

His negligence in allowing his companion to walk behind him might have closed the doors of the virtual world. He would be forced to follow the only remaining path that Ugo was unaware of—the escape through the skylight—in a storm of physical violence. It would be a long day, a day when death would gather with obscenity a rich harvest of kyis. And the kyis... would belong to the others.

For an instant, he stopped to look at the inner seed that lent him strength to move forward, regardless of the number of bodies he had to step on. A quote came into his head, a paragraph from the Book of Creation Inrumiral, verse 12.3. The orations of Zhan's third coming: *"From darkness with darkness combined, from ice upon ice multiplied, through the vein of night, Arghail creeps into existence. His footsteps will fade, and his voice will vanish, and eternity will be death."*

He was feeling the same about himself; he was feeling the source of power growing inside him with every passing moment, becoming more indifferent to the sight of death.

The madness of the last days insinuated in his kyi like an insidious, toxic aroma, which, for the first time, made him doubt that he still knew where the border between good and evil was. Maybe Baila wasn't so wrong to proclaim that "Gillabrian is Arghail's tool." The night's border was thin, and he no longer had a problem with crossing it. For Sigia.

He turned back on his steps, trying to make as little noise as he could, afraid that he'd wake the forest's life lurking in the darkness. But the old Antyran was nowhere to be found, so he finally burst toward the tunnel leading to the prison meadow on Tormalin. Although it was the only path, he kept losing it and had to search it out through the thicket, his head spikes wrinkled by the fear that he might be lost for good. Was the fear clouding his smell, or was the path playing tricks on him?

After several long minutes, he finally reached the puddle to Tormalin without finding a trace of his fellow companion. It was definitely the right hole, surrounded by their footprints embedded in the mud. Where could he be, then? Perhaps in his running, he had passed a crossroad and didn't see some other path. He decided to search one more time, so he turned back and began walking on the trail, this time checking any opening in the bushes or any smell that could reveal a different path.

Gill had already passed two broader trees on the right side when he figured out that the light-colored spot between them could be a footprint. He turned to smell it. Undoubtedly, here Urdun had left his treacherous trail embedded in the muddy ground. His hearts pounding fiercely in his chest, he pushed aside the fleshy arkane

bushes and saw a forest path, narrower than the one he just left and completely camouflaged by the vegetation. He could barely squeeze under the thick branches that formed a compact canopy over his head. Without hesitation, he began to creep slowly into the dark, careful to avoid the smallest rustle, to find out what the old Antyran was up to.