

The Silver Realm - The Warriors

The Nights Can Be Long

He did not want to open his eyes. He tried to be as still as possible. He attempted to relax and clear his mind. Perhaps he could fall back asleep. If he didn't open his eyes he wouldn't see the clock and he would not have to get out and do it again.

It wasn't that he hated the work. No, he loved it. It was just that there was almost always a dark side to deal with and the memories of the battles and the horrors witnessed start to mount as the years go on.

If he didn't see the clock he could continue pretending that this life was his real life. He could wake up later and go to a regular job like the rest of the people on this planet. If he could fall back asleep, he could pretend for another day that he was just another guy.

He rolled onto his side and tried to fall back asleep. It was no use. He could hear all the sounds of the highway only a block away. Every car and truck sounded as if it was right outside of his window. His small hope falling asleep vanished when the train whistle blew. Another slow thundering freight train, and a long one at that.

He rolled back over and looked toward the clock. He opened his eyes. The brightly lit clock was covered with a cloth to keep his room as dark as possible. Slowly he moved his arm over and lifted the cloth. It was 4:37 am. Crap.

There was no avoiding it now. He had to get up.

Minutes later, he was climbing in his truck in his running clothes. The temperature was 25 degrees and he could see the frozen ice on a pothole full of water from the recent rain. If the rain would have waited a couple of hours, it would have been snow. Not that it would have mattered. He had to go no matter the temperature. He started the truck and headed to a local high school's track.

He always stretched a little. He knew that the latest medical research pointed toward cool down stretching rather than warm up stretching. Still, his calf muscles cramped almost every time he skipped the warm-up stretches. He finished his warm-up and started walking to the finish line.

He ran one mile in one direction on the track and the second mile in the opposite direction. His story was that this helped his knees and prevented injury. There was truth to that but the main reason was that he used the turn around to synchronize his departure and arrival on this planet with the same on his destination. He walked across the finish line and his image shimmered.

The school's transportation department was right behind the track and the director, a middle aged man named Bob Thompson, came in to work between 5:00 and 5:30 am each day. He had to see who called in on the computer as sick so he could adjust the routes. Today, he had arrived at 4:40 am and noticed that crazy, bearded old guy warming up on the track again.

He had watched him before and saw that he ran 8 laps. Always 4 in one direction and then 4 in the other. He never saw anyone else do that. Weird. Oh, once in a while he would only finish 6 or 7 laps but then he was usually limping. He saw the old man on the track one Saturday and got a good look at him in the light of day.

The old man was about 50 to 55 years old. He stood over 6 foot tall and was balding with a lot of gray hair on his head and in his full beard. He had a bit of a pot belly and usually leaned forward some when running.

The old man did not do that slow running that was almost walking but he was not fast either. One of the coaches told him that the old man seemed to run about a 10 minute mile, as if he knew what that was supposed to mean. The coach went on to say that it was pretty good for a guy his age. Whatever that meant.

The transportation director finished logging into his computer and looked back out the window. The old man was finishing his warm-ups and walking to the finish line. Crazy, running the opposite direction on the track for the first 4 laps. Really weird. The old man walked up to the line and then he was all blurry for a moment.

Bob shook his head and then rubbed his eyes. He looked again. The old man was doing just fine. He was lumbering along at his normal speed. Sometimes, when he went around the corner just right, he would look as if he was falling forward. Bob watched for one lap and then went back to work. What a weird old man. Who would be out in the freezing cold running? Why didn't he just get a treadmill? Moments later he forgot about the old man as he saw that he was short two bus drivers.

The young man felt the tears in his eyes as he reviewed the scene in front of him. So many good men and women had died already and he was to blame. he had talked them into fighting against the invaders. Outnumbered by well-trained alien soldiers, they had fought a mostly hidden war that had stretched on for four years.

His name was Jon Trostren but the media called him General T. There was no real reason for it. A news article, years ago, gave him the title in a story that had little to do with the truth. Still, his supporters jumped on it and the name stuck. The truth was that he had been a restaurant manager and volunteer firefighter before the aliens attacked.

He had been at work when the rays hit his hometown. He was under the vent hood and the metal protected him from the devastation that fell on those exposed. Two billion died that one day. The sadly ironic thing was that the rays came from a weapon one of the world powers had developed to stop the aliens.

