

CHAPTER ONE: HOMELAND

When a man cannot call a place his home, a people his people, then he is pretty much the lesser for it. Eric Wayne had known such a homeland, had basked in the richness of those who cared for him. But Eric Wayne was dead, and the world that had first known him, the world he remembered as Earth, had passed into the back of his mind, though it would not, could not be entirely forgotten. It had been left behind a short time ago—or perhaps a millennium. A hundred light years away, maybe a thousand—or maybe no distance at all. Who could know? But it didn't matter. Now there was only Dannus Erekwane, and there was the world called Maldrinium.

My world.

Of one fact only could I be absolutely certain: more than one-and-a-half iums had passed since I first found myself upon the surface of this bleak world, as naked as the day of my birth. Ithantikor, largest of Maldrinium's three moons, had been nearly full when I first wore the chains of the Red Tuels upon my wrists and ankles. Since that time it had vanished completely once, marking one full rotation, and now was slightly more than half full. Even in this partial state it appeared far more imposing than Xava, its sister, or its diminutive brother Oriot.

Nearly three akiums ago the *New Hope II* had sailed into the harbor near Cheleqin, the Jennithusian people lining the shore as it glided between many well-provisioned vessels, all ready at a moment's notice to cross the Straits of Zeer and assist their kev in what would have been a hopeless battle against the might of the Green Tuels. But the warships did not depart; instead, they resumed their utilitarian function as a fishing fleet within mygs, for the news from the Tuelian Continent brought much relief. The Green Tuels had been crushed, and the menace to the Jennithusian Continent—to all of Maldrinium—had been prevented.

The Jennithusians, a practical people, did not dance in the streets of Cheleqin at the news brought to them by Dencentus, their kev. This was at best a bittersweet victory. The crew of the original *New Hope*, reduced to mindless vegetables over the iums, had perished in the explosion that leveled Arrartet. Zeer, a great kev and the father of Dencentus, had sacrificed his life in the destruction of the Green Tuels, as had the revered Jennithusian scientist Seviarus Tarrinor, father of my own beloved Marana. In the Endless Forest of the Tuelian Continent Seviarus had united Marana and me in the eyes of Hammot, the seemingly universal Maldrinium deity, and even now I still grieve for him as one would his own dad. He had done much for the Jennithusian people and would be sorely missed, though his work would be ably continued by his son Vassio, who had shared in our adventure.

Once Dencentus had related our exploits on the Tuelian Continent to the Jennithusians, there was little that these grateful people would not do for us. For me, an outsider, their reception was especially warm. The name of Dannus became known to all, and my beard, as well as my slightly darker complexion, made me easily identifiable. But I admit that this praise became a constant source of embarrassment to me, and I vainly sought to play down my role, which had been no greater than that of the others. Still, I was a novelty among these fair-skinned people. The destruction of Arrartet became a game played in the streets and fields by Jennithusian children, and Marana would laugh as she saw me turn red while watching many of the youngsters sporting mock beards, manufactured from the wool of the *grik*.

Dencentus, despite his lofty position, was a personable young man, and a strong friendship developed between us on the lengthy voyage across the Straits of Zeer. I took every opportunity to tell the young kev of a dear friend that had been left beneath the rubble of Arrartet, one whose help and unquestioning loyalty were the primary factors in our reaching the city in the first place. Mezzax, the False Tuel, maligned and despised by his own people in his lifetime, would in death be loved and honored by thousands who never knew him, and by three who did. No statues would be built, for this was not the way of the Jennithusians. City streets, halls of learning, fishing vessels—all these now bore his name. In Zitthus, on the western coast, and in Pecctan, far to the north, the name of Mezzax became an integral part of the lore regarding the

destruction of the Green Tuels. On the shore of the Tuelian Continent I had made this vow, and with pride I saw it carried out.

The key, reunited with Tammia, his lake, upon our return, would have gladly granted us anything that we desired. Vassio asked simply for larger quarters to be built adjacent to the Tarrinor home on the shore of a nearby lake, so as to allow greater flexibility in carrying out new experiments. Dencentus gladly approved this and promised the young scientist a limitless supply of materials and skilled assistants.

