

# Terra Draco

The Fantasy

## Chapter 9: Allies

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# Terra Draco (West)



## Chapter Ten

# Ignition

I  
Winter – 1019 YD  
Gesula, Lenyol

‘Eamon, stop!’ Kesia, eleven summers old, begged her brother. ‘Ma said to stay by me.’

‘You run too slow!’ Eamon was three years his sister’s senior and almost two feet greater in height. He ran deeper into the woods.

Kesia exhaled in frustration, continuing to lag after him.

‘How do you intend to catch our dinners if you struggle to keep in step with me?’ he panted, veering suddenly out of sight.

‘With stealth!’ Kesia cried, ducking into a hollow tree.

In the distance the crunching of feet on dried leaves continued under her brother’s forward motion. Realising he had lost his tail, he stopped. ‘Kesia?’

Kesia was silent, clasping a hand over her mouth to smother a mischievous giggle.

‘Hey, Kesia, come on.’ More crunching indicated backtracking. ‘Ma’ll kill me if you get so much as a scratch.’

Kesia peered out to see her brother searching the woods in alarm. She glanced east to where the watch tower stood—deep as they were, it could no longer be seen. She felt a rush of disobedience as her mother’s strict orders to venture only within view of the tower played in her mind. Turning back to her brother, she decided they ought to return.

She climbed out from the hiding place, peeling cobwebs away. Leaning against the empty trunk, she waited for her brother to notice her.

Eamon stood in the middle of a clearing with the most of his back to Kesia. He turned slightly toward her, searching low-lying branches for his sister, when something in the corner of his eye caught his attention; he jumped when he saw Kesia standing against the tree.

‘Lenyol’s Light, you scared the life out of me!’

Kesia made to speak when a wisp of wind blew a handful of soil into the air behind Eamon, the rich earth ribboning in on itself. A second, stronger breeze lifted the leaves and sent them spiralling past her brother.

As Eamon turned to see why the leaves moved so, a man appeared within a faint mauve fog. He smiled at the boy.

The man, wild of beard and hair red in hue, grasped Eamon by the ear and enveloped him in his dark robes. Kesia remained frozen by the tree as both disintegrated into the falling leaves, left forever with the image of her brother's face burning with desperation and stoic acceptance that a cry for help would imperil his only sister.

## II

January 12 – 1027 YD

Alendae, Lenyol

Kesia's rooms in Alendae were bright with the midday sun, and quickly filled with guests and their belongings.

'Glazed windows!' Orla awed, rushing to the northern walls and pressing her fingertips to the warm glass. 'Do they not melt in the sun?'

'Perhaps in fire,' Kesia considered, 'but they bear the sun with ease. Mellena, will you open the shutters?'

Mellena did as she was asked, opening the shutters along the other walls, letting in light and air from the busy street—though it was hotter out than in.

Orla stepped away from the windows. 'You say you are a carpenter. I think perhaps you are a noble carpenter.'

'No.'

Orla raised an eyebrow at the pottery, brass work, and books piled throughout the first room. 'A rich carpenter?'

'A lover of things,' Toran explained.

Pricks of mortification coloured Kesia's cheeks. 'Since we are in a respectable district and ours is a mixed party, we best find you a room at the nearby inn, Toran.'

The room slumped into silence.

'Shall I walk with you?' Orla then offered. 'Perhaps we will eat, and give the ladies time together.'

'It has been a long morning,' Toran muttered, 'I'm sure Kesia would prefer a rest. We will return later.'

They collected their purses. Kesia closed the door behind them with more force than intended.

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'Toran is a fool, Kesia.'

Kesia threw her key to the table.

'Toran and Oran both, cut from the same cloth.' Mellena shied from Kesia's glare, turning to a side table of food and such. 'Is that a wineskin I see?'

'The goblets are in the basket over there,' Kesia answered, sitting at the table. 'I feel so vexed. I imagined a grand trip!'

'Imagine on! Down this,' Mellena filled the retrieved goblets with light wine, 'and we shall dress for the markets—eat—drink—and be merry.'

