

# The Garnet Star

*by beneathoseans*

Dailus was the crowned Prince of Apodis, a kingdom of winged men and women who have built their city high in the mountains of Unuk and El-Nath. Their kingdom was rich and content though it was bordered by the sea.

Atrya was the youngest daughter of Emperor Nun-Chi of the city of Eridu, and her people dwelled in the waters of Pleione. The ocean was abundant with life and treasures, but the air above prevents them from conquering the world and claiming it for their own.

Theirs was a forbidden love that could never be, for one worshipped the skies, while the other swam the seas. However, they found love and shared it in secret. But secrets always have their way of coming out, and with that revelation an ancient hatred between their people would bring them all to war and complete annihilation.

There was only one way for their love to continue and survive, but it was perilous. Many have tried it and perished. Dailus and Atrya will test the boundaries of their love, and their world, and find escape with THE GARNET STAR.

Validated by : WriterMerrin

## One

*Chapter 1 of 2*

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***There was one law in Pleione everyone should obey: Eridu owns the night and Apodis owns the day.***

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## ONE

The sky had turned orange-indigo when Dailus and Kuma decided to go out of the castle to stretch their wings in flight. As they flew, the night air that had begun to chill slapped against their faces causing their skins to burn slightly with its icy touch. Dailus loved the cool breeze, though his cousin did not. He had dared him to go to the Northern gates of the Kingdom where the last rays of Vega would be seen before he retires for the day. Dailus loved seeing the setting of Vega from the Northern Gates not only because its full glory was visible from that point, but also because the distance from the Castle to the Northern gates allowed Dailus the pleasure of seeing the Magnificent City of Apodis.

From the towering battlements of iron and stone of the Southern and Northern Gates of the City, to the beautiful white, round rooftops of the houses below, to the deep-green leaves of many trees that bore fruits that served as food for the people, to the mountains of Unuk and El-Nath where the Castle of King Cepheus...his father...lay white and shining in the fading light, Apodis was a breathtaking beauty to behold. The only thing that was greatly misplaced was the border around it.

A high wall that was built many ages ago kept the Apodisians from going anywhere outside their great City, for even though they had wings, the distance from the farthest landing point to the border was so great that before they could reach it, exhaustion would bring them to a watery grave. They were told that nothing lay beyond the border except empty waters filled with unspeakable horrors, but this kept only the weak of mind at bay. For someone like Prince Dailus, the borders were more of a challenge than a threat, and it excited him to plan crossing it every single day.

He knew he was not allowed beyond the Borders, but he wanted to see what was on the other side. After hearing countless stories of Apodisians who have tried to cross...most were found dead and some were never found at all...the young prince's curiosity grew until it became an obsession. Since he turned sixteen, all he could think about was getting to the border and looking out beyond it. Everyone told him there was nothing beyond it but water and danger, but with more and more people caught trying to cross the Borders, Dailus suspected that all stories he was told about the horrific things on the other side were untrue.

"Why cross over if all it leads to is death?" he asked. "There is an abundance of everything they need here; what could they possibly want that is out there?"

"Maybe they are just suicidal," Kuma said sardonically.

"I think there is something that lures them to the Borders," Dailus said, ignoring his cousin's remark; "a treasure or something...something that is worth one's life."

"There is no such treasure," said Kuma.

"How do you know? You've never been there, you've never seen what they've seen," Dailus retorted.

"And hopefully I will never get to see it! The Borders are there for our protection, Dailus. Beyond it is... a very dangerous place," Kuma warned, but he knew the words fell on deaf ears.

"Too many attempts to breach it tell me otherwise," said Dailus, laughing as he swerved passed his cousin. Being the fastest flyer in the kingdom had its benefits...one being annoying cousins with your speed. "You, however, warn me as if you know so much about what lies beyond it."

"I don't."

"I know you know a great deal more than what you've led me to believe," said the prince. Kuma tried to put some distance between himself and Dailus, but the prince kept swerving past him, outmaneuvering him until they were once again face-to-face. "Spill it! Tell me everything you know about it!"

