

Fifteen years have passed since the events of *The Bones of Makaidos*, where our four heroes, Billy, Bonnie, Walter, and Ashley, entered adulthood and a period of peace. Now, Mr. Davis brings us the beginnings of a new series, Children of the Bard. Book One, *Song of the Ovulum*, is grittier than the previous books—part spy novel, part underground church/concentration camp novel.

Mr. Davis didn't just drag out a complete story; he started afresh with the twin children of legacy and five-thousand year-old teenagers from Genesis six. Most of Joran and Selah's arc is from Joran's perspective, and he's very well-developed and carries his end of the plot well. He's hurting and angry, but beneath all that he's a good kid who matures as the story progresses. His arc is one of redemption, a theme Davis develops beautifully.

*Song of the Ovulum* has beauty, intrigue, and grit all wrapped in a package. I'm looking forward to its sequel.

—**Kaci Hill** (Co-author of *Lunatic* and *Elyon*)

Outstanding! *Song of the Ovulum* is a masterpiece without comparison! This breathtaking saga will take you on a journey along with new characters and old characters, from before the great flood to the present time. When you read *Song of the Ovulum* you will feel like you are walking among dragons, Oracles, and Listeners, right in the thick of the action. You cry in times of pain and smile during times of joy. The pages keep turning, no matter the time. Bryan Davis has created yet another wonderful chronicle for us to enjoy and learn from. Keep reading. You won't regret it.

—**Melanie Sue** (Age 15)

WOW! *Songs of the Ovulum* is amazing! The imagery has to be some of the best. Mr. Davis had me ducking when fire was spewed at the people, jumping when someone was injured, and wincing when the candlestones shone. The detail is also fantastic! I can picture exactly what Tamiel, the other demons, the dragons, and most

of all the humans look and act like. This book is amazing, and I can't wait for the next in the series.

—**Val Chapman** (Age 15)

When I began reading *Song of the Ovulum*, my heart raced with excitement. As the plot continued to unfold, I was laughing and crying, anxious to find what part all the characters would take in this new series. *Song of the Ovulum* left me enthralled. It was filled with the qualities of friendship, sacrifice, and God's love. Children of the Bard is off to an amazing start, and my high expectations were not only fulfilled, but exceeded. I am delighted by *Song of the Ovulum* and overjoyed with the opportunity to continue this journey even more!

—**Skyeler Syrek** (Age 16)

From the moment I started, I found myself pulled into a separate world of dragons, Listeners, and Oracles. I would find myself alongside the characters, in the Healers' room with Bonnie, fighting atop dragons with Walter, or in a deep, dark dungeon with Billy. Wherever it took me, I found myself feeling their emotions. Mr. Davis has done it again! Bringing us into a world we have never known before or feel like we've known all our lives, his magic with words makes us feel as if we are there in the midst of what's happening. We are fighting the battles, feeling the pain, or thanking the Maker. Thanks, Mr. Davis, for another exhilarating experience.

—**Naomi Hesterman** (Age 16)

*Song of the Ovulum* transfixed me from the first word of the prologue to the final word of the last chapter. Mr. Davis has whipped up another great fantasy/Christian story. With new characters and old characters, this book was like none other I have read. This book keeps you on your toes, flipping through page after page, and it leaves me satisfied, yet craving for more!!!

—**Dan Lupo** (Age 13)

Bryan Davis has done it again with *Song of the Ovulum*! This wonderful book is filled with action and packed full of spiritual truths. Watching the characters grow in their faith and risk their lives for each other has inspired me to become a better person and closer to God. Every page in *Song of the Ovulum* is filled with page-turning events that make you never want put it down.

—**Rebecca Blome** (Age 17)

I went into this book wondering what new adventures could befall our heroes and heroines. Immediately, I was swept into the action and couldn't wait to start a new chapter. *Song of the Ovulum* is another fantastic story of faith, discovery, loyalty, and inspiration. With both new and old characters, the story flows seamlessly from one world to the next. This book keeps Bryan Davis at the top of my list of favorite authors.

