

THIRTY DAYS

by

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(for NaNoWriMo 2010)

I am writing 'Thirty Days' for National Novel Writing Month 2010. I am also writing it to raise money for charity. The specific charity that I want to help is St Luke's Hospice (Harrow and Brent). They provide care and support to terminally ill patients and their families from the Harrow and Brent areas of north London, regardless of their background. In May 2009 my father sadly passed away, but his final days were made more comfortable by St Luke's, and I'm grateful for the care that they gave him and the support that they gave to my family. And so I would like to raise some money for them as my way of saying thanks. You can find out more about St Luke's via their website at www.stlukes-hospice.org

If you would like to sponsor me you can do so via my Just Giving page at www.justgiving.com/karlsgreen I and St Luke's will be grateful for anything that you're able to give.

And finally, I've also set up a page on Facebook about the novel where I'll be posting any news about what I'm doing, and you can find it at <http://bit.ly/9OfC6p>

This file, and all other chapters, will be made available on my website at <http://www.karlsgreen.co.uk/thirtydays> You may freely distribute this file subject to the following two conditions:

1. You do not alter the file in any way, shape, or form.
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DAY THREE

THE LEDGE

Whilst the All Seeing saw her as a threat, they also saw her as beautiful. The All Seeing were used to seeing things that were unchanging. What once was will be again, and what will be has been before. But when a random element such as her arrives, things change. What once was may not be again, and what will be may not have been before. And, to the All Seeing, something new is also something beautiful.

However, they also see something new as something threatening. Something new can not be determined. Something new can not be controlled. Something new has to be dealt with, in order to preserve the order.

And so they sent the Other to the new world that she was now on. The Other was to find her, and was to deal with her, to preserve the order, and thus preserve the All Seeing.

She was able to sense this Other, and was able to prepare for its arrival.

The Apocolynium – III

Steve and Natasha did not sleep soundly that night. Once again they both had the same dream. It was a dream where they were falling from a great height.

Lisa and her party walked all through the night. It was already dawn by the time they approached the gates to the great city of Practor. The gates were closed, and there were guards on duty.

‘OK,’ said Parto, ‘We’re here. Now how do we get in? Is there a tree nearby?’

Lisa gave him a look that quite clearly meant that there was no tree. Without saying a word she turned around, and approached the guards.

The Head Guard approached her and asked her, ‘Who are you, and what business do you have here at this hour?’

Lisa smiled at him and said, softly, ‘My name is Lisa, and you will let me and my party in.’

The Head Guard looked at her for a while, and then said to the other guards, ‘Open the gates.’

Lisa curtsied and said, ‘Thank you.’

Parto turned to Gramshaw and said, ‘How does she do that?’

Gramshaw replied, ‘Wouldn’t you open a gate if she came up to you and asked you to?’

Once the gate was fully opened they passed through it. Once they were in Lisa turned to the guards again and said, ‘And now you will forget.’ She waved her hand in front of them as she did so. They then all had blank expressions on the faces, as though they had just awoken from a dream. And indeed that’s exactly what they thought. After his shift ended the Head Guard returned home to his wife. He said that he must have dozed off during the night as he swore that he had had a dream about Lisa from the legends, only that she was more beautiful than he had

ever imagined her to be. His wife's reaction was to simply not be impressed by the fact that he was dreaming about beautiful women that weren't her.

Once they were inside the city Lisa quickly moved them all away from the gates. 'OK,' said Parto, 'We're here. Now, what are we supposed to do?'

'We go up,' said Lisa.

'Up? Up where?'

Lisa simply looked up at the citadel.

'I hope you don't mean *all* the way up there.'

'I'm afraid so.'

Parto looked up and gulped. 'I've never been good with heights, you know.'

'You'll be fine, now, come on.'

As they walked through the city, which was extremely quiet at this time in the morning, Prion asked Lisa, 'How will you get us into the citadel? Will you be able to do the same thing that you did with the guards on the gate?'

Lisa shook her head. 'No, I can only safely do that with a small group of people. There'll be a much larger group at all of the entrances to the citadel itself, not to mention a large concentration of citizens who might see us as well.'

