

Kasani: Walking Another's Path Exalted Fiction

It is said that a life is the sum of experience and the wisdom gleaned from it.

I say experience *is* life and wisdom is merely understanding this.

And yet, despite experience, despite wisdom, there are those amongst us who are doomed to repeat their mistakes even beyond death.

My name was Heikanu and I write this as a testament to that past, or, perhaps, a testament to the past of Surano, the Exalted soul which lives within me.

When I was very young, and my family was my world, my father was like a king: proud and strong, someone to admire. A former soldier become blacksmith, he was respected around the village for his skill and for his fairness.

He was a man you could place your life in the hands of, someone you could trust to look out for you and be there when you needed him.

I always assumed that I would become a soldier too: the tales my father told of his travels to distant lands on campaign, and the camaraderie he shared, were more than enough to seduce any young boy.

Thus, this was the vocation I trained for, what I practised for in swordplay with my father, when I was hitting my brothers with a wooden stick as if it were a real sword and trying to wear his armoured breastplate, despite the impossibility of weight.

I was a small child and was proud of my father and thus found myself defending him to the older boys, jealous of his standing. Being a few years shorter, I found myself surviving by wits alone, which has actually served me well in my later years. Indeed, if I had not learned to live by my wits, I may not be alive now.

By the time I achieved adolescence, I had grown to a much more powerful stature, tall and lean for one of my age.

I was not the brawn and bulk that the rest of my family were, yet I was more than able to hold my own against my siblings. I was notably different to my siblings in other ways too, which caused several remarks around the village, particularly about my paternity.

I was tall, lean and handsome whereas my siblings were...well...thugs. And as I grew older, my sandy hair turned to purest silver and when I say silver, I mean *silver*, not just white or any other age-coloured grey. Then there are my eyes: the whites turned to purest black, though people tend to not notice, most being too weak-willed to look me in the eye.

Quite why I was so different from my brothers was not to become apparent until I got much older but until that day, I was also notably more... regal.

I was recruited by the local garrison at an early age and began my apprenticeship. Training went well at first and I quickly became a notable swordsman. Though, in hindsight, my facility with the blade is somewhat suspect: natural talent or preternatural memory? Only the Gods know the answer.

The natural course of progression from village boy to garrison soldier and onwards, to whatever petty destiny was mapped out for a normal youth, was quickly shattered when the Sun Himself spoke to me and I exalted.

The slumbering soul of the Solar Exalted called Surano roared his awakening and I was forever changed.

Memories that were not my own awakened within me, thoughts of another being surged through my mind, permeating my Essence and I was no longer merely just Heikanu: I was a new being, an old soul in a new body awakening for the first time and I lost control.

Surano is a creature of anger, filled with hatred and bitterness and cynicism. He has had millennia of hopes and dreams shattered and his mind is frayed. Perhaps he never was sane, but the thoughts he has...no, to be true...the thoughts *I* have are terrifying and I do not know if they are the thoughts of a man of power or a man of insanity.

The small garrison outpost I lived at in apprenticeship quickly fell to 'our' might. In that brief time when I had no reason, Heikanu was gone and there was only Surano. I killed those poor soldiers whom I had once called my friends. I slaughtered them and I *enjoyed* it.

Since that day, my life has altered irrevocably. I burnt the garrison down and with it, my past. I can never go home, never see my family again...my father...there is no going back.

I took the name of Kasani, knowing that Heikanu died that day, had to die: laid to rest if only to put the past behind me. Whatever Heikanu was, what last vestiges of conscious personality that were him, it all died in the fire at the garrison and that is where I was born anew.

I live my life from day to day, striving to make some sense of what I now am.

I know that I am not Surano but we are one and he sometimes speaks to me, a voice out of the past. Where the goals and desires of Surano and those of Heikanu crossover, that is what Kasani seeks, though Surano's needs burn like molten rock deep within me.

And the constant rage and anger he feels from lifetimes of defeat sometimes rise like a high tide and just so, threaten to carry me away to Surano's shore.

I can sometimes feel Surano raging at me as I rail against his wishes. I feel deep shame for what he has done in the past, for what he has done in his former lives, and I feel shame for what he did to my friends.

I feel shame for my own actions, for Kasani-choices, as sometimes the Heikanu of old appears out of the mist of memories to shake his head at what I now do. Yes, just as Surano resides in my subconscious, so does Heikanu, the youth that I once was before I exalted.

