

A STORM OF CLOAKS
BOOK 1

NESTLESS EAGLES



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A JOURNEY IN INK

NESTLESS EAGLES

BY
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Nestless Eagles

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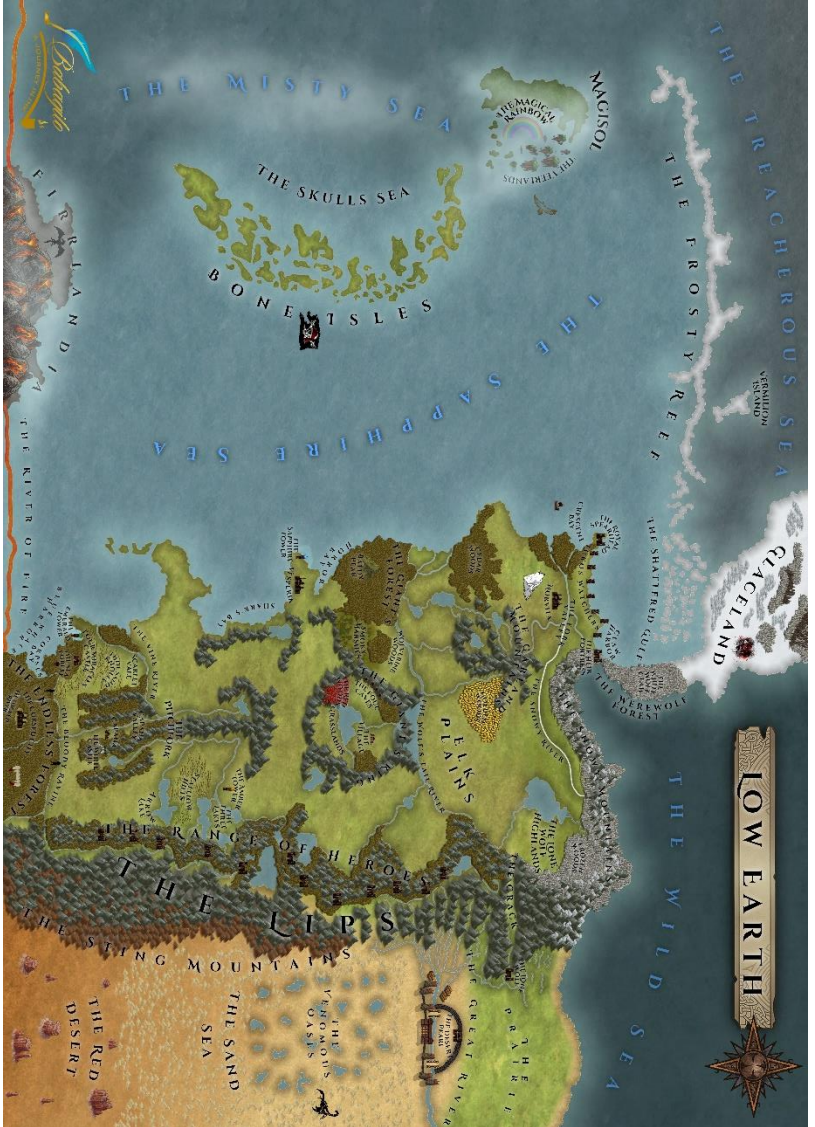
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CHAPTER 1

THE CLASSROOM



A red ball of fire was setting in the west, sinking into the Sapphire Sea. With its final dive, it painted the scattered clouds in pink and amber, blessing the Southland with another sunset to remember.

Niro's eyes followed headmaster Nestor Weber, who was teaching the final class of the day. The man stood speechless as he gazed through the west-facing windows.

"A miracle..." he gasped, forgetting himself for an instant. Yet the students' murmurs and odd stares pulled him back into the room.

“Against all odds,” Nestor continued the history lesson, “the wizards and the wolf king turned the tide and defeated...”

Bong! Bong! the shelter’s bell rang, but no one moved.

“All right, now.” Nestor clapped his hands. “The lesson is over.”

The students, however, remained seated.

He thought to hold the announcement until the evening, but the young, persistent eyes followed him like hawks, not letting go. Nestor shrugged his shoulders.

“The Banners’ Game won’t be canceled tomorrow,” he announced. “It will take place as planned!”

