
A Song of the *Golden Teal*

By R. Walt Bailey

Many times, she had been compared to a beautiful woman; but, as a sailing ship she was lean, sleek, and fast. The *Golden Teal* was large for a schooner, but her three masts and the canvas they held, along with her narrow beam, made her the fastest ship on all the oceans of Rythmar. But it was her Captain who made her the deadliest.

Moyran LeGrand was in his late twenties, but he had already commanded the *Golden Teal* for fourteen years. He began his service aboard the *Teal* at the age of six as cabin boy to his father, the Captain. He had served and served well at every position aboard the ship until his father's unexpected demise at the hands of pirates. At fourteen, Moyran had assumed command of the finest ship on all the oceans and had become a legend in the process. The *Teal* was a trader and made a fine living at that enterprise. But she was also a hunter. The Captain carried commissions from every nation on the western ocean paying the crew five hundred gold marks for every pirate ship they brought to justice in any of a half dozen major ports along the western coastline of the northern continent.

As a trader, Moyran was a wealthy man; but, as a hunter, he was the richest sea captain on all of Rythmar. Most of his crewmen had served aboard the *Golden Teal* longer than Moyran had been alive. Each had an account with the mercantile association of the Island of Narisha with more money than they could ever spend in a lifetime. They served their brash, handsome, young Captain because they loved him, and they loved the adventurous life the *Golden Teal* afforded them.

An hour before sundown, Moyran stood with a Valdarian Ranger on the quarterdeck of his sleek ship. "They have not changed course in two days, Captain," the tall Ranger said. "J'rea has been almost on top of them all day. They are just over the horizon, and still on the same heading."

"Ships officers in my cabin in ten minutes, Mr. Gee," Moyran said.

“Aye, Sir,” the First Mate replied from his position beside the helm. Mr. Gee had served aboard the *Golden Teal* for almost forty years. The older gray headed man looked up at the sound of whistling wings as a sleek, silver Weyr-Drake banked in to land with two graceful back wings. She was immediately greeted by her Warder, Ranger Captain Cain, who was on loan to them from the Valdarian Legion. Cain lovingly scratched her ears and eye ridges as the small dragon butted him in the chest with her head. Just like all Weyr-Drakes, J’rea was a favorite with the crew because of her playful nature. Whether it was chasing dolphins riding the bow wave of the sleek ship, or hunting wharf rats in the hold, like a large otter, the beautiful, sleek, creature was always busy at some enterprise that she considered playing.

Doctor Bayville was the last of the ships officers to join the meeting around an oval conference table in a large room adjacent to the Captain’s cabin. Moyran nodded to his childhood friend as he took his place at the head of the table. “The crew will be fed early this evening. The *Ravens Wing* is just over the horizon on a parallel course. I plan to run with lights out this evening and close to within spitting distance of her by an hour before daylight. With Cain’s help and his Weyr-Drakes crepuscular eyesight, we will close and take them before they are awake and can sound the alarm. Let me remind you that they outnumber us, but we must take the *Ravens Wing* intact for our plan to work. We have the element of surprise on our side and there is a new moon this evening.”

“Will we be taking prisoners?” Mr. Gee the first officer asked.

“Only the Captain or their first officer,” Moyran answered. “And, any man that does not take up arms against us... I want our best archers in the rigging. Their shooting will determine the outcome... It is imperative that we get our boarding teams aboard for this to work without them being discovered. Remind them again to wear their amber arm bands. We don’t want our archers shooting our own people by mistake.”

Two hours before first light, Moyran left his cabin and climbed the stairwell to the main deck of the ship. He then climbed to the quarterdeck and noticed that the Ranger Cain was standing by Pan the helmsman, relaying instructions to him from his Weyr-Drake, high above them. Moyran eased up beside them and readjusted his loose sword belt. “We are three hundred yards behind them and closing, Captain,” Cain said. He then turned and gave the helmsman a small adjustment.

“Everyone is in position and ready, Sir,” Mr. Gee reported.

“Very good, Mr. Gee, take command of the ship when I depart and, on my signal, send the boarding teams over.”

“Aye, Sir.”

On Moyran’s way to the bow of the *Teal*, he was stopped briefly by Doctor Bayville who quickly tied an amber arm band around his left arm. “I’ll see you on board the *Ravens Wing*,” the Doctor said with a pat on the arm and then was gone to his other duties.