Surano has tried many times to rule the world utilising his exalted powers. He has forged empires across the globe, had armies fight in his name and had slaves sing his praises until finally he was betrayed.

Since that time, he has suffered countless deaths as all the Solar exalted have, hunted due to their madness until finally he has escaped the net and emerged anew as Kasani.

Surano wishes vengeance and domination, however, Heikanu is a simple villager who wants nothing more than to grow up, find a wife and die an old man with many grandchildren.

The Kasani I am now is a blending of Heikanu and Surano. The blending of an arrogant godling and a mortal peasant boy. And each of my old selves loathes the other. Do you wonder why I strive to remain unseen from the world around me? Do you understand why I do not want to face other people unless I really have to?

Part of me knows that ordinary folk are beneath me, that they should serve and worship me as a god. But part of me, the old Heikanu part, knows that they are human beings and that they are just as alive as I, with the same feelings and emotions.

Yet, both old-Heikanu and Surano both agree that the Dragon-blooded are not to be trusted and are to be destroyed.

The only ones who provide any comfort and understanding are the other Solars, those like me. But even then, I do not know if they suffer from this internal war: this conflict of personality. And I dare not discuss it for fear of them thinking I succumb to some new curse.

Thus, I remain aloof even from my own kind.

My goals, the goals of Kasani, are typical: survival and knowledge. The Solar exalted are still hunted, though not with any of the old ardour which lead to countless reincarnations of Surano and possibly his insanity.

I also wish to understand more of what I am and what it means to be exalted. What society we once had has been eroded by hundreds of years of persecution and so there is no one to tell us about ourselves, no one to explain things to us.

Surano and Heikanu both seek knowledge, though for radically different reasons. Heikanu's needs are simple and his desire for understanding also is simple. He is a confused teenager and his exaltation is just another layer of mystery for him.

Surano, on the other hand, seeks knowledge for power and power alone. Thus where their needs meet, lies my desires.

Such as they are.

It is this quest for knowledge that brought me to the town of Newport, the place where my testament takes place.

I wandered amongst the peoples there, my powers concealing my true identity from the world around me: to everyone there, I was just another face in the crowd, despite my odd trappings.

It was in a tavern of all places I overheard that a terrestrial sorcerer sought the Book of Aina and that he was hiring hands to assist him on the venture. Quite what this tome was I could not say, but something within me knew it to be important and so my curiosity was aroused.

I lazed the afternoon away, drinking quietly in this waterhole, supping bad tasting wine and even worse tasting ale, just hoping that one of these rabble would say something useful.

It was maddening listening to their endless prattle, as they rambled on about this and that: it is a wonder I didn't decapitate one of them and force a confession out of the others.

At least, that is what Surano would have done.

But I am not Surano and Kasani does not kill in cold blood without purpose, regardless of how low these people truly are.

The three fools became more and more drunk over the afternoon and I got more and more irritable. Finally, one of them said something about going to see the sorcerer Yasho tomorrow and he had better go and sober up otherwise he might make a bad impression. This was my chance.

It was a simple matter for me to slip out of the tavern unnoticed and even easier to follow the drunken mortal. I travelled by rooftop, moving as a cat, leaping from house to house, blending with the shadows as best I could.

It was far from a true test of my abilities as this buffoon stumbled home: I who have eluded more potent enemies in the course of my ascension, I who have fought demons by rooftop and crushed empires with but a word.

I had to catch myself: it wasn't I who had done these but Surano and it was Kasani who was following a drunk. A drunk who may lead me to Yasho, who in turn may lead me to the Book of Aina.

He arrived at flophouse near the docks, half-bursting, half-falling through the door in his entrance.

On the building opposite, numerous gargoyles jutted out from the top of the roof and upon one, stood I, in perfect balance, watching the scene below like the owl watching his prey.

People wandered below even at this late hour and I stared at the flophouse from my vantage point, almost daring someone to notice me. Just give me an excuse to make you pay for your inferiority.

The wind tussled my hair and sent my cloak billowing, allowing the cold air to chill my body. Though possessed of great power, I am no more resistant to the effects of the weather than any mortal and it would be a terrible thing for one of Heaven's chosen to come down with a cold.

So I made my decision and travelled across the rooftops, back to my room at the tavern. In through the window I went and to bed.