'So how will we get in?'

'I know of a way. I don't think Parto will like it though.'

Parto's ears pricked up at the mention of his name. 'What won't I like?'

Lisa just smiled and kept on walking.

'Come on, don't be like that! What is it that I won't like?'

Sarna then said, 'Just go with the flow, Parto, just go with the flow.'

After they had been walking for about ten minutes they came across a gate that blocked the street. These gates were used to help keep order in the city. Everyone had to make sure that they were within their own neighbourhoods by no later than their equivalent of about 11pm by your clocks. At that time the gates were closed, shutting off the neighbourhoods from each other, and no one was permitted to pass through them. Everyone was expected to return to their homes for the night. Whilst it wasn't a crime to be in a different neighbourhood to your own when the gates were shut, if that did happen it meant that you weren't able to return to your own home that night, and so unless you had a bed available to you in the neighbourhood that you were in you were forced to sleep in the streets, and that was a crime. So, by and large, most people did go home to their own neighbourhoods. And once they were there most found that they had little more to do than to go home and go to bed. And thus, the Council of Three reckoned, the gates

help to keep order in the city, as well as foster a sense of identity and community within the various neighbourhoods. Whether they were right or not is not really something that I can comment on.

Lisa looked at the gate and said, 'There's nothing more that we can do for now. The gate will be opened before too long.' To their left a local tavern was opening up for the day. Lisa then said, 'Parto, would you like to have some breakfast?'

'I thought you'd never ask!' came the enthusiastic reply.

Lisa smiled at this, and then led the party into the tavern. There were only two other people in there – a large man with a shaggy beard who stood behind the bar, and his wife, a middle aged woman, who was wiping down some of the tables. As the man saw the party walk in he looked at them and said, 'Hello, what have we got here then? You don't look like you're from this neighbourhood, and the gates haven't been opened yet.'

Lisa quickly said, 'We're from out of town. We stayed the night at a friend's house. Unfortunately, he was only able to give us a place to sleep for the night, and can't afford to provide us with breakfast.'

'Aye, and where is your friend now?'

'He has an early shift in the refinery.'

'Well, if you say so. I'm never one to turn down good business. Just as long as I don't get any trouble from the guards by your being here.'

'I assure you, you have nothing to worry about there.'

The man nodded his head, satisfied with the explanation, even if he didn't fully believe it himself. In fact, he wasn't keen to through the party out. He needed the business, and he found Lisa to be much nicer to look at than his own wife. 'So, what can I be getting you?'

'Just five bowls of porridge and a large jug of water with five glasses.' (I should explain here that it wasn't exactly 'porridge' that Lisa ordered – as the plants on Pyna are different to the plants on Earth there are no oats from which to make porridge from. It's just that's the closest thing that you have on your world that corresponds with what it was that Lisa did order – a type of porridge made from a grain that is found on Pyna, although it is quite different to your oats. They are much more nourishing and are already sweetened.)

'Coming right up. It'll be a little while because it's still cooking, but take a seat and I'll bring it out to you once it's ready.'

'Thank you.'

Lisa led them to a table in the far corner, away from all of the windows.

'Couldn't we have had something a bit more than just porridge?' moaned Parto.

Sarna then said, 'Just be thankful for what you're given. It'll be good for you, and give you the strength that we need for today.'

'Speaking of which,' said Prion, 'What is it that we are going to be doing today?'

Lisa was silent for a moment. She then took a deep breath and said, 'There is a man here in Practor who has a very dangerous artefact. An artefact that dates from the same time as what you call "the legends". We have to stop him from using this artefact, otherwise I dread to think about what will happen next.'

'This artefact,' said Sarna, 'Was it something that belonged to Marloki?'

Lisa nodded.

'Whatever happened to Marloki, after you faced it?'

'I really don't know. I had hoped that it would have been banished forever, if there is such a thing as forever. But I fear that may not be the case.'

'You mean Marloki may be coming back?'

At this point the party all fell silent as the barkeepers wife came over carrying a tray with their water and five glasses. 'The porridge will be ready in about another ten minutes.' (Again, you have to allow me some creativity in the translation. They don't measure time in minutes on Pyna, but rather than waste time explaining to you how they do go about measuring time, I've taken the liberty of approximating the time frame to the system that you all use on Earth.)