Kesia said nothing as she lifted her goblet, and in quiet she remained, so that Mellena grew distracted and went to her satchel. She removed a garment, unravelling a vest of black and red. She donned and buttoned it, fitting her womanly shape with fine finesse.

In her worn cinnamon surcoat, Kesia felt perfectly plain. 'That is very becoming.'

'Oran commissioned a seamstress here to make it. The needlework is gorgeous.'

Kesia lifted her back to inspect the work. It was fine indeed, and doubtless costly. Its beauty elevated her.

'He dotes on me—yet what a deterrent clinging is.'

Distaste soured Kesia's delight. 'I suppose if his feelings were requited you would think differently on his gestures.'

'No doubt.'

Both turned to their goblets. Their ride to the city had been long; they were tired.

'Kesia.' Mellena extended a hand, planting it by her friend's. 'I cannot turn my mind from thoughts of Miggest.'

A long look passed between them.

'I thirst for adventure! Our worlds are so very small.'

Kesia knew Mellena's heart, and was pained. 'And Oran?'

'Oran,' Mellena scoffed. 'A shepherd's wife!?' This will be the finest garment I ever own, worn only while sweeping, washing, and shushing babes; and the Crossroads shall be the furthest I go until the children are married themselves.'

Kesia nodded, realising her goblet was empty. 'Let us go for lunch. I am starved.'

They busied themselves washing and tidying, Kesia quietly troubled all the while. For though the song of adventure summons loudly, how could a person of good conscience be so cavalier about the affections of another, and deliberately lead them toward heartbreak? Surely decent people obeyed their inner guide without trampling the paths of others?

Hunger tugged Kesia free from such thoughts, and within a short while they had quit her rooms and made for the markets.

III  
January – 1027 YD  
Lirna, Lenyol

January began to wane, and the heat of summer continued unrelenting. There had been no fires since those of Archoak forest three months previous, yet the threat crouched in the air, prowling each time the wind flew from the north.

Régan dismantled a slice of bread while watching the day begin below. With Brennan's departure some days before and the Duke and Duchess in Dara, she was perfectly bored. The heat forbade activity; her rank precluded touring; her disposition opposed mingling. She had received a letter from the Baron of Bescon near the northern border, begging she dissuade her father of further trade with Migest. The Baron was certain the Archoak fires bore an ill omen, and that care must be taken to prepare for the years ahead—a sentiment she shared. Perhaps she should return to the capital, and make yet another attempt at diplomacy and filial piety.

There was a change in movement on the ground: a messenger had arrived and words were spreading outwards. Curious, Régan returned to the Great Hall.

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Through the northern windows, the steward of Lirna Palace pointed—superfluously—at the waves of smoke on the horizon.

'The fields have caught, Your Highness.'

She inhaled and blinked for patience. 'You have a keen eye.'

'I am instructed to secure your safety, and insist on your making for Offenure at once.' There was resistance in her silence, and he added: 'The wind will press the flames toward us.'

Régan hardened her jaw. The threat was not the fire, but the contents of its smoke: the harvest was lost. Not two weeks before Lughnasadh.

'Your Highness?'

Lord Carrick, wet from the waist down, entered the Solar. 'I have come to escort you to Offenure. I have a rigged boat to transport you in, if you are daring enough to face the waves.'

Wild water was not her friend; the base of her stomach retracted; yet she nodded and bowed her farewell to the steward. 'Send your warriors to collect those fleeing the blaze. Move quickly.'

Carrick placed a hand on Régan's back as they descended the main staircase. 'Now the fires have begun, I fear only the river and sea will stop them.'

IV  
January 13 – 1027 YD  
Delus, Offenure

It was four in the morning. Sevína roused the chamber fire to allay the chill of death.

'I fear this drought will not die easily.' High Priest Arnaud cupped Sevína's hand as she offered it. 'Do not mourn me, my dear. I rejoice at crossing the Bridge, and long for my sojourn in the Otherworld.' He averted his gaze from her anguish. 'As I dreamt tonight, Miggest came to me. I placed my forehead on the earth before Him and He lowered His great head, touched His muzzle to my cheek, and spoke: *Agat sheirbheáil liom go maith.*' You have served me well.

Sevína held fast his hand.

