtu, tu deixar amuleto no deserto que nós saber e nós vir.



Desapareceu tão repentinamente como tinha aparecido. Na'A montou e tomou o rumo do nascente, iniciando a travessia do deserto em direção ao seu destino, palpando o amuleto com um sorriso profético.

Cerca de cem metros mais à frente, virou-se uma última vez para aquele oásis, mas o que viu foram dezenas de pequenas luzes que se movimentavam no ar de um lado para o outro, criando um bailado de luzes único na noite do deserto.

Apêndice B: *A Profecia* – “A Ilha”

A ILHA

Desde que regressara a Garça Real, uma sensação de inquietude invadia Na’Akano, como se cada gesto seu estivesse a ser observado ou cada pensamento vigiado. Talvez a razão fosse a iminente viagem de barco, uma experiência nova que não ansiava, ou então o longo afastamento de Alagosadhar a que se votara por imperativos de um destino que ainda tinha dificuldades em compreender. Fosse o que fosse, aquela cidade não lhe ia deixar saudades e tinha pressa em partir.

Há dois dias que esperava em casa de Trynio a melhor maré para zarpar. O Velho Mestre, alcunha pela qual o irmão de Saleno, marinheiro experimentado, era conhecido, servira de ponte para a contratação da tripulação do Furacão, o mesmo barco que aportara uns meses antes com Davdak como passageiro, mas as monções e os ventos contrários só aconselhavam a viagem na primavera seguinte. Por isso, passara o inverno na quinta reavivando as memórias perdidas da Profecia e treinando os homens no tiro com arco em que era exímio, e na luta com espadas em que Karin se revelava um excelente aprendiz. Sendo também ágil de mente e rápido com o pensamento, daria um excelente Guardiã, que provavelmente nunca mais iria ver.

O acender das lanternas de óleo precedeu em alguns minutos o aparecimento das primeiras estrelas. A mulher do pescador tinha acabado de colocar na mesa alguns peixes assados no sítio da lareira e todos se preparavam para a última refeição do dia, quando o som de pancadas na porta numa sequência combinada se fez ouvir.

- Vai abrir a porta filho – ordenou a matrona ao jovem adolescente que já estendia a mão para um apetitoso robalo. - Pelo bater deve ser o teu tio Saleno.

- Saleno e Karin! – Comentou o pescador. – À hora da refeição a maldita maré traz sempre mais um, neste caso dois. Viva Saleno, só te esperávamos de madrugada.

- Cheirou-me a peixe assado à distância – respondeu com uma jovialidade que estava longe de aparentar. – Karin insistiu em vir também. Os assados da tua mulher são sempre deliciosos. A maré está de facto má e trouxe alguns contratempos, mas primeiro vamos comer. Onde está Na’Akano?

Todos seguiram o movimento de cabeça de Trynio em direção ao canto mais escuro e afastado da sala.

- Está há horas ali sentado no chão com o capuz na cabeça. Que uma onda me leve se eu fazia ideia que alguém pudesse estar tanto tempo sem se mexer.

- Sugiro que não o interrompamos. Ele come pouco e já me ensinou os benefícios da meditação. Faz sempre isso quando tem um problema para resolver – respondeu sentando-se à mesa.

A refeição decorreu num ambiente carregado, muito devido às notícias que Saleno trouxera. Desde o assassinato de Kruger que os soldados circulavam em maior número. Ainda não tinham desistido de encontrar os autores do feito e prendiam arbitrariamente quem lhes parecesse suspeito. Sair à noite era uma aventura e os espiões multiplicavam-se. O dono da Fúria do Mar tinha sido enforcado e as prostitutas entregues aos soldados. Saleno não conseguiu esperar pelo fim da refeição como prometera:

- Há muitos soldados na cidade e o Capitão do barco diz que não é bom augúrio partir sem saber o destino. Não deixa o porto antes de conhecer a rota. Os marinheiros são supersticiosos e a tripulação está do lado dele.

- Pela tempestade, - atirou Trynio - isso eu já tinha avisado. O ouro da paga apenas adiou a decisão. Se o elfo quer zarpar de madrugada como combinado – disse apontando o queixo na direção de Na’A - será melhor irmos falar com esse Capitão de água doce. Sei onde mora, mas neste momento não confiaria muito na palavra do Peixe-Aranha. Teve muito tempo para nos pedir a rota, porquê só agora na véspera da partida?

- Nuvens escuras rodeiam o castelo - acrescentou Karin. - Nos últimos dois dias tem aumentado o número de patrulhas e a figura de negro tem sido vista a percorrer as ameias do lado do cais. Chegar aqui sem ser visto foi uma autêntica aventura.

Todos olhavam para Na'Akano, presos da sua imobilidade. Se ele queria mesmo partir, tinha que tomar uma decisão rápida, mas ninguém se atrevia a chamá-lo, tal como ninguém conhecia a rota.

No seu canto, o jovem mago procurava há horas dissecar aquela amargura que o invadia. Há meses que não sentia vibrações tão fortes, emanações mentais como as que sentia entre o seu povo e que Astrid lhe ensinara a captar. Mas ao invés, agora não havia harmonia, eram sinais distorcidos, mesmo sinistros, que o atingiam sem piedade.