When Moyran reached the bow of the ship, he found several crew members waiting on him. One of them had a longbow; the others were armed with only grappling hooks on stout thin ropes. Just at the edge of his vision, Moyran could see the stern of the pirate vessel ahead and the white stray her hull generated as she passed through the waves. The *Ravens Wing* was now only thirty yards ahead and the *Teal* was steadily closing. Only five yards separated the hulls of the two sleek ships. Moyran focused his concentration on the helmsman stationed in the back quarter of the ship, but the man never suspected anything was amiss. The lead seaman on the bow of the *Teal* threw his grapnel, catching it in the stern mast’s rigging. He quickly handed Moyran the rope and grabbed another that was coiled and waiting by his feet. Moyran nodded to the archer and took up the slack in the line as he stepped up on the bow rail. In one quick motion he swung over the five yard and closing gap between the ships and as he landed

lightly on the quarterdeck, he heard the zip of an arrow passing over his left shoulder. When he glanced up, the helmsman was slumping to the deck, incapacitated and dying.

Quickly he grabbed the large wheel of the helm and slowly began bringing the *Ravens Wing* up into the wind to slow her speed. Three grappling hooks grabbed the side of the enemy ship almost at the same time, and in almost as many heartbeats the first boarding team, including three archers were aboard. Moyran relinquished the helm to one of these men and motioned for one of the bowmen, Mr. Davis, to follow him. He was looking for the officer of the deck and in the early morning darkness; it took him a few moments to locate the man. He found him standing with his back turned on the lower main deck of the ship. All he had to do was point. Mr. Davis nodded his understanding, and almost that fast the second pirate was dead.

With the coming of the morning sun, he could now just make out the bow of the large ship. The single man stationed there suddenly disappeared over the side as he was hit by a diving Weyr-Drake, the impact breaking the man's neck. A hand on his shoulder, turned out to be the Ranger, Cain's. "We've twenty-five men aboard, Captain."

"Let's begin in the stern as we planned. I'll take the Captain's cabin. You take your team and begin working forward. The more we can take without a fight, the better. Mr. Gee will take his team to the bow and work backward." The *Ravens Wing* had three hatches. Their plan was to attack the lower level of the ship from the bow and the stern, then force the pirates to the middle where their only escape appeared to be the middle hatch. As men made their escape onto the main deck, they were subject to the *Teal's* archers stationed on platforms built at the juncture of the upper and lower masts.

Moyran silently made his way down the steps from the stern hatch and encountered no one as he quietly opened the door to the Captain's cabin. The ambient lighting provided by two large lanterns turned down to their lowest setting, provided enough light to see that the large bed was occupied by two

people. Moyran held his sword in his right hand and eased a cudgel from his belt scabbard with his left. The pirate captain awoke instantly when Moyran's blade touched his neck. With his left hand, Moyran hit the large man a knockout blow with his cudgel. The naked woman beside him came up screaming wildly and Moyran just missed getting clipped by the dirk she swiped at his midsection. Acting reflexively, he drove his sword completely through the dark haired, middle aged woman. As she fell to the floor on the far side of the bed, he retrieved the handcuffs from his belt and secured the Captain's hands behind his back while he remained unconscious.

Once back out in the corridor, Moyran quickly saw that his crewmen had caught the pirates completely by surprise. Most had been killed silently while still in their hammocks. With attackers forcing them from the bow and from the stern at the same time, others panicked and fled up the middle hatchway to the main deck. There they met a hail of arrows from the archery platoons on the *Teal*. As the sun was beginning to appear in the east, it was all over. Back in his cabin, Moyran received the butcher's bill for the daring early morning raid. "We've six wounded, Sir," Mr. Gee began. "Two are out of action according to the Doctor. Four are just superficial wounds, Sir."

"What about the pirate crew?" Moyran asked.

"Five are still alive, but three won't see tomorrow's sunrise. We have the Captain and the first officer uninjured, Sir."

"An excellent attack performed by an excellent crew, Mr. Gee. After the *Ravens Wing* is made ready for sailing, see that the crew gets an extra ration of rum."