"NO!" said Kuma and he decided to go down. He dove towards Unuk-Milui...the Northern post...where his father, the Baron, Saiden, held residence. Dailus followed him swiftly and caught him just before he reached the confines of the guardhouse.

"Hey!" he cried. "Let me go!"

"I am the crowned Prince of Apodis, Kuma," he said, locking his cousin's heel in a tight grip. "And I order you to tell me everything you know!"

"And risk my head being chopped off for doing so...not a chance! You're in this alone, Dailus!" said Kuma.

"I am going to be King someday, Kuma, I should know every inch of it," he said, and he pulled Kuma up by his ankle...a stunt that Kuma hated. "And you are going to help me."

"LET ME GO! I will do NO such thing! Lest you forget...your kingdom ends at the Borders!" Kuma cried. "What's beyond it is no longer yours!"

Dailus let him go, still laughing at his own joke. "Apodis owns the day...everything the light touches is mine!"

"You know how much I hate it when you act overly ambitious, Dailus!" Kuma said resentfully.

"And you should see your face when you're annoyed...IT'S PRICELESS, KUMA!"

Still scowling at the humiliation he endured, Kuma decided to glide towards the Watchtower before Dailus decided to do something else to him for his amusement. "Not all of it is yours!" he cried. "You sound like you'd make a poor king! Your own father did not covet the world, and neither should you."

"How do you know he doesn't covet it, dear cousin? Have you asked him?" Dailus said, following his cousin downward towards Lio, the Head Guard of the Northern tower, who waved at them as they descended.

"No, but how do you know he does?"

"I don't, but he is my father, and I bet he and I have the same line of thinking," Dailus said, landing ahead of Kuma and spreading his arms wide as if he was about to catch him. It was meant as an insult, and Kuma resented it even more than the ankle dangling stunt Dailus did earlier. He stopped in mid-air, folding his arms across his chest, scowling even deeper than before. Dailus put his arms down and looked at his cousin apologetically. "All right...maybe I was overly ambitious to want more than the kingdom." He tried to look as sorry as he could, but Kuma wasn't buying it. In the end, Dailus gave up; flinging his arms in the air, he said, "Aren't you curious about what is on the other side of that wall?"

Kuma shook his head. "Not the slightest. I know what's out there: the Eriduns."

"The Eriduns are not the only ones beyond the Borders."

"Again," Kuma said, "how do you know?"

"I don't," Dailus said.

"Then it makes no sense going there, Dailus."

"Actually, it makes all the sense in Pleione, Kuma," countered the prince. "For one, if there is something magnificent outside, it will be a great victory to Apodis if we claim it. Second, if there is nothing out there but the Eriduns, it will benefit our people to know the truth. We can stop them from attempting to go to the Borders by educating them on what is exactly on the other side."

"Well, I don't want to go anywhere near that wall much less beyond it," said Kuma, landing beside Dailus. "It is against the law, Dailus, and even you, my prince, are not

exempted from the law. Those who have been caught were executed. You'd be foolish to attempt it."

"Execute ME? Me, Kuma?" asked Dailus, laughing at the hilarious idea his cousin presented. "No one can execute me. I can cross the Borders if I want to and when I want to. No one can stop me, not even you."

"It is also too far for any Apodisian to fly to. You'll die of exhaustion before you reach it."

Dailus snorted. "I'm the fastest flyer in Apodis, Kuma!"

"Speed is one thing, endurance is another."

"Well, if you don't want to come, FINE! I'll do it alone if I have to," Dailus said, greatly vexed by his cousin's persistence.

Lio, overhearing their debate, gave Kuma a worried look, but Kuma shook his head. Relieved, Lio returned to his post inside the tower.

"Why can't you be a nice prince and follow the law, Dailus?" Kuma said shortly. "The Borders are there because..."

"...because someone waged war with the wrong neighbor," said Dailus, sounding more contemptuous than necessary.

"They started the war, Dailus, not us."

"I wonder if it says the same thing in the Eridun history books."

