

Dreadwood – a short story prequel to Andrei Babanin’s
“Wedhermer” novel

By Andrei Babanin

Centranian outlands, August, 1828

Oskaer Donvar shuddered awake, as if his very bed was being shaken by an intruder who had the audacity to terrify the lad by alerting him of his presence. He looked down the rough grey blanket of wool, towards the railing of his bed. There he thought to see a hooded nemesis, tree branches sprouting from his shoulders and back, dead leaves floating down to the wooden floorboards. But there was no one.

The young adult licked the inside of his parched and sore throat as he gazed out through a pane of the smeared glass window. From his low position he could only see a void of white, a duller shade to the usual bright. Another day had arrived.

With a groan he arose from his bed, pulling back the prickly covers and obtaining his trousers from a chair to his right, a rickety thing that rocked to and fro from his action dangerously before settling once more.

Oskaer had dark hair, like his mother, except his was soft, since the day he was born into the world. His complexions would be the sharp and chiselled kind of a young man, were they not naturally rounded off, giving him a sense of gentleness and innocence. His hazel eyes looked out at the world and although he wasn’t well built, he was not a scrawny lad.

He did not like the house. It was grey, like the forest. Or at least it always seemed that colour. And as he emerged from his quarters into the main drawing room with an adjacent hallway, his father came out from the opposite bedroom. That was all the house consisted of.

Laydeq Donvar had not aged well. He was greying, bags always under those fatigued eyes. Yes, he always looked so exhausted. And unlike his son, he was a brunette.

Immediately upon eye contact, the father approached the son, “You remember, don’t you? Hickery flowers, neo-grapes. That’s it. All that I need you to get.”

The boy looked over the other's shoulder, towards the other room, "We're just going to leave her by herself?"

"Your mother has been sleeping longer as of late. I'm afraid she might be ill. She can barely walk as it is, she'll be fine."

Oskaer nodded and proceeded down the hallway along the wall of his own room, heaving open the main door to the outside as the floors groaned beneath his feet and a breeze came billowing through the entrance. Black leaves scuttled inside before the door slammed shut.

Laydeq remained for a while, glancing across back at his room. Sighing with heftiness he went back into his sleeping area, halting in the doorway as he watched Misaleine on her side facing the other wall, sleeping. Her dark hair draped down in gentle curls over her shoulders as they rose up and down in time with her breathing. Laydeq soundlessly stepped across to her side of the bed, bent down and kissed her on the forehead.

He then made his way back out of the room and closed the door in his tracks. Swiftly emerging outside he let the winds that had now picked up dishevel his hair, taking in the surroundings. Pillars of tree trunks stretched out as far as the eye could muster, shadowing the forest beyond with heavy canopies.

Ripping out an axe from the soil he trudged through the podzol to hack away at some wood as he always had done. He paused in his progression as he noticed a piece of bark loose on the ground. Crouching down he picked the object up and fidgeted it around in his hand. And there he felt a leathery texture from a piece of black fabric lodged in the wood.

He looked around, observing the trees as they swayed in the wind.

Cold waters trickled past and through Oskaer's fingers as he cupped his hands and elevated them from the stream to his lips, hydrating himself.

Grey pine needles and twigs snapped beneath the young man's feet as he walked amongst the trees. Branches twisted and turned overhead in thick canopies, an oaken forest.

His boots hiked him up the rather steep incline in the earth, his long-sleeved shirt and regular trousers providing enough warmth to survive the occasional gust. Crags of earth jutted out from the hill, providing sure footing and briefly shortening the dread of slipping and sliding back down. Time again he'd have to take awkward long strides onto the natural platforms.

Oskaer's eyes scanned over the shrubs and undergrowth, seeking the sharp, sprouting bush of a neo-grape. 'twas approaching the afternoon as of then, and the gloom beneath the shades of the trees assisted in pinpointing the bioluminescence of the plant. Indeed, he noted a faint purple glow up ahead as he kept on walking, and soon he was plucking the fruit from the sharply-edged leaves, popping one in his mouth and feeling the juices trickle down his throat.

Meanwhile Laydeq heaved and divided a log with the swift blade of his axe, the two new fractions toppling in opposite directions. His fingers fumbled around for another, firmly grasping its shape and placing it before him as he eyed an emerging figure ahead in the trees.

In that moment he recognised the odd familiarity from an ally long forgotten, for he like Donvar had aged as well.