Arnaud smiled, nodding to himself.

Sevína observed a shift in his eyes and awaited her master's final exhale.

And so it came, quiet and content.

'You served well,' Sevína repeated. 'And with great faith, Arnaud.' She held his hand for some time.

Exiting into the hall, she leant against a tapestry, lowering herself to the floor in the darkness. Priest, mentor, friend—now predecessor. He bequeathed to her the duty of bearing the Ebony Throne.

Her throat grew in grief; her mind shielded her with thoughts of the coming days. As the High Priestess of Miggest, she would captain An Lónra. She would be consecrated in a long sequence of rituals and ceremonies not performed since Arnaud's accession thirty years ago, and then visit each of the region's temples in a tour which would take months. She thumbed her ring, gazing on the large star sapphire—violet in the light—which had so often been admired by others. With it, she would not be cut off from Tenenum Temple, or Brennan.

Or abdication.

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Dawn came following a restless sleep in the hall. Vilsonius pressed a hand to Sevína's knee; dry eyes furrowed.

'Go and rest, Sevína. There is nothing to be done this morn.'

Sevína swayed and gazed confusedly at her surrounds.

'Here,' he uttered, and taking her hands raised her to standing. 'Arnaud passed in the night.'

'Yes,' Sevína spoke quietly. She continued nodding, sinking into memory.

Doors groaned from far off, and footsteps after. 'The Custodia comes.' Vilsonius bowed his head toward the Solar. Sevína followed him along the fifteen yards of

hallway, and sank into a daybed. She beckoned to the fireplace; the wood kindled to life. She folded into the cushions where he left her to sleep.

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'I will not support the autumn trade without better negotiation. Màtac insults us.' Sevína was revived by an hour and a half of rest, observing the cityscape through a window. 'The people will lose faith in us if we exchange pride for grain and stock.'

Vilsonius stepped aside as a servant brought in a fine breakfast for the new High Priestess. He took of this tray as the servant left.

'I once set myself to the task of locating the Interpreter of Lenyol.'

This secured Sevína's immediate attention.

He bit into the still-warm bread. 'Two years! Without that.' He pointed to the ring on Sevína's finger, then continued to eat.

'How did you begin?'

He smiled. 'Slowly.'

Sevína paced toward him. 'Was the Interpreter aware of their heritage? Could—would you do the same here?'

'I began the trail some six months ago. Perhaps you will return my ring after your consecration; I have some questions to ask of a family in Yardford.'

## V

January 20 – 1027 YD

Alendae, Offenure

Alendae was an interesting and picturesque city hugging the river Noira, with countless activities to offer four inquisitive visitors. Kesia withdrew into her work, delivering her commissions and procuring new materials; Mellena frequented plays and the markets; and Toran gave tours of the libraries and temples to Orla.

The City Square Market ran each Saturday. The party came together to explore its lanes and secrets, and Orla gripped Kesia's hand with excitement while assuring her that one could find *flying opossums* in the market if one knew where to look and who to ask! Toran explained that opossums could not fly, and Kesia linked arms with Orla when her face began to fall. A glint of sisterhood kindled between them. 'Forest-creatures are not to be sold, but I know where we might find them.' Kesia winked and smiled at the light returning to Orla's eyes.

Mellena disappeared into the clothing quadrant, and Toran drifted to the book-sellers. Kesia led Orla through the alleys of stalls, glad of the cloth coverings overhead in the mounting heat, and into the animal quadrant. There cats, puppies, goats, foals, and more dominated their senses—still further they went, wondering

aloud if wild things might be bought, and were nudged by hints toward a covered carriage behind the stalls. A man in sage garb whittled wood on the step.

Kesia made small-talk of the ghost-wood in his hands. She identified herself as Gesulan, and began speaking of its forests, and her love of its animals. Orla lamented never having seen them for she was new to Lenyol, and the man jerked his head toward the door—a curtain of leather—with a wry look.

Inside they found a selection of cages containing half a dozen species: a common rope-tailed opossum, a trio of hedgehogs, a hare, charcoal lizards, a tree-bear cub, and a pair of kitten-sized opossums with pink fingers, black face markings, and wing-like stretches of skin between their upper and lower limbs. Both ladies melted at the sight of them.

