

## Ræm's Backstory

Ræm enjoyed a happy childhood, despite the community's irregular wars with the Great Ogre and the unleashing of the Wrath of Gaia. She had never seen the Sun, the Moon, or the Stars and knew only dark days filled with heavy clouds and incessant caustic rain. But for the great shield her father devised, her life would have been intolerable.

This instilled in her a very deep yearning to one day witness these wonders for herself. As a result she was drawn to the stories of these marvels, and in turn grew to appreciate everything around her. Learning from infancy to cherish the smallest gifts that life bestowed; she took great pleasure in the beauty of nature and its great diversity. Her dreams of brighter days, and of new beginnings became her overriding desire. These shaped the young girl to literally reach for the stars.

Unlike many, she did not blame Mother Earth, but understood it was her way to cleanse *terra firma* and begin afresh.

Ræm loved to spend time with her mother and father, growing to admire the strange assortment of permanent companions that always seemed to accompany them wherever they went.

Her mother groomed her from an early age to be the next Empress, and the next Gatekeeper. Life in the Imperial Palace was usually quite formal and extremely boring, whilst times spent at their proper home, and especially on the shore became her release. She loved the ocean and the sense of freedom that it liberated within her heart. She spent many long days with To Mo and To Ma who taught her how to swim, fish, and hunt.

Meanwhile Ræm's quest for knowledge was unquenchable. Of her own volition, she started to attend school just after her fourth birthday. She should not have begun for another year at least and six was the usual starting age, but it provided her with an escape from the confines of the Palace regime, and brought with it a liberating sense of freedom. Ju Lo and his language assistant Suzy Wong, accepted her and encouraged her in many disciplines, including languages, science, and deeper knowledge of their combined hereditary.

When she grew older, she also became an irregular crewmember for the outgoing Australians, Gary and Shirl. At first, they simply took her along for the ride and occasional sea fishing. However, her inquisitive nature and determination to help and learn, led them to train her informally as a sailor. By the time she was eleven, she could sail the boat herself and had learnt how to read the navigation charts. With the passing of another year, she had not only become competent, but also a talented mariner.

One day her Father came to her early in the morning and said they were going on a trip. They left quickly with n'Gnung and Aroweena and arrived on the shore, immediately making their way down to the small harbour at the end of the beach. Gary greeted them and helped them aboard, before they all sat down and chatted, which was most unusual.

"Aren't we going anywhere today?" Ræm enquired as boredom settled around her.

The prattling conversation stopped immediately and Gary handed her a piece of paper. It simply had a location on it. She stared at it for a moment, determining immediately there was a secret to be unlocked, and went below to check the charts. She took her time, eventually fixing it as a point near the small island across from them, but on the other side where there was a natural harbour. She bounded back up to the deck and told them. Gary looked at her Father, and he simply nodded his head, his curious smirk and twinkling eyes giving her no clue, only adding to her confusion.

"Your crewmember today is Aroweena, and she has never sailed before [true]. When you get to the location I gave you, go to lobster pot number eight and bring back whatever is inside. We are not here." Gary started laughing as he finished speaking, and Ræm's whole face echoed her hearts incredulity, as her mouth dropped wide open in astonishment.

She screwed up her face thinking this was a joke, before stuttering, "You cannot be serious!" but it was not a joke and she soon realised they were deadly serious.

She had done this kind of trip many times, but had never done the whole thing herself before. However, she had done each of the parts, so she sat down and reasoned through what she had to do. Speaking to no one in particular she said aloud, "First I need to know the direction and speed of both the wind and the current, plus the state of the tide. Then I can work out which sail to use to get us into the lagoon." Gary looked at Jack, and they both turned to watch the gifted youngster.

Satisfied with her reasoning she went below and checked the tidal data first, the current, and finally the wind. It was a fairly calm day compared to others recently, and conditions were actually ideal. She marched up to the aft deck and stated, "You all set this up didn't you. Well I'll show *you*."

“Aroweena, hoist the jib, that’s the sail at the front of the boat.” The Ddwyrth did as instructed and when the wind caught lightly, Ræm rushed to release the front mooring rope, thus allowing the boat to turn against the rear mooring and drift around slowly towards the open sea.