A stern gaze came from a face set as if in stone, wrinkles and dimples spread all across. The man was in his forties like Laydeq, with darker hair that appeared to be slightly greying. He was in strict pickle-coloured uniform, golden epaulettes and aiguillettes hung from his shoulders and chest, and a silver rapier at his side.

Laydeq dropped his axe in disbelief, and the man opposite took notice of this, "In case you haven't recognised..."

He awaited a response, of which Donvar blurted out answer, "Uh... W...W-Wilgoren? Jarsis Wilgoren?"

The uniformed man nodded, "That's right. The silent 'J' in Jarsis pronounced as a 'Y', glad that you can recall correctly."

"Jarsis," Laydeq frowned and looked back at the house, before glancing back, "What are you doing here?"

“Correct question would be how I’ve found you here. Of which the answer would be that it was bloody difficult.”

Jarsis with a ‘Y’ stepped forwards, his hand resting on his rapier.

Laydeq straightened his back, “Some milk, perhaps?”

“Get me whiskey.”

The host chuckled, “This isn’t a pub.”

“Well, I’m sure you’ll find some nonetheless.”

Donvar’s smile disappeared and he made his way over to the bulkhead doors layered with soil not far off, “You always could see right through me.”

“As could many,” Jarsis fumbled around with his flintlock pistol, “How’s Misa?”

When a reply didn’t come from the depths of the cellar nearby, he decided to leave it at that. Didn’t matter if he was heard or not.

Laydeq came climbing out with two swirling bottles of black liquid, colour altered by the brown of the glass from the outside.

Jarsis chuckled once he came over, “Indeed this isn’t Varehnman cuisine.”

“No, it’s country cuisine.”

“Burn the country. Although I do miss the fresh air.”

“Yeah? How’s the city?”

Jarsis swigged from the bottle, “Oh you know. Crowded. Pungent. Dangerous. Anything that will happen when you stack thousands of people to live together *will happen*.”

“Millions wasn’t it?”

“Listen, Donvar.” Jarsis seated himself on a tree stump and motioned the other to do the same, “I’m not here to stall and I suggest you don’t either.”

“I’m not stalling.”

“Alright.” Jarsis drank again, “I didn’t spend a week and half looking for you for no reason.”

“Well I presumed so.”

“Yes. And yes, the population of Varehnman is vast. What can you expect from a three-levelled city? Many people... fleeing.” Jarsis coughed and placed down the bottle at his boots, “My business here, is related to Misa.”

Laydeq gulped down too much whiskey and spurted out the liquid, coughing and inhaling, “M-Misa? My Misa? Misaleine?”

“She’s the only one here yes you dupe.”

“Look Jarsis, we’re happy here. Have been for 19 years. Alright? 19 years. That’s a heck of a long time without disturbance.”

“But you’re not really happy though, are you?”

Laydeq’s face altered, “And you, Lieutenant?”

“It’s Commissioner now, thank you very much.”

“And why would the Eradicator academy permit their own Commissioner to leave the city for the country?”

“Listen here, Laydeq. I have a couple of questions that need answering. I want this to be easy.”

“Mate. If this is about me returning to the force then you’re wasting your bloody time.”

“This isn’t about your loyalty, Donvar. Goodness, I’d forgotten about that decades ago.”

“Alright. Fire away then.”

Jarsis pulled out his flintlock, after which Laydeq fidgeted, “Relax.” The Commissioner pulled out a rag and began polishing the weapon without looking up, “You live in the Dreadwoods.”

“This forest comes with variety.”

“Alright. But let’s say in the span of these, what was it, 19 years; have you come across a Dreadwood tree?”

“Many times.”

“Has it ever *turned*?”

Silence followed between them, such that Jarsis halted his cleaning process and looked up at the other whom queried, “How is this related to Misa?”

“Because you and Misa had a child, did you not?”

Laydeq tilted his head, “Alright and how do you know of this?”

“I may not be the only one.”

Donvar became pale, “Oh...”

“Listen, Donvar. Let’s get back to the task at hand.”

“Yes, yes.”

“Where is the kid?”

“I uh, have him gather our food. S-Some of it.”

“You let him wander off on his own?”

“Listen, Wilgoren-”

“No, we’re not done.”

“But I can’t-”

“As his guardian you must.”

“Jarsis.” Laydeq leaned on his knees with his arms, “Tell me more on who knows about Misa. And myself.”

“They don’t care about you. But they do about Misaleine. And they do about the kid.”

“This is too much...”