The old-timers had argued against it. They spoke for months at the World Congress against developing new technologies. They reminded everyone that the planet was under the protection of the Order of the Silver Star and that enemies could only use our own technologies against us. The world no longer believed that the Order existed and the fear mongers won the day.

Two days after a successful test of the weapon, the enemy showed up in hundreds of small ships and positioned themselves over all the major cities. The World Congress was given until the sun set on the Great Hall of Peace to surrender. They didn't, and the aliens released the rays. The next morning, all of the countries in the world surrendered except for his country, Kingsland.

Kingsland was still strong in the belief in the Order and they knew the world caused this mess. They deployed the old uniforms of the Order and fought back when the aliens tried to take control of the utilities or the government buildings. The rays did not work when they wore their helmets from the Order's uniforms and the enemy was forced to fight man-to-man.

Still, it did not take long before the warriors were all dead and there was no one experienced left to fight. So a new generation took up arms. Jon was the first of the new group to win a major skirmish and be given a new name.

Even though their country was the only one on the planet that had fought back it had made an impact. For four years, the other countries around the world sent them troops and funds to keep the fight alive. It had worked and they grew stronger and stronger. Once they started to have an impact, the aliens brought forward other technologies to destroy them.

He remembered the morning of the first high-tech attack. He sat up in his cot and felt something slide off his chest onto the floor. He reached over and turned up the lamp. On the floor were a paper and an amulet. The paper said, "Wear the Amulet of Freedom and their technology will be worthless." He didn't see how it could hurt so he started wearing the amulet. It worked; the aliens' technology was negated by the Amulet of Freedom from the Order of the Silver Star. Soon, they were starting to push the aliens back and the amulet drove morale to high levels. People began to believe that they might take their planet back; however, the influx of mercenary fighters stopped their successes.

About a year ago, the enemy started using electronic sweeps for life forms in the field. This destroyed their guerrilla tactics by eliminating the ability to hide after an attack. They tried using tunnels and caves but the sweeps could penetrate great distances under the ground. They were forced to fight in the open as regular soldiers do. The enemy started winning again.

He had approximately 15,000 soldiers when the ground battles started to take place and now he was down to 3,000 with many of them wounded. The enemy had suffered also but they just brought in replacements by the shipload whereas his came in slowly. Morale had dropped and along with it his number of new recruits. He knew that he needed a victory soon or all would be lost.

So, he knelt in front of his officers that morning and prayed while holding the sword of the Order. The sword was supposed to have powers but he never felt any. It was beautiful but beyond that not special at all. Yet, when he prayed this time, he thought it warmed a bit. Wishful thinking he was sure. Some of the officers joined him but most mumbled about how the Order died years ago in the galactic peace that followed the great wars due to a lack of need.

The field in front of him was long grass that drifted into the distance between two hills like a painting on a wall. The field was long and narrow running east to west. It started narrow on his end and widened up until it reached the river where it narrowed a bit before drifting to the hills.

The enemy was almost directly across from him and was forming up at the edge of the woods. He was on the north side with hills at his back. He always fought with an escape route nearby as that had allowed for their survival in the early days. Today he was not so sure, as he would not be able to move through the rough hills easily with so many wounded.

Gloom was setting in among his troops as the enemy prepared to attack once again. He looked around and saw no one working to fire up their companies. They all looked resigned to their fates and he didn't have any more inspirational words for them. Four years had used up all his words. He ordered the officers to form up their companies. He turned toward the enemy and prepared to do battle.

The enemy started across the field and his officers moved the companies into defensive positions. Everyone was looking across the field when a shimmering occurred in the middle of the field.

Jon felt the amulet growing warmer and his sword started to glow. Soon a light appeared above the shimmer and formed into a brightness that replicated the Amulet of Freedom, although much larger.

All of the soldiers on the field stopped to watch as the shimmering increased. Soon a hazy image appeared. The image solidified into a man walking. Moments later, the shimmering was gone and the man stopped in the glow of the brightness. In a short time, the brightness turned off and all that was left was the man.

He wore black boots that rose above his knees and had a gold band around their top and another gold band at the ankle. On the front of each boot, in the gold area near the top was the symbol of the Order of the Silver Star, an outline of an angel with a star in her outstretched right hand. His pants were laced with white glowing lines of force flowing through a black material. His belt was black with gold trim and had a gold buckle with the symbol of freedom from the amulet engraved on it.

He wore a breast plate that covered his body from his neck to his belt. The plate appeared to be metal but flexed as he moved changing shape so that there was no discomfort to the wearer. He was wearing a long jacket made of another unknown material that ran from his neck to just above his boots and was open in the front with a catch chain at the waist. His helmet had a silver band that ran around his forehead and above it his head was covered with a black metal. The helmet came down and covered his ears and the back of his head and neck as it draped over his jacket. He was wearing gauntlets that covered his jacket sleeves and ended just before reaching his elbow. The only part of his body showing was his face.

He was a tall older man with an easy smile and laugh lines by the corners of his eyes. Yet, his face still had the hard lines formed by lots of serious work with the tan and weathered look of someone who spent time outside working. He had a full beard that contained more white than black.

He looked around the field with deep set light brown eyes that appeared to glisten with gold and were topped with thick eyebrows. When he completed his quick review he motioned to Jon and the commander of the alien forces directing them to come to him. The battlefield was quiet and everyone waited to see what the commanders would do.

Jon stepped forward right away. The man had the marks of the Order and hope blossomed that his prayers may have been answered. The alien commander hesitated a bit and then stepped forward also after indicating to his guard to accompany him. He came forward with ten heavily armed soldiers.

Jon approached the man and could see that he was older, probably around 50 to 55 standard years. Yet, he did not look past his prime and in fact radiated a confidence that surprised Jon. When they had all reached a distance within a sword's length he had them stop. Once again, his eyes swept over them. His look made Jon feel as he did when his dad had caught him doing something wrong. Clearly the alien was even more uncomfortable as he nervously fidgeted. The man quit his scanning and looked at the alien commander.

"Why are you violating the treaty of the Order by bringing outside warriors into battle? Do you understand what that allows the Order to do?"

"These are my men. We brought them from our world."

The old man laughed and pointed to the ten men standing behind the commander.

"These are from two systems beyond yours and half of your troops are mercenaries from even further. Do not lie to me. You might make me angry."

"I don't care if you are angry nor do I care about a dead treaty for dead men."

"Do I look dead to you?"

"You are one old man. You mean nothing."

"Then you are refusing to comply with the treaty and remove the violators?"

"That treaty died with the signers."

"The Tall Man is alive and I ask again - are you refusing to comply with the treaty and refusing to remove the violators?"

"I am Supreme Commander Krused of the 13th Brigade and we crushed the Tolgrate Rebellion in three days. You and your treaty can go to Hell."

The commander turned and walked away. The man turned to Jon and motioned for him to return to his lines. The man walked with him.

"Do you mind if I join you today?"

"Not at all. Are others coming to help?"

"I don't think we will need them."

Jon was shocked and did not know if this man was crazy or not. Surely one man could not make much of a difference.

"I have less than 3,000 men and women to his 15,000. That is not a fair fight."

"True, true. Still, he might not know the situation is unfair."

Jon was stunned. Somehow, his prayer brought him a crazy old man. What would the troops think now? They approached his lines and he motioned for his officers to come forward. It was risky. The enemy could send a blast their way and take out the entire command team. However, with what had just happened he knew that the meeting was needed.

The officers lined up casually in front of the old man except for seven. Those seven created a straight line and knelt down in front of the old man. He smiled.

"Your prayers were heard today and the Order will respond."

He took his hand and reached into his pocket of his jacket and drew out seven amulets of freedom. He placed one around each man's neck. Two more officers stepped forward and knelt in the line.

The old man looked at them with a sad face that showed a deep understanding and a slight hard edge of wisdom.

"You are willing to line up for an amulet. Yet you did not pray this morning and your thoughts moments ago were rather disturbing. No. The amulets go to those who have believed and held strong during the dark times."

The men were shocked to their cores as they realized the total meaning of the old man's words. Truly he must be of the Order if he has knowledge of their thoughts and feelings. They were shamed and stepped back with heads down.

"Do not be ashamed and stand proud. The person who fights for honor and follows the Order's ways can be proud, even if their belief is not strong. Your time will come."

Look for the rest of the story coming soon at Amazon.com