—**Kristen Twomey** (Age 16)

I loved *Song of the Ovulum*! Once again Bryan Davis has woven a masterful tapestry of love, sacrifice, and the never-ending power of God's mercy and compassion. This amazing tale of Lauren and Matt will take you on a thrill ride you will never forget!

—**Cassidy Clayton** (Age 14)

*Song of the Ovulum* not only brought back nearly all the familiar faces, it introduced still more characters just as captivating and endearing as the originals—perhaps, in some cases, even more so. The stakes seemed so high, I often found myself thinking that there was no possible way out this time, but I was again proven wrong. Dragons, at least those that serve the Lord, really can take on almost anything. From the days of the flood, all the way to the up to the current world relations with Second Eden, Mr. Davis has shown his amazing ability to create memorable characters to fill fantastical worlds where anything and everything might happen: plants may turn to people, voices may be stolen, and songs of

mercy have power incomprehensible. For those of you who thought the ride was over with *The Bones of Makaidos*, buckle your seat belts and get ready to dive in even farther, because you ain't seen nothin' yet.

—**Alisha Lavender** (Age 15)

I loved the array of songs that spanned throughout the book. This book rivals even *The Bones of Makaidos*. The previous series never shied away from God, and in *Oracles of Fire* the passion strengthened. This book carries on that passion. It was a wonderful story about God's redeeming love, mercy, and forgiveness. This book will leave you hungry for more.

—**Kathleen Clifton** (Age 16)

*Song of the Ovulum* is beautifully composed; definitely a page turner. I've developed a habit of staying up late reading. Thanks Mr. Davis for writing another fantastic book!

—**Nichelle Phillips** (Age 16)

Fans of the *Dragons in Our Midst* and *Oracles of Fire* series have waited a long time for this book, and I am happy to say they will not be disappointed. *Song of the Ovulum* took me on an exhilarating ride from cover to cover, alongside characters I quickly came to love. This book has it all: fast-paced conflict, heart-stopping plot twists, and a beautiful message that left me feeling inspired and refreshed. There were moments where I wished I could leap through the pages and join in the action! Bryan Davis is a master storyteller. Book Two cannot come fast enough.

—**Gina Garavalia** (Age 17)

When I finished *The Bones of Makaidos*, I thought it was all over. Boy was I wrong! Mr. Davis has entered the world of Billy and Bonnie again. *Song of the Ovulum* lets you reunite with old characters, plus meet many new ones. See Walter and our old friends

back in action! Travel back to Bible times to meet Methuselah's kids. And to top it all off, give your spiritual walk a boost. What a great ride! Congratulations on another great book, Mr. Davis. This book is a MUST read!

—**Jared Besse** (Age 13)

In *Song of the Ovulum*, Bryan Davis revives a world familiar to those who have experienced his adventurous books before; he has crafted a tale that brings readers the sensation of being encompassed within the tumultuous and exciting events, journeying along with their beloved characters who manage to give constant hope in times of despair. It is scarce for avid readers to find books that not only contain innovative and original storylines, but are spiritually edifying as well. *Song of the Ovulum* is a rare find in today's world, and is well worth anyone's time.

—**Sarah Halbrook** (Age 19)

A captivating read! I was enamored from page one. Bryan Davis has once again produced a tale filled with extraordinary adventure and thrill. Readers will fall in love with our new hero and heroine as they follow along in their incredible triumphs and perils.

—**Katie Larink** (Age 18)

Dragons in our Midst readers, be prepared for a lot of surprises – and thrills. Whether or not you've read the eight books in the previous storyline, *Song of the Ovulum* will twist your mind and pull you in before you can even realize what's going on. Brick by brick, Mr. Davis builds up his most shocking story world yet, along with an epic yet smoothly-constructed storyline that will keep you fully engaged even after you've turned the last page.

