

The Shaedon Resurgence

Book 3

The Xoron Redemption

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*The beginning of the end,
Unless He does amend
Forever the cycle remains unbroken,
Unless the Prime Spell's words are spoken,
The tower is where it began*

– Excerpt from the Book of Luminar Prophecies

Chapter 1 – Regrowth

Grummus' jaw dropped as he watched the missiles impact Zar at five different locations. In mere moments, the explosions caused shockwaves as the payload did its job. Circles grew larger from each of the impact zones, the terraforming bombs erasing all fauna in their path. He was witnessing the destruction of Zar, the home world of the Saranus. Billions of lives were being snuffed out in a matter of minutes. Tears ran down his cheeks as he watched, powerless. He clenched his teeth and dug his fingernails into the palms of his hand. The planet's atmosphere changed abruptly, causing the planet's former greens, browns and blues to transform into a lifeless grey hue. He shifted his gaze to the one responsible for this heinous act of genocide. The man had dark, purple skin; golden white eyes, with no visible pupil; white spiky hair, pointy ears, and a vicious grin smeared across his face. His name was Rüz Numera. Someone he had once considered to be one of his best friends. The Patriarch of the Kevar had called him the Destroyer of Worlds. Intending irony, Kos' words had become the truth. Grummus couldn't grasp it. How could the destruction of a world and the killing of billions of innocents be justified?

Grummus started as he gasped for air. It was like waking up from a terrible nightmare. His bright green eyes scanned the area quickly. He was back in the grove. He had no idea how much time had passed exactly, but judging from the way the light came through the thick, layered canopy he had been meditating for more than two hours. The lush grass beneath his bare feet felt soft and soothing. Grummus stretched his back as he got up. He felt stiff from the long session. He was alone, save for some Wyngayan squirrels and cheerfully chirping birds. Reaching down for his straw hat he pulled it firmly over his thick, blond hair. Looking up, he collected his thoughts for a moment. His meditations had not given him the solace and answers he had sought. Even in the presence of old Mulgayus his journey into his subconscious had left him lost and

without answers. Many of the Elders had told him that deep meditation would eventually yield results. Perhaps it was just impatience, or perhaps he didn't believe enough in meditation, or in himself. Maybe his faith in the old Earth Mother was lost and in turn, she had abandoned him. He shook his head. This was not how he was supposed to think. Yet, it couldn't be helped.

As he walked out of the grove, his mind wandered to the time when he was still aboard the *Sprite Darter* after their escape from Gan'darra. Shortly after Rāz had issued the order for the missiles to be launched, he had been escorted away to a safe place, for his own protection. Zar'kiln, the child Emperor had tried his best to explain to Grummus why these drastic measures had to be taken. He had heard the words, but they felt hollow and meaningless. All he remembered was an ancient Scarowyn mantra; *all life is sacred*. He had repeated it over and over until his mind had gone numb.

The remainder of the *Sprite Darter* crew had flown the ship back to the Bastion and after a debriefing, Grummus and the others were relieved of duty. He had submitted his resignation from the Alliance fleet at that time. That was over a year ago and he had returned to Wyngaya as soon as he could book a flight from the Bastion.

The Elder Council had decided that he should take a leave of absence and come to terms with what had transpired. Although he was reluctant at first, he realized that he needed to process everything that had happened over the past five years. The resurgence of the Shaedon, the fall of Netherea, their confrontation with the Architect and the subsequent destruction of Zar. He had barely finished his Rite of Ascension and he had been thrown into the deep recesses of space. It had proven to be a cold, dark place indeed.

"Much on your mind, eh?" came a croaking, but warm voice.

Grummus barely avoided bumping into the Elder crossing his path. He smiled at the elderly man uncomfortably and nodded.

"Excuse me, Elder Woodbine."

“There is no need to excuse yourself, young one. Come, walk with me.”