Ræm was practiced with this manoeuvre having done it countless times before. She had never done it as Captain before. She watched as the nose came round slowly and waited until the jib stalled before telling Aroweena to set the sail to the other side of the boat. Gary was ensuring Aroweena carried out the commands correctly and quickly.

Meanwhile Ræm started to let out the looped rear mooring rope so the boat continued to spin in the water past the 90-degree mark and came under power again from the front sail. Watching intently as she positioned and locked the rudder, she gauged the moment perfectly and released the captive eye of the mooring rope, pulling back the now long single rope quickly into the craft and stowing it aboard.

She had Aroweena hoist the mainsail, before attending to tune both sails to get maximum drive from the wind. Set fair the boat began to glide through the water, as a large cheer went up from the four people who were theoretically not there.

Ræm suddenly felt a burst of pride, her eyes watered slightly as her Adam’s apple caught a lump in her throat. The moment passed and she knew she could not have done this alone, so took a dedicated moment to thank Aroweena for her skill and assistance.

The outward leg was easy and downwind, but the girls had to work a lot harder on the second leg into the wind. Their respect for one another grew during the day, as they melded into a team that began to understand the boat and what was required of them. They collected the lobster pot and apart from several large lobsters and a belligerent crab, also discovered it contained two strange tokens.

The third leg was again a continuation into the wind, but soon they rounded the tip of the islet and set the final course for the simple run home with the wind to their backs. Ræm stood commandingly at the wheel and felt a great sense of achievement already. She knew docking could be tricky sometimes, but conditions were perfect that day, so did not worry unduly about the final task. With everything going exactly to plan, she relaxed and enjoyed the entwined feelings of power and contentment.

This shattered and turned to panic a moment later when Gary screamed aloud, “Man overboard.”

She whirled and saw n’Gnung wearing a buoyancy aid, jump into the water. Her mind went blank.

With the reality of the situation, she began to respond. She remembered the drill, and had performed it on several occasions; in fact she had done this same thing only a few days ago. Was that a coincidence? She realised they had all connived to set this all up. *I’ll show you* she thought to herself. Her only ally from these impossible monsters was Aroweena, so she gave her a look of encouragement and a *thumb’s-up*, before returning to her thoughts.

She remembered the drill, go on for three boat lengths, turn into the wind and complete the first loop of a figure of eight. There would be a chance to get n’Gnung back if she was lucky, otherwise she would complete the figure of eight and come back, in theory at least, to exactly where the lost sailor was.

Her watchful eyes judged distance before commands flowed from her as both sails reset after 140 feet, and the boat heeled to come about on its new heading. She watched intently the positions of the man in the water and the boats relative position, before making her last call to complete the first loop.

Ræm had purposefully sailed slightly further windward than necessary in order to ensure they were on the correct side of the wind and current in relation to n’Gnung. She slackened both sails little by little and later slowed by turning them into the wind, so they were hardly driving the boat at all.

Gary and Jack, both held Yachtmaster Ocean (Sail) qualifications, whilst Shirl was as good without ever having been tested. They watched intently as Ræm brought the boat in perfectly on the first pass, a risky manoeuvre for all but the most experienced of sailors. She dropped both sails at precisely the right moment and simply let the current push the boat the last few yards towards n’Gnung.

Aroweena stood ready with a lifeboat ring, but Ræm’s positioning was so accurate that n’Gnung came into the lee of the boat and bumped up against the hull. He was handed down a rope with which he was able to crab sideways to the stern and climb back aboard via the rear ladder.

Standing once more inside the boat, n’Gnung high-five’d Ræm as the others joined to cheer her. She took Aroweena’s hand and raised it with her own arm, so they both shared the honour equally. n’Gnung was handed a beer, as other bottles were broached for the remaining passengers.

Ræm let them have a piece of her mind, which only brought forth more cheers and howls of laughter. She almost managed to keep her stern face, before succumbing and joining the delight. Everyone aboard knew she had done good, real good.

Ræm completed the trip by bringing the boat in perfectly and moored with Aroweena's help. They held a small and impromptu party, with Aroweena ready for her first beer, and as a special treat, Ræm being allowed a small can of Australian original.