—**Ian Hancock** (Age 18)

*Song of the Ovulum* has a very strong message of redemption and mercy. From the first page to the last, it draws readers in and they feel like they are there with the characters. Bryan Davis has presented in each of his books a strong Christian message that challenges the readers' faith and encourages them in their Christian walk.

—**Emily Hancock** (Age 18)

I had a lot of fun reading *Song of the Ovulum*. It's a really great book, and I'm definitely going to be reading it again!

—**Christine Elliott** (Age 11)

Well, Bryan Davis has done it yet again. An excellent read. He captures readers with the first word, holds them until the last word, and leaves them aching for more. Just as with *Dragons in our Midst* and *Oracles of Fire*, there is action, adventure, and of course the ever present power of God's love and mercy. I can't wait for the next book in the series. I know the rest of my family will love this book as much as I do.

—**Tammy Whiting** (Parent)

As a parent who reads over the shoulder of his pre-teens, I appreciate the battle between good and evil and the chance to exercise discernment between the two. Thanks, Bryan, for writing books I am thrilled to hand to my sons. *Song of the Ovulum* resonates in my house.

—**Mark T. Hancock** (Parent)

I love how Bryan Davis has seamlessly integrated a new storyline and characters into the existing world of *Dragons in our Midst*. I look forward to sharing the adventures of Billy and Bonnie with my children as they grow up.

—**Rebecca Rasmussen** (Parent)

Children  
of the Bard 

# Song of the Ovulum

Bryan Davis



**Living Ink Books**  
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## **Song of the Ovulum**

### **Volume 1 in the Children of the Bard® series**

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To hear a performance of the song on page 361, access this web link:  
**<http://www.daviscrossing.com/ItsYou.mp3>**

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A whip never draws love from those who kneel. Only mercy can penetrate a heart, soften it with healing balm, and set it ablaze with devotion. This story is for those who wish to learn the mercy song—the melody of grace, the harmony of forgiveness, the rhythm of a heart set free. After your chains are broken, perhaps someone will ask you, “What is your mercy song?” Then, you will be able to pass the liberating music on to another imprisoned soul.





## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Special thanks to Jason Waguespack who helped me come up with the idea for this book. Without your help in brainstorming, this series might never have come to pass.

Thank you to my wife, who also happens to be my editor. You are amazing. Even after reading the entire manuscript multiple times, you never fail to find a new way to improve the story. Most of all, I appreciate your emotional and spiritual support. I couldn't do this without you.

Thank you to the folks at AMG. You have done a great job once again. I trust that your work for God's kingdom is being noticed by the King.

As always, I give thanks to God, the great musician who composed and taught me my mercy song. I look forward to singing it in your presence when my time as your minstrel has come to an end.







## AUTHOR'S NOTE

When I completed *The Bones of Makaidos*, I thought the adventures of Billy, Bonnie, Walter, and company had reached an end. In that book's epilogue, however, I left hints that a new adventure with new characters might be forthcoming. Still, I didn't want to continue in this world of dragons, anthrozils, and slayers unless I came up with a really great idea. Well, after a round of brainstorming with contributor Jason Waguespack, an idea took shape, a cool concept that gave birth to *Song of the Ovulum*. I am excited about this new series, Children of the Bard, four books that will continue the excitement and heart of Dragons in our Midst and Oracles of Fire.

Although it will be helpful to read the eight books in the previous two series before reading *Song of the Ovulum*, it isn't essential. This story can be enjoyed without knowing the history behind these pages. Yet, if you choose to take the leap into *Song of the Ovulum* without reading the other stories, I highly recommend that you first check out Jason's recap at the end. It should provide all the information you need to embark on this new adventure.

With that said, I invite you to turn the page and explore a new world of fantasy and adventure. Ladies and gentlemen, prepare to draw your swords. The heroes and heroines within these pages are going to need all the help they can get.