"Not again...I've heard your conspiracy theories too many times, Dailus, it's no longer amusing!"

The prince turned to the empty space between them and the wall that kept him from the world beyond it. He wondered if he was overly romanticizing the enemy. Their books have detailed descriptions of how lethal and merciless Eriduns have been towards their kind...killing off their younglings with spears of lightning, or drowning them slowly in their whirlpools. The massacre of Utan-Kee was particularly terrifying to see, and it filled his younger nights with endless nightmares. However, talks with their most unpopular philosopher and teacher, Arrackis, made him rethink the books that had molded his childhood.

"Have you ever heard anything from the Eridun point of view, Kuma?"

"No...and thank goodness for that! I never want to meet an Eridun for as long as I live!" Kuma said loudly.

"I've been thinking about that, you know," said the prince, still looking blankly into the open space. "Why don't we make peace with them? Open the gates and allow them in."

"Dailus you have lost your mind!"

"It's been ages since that war...there is a new generation of Apodisians and Eriduns now," said Dailus, "and we know nothing of their quarrel. We should try to make peace with them and gain back their friendship."

"Friendship with monsters?" Kuma cried. "Dailus...has Vega fried your head? Eriduns have no sense of intelligence...they are not a people...they are beasts of the waters!"

Dailus looked at his cousin, half laughing at his panic. "You worry too much, Kuma. The stories about them are so magnificently horrible that I find myself disbelieving them all. I have never seen one of these so-called monsters of the deep. For all we know, they're all dead."

"...or waiting to ambush the next Apodisian who crosses the Border!"

"Think, Kuma...if they are as beastly as the stories make them, how could they have waged war?" Dailus asked. "Only intelligent beings can do that...beings with a sense of self-government, who have laws, and organized militia can wage war against another people as advanced as us." Kuma looked away, defeated. "If they are intelligent enough to wage war, then they are intelligent enough to declare peace. I do not fear them. Besides, if they are truly beastly, why do we have attempts at the Borders every year? No, Kuma, they are not beastly at all; I even suspect that they are the reason for the attempts."

Kuma, having given up, said nothing.

"When I become king," said Dailus after a while, "I shall order the wall destroyed."

"What an ambitious task?" Kuma said sardonically. "And how do you begin this incredible deed, my prince?"

"With your help, of course!" Dailus said, smiling suggestively at his cousin.

"I won't help you," Kuma replied.

"Of course you will."

"No, I won't, because I don't believe in your cause," Kuma said. "I like the way things are...with them out there and us safe in here."

A long silence ensued between them after that, and Kuma could see that Dailus was lost in his own thoughts for a while. What he was thinking of, Kuma could only guess, but he knew, no matter what his thoughts were, it couldn't be good for them both.

"Vega will help me," Dailus said shortly.

"Vega leaves the skies, my prince, and it takes him hours to return," Kuma countered.

Dailus walked towards the edge of Unuk-Milui and looked out into the gargantuan cage surrounding his Kingdom. "The gates are not that far. I can make it there and back in a matter of hours."

"Don't do it!" Kuma warned stiffly.

At that, Dailus turned to him and laughed so loud Lio rushed out of the tower. Kuma looked at him, shrugging his shoulders, looking as confused as he does.

When Dailus finally got the better of his mirth, he said, "You never cease to amuse me, dear cousin! You should look at yourself when you're scared out of your wits...it's amazing how your face contorts in so many folds all at once."

"I should remember to stop accompanying you from now on."

Dailus, knowing he had pushed Kuma's patience too far, grabbed him by the arm and pulled him close, placing an arm around his shoulder. "I'm sorry. Don't be like that; you know that you are the only one in my confidence, Kuma. The only one that I trust with all my secrets and all my secret longings. I dread the day I lose your friendship...forgive me. I know I went too far with my jest."

Kuma smiled at him, and said, "Yes you did." Then, tapping his arm, Kuma added, "Forgiven. So, can we stop talking about the borders now?"

"All right, no more talk of the Borders...for now," said Dailus. Kuma sighed and walked towards his father's house. Dailus looked at the wall again, and he could still feel the desire to reach it and cross it burning inside him. "I will reach you someday... someday..." Then he, too, went inside his uncle's home.

## TWO

### Chapter 2 of 2

Dailus discovers something in Baron Saiden's house.

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TWO

"Son!" barked Baron Saiden. "I'm glad to see you home, safe and sound." Then he caught sight of a familiar red-haired boy that spent many nights inside his house. "And you've brought my favorite nephew along with you!"

Kuma straightened and bowed before his father. "Yes, sir. The prince is here for our libraries, today."

"Hello, Uncle," said Dailus, bowing before the baron before giving him a hug. "I shall be staying here for the night, if that is all right with you."

"All right?" said the Baron. "Of course it is all right, my boy! Besides, what will my brother say if I let you out when Vega is no longer in the sky to guard you?"

Kuma stiffened at the familiarity that his father allowed, but knew that Dailus was always getting away with being overly casual. At his father's comment, he blanched. "I will take responsibility for him, of course. He certainly needs watching." He gave Dailus a mock-serious glare.

Dailus laughed and asked, "Me? My dear cousin, do I need watching?" He tried to look as contrite as possible.

Modifying his glare to gain a more serious tone, Kuma said, "Yes. You do." The prince gasped as he tried to look surprised. "I still remember what happened the last time you visited." Kuma paused a bit and then corrected himself. "Come to think of it...every time you visit us and spend the night, something disastrous happens."

"Funny," Dailus said, "I've never been punished for any of the wrong doing you say I do around here."

"That's because I get blamed for most of it!" said Kuma quickly.

Dailus wanted to laugh harder, as he remembered the many times he got his cousin in trouble for the mischief he had done, but Kuma's expression told him that he was no longer accommodating such behavior at his expense. "I promise I'll be good."

The baron, who had been laughing all the while, finally cut in and told them that dinner was now ready. "After dinner, you boys can entertain yourselves with a bit of game, but only for an hour. Then you both should head on to bed. You can use the room in the west wing, Dailus."

Surprised that he was offered a different room, Dailus flew closer to the baron and suggested he stayed with his cousin for the night, as he had always done. "I promise we won't wander out like before. We will both stay in the room."

"I'll, ah, be able to keep a better watch on him, that way!" Kuma added, but shrank before his father, expecting a refusal.

The baron was very fond of Dailus but was too familiar with his attitude to ever trust him with the promise of a quiet night. Dailus was quite hard-headed when it came to rules and loved testing boundaries to their limits, and Kuma was never strong enough to resist.

Baron Saiden decided to decline the request. "Not tonight, Dailus."

Dailus's face sank; he had not gotten an outright rejection for a long time, making one given by his uncle sting him more than he expected. "But, Uncle-"

"No, Dailus. I want you to stay in the room above mine tonight," Baron Saiden said. Dailus made a whining sound that the baron warded off with his hand. "So that can keep a close watch on you."

Kuma reeled back with sympathy, but couldn't help emitting a snicker. Dailus glared at him, causing him to shrink again, but only for a while. He flew closer to his father and, looking at Dailus with a hint of satisfaction still in his eyes, he said, "As you say, Father. I'll take you there, cousin."

Dailus hovered for a while in mid-air, wondering, pondering how he could execute all that he had planned for that evening...and the next day...without the help of his cousin, who seemed to be enjoying the idea of a peaceful night. However, he needed Kuma's help desperately and decided he would try to convince him when they were alone in his room.

"I will wait for you both in the dining hall," said Baron Saiden, and then he glided downward and through an archway that led to a brightly lit room.

The two of them headed in the other direction, upward, passing the baron's room, and then up and westward toward the guest room, where Dailus would spend the night...alone.

When they were satisfactorily out of the baron's sight, Dailus grabbed Kuma's arm and demanded an explanation for his abandonment. "Why didn't you help me back there?"

Looking at his cousin aloofly, Kuma replied, "I asked if you could stay in my room. What more do you want?" He shook his arm free. "I don't want to disappoint him again. You would have talked me into doing something we shouldn't, wouldn't you?"