They laughed and shared, until Gary asked her why she had attempted the more risky first loop and not the easier figure of eight. Ræm replied at once, "Because I know there are many sharks in these waters, and I also knew that if I stayed windward I could secure the rescue more quickly. The longer you are in the water the greater the chance of being eaten you know." Ræm stated this with the emphatic knowledge in the way only youngsters can.

Both Jack and Gary began to reply and compliment her wisdom, when the stage was taken by n'Gnung, "What! There are sharks in these waters? You never told me that before you asked me to jump into the sea."

n'Gnung played the fool to perfection, elaborating on his initial comments as everyone else broke into uncontrollable fits of laughter. He stomped and paced around, making vague swimming motions, whilst imitating a giant and hungry shark in between the spaces of his performance.

They all knew that he was very aware of the danger the sharks posed, and had taken a sword with him as protection, but there was no need to let that ruin the comedy. Aroweena came to his aid as the straight person, and together they made a remarkable improvised performance that remains one of the funniest things they had ever had the pleasure of witnessing.

Finally, all settled and drank another beer before it was time to move on. The next act began with Shirl, and they gathered around Ræm, took her prone and protesting into their arms, and gave her three cheers or *hip, hip, hurrahs*. With her arms and legs securely held, she was thrown upwards on each *hip*, again on the next, and thrown into the air on the *hurrah*. She was caught for a second repeat, but for the final throw; she was tossed into the sea nearby.

Ræm had been expecting that, and was already planning her reply before she hit the water. She spluttered to the surface, indignation flailing rapidly from her rabid tongue. They howled with laughter, except for one of their number who stifled her mirth out of newborn admiration.

Instead, Aroweena leapt into the water and came immediately to her side and each knew it was out of a new and growing respect for each other. Then they all bombed into the sea nearby to join them and a water fight ensued. It was fun while it lasted, but as soon as Ræm tired of it, Jack went to her, and despite the torrents of water aimed at him, picked her up and carried her out of the water secure in his arms.

He spoke to her gently, "Know I would never ask you to do something if I thought for one moment you could not conquer it. How do you feel now?"

"I feel very wet, and I have a great sense of accomplishment," she giggled.

He enquired, "Now you know you can sail a boat all by yourself. Why do you know that?"

"Because I have already done it," Ræm stated as a matter of fact.

"Exactly. That was the lesson I wanted to teach you today. Knowing how to do something is one thing; actually doing it is something quite different. Doing something yourself is an accomplishment. Never forget this.

"It also brings with it greater confidence and the respect of others. Just now Aroweena went instantly to your aid, and know she is not easily impressed by anyone, I can assure you."

Ræm knew her Father spoke the truth, because she did feel larger, bigger, and more of an adult. She turned to her Father and stated, "I love you." This new confidence transmitted into her everyday life. Every new challenge she faced and conquered, only added to her feeling of worth in the years to come.

That evening, Jack had organised a small celebratory party. Ræm wanted to know what the two mysterious tokens they collected were for, but he refused to say anything other than she would find out after dinner. She was not impressed, but knew not to push him once his mind was set.

The evening was an informal affair and consisted of the usual suspects, and a few others such as Billy, Mavis, and Gilly. The evening took its natural course, Jack hoping his daughter would mix and discover new attitudes and make new friends. He was of course, misguided. In time, it fell to her mother to reign in Ræm's socialising excesses. To complete the moment, Jack spoke:

"Friends, we are gathered here this evening to welcome into our midst a new Able Seaman. Aroweena if you please."

The Ddwyrth was obviously taken by surprise and stood to the applause and whistles of the crowd. Knowing she was not one for formalities and medals, Jack kept the proceeding brief. At his nod, Gary came forward and presented her with a bracelet that bore the sign of an anchor. It had one band, which Jack had commissioned personally to be made of the finest gold, by Owain and the Ddwyrth. Aroweena's eyes glazed for an instant, as she stood to more applause, before reaching for her drink, mumbling a reply and downing the draught in one.

She returned to her seat directly, but many were aware she kept touching and glancing at her new jewellery occasionally, her inward pride almost hidden. Sometimes in the future, people would come to ask her why she wore it and what it signified. She simply dismissed the issue out of hand, saying, "It was something I was given because I worked in a competition. It is of no worth and I must remember to take it off," although she never, ever did.