# CONTENTS

Acknowledgments XI

Author's Note XIII

Prologue 1

CHAPTER 1	The Listeners	5
CHAPTER 2	Reading Minds	23
CHAPTER 3	The Color of Mercy	47
CHAPTER 4	Dreams	63
CHAPTER 5	The Silent One	73
CHAPTER 6	Hearing Things	91
CHAPTER 7	Voices	107
CHAPTER 8	Prisoner	117
CHAPTER 9	Breaking In	135
CHAPTER 10	Valor	149
CHAPTER 11	Taking Flight	169
CHAPTER 12	Silence in the Woods	181
CHAPTER 13	Trapped	209
CHAPTER 14	In Disguise	227



## SONG OF THE OVULUM

CHAPTER <b>15</b>	Discovered	241
CHAPTER <b>16</b>	The Slayer's Triumph	259
CHAPTER <b>17</b>	Healing Touch	275
CHAPTER <b>18</b>	The Red Wall	289
CHAPTER <b>19</b>	A Hidden Dragon	313
CHAPTER <b>20</b>	A Hand of Mercy	331
CHAPTER <b>21</b>	Forgiveness	349
CHAPTER <b>22</b>	A Knight Disguised	365
CHAPTER <b>23</b>	Dragon Warriors	379
CHAPTER <b>24</b>	The Song Restored	393
CHAPTER <b>25</b>	Dragon Attack	411
CHAPTER <b>26</b>	The Green Ovulum	427
CHAPTER <b>27</b>	The Firestorm	439
CHAPTER <b>28</b>	The Mercy Song	449
<b>xvi</b>	Recap of <i>Dragons in our Midst</i> and <i>Oracles of Fire</i>	471





## BONNIE'S CHAINS

Some nights I lie awake and reach  
For hands I would enfold,  
To feel my friend's familiar warmth,  
His lovely eyes behold.

Yet when my fingers stretch for his,  
I grasp but empty air;  
I rise and search the silent room.  
Alas! He isn't there.

Oh will this nightmare never end?  
This pain, this lonely war?  
Will dawn arise and bring you back  
To arms that ache for yours?

We battled foes of ghost and flesh  
In fields of sky and sod.  
You bore my soul on paths through hell;  
I carried yours to God.

My soul I stitched to yours alone;  
I wrapped you in my wings.  
You set my heart aflame with love,  
And now my spirit sings.

To God who hears my every prayer  
This orphan's outcries burn;  
On wings to altars filled with light,  
I beg for your return.

As long as you are out of reach,  
My heart is never free.  
These hands, these arms are tightly bound  
By chains I cannot see.

Come back to me my hero friend!  
And tear my chains in two.  
Restore the warmth, inflame my heart,  
And fill my arms with you.







## PROLOGUE

A winter storm is brewing. I can tell by the damp chill in the air. I hope we get blankets. Last year the guards told us they had to save the coats and blankets for the soldiers, but I don't believe them. Malice spices their words, as chilling as last February's blizzard. It was so cold one night, Ashley nearly froze to death. If not for wrapping her in my wings, I'm sure she would have died. Summer breezes thawed our bones, but autumn breezes portend another storm. Will we survive this time?

It has been fifteen years since I last wrote in a journal. In spite of the miserable conditions, I am thankful for Walter's courage in sneaking this little notebook and pencil to me. It will be difficult to keep them hidden, but Ashley and I managed to dig a small crevice in the wall behind the toilet. Since it's near the rat hole, I doubt that anyone will look there, but when Stella's on duty, you never know. Sometimes I think her piercing eyes can see through concrete.

Ashley is asleep, curled on our mat in the corner. Poor thing. The experiments are getting more invasive. Of course, I grew accustomed to the never-ending needle jabs when my father tried to learn the secrets behind my dragon ancestry and the reasons my



## SONG OF THE OVULUM

blood brought healing and youthful vigor. The Healers, or so they call themselves, are determined to unlock the secrets, and morning will dawn with my turn to face the electric shocks and specimen-collecting needles. My faith will have to remain strong.