Grummus walked hesitantly beside the Elder along the only path leading out of the grove and back to the ancient world tree, Mulgayus. He remained silent, not entirely sure what the old man wanted from him.

“Your meditations seem to focus solely on the past,” said Woodbine, glancing sideways at him.

Grummus took a few seconds to think before speaking.

“Yes, I can’t really help it. My mind keeps wandering back to one specific moment...”

Woodbine stopped and, turning towards Grummus, his bright, blue eyes met his. Not just looking at him, he seemed to perceive his entire essence. It was a strange sensation. The Elder grabbed him by the shoulders.

“I know. I’ve witnessed it too. Your meditations, your memories. Listen, my son, you cannot keep dwelling on the past. It’s been over a year now. Life goes on. We can choose to accept that which is in the past, or we can relive it countless times, but I think you will agree with me that the latter won’t give you the answers you seek.”

Woodbine gently loosened his grip and Grummus looked down and back at him.

“I- I don’t know how...”

A friendly grin appeared on the Elder’s thickly bearded face.

“Acknowledgement of your problems is a good first step. That, and a change of scenery, I would think.”

Grummus hurried after Woodbine who continued down the path.

“A change of scenery?”

Woodbine nodded.

Grummus’ expression shifted to somewhere between uncertainty and anxiety.

“It is time, son.”

“But, what about my meditations?”

Woodbine shrugged.

“What about them?”

“Well, shouldn’t I at least have had some sort of vision or something... anything other than what I’ve experienced up to now? I thought that was the main idea of having me come here.”

The warm, friendly smile reappeared on Woodbine’s face.

“People come here for many reasons. Some just want to enjoy the solitude, others come to meditate and then there are those seeking answers...”

Grummus frowned. “You mean... me?”

Woodbine pursed his lips and stroked his beard as he stopped walking.

“Well, you were seeking answers, were you not?”

“Yes, I was. I am.”

“Then how come in all this time here, you have found none? Surely there must be some lying about in the grove?” asked the Elder, sounding surprised at Grummus’ reply.

“Answers don’t just lie about...”

“They don’t? Well, that explains a thing or two, then.”

The Elder laughed heartily and Grummus glared at him.

“What’s so funny? I’ve spent nearly a year in this place and I didn’t find any answers.”

“Because you were looking in the wrong place. I mean no disrespect, Grummus, but we had hoped you would find out for yourself eventually. The fact that you keep trying tells us a lot about your personality, but the time has come for change.”

They reached a fork in the path. A signpost indicated that Mulgayus was located to the right, while the city and spaceport were the other way. Woodbine waited in the middle and turned towards him.

“Rest for today, young one. I will send someone to collect you tomorrow.”

* * *

As Earthmaster, Grummus had enjoyed the hospitality of the Elders living in and around Mulgayus. He had been given small quarters at one of the other great trees surrounding the ancient world tree. It was a simple

room with a small regeneration alcove that allowed him to rest and draw nutrients from the tree itself. Everything inside the room was made of natural materials and most of the furniture was still part of the tree itself. The Wyngayan woodbenders simply 'asked' the tree to take shape in certain forms and thus the inhabitants of the tree lived in perfect harmony with it. Of course, the entire process of transmogrification took ages to complete. It was not without reason that there was a saying: 'to have the patience of a woodbender'.

Grummus usually woke up close to sunrise, but he had spent the entire previous evening wondering what the Elders had in store for him. He wasn't sure he was ready for change. He started when someone banged on the door rapidly three times.

"Grummus, are you there? Grumps wake up!"

He heard the muffled voice of a young woman standing on the other side. From the sound of it, she had been at the door for some time already.

"Coming!"

He rose to his feet and, slowly unlocking the door, he opened it.

"There you are. I was beginning to think you weren't home."

Grummus found Sedora standing in front of him. She was barely half his height and he smiled down at her, but she was clearly not as cheerful as he was.

"Hi Sedora, what's going on?"

The Gald woman's green face told him enough. Her hawk-like eyes shot daggers at him.