After an extensive lecture on caring for Léim—so they were called—they departed with much lighter purses, Orla carrying the creatures in a box, Kesia laden with insects and fruit for their nourishment.

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The four reunited and secured a table at a food stall in the shadow of Alendae Palace. Mellena and Toran were desperate to see the Léim, but knowing the laws on forest-creatures were strict, Kesia forced the others to stay silent on the subject until they had returned to her rooms.

Orla's attention fluttered to the palace. Its architecture was ornate; as Toran began gabbling about it being the design of Duchess Someone in preparation for her daughter's coming-of-age, Kesia followed the lines of its spires to the clear sky above. Talk came to her from a nearby table of fires in the west; she turned her ear toward the speaker, glancing up at the mention of lost villages, stock, and crops.

She was assaulted by the memory of her father's body in the funeral pyre, and the dark imaginings of too active an imagination. The charred meat at their table made her stomach turn. She excused herself, claiming heatstroke, and found a place to rest along the edge of the central fountain.

Water sprayed her back and cooled the nape of her neck. She closed her eyes and rested until the nausea passed. It was terribly hot. The Léim would be smouldering in their box—they must take them to her rooms. She turned back to the others, and noticed Orla subtly observing her.

Kesia rose and looked up at the palace. A shadow fell on it: yet it was already shaded. Kesia frowned, searching for a source; and another shadow flew along the stall coverings across the market.

Kesia turned quickly and sought the source again in the sky; and out of its blue fabric broke three black dragons, tearing toward the palace with heads lowered for collision. Kesia screamed and crouched to the ground, drawing a shield of blue energy equal in height to the palace; and she funnelled the north wind to repel them; but the dragons passed her defences like sun through glass. As they flew

overhead they appeared transparent, then disappeared against the palace façade; and before she realised they were only a vision, the gale she had summoned lashed the market, flipping its stalls and wares.

When the upturned market found its feet, fingers began pointing at Kesia. Slowly the cowering crowd straightened and narrowed its eyes.

## VI

January 21, 1027 YD

Offenure, Lenyol

Régan was escorted on foot from the docks through a maze of alleys, tunnels, and corridors. Carriages and horses were in short supply, for the Custodin had dispatched his resources north to evacuate the people and granary stores ahead of the blaze. The vicious wind had carried the smoke even to the city, and the warriors amassing in Offenure Plás wore coverings over their mouths.

When the Princess arrived in the castle, she was briefly acknowledged by her father before being passed over for Lord Carrick, whom Mâtac deemed more useful in such a crisis. High Priest Alsandul noticed Régan's indignation and quickly found her side.

'Let it pass,' he murmured, placing a hand on her shoulder and walking her toward the Great Hall's magnificent windows. 'He has cut down the High Commander this morning, and banished your mother to her rooms. Be wise and observe carefully his faults. Consider what your own movements would be—and bide, Your Highness.' On the last he squeezed her arm with gentle force to ensure his words were marked.

Régan conceded. She noted the Custodin's emphasis on preserving the grain, and the unspoken outrage this germinated in those present; in his short temper, and how this tightened the lips of those best suited to give advice; and how the urgency of the situation was given inadequate focus, diminished by the ignorant with louder voices.

Employing her residual seasickness to keep quiet her tongue, Régan quit the hall after several hours of such observations, taking solace in Alsandul's praise—expressed in a small rub of her back. The sun had now fallen and rest would best prepare her for the following day.

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Yet no rest could have girded her against what would unfold.

The day burst into being with marching footsteps, a series of thumps against her chamber door, and Alsandul letting himself into her rooms without awaiting invitation.

'Rise, Your Majesty!' He stormed toward her shutters, splitting them to admit the piercing dawn. 'Brennan has been seized.' He collected a cloak from a stand as he came to her bed, checked discreetly that she was garmented, and passed it to her as he drew back the covers. 'He is being taken to the Great Hall, and may be there now—a maid discovered him this morning with the Charge of Darkness, on the Northern Tower. He will be charged with High Treason.'