Two days after the taking of the pirate ship found the *Golden Teal* sailing on a north westerly course, parallel with her prize. "Sail on the starboard quarter," the lookout sang out. "It's the *White Wolf*, Captain." Moyran nodded his understanding and acceptance of the report. A quick glance towards the starboard quarter and he easily verified the lookout's sighting. Several years before, he had supervised

the laying of the keel of the sleek ship that now approached them. He had also handpicked its captain, a most capable man named Carl from the southern continent. On many occasions sailing in the service of the Ahnveil Navy, Captain Carl had proven himself to be both brave and resourceful. Moyran considered him to be a personal friend.

The *White Wolf* was displaying a golden flag on her stern, signifying the Viceroy of Narisha was a passenger. Moyran shook his head slightly. He had met the Viceroy ten years before and had disliked the man immediately. In the intervening years his attitude toward the arrogant man had not improved one bit. Accountable to the King only, the large obese man was responsible for the huge port on the island nation of Narisha along with all of its admiralty, including the shipping of Narisha's two major exports, wool and naval stores. Moyran knew the *White Wolf* was packed with loyal sailors who would sail the captured pirate vessel. Every man on this mission had been handpicked, except the Viceroy and his aide, by Moyran and Captain Carl.

As several longboats began to ferry sailors from the *White Wolf* to the *Ravens Wing*, inevitably Moyran received the request for the Viceroy to board the *Golden Teal*. A large sling had to be lowered over the side for the fat man to sit so that he could be winched aboard. The crew knew how irritated this made their Captain, and Moyran never knew if they were smiling at the Viceroy's fumbling, obese condition or at how uncomfortable his presence made Moyran. Preceding the Viceroy was his factor, Montbane. In spite of himself, The Captain had always liked the small fastidious little man. He reminded Moyran of a busy little bird, always fussing with something concerning the large Viceroy. In many ways they were total opposites. The Captain was certain; the fat bureaucrat could not function at all without the slight man's complete attention at all times.

Moyran took notice of the large amount of luggage that accompanied the Viceroy. His footman scurried back and forth stacking the luggage on the main deck. He was jolted back to the present by the

banging of the factor's staff on the wooden decking. "I have the honor of presenting the Viceroy of the Admiralty from the sovereign nation of Narshia, His Eminence, Viceroy Dekalb." Moyran stood patiently as he waited for the obese Dekalb to climb the stairway to his quarterdeck.

The large sweating man had aged since last Moyran had seen him. "Captain LeGrand, how nice to see you again," the Viceroy said. "I have to say that I was disappointed at not being piped aboard, Moyran. I thought you naval types always insisted on the strictest of protocols and ceremonies."

"We do, Mr. Dekalb, but you are no longer the ranking official here. You see, I was made a full admiral of the Ahnveil Navy during the last war and have never been decommissioned; so, you see a mere Viceroy is far beneath me." Moyran waited to see the hate that etched across the large administrators face. "But we don't have the time for pomp and ceremonies right now anyway... I'll address you as I always have, and I expect the same from you and your factor." Without waiting for a reply, Moyran turned to the small aide. "Montbane, you never approach the quarterdeck of a ship without first asking permission to come aboard. I am the Captain of this ship, and my crew obeys me without question... Do not make that mistake again." The small bird like man did not reply, but simply bowed his head in understanding.

"I don't see that we have much of a mission left," the Viceroy added. "I understood that we were to hunt and take the *Ravens Wing*, and obviously that has already been accomplished... I don't see why the King sent me on this excursion anyway. He knows how much I hate sailing and the cramped confines of a ship."

"Since you set sail on the *White Wolf*, our mission has been changed," Moyran said. "Captain Carl, will be here within the hour. When he arrives, we will go below to my cabin and I can brief you on our new objectives at that time. In the meanwhile, my first officer, Mr. Gee, will see that you and your factor are made as comfortable as possible while aboard the *Golden Teal*." It took Dekalb a lengthy

amount of time to negotiate his way off of the quarterdeck and even more time to get down the main hatchway. When he was safely out of sight, Moyran asked Leif, his cabin boy, to find the Ranger Captain, Cain.

“You wanted to see me, Captain?”

“Yes,” Moyran replied and motioned Cain over to the stern of the ship. “Sometime tomorrow morning, early I imagine, a black bird will be dispatched carrying a message. I need your Weyr-Drake, J’rea, to intercept the bird once it is out of eyesight from the ship and return bird and message to the *Ravens Wing*. Can she do that?”