The next morning, I awoke with the sun, as is my usual habit but I did not breakfast nor perform my daily katas. Instead, as dawn broke, I dressed and left the building via the window and across the rooftops I went once more.

I resumed my owl's vigil opposite the flophouse, careful to make pains to conceal myself: the day being no friend to those who wish to remain unseen.

I rapidly grew bored of waiting for this ruffian to leave the flophouse but fortunately, I did not have to wait long.

The door to the building opened and a sullen, dour-eyed man walked out of the flophouse. Dressed in leather greaves, a steel breastplate and sheathed blade, the man from last night was no longer a drunk in revelry but a man looking for work: fighter's work.

Out of the building he came and, dropping to his knees, he plunged his head in a nearby water trough: a cold-water shock to the alcohol poisoned mind.

At that, I felt a flash of empathy for this man, for I too was feeling rather the worse for wear after the previous day's drinking. I was missing my breakfast and my green tea: a thing I tried to keep to as routine assisted my stability.

The man stood and shook his head: flinging flecks of water all about. He grunted and spat a wad of phlegm on the floor and made his way off. I followed him on my elevated path.

Across the town he went, arriving at a large palatial building. It was a new construction of three floors and though someone had gone to great expense to build it, it did not yet look occupied.

A number of uniformed soldiers stood outside it, guarding the entrance ineptly. As the mercenary approached, it took a few moments for the soldiers to even acknowledge this fact and even then, there was no snap to attention.

Lazily, they took their pikes from the wall where they had rested them and congregated loosely around: a shoddy formation designed for comfort, not defence.

These were not soldiers, more a gang of paid thugs. I felt nothing but contempt for them.

The mercenary was halted by one of the guards and there was some laughter among them as the man I followed spoke rather animatedly, obviously trying to get inside.

The guards were not impressed and, as they barred his entrance, I could see the man getting more and more irritable. A sudden flash of insight, an appraisal of his manner and his bearing: this man is a killer and if they toy with him, they will die.

After some time, it became obvious that this mercenary was not going to gain entrance to the building without bloodshed. I shook my head at the utter incompetence displayed by the guards and leapt from my vantage point across the road to the second floor of the palatial building. From there, I leapt up to the third floor and stole in through a window.

The room I entered was small and devoid of decoration: bare floorboards and naked walls abounded. I moved silently across the room and slid open the door.

The corridor beyond was equally empty of items or any sign of inhabitation and my curiosity began to rise.

Closing the door to, behind me, I made my way through the corridors, passed other doors (from behind which I could hear no noise) and, finally, to a set of stairs.

It seemed to me that this third floor was completely empty and so I made my way down to the floor below.

The rooms here were larger and opened directly in to one another: eight rooms in a rectangle. The inner walls of each room had a door that opened up on to an open-air balcony, hanging over a large garden on the floor below. At the centre of the piece, there was a large fountain but this did not seem to be completed as no water flowed.

I stole back inside the building and quietly moved from room to room until I located another stair.

It seemed to me that those guards outside probably *were* nothing more than hired thugs. A token guard to this building, placed only for show. This building had nothing in it worth stealing nor protecting and thus, I concluded that there was something not quite right about this situation.

I descended to the ground floor and into a long corridor flanked with rooms. I stood motionless at foot of the stair, listening before moving further. Fortunate that I did because voices in discussion floated towards me. Following the sounds, I moved to a door at the end of the corridor and listened there.

“So, what exactly is it that you want *me* to do, Master Yasho?” said a voice which could only belong to a young man.

“There is much that must be done in this venture and not all of it I can be certain of,” said a low, grating voice, the voice of a man who smoked too much.

“You don’t know, do you,” replied the first voice, a note of accusation there.

“Of course I do,” snapped Yasho. There was a pause: a smell of tobacco. “I know where the book is and what is guarding it. I know how to get there. But I cannot possibly know everything we will encounter. You are to be there as my right hand, as a contingency for...ah...trouble...if that is what we are to face.”

“And I?” said a deeply powerful and masculine voice.

“You...ah...you are another matter entirely. There is a particular task I have summoned *you* for but you and I alone shall discuss this,” said Yasho harshly: there was no doubt he was in charge here.

“Excuse me, Master Yasho,” came a fourth voice, this one also male and well in to his adult years. There was a pause and he continued. “I do not mean to speak out of turn, Master Yasho but...do we not require more mercenaries?”

“*More?* What do you want *more* for? *More* means you are either not paying me enough or you don’t think very highly of my skill, either way, I don’t care for this attitude,” came a voice, obviously irritated. This latest voice was deep and resonant and I recognised it to belong to the man I had followed here: having spent most of the previous day listening to his endless boasting, I was quite familiar with it.

“Indeed, Hako, you insult our honoured guest. The mercenary captain here and the five veterans he has handpicked himself will serve our needs,” said Yasho, a note of amusement in this voice.

“Please accept my apologies, Master Gohei, I meant not disrespect,” said Hako.

A grunt was all Hako got in reply.

“Is everything in place?” asked the first voice.

“Yes, we ride tomorrow,” came Yasho’s voice.

“Tomorrow?”

“We await the remainder of Master Gohei’s men, Yuchi-san,” said Hako.

“Ah. Then I will take my leave of you, Master Yasho and return tomorrow,” said Yuchi.

I heard movement inside the room and I decided that this is my opportunity to discover more about this situation.

Calling upon my exalted charms, I slid to one side of the door. As I stood flat against the wall, the door slid open and a youthful man walked out, oblivious to my presence.

Before the door was closed, I stole inside the room, careful not to draw attention to myself.

Inside the room there were four men.

Sat on a large chair, a sort of merchant's throne, was an aged man with a shock of grey hair and a long mandarin moustache. He sat in the chair, fine red robe about his person, smoking on a long pipe.

Beside him stood a very thin man who appeared to be in his late 30s. Slightly hunched over and dressed in simple clothes, he did not appear to be a man of much presence.

Near to where I stood, there was a tall, powerfully built man. I say man because he was shaped as one, but the truth is that his jet-black skin and flames for hair betrayed him to be far from mortal. Smoke trailed from his eyes where I could see there were flames there also. He was naked save for red pantaloons.

Lastly, stood almost nonchalantly in the corner of the room, arms folded and leaning against the wall, was the man I had followed here, Captain Gohei.

As I slid in to the room, I was startled at the demonic entity which stood by the wall, opposite Yasho. It was not often I saw a creature of Malfeas here in our reality, if that was indeed what it was. The creature's eyes literally burned at the spot where I stood but if the creature could see me, it made no sign of this.

I found a comfortable spot within the room and stopped to listen.

"Sahzra, now that Yuchi has left, we can discuss our little arrangement. Hako is of no importance and Gohei is vital to this plan," said Yasho.

"What is that you wish of me, Master Yasho?" asked the creature, its voice loud and cavernous.

"Within the catacombs where the Book of Aina lies, there is a door sealed by powerful magics. The door can only be opened by a being of immense strength but only one being may open the door. Groups of men have tried to open it but have failed each and every time."

"This is not the first time you have sent men down there?" asked Gohei.

"No but it shall be the last. I have appropriated the final information I need and learned the secret of the door."

Gohei nodded with a grunt.

"Explain what I must do, Yasho, I grow weary of your pathetic plane," boomed Sahzra: demons love their theatrics

"The door is bound by magic and no demon, elemental or spirit may touch it. This means that there are very few people in the world left who *can* open it." Yasho paused

to draw in a deep breath from his pipe. "I require you to transfer Yuchi's strength to Gohei who will then be able to open the door."

Sahzra nodded at this. "And in payment?"

"Yuchi's soul. He won't be needing it once you've finished," said Yasho.

I looked at the people around the room and none of them showed any sign of concern, no sign of displeasure at the thought of bargaining with a youth's soul. I looked at Yasho in a new light: he certainly had thought this through.

"Done," said Sahzra, his face literally splitting in a face-wide grin.

"What's through the door?" asked Gohei gruffly, his boasting manner lost to business.

"Very little, as I understand it," said Yasho. He drew on his pipe once more. I didn't believe him and from the look on Gohei's face, neither did he.

The captain grunted his assent and I decided that if anyone were going to make it out of that catacomb alive, it would be him.

"Anything more to go through before tomorrow?" asked Gohei.

"No, you may leave Master Gohei."

The captain stood up and bowed to Yasho and then walked out of the room. The flaming creature bowed its head and disappeared.

I decided that it was also my own turn to exit...

I returned to my room at the tavern and, upon entering through my window, the creature calling itself Sahzra materialised before me.

Although far from expected, centuries old instincts took over and my blades were out of their sheaths and at its throat in the blink of an eye.

"You need no weapons with me, Exalted One," said the creature in its booming, hollow voice.

"You know what I am?" I asked it suspiciously. "That is reason enough for me to kill you."

"I know what you are and *who* you are, Surano" it said, its lips curling in a smile.

For one maddening second, I nearly lopped off its head for its insolence. How *dare* it presume to know *me*. "You are mistaken, demon, for I am not Surano," I said harshly.

"No...were you, I would not be stood here now but you possess his soul, Exalted One," said Sahzra slowly.

“Come, demon, speak quickly before I grow weary of your stench,” I said, fixing it with my most baleful stare.

“I propose a bargain. For years, Yasho has had me do his bidding, feeding me morsels of souls in return for tasks he sets me. This Yuchi is the latest in a long line of petty energies he promises. When I have concluded transferring the strength of Yuchi to Gohei, there will be little left in the way of soul-energy within Yuchi’s weakened form. Yasho knows this and knows that as long as he feeds me inferior souls, that I am bound to his will, not strong enough to find my own sources,” said the demon pathetically.

“You wish me to free you? What bargain is this?” I said with a sneer.

“I wish you to free me from Yasho’s will and in return, I will not inform the sorcerer of your interest in the book,” said the demon.

“Oh? What makes you think that you can move quicker than my sword?” said I, almost amused by the demon trying to manipulate me.

The demon fixed me with a grin. A very large grin. “You are yet young, Exalted One. You know little, if you think you can harm me if I choose to escape,” and the demon vanished.

Summoning my personal essence, I drew the power up within me and forced it in to my blade. I lunged forward and pierced the incorporeal form of the demon, the essence tearing in to its spiritual form. Sahzra bellowed in surprise and I laughed at its stupidity.

Once more, I drew upon the power within me and bade the energies enter my senses and sure enough, I could see the demon Sahzra, impaled upon my sword.

“Do not be so foolish as to discount my power, demon. But I know you are far from discorporated. I offer you this, a counter-proposal. If you can get me to the book unharmed, I will make sure that you go free.”

The demon, whilst still impaled upon my blade, seemed to cogitate on this a moment. “If you can abduct the mortal known as Yuchi, I can masquerade you as him and you shall have your passage to the book.”

“Unharmed? This means no trickery, demon. I will be watching you and if you attempt to deceive me, then I *will* destroy you, even if I have to follow you back to Malfeas to do so.”

If the truth be known, I didn’t even know if I *could* follow it back to Malfeas: the demon had greatly annoyed me and at this point, I was acting more out of anger than reason.

“I will do as you bid. Free me from Yasho and we will both benefit from this arrangement.”

I bowed my head in assent and withdrew my blade. As I sheathed it, the demon disappeared.

I was not happy about the arrangement. Never trust a demon: they, as a matter of course, will *always* try to outwit you. Well, I am far from some simple-minded terrestrial sorcerer and had my own contingencies.

Thus I made my preparations. It was still early in the day and the preparations I had in mind would take up all of the sunlight and much of the darkness.

After procuring the ingredients necessary, I began the long ceremony required to perform my own sorcerous powers. After much incanting, chanting and spellcasting, I bridged time and space, puncturing a hole between our realm and Malfeas and summoned forth a demon known as Variel.

“Ahhhh, so we meet again, Surano,” said the demon. The demon had an elongated bat-head, a long forked purple tongue which tasted the air, snake-like, on occasion, a hunch-backed humanoid body and the hind legs of a dog. The arms were black and winged, bat-like with human hands at the end.

Again, that name! The demon must have seen the flash of anger flash across my face because it began a hissing laughter.

“Stilllllll denying your true identity, Surano?” it cackled.

“Call me that *name* one more time, demon and I shall banish you back to Malfeas with my blade!” I hissed angrily.

The creature bowed its head in obeisance but I saw its eyes looking at me, filled with humour.

“Whaaaaaat do you bid of me?”

“As I summoned you, now I bind you,” I shouted and so began our contest of wills.

Whenever a doorway to Malfeas is opened, the sorcerer mentally seeks out the demon that he or she wishes to summon. The demon is then pulled from its dimension and brought to ours, albeit unwillingly. Once within our realm, if a sorcerer wishes to bind the demon to his or her service, he or she must defeat it in a battle of wills, as both entities try to enforce their will over the other.

How difficult this is depends on the potency of the demon.

For me to defeat Variel, it did not take long.

“Ahhhhh, defeated again...one day, Surano, one day,” it said, almost amused by its defeat, as if this was a game played between two old friends.

My energies tested, I let its last slight against me pass. “I have an important task for you, demon.”

I went to bed early that evening, requiring time to recover the energies spent in bridging the two realms but I woke with the sun as always.

It was unfortunate that I had to break my routine once again but it was necessary for me to be in the right place at the right time.

I stood on Yasho's building, keeping a watch out for the approaching Yuchi. He was last to arrive and it was a simple matter for me to knock him unconscious and hide him in my room.

I then returned to the palatial building and enacted my plan.

We reached the catacombs that evening and it had been a long journey, though less tiresome than I would have imagined. In some way, the amusement I gleaned from my plan to outwit Sahzra managed to make the journey much more pleasant.

The catacombs themselves were situated several miles away from Newport, the entrance hidden beside a wide river.

A tunnel led down in to the earth and the five mercenaries, Gohei, Yasho and then Hako led the way. The tunnel opened out in to a large cavern, paved in flagstones and dominated by a huge stone door, covered in sigils. It was a language I recognised but could not read: ancient but still familiar.

We stood there and it was suddenly time for 'Yuchi' to take up his place. Yasho took out a sigil-covered baton from within his robes.

"Yuchi, hold this for me," he said.

Gohei turned his head from the door and looked at Yasho, a scowl on his face. Perhaps he did not approve? Or perhaps he was merely apprehensive at what lay beyond...

Suddenly, Sahzra appeared, a wicked grin on his face. He floated in midair and looked at Yuchi. His grin widened and his eyes raged into tiny infernos. The baton suddenly glowed blue and 'Yuchi' frowned.

"And now, Surano, we drain *your* strength!" shouted Yasho, barely able to contain the glee within his voice.

The blue glow of the baton surged in to 'Yuchi' and he was consumed by the bright light.

"I think not, foolish mortal!" I shouted as I darted out of the shadows.

Sahzra blinked and roared as his dropped the illusion surrounding Yuchi. Where the youth had stood, there now was Variel, an expression of pure agony on his face.

“No!” screamed Yasho.

A blue nimbus surrounded Gohei as the demonic strength of Variel was transferred to the mercenary captain.

“Company, attack the intruder,” shouted Gohei.

The five mercenaries turned as one and set upon me, blocking my path to Yasho.

I halted my charge and set myself, katana and wakazashi in hand, a grin on my face: all too easy.

The mercenaries formed up before me and took up combat stances. Five against one, they faced off against me. They charged and I started the slaughter.

Two try to slash at me with their swords, however, I cut them down before they even got close.

The other three, wary of me now, attempt to draw me out and encircle me, unfortunately for them, I am faster, stronger and exalted.

I quickly strike them down, but it is too late. I look up from the final corpse to see Gohei opening the doors and Yasho laughing in the room beyond, whilst Variel lay on the floor, weak as kitten but still alive: no soul for Sahzra.

I growl gutturally and leap forty feet, taking me between the two doors as Gohei tries to shut them.

He is a strong fighter and manages to put up his blade against the flurry of my attacks. I press the attack, hacking, slashing, everything and anything I can do to try and take him down.

Back and forth, Gohei and I exchange blows: each struggling to get that telling blow which will end the battle.

Finally, I draw in the essence and launch an attack no mortal could possibly defend against and Gohei is taken down. I was wrong, he wasn't as wise as I first believed: he was foolish enough to think he could beat me.

Finally, there is just Yasho, Sahzra, myself and the Book of Aina.

“Sahzra, kill him and I will set you free,” screeches Yasho as I stalk towards him.

“Sahzra, kill Yasho and you *will* be free,” I shout.

Sahzra smiles that huge, face-splitting smile of his and vanishes in to incorporeality.

“Traitor!” screams Yasho.

“Wrong. It is not possible for a slave to betray his master, for a slave possesses nothing, not even loyalty,” I smile and cut Yasho down.

I step over the body of Yasho and claim my prize, however, something stops me. I look at the book and on the cover, I see a sigil. It is in an ancient dialect I do not know but I understand it just the same.

It belongs to Surano.

The life drains out of me as I realise that no matter what I do and where I go, no matter what I think I am doing, Surano is always there, guiding me, regardless of whether I know it or not.

I lose my desire for the book and walk out of the cavern, my heart heavy with Surano’s laughter.