Régan uncoiled from her pillows, drew the cloak over her bedclothes, and tamed her mane of hair into a brass clasp. 'What was he doing on the Northern Tower?' She made for the hall, Alsandul at her arm, 'And which maid discovered him?'

This was not the expected response. 'Régan, he was found reading the Charge of Darkness.'

She did not stop as he did, answering with: 'Isn't that a private matter?'

When she saw he had halted, she also paused.

'No. It is not.'

She met the High Priest's eye momentarily, then continued on. 'I don't care if he was reading my father's own journal. I would like to know which maid discovered him, and why she was also on the Northern Tower.'

## VII

January 21, 1027 YD

Northern Lenyol

Coils of wind broke from the centre of Alendae Palace's Great Hall, and a pale purple haze swelled in its centre. There Kengar appeared.

'The Duke summoned me with regards my niece,' he stated to one of the guards.

The guard stammered some response and exited, leaving his colleagues to their stunned silence. Kesia was deeply relieved by the sight of her uncle, and temporarily dismissed the manner of his arrival.

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At the High Table, Kengar spoke with the Duke of Alendae and the weaver Breckin at length. Kesia sat across the hall inside a set of castle guards.

Her arrest had been swift, though peaceful, and she had spent the night in the Great Hall. There she had feebly explained herself to Breckin, a member of the guard and an acquaintance of her uncle's. A messenger had been dispatched, and after a circular conversation there was nothing to be done but rest and await Kengar.

'We cannot allow young weavers given to delusions to roam the city!' Duke Nóe suddenly cried out, thumping the table.

'My Lord.' Kengar bowed slightly, firm of voice. 'Perhaps we should speak privately.'

The Duke was obeyed Kengar's serious tone and led him to a chamber behind a curtain.

Not five minutes passed. The Duke stepped beyond the curtain. Kengar followed suit.

'Release her,' Duke Nóe commanded.

The guards immediately abandoned Kesia's side.

'You may go with your uncle, Kesia.'

Kesia startled at the Duke's use of her name. He examined her briefly, seeking and perhaps failing to find—then quit the room.

'It is always good to see you, Kengar.' Bricken shook Kengar's hand. 'Until next time.'

'Yes, Bricken. Thank you.'

Kengar crossed the hall and embraced Kesia. 'Come, Kesia. Let's away.'

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Afternoon came. Kengar and Toran loaded the cart, leaving Mellena and Orla to keep Kesia company and distract her—'What if I had killed someone?'; 'Is this the beginning of madness?'—with the beautiful Léim.

They departed the city soon thereafter, aiming to reach The Crossroads before nightfall. This they did, gladdened by the Wanderer's music. Dinner was had as the sun began to slide away, and Kengar excused himself and Kesia from the group. 'Let us take a walk.'

They left the camp, wandering the fields. Far off to the south-west the tail of the Barlon Ranges pierced Intiae Forest. The sun descended behind them to form a sharp silhouette.

'Otàmil was given to visions,' Kengar opened. 'They were rare.'

'Did they come to light?'

'He would not relate them to me. Once, in—I suppose it doesn't matter where—he attacked an—a kind of colleague. Quite brutally. What he had seen I never knew, but he was fierce, and regretted it terribly, for the—man—was badly scarred.'

'I ruined the goods of the market-sellers. I might have made amends, but I fled like an assailant.'

'The Duke will see it is righted.'

'What did you say to induce him to free me?'

Kengar stalled. 'Well, just—he knew your father. Otàmil was well known in the court.'

'Oh.' Kesia turned away, and frowned at the mountains. Otàmil was a stranger to her. 'Alright.'

She walked away, wanting time and space.

She had no desire to return to the city after the incident. Perhaps the time had come for her to finally complete her weaving apprenticeship and set out as Mellena intended. She stared at the mountains, captivated by the scope related in their distance.

Then a bird took flight from one of the peaks, followed by its mate. She awed at the power of her own vision—before doubting it, for the ranges were forty miles off.

'Can you see them?' Kengar whispered, grasping her around the shoulders.

Brennan's words echoed across time: '*How could I make out an eagle at such a distance?*'

Kesia gasped.