“Of course, Captain,” Cain replied. “What is going on?”

“I had rather not say, yet,” Moyran replied.

By design, it was dark when Captain Carl made his way to the *Golden Teal*. All of those involved in the next phase of the complex mission gathered an hour later in the Captain’s cabin.

Moyran sat at the head of the table. Eleven other men were seated around the oval structure with a large map of Narisha and the northern continent hung on the wall behind Moyran’s head. Moyran held in his hand a document bearing the King’s seal. “Mr. Gee, would you please verify the receipt of this document I now hold in my hand.”

“Captain Cain’s Weyr-Drake delivered that document right at dusk dark this evening,” the first officer said.

“Thank you, Mr. Gee. Mr. Montbane, would you verify the seal on this document please.”

The Viceroy’s thin factor rose from his seat and accepted the rolled document from Moyran. He glanced at it for a few moments in the light of one of the lanterns which hung around the large room.

“This bears the seal of the King of Narisha, His Eminence Xantier.”

“Thank you, Mr. Montbane,” Moyran said. “Gentlemen, these are our new orders for the rest of our mission.” Moyran broke the seal with the index finger on his right hand and quickly read the document twice. “I will save everyone from all the flowery salutations. The document says that our three ships will sail under my command and destroy the pirate guild in their stronghold in the Rothmeer Islands.”

“I’d like to see that document,” the Viceroy said in a huff.

“I thought you might,” Moyran said passing the one page of parchment to the large man.

Dekalb read the short order through several times and then spent more minutes examining the large seal of the king on the outside, but he could find nothing out of order. With a large sigh, he passed the document back to Moyran. “Does anyone else wish to examine our new orders?” Moyran asked. When no one else spoke up, the Captain rose and pointed towards the large map on the wall.

“Gentlemen, it has been common knowledge that the pirate guild has established their headquarters here, in the Rothmeer Archipelago. But, all efforts to root out these buccaneers have proven unsuccessful for several reasons. First, only someone familiar with the reefs and tides of the area could successfully negotiate the narrow passage into their harbor. Secondly, their port is heavily fortified on both sides of the narrow entrance, and we have never known the flag code to get by their defenses. And, lastly, we have never been able to catch all of the pirate ships at anchor at one time. In two days, time, we are going to storm their port and destroy their ships.”

“Captain, I must protest,” the Viceroy said. “I realize that you and the *Golden Teal* have just returned from your adventures on the western continent of Xentera. But while you were away, we have mounted several missions to attack the stronghold of the pirates. Out of the six ships we sent, four were totally destroyed and the remaining two were only just able to make it back to Narisha. We lost several hundred good men, and the pirates were not even in the harbor when we attacked.”

“They knew you were coming, Mr. Dekalb. That is one reason for all the secrecy of this mission. But the Viceroy does raise a good point. Since I am putting all of your lives in danger, you certainly have a right to know how I plan to succeed where other missions have failed.” Moyran looked at all the faces around the room and every eye was focused on him. “When King Xantier asked for my help, the first thing I did was ask my Valdarian friends for the loan of a Fair of Weyr-Drakes and Rangers. Captain Cain and J’rea his Weyr-Drake were the reason we were able to pull off this daring capture of the *Ravens Wing* with so few casualties. With the Weyr-Drakes help, we have been able to accurately chart the passage into the anchorage of Rothmeer and the coded flag procedure to get us past the defenses on either side.”

“How will you know the correct flag sequence?” the Viceroy asked.

“Once again, J’rea has helped us immeasurably,” Moyran said. “We took both the Captain and his first officer prisoner when we stormed the *Ravens Wing*. In the Captain’s cabin was this document giving the flag declination for this month.” Moyran held up the single sheet of paper he had personally retrieved from the Captain’s cabin. “Separately, we have debriefed both of the captives and their stories agree with what the Weyr-Drakes have observed while flying above the harbor. One small slip that J’rea was going to use her impressive teeth to remove portions of their anatomy and it was hard to get either of those two to shut up.”

“You are going to put all of our hopes, not to mention our lives, on the sightings of a big flying lizard,” the Viceroy almost screamed. “Once again, Captain, I must object to this mission.”