'Thank you,' said Lisa. Once the women was out of earshot again Lisa continued, 'Yes, Marloki may be coming back. But I fear that if Marloki does come back, things will be far worse than the last time that he was here. There's a lot more at stake this time.'

After a moment of silence Gramshaw said, 'Who is this man who has the artefact?'

'It is a man called Welt.'

'Yes, I've suspected as much.'

Parto asked, 'You've heard of him?'

'Indeed I have, and he truly is an evil man. Officially he works as an advisor to the Council of Three who rule Triceria. But unofficially he runs much of this city, and it is widely believed that he wishes to increase his power, even to the point of taking over the whole of Triceria.'

'What's so bad about that? How will that affect us in Allana? I don't care who rules Triceria.'

Gramshaw sighed. 'You really are a simple man, aren't you Parto?'

'Oi!' said Sarna, 'That's my brother you're talking about.'

'I beg your forgiveness, but it is frustrating when he says something foolish like that. Parto, allow me to explain it in simple terms. You do know about the war that our two countries fought 147 years ago, don't you?'

‘Yes, of course, I’m not stupid, everyone knows about that.’

‘Good. The people of Triceria still feel bitterness about that war, even though there’s no one left alive from that time. They felt that Allana were unjust in taking away their land, which constituted what had been a third of their territory. Since that time Allana has grown in power, and controls much of the world’s trade, whereas Triceria has only just about got by. The Tricerians feel that if their territory were returned to them then they could once again build up their power and become strong once more.’

‘But they have this city, and this citadel. There’s no other building like it in the world! Can’t they be satisfied with that?’

‘The citadel dates from a time long before the war, when Triceria was strong. But tall buildings don’t put food on people’s tables, or clothes on their backs. They are also costly to maintain. The costs that Triceria faces limits the development of the country, which is why they now lag behind Allana.’

‘I see. That’s why this Welt guy wants to get Marloki’s power. He wants to wage war on Allana!’

‘Exactly, I believe that is the case. A Triceria ruled by Welt terrifies me. He is a most cruel man. He’s also involved in Triceria’s justice council, and people have long since lost count of the number of people that he’s sent to be executed, sometimes for the most petty of crimes. I once heard a story that he once sentenced a five year old child to death for stealing a piece of fruit. A five year old! I don’t know if it’s true, but it was rumoured that the allegation was false, and that this was Welt’s way of getting back at the child’s father who had wronged him in some way. He is a disgusting man.’

‘Yes,’ said Lisa, ‘He is. I fear for this world if he should obtain Marloki’s power. Marloki may help him to start a war with Allana, but Marloki would have no interest in helping Triceria regain its lost strength. Marloki is only interested in destruction. And I fear that Marloki is looking at more than just Pyna this time.’

The barkeepers wife returned with a tray holding five bowls of porridge which she set down on the table. The party ate them in silence, as the importance of what it was they had to do that day dawned on them all.

Whilst the party were all eating their breakfast, Welt was eating his from his chambers. His chambers were a long way from the basement where he carried out much of his work. They were about half-way up the citadel on the northern side. He had chosen them specifically. Most people when given a choice of where to live in the citadel would prefer some chambers either on

the east or the west sides of the building, particularly the west where they could see the sun set over the city. (As on Earth, Pyna's sun rose in the east and set in the west.) But Welt specifically wanted to be on the northern side of the building. Here, he was directly below The Ledge, and from his windows he could see the condemned fly past his windows, and could often hear them scream. It gave him a perverse pleasure.

But as he ate his broth he pondered the fact that today it was his turn to go flying past his own window. But to what end? Would he really somehow end up on the Earth? The idea seemed fantastical, but then the whole idea of what the stone could do had seemed fantastical, and he had already seen some of its power. He had been able to kill Black Club through the power of his thoughts alone. He had heard the voice of Marloki through the stone. It certainly hadn't been his own voice that he had heard, and Welt was convinced that he wasn't going insane.