In time, Jack called upon his daughter, "Ræm, today you have passed the most serious challenge of your young life ... with flying colours. Know you have earned this right through your own efforts, and now join Gary and myself as being the only three properly trained and qualified sailors. Please may I have a big hand for the new and third Captain of our fleet."

Again, the cheers erupted, and Gary had to call for order. He presented her with a bracelet of similar design, also made of pure gold by Owain and his smiths. However, this one has four bands signifying rank. With the official presentation complete, Ræm held her arm high and showed the seal to everyone. She followed with an impromptu short speech, and publicly thanked Aroweena for her assistance; making it known, she could not have completed the day's trial without her excellent backing.

After that evening, Ræm came to love evenings spent on the shore, especially the cheery, boisterous humour of Owain, and later as she aged, the clever and intricate stories of Rambling. However, the first result was that a month later she went to live with Billy and his people for a few days, revelling in the simple yet satisfying experience, as she connected deeply with nature and Mother Earth.

The second and more unexpected result was, that she became a regular, if erratic visitor to Gilly and his tribe of Hells Angels. By the turn of another year, they had formed a rock band, and she saw both words and music as languages in their own right.

Jack had serious misgivings about someone so young being exposed to that kind of culture, although at heart I loved it himself. Jinnie knew of his misgivings, and they talked about it sometimes, and quite openly. It wasn't until one evening some months later that the talk again came to centre upon *Rebel Ræm*, when who should put it into perspective but n'Gnung. He began, "Tell me of your daughter and her destiny?"

Jack raised an eyebrow to his cheery enquiry, and knew immediately he was up to something. However he replied, "As far as every indication I have confirms, she is destined to become some sort of saviour, and rescue mankind from ultimate destruction. She commands the Sword of Destiny, and has many rare gifts. What of it?"

Jack had hoped to throw the question back at him, not expose myself to subtle probing of his own motives, "So you have freed her mind to learn, and know she absorbs everything. She is a wonder in this respect. Yet all her tuition is either: practical, academic, theoretical, or comes from our establishments, is this not so?"

"And yet, if what we fear is true, then one day, she will stand alone against an impossible foe of unimaginable power. She already has the confidence and self-belief, but there is more to this. She needs to become her own person. Now, I will ask you all here, what is the one thing that all people who overthrow a regime have in common?"

They were surprised at n'Gnung's depth, but Jack became determined to work through his logic, as those around all offered answers and observations. Suggestions such as Leaders, freethinkers, and similar were evaluated, and n'Gnung sat there patiently, his smile growing conspiratorially, and his eyes sparkled increasingly. In time, they admitted they did not understand his point.

"Then let me state the obvious. They are all rebels and have a revolutionary heart - a drive that spurs them to achieve the impossible; the unthinkable even.

"If you wanted to create a rebel, where on this island would you go?"

Jack could not fault his logic; "The first place I would go is to the Cavern, and join Gilly and his friends. If I were not her father, my heart would be entirely at ease."

However, Jack learned to let Ræm have her head, leave to join the rebels at her will, knowing she would return and grow from exposure the rogue elements of their society, and even their music. That

was not to say he felt entirely at ease, and spoke to her about more adult matters on occasions, with mixed results.

Ræm's Aunt, Weid Noi, also spent much time with her, and introduced her to the work of the Seer, which was unlike the others. Weid Noi took time to nurture her inquisitive mind and teach her other concepts of an entirely different nature. On one of these occasions just before the next Great War with the Ogres, they were joined by the Shaman, who when finished with her Aunt, took Ræm for a walk in the forest, and told her a very great secret. She learnt the truth about the Sword of Destiny, and also, that in a year or so, she would become the Shaman's apprentice.

Growing up with so many diverse influences in her life, led Ræm to become very self-assured, to the point of being precocious; like when she pleaded to be allowed to learn the language of the Ancestors. Within months, she had become a match for her teacher, and one year later had virtually overtaken everybody except Gangling, Kay, and her father.

As her age moved into teenage figures, so she also moved to spend more and more time at the University. John was always kind and paid her special attention, making her feel very special. Faye Wong admitted her curiosity for a depth she did not often offer others, and she became a regular fixture within the University.