Laydeq stood up with his hands on his head and breathed slowly, walking away.

Jarsis too arose, “You know the danger that Dreadwoods pose?” The other paused so the Commissioner continued, “Their sap may be flammable early in their lifespan, but as this chance decreases over their

years of ageing does their chance of offspring increase. They don't reproduce asexually like most flora, no. They require an external host to carry the *seed*." Laydeq turned around to face the man who kept on speaking, "When a Dreadwood tree reaches the end of its life, it will implant its sapling into the next moving organism that passes by it. Killing it in the process, but spreading its doppelganger." Jarsis stepped forwards, "For the kid's sake tell me where he is."

Donvar shook his head and began marching away into the forest, in long strides.

"Laydeq!"

The other did not stop.

Commissioner Jarsis Wilgoren shrugged his shoulders and decided not to pursue, though his gaze shifted over to the oakwood house. Adjusting his uniform, he made his way over past cut logs and over dead grass towards the front door, pushing against its adorned glass pane and causing the entrance to creak. A long hallway greeted him, and far ahead he saw a dresser.

Making his way forwards he pulled out one of the drawers, shuffling through its contents. Papers and inkwells, gloves and knitting needles with bundles of wool. Soon he came across a yellowed birth certificate and he stopped.

BIRTH CERTIFICATION

Date: 19 JULY 1809

Time: 0114 hours

Name: OSKAER LAYDEQ DONVAR

Parents/Guardians: Mr. Laydeq Donvar, Ms Misaleine Donvar

Afflictions: None

Notes:

Infant suffered temporary asphyxiation; Dr. Kern required intervention with tool no. S01. Umbilical cord was detached with success but shortly after the mother lost consciousness due to severe blood loss. A mouth to mouth procedure was suggested by the father as the patient has ceased breathing as well but was rejected.

Total death period: 48 mins.

Jarsis stopped reading and put down the paper, before his eye caught sight of something else, a glistening square reflecting light from the rays that came through the window before him. He pulled out the object, and another, several it was. Photographs of a fatigued Misaleine cradling what seemed to be a bundle of innocence. And even in the dark of the setting with the trees in the background casting their shadow in the night, he could tell that the newborn was a boy.

“Officer.”

Jarsis spun around, eyeing Misa seated in a steel wheelchair with protruding spikes and turrets.

The woman’s frizzy uncombed hair tumbled down her shoulders, dark eyes gazed out from a pale face that smiled weakly and continued talking, “We don’t get many visitors in these parts. Only poachers and sap gatherers. They say Dreadwood sap burns like the sun.”

Wilgoren cleared his throat, taking note that she hadn’t recognised him, or at least wasn’t showing it, “I’m undergoing a private investigation madame.”

“Is that so? Who sent you?”

“I’m here under my own will, madame.”

“I see, corruption of independence runs deep in the High Cities for lone officers.”

“I’m a Commissioner-”

He silenced himself, but Misa tilted her head and kept smiling, “Hm.”

“Madame, this is your son, is it not?” He held up the photograph at her eye level so that she could see from the distance.

“Oskaer... he’s such a good boy. So patient, respectful of me and Laydeq. One could never expect from the role model I would present.”

“Madame,” Jarsis performed a step forwards, “Are you aware of his whereabouts?”

“Oskaer goes where his mind is free, he goes where he can find solitude from the rest of the world...”

Oskaer Donvar plucked some Hickery flowers from their roots and placed them in a pouch, their black stems connecting to a yellow bud speckled with black dots and encircled with sprouting white petals. He looked ahead across the soil of creeping tree roots and clusters of mushrooms and toadstools to eye the skyline of the ruins.

Arising onto his feet he rambled forwards towards the stone columns; vast bricks stacked onto one another. His feet soon touched ground with a bricked floor that joined with the surrounding soil. Vines circled around the crumbling walls and pilasters, moss and weeds were cracking the stone beneath his boots.

He came into a room half blown away by some explosion in the air centuries ago, as elongated windows stood half intact and the walls stopped halfway at about 8 feet tall.

It was here he seated himself on a collapsed stone arch, and waited.

Winds rustled the trees and blew across the floor carrying their crinkling leaves. Wood creaked and birds could be heard with their songs of dawning autumn. The walls stood dormant and unmoved, a safe haven, closed away.

Oskaer shut his eyes, and inhaled the air, before slowly breathing it out once more. He crossed his legs and straightened his back, his hands on his knees.

He breathed in... and out... in... and then out... in... out.