"Were you still sleeping? It's almost noon!"

"I'm sorry..."

"Elder Woodbine sent me to come pick you up. It sounded important. Come on, hurry!"

She pulled him by his arms and he nearly toppled over the doorstep.

"Wait, I still need to get dressed properly. I can't go to the council wearing this!"

Sedora regarded him from head to toe. "You could be right," she giggled. "Okay, I'll give you five minutes, but you better hurry. I don't want to disappoint the Elders."

"Fine! Just don't be such a drama queen," said Grummus sighing as he turned around to change into his official Earthmaster robes. He hadn't worn them since before the mission to Zar. Holding them up, he felt a strange sensation of unease and anxiety. They still fitted perfectly though.

Sedora's eyes widened with excitement when she saw him coming through the door in his official attire.

"You look good."

"Thanks," he blushed.

"Good to go, then?"

He quickly grabbed his straw hat and shoved it on his head.

"Yep, let's do this..."

It had been a long time since Grummus had stood before the grand door leading into the Elders' chamber. They were ushered in by a guard. The door opened of its own accord to reveal them all already seated at their respective places. Grummus noticed that the seat that had once belonged to Elder Leafbeard was now taken by Woodbine. Six years ago, Woodbine was already a respected member of the Earthmaster society, but he was mostly known to guide younglings in the way of meditation and he was a great teacher of the mystical arts of magicka. He had been the perfect candidate to become an Elder.

"Please, young ones, come forward," Woodbine said after the door closed behind Grummus and Sedora.

The young Gald woman frowned shaking her head in disbelief.

"Wait, me too?" she asked, her voice shaky and uncertain. She became even more nervous when all the elders turned their heads to face the pair of guests that had just entered.

"Yes, don't be shy. Come forward, please," Woodbine insisted with a warm, welcoming tone.

Sedora looked up at Grummus, who nodded to her. She smiled back at him, briefly.

“You two have a history together?” one of the other Elders asked. Grummus knew that his name was Cacturis, one of the oddest of the Elders. He always wore a sombrero and seemed unused to the climate in this region of Wyngaya.

“That’s correct. Sedora helped me to get back home when I was stuck on Saridia during my Rite of Ascension,” Grummus said.

“And you vouched for her to be trained by Master Tryu, did you not?” asked another Elder, this one unknown to Grummus. He wore a large brimmed hat and sported an enormous moustache, which he was plucking with his right hand.

Grummus nodded at him.

“You never doubted her at all. Why?” Cacturis asked.

“From the moment we first met, I knew Sedora wasn’t your average Gald. She proved it many times during our travels too. I thought she deserved a chance to make something of her life.”

“You two had only met a short time before you vouched for her. How could you have been so sure of her abilities?” asked another Elder called Greentrunks. Grummus had met him before, during his promotion to Earthmaster.

He shrugged.

“Like I said, she had proven herself to be a great help during our journey back home.”

“Yes, but she had helped you with technical skills. How did you know she had the talent to be trained in the use of magicka?” Woodbine asked.

Grummus frowned and stroked his goatee.

“I suppose it was just a hunch. Why are you asking these questions?”

“You have found it impossible to find the answers you seek this past year. How come you can answer most of these simple questions with such ease, Grummus?” Woodbine asked as he rose to his feet. He stepped in front of them, scrutinising them both severely. “It seems to me like you have no trouble at all finding answers and that is why we asked you to come here. You see, there is one question the Elders need an answer to. It regards young Sedora here,” he said, gesturing at the Gald girl.

“And which question is that?” asked Grummus, still sounding uncertain about the Elder’s motives.

“Sedora has trained well under Master Tryu’s guidance, but the time has come to test her abilities. It will be your task to judge her and answer the question – ‘is her training complete?’” explained Woodbine as he circled them.

“I’m ready,” whispered Sedora.

“What did you say?” asked Woodbine, looking her straight in the eye. Sedora cleared her throat.

