

**Author's Note: This is an excerpt from the first chapter of The Bow of Destiny. It is copyrighted and may not be reproduced in any way. This is a work in progress.**

Athson yawned. Weariness gripped him soon after his memory-fits. Best not to fight sleep. He fed wood into the fire, pulled his blanket from his pack and spread it over himself as he stretched out. Sleep soon covered him like a blanket, his thoughts of making a fir-limb shelter forgotten along with enigmatic Withlings and ten year old sorrows.

Fear rushed through the dream. Trolls stab helpless villagers through sliding curtains of choking smoke and raging flame. Dying children wail as mocking slayers howl. The violence fades into darkness. Where am I? He flails and fears he lies in a grave yet finds emptiness instead of dirt.

Silver light rises and Eagle's Aerie soars beneath the moon. Athson climbs the weather-worn stair and scraps his hands as he gains speed. The rock-face blurs as Athson swoops onto the pinnacle towering over the ocean.

Athson paused and then floats toward a voice murmuring by a swaying flame within a shadowed crevice.

A silhouette kneels and rocks, dark against the fire beyond it. A woman's uneven voiced chants:

"The bow shall be hidden from heart..."

The swaying speaker feeds wood into the fire. Sparks snap from the coals and whirl amid the orange-blue tongues. An arc forms in the smoke and fades into the stars.

"The eagle will guide the heir..."

An eagle's scream pierces the night wind.

"The bow shall be found at need..."

Wrinkled hands tie a wad of cloth with string – a bowstring.

"And the arrow shall Eloch prepare."

A shooting star streaks across the horizon and drags Athson's attention from the crouching figure before the popping fire.

The eagle screams again – louder and nearer.

The figure half-turns and tosses the packet at Athson's feet. He stares at the shape, then back to the kneeling woman. Her face half-lit by the firelight reveals a pointy nose that overshadows her receding jaw. Grizzled wisps of gray hair wave in the wind. "For you."

Athson stoops and inspects the package. He unties the knot and pushes the string in a pocket. Within the cloth he finds a tattered note and more fabric he guesses is a pennant.

"Zelma's done it." She gazes skyward and raises her arms.

"Why." Why my village? Why me? His anger flares and he tosses the packet away. "This isn't mine." He whirls and stumbles into darkness.

"He needs to see." The woman's voice screeches and slices through whistling wind.

The eagle's deafening scream stabs his awareness as immense wings snap like a clap of thunder. Talons tear clothing, pierce flesh and snatch Athson into mid-air. He dangles and kicks as he yells while silver landscape yawns beneath him. The curious sound of joyous cackling trails into the distance.

Athson squeezes his eyes shut but dares squinting at the moonlit sky that stretches overhead. The land wheels as the eagle glides over land mottled by shadow and pale light. The

world unfolds as the Archer far glimpses beyond the distant Drelkhaz Mountains to the far eastern shores of the great Endless Sea.

His vision focuses onto an old woman as she rests by her campfire on an empty plain south of Auguron. She stirs from sleep and cocks her head as if listening. She gazes at Athson. His vision whirls away from her as she rises in her gray dress.

A young woman rides along a road beneath tufts of glowing clouds. Her braided hair dangles over her left shoulder and wears pale leather armor and leggings made for dueling. She brushes her face as if wiping away a tear. The hilts of two of swords protrude above each of her shoulders. Athson finds her high-cheeked face attractive as his vision changes.

Darkness descends over both Athson and the eagle. The giant bird glides in silence.

A knife glitters pale in the darkness. It slashes in a vicious arc and then pauses. Blood covers the weapon and drips from the tip. Athson shouts his dismay but wind thrusts it back into his mouth. My knife! His own weapon bought in a fit of anger when Sarneth withheld his father's sword. The blood chills him worse than the wind or the eagle's hold.

The eagle's screech pierces his hearing and its wings drum thunder.

Athson trembles as darkness recedes. The bracing wind slaps his face.

Shadowy wings ride wind from the south. The figure blots out stars as it swings north and glides a shifting course. The eagle shrieks defiance at the approaching beast. Fire belches amid an answering roar. Athson yells as the giant bird dives at the black shape. Ragged wings so dark they drink moonlight flutter against frigid air. Eagle and dragon glide and twist past each other.

The streaking shadow trails fire and rotten stench. Athson struggles to name the creature until one thought flares: Magdronu. The eagle dives. Athson flails arms and legs as screams. And then the talons release him.