And there it was.

A voice, far but rising in volume. And getting closer.

Oskaer...

The lad twitched and opened his eyes, the winds had not changed, but they were there.

Oskaer...

He looked around the room, but there were so little to no places for concealment.

“Mirror?”

The voice had ceased. And disappeared.

“Mirror!”

Oskaer

Now he looked and he saw the shimmering girl, pale and blue, translucent. Her hair was wavering so slowly as was her dress, as if time had slowed. And yet it hadn't. He could barely make her out in the bright of day, but it was always like this.

“Mirror.”

Call me Mira please, Ossie

He chuckled, “Same thing.”

She laughed in return and as the sun came through, she had vanished.

He arose and frantically glanced around, even about to step outside the room.

Look up

He did, and saw the girl holding onto the pane of broken glass, her legs dangling yet her arms showed no signs of strain.

“How though?”

Does it matter?

He thought about this briefly, “No I guess not.” Foolish he thought to even begin analysing something as simple as this.

In the larger scale of things

“In the larger scale of things.”

She tilted her head, as if something suddenly became clear.

I know you Ossie. I can't figure out what it is though. The final fragment of familiarity to knowing a person, fully knowing them; I can't understand what it is. Or even begin to think of it! Funny how memories work, isn't it? Or how perception works...

Oskaer looked away, at the trees, “I guess...”

We all live in the present. We understand the present. We remember the past. And we make plans for the future. But only one of those actually exists, Ossie.

“Well, I have no plans for the future.”

Oh, I wouldn't know about that...

He tilted his own head, but when looking up to reply saw that the girl was gone.

“Mira?”

Oskaer stepped out of the room and got a full pan view of the forest. In the distance, a doe turned its gaze towards him: its eyes were yellow and its pupils shrunken and piercing.

Without a second glance it turned and galloped away.

Laydeq Donvar was seated on a bench outside the house, with the ink of the night enveloping him and his surroundings, his only illumination the orange lamp at his feet. Its radius of light cast some of the trees ahead in a sinister glow, their rough textures visible as clear as day.

He had leaned against the outside wall of the house, with the window above his head, when he had noticed movement in the bark of the trunk ahead. It had snapped and cracked away from its owner with a limb that almost appeared human protruding out, encrusted in chunks of the wood, and a brief glimpse of yellow from within.

Laydeq now stood at the feet of a pale Dreadwood, its grey trunk leading down to gnarled roots that contained the skeleton of a doe.

He gently outstretched a hand and stroked the dead tree; its surface was so smooth. Though a piece of the bark fell away and out crawled a swarm of baby spiders, causing the man to step away.

Donvar sighed and seated himself down, "Misa. I know you can't hear this, but I don't have the courage to say it to your face, and yet I'd always been bold in that matter. See, we'd both been through so much. So, so much. I never expected we'd come to an early retirement with our own son. And he's such a good boy, such a good boy... Gosh, how can I protect you when I can't even bring myself to say that you're INSANE!!"

His head dropped down, and soon he felt himself arising onto his feet. The roots had stumbled his balance and although he tried to maintain it, he soon found himself falling backwards and something sharp and rough impaling his back.

He cried out without voice, painfully he pulled away but it had already implanted itself in his back.

"No... not like this."

He soon felt the dirt in his face as he collapsed down, and the branches of the sapling extended across his body. His knuckles turned white as he gripped the roots of the tree before him, that only stared down in grim bleakness.

Jarsis Wilgoren approached the fortress ruins listening for the crunching sound of footsteps over the natural debris floating down from the trees. Not far off he saw the emerging figure of a lad of 19 who appeared to be making his way out, and who caught eye contact with the Commissioner.

Wilgoren laughed in disbelief, "Oskaer."

The lad appeared confuddled, and the policeman stepped nearer speaking reassuringly.

"It's Oskaer, right?"

“How might I help, officer?”

“Well, I’m a friend of your father’s...”

“I presumed you’d talked to him.”

“...an old ally.”

Silence came between them, and Jarsis tilted his head in confusion before Oskaer stated, “You’re Jarsis Wilgoren.”

The other smiled, “Yes. Good to hear-”

“Father has said a lot about you. Your methods. Your sins. Who you really are.”

Jarsis’ smile faded and he cleared his throat, “Listen, Oskaer.”

“Stay back.”

“Come on don’t start... any... of this. Alright? I’m here on official business and I wish for there to be trust between us.”

“I’m not going to talk, sorry.”