“I said, I’m ready,” she said much louder, and with confidence.

A contented smile appeared across the Elder’s face. He shifted his gaze to Grummus, who gave him a curt nod.

“I’ll gladly accept,” Grummus said. He looked down to his right side where Sedora stood.

Her eyes shone with happiness.

“Good. Then you’ll be on your way to Saridia Prime this afternoon. I’m afraid you will have to get there by ship. As the Netherea situation is still unstable, we are unable to summon portals to locations as distant as Saridia” said Elder Cacturis, ending in a sombre tone.

Grummus and Sedora gave each other puzzled looks, then turned around to face Cacturis.

“You’re serious? This afternoon?” Grummus asked, completely thrown off guard.

“You’re not busy, are you?” Cacturis asked, winking at him.

“I suppose not...”

“Then it’s settled!” Woodbine said excitedly.

“We’ll have transportation arranged for the two of you. Please make sure you’re at the spaceport towards the end of the afternoon. You’ll have some time to prepare for your travels,” said Elder Greentrunks.

Sedora and Grummus bowed respectfully to the Elder council.

“You’re dismissed. May the Earth Mother guide you both,” said Woodbine as he waved them away with a hearty smile.

* * *

Grummus watched through the Saridian cargo freighter window as they blasted into space from the spaceport closest to Mulgayus. Once they were far into outer space, Wyngaya looked like a bright, green marble with swirls in shades of blue. Although he had seen his home world from space on multiple occasions now, it still left him in awe. Sedora joined him and they watched the planet getting smaller and yet smaller, until it was nothing but a small dot in a black canvas dotted with diamonds.

“So, I guess it’s just us two now, then, eh?” she asked cautiously.

It seemed to her that Grummus was reluctant to leave his home. Although grateful for everything he had done for her, she could tell that his experiences in the Empire had changed him. He hadn’t been his cheery self lately and she regretted that. Secretly, she vowed to cheer him up as much as she possibly could. Surely there was still enough left to be happy about in this Universe. Of course, her own life had taken a turn for the better, so she had reason to be grateful. She was certain that she could make Grummus see that there was enough to be positive about.

“Oh, I’m sorry, did you say something, Sedora?” Grummus asked, looking at her as if he had just woken up from some terrible nightmare.

She grabbed one of his hands with both of hers and looked him in the eye.

“I said, it’s just us two now. Are you okay? You seem distracted.”

Grummus shook his head. He gently patted her hands before letting both of them go.

“It’s nothing... Or well, it’s just that I haven’t been on a spaceship in almost a year. I guess it just feels a bit strange.”

“It’s been a while for me too, but I’m kind of glad we’re headed back to Saridia. It feels a bit like going home after a long holiday” Sedora said, shifting her gaze to the stars shooting by the window.

Grummus hmm’d and nodded his agreement.

“I forgot that Saridia was your home before all of this. Do you still have your own place there?”

“Nah, I abandoned all that I had. I’m pretty sure they will have got rid of all of my old junk and rented the apartment to someone else by now.

It wasn't much to begin with. It just feels right to have a completely new start, I guess," she said, giving him a look that betrayed some regret.

"Sounds to me like you're not entirely sure about your decision," he said, more a question than a statement.

She shrugged.

"I dunno, maybe. I did leave some things behind that I could have kept. Pictures and some gifts from my brothers, perhaps."

"We could have a look once we get there? Who knows, maybe they didn't throw it all away? Maybe they asked your brothers to store your stuff for you?" Grummus suggested.

He pushed himself off from the windowsill and turned around, then walked towards the nearby table in the mess hall.

"You wouldn't mind? I mean, we're not exactly on a pleasure trip to Saridia."

"We'll find some time, I'm sure," Grummus said, seating himself at the table.

Sedora sat opposite him.