Levantou-se com movimentos tensos, arrastando consigo o olhar dos presentes. Todos o viram colocar o seu saco a tiracolo e colocar o arco às costas, mas quando pegou na espada embrulhada em pele de auroque, a ninguém escapou o estertor que invadiu o seu corpo. Lentamente, também o viram pôr a descoberto o punho da espada, no qual uma enorme safira dava mostras de querer explodir com a intensidade azul com que brilhava.

- Esta é Glawar, - disse virando-se para todos a vissem. - A espada forjada nas oficinas de Naur'Can para Davdak. Não há outra igual e foi concebida a partir de uma estrela que os deuses enviaram à terra. E agora o seu antigo dono sentiu a sua presença. Ainda te sentes capaz de dirigir uma embarcação Trynio? – Perguntou olhando com decisão os olhos do Velho Mestre.

- Pelas baleias brancas dos mares do sul! Ninguém conhece estas águas melhor que eu – o brilho do seu olhar era real. – Maldita a hora em que vendi o meu barco ao Bijagó, mas o miúdo não tem guelras para andar no mar – comentou olhando o filho. Bijagó era o nome do seu antigo imediato.

- Davdak sente a vibração da safira, mas não sabe quem a transporta e isso pode dar-nos uma vantagem. Não sei se conseguirei estar à altura de o vencer, por isso urge abalarmos rapidamente. Ele fará tudo para recuperar a espada.

- Com o mar não se brinca rapaz – exclamou o Velho Mestre fazendo uso de uma sabedoria calejada por anos de tempestades. – Faça o que fizeres, não zarpas antes da maré.

- Achas que consegues convencer o Bijagó a embarcar connosco, mesmo não conhecendo a rota?

- Que me nasçam barbas de bagre. Aquele barco era meu. Lanço-lhe uma maldição que ele nunca mais terá marés favoráveis.

- Então vai falar com ele. Tenta também contratar um dos marinheiros do Furacão. Preciso saber onde levaram Davdak. Ah, e manda alguém dar ao Peixe-Aranha um destino falso, talvez na direção do Reino do Cruzeiro do Sul. É provável que ele nos tenha traído. Encontramo-nos no barco à hora da maré.

Mal Trynio e o filho saíram, Karin que tinha ficado prisioneiro do fascínio da espada, não se conteve:

- Como é que tens a espada de Davdak? Um homem só perde a sua espada quando morre, foi o que Saleno me disse. E porque é que nunca a mostraste antes? – Disse sob o olhar concordante do amigo.

- Tudo o que precisas saber Karin-Su, filho de Che-Karin, eu já te disse. Davdak não é um homem comum. Ele é fruto de uma união entre homem e elfo e tornou-se um mago muito poderoso e ambicioso. A tua preocupação e a dos teus seguidores, é recuperar o Diamante e levá-lo para o local marcado na Montanha. Quando eu partir, afasta-te daqui, treina os teus homens e, acredita, o momento que procuras chegará.

Ainda faltavam algumas horas para a maré, e tinham que esperar por notícias de Trynio. Na'A colocou a espada em cima da mesa e concentrou-se no seu punho, alheando-se dos restantes companheiros. O brilho da safira era intenso, apenas interrompido por ligeiríssimos pontos negros que, mais atentamente, verificou que eram pequenas runas microscópicas gravadas numa ordem meticulosa e propositada ao longo do equador da safira. À medida que as percorria, ia sendo arrebatado gradualmente para um transe hipnótico, tal como lhe acontecera quando entrara no portal no deserto. Quando deu a volta completa ao círculo de runas, um raio de luz anil aprisionou-o levando-o consigo para dentro do seu universo.

As imagens eram esbatidas como se estivesse a ver através de uma parede de água. Pela mente de Na'A voaram imagens de um pedacinho de Meteus a despenhar-se na terra milhares de anos atrás, do martelo e da bigorna que lhe deram a forma de uma espada, da safira encastrada e finalmente do punho que a segurou.

Depois, num quarto recatado, em cima de uma mesa, a espada ondulava com o artífice debruçado sobre o seu punho, acompanhando a ondulação com uma precisão milimétrica, gravando algo na safira encastrada. As vestes, negras e distorcidas, escondiam feições decididas e sabedoras sob a proteção de um capuz, guiando o cinzel no desenho das runas. Estas, absorviam com avidez as emanações emitidas pelo artista, fixando as impressões por ele transmitidas, na joia.

A espada, tornada poderosa, prolongava o braço do dono, obedecendo-lhe, procurando alcançar o poder e o domínio. Semeou a discórdia, a ambição e a vingança. Depois, por entre as imagens tremidas, filtradas pela parede de água, Na'A viu uma luta de magos pela posse de um livro. Uma figura esbelta, de longos cabelos prateados que lhe pareceu vagamente familiar, levantava um tosco bordão e bradava palavras poderosas com os braços abertos ao céu. O Mago Negro foi expulso, mas o mal estava feito e os deuses descontentes.

Através do olho da espada, cada vez mais intranquilo no seu torpor hipnótico, do alto de uma duna escaldante, Na'A viu Naur'Can ser devorada pelas areias do deserto, viu o fim de uma civilização e o povo espalhado aos quatro ventos, enquanto a espada, cavalgando um descomunal Wyvern à cintura do seu mestre, voava derrotada com promessas de vingança, repousando num rochedo no meio do mar.