Oskaer moved past the Commissioner whom lashed out and gripped his arm.

“Don’t touch me-!”

“What are you going to do? File me for assault? You live in the middle of nowhere. There’s no one here, other than me. And you need me to protect you.”

Oskaer tugged his arm away from the iron grasp, “So what are you now, my guardian angel?”

“I might as well be, I might know more about you than even you can understand, qualities that make you a subject prone to danger.”

“We’ve only just met and you and father haven’t spoken for decades-”

“There are bad people coming-”

“Officer I’d like to speak my mind-”

“Listen to me! There are bad people coming; anarchists and extremists. They see you and your mother for who you really are and they will kill you for it.”

“What...”

“Your kind sees the world through a differing clearer picture and such qualities are dangerous as the world *fears it and doesn't want you breathing.*”

“Stop.”

“Your father and I came across their like 20 years ago back when your mother was being hunted. And now others are coming to finish the job.”

“Then what do I have to do... *with any of this?*”

“You're Misaleine's biological offspring; you're as much a danger as she is.”

“I'm *dangerous?* And this is in my genes?”

Jarsis Wilgoren glanced up at the heavens as the birds had ceased their voices and the sky was streaked with the red of dusk, “The sun is setting and they're coming.” He marched forwards trying to recall the way back.

“How many of them are there?”

“Too many to count.” Wilgoren turned around, “Where are we, how do we get back?”

“Uh...”

“Quickly boy!”

“F-follow me.”

The two dashed into the thickets and woods leaping over rocks and logs and avoiding low-hanging branches and thorns.

Laydeq's own skeleton was now limp at the roots of the tree as a new figure of wooden endoskeleton with the sapling at its heart but flesh of man materialised before him.

The clone's eyes flickered open and sharp protrusions of wood grew out from its fingertips.

Jarsis and Oskaer kept sprinting, the Commissioner never removing his gaze from the lad he pursued.

Back at the house, the wheels of Misa's chair rotated to propel her forwards down the hall, as gazing through the window she began to see a tree snap and crack away, revealing a human limb encrusted in wood.

"Tell me you can use a rifle, at least a hunting one."

"Father has been training me."

"Use it."

The two came to the clearing with the house up ahead in a gloom of shadow. The Commissioner pulled Oskaer with him, glancing around frantically and eyeing the trees. The lad bellowed as he saw a disfigured shape sludging its way around the rim of the house close to the ground.

Jarsis snapped his attention to the thing and revealed his flintlock, "Recognise this you scum? This has more than one shot so you'd better--"

The silhouette lunged with the speed of lightning, a mix of wood and a billowing coat could be seen as Jarsis fired off into the overhead branches, the hot gunpowder quickly setting them ablaze.

Oskaer stood rooted to the soil as the humanoid wrestled the Commissioner against the trunk of a tree. The boy only committed to running towards the house and a rifle inside when Wilgoren spun around and pressed the assaulter against the now fully burning oak.

The fire spread amongst the other oaks and Dreadwoods, and through the rain of floating sparks, from the dark of the forest's belly, the silhouettes of other hybrid men with sprouting branches and bark emerged.

Oskaer dashed past his mother whom gazed out into the night through the main window and into her room, an intricate hunting rifle suspended

over his parents' mantelpiece. He pulled out drawers and fumbled around with the gunpowder casket.

Meanwhile outside Jarsis aimed with his gun in one hand and steadily unsheathed his rapier with the other, "Back."

The humanoid assassins were garbed in hooded cloaks and leather coats of red and black, barely distinguishable from the layering bark. One had begun growing a razor-edged blade of wood from his wrist. Without warning a heavily wooden bloated foe from the side barged into the Commissioner, sending his gun flying. He was thrown against the wall, rolling in the dirt.

Arising he dodged the juggernaut and blocked an attack from another. He pulled away and attacked from the side but the hitman lightly repelled it, lunging to impale the man whom broke the attack by his free hand. He beat the assassin in the face before being sent off his feet by the giant once more. He impaled the belly of the foe that had charged while lying on the ground, leaping up to avoid the heavy body. He blocked a punch with his forearm before being disarmed with a backward kick from a humanoid. Jarsis then swiftly beat the other in the stomach, snapping off a branch from their shoulder and adeptly finishing off the adversary.

Jarsis safety-rolled forwards, obtaining his rapier and blocking a swinging attack. The conflagrations all around burnt bright but Laydeq Donvar still walked through.