There was currently no one else in the mess hall. It wasn't a large room, but it was where everyone would gather throughout the day to share meals and relax while the ship was on auto-pilot. The centre of the room was occupied by a large oval bar slash table surrounded by eight chairs bolted to the floor at fixed locations. One wall was lined with cupboards and food dispensers. A simple spoken order to the mess hall computer conjured up pretty much anything one desired.

Other than the captain, there were three in the ship's crew. One was designated to the engineering section. The other two were chiefly responsible for keeping an eye on the cargo and for maintenance work. As the cargo ship was over thirty years old, many of its subsystems were starting to degrade, which meant the crew had ample work, but otherwise the ship was still in good condition and met every safety standard the Alliance demanded for any spacecraft. Without a proper licence, it would have been grounded, or possibly even dismantled.

“Grumus, can I ask you something?” said Sedora, after what seemed like one of the longest, awkward silences she had ever experienced. All this time, he had just been sitting there, staring at the table and she had hesitated to speak.

“Sure, of course,” he answered, giving her as warm a smile as he could muster.

“You don’t mind coming along, do you? It feels as if you’re not happy being my examiner.”

Grumus frowned and eyed her thoughtfully.

“Of course I’m happy to be your examiner. Why wouldn’t I be?”

“I dunno. Your mind seems to wander constantly. You’ve changed, I guess.” The words felt heavy to Sedora.

Grumus’ gaze went back to the table’s shiny surface, as if the answers were somewhere along the curved lines of the faux oak. He took a deep breath and sighed before answering.

“I apologise Sedora,” he said, looking straight into her brightly shining, yellow eyes.

“I don’t mean to be like this. It’s just...I’ve spent the past year on Wyngaya, hoping to find some answers, only to find out that there aren’t any. I suppose I just realised that maybe I’ve wasted an entire year on self pity. How sad is that?” he asked sullenly.

Sedora shrugged.

“Look at it this way. It took me a whole lot longer to learn that I was wasting my life being a criminal. We all get a second chance, if we allow ourselves to. I don’t see how this is any different. I may not have experienced what you’ve been through and it must have been horrible. A year to process all of that doesn’t seem that long to me.” Sedora made sure she kept her gaze fixed on him. The look in his eyes had changed a little, at least. He seemed to be back with her now. Instead of somewhere deep inside his own mind.

“Maybe you’re right,” he said, sounding a lot more confident.

“Who knows, going back to Saridia might be just the break you need as well?”

Grumus looked at her as if he suddenly realised something. His eyes glinted.

"You know what? I remember that I made a promise to someone, somewhere... around the time when we first met. I promised that we would return one day and make things right. That we would help Saridia."

"Really, who?"

"His name was Somin. He was an old fisherman I happened to run into by chance. If it weren't for him we would've had a lot more trouble getting off Saridia, back then. I'm starting to think you're right. This might just be what I need." Grummus sounded almost cheerful.

An enthusiastic grin was smeared across Sedora's face.

"You're starting to sound a lot more like the Grummus I used to know."

* * *

Grummus and Sedora entered the large semi-circular bridge from the turbolift once the door slid open and were greeted with curious frowns from the ship's captain and one of the other crew members, a female Saridion. They had apparently been in conversation together, but had stopped talking the moment they noticed the odd pair entering the room.

"Ah, eh sir Grummus, I mean Master Grummus," said the Saridian captain, quickly correcting himself and fidgeting with the datapad he was holding. He stepped forward and extended a hand.

Grummus slapped it, knowing it to be Saridian custom not to shake, but to slap hands. First the inside, then the outside, gently, but still firmly.

The captain seemed both surprised and confused that a Scarowyn knew his people's custom.

"Just Grummus will do, Captain Olugg."

A nervous grin appeared on the small, blue-skinned humanoid's face. He seemed to be at a loss for words for a moment.

"Right. You don't mind me calling you Master Grummus, do you?"

"Of course not. If that is your preference."