Before making a decision regarding our future, Marana and I borrowed a sturdy sloop from Dencentus and set sail down the eastern coast of the continent. Marriage was a functional ceremony for the most part among the Jennithusians, and the concept of a honeymoon was unknown. But Marana, who had learned much of my past life, found the prospect exciting, and for the next twenty-five or thirty mygs (we somehow lost count) we spent a joyous time together. For a short while we anchored off the gentle beach of Tapi, one of the Jennithusian isles near the southern coast. But news of our exploits had preceded us there, and the shore became lined with people seeking a glimpse. We said our tactful farewells and returned to the sea.

Though not far from the coastline, the beautiful tropical island of Tydara was sparsely inhabited, and here, within the confines of a sparkling blue lagoon, my Jennithusian beauty and I came to know each other better than we could have ever dreamed of. We had not doubted our love for each other before and, if possible, it had only become strengthened during our time on Tydara.

We returned to Cheleqin, the principal city on the Jennithusian Continent, so named in honor of the beloved of Jennithus. A *city*? By the standards of my past life it was not much of a metropolis, even paling in comparison to the once-mighty Arrartet. Though quite large, housing many within its low walls, it was little more than utilitarian. Drab brick and sturdy wood comprised the primary construction materials, with even the key's "palace," the largest structure within the walls, being scarcely noticeable. Besides the countless small dwellings there were merchants' shops, halls of learning, artisans' galleries, warehouses, and inns. Nearly all who lived within the walls also worked there, save for some of the fishermen. If one could say nothing for the aesthetics of the city, it could at least be noted that the residents kept it spotlessly clean.

Crime was hardly a factor in Cheleqin, or for that matter on much of the Jennithusian Continent. There was no official police force or security guard. Citizens within the walls were responsible for safety in their particular sector, and they saw to it that any trouble was avoided. None carried weapons, though one warehouse was full to overflowing due to the escalation in production prior to the return of Dencentus. Jennithusian arms consisted of swords, pikes, taper axes, and even small catapults, weapons similar to those used by the Black Tuels of the Endless Forest. These primitive weapons would have stood little chance against the powerful ordnance of the Green Tuels. Seviarus could have given his people such advanced weaponry iums ago, but he and Zeer had agreed that they had little need for them. Now, Dencentus faced an important decision: do the Jennithusians remain in the past defensively, or does Vassio develop such weapons for them to have on hand? True, the designs of the Green Tuels had been checked, but who was to say that another enemy might not arise from some other land on Maldrinium? Yet such weapons breed power, even internal strife, and oftentimes the defender becomes the offender. The issue would not likely be resolved any time soon.

The confining walls of Cheleqin offered little, for I knew that city life was not for me. I asked Dencentus for a small piece of land beyond the walls, where I might work the soil as I once had. Earthling Eric Wayne had given up farming to seek adventure, but to Dannus, the Jennithusian, it seemed a most inviting way of life. Marana shared my feelings about this, which made the prospect all the more pleasant.

Dencentus's gift to us was more than we would have ever imagined. In a fertile valley about fifteen vaiks west of Cheleqin was a large, untapped patch of earth. Fed by underground springs, the soft loam was the richest I had ever seen in my life. There was a small pond in the center of the land, and a copse of elms in one corner. To the south the *fuul* trees grew wildly in abundance, giving us a leg up on a fine orchard. The delectable fruit of this tree, while resembling a nectarine, has a sweet, distinct taste of its own. There were also a few gentle slopes, ideal for water runoff. Even the occasional hills were ideally suited for contour plowing.

Though wild beasts still roamed across the Jennithusian Continent, especially in the desolate Shiib Wilderness to the north, the domesticated animals here were a far cry from the horrors I had observed on the Tuelian Continent. Most important was the *sterr*, a ponderous but gentle ruminant closely resembling an elk. An extra pair of appendages and nearly half a ton of weight made the sterr an essential work animal.

Incredibly fast for its size, a sprint on a sterr proved quite breathtaking. They also produced a sweet, nutritious milk.

Goats, hogs, and ducks were nearly identical with those I had known before, while the chickens, called *wintbs*, were immense, and ill-tempered. But the enormous, tasty eggs they produced made it well worth the care they needed. Meat was provided by the *doirs*, cattle-like beasts of short stature and excessive bulk. The wooly griks, larger than sheep and quite hideous in facial appearance, were among the most gentle of all Jennithusian beasts.

We did not want for any animals, for when news of the farm became known the grateful Jennithusians flocked to the land, none coming empty-handed. Soon we had to tactfully refuse any additional gifts. But the undaunted Jennithusians joined together on a new project, and within ten mygs a fine house and spacious barn had been raised on our land.

The tumult eventually died down, and we embarked on our new lives. I employed a foreman, a capable older man named Dakkis, and from dozens of eager youths Dakkis selected a handful to help in the initial clearing and planting. Despite the dimness of Maldrinium's dying sun the weather stayed warm throughout the ium, for clouds were seldom seen. When they did drift in off the coast, usually at night, they brought rain with them, more than enough for our thirsty crops. With such ideal conditions we planted rows of corn, legumes, potatoes, lettuce, beets, and a delicious fruit called a *noak*, a purple-colored strawberry that grew to the size of one's fist. The fual orchards were trimmed slightly, nut trees transplanted there. In less than an akium we already had a well-organized, bountiful farm.

Vassio had dinner with us at least one myg in ten, more if possible, though his work kept him quite busy. At times Marana would accompany him back to the city, for we had agreed that she should not entirely give up the work she had done all her life. She would remain at the Tarrinor complex no more than two or three mygs at a time, and was as happy to return home as I was to see her. I would then learn of the news from the city, for even fifteen vaiks tends to isolate one from what is happening. During the first akium I rode to Cheleqin only once—to barter for some new equipment—though I did take the opportunity to call on Vassio.

One of the most significant events during the first akium in my new homeland was the news that Tammia now bore a potential heir. Aside from this the weapons debate continued to drag on, with Vassio holding himself in readiness to follow through on any decision rendered. But the energetic young scientist did not waste his time while Dencentus and those of his council argued. Experiments with dy-clon, the propulsive element first used to carry Seviarus and the others to the Tuelian Continent, started up again, this time with greater success. Chambers and valves were constructed to withstand the abrasive action of the clonnik. The *Dy-Clon II* was built, a sleek vessel in the mold of its predecessor. Vassio and two aides circled the continent twice, as well as all the southern islands, and the vessel performed flawlessly. The kev, much impressed, commissioned Vassio to apply this method of propulsion for the vast fishing fleet. A big task, to be sure, but one he knew that he could handle, and he was already looking beyond it.

"Think of it, Dannus," he said one evening at our table. "Some myg dy-clon will be adapted for use on land! Visualize fine paved roads crisscrossing the continent, roads like the one that led to the gates of Arrartet, not these rutted sterrways that now exist. Then, think of land vessels traversing these roads at forty, even fifty vaiks each kimyg! A journey to far Pecctan, once endless, would take but a few mygs!"

For a moment he became lost in his visions, while I chuckled inwardly. Marana also smiled, for she knew how little Vassio's words could affect me. She had inherited the gift of peering into one's mind from her father. From the beginning I could hide nothing from her, nor did I ever try. Vassio knew that I came from another world, but that was all. And he never pried, for it was not the Jennithusian way. But Marana had seen everything there was to see, and she shared my private knowledge. She too saw the choked highways and freeways of my past world, saw the blur of great machines whizzing by at astounding speeds. Vassio's dream was a child's toy by comparison.

The Jennithusian Continent was not a land of millions, yet these mostly pastoral people were on the verge of a new era, of that there could be no doubt, and I found something most disheartening about this fact. When technology intervenes and dominates, nothing short of a major catastrophe could ever hope to hurl a people back to the life that they, or their ancestors, once knew. The Jennithusians were only a few hundred iums removed from the life of primitive nomads. Where would they be in another hundred iums, or

two hundred? Marana, who loved nature as much as life itself, knew what I felt, and her smile faded. Vassio never noticed.