But he still had his doubts. Part of him suspected that there may be a trick being played on him, a trick that could cost him his life.

But the Earth, the Earth. There was no trick there. It had power. A power he wanted. A power he needed. He had to get to the Earth, the Earth, the Earth...

On Earth itself Steve and Natasha were just getting up and pondering on their latest dreams when they both jumped simultaneously. They had received another text message, with the same three words as yesterday: 'Destiny Will Fall'.

Steve was starting to get panicky. He suspected that someone was out to get him. Who and why he had no idea about, but he knew that something was up. He was also frustrated that there was nothing that he could do about it. He didn't know of any way of tracing these text messages back to their origin.

Natasha was a little calmer about the situation. She still believed that this was probably part of some marketing ploy, and so quickly deleted the message and got on with her day.

Both of their days were disrupted because of the strikes that London Underground workers were taking. For Steve, the Bakerloo line was suspended south of Queens Park, and so he had no way of making it to Elephant & Castle. Fortunately, this was a situation that his office was familiar with. Their policy was that if you genuinely couldn't get into the office because of strike action then you could simply get the day off for free. This enabled Steve to focus on his novel, and make up the ground that he had already lost.

As Natasha only had to go as far as Stonebridge Park her travel plans weren't so badly disrupted as the London Overground trains were still running. It meant that she had to get a

later train than she normally did, and the train that she did get on was a lot more crowded than she normally experiences, but she was eventually able to get into work. Her office was also understanding of the situation, and permitted her to leave the office early to try and avoid the rush hour getting back home.

Back in Practor, by the time that Lisa and her party had finished their breakfasts the gates had been opened. Lisa paid for their meal, although no one could quite see where she got the gold coins from about her person. They just seemed to appear in her hand.

Once they had left the tavern there were quite a few people about as the city slowly came to life. There was no Tube strike here to unfairly disrupt and inconvenience everyone's lives.

Parto asked Lisa, 'I take it that Welt is inside the citadel, and so that's where we need to go?'

'Yes, that's right.'

'So how are we going to get in?'

'There is a way that isn't guarded.'

Parto said no more, and Lisa was relieved at this.

Their path slowly took them around the edge of the citadel, towards its northern edge. Eventually, Lisa led them down a back alley, which had steps that led down the side of the citadel. At this point they started to hold their noses as there was a disgusting stench filling the air. Eventually they saw the source of this stench – there was a sewage outlet that led into a stream.

Upon seeing this Parto immediately said, 'This is how we're going to get in?!'

Lisa responded with, 'If you have a better idea then we'll gladly take it up.' After a brief moment of silence she then said, 'Good, then let's go.'

The outlet pipe was low on the ground, and was just large enough for them to crawl through, although by this point the smell was almost unbearable. Without hesitation Lisa went into the pipe first. Prion was about to follow her when Parto pushed in front of him, saying, 'Out of my way. If we have to do this I want to get it out of the way as quickly as possible.' He then dived into the pipe after Lisa, quickly followed by the others.

Fortunately they didn't have far to go before they came out into a chamber that they could stand up in. Unfortunately, the effluent from the pipe was flowing fairly quickly, and it wasn't long until they were all covered in it.

After Parto came out of the end and stood up he looked at Lisa, expecting her to be covered in the stuff they had just crawled through. Only she wasn't. There wasn't a single spot of the stuff on her dress, and her hair, arms, hands, legs, and feet looked exactly the same as they would

have down if she had just come out of a bath. ‘What the...’ Parto said, so much in surprise that he couldn’t even finish his own sentence.

As the others all came out, as covered in the stuff as his was, Parto said, ‘Look at her! She’s completely clean! How does she do that? We’re covered in filth and look like a mess, and she’s completely clean! That can’t be right! That’s not fair! I mean – ’

‘Parto!’ interrupted Sarna. ‘Haven’t you worked out by now that she isn’t like us?’

‘Yeah, but, why do we have to go around looking and smelling like this, and she gets to magic it all away. Lisa, couldn’t you magic all of this off of us? I’m sure you could, I’m sure you know how. I mean, I’m not sure I could help stop Welt if I have to put up with this smell. It’d really be for the good of the world you know. You see – ’

‘Parto!’ This time it was Gramshaw that interrupted. ‘Don’t you ever shut up?’