“What brings you two to the bridge, if I may ask?” Olugg tugged at his uniform, which seemed to creep up constantly over his slightly bulging belly. Grummus guessed he was somewhere in his midlife.

“Sedora and I were a bit bored sitting in the mess hall, so we decided to have a look here. I hope we’re not interrupting anything?”

Olugg pouted and curtly shook his head.

“You’re welcome to spend some time here, if it pleases you. As long as you don’t get in our way, Master Grummus,” Olugg added apologetically.

“You’ll barely notice we’re even here,” Sedora said, giving the captain a sly wink.

Olugg gave her a blank stare, responding curtly to her sassy remark.

“Right.”

“Shall we get back to our maintenance report, Captain?” the Saridion woman asked. She was still young and to Grummus it looked as if she worked out regularly. Most of the Saridions he had met were all small and plump.

“Of course, Miss Zirra” said Olugg with a nod, “let’s get back to it. Excuse us, Master Grummus, Miss Sedora. And please, refrain from touching anything,” he said, gesturing for Zirra to follow him to his private office at the rear of the bridge.

As the office door shut with a pleasant hiss and a soft thud, Grummus and Sedora sat themselves down next to the captain’s chair. The viewscreen was displaying their current flight path to Saridia Prime and they studied it for a moment in silence.

“Remember traveling to Wyngaya?” Sedora asked, still focussing on the viewscreen.

Grummus nodded.

“Yeah, seems like a lifetime ago. It was the first time I had travelled on a spaceship. Somehow it doesn’t feel as special or adventurous anymore.” Deep down he regretted that. Exploring space had been a dream of his in the past, but it had shown its dark side and now it didn’t seem as inviting and mysterious as it had once had.

"I dunno about that Grumps. My time on Wyngaya has been great, but space travel is wonderful. There are so many places I still want to see!" said Sedora, enthusiastically.

"I'm afraid my experiences haven't exactly been the best," said Grummus moodily. He gazed down at the floor momentarily, before looking back up at her.

"I know. We're still at war with the Shaedon and all. But you can't help but admit that, despite all the bad things that have happened, good things came from them as well."

Grummus frowned at her.

"Like what?"

"Well, we never would've met otherwise! And the ordeal with the Shaedon has brought the Alliance and Empire closer than ever. You can't deny that," she replied.

Grummus scoffed, but had to admit she was right on both counts.

"Look, I know we're not exactly in the best of places right now, but you can't give up hope! There's so much left to live for. So much left to fight for! If we had all given up, the Shaedon would have seen their plan come to fruition. The only thing to get in their way was a few people with enough courage to stand up to them. You are one of them Grummus. You're one of my personal heroes you know. It kills me to see you like this," said Sedora.

Grummus looked at her with sad, watery eyes.

"I'm not a hero... I'm a coward! I watched him do it. He pressed the button and sentenced all those people down there on Zar to death. I should have stopped him. There had to be another way to stop the Architect. I just couldn't accept it. I could not accept the cold, hard truth. So, instead I just wasted a year of my life, trying to find out why I didn't do anything. Trying to figure out why an entire planet had to be destroyed. How killing all those people would save the rest. I couldn't, Sedora. I couldn't find the answers," Grummus said, his voice trembling. He covered his face with his hands.

Sedora stood and laid her hand on his shoulder.

"I don't think anyone really knows the answer. The Architect may be dead. There's no way of knowing if destroying Zar will save us all, but

other than their activities on Netherea, the Shaedon have been quiet. It looks like they depended on the Architect a great deal. We may have set their plans back years, perhaps even decades.”

Grummus removed his hands from his face. His eyes were red and swollen.

“All life... is... sacred,” he said, his breathing erratic and his voice hoarse.

“So it is. Then let’s not waste yours any more than you’ve already done, eh?” Sedora retorted.

Grummus gave her a sullen look and nodded.

“Maybe you’re right.”

“I am right. Besides, I need you to give me a passing grade. I’ve studied long enough for the trials. I am ready, but you should be too.”