Wilgoren hollered, "Donvar!"

The Commissioner then shuddered as the ally turned to face him, and the pupils were sharp and microscopic as the eyes were yellow. Roots were growing and slithering through and above the ground beneath his feet, which immediately lashed out across the clearing.

They burrowed beneath the house and splintered its walls which began collapsing like shredded cards as Oskaer pulled up a rifle against his shoulder, his mother seated behind him.

The assassin with the razor sword of an arm observed the two from a distance, and began to swiftly march their way.

Jarsis bellowed and kicked away a foe, obtaining his gun from the soil to aim but the roots ensnared him and carried him away, pushing him against a tree with one arm pinned behind his back and the other still holding his sword. He gasped as one of the roots implanted a sapling in his side, instantly beginning to spread its branches within.

Numerous assassins charged towards Laydeq's clone, who impaled each one with ease with the protruding wooden talons from his fingers.

The leader however took no notice as one thing only was on what remained of his human mind. He walked amongst the crumbling walls as Oskaer raised his rifle. The humanoid pushed aside the firearm as it was shot before snapping it with his blade, then now with his free hand impaling the lad and implanting a Dreadwood sapling in his gut.

The boy collapsed in agony to the floorboards as the leader continued on to Misa in her wheelchair up ahead.

Laydeq stabbed and threw an enemy off their feet while Jarsis observed a slithering root up ahead with its bark partially torn back, its flammable sap glistening from within. He adjusted the arm that was pushed behind him, fingering his flintlock.

The leader was coming so close and so swift now that Misa could make out his features. Miniscule pupils and yellow irises, his veins bulging around his eyes as slim roots grew within, visible and pressing against the rotting skin. Branches and chunks of wood were covering the majority of his body, while his hooded red and black coat billowed behind him.

Jarsis' rapier hovered above his wound, before he thrust it inside and extracted the sapling as it scattered at his feet, its branches shrivelling.

Oskaer rolled onto his side, cocking his rifle in pain and aiming at the foe behind him about to assassinate his mother.

And as Laydeq shifted his gaze over to Oskaer as more humanoids surrounded him did Jarsis pull the trigger from behind his back, watching the sparks fly through the branches and to the exposed root.

The sap erupted in inferno that exploded in a chain reaction along the spiderweb of roots across the clearing. One by one the assassins burst in flames, and soon Laydeq Donvar with them.

Oskaer prepared to fire as the leader drew back his weapon to swing and as the lad's shot was interrupted the explosion incinerated the hitman and thus Misaleine with it.

Silence fell over the woods once more as sparks and ashes floated down in gentle quantities, layering over an unconscious Jarsis and Oskaer. It settled on their bodies like snow, before the Commissioner coughed awake, breathing in raspy intervals. The roots that bound him had scorched away and he was free to move, he himself partially, but not fatally, burnt. Stumbling onto his feet while leaning on a tree he began limping across the courtyard, or what remained of it.

Indistinguishable rubble was displaced all around, dark and cold. The trees had ceased burning and the moon shone pale on the man and the 19-year-old lying not far off.

With his last remaining strength, the officer collapsed near the lad, noticing the sapling wound in the boy's gut. He glanced around at cinders of corpses, before back at the boy while extracting his rapier.

"Careful now..."

He began adeptly shovelling out the growing specimen within Oskaer, attempting to bring hope back to his survival.

Two horses trotted patiently through the dense fog of the morning, Oskaer balancing atop one mount while Jarsis on the other, nursing his own wound which he had roughly bandaged up with a shred of his uniform.

The lad shook himself awake, nearly toppling of his steed before leaning upon its neck.

"There were people... people looking for mother."

"I know." Was the bleak reply.

Wilgoren observed the lad, whom glanced around in confusion, even at his own burn marks and injuries. Curiously, the Commissioner inquired.

“Do you remember last night’s events?”

“I... can’t. I mean, it’s right there yet I cannot...this amnesia... are mother and father...gone?”

This came out of the blue though Jarsis knew it would eventually come to it anyway, “I’m afraid so.”

“Oh...”

The lad bent over. At first Wilgoren thought he must be weeping, then he took note of the physical pain that came with the mental, so he stated “That wound needs attention.”

“Where are we going to find help in the middle of nowhere?”

“I think I might know a place.”

Oskaer followed the other’s gaze and his eyes too widened as out of the mist emerged the three-levelled city of Varehnman, eventually disappearing to the heavens, supported by vast stone arches.