‘I can do, when I have nothing to say. But I really can’t go on like this. It’s not – ’

This time it was Lisa who interrupted him, but not in a way that he had been expecting. She had walked up to him and kissed him squarely on the lips. As she drew her lips away from his he was finally speechless. ‘Come on,’ she said, ‘We have to get moving. We’re wasting time here. Don’t worry about all of this mess – it’ll be character building.’ She then turned around and started to walk down the passageway.

Parto just stood still whilst the others passed him, not quite believing what had happened. As Sarna passed him she said, ‘Kissed by a goddess, who’d have thought it.’

Parto finally came out of his trance and followed the others, without saying another word.

After a short walk down the passage they came to a ladder with an overhead door at the top of it. Lisa climbed the ladder and waited at the top. Prion, who was immediately behind her, asked, ‘What are we waiting for?’

‘We’re waiting for the path to be clear.’ After about a minute, with no obvious sign that the others could determine that the path was now, indeed, clear, Lisa opened the door, and climbed through it, quickly followed by the others.

Once they were all through Lisa closed the door behind them. They were in a windowless corridor, which was lit by a few candles along the wall. Lisa quickly led them down the corridor, her feet making no sound on the stone floor. A short way down the passage she turned to the right, where they found themselves at the base of a spiral staircase.

She whispered to the others, ‘This will take us all the way to the top floor, it will then only be a short distance to The Ledge. We need to be there by noon, which is still some hours away.’

Gramshaw asked, ‘Do you know how many steps there are here.’

Lisa pondered for a moment and then said, 'It should only be a few thousand, no more than three thousand I should think.'

Gramshaw took in a deep breath. 'Well, I could use the exercise.'

Lisa then started to lead them up the stairs.

After he had eaten Welt made his way silently to the top floor of the citadel. He then went out to The Ledge. There weren't any executions planned for today, and so he knew that he could sit out here alone.

He walked out along The Ledge, and sat down about five metres from its end. From there he looked out upon the world. He could see the canyon below, and even from all the way up here he could hear the sound of the vast river rushing through it. Beyond the canyon he could see the vast plains of Triceria, and, in the distance, the city of Bronton.

He sat there and thought for a very long time. He still wasn't decided as to whether or not he would follow the instructions that the voice from the stone had given him. If the voice was right, then he would find himself on Earth, where he could eventually capture its power which he could then bring back to Pyna and Triceria and achieve everything that he had ever dreamed of.

But if the voice was wrong...

Lisa and the rest of the party were making slow progress up the staircase. There was an opening onto each floor of the citadel, and at each one they had to be careful in case there was anyone else there. All of them knew what would happen to them if they were caught within the citadel. There were a couple of occasions when they found that they had to backtrack and step out onto one of the floors below whilst someone came down the stairs. They were worried that the smell that they had brought with them from the sewer might give them away. But, whilst one or two people who travelled down the stairs commented on smelling something strange to the person that they were walking with, no one followed the smell to its source.

However, after about an hour of climbing, they found an entrance that opened onto a corridor, and on the other side of that corridor was a room with an open door. In that room was a desk. And behind that desk sat a man. A man who had a clear view of the staircase.

'We have to wait,' said Lisa, quietly. 'If we go on that man is bound to see us, if he doesn't smell you first.'

Parto asked, 'Can't you do the same thing with him as you did with the guards at the gate?'

Lisa shook her head, 'No, it's too dangerous here. There are too many people about. We just have to wait, that's all. He can't stay there forever.'

And so they waited...

Welt lost all sense of time out on The Ledge. He was split into two minds. To fall or not to fall. To take a risk or not to take a risk. He could feel the stone in his pocket. As the hours went on the stone seemed to get heavier and heavier.

There was a part of him that wished he had never come across the stone. A part of him that wished that he had never found himself in this position. If he hadn't had found the stone then he would have continued on as he had always done. Yes, he wouldn't have the power that he longed for, and the Council of Three would always be there to get in his way, but things weren't too bad in his life. He still had far more power than most of the people in Triceria.