I have used much of our candle, so I must join Ashley in slumber soon. Yet, I fear the dreams. Of late they have been dark, foreboding, mysterious. It seems that they are a movie trailer—a montage of scenes that cast more shadows over this present distress. I know, of course, that God is with me even in the darkest of prisons, so the dreams, though piecemeal and fractured, have helped me feel his presence in inexpressible ways, as though he is calling me to more intimate fellowship than ever before. The darker the night, the brighter the flame, and the more precious it becomes to those who wait for the dawn.

I am sure a new scene will enter my dreams tonight, a story from long ago that will provide another puzzlement. Maybe if I write the dreams, all will become clear. I pray for clarity. This cruel, twisted world is void of it.

At one time, our plight seemed unimaginable. When Billy and I celebrated the birth of our twins, all was well. The people had accepted the existence of dragons and anthrozil hybrids, and the relationship between Earth and Second Eden was blossoming into an alliance of cross-dimensional worlds. Who could have predicted that rumors of war would begin to flourish only a year later? Who could have guessed that Billy and I would be forcibly separated and our children taken away before they were even weaned?

I apologize for the smudges. My tears are smearing the pencil marks.

If only they would allow my children to visit me! A glimpse is all I ask. What do Charles and Karen look like? Did they ever develop dragon traits? If not, have they been brainwashed to hate dragonkind? Are they even alive? Do they know I exist? And what of my husband? Is Billy suffering the same brutality I have to



## P R O L O G U E

endure? Will we ever be together again on this side of Heaven's gates?

At least Walter brings us news now and then, much of it dark and fearful, especially concerning the disease spreading among some anthrozils. The details are sketchy, and Walter can't give us more than a few coded messages. Since he is not dragonkind, he is able to spy out our persecutors, but he does so at great risk. If they learn he is merely pretending to be on their side, what will they do to him? And does this pretense violate his conscience? But I leave that dilemma to him. I am not his judge. And now that I think about it, if the guards become suspicious, I should erase this paragraph. If they find this journal, Walter's life will be forfeit.

I must end now. Stella will come on duty soon, and if she is in a foul mood, she will likely torture me again.

I hear footsteps. And chains.

Help me, Lord!

Bonnie Bannister







## 1

## CHAPTER

# THE LISTENERS

Joran set an arrow to his bowstring. The giant lay on his back only a few paces ahead, quiet and motionless. He was a clever one; his pose could be a ploy. If this Naphil's heart still had life, he wouldn't be able to hide it for long.

Surrounded by curtains of smoke, Joran tiptoed over fallen branches, scorched leaves, and blackened evergreen needles littering the carpet of thin grass. Narrow fire lines crackled here and there, looking like sizzling orange serpents as they gobbled the debris. Pools of thick tar dotted the area, less-than-subtle evidence of the recent battle between a dragon and the demon that got away. Unlike the Naphil, the demon, one of the lesser Watchers, seemed no smarter than a pomegranate, so Makaidos, though an inexperienced dragon, would likely catch him eventually.

Joran leaped over one of the black pools and halted, holding his breath to avoid taking in the noxious fumes. The giant hadn't moved a muscle. Even the arrow protruding from his chest stayed perfectly still. A single arrow rarely slew one of these beastly



## SONG OF THE OVULUM

humanoids, and they had been known to swim underwater for more than a league, so he might be holding his breath.

While Joran's sister crept up behind him, her sword in one hand and their captivity lyre in the other, he listened for the slightest noise. Even from a distance, and even with the surrounding fires emitting pops and snaps, the Naphil's heartbeat would be easy for his sensitive ears to detect. Still, nothing sounded, not a thump or a breath. He was either dead, or the pools of darkness had slowed his heart to an imperceptible level.

"Is the lyre detecting anything?" Joran asked.

Selah slid her sword into its scabbard and held the lyre's wooden frame with both hands, lifting the strings close to her eyes. "The G string is vibrating slightly. It's the only one not housing a demon."

"That's a good enough sign for me. The ovulum has to be around here somewhere."