Saleno e Karin observavam o transe de Na'A com uma expectativa crescente. Os tremores frenéticos e o suor que lhe escorria pela face davam mostras de continuar. Estava há cerca de uma hora num mundo que não compreendiam e viam-no aproximar-se perigosamente do esgotamento físico.

Alheio às preocupações dos seus amigos, a angústia de Na'A mergulhava agora na visão apocalíptica da destruição de uma civilização que teria sido a sua. A espada tornara a levantar voo e a mão que a empunhava digladiava-se novamente pela posse do Livro nas ruínas do deserto. Dezenas de gritos mudos de espetros presos ao seu juramento, juntavam-se ao esforço do cavaleiro na luta contra o mago. Quando a batalha parecia perdida e a espada vencedora, do norte, fortalezas voadoras apareceram, vomitando o fogo do Dragão, reclamando a espada e projetando o mago no vazio do deserto.

Pancadas fortes na porta, na mesma cadência ritmada que identificava um amigo, tiraram Na'A com brusquidão do transe em que se encontrava. Resvalou para o chão, caindo desmaiado por exaustão.

Quando acordou, deitado no rudimentar catre do sobrinho de Saleno, um pano húmido numas mãos femininas limpava-lhe a face e arrefecia-lhe o corpo dos estertores do suor que libertara abundantemente. Sentou-se, recompondo-se da experiência, enquanto à volta da mesa, Saleno e Karin questionavam o jovem que trazia novas de Trynio.

- O meu pai falou com o Bijagó. Vai sair de madrugada para a pesca e não se importa de levar mais uns passageiros. O Peixe-Aranha estava muito nervoso quando lhe demos a rota falsa e abalou logo para o barco com a tripulação. O meu pai seguiu-o e mandou-me dar o recado. Diz que quer toda a gente no barco daqui a uma hora.

- Sabes se também há soldados na doca? – Indagou Saleno ansioso. Também ele desconhecia o destino de Na’A e temia ter sido descoberta a sua presença na cidade. Afinal, tinha sido ele que matara Kruger. Se assim fosse, também o irmão e a família correriam perigo.

Mas foi Na’Akano quem, aproximando-se da mesa já recomposto, respondeu:

- Os soldados pretendem pôr a descoberto o possuidor da espada. A safira no seu punho é uma potente fonte de energia onde Davdak gravou as suas impressões, é a sua alma gémea. É a mim que ele quer, embora não saiba quem sou. Deve estar desesperado porque neste momento está sozinho, já se deve ter tomado conta que o Enviado está morto o que atrasou mais uma vez os seus planos, mas os conhecimentos gravados na safira podem ajudá-lo a recuperar mais rapidamente.

- Então nesse caso temos que abalar já. Pelo que dizes, ele não vai parar até encontrar a espada. Só temos de arranjar maneira de chegar ao barco do Bijagó sem sermos vistos. Se o Peixe-Aranha nos traiu, é junto do barco dele que devem estar escondidos os soldados - acrescentou Saleno.

Sáíram os quatro para a fria brisa marítima que ainda se fazia sentir, com o filho de Trynio a liderar a marcha. Conhecia aquelas ruelas estreitas que se entrecruzavam por entre as casas do bairro dos pescadores de cor. Em silêncio, foram-nas percorrendo na escuridão da noite, apenas interrompida pela luz de uma ou outra lamparina que atravessava as desnudadas vidraças e pelo testemunho intermitente das estrelas.

Aquela parte da cidade era plana, e a doca ocupava a parte ocidental da baía que começava na arriba do castelo. Era a parte mais abrigada que protegia os barcos das investidas do mar, principalmente no inverno.

Na’A não comungava da simplicidade de processos de Saleno, em que bastava chegar ao barco, por isso foi recitando palavras de proteção para os quatro. Envolveu-os numa aura energética que repeliria setas perdidas ou estocadas diretas das espadas dos soldados, mas o seu maior receio era o Mago Negro sentir a sua presença.



Deram a volta pela extremidade este do bairro e foram desembocar no extenso areal onde os pescadores, no intervalo da faina, reparavam os aparelhos de pesca. Passaram ao longo das cordas esticadas entre postes enterrados na areia da seca do pescado, e caminharam junto à rebentação em direção ao local onde o extremo do molho entrava no mar. Thorn, o filho de Trynio, podia não ter guelras para o mar, mas revelava valentia e destreza em terra. Subiu o molho com ligeireza, indiferente à rebentação das ondas e fez sinal aos outros para esperarem. – Subam quando ouvirem um assobio – silvou para baixinho.

Uma vez lá em cima, desnudou a cabeça e caminhou despreocupadamente pelo empedrado do molho à luz da aurora que rompia. Do outro lado, na proteção da baía, a azáfama dos pescadores a prepararem os barcos para a saída para o mar era já grande. O molho tinha cerca de cem metros e o barco que procurava, o Espadarte, estava mais ou menos a meio. Aproximou-se e parou junto às amaras da proa onde o Bijagó gritava uma ordem qualquer ao lado do pai. Ficou surpreso pois esperava vê-lo chegar do lado de terra:

- Onde está Na'Akano? – Perguntou. – Está tudo preparado para partirmos. O Peixe-Aranha traiu-nos e tem o barco cheio de soldados escondidos.