But he longed for more, he always longed for more. Whatever power he had it was never enough. He had to have more.

He felt that the stone had to have power as well, that it, too, sort it out. Maybe, he wondered, it had been the stone itself that had called out to him, making him dream about its location.

He then started to wonder about who was using who. Was he using the stone to gain more power for himself to bring about the resurgence of Triceria? Or was the stone using him to gain power for itself?

To fall, or not to fall...

Lisa and her party found themselves stuck on the staircase for a very long time. The man at the desk stayed in his seat for a very long time, and didn't seem to give any indication as to when he would be leaving his position. On more than one occasion the party had to move down the stairs due to someone coming down from above. And at one point they even had to rush down in a hurry as quietly as they could when they heard someone coming up the stairs. They all considered themselves to be very lucky that they hadn't been caught.

But time kept flowing away from them. When they had started on their climb they had had plenty of time to get to the ledge by noon. Now their time was running out, and there was actually a risk that they wouldn't make it in time.

Eventually, the man behind the desk did stand up. He held some papers, and walked out of the room and down the corridor. Once he was out of sight Lisa whispered to the others, 'Come on, quickly.' They all started to make their way up the stairs again.

They were barely halfway up the citadel...

Eventually Welt stood up. He looked up to the sky and saw that it was nearly midday. Soon he would have to make a decision one way or another. The voice had insisted that he had to fall at noon. That was therefore the deadline for making his decision. One way or another, he would have to do something by then. If he chose to do nothing, then he was effectively choosing not to follow the voice, and therefore he would be able to get to the Earth to gain its power.

He slowly walked along The Ledge until he was almost at the edge. The wind today was still and calm. On other days there had been unwilling convicts who had been blown off The Ledge by the wind before they were compelled to jump via other means. That wouldn't happen to Welt today. He had to make a conscious decision as to whether or not he would fall..

Lisa and her party were making a considerable effort. They hardly came across anyone else on the higher floors, and were able to make good speed. They started to wonder how much longer their luck would hold out, expecting to be caught at any minute.

They kept climbing higher and higher. Parto, despite his fear of heights, kept looking out the window each time that they came around the spiral. He kept seeing the ground get further and further away from them. Each time he felt that they must surely be near the top by now, and yet the spiral kept going round and round and round.

However, they did, eventually, get to the top. As they did so they stopped and caught their breath. Prion looked at Parto and said, 'Don't worry, if nothing else, the view will be worth it.' Parto was too out of breath to be able to respond to this.

'Come on,' said Lisa, 'It's almost noon. We have to keep going.' She then started to lead them down the corridor, and they followed as best they could. This corridor had large windows on the left hand side, from which the whole of Practor could be seen. However they didn't have time to marvel at the view, which Parto was glad about as it was starting to make him feel nauseous.

Fortunately they didn't come across anyone else along this corridor. After a little while Lisa took them down a side corridor on their right which didn't have any windows on it. At the end of this corridor was a large wooden door. Lisa stopped in front of it and said, 'We're here. I just hope that we're not too late...'

Welt heard the doors open behind them. He wasn't overly surprised by this. He had been half expecting something to happen. He turned around and saw who was passing through the door. He knew exactly who the girl leading the party had to be. 'Lisa. I thought you'd come back.'

'Welt, I know that you have the stone. I also know what it has instructed you to do. You need to know that you don't have to do what it says.'

'How could you possibly know what it has told me to do?'

'I know that it's told you that if you jump off of this ledge whilst holding it out in front of you, you'll be transported to Earth.'

At this point Parto whispered to Gramshaw, 'Earth? Where's that?'

'Damned if I know.'

Welt continued, 'And why shouldn't it take me to Earth? Do you know what is there? Do you know what I could do with the power that is contained there?'

'I know what is there, Welt, but trust me, you won't want it. The cost will be too great.'

'Who are you to say what I do or don't want? I will decide what I want, and what price I'm prepared to pay for it!'

'Listen, Welt, I know that you want to make Triceria strong again. I know that you want to punish Allana for the wrongs you feel that they are responsible for. But you have to listen to me – there is more at stake here than the future of Triceria and Allana. Marloki is using you. It couldn't care less about Triceria. All it wants is a way to use that power for itself. And once Marloki has that power the future of Triceria won't just be at stake any more, the futures of Pyna, Earth, and all of the other worlds will all be in jeopardy!'

There was silence for a moment whilst Welt pondered this. He thought that Lisa might have a point. What if all of this was just a trick? What if he was just being used?

But then he thought back to the Earth's power, which had a hypnotic hold over him. He needed that power, he had to have it.

And nothing was going to stop him getting it. Not Lisa, not Marloki, not anyone.

He turned towards the edge of The Ledge. His mind was made up. For good or ill, he was going to take the fall.

'Wait!' called out Prion. 'Think about what it is you're doing.' He started to slowly walk towards Welt, and the others followed him, included Parto despite his fear of the height they were at. 'You heard what Lisa said. This isn't about getting power for yourself, or about the quarrels between Triceria and Allana. This is about Pyna, and this place called Earth, and everywhere else that Lisa referred to.' Prion didn't fully understand everything that Lisa had said, but he knew that what was at stake was huge.

Sarna then said, ‘Don’t let the stone control you. Let us help you. You don’t have to do this. Think beyond yourself. Think beyond Triceria. Think of everyone in Pyna. Whatever power the stone has promised you won’t be worth the ruin of the whole world. That doesn’t serve anyone other than Marloki.’

Gramshaw then said, ‘Sometimes the braver thing to do is step back from a course of action. To admit that one has made a mistake. It is not too late for you to do that. You can still save Pyna, and Triceria as well for that matter.’

Parto then added, ‘Seriously, you don’t want to do this. I can see you can’t. It’s in your eyes. You don’t like the idea of falling from this height. And I can’t say I blame you, I’m terrified just standing here. So, what d’you say, eh? Why don’t you come back from there?’

The party were now just a couple of metres away from Welt. He had taken the stone out from his pocket, and he was holding it in his hands. He was pondering what they had said. Parto was right, he didn’t *want* to fall off the edge of The Ledge, but he was feeling compelled to. It was almost as if he had no say in the matter. The power of the Earth kept calling him.

Suddenly, he felt a searing pain in his head, and he fell to his knees. He heard the same voice, the voice from the stone, the voice of Marloki, in his head. ‘It is time! It is noon! You have to fall! You have to fall off The Ledge now! Trust in me! Do not listen to these others. I can take you to the Earth, I can take you to the power! Think of the power, and think of what you can do for Triceria! Do as I command you to!’

By the time that he had climbed back to his feet Lisa had rushed over to him and was holding both of his arms in front of her, facing him. ‘Fight it, Welt, fight it. You can do this!’ She held on tightly to him. She was determined not to let him fall.

But the pain in his head increased again. He threw the stone out from him with all of the force that he had. It went into Lisa, and the force of it forced her to let go of Welt – and sent her flying over the edge of The Ledge.

‘No!!!’ cried out Parto. He scrambled to the edge and looked down, ignoring his fear. But he couldn’t see Lisa. All he could see was a bright light that was getting further and further away. Then it started to get closer again, and Parto got back from the edge.

The pain in Welt’s head subsided. He looked at the edge of The Ledge and then said, ‘What have I done?’ Without saying another word he ran to the edge, and then jumped off.

He jumped into the approaching light, and then vanished. The light reached the edge of The Ledge, and stopped. It intensified for a moment, forcing the rest of the party to cover their eyes, before it disappeared.

After a moment whilst they slowly opened their eyes and got their wits back Parto asked, 'What just happened?'

'I wish I knew,' said Prion. 'I wish I knew...'

Back on Earth, at the very moment that Lisa was forced off of the edge of The Ledge, both Steve and Natasha felt a sharp pain in their chests. It only lasted a moment, and then they were relatively fine again. But they felt a lot weaker for the rest of the day.

Yes, dear reader, I was right to be concerned by the events that have been taking place. I think I know what is to come next. And if I'm right then we all have a lot to fear. Yes, we all have a great deal to fear...