At once, the anxious children bolted from their seats, rushed across the room, and cheered with excitement.

Niro’s heart was booming like a giant drum. He tried to stand, but his numb legs failed him and he dropped back into his seat.

It’s the damn contest, he thought. His jaw clenched hard. He had trained relentlessly throughout the year, dripping rivers of sweat and dedicating mountains of hours, only to be ready for this moment. Finally, the time had come, yet he trembled like a leaf of autumn.

“Breathe...” he urged himself.

A sudden breeze blew through the windows, filling the boy’s lungs with salty fresh air.

The black banners fluttered on the stone walls, their embroidered golden sayings glinting under the dim light. Niro’s sapphire eyes sparkled as he read them to himself.

Nothing is impossible when you believe!

He took a deep breath.

What your mind sees, you can achieve!

His heart pumped new blood, reviving his frozen legs.

The brave face their fears, but the wise one dismisses them, for they are not real!

A voice spoke behind him.

Niro turned and stared at the headmaster. The man, in his mid-fifties, winked at him with his shiny crow eyes, exposing a row of yellow teeth. His forehead was as high as the southern bay cliff and his dry silver hair spread wild as though a storm ran through him.

Nestor put his hand on Niro's shoulder. "Anytime I read these words of wisdom, my spirit soars far up above the clouds."

Niro said nothing, but he looked around. All of the other students had left the classroom.

"I should be going," he said, rising to his feet. "Don't want to be late for dinner."

"What troubles you, my lad?"

He forced a smile. "Nothing important. Just the butterflies before..."

Nestor darted a suspicious glance. Clearly, he knew the boy too well to believe that. Niro had a razor-sharp brain and a chest overflowing with boldness. Perhaps too much. But now, he appeared a bit shaken and not at all like himself.

"Just give it your best." The headmaster gave him an encouraging smile. "I am certain you will make us proud."

"It's not so simple... Not this time. Tomorrow, I must win no matter what." His determined eyes pierced the headmaster.

“You put much pressure on yourself, boy. Enjoy the tournament instead. Whatever happens, happens.”

The voice in Niro’s mind screamed, and his eyes turned into blue glaciers. He shook his head in disbelief and started to leave the classroom.

“Niro!” Nestor grabbed him by the arm. “What’s the matter? Are you angry at not being recruited by the Ghosts yet? Is it the wizard you are concerned about? Speak up and share the load!”

A wave of heat rose in the boy’s chest, and his cheeks went crimson. Not being summoned by the legendary warriors of the Endless Forest had wounded his pride more than he would admit.

Last summer, the wizard had left, not to be seen again. No word had come from him. The boy started to get worried.

“None of that concerns me now,” Niro snapped. “The survival of our shelter is on the line. More than 300 children will become homeless soon, and all you have to say is, ‘enjoy the tournament’?”

Never before had he or any other student dared to speak in such a tone to the respected headmaster. But now that the harsh words had poured out of his blazing

mouth, he wasn't ready to stop. The dam of courtesy and politeness had already collapsed.

"I heard the conversation between you and Lord Henry Lom the other day. If we don't pay our debt by the end of the month, he will take the Four Miracles Castle from us. How did it come to this? How could you let it happen?" Niro's words lanced the old man's heart, and his accusatory glare sliced like an eager dagger.

Nestor slumped on a wooden desk. A thick overcast cloaked the orange light of the dusk, and the room grew gray and cold.

On the black banners, the golden phrases turned dull.

"You are right, my lad... " Nestor's faint voice barely escaped his throat. His gloomy face stared down at the floor. "I have brought a terrible disaster on us all...wasting our meager funds... I dug with my own hands our dark grave. What have I done?"

Niro glanced at the headmaster. The man, once strong as an oak and admired by all for his brilliance, looked like a withered tree, bending forward and ready to fall.

I shouldn't have said that, thought the boy, regretting his sharp words. Nestor had devoted his entire life to the

children, leaving behind his personal desires and dreams. The Four Miracles wasn't an ordinary shelter—it was home to orphans, foundlings, and other cast-off children. While their parents abandoned them, treating them as a heavy burden and useless mouths to feed, Nestor embraced them with his loving arms.

Only a few knew how much dedication and love he poured into these damaged children, training their minds, rehabilitating their confidence, instilling values and purpose in their troubled hearts. All of them had been transformed by his brilliant mind and his warmth. Yet his infinite compassion led him to his downfall.

In recent years, people in the South had suffered devastating disasters. Ranchers lost much of their livestock to a deadly plague, and farmers saw their crops wilt in the severe weather. Thus, the stream of children flowing to the shelter turned into a flood.

Not being able to reject a child, Nestor gathered to him the drifting lambs and crippled flock, thinking they would muddle through the hard times. But there were many of them to heal and provide for.

He borrowed money from lords and wealthy merchants until the debt piled above their heads. Soon

enough, their only safe home turned to quicksand beneath their trembling legs.

"I shouldn't have accepted more children than we could handle," Nestor mumbled at last, confirming the boy's thoughts.

"I am sorry, sir..." Niro drew a long, painful breath. Tears filled his eyes. He had flung thoughtless knives at this kindhearted man, and he loathed himself for that. "I didn't mean what I said. It was in the heat of the moment."

"Do not apologize. You spoke your heart and the truth." Only Nestor would turn his right cheek after being slapped on the left.

An empty silence fell until Niro's eyes faced his headmaster.

"Now you understand why I must be victorious," the boy explained. "The winner will walk away with a tremendous prize. Fifty gold, and hundreds worth of silver and copper!" The dark blue in his eyes flashed with new hope. He envisioned the chest of coins, which might pull them out of the sticky mud of their debts.

"I curse myself for putting you under such a burden..." Nestor banged a mighty fist on the desk, biting

his lower lip with frustration. A thin line of blood trickled down his chin.

“Perhaps it’s for the best...” Niro mumbled as a new realization took shape. “You once taught us that any warrior who fights for his home would defeat ten invading soldiers. Tomorrow, I will be that warrior. The one who cannot fail. While the other houses will use the award to decorate their chambers and plan lavish feasts, we shall return the money we owe and keep our only shelter.”

Nestor’s dark eyes blazed with pride. At once, he jumped to his feet and hugged the young man with all his strength.

“Let’s go and eat something now, eh? May the gods answer your prayers, for the sake of us all.”

Niro nodded with a sigh and the two left the room.

Supper would not be ready for another half hour, so they walked out to the courtyard. Waves of rolling laughter and the cries of children playing buzzed through the place.

Niro squinted at a pack of boys surrounding a man in gray robes.

"Blessings from the Misty Gods to you all," called the priest as he handed them loaves of bread, some apples, and a few oranges.

"Gratitude, Marcus." Nestor hurried to shake his hand. "You are a true friend of ours."

"Always at your service, headmaster," the man said with a smile. For long moments he measured Nestor's face until he spoke again.

"Rumors say that you owe much to Lord Lom and will soon lose this place. Such a shame." He surveyed the castle's walls with a saddened face.

"We will find a way," answered Nestor in a polite but firm manner.

"I wish so, brother. But in case you don't, please consider the ministry's offer. We will care for the children as our own, teaching them to be loyal servants of the Misty Gods."

The headmaster nodded. "Good evening, Marcus," he said and left the man.

Niro noted the sour expression spreading on the hooded man's face. A moment later, Marcus tightened his bag,

NESTLESS EAGLES



You are about to immerse yourself into an epic adventure like no other: A Storm of Cloaks. In the midst of this deadly storm, magical orders are battling, betrayals brewing, and all bleeding. Nothing is certain... None is safe...

High above the Sea Forest, Niro and his notorious band, the Nestless Eagles, are about to lose their only shelter. Desperate to save their nest, they embark on a perilous journey...

Roy Fogel, the Lord of the Lone Wolf fortress, has just received grim news. At last, his secret past might have caught up with him. There is no time to be cautious now, for the North's fate and his own destiny are on the line.

For eight long moons, Elmagos, the green wizard of Low Earth, found no clues about the kidnapping riddle, yet his eyes and ears discovered other troubling signs, marks he has not seen since the Great War.

Amid this turmoil, an unexpected visitor whispers dreadful tidings: "Wizards and witches are leaving the Floating Islands for Low Earth, joining forces with the Cursed City. Soon they will be ready to wage a total war."

A terrible storm is coming...