Moyran focused his raptor like gaze on the fat bureaucrat. “Your objection has been noted, Viceroy. You may remain in your cabin during the action. However, I have need of your factor on the pirate ship. Mr. Montbane, you will be assigned to my first officer, Mr. Gee who will command the *Ravens Wing*. He has need of your services.... I’ll note your further objection, Viceroy Dekalb,” Moyran

said holding his hand up to stall another long oratory from the overweight official. “Montbane, Mr. Gee will escort you to your new assignment aboard the *Ravens Wing* at the conclusion of this meeting. Your footman will be quartered aboard the *White Raven* for the duration of the mission.”

Early the next morning, no one but the lookout took notice of the black bird that was launched from the porthole in the Viceroy’s former cabin aboard the *White Wolf*. No one noticed the silver Weyr-Drake that took off from high in the rigging of the *Golden Teal* a half minute after the messenger bird was dispatched. All of the next day, Longboats moved men and equipment between the *Teal* and each of the other ships. They also placed empty barrels in their path so that the ballistae crews could continue their practice as they sailed.

Late in the afternoon Cain reported to the Captain as he stood on his quarterdeck. “J’rea didn’t harm a feather on that black birds head. Mr. Gee has the message and the bird safely aboard the *Ravens Wing*.”

“Thank you, Cain. Are all the ships still in the harbor at the Archipelago?”

“Yes, Captain,” Cain replied. “Will we be there by midday tomorrow to catch the tide?”

“We are right on schedule. Actually, I have asked the helm to slow down just a bit to allow for the best speed the *Ravens Wing* can make. She is larger than the *Teal*, but Mr. Gee will coax all she has to give out of her.”

That evening, Moyran once again had to endure a meal with the Viceroy who continually renewed his objections to what he called “a mission doomed to failure and a loss of both ships and men.” When the Captain had heard enough, he excused himself and returned to the quarterdeck where he found both Cain and J’rea. Moyran lovingly scratched the sleek, small dragon’s head and eye ridges and she began purring loudly from the newfound attention.

Moyran had breakfast with Captain Carl and Captain Gee. Cain, the Valdarian Ranger joined them later. “All six ships are still in the harbor, Captain,” Cain reported. “A seventh passed through the narrows this morning. Once again J’rea verified both the flags and the sequence.”

“Very good, Cain,” Moyran said. “Alright, we stick with the plan. The *Ravens Wing* goes first followed by the *White Wolf* and lastly the *Golden Teal*. There are two catapults to port, those belong to you Carl. The two catapults to starboard are the responsibility of the *Teal*. I’ll do my best to pull a beam of you so that we can launch our attacks together. Mr. Gee you concentrate your ballistae fire on the ships at anchor in the harbor.”

“What about the port city and the docks?” Captain Carl asked.

“We don’t have enough men to attack the port garrison,” Moyran said. “If we destroy their ships, they won’t be able to resupply themselves and we can starve them out in less than a month’s time. The King has hinted that he will even ask the combined armies of Narisha, Baldor, and Sundaria to help in a large-scale invasion of the island.”

“Since your wife is the Queen of Sundaria, getting their help shouldn’t be too difficult,” Cain said with a smile.

“No, removing this nest of pirates will benefit all of these nations. We won’t have much trouble getting troops for the invasion... Alright, Gentlemen, in two hours we will find out if all the preparation and training were worth it. Return to your ships and good hunting... Cain, I need you and J’rea beside me in case something goes wrong.”

Moyran stood on his quarterdeck with Cain by his side. The *Golden Teal* followed the *White Wolf* which followed the *Ravens Wing* as they began negotiating the serpentine narrows of the entrance to the Archipelago and the concealed harbor beyond. “Who is guiding the helmsman on the *Ravens Wing*,” Moyran asked.

“Captain Nadea and her Weyr-Drake G’sel,” Cain answered pointing up in the sky to indicate the Weyr-Drake was airborne.

“Word around the campfire is that you and Nadea have been known to share a cabin occasionally,” Moyran said with a laugh.

“We have been together since the Academy. We impressed our Weyr-Drakes at the same time at the old volcano in Lander.”

Their conversation was interrupted as the large Dekalb made his way onto the quarterdeck, “Permission to come aboard, Captain?”

“Permission granted, Viceroy. This deck is about to become a very dangerous place, Mr. Dekalb. You might consider riding out the coming battle in the relative safety of your cabin.”