Perhaps because of her self-dedicated day work, she also homogenised with the students. In total contrast to her daily schedules, that became ever more complicated and fulfilling, as her band also played the University regularly. Jack admitted later, "I must admit, the first night I was filled with trepidation, and later wonder, because they were damned good. Perhaps more importantly, she was not fazed by the crowd and led the band from the front, bewitching the throng as the group played their magic on stage backing her vocals and guitar."

Later they threw open the stage and she encouraged floor artists to come up and have a go. Jack ended up playing lead and singing The Outlaws *One Last Ride* with Gilly and the usual crew, before someone shouted out another song request he vaguely remembered. Their *Stairway to Heaven* was never going to be as good as Led Zeppelin's, but then again, the crowd loved it and called for an encore. They passed the buck back to Ræm, and she stole the night, singing modern songs some had never even heard of before, but the student population loved.

John joined them as the evening wound up, and asked bluntly, "How old did you say she was?"

Jack turned to greet him, and offering a toast stated, "Almost 13 going on infinity. Why did you ask?"

John looked back at Jack and dolefully said, "I thought so," before raising his glass to chink; and from that very moment, they both knew they were already a generation older.

As they sat to talk and share, John mentioned, "I need to think about my replacement, at some point in the not too distant future. I am good for many years yet, but the next generation, as we see here tonight, are already finding their feet."

Jack heard him, and after assessing replied, "Why not take several deputies and make them responsible for various departments? Your job would become overseeing them. Finding an actual replacement for the perfect person is never easy."

The next day brought changes to the University hierarchy, and a few months later, similar changes came to Jack and Jinnie's home, the day after her thirteen birthday, when the Shaman came to visit, leaving with her new apprentice.

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Ræm's apprenticeship with the Shaman was strange in many ways, but Sun Kist helped her greatly to adjust to the strange ways and even stranger speaking of the sage. After two weeks she became very homesick, and after two months asked if she could finish and go home, because the teachings appeared to be of little value.

The Shaman listened to her, and explained about the seed and how it grows. Sometimes it grows quickly from planting requiring but a little water to initiate development. At other times, as in her case, the seed lies dormant until precisely the right conditions are met. Suddenly it bursts forth into a creation, a wonder of great worth. Ræm agreed to stay for a while, and before she knew it half a year and more had passed, so complete was her absorption.

Completed also was the first phase of her training, so one morning she was given leave to return and spend the day with her parents. Her only task was to return at dawn under her own means. She leapt up and hugged the Shaman, who was quite shocked by her reaction, and also very pleased. The reunion at her home meant a lot to everyone, reinforcing that she was simply working and walking a different path in life of a while. Their family bonds grew stronger, and the loneliness and melancholy was replaced by renewed faith and love.

This short day taught her a great deal, which the Shaman used to great effect over the coming months and years, as she took great pains to nurture and equip this special child for the dire battle that was destined to shape her future, or herald her untimely death.

Although yet still a girl in many ways, Ræm always knew she had a destiny to fulfil, one within which the balance of life on the planet may depend, and also may turn upon her own salvation. She had already devoted many years of her small life in the quest for knowledge. She had gained from exposure to the lessons of nature and the physical world, the structures of science, of many languages, and of the hearts and desires of people.

Ræm never consciously recognised that she quickly became far more advanced than Sun Kist over those passing years, but kept her shamanic peer close and guided her at times of distress towards the enlightenment that would surely follow. They were not natural sisters, but they were all each other had, and bonded to become more than themselves alone.

Whilst Ræm was far more educated and exposed to life, Sun Kist had a very deep affinity with nature, and knew things instinctively that Ræm took longer to comprehend. This in turn brought them closer unto a true understanding, and so much so that true sharing came between them to form its bonds.

Later they truly became good friends as they travelled the land and learned together about the wonders of nature. Meanwhile the Shaman kept a watchful brief; she already understood that without Sun Kist, Ræm would never understand the truer nature of Gaia, nor heed her lessons. Eventually she saw the spark of understanding flare within Ræm's heart, and waiting just long enough to kindle it, swiftly moved on, for the times were soon to change once more.