"I was planning on something we can do to pass the night," Dailus admitted. "What fun is it, if we're to stay in separate rooms?"

Kuma flapped his wings and playfully sped towards the room. "Sleep isn't supposed to be fun, and there is plenty to do before then. We have an hour to spend before we go to bed. Do you want to practice our archery after supper?" Arriving at the door, he looked down his nose at Dailus, hoping to ignite a competitive spirit, but Dailus refused to give in. "Dailus, father just wants to make sure you stay out of trouble while you are here. How many times did he need to explain bruises, broken bones, frayed wings, and lumps on your head to the king?"

"I have not broken anything for months," Dailus said defensively.

"You have not been here for months." Then, with a grin, Kuma added, "I would also like to sleep with a victory under my belt, so, archery or nothing." He opened the door and sketched a mocking bow. "Your room, my prince."

The room had a large round bed at the center and a wardrobe on the right. There was also a table with water and fruits near the door and another table near the bed with many oddments that Dailus remembered tinkering with as a child. It was a comfortable room, but he didn't want to be comfortable that night. He wanted to stay up until he couldn't keep his eyelids open. Before, he and Kuma would wander out of their room and explore places like the library or the kitchen, and they would always end up making something that made noise like crashing sounds that woke up the chambermaid from the farthest room in the lower corridors.

They had fun, and it was one of the reasons why he kept coming back here. Tonight, though, Kuma would be on the other side of the house, sleeping, while he would be here, enduring the silence until it drove him mad.

"What good is archery to me, if it's only for an hour or two?" He crossed his arms and let out an exasperated sigh.

"What is it you plan to do that requires the whole night, anyway?"

"I wanted us to plan on how we'll get to the border."

Kuma crossed his arms and let out a sigh. He took a deep breath and said, "Then I'll have told my father the truth, when I said that you were here for the library. You can do some studying. Read all night, if you want. You will be too tired to plan anything treasonous, and tomorrow we can dazzle each other with our marksmanship." Dailus smirked but kept quiet. Kuma looked at him with a silent plea in his eyes and said, "So, why don't you get ready for supper?"

Dailus nodded and bowed his head slightly, hoping to look as disappointed as Kuma would buy. Kuma shook his head and turned around to leave, but as soon as Kuma's back was to him, he grabbed his cousin and wrestled him into a loose headlock, much to Kuma's chagrin.

"Beat me, will you!"

He only stopped struggling when he happened upon the hope that no one had heard the scuffle. "In a fair fight, yes! Can't you just be serious, for once?"

Dailus was still laughing until he saw how tense Kuma was. He coughed a bit to clear his throat. "Sorry," he said. He meant it, too, not that it made any difference since Kuma's demeanor hadn't changed a bit. "Look, I was hoping you'd help me with the research I planned to do. I mean, it's no fun making a discovery if I can't share it with someone I trust. And you're the only one I trust, Kuma."

Dusting himself off and carefully backing out of the room, "Humph! I am honored that you choose me to backstab, then!" Stretching out a wing to check his feathers, he made as if it took too much concentration to stay angry. "Yes, yes. Tell me about your research, later. I'll help you find the books."

"Thank you," he said as sincerely as he could. "Now to dinner."

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Having just gotten through with a list of previous stunts pulled, Kuma stepped into the dining room, feeling as if he had suitably chastened his cousin. He gave his father a confident nod and looked to an innocent Dailus, attempting to take credit for the current passivity.

"So, Dailus," Baron Sainen said, breaking the uncanny silence of dinner. "Your father told me about your desire to learn tactical combat next season."

"Yes. I was fascinated by what Arrackis taught me, a few days ago," Dailus replied.

The Baron let out an audible groan.

Kuma brightened at the subject, not only because he planned on learning with Dailus, but because he felt that it would finally teach his cousin some discipline. At his father's groan, though, he grew a puzzled frown. "Why? What has he said now?"

"I was hoping that your father would remove that fool from the faculty," the Baron said.

"Remove him? He's the best!" Dailus explained with a mouth full of baked figs. "Last time, he discussed the history of the Border with me and Kuma, and even told us about the many failed attempts at reaching it."

"Has he?" said the baron, abandoning dinner completely. "What else did he say?"

"He said that many of them might have been captured by the Eriduns," Dailus supplied happily. "Fascinating creatures they are, too, these Eriduns. Don't you agree, Kuma?"

Kuma shivered involuntarily and gulped his food down. "Well, Arrackis does paint them that way. Nothing else you hear about them is very nice, though." He raised an eyebrow at his father. "Everyone...well, most everyone knows that the Eriduns are dangerous, but our teacher doesn't share that opinion."

"Arrackis..."

"Dangerous?" Dailus said, cutting off his uncle's comment. "Kuma, we don't know that. Besides, the only stories we ever hear are written by Apodis historians...people who are clearly blinded by a hateful past."

"Dailus," said the baron, sounding as if he had just given a command. "We will discuss this matter some other time...and in your father's presence. For now, finish your food and get some rest."

Kuma placed a fist on the table as he prepared to defend the more realistic historians against one perhaps dangerous philosopher, but he quieted down at his father's reaction. He knew that his father hated the Eriduns as much as anybody...and justifiably. He wondered why his normally forgiving father seemed so touchy on the subject of Arrackis, though. He narrowed his eyes at Dailus, hoping that the research he had come to do wouldn't be the trouble that he had been trying to avoid.

Dailus was just as surprised as Kuma at the baron's obvious disapproval of Arrackis, and normally, Dailus would have said more to his uncle in Arrackis' defense. However, he saw the look of caution in Kuma's eyes and decided to hold his tongue...at least, until he was done with his research.

"Yes, Uncle," he said, looking at Kuma slightly. He guessed that his uncle had some argument with the professor often called eccentric, which was why he wanted him removed from the faculty. But the way his uncle dismissed discussing anything about what Arrackis taught made Dailus suspect that there was something other than an annoyance at thoughtful eccentricities.

Kuma cleared his throat and attempted to regain his earlier enthusiasm. "But, ah, about the combat training next season... We have both been practicing our marksmanship. I think that I am a little better, of course, but we won't actually have to go to the borders and fight Eriduns, will we? There is plenty to, ah, occupy our time inland, yes?"

"Dailus," said the baron. "I know that you've been brainwashed to believe that there is nothing wrong with the Eriduns."

"Brainwashed?" Dailus echoed. He was insulted by the insinuation that he couldn't think for himself, that someone had power over his own thoughts. "Uncle, I am more

than capable of deciding if a person's theories aren't correct."

"Then there will be no more talk about the borders," said the baron. "Not while you are in my house."

Kuma subsided and resigned himself to hiding with Dailus in the library, after supper. Probably no archery practice, either. He concentrated on his food and avoiding Dailus' eyes. The Eriduns had to be monsters, he thought, but what secrets did they hide that isolation would forever deny to the Apodis? He glared at Dailus for making him interested in his research on a subject that upset his father.

Dailus thought it best to finish his dinner in silence. He never thought he'd be capable of angering his uncle...a man who was known for his patience and tolerance...twice in one sitting, and he didn't want to push it further.

However, as he and Kuma left the dining hall, something told him his plans for the night would not be executed easily. His uncle was now suspicious of him, and probably Kuma. He was sure that he could feel eyes watching them as they glided down the main hall.

"Kuma," he said. "I don't think we should do anything for the night." His voice wasn't raised, but it was loud enough for everyone to hear. "I'm very tired," he added, faking a yawn. "I think we should go straight to bed."

Kuma flitted back a couple of steps, donning a look of intense suspicion. He almost asked whom his cousin thought he was kidding but decided that perhaps his father had frightened him sufficiently. "Oh? Well, I suppose that I can always trounce you at archery some other time. I think that I might be in the library for a bit, though. Perhaps I'll find something to interest you."

"That's a good idea, Kuma!" he said with too much enthusiasm. He cleared his throat a little before adding, "I mean, er, that's fine. We'll do the archery practice tomorrow. I will need something to read to put me to sleep. Maybe one of the essays you've written before...if you haven't burned them all."

Kuma tossed a sarcastic, "Ha, ha," on their way to the library. "Well, what are you here to look up? Did Arrackis tease you into an interest for something that could actually be useful, for once?"

"Not really," Dailus replied. He flew up to the top-most books on the first shelf to his left, but noticed that most of the books there were trivial and uninteresting. He went down and encountered the baron's collection of books on political matters.

'Better as you go lower,' he thought. He looked up and saw Kuma browsing books on the other side. "Kuma! Look at the lower shelves!"

"As you command, my prince!" Running a finger along the spines, he sifted through the classic plays and poems, looking for anything that featured Eriduns. Anything of a less fantastical nature would be too old for his father's library, he knew. "Ah. Here is one for you! Why do we even have this? It's about the only book I can think of that makes them look civilized. *The Garnet Star*. You know, I had to translate this, once."

"*The Garnet Star*?" Dailus said excitedly. He couldn't wait for Kuma to reach him, and decided to meet him halfway. "What is it about?"

Kuma looked at his cousin with an expression on the verge of disgust. "You haven't read *The Garnet Star*? It's a classic! I used to pretend that I was Acamar! They have plays of it, and lots of different translations of it, and..." He trailed off as he realized him that the character he once idolized was an Eridun. "Well, it's just a fantasy, but it says a lot about the Eriduns. Who knows how much is factual, though?"

Dailus was slightly embarrassed by the fact that he never knew about this book and wanted to pretend he'd forgotten it but decided he'd get more help from Kuma if he would be honest.

"I didn't even know the existence of this book," he admitted. "Will you tell me the story?"

Kuma raised an eyebrow. "Huh? And I half thought that you were just playing around! Well, I used to like it a lot. It's about the end of the Thuban War." Dailus' eyes brightened at the mention of the first and biggest war in Pleione's history. "Yes!" Kuma affirmed, as he guessed at what went on inside his cousin's head. "*The War*! The one that went on for hundreds of years. This book has a more or less detailed account of how it went, lots about combat information from both sides. It does have some romance, though."

Dailus squirmed at the mention of romance. He loved the adoration he got from female Apodisians but didn't like to entertain the idea of romance just yet. He was far too young and too curious about the world to think about love.

"It's between an Apodisian and an Eridun; they fall in love and end the war by defeating Warlord Segin. They were supposedly the ones who made the oath that keeps the two races apart, and then they used the Garnet Star to go to some other world, where they could be happy. Fantasy stuff. I'll keep looking."

"For someone who hates the Eriduns, you sound very enthusiastic about this book," Dailus observed. Kuma shrugged his shoulders. "Maybe I should read it myself."

The story, Kuma's interest, and the fact that he had this book mystified Dailus greatly. Why did Arrackis not mention this book to him? Surely, being a scholar and one of the authorities on Eridun lore, he would have this book in his library. It should have been the most used book in his class. Was there a copy of this book in the palace? If there was, where was it?

Kuma reluctantly handed it over. "It has been a while since I've read it, but, yes, you should."

He headed back to the bookshelf and picked up a few more books, but he interrupted his search several times to come back to the book and recommend certain chapters with the best scenes.

"Oh! And that's one mystery that I always wondered about. Whatever happened to the Garnet Star? They break it in two at the end. The rulers of the new governments took them, so that means one of the pieces should be with your father."

Another mystery, Dailus thought.

Kuma turned to the end of the book and pointed to the picture of a bright-red, heart-shaped gem bound by silver clasps on top of three silver rings with strange writings on them. "Has your father ever shown you anything that resembles this?"

"No," Dailus said softly. He fingered the picture and wondered if his father had this item in his treasury.

"Ah, well, it will be a very solemn occasion, when he hands it down to you. Being the king isn't supposed to be fun, you know. Which is why you should read this first! And I will need to read everything else, to help you, when you become king."