“It is stuffy in there, and besides I want to see the success or failure of your venture with my own eyes.”

“You should not have to wait long, Sir, we are almost through the narrows,” Cain said. “It is time to find out if we interpreted the flags and sequence correctly.”

The *Teal* mirrored the exact course of the *White Wolf* in front of her. She of course mirrored the movements of the *Ravens Wing* that lead their small convoy into the pirate’s harbor. After the *Teal*’s final turn, Moyran could see they faced a half mile straightaway before the narrowest point at the entrance to the harbor. At this bottle neck were located the harbor’s defenses. On either side of this choke point were two large catapults and the crews to man them. Two hundred yards before the narrows, the flag crews on the lead ship ran up five flags, all of different colors. At the starboard garrison, the responding sequence was two flags of yet different colors. The *Ravens Wing* answered by replacing her five flags with three new ones with as of yet unused colors. As the captured pirate vessel made its way

past the narrows, the crews of the catapults waved in friendly recognition. A quarter mile beyond the garrisons, seven ships rested at anchor.

“Looks like it is going to work,” Moyran said. “Flag crew, mind the sequence the Wolf uses well... Ballistae crews stand ready to uncover your weapons.” Moyran watched as his crewmen ran through the correct flag sequence and then answered correctly the challenge from the garrison. “Helm steer us two points to starboard. You may uncover your weapons and fire as she bears, Mr. Davis.” Moyran watched as his practiced crew retrieved one of the huge bolts that resembled a large arrow with a huge broad head, except that a large portion of the shaft behind the head was surrounded by a glass vial filled with amber oil. The oil was the extract from pressed seaweed his crew recovered and prepared well over a year in advance.

As the *Teal* veered to the right and came abreast of the garrison on that side, the first of the two ballistae crews ignited the dried oil on the broad-head and fired their weapon. At fifty yards, the shots were hardly a measure of the crew’s skill. Within several heartbeats, both of the catapults were burning infernos. Moyran glanced to the left and noticed that one of the catapults on the port battery was already ablaze. He followed the trajectory of the second bolt and watched with satisfaction as it impacted with the last weapon. Instantly, the wooden framed structure was ablaze.

“Ballistae crews prepare to engage the ships at anchor,” Moyran commanded. “Helm, give me two more points to starboard. We will circle the anchorage on the right of those ships.” He had forgotten about the Viceroy who looked in shock at the destruction of both garrisons and now the ships sitting at anchor. Already, Mr. Gee and his team aboard the *Ravens Wing* had started fires on three of the seven anchored vessels. He followed another bolt from the *Ravens Wing* as it impacted on the stern of a pirate vessel already ablaze. “Ballistae crews your targets are the stern cabin windows on the ships we are passing. Mr. Davis, you may fire as they bear.”

For really the first time Moyran had a minute to examine the long sloping hillside of the small mountain directly behind the harbor. The anchorage was formed by a large bowl carved by rain and wind from the side of a mountain. Many houses and buildings dotted the tree covered hillside and spoke of the large number of full-time residents the Rothmeer Islands supported. As the *Teal* rounded the last ship in line, Moyran directed the helmsman to steer a course parallel to the wharfs and docks. “Mr. Davis, put a few bolts into that wharf and any wooden structures adjacent to it.” When he looked across the harbor, he could see that Captain Carl had the exact same idea and was rapidly firing the other end of the wharfs.

In twenty minutes, the battle was over. All seven pirate vessels were on fire and rapidly burning to the water line. The few crew members left behind on anchor watch had already fled the developing inferno of each ship and were trying in vain to find a place to make their landing on the docks, but everything there was on fire as well. With the *Ravens Wing* in the lead and the *Golden Teal* bringing up the rear, the three attacking ships made their exit from the harbor and their safe passage through the narrows to the archipelago beyond. “That was exceptionally well done, Captain,” the large Viceroy said. Once again on the open ocean, Moyran called for a meeting of all of his Captains and selected passengers.

He convened the meeting on the quarterdeck of his ship instead of below next to his cabin. “Well done, Captain Carl and Captain Gee. Your ballistae crews shot superbly. As far as I could tell, every ship was destroyed. In less than a month’s time, the King’s Legion will land and root out the survivors. By that time, the island should be getting pretty hungry.”