And so it came to pass that during that year with the Shaman, Ræm studied the Tablet of Enlightenment and other heady scripts, yet felt she had achieved nothing, except gaining confusion. Some of what was written within the tablet conflicted with her understanding of the metaphysical and physical worlds, plus the endless riddles of the Shaman had done little to unravel the mysteries hidden long within the depths of perception.

In time Ræm sought once more the guidance of the Shaman, stating, "Great Mother, what of my destiny, for the Tablet only offers confusion and distraction. It offers a path to enlightenment, but the road is long and may not be for me in this lifetime. You have taught me the subtleties of *Right and Wrong*, and how each may deceive as to their true nature if we are not vigilant.

"You have taught me the power of love, acceptance, and of understanding different peoples as opposed to cursorily judging them. The tablet always speaks in extremes, and yet real life is not like that. There is no pure black or white, merely many shades of grey, and colours so many as to be uncountable. I believe that everything is composed of the white, and the darkness contains nothing.

"Yet the light is a beacon along the road to self-improvement, and the darkness is but the way to sin and a signpost to great evil and death. Therefore, white and black together represent the whole, and surely would contain half each. But then the darkness grows and walks amongst us, while the light recedes as if in fear. It also seems one cannot exist without the other. How can this be?"

The Shaman heard her words and smiled, because at last she was beginning to ask the correct questions. She considered her reply before answering, "Speakest plainly to thee this day I will, for this one time alone. You cannot judge Good and Bad alone and without context. This is why I began by instilling within you the strongest understanding of telling what is Right, from that which is Wrong.

"What if I told you a story about a great King who made his empire and dominated the world by wiping out a whole race of beings. He thought he lived by his honour, but his sword alone killed thousands, and so did those of his companions. Would this man be Good or Bad?"

Ræm immediately started to reply, "Bad..." Then she stopped to think deeper, before making her considered reply, "You did not give me the situation, by which I mean was the killing in the name of Right or Wrong. Therefore, I withhold my answer until I know more.

"Ahha! Great spirit, you are speaking about my Father and contrasting him with the Great Ogre; then know he is not perfect and sins as all people do; with and without their greater knowledge or comprehension. If this man is my Father, then know he is Right and Good - A Soldier of the Light.

"But if this man were the Great Ogre, then know also that he is evil and does Wrong intently and on purpose so as to hurt others and make their lives a misery. His heart is empty where my Father's is full of compassion."

The Shaman chuckled at her bright student and pushed her further with an observation, "How can this be, for do they not both want to rule the world?"

Ræm smiled and replied, "That is an unfair assumption, which I will eschew. The difference, as we have already witnessed, is that the Great Ogre would enslave the world and all it's beings to be

slaves of his untouchable will. My Father would simply fight to give all people their freedom, and the choice to make their own futures as they see fit – even if this prejudices his own beliefs and desires. He respects the differences between all living things and delights in them. He does not try to bend them all to his own will, or kill all those that refuse.”

The Shaman was greatly pleased with her response and depth of understanding, yet probed her student one more time, for this one needed to break free, and not be broken, “Tell me of the Sword?”

Ræm knew the answer, because it was simple, but also knew this was not what the Enlightened One was asking her. In a few moments she replied, “The Sword of Destiny was created by the Eleventh and Seventh, and is reported to have magical powers. I now consider these powers to be runic in nature, which means you, or another like you had something to do with the casting. I also have known for a long time that it is a weapon of healing, not death. It is also my birthright, or so I have been told.”

The Shaman riposted at once, “Kind to you I have been this day child, for still the future resolved be not. Determine as the days turn soon and sours, the souls survival or extinction of the fayre or foul. The Destiny of the Sword was cast in the womb of the female of this earth, and graces us with her love and compassion undue. The Ddwyrth and Elven laboured hard and long to forge the blade, but could never make it true. Without the runal blessing that your own blood bestowed in whitest – bluest hue.

“Leave me now oh daughter fayre, for thee must learn the blade. Come to me once more and bare, when you can call it to your whim or wishes made. Learn no more the Tablet of Enlightenment, for sagacious ye are without its guide.”

Ræm thanked her gratefully; at last free of the cursed Tablet of Enlightenment, which to her had become a millstone around her neck. She was about to leave when the Shaman added, “Fayre child, know you should also spend more time with the ones you love these days, for soon comes your sixteenth year, and Trials of Passage must ye take. Build your home and of it make, a place no other could forsake.”

She did as the Shaman instructed, becoming a regular visitor to her parents and others. She instructed Dan Nai to build her home beside her parents in the Valley of Knowledge, and made it similar in some ways to the home of the Shaman. It had a large patio outside the front door, with steps leading up to it and the central door. There was another balcony set back above where her bedroom would be, which also faced the Sun. It was the first ever fully, two-storey building on the island, and built around a variation of the gazebo principle. It was heavily influenced by her Father’s knowledge of constructions of the Last, and had an arched roof covered with grass bundles akin to thatch. Like the Shaman, she had a fireplace built to ground and upper floors, the downstairs one being grand and open for the enjoyment of friends on chilly nights.

Soon her thoughts turned and she prepared like all the others for the trials, but decided to take both the male and female versions, but not a husband. She was tempted to try and break her Father’s record, but knew this was not her calling, so instead took one trial each day, the female for the first week, and the male for the second. This allowed her ample time to work with the sword, trying to call it whenever she had free and dedicated time.

One day shortly after her coming of age birthday party, which was a lavish affair of state; she heard her name being called telepathically. It was not the sword, the Shaman, but the Seer who was trying to attract her attention. Curious she heeded the call and attended her dear friend in order to offer her assistance. Weid Noi also knew the world was turning once more, but could never see the Third Way. She asked Ræm to join her presentation, as an advisor with special knowledge. Separately they attended her Father and his closest, and their appearance was formally made. She did not tarry, as her role this day was of advisor, not of daughter.

Throughout this period Ræm’s studies progressed rapaciously, but yet for all her newfound skills and knowledge she always failed to call the Sword to her. She tried and failed in the weeks, months, and years that followed. She could feel the blade just sometimes, but it was always such a fleeting whimsy. She desperately wanted to attend the Olympics in 2030, but the Shaman forbade it. When she pressed the point, she was told that all would soon be revealed, and she must remain to be kept safe from harm. Mollified, but not happy, she continued with her studies, and to call the impossible blade to her hand. This changed the morning Sun Kist rushed in all of a fluster, rambling that everyone was lost.

Through her garbled utterings, Ræm deduced that her Mother, Father, and all the Kings’ and Queens’ had become captives of the Great Ogre. Tribes assembled for the Olympics had been invaded by the Ogres and killed during what should have been a festival of brotherhood. Her rage flared as

she determined the Sword of Destiny to answer her bidding. Nothing happened and it felt more remote than ever.

Then her heart wept for the innocent killed that day, and for the loss of so many world leaders. Her heart erupted in grief and brotherly love. For just one instant, she wished the sword was in her hand to right this grievous wrong ... and there it was!

Stunned, she stared down at it, and drew her fingers lovingly along the blade, learning of its secrets along the way. Trancelike she knew within that moment that she and the blade were one. Their destiny's were irrevocably linked, and that if she had faith in the impossible, then all would come to pass, as if the Sun would finally remove his hat.

Her reverie is broken by the Shaman, "Done well thee hast, and better still. Return now the blade and do not seekest it again until calleth for you it does. This may be minutes or years, but knowest, when the sword calls, you must attend it promptly, for within moments next, the world will turn once more, and finally.

"Send now back the sword of light and love, and seekest never again until the time of your true calling." The Shaman repeated for surety, and waited, as she watched her young and gifted charge, as within a few seconds the Sword disappeared from her hand; the difference being, that now Ræm knew what it felt like in her hand, and iwa confident she could summon it at will - if only because she has already done it.

The Shaman spoke her at the last, "Die be cast within the nearness of time so beit. Called you will be to face an Ogre of very little worth, but all-powerful he may be. Trusteth true to your heart and offer love, for this is all that can ever prevail. Show him the deeper meaning of compassion, and give him the Sword, for know he would defy you with it, and yet it will heal him unto his timely demise.

"Know I will be standing within and without you, and however hopeless the situation appears, remain true and believe in the Good, the Right, and the Light. Together we will let the Great Ogre kill himself upon his very own and empty heart."