Within mygs these depressing thoughts had all but disappeared, for our lives were happening *now*, and we had much to live for. Marana returned to the city with Vassio less often, never staying more than a myg or two. Despite her heritage she had found the life she loved, the life she had always feared to admit that she wanted. Vassio kidded us regarding this, but he came to understand the reasons for his sister's waning interest. A brother's natural reaction might have been one of jealousy, but that was not him. Besides, he knew his strong-willed sister as well as anyone and realized that the choice was hers alone. That I happened to love my new homeland as much as she did was only coincidental.

And what of the Jennithusian Continent, this place that I now proudly claimed as my home? What had I seen of it? What did I know of it? I knew Cheleqin, had sailed along the extreme southeastern coast, had anchored alongside two of the eight islands. But that was all. I did not believe myself to be a restless soul anymore, for had I not transcended time and space—and death—to arrive here initially? Had I not fought across the length of an immense continent to help save a world? Yeah, my wanderlust was more than satisfied, and yet...I felt that I should know my homeland.

On many a beautiful warm night, while sprawled on the soft earth in front of our cottage, Marana would tell me about the Jennithusian Continent. Smaller than the vast Tuelian Continent, it measured more than eight hundred vaiks across at its widest point, and eleven to twelve hundred vaiks from the northern coast to the southern shore. Fertile valleys and gentle, rolling hills accounted for much of the land area, with a nearly tropical climate prevailing throughout. Only in the Larakin Woods or the Hills of Jennithus would one find cooler weather. It was also likely that the lofty Monthok Mountains on the north coast had freezing temperatures, though this range had never been explored as far as anyone knew. Sheer cliffs made them inaccessible from the seaward side, while on land it meant traversing the dreaded Shiib Wilderness, a bleak prospect.

The North Manakath River, which has its beginnings in the Hills of Jennithus, twists and turns across the width of the continent before emptying into the Tekobian Sea. This river is considered the dividing line between the northern and southern sectors of the continent. Strangely, not a single city sits along its bank, while only one city, Walica, is located along the Lower Manakath River, which flows southward to the sea. A network of underground streams and wells provide more than enough to all the Jennithusian cities, regardless of their location.

Despite the vast distances between the Jennithusian cities, all the citizens are fiercely loyal to their kev in Cheleqin. They are taxed fairly, and they seldom want for much. The kev visits all the cities on the continent at least once in an ium, so that the people would not feel isolated. He mingles with them, listens to their needs, acts on them whenever possible. This practice had been carried on successfully since the beginnings of recorded Jennithusian history, interrupted only during the iums that Zeer spent as prisoner of the Green Tuels. Even then the regency council, along with young Dencentus, visited the cities whenever they could.

There are only eleven cities on the continent, as well as the eight southern islands. Each is governed by a vurakev (literally, "officer of the kev"), a strong figure responsible only to the kev and the council. Only Cheleqin has no vurakev, the council taking on such tasks as are performed by these officers. No small towns of any sort exist, for the radius of each of the cities is vast. The sphere of Cheleqin, for example, extends about one hundred vaiks in all directions (except the sea, of course). One who lives fifty vaiks north of the city is from Cheleqin, as is one seventy vaiks south, though they are hardly neighbors. The city of Bulth claims the largest sphere of all the cities, a radius of one hundred and fifty vaiks.

Fishing is the primary occupation of the seven coastal cities and the islands. Though doirs are raised for their meat, the Jennithusians eat very little of it, fish being their staple food. The four inland cities receive their fish from the others, since the taking of lake or river fish is forbidden under the laws of Hammot. In turn, these cities have much to offer. Bulth, Sellak, and Walica proudly boast of their mining operations, which provide the continent with valuable metals and other useful minerals. Each of the cities is a center of manufacturing, many of the finest artisans residing in them. Distant Pecctan, with no mines, provides many of the invaluable sterrs to the land.

Such is the Jennithusian Continent, my new home, three hundred iums after Jennithus walked the land. It seemed quite tame when compared to the rugged, deadly Tuelian Continent onto which I had first been

thrust. But this hardly troubled me, for I felt pleased with my homeland and my exceptional woman. Danger and wild adventure would be nothing but memories for me from now on.

Or so I thought.