Sedora pointed a green index finger at him then, hands on her thighs, she grinned slyly. She sounded wise beyond her years in Grummus’ opinion.

“Thank you, Sedora. I needed that,” Grummus said. He rose to his feet, wiped his tears with his sleeve and turned to the exit.

“Let’s go play a game. I wouldn’t mind killing some time on something more trivial. Besides, the flight will take a while,” he said.

* * *

It was the dry season in Herzenflag. The Saridian sun had just set and its last rays graced the large cliffs of the small backwater. The town had grown quite popular over the years, especially after the Scarowyn had taken a special interest in restoring the surrounding area and tackling pollution. As a result, the town square had expanded practically beyond recognition. The old space port had been turned into a casino and hotel, and a new spaceport had been constructed a bit further outside the town boundaries. Captain Olugg had just finished docking the spacecraft and they were awaiting orders from ground personnel, to disembark.

Two Saridion docking assistants and a Gald administrator were already awaiting the disembarking party when they walked down the ramp of the freighter and onto the landing platform.

“Manifesto. And hurry, we ain’t got all day,” snapped the Gald administrator curtly.

Grummus was surprised that the captain didn’t seem at all bothered by the Gald’s rudeness. Instead he handed him the datapad with the manifesto with a friendly smile on his face and nodded at him respectfully as he walked on, down the ramp. The others followed him.

“Never let any Gald ruin your day,” Captain Olugg said. He threw a sideways glance at Sedora and gave her a wry smile.

“No offence, Miss Sedora,” he said apologetically.

She sniggered.

“None taken. We do have a similar saying, you know?”

“How’s that go?” Olugg asked.

“Never let any Saridion ruin your day,” she answered, with a friendly smile.

“Fair enough,” said the captain. He reached for his vest pocket and took out a small credit chit.

“Before we part ways, I want you two to have this,” he said, handing the datapad to Grummus.

The Earthmaster inspected the device before storing it in a front pocket of his shoulder bag.

“How much is on it?” he asked curiously.

“Oh, nothing much. One of the Elders told me to be sure and hand it to you when we got here. It should be enough to support your stay for the next few weeks. Probably more.”

“Thank you Captain Olugg, your hospitality is most appreciated,” Grummus said, tipping his hat to the small, rotund Saridion who bowed his head graciously

“It is always a pleasure to serve the Scarowyn. Have a safe and pleasant stay on our fair world. I’ll be off to the local watering hole now, if you don’t mind.”

“Of course, may your plants take root and flourish,” Grummus said politely.

“Thank you, kind sir,” Olugg said as he hurried towards the exit.

A minute later Sedora and Grummus found themselves on the old town square of Herzenflag. It was still recognisable, but the number of establishments seemed to have doubled. The old space port especially had become a real eye-catcher since being turned into a casino and hotel. Bright, neon lights covered the broad entrance. It was clear that the owners were Gald, as two large statues of Gald dressed in extravagant clothing adorned either side of the entrance.

“Wow, this place has seen better days,” remarked Sedora as they walked past the casino.

Grummus gawked at the seemingly superfluous golden décor.

“I never understand things like this...” he whispered to himself.

“I do. Or did, I have to say. It all seems so insignificant when greed is no longer your main purpose in life,” she said.

Grummus sniggered.

“What?” said Sedora, poking him.

“It’s just so funny to hear those words coming from you. You were such a different girl when we first met.”

Sedora gave him a friendly smile.

“I guess so,” The look on Grummus’ face changed to one of sudden realisation.

“You know what? Remember that I told you I’d once made a promise to an old friend here? He lived not far from where we are now.”

“Who?”

“Somin, that old fisherman I told you about earlier.”

“Want to go and pay him a visit?” Sedora asked excitedly.

“I did promise I would return some day. I suppose now would be as good a time as any. It’s down this way, if I remember correctly,” said Grummus, motioning for her to follow.