- Aguardam um sinal meu – respondeu apontando na direção de onde viera.

- Então chama-os. Mais um bocado é dia completo e nós somos pescadores e não soldados.

Thorn não esperou segunda ordem. Voltou uns passos atrás, colocou dois dedos na boca e soltou um estridente assobio. Aguardou uns segundos, os suficientes para observar três vultos a emergirem da ponta do molho, e fez-lhes sinal que avançassem. Mas apenas Saleno e Karin correram para o barco. Na'Akano, de pé em cima do molho, olhava para cima na direção da muralha do castelo do outro lado da baía.

Todos seguiram o seu olhar. Entre duas ameias, uma figura de negro era atingida pelos primeiros raios de sol, provocando um contraste medonho com as nuvens negras que se adensavam e avançavam pelo céu da baía. Na mão esquerda, Na'A com o capuz colocado levantava lentamente a espada segura logo abaixo da guarda com a ponta para baixo e a safira ao alto.

Os dois magos fitaram-se desafiantes. De repente, do alto das ameias, o Mago Negro levantou os braços ao céu e começou a baixá-los gradualmente em direção à baía, ao mesmo tempo que recitava palavras que comandavam os elementos. As nuvens negras por cima de si começaram a avançar num rodopio avassalador, qual furacão descontrolado e um dilúvio de grossas gotas de chuva batidas por ventos fortíssimos começou a cair no mar que se tornou revoltoso.

O furacão avançava para a baía, com o seu mentor do alto das ameias a intensificar a sua violência. Dois barcos que já se tinham feito ao mar foram sugados como uma pena levada pela brisa, e o pânico instalou-se entre os pescadores no momento em que mais dois tornados descendo do negrume das nuvens se começavam a formar.

Na'A virou-se ligeiramente, dando o seu flanco esquerdo à tempestade e levantou os braços em cruz, com a cabeça inclinada para baixo. Do seu lado direito, o sol nascente incidia sobre os furacões, dando-lhe uma beleza aterradora. O mago apontou o braço direito ao sol e o esquerdo, com a espada segura, na direção da tempestade:

- *Le suilonSu naurNa, no dirwegDi na alagoAl ah cofnCo i gwaewGw*<sup>6</sup> – gritou olhando diretamente o astro-rei.

Em cima do molho, Thorn e Saleno soltavam as amarras olhando ansiosos Na'A, que continuava a desfiar palavras incompreensíveis, enquanto Trynio, ao leme, gritava uma ordem a Bijagó. Todos pararam com o olhar fixo no elfo quando este, aproximando as mãos uma da outra, começou a tecer uma teia de luz brilhante como se toda a força do sol se tivesse comprimido entre elas. Depois, viram-no comandar a luz, atirando-a para o centro da tempestade ao mesmo tempo que gritava: - *DostaDo alagoAl*<sup>7</sup>. À sua cintura, a safira do punho da espada brilhava intensamente.

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<sup>6</sup> Eu te saúdo, Sol. Acautela-te com a tempestade e esvazia os ventos.

<sup>7</sup> Arde tempestade.

No meio da baía, os elementos da natureza potenciados pelos magos encetavam uma luta de titãs. Miríades de pequenos filamentos da luz do sol envolveram a força rotativa do furacão, dando-lhe um brilho intenso e criando um campo de calor que começou progressivamente a tirar força aos ventos e a desviá-los da rota de colisão com o barco.

Na'A aproveitou o bloqueio das forças destruidoras e correu para a embarcação colocando-se na proa virado para a ré, enquanto os outros, usando as varas dos remos, afastavam o barco do molho, contra o qual alguns barcos já se tinham esmagado empurrados pela forte ondulação.

O contra-ataque do elfo aos tornados abriu um corredor que permitiu ao Espadarte escapar-se, mas a força dos ventos era ainda demasiado forte e rasgou a vela entretanto desfraldada por um dos marinheiros, e rapidamente a forte ondulação começou a impelir a embarcação para trás.

Na arena da baía, os elementos continuavam a digladiar-se interpondo-se entre os magos e impedindo o confronto direto. Entretanto os marinheiros, numa atitude de desespero, tentavam com os remos evitar que a embarcação de dez metros colidisse com o molho para onde estava perigosamente a ser empurrada.

De repente, Na'A teve uma ideia. Debruçou-se sobre o oceano à sua frente e captou as centenas de formas de vida invisíveis que cruzavam o oceano sob o espelho de água revolto. O esforço que teve que despender para captar tão grande quantidade de minúsculos cérebros e comandá-los foi tremendo, mas gradualmente um enorme cardume de peixes de todas as espécies e tamanhos começou a juntar-se sob o casco do barco e a rebocá-lo, primeiro lentamente, depois com mais rapidez em direção ao mar aberto.

Para trás começou a ficar o caos em que se tornou a marina, com todos os barcos destruídos e a cidade invadida por vagas enormes levantadas pelo efeito dos tufões, enquanto do alto das muralhas Davdak assistia impotente à sua derrota, vendo o Espadarte afastar-se em direção ao alto mar com o seu misterioso mas já figadal inimigo.

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Há já cerca de um mês que navegavam para oriente, e há muito que tinham passado as águas conhecidas. Todos olhavam Na'A com um respeito acrescido, mas fora graças à energia do sol acumulada pela safira, que recuperara mais rapidamente. Nunca tinha chegado tão perto do esgotamento físico como naquele luta, nem mesmo no deserto, apesar de ter estado às portas da morte. Não admira que Davdak tivesse tentado tudo para reaver a espada. Mas agora, quem sofria a bom sofrer era Thorn. De facto, não fora feito para andar no mar. Passava os dias sozinho, sentado na ré numa luta constante contra o mal do mar. Não aguentava nada no estômago, e só uma infusão nutritiva que o elfo lhe preparava o mantinha vivo. As melhoras eram muito lentas, mas acabaria por se adaptar.

As primeiras semanas bolinaram com a costa à vista onde, em breves paragens, se reabasteciam de água e víveres. A última paragem tinha sido no Pantanal, terra esquecida pelos deuses, um autêntico labirinto onde era muito fácil alguém se afundar em areias movediças ou ser atacado por algum crocodilo, espécie muito abundante naquela região, ou então algum réptil venenoso dos quais a mordedura era quase sempre fatal. Mas também eram muito abundantes os ninhos das aves que nidificavam por entre os canaviais e a vegetação rasteira. Para onde quer que se olhasse, a paisagem era sempre a mesma e sempre pouco convidativa.

Thorn era sempre o primeiro a desembarcar e o último a retornar ao barco. Nesta última paragem contudo, foi bastante imprudente ao desobedecer ao bom senso e internar-se por entre os canaviais enquanto os outros enchiam os barris de água. Ninguém estava com disposição de se internar por entre aquele puzzle de armadilhas e já todos desesperavam por ele. Finalmente lá apareceu e escapou de uma valente reprimenda do pai, quando mostrou um saco cheio de ovos e três patos coloridos que apanhara.

Trynio não conseguira contratar nenhum dos tripulantes do Peixe-Aranha, mas Na'Akano vira, na alucinação que a safira lhe provocara em casa do Velho Mestre, um rochedo no meio do mar que calculara fosse uma ilha. Nos mapas que encontrara da gruta dos Kiburtu's, no deserto, havia a sinalização de uma possível terra no meio do mar, para oriente, que apontou ao capitão do Espadarte.

Trynio e o Bijagó, passavam os dias de volta do mapa. Lendas de uma terra distante no meio do mar que abrigava monstros eram contadas, mas ninguém a tinha visto. “-Se calhar o Peixe-Aranha viu”, disse uma vez Saleno. “-Ou alguém da sua tripulação”, rematou o Velho Mestre. “-Quando tentei falar com eles sobre o assunto, até parece que tinham visto o diabo”. Faziam anotações da costa durante o dia, e mapeavam as estrelas de noite.

Era a segunda vez que a lua se levantava esplendorosa na sua plenitude e os víveres começaram a ser racionados. Metade da tripulação do Bijagó tinha fugido quando a tempestade se instalou na baía de Garça Real, mas a outra metade tinha-se mantido fiel. Embora isso significasse mais trabalho para todos, também significava água doce e alimentos durante mais tempo. O mar fornecia peixe que as redes iam tirando, contudo não havia nenhuma fonte de água disponível para além da que ia diminuindo nos barris.

Aquele início de noite revelava-se simplesmente deprimente. Desde o meio da manhã que o vento deixara de soprar e todos se arrastavam de um lado para o outro, fazendo e refazendo as mesmas tarefas ao som triste da deriva a que o barco estava sujeito. O sol fora implacável durante o dia e a moral estava em baixo.

- Se não encontrarmos terra nos próximos dois ou três dias, temos que voltar para trás – comentou Trynio para Na’A.

- Se não tivermos vento, nem para trás nem para a frente – respondeu o Bijagó. – Uma vez estive uma semana sem vento e....

- Não precisamos dessas histórias agora – interrompeu o Velho Mestre. – Nós dois estudamos os mapas de Na’A, e se eles estivessem certos já devíamos estar a ver terra. A não ser que quem os fez não tenha sido rigoroso o suficiente, e é por isso que estou a pensar que com vento de feição, poderemos continuar para oriente mais dois ou três dias.

- E é isso que vamos fazer. O Peixe-Aranha levou Davdak a algum sítio, e nós vamos descobri-lo. – Na’A falou com convicção, não deixando dúvidas sobre os seus propósitos.

Mas os pescadores intervieram manifestando o seu desagrado pela situação que viviam. Julgavam que iam sair para a pesca e não sabiam a razão de estarem ali. A aura protetora que tinham visto em Na'Akano começava a dissipar-se em face das dificuldades e do desconhecimento dos propósitos daquela viagem. Eram pessoas simples e a pesca era tudo o que sabiam fazer. Regressar sem peixe, significava falta de sustento para as suas famílias.

O elfo levantou-se e foi à cabine onde tinha os seus pertences. Do saco das moedas que trouxera do deserto, contou várias e voltou para fora, mas antes apalpou o amuleto que trazia ao peito que lhe trouxe as recordações do seu propósito de vida.

Uma vez cá fora, dirigiu-se a cada pescador e a cada qual ofereceu uma moeda de ouro e outra de prata. Sentados contra a amurada, receberam-nas indiferentes até se aperceberem, à fraca luz do crepúsculo, que não eram as vulgares moedas de cobre que tão bem conheciam.

- Quando a nossa missão estiver terminada, receberão mais duas moedas iguais a essas.

Aquela paga significava quase dois anos de trabalho e constituiu forte motivação para quem fazia do trabalho duro a razão de uma vida. Os homens tinham de facto valores diferentes dos da sua raça, e dependiam muito mais dos bens materiais. Fosse como fosse, ganhara aliados incondicionais e aquela noite traria sonhos de melhor vida, trazidas pelo mordiscar das moedas, confirmando que eram de ouro.

Rompia a aurora quando os homens foram acordados pelo surdo baque do vento tímido a bater na vela triangular. O novo alento de uma noite dormida sob os auspícios da promessa de melhor vida, acelerou a azáfama de pôr o barco na rota.

Na'A posicionara-se na proa em companhia de Karin e Thorn. Bijagó segurava o timão com Saleno a seu lado enquanto Trynio bradava ordens aos pescadores. E tinha razão em o fazer. O vento trazido pelo destino caprichoso, aumentava de velocidade com uma rapidez impressionante. De repente, o Espadarte quase não tocava na água.

- Estica-me esse cordame filho de uma sardinha. Se essa vela me rebenta atiro-te aos tubarões – gritou o Velho Mestre para um dos marinheiros, enquanto segurava o timão. – E vocês aí, fixem-me a retranca cinco graus a estibordo. Vai chamar os outros para dentro da cabine, isto vai ficar feio – disse por fim a Saleno.

As ondas abatiam-se no convés sem piedade e um dos marinheiros esteve quase a ir borda fora quando a violência do vento aconselhava soltar a adriça para baixar a vela. Valeu-lhe a experiência de ter amarrado uma corda à cintura.

As ordens já não serviam para nada, pois ninguém conseguia fazer-se ouvir por cima do barulho da tempestade. Nestes momentos, valia a experiência de cada um e o pescador, que momentos antes estivera quase a cair ao mar, começou a gesticular freneticamente para a cabine, apontando uma enorme massa de água que se dirigia para a embarcação. Outros dois agarraram a vela acabada de arrear e ataram-na ao mastro, usando as cordas para se segurarem, esperando o embate.

Dentro da cabine, Bijagó esforçava-se por apontar a proa para a onda gigante que atrás de si arrastava nuvens negras, mas a constante perda de contacto com a superfície dificultava a manobra. Thorn, que já recuperara totalmente o seu receio do mar, fazia juras de não voltar a entrar num barco e Saleno, que vivia o secreto receio imposto pelo aparecimento do novo guardião, começou a pensar em como seria a vida depois da morte.

Na'A captava estes pensamentos íntimos mas nada podia fazer. A enorme onda passou por eles, levando o barco até ao seu cume e deixando-o cair novamente na água com um impacto terrível e um barulho de madeira a partir. A embarcação adornou perigosamente e o mastro quebrou pelo meio tombando em cima da cabine, desfazendo-a com a força do embate. Apenas o Bijagó se manteve amarrado ao timão, todos os outros foram arremessados para o convés, agarrando-se como e onde podiam.

A tempestade durou algumas horas e, quando acabou, a natureza brindou-os com uma chuva torrencial, de tal maneira intensa que quem estava à proa não conseguia ver a ré. Com o cair da noite, a pluviosidade foi diminuído de intensidade até que, já noite dentro, as primeiras estrelas começaram a aparecer num céu límpido e calmo, o mar tornou-se chão e cada qual começou a palpar as suas feridas.

Quando a manhã acordou e a escuridão partiu, era visível o caos que reinava no barco. Ninguém conseguira dormir. As roupas molhadas doíam até aos ossos, e o sal do mar ardia nas feridas, alguma delas bem feias. O Velho Mestre ergueu-se por entre o cordame, segurando o braço que partira quando o mastro tombara e silenciando as dores com a força dos dentes. Olhou Bijagó sentado no chão da cabine escorrendo sangue da nuca, mas ainda com a mão esquerda segurando o timão:

- Pelas entranhas de um espadarte, que nunca vi uma tempestade assim nos cinquenta anos que levo de mar.

Bijagó não conseguiu evitar um sorriso. Nunca tivera jeito para imitar aquelas saídas brejeiras do seu antigo mestre, embora tivesse tentado.

- Como estão os outros? – Perguntou.

Trynio não teve tempo de responder. A embarcação, muito danificada, estacou de repente presa num banco de areia, voltando a atirar ao chão os que já se tinham levantado e aumentando o volume dos gemidos dos outros.

Cadenciadamente, todos menos um marinheiro que partira uma perna, se aproximaram como puderam da proa e contemplaram a pequena baía onde tinham encalhado.

- Eu seja mordido por uma moreia! – Exclamou o velho mestre. – Então não é que a ilha existe mesmo! – Um gemido abafou a sua alegria quando tentou levantar o braço partido.

O rescaldo da terrível borrasca foi doloroso. Saleno tinha desaparecido, e o pescador que corraera a recolher a vela estava morto com o pescoço partido. Na'A, mais uma vez surpreendeu todos ao curar os ossos partidos e a aliviar as dores das fortes contusões sofridas pelos restantes. Só não conseguiu aliviar o desgosto de Trynio, que nutria uma grande afeição pelo irmão.



Também Karin estava pesaroso. Depois de enterrarem o pescador na base da primeira árvore do extenso palmeiral, acercou-se do Guardião.

- Saleno sabia o que o esperava, e também tinha a noção que a sua morte não tardaria – tentou Na’A em vão consolar o jovem.

- Mas porquê? – Retorquiu Karin com uma pergunta. – Ele não precisava de morrer só porque o colar brilhou para mim. Este adorno não passa de um colar e, se calhar, estava melhor ao pescoço dele.

- É uma das tuas primeiras lições. Ninguém sabe o dia ou a hora da sua morte, mas o Guardião vai ter de suportar esse fardo. O colar não escolhe qualquer um e, a partir desse momento, estás comprometido com o futuro da humanidade. Sempre que surge um novo Guardião, é sinal que o anterior vai morrer. Eu não te ensinei nada nestes meses? Tu tens uma missão!

Karin tinha de facto aprendido muito, mas Saleno substituíra o pai assassinado no seu afeto, e estava muito desgostoso. Afastou-se meditando em tudo o que lhe acontecera nos últimos meses, culpando-se por ter deixado o desgosto toldar-lhe a razão. Já tinha tido provas de que o colar não era um simples adorno.

Nos dias seguintes, os pescadores dedicaram-se a reparar a embarcação e Na’A convidou Karin a acompanhá-lo na exploração do local. Se fosse aquela a ilha que procurava, o local que secretamente Davdak frequentava, precisava saber que segredo escondia. Em face dos perigos que poderia encontrar, foi com relutância que convidou Karin para o acompanhar, mas achou que seria a melhor maneira de o fazer esquecer o desgosto do desaparecimento de Saleno. Partiriam na manhã seguinte.

A meia-lua que constituía a baía estava escondida por uma enorme escarpa cujo término, a sudeste, fora moldado pelas ondas do mar, formando um rendilhado que projetava a água no ar em milhares de gotas de espuma. A beleza do local era conferida pelo campo de palmeiras existente entre a praia e aquela imensa parede de pedra circular que ia diminuindo de altura para norte, até suavemente voltar a entrar no mar revestida por um tapete verde de erva que crescia livremente, constituindo a única entrada na baía. A meio da parede rochosa, uma abertura deixava escapar um jacto de água que formava um riacho que corria para o mar depois de encher um pequeno lago cercado de penedos.

Na'A caminhava com Karin a seu lado. O jovem era da sua altura e nos últimos meses ganhara uma maturidade notável. O seu objetivo imediato era subir ao topo da escarpa para ter uma visão do interior da ilha, procurando não ser detetado caso fosse habitada. Quando estavam prestes a deixar a proteção das palmeiras, foi Karin quem alertou para o facto de estarem a ser seguidos.

- Pois estamos – respondeu Na'A sorrindo. – Parece que arranjaste um lugar-tenente.

O Guardiã só percebeu o que o elfo quis dizer quando surpreendeu Thorn a afastar dois ramos de uma palmeira e aparecer na sua frente. Na irreverência da puberdade, resolvera segui-los.

Os três continuaram juntos, mas Na'A decidiu que o melhor seria seguirem junto à costa em vez de subirem ao topo da desprotegida meseta. Quando contornaram o cabo, uma ampla baía, cem vezes maior que aquela onde encalharam, estendia-se à sua frente servida por uma praia de areias douradas e um mar de águas turquesas.

As areias estavam comprimidas entre a rebentação e o extenso palmeiral, que se prolongava pelas suaves encostas de ambos os lados, com exceção do bloco central onde, apesar da distância, vislumbraram o que parecia um pequeno barco encostado a uma espécie de embarcadouro, e duas enormes colunas.

Ao abrigo das palmeiras chegaram lá ao entardecer. A baía devia ter sido poupada às investidas da tempestade, pois não havia sinais de destruição. Os dois pilares que viram de longe, estavam afastados cerca de dez metros um do outro, e marcavam o início do embarcadouro que não devia entrar mais de seis metros na água, sensivelmente o tamanho do barco. Dois bancos, um de cada lado do pequeno mastro era tudo quanto viam. Os remos estavam em cima do passadiço.

Das colunas de pedra nascia um caminho em laje que se estendia pelo meio do enorme largo para o interior, até desaparecer por entre as palmeiras e os coqueiros que proliferavam em abundância. O estranho das lajes eram os desenhos anárquicos que cobriam a sua superfície, quase como se alguém ou alguma coisa as tivesse riscado aleatoriamente.

- Esta coluna tem dizeres, mas não percebo nada – disse Karin enquanto observava de perto uma das colunas. Era maior que ele e intrigava-o as estranhas letras gravadas num círculo perfeito ao seu redor e em vários andares.

- São runas – esclareceu o elfo deixando as lajes e aproximando-se para ver melhor. – Quem as gravou tinha um intuito em mente.

- E esta aqui também tem – confirmou Thorn.

Mas Na’A não teve tempo de decifrar a disposição das runas. Um enorme urro fez-se ouvir, e depois mais outro, a que se seguiu uma cacofonia completa. Todos se viraram na direção do som, que vinha precisamente do enfiamento do caminho.

Karin ia puxar da espada mas o mago a seu lado travou-lhe o movimento:

- Não viemos aqui para lutar. O sol já se pôs e o que quer que tenha feito aquele barulho não me parece que venha tomar banho a esta hora. Vamos abrigar-nos por entre aquelas palmeiras e esperar que a noite caia por completo. Comemos qualquer coisa e depois vocês esperam por mim enquanto vou ver o que existe no fim deste caminho.

Era já noite cerrada quando Na’A se levantou.

- Esperem por mim até ao nascer do sol. Se eu não regressar, voltem ao barco mas só na noite seguinte e esperem por mim mais dois dias. Depois levantem âncora. Não andem por aqui de dia.

Thorn ia comentar que levasse o arco, mas a silhueta do elfo já tinha desaparecido.

- Se tu o visses a lutar, verias que não precisa do arco para nada. Não te lembras do que fez na baía de Garça Real?

O caminho empedrado continuava umas dezenas de metros para o interior. De ambos os lados, restos de construções em ruínas, onde meias paredes e grandes blocos de pedra tombados eram invadidos pela vegetação e atacados pelas trepadeiras. Na'A caminhava atento, mas tinha a certeza que quem quer que habitasse aquele local não estava à espera de visitantes. A lua, em quarto minguante, era ofuscada por milhares de estrelas que conferiam ao local um aspeto soturno, dando às pedras um tom acobreado, mas ajudavam o elfo a confundir-se com os elementos.

A dada altura o caminho atravessava um muro com cerca de cinco metros de altura e um e meio de largo, que se prolongava para ambos os lados até ser travado pelas paredes de rocha, formando uma espécie de arena enorme. O topo do muro formava um degrau de encontro à rocha e, por ela acima, viam-se sombras do que pareciam dezenas de grutas escavadas propositadamente. Na parede, mais ou menos à altura de um homem, tochas ardiam com cerca de quinze metros de intervalo. Concentrou-se na busca de forma de vidas e sentiu que não estava sozinho. Na'A tinha uma excelente visão noturna, aliás como quase todos os elfos, mas não conseguia vislumbrar a origem da vida que percecionava. Ao invés, do outro lado da arena, viu uma enorme frontaria em pedra que indicava que quem habitava a ilha devia estar lá dentro. De ambos os lados da porta, archotes libertavam uma fraca luz amarela permitindo ver melhor os contornos de um enorme portão fechado com uma aldraba no meio. Espalhados pelo chão empedrado, acumulavam-se restos de carcaças de animais e manchas de um líquido viscoso que parecia ser sangue.

Caminhava silenciosamente ao longo do muro com os sentidos alerta. Tentava perceber o ruído que ouvia, como se fosse o vento a deslizar por entre as falhas da rocha, mas a verdade é que não havia vento. Apurou o ouvido e notou que o som vinha de cima e de vários locais. Nesse mesmo momento, como que a confirmar as suas suspeitas, um líquido gorduroso caiu-lhe na cabeça provocando-lhe um sentimento de repulsa quando o tateou.

De um dos nichos da parede de pedra, uma boca semiaberta deitada de lado, deixava escapar por entre os enormes dentes a baba do sono. De repente, percebeu. O som que ouvia era o ar a passar pelas ventas das bestas que dormiam nos nichos. Deviam ser animais enormes e, provavelmente, as carcaças que abundavam um pouco por todo o lado deviam ter sido o jantar. Isso explicava os urros que ouvira da praia.

Aproximou-se silenciosamente da frontaria onde três degraus davam acesso ao espaço que antecedia o portão em madeira maciça. Duas colunas laterais suportavam a pedra cimeira que abrigava a grande portada. Para espanto de Na'A, a aldraba simulava a cabeça de um dragão. Uma observação mais atenta às colunas mostrou-lhe o desenho de runas, mas não estavam desenhadas como as conhecia. As pontas estavam retorcidas, numa derivação do desenho tradicional, tentando potenciar o efeito mágico de cada uma. Mas só o fato da derivação ser retorcida e não reta conferia-lhes um efeito maléfico. As runas que aprendeu, não tinham curvas. Na base de cada coluna encontrou a gravação que receava encontrar: um meio ovo cortado em serradura com três ondulantes chamas a saírem de dentro. Já não havia dúvidas. Davdak adotara o símbolo que identificava Meteus e marcara-o também ali. Mas também ficou com a certeza que as bestas nos nichos não eram dragões, mas sim Wyvern's com os quais o Mago Negro se aliara para atacar Naur'Can e provocar o seu desaparecimento centenas de anos antes.

Mas se ele estava em Garça Real, quem estava ali a controlar as bestas? Que aliados poderia ter encontrado, suficientemente poderosos para o ajudarem a controlar os Wyvern's?

Os seus pensamentos foram interrompidos pelo alerta de que a noite se aproximava do fim e não queria ser encontrado ali, mas não iria embora sem ver quem controlava as bestas. Olhou em toda a volta e viu umas escadas largas que, em cada um dos lados, levava ao topo do muro e ao acesso às grutas. Constatou enquanto subia que nem todas estavam ocupadas e em boa hora se introduziu dentro da primeira, pois as enormes aves começam a despontar para o novo dia, no preciso momento em que também a porta se abriu deixando passar um personagem que abalou Na'A.