Captain Carl handed Moyran a small piece of paper. “That only leaves us one unknown. Who is the trader among us that sent this message that our fleet was coming to attack? The bird was sent from

the *White Wolf*. Every member of Carl's crew is from the southern continent. It cannot be one of them. The only outsider was your footman, Viceroy Dekalb."

"I don't see how it can be my man," the Viceroy said. "He is mute, and cannot read or write... Besides, he has been with me for ten years now."

With a motion of his hand, Moyran had two of his crew members seize the small man. "For six years now, the King has suspected a traitor in your office, Mr. Viceroy. He and I together cooked up this elaborate plan to flush the man out. We separated you, your factor Montbane, and your footman on to different ships. No one knew the details of our mission except me. Each of you was told at the same time and you Captains informed your crews, but we were already at sea by that time. I solicited Cain's Weyr-Drake, J'rea, to help in capturing the message bird. Alive and intact by the way and the message was a clear warning to the pirates of our coming attack."

"Your man's name is Bentile?" Moyran asked. "The Viceroy nodded his head. Moyran looked up at the sound of whistling wings, as the silver J'rea banked in to land beside him. Moyran lovingly scratched the silver Weyr-Drake's ears and eye ridges before turning to the footman. "Mr. Bentile, I think you can read and write, and I also don't think you are mute either." The captive man struggled in vain against the two large seamen that held him. "Have you ever seen the teeth of a Weyr-Drake, Mr. Bentile?" Right on cue J'rea began growling and flashed her impressive teeth at the frightened man. The small man was terrified, fear etched across his weathered face as he renewed his efforts to get away from the men that held him. "Hold out his hand," Moyran commanded.

With his right hand, Moyran removed a coin sized medallion from over his head. He placed the medallion in the outstretched hand of the trembling man. As the gold medallion rested in his palm, the small man looked from Moyran and back to his palm several times. "Release this man with my

apologies, Mr. Bentile. You were indeed telling the truth and are not our traitor. Viceroy Dekalb, your hand please, Sir.”

“Captain LeGrand, I must protest this display,” the fat man said as he stretched out his right hand with the palm facing up. Moyran placed the medallion in the Viceroy’s outstretched hand, but there was no reaction. “Mr. Montbane,” Moyran said. The Viceroy’s factor ran to the far rail on the other side of the quarterdeck.

“Curse you, Captain LeGrand,” the man said pulling the blade at his waist. “You may have won the battle today, but you won’t take me alive.” As the thin bird like man turned his back to leap over the railing, he was hit in the head by the talons of a diving Weyr-Drake. He crumpled to the deck unconscious.

“Thank you, Nadea, for G’sel’s help,” Moyran said addressing the pretty Valdarian Ranger standing beside Cain. “Take that man into custody and bring him to my cabin when he has recovered.”

An hour later, Moyran sat at the desk in his cabin along with Viceroy Dekalb and Doctor Bayville as the chained Montbane was brought before them. “What is the secret of this medallion you carry, Captain LeGrand,” the Viceroy asked.

“No secret,” Moyran replied as he took the medallion and chain over his head once again and tossed it to Doctor Bayville, who was closest to the prisoner. “The medallion is one of the seven made from the sword of Vanatee. It cannot be possessed or even touched by an evil person.” Moyran nodded to the Doctor who passed the gold medallion along the arm of the bound man. Montbane screamed from the touch and everywhere the medallion passed, it left huge burn marks on the man’s arm. “Put Montbane in the lockup in the hold,” Moyran instructed the two seamen who escorted the prisoner away.

The large Viceroy shook his head sadly. “Montbane has been in my employ for almost twenty years. He is the last person I would ever have suspected.”

“That is why he was so effective. You trusted him with everything,” Moyran said. “He was also smart enough to blame your footman for the treachery. And, except for the help of the Weyr-Drakes and my medallion, he would have gotten away with it.”

The Viceroy excused himself and left Moyran and Doctor Bayville alone. “Is that the end of the pirate guild?” the Doctor asked as he poured them both a brandy.

“No, as long as there are have’s, there will always be have nots. And, there are usually more have not’s than haves. The pirate guild will be back, or something else will take its place. But there is some good news. At least you and I don’t have to explain to the King why our friend and factor of twenty years was a spy.”