A fly landed on the giant's bulbous nose, but his pale, bearded face didn't twitch. As the sun eased toward the western horizon, its rays broke through a gap in the trees and struck the giant's closed eyelids. Still, he remained motionless. Dead or not, he wasn't about to start a fight anytime soon.

Joran looked up. The smoky sky revealed no winged creatures at all, no demonic Watcher or warrior dragon, but the Watcher could return at any moment to retrieve the ovulum, if the Naphil still had it.

"No signs of life," he said as he released the arrow from his string and pushed it into the quiver on his back. "But no other sign of the ovulum either."

Selah stepped around one of the black pools and pointed at the giant. "He has a supplies bag on his belt, but we should be able to hear the ovulum if it's in there."

"I'll check." Joran eased up to the giant's body and listened to the goatskin bag. No song of the ovulum emanated from within. After sliding his bow up to his shoulder, Joran untied the bag's





## THE LISTENERS

leather drawstring and pulled it open. Inside lay several black scarabs, each one the size of his palm, but since their eyes lacked any hint of fiery redness, they had not yet been activated as weapons. They posed no threat.

As he retied the bag, a faint melody reached his ears, but it seemed warped, troubled. He followed the sound to a spot under the giant's meaty arm. Using both hands, he shoved the arm out of the way, revealing a pool where blood had collected and blended with black resin to create a thick slurry. A glass egg lay half-submerged in the mire.

While Selah again skulked closer, Joran slid his hands under the ovulum and lifted it carefully. The demon's ammunition, sticky dark resin it shot from its eyes, still adhered to the surface and slowly oozed onto Joran's fingers. No wonder the ovulum's song sounded so troubled. This liquid curse, this evil spell of hopelessness, must have distorted the holy sound. Apparently the demon planned to keep the ovulum's rescuers from hearing its call.

Joran looked up again. Since Makaidos wasn't around to burn the spell away, he would have to risk a song. It could draw the demon back, but it was the only way to restore the ovulum.

He eyed the resin as it began crawling from the glass shell to his wrists. The ovulum wasn't the only one needing to be saved. This stuff could take over his mind if he didn't hurry. "Selah, I need a rhythm."

She pressed close from behind and peered around his arm. "A cleansing song?"

He nodded. "If you add a harmony, it might go faster. We need to get out of here as soon as we can. Makaidos will find his way home ... if he survived. He's not exactly experienced in demon hunting."

"You'd better fight those doubts." Her voice carried a calming tone. "If you let that darkness spell affect you, you won't be able to sing."



## SONG OF THE OVULUM

“I remember Seraphina saying something like that.” Joran mentally cringed. Resurrecting grief over Seraphina wasn’t the best way to counter negative thoughts.

Selah’s eyebrow twitched, a sign of hurt, but a smile brushed it away. She played the lyre, alternating between two high notes. Following her upbeat rhythm, Joran began singing.

Dark begone. Doubt depart.  
 Light restore. Faith restart.  
 Cast away the gloom and fear;  
 Heed my words, let sight be clear.

As he repeated the lyrics, the music intermixed with the resin, diluting it and forcing it to stream down the transparent shell, clearing its smooth surface. A bluish glow blossomed at the center and feathered out toward the inner edges. With every pulse, the ovulum emanated a musical note of its own, part of its signature melody, now unhindered by the demon’s curse and the giant’s smothering weight.

Letting out a relieved sigh, Joran shook the leftover resin from his fingers and turned to Selah. “It’s alive.”

She hooked the lyre’s bracket to her belt and took the egg, cradling it in her palms. “Thanks be to Elohim!”

“Perhaps.” Joran jerked the arrow out of the Naphil’s chest and wiped the point clean on a clump of grass. “We have the ovulum. We’d better go.”

“Perhaps?” Selah squinted at him. “Are doubts from the demon’s curse still lingering?”

“Not really. I’m just thinking about what happened. With the angle I had, it seemed like an impossible shot, especially from a dragon’s back. I suppose divine guidance had something to do with it.”

“Then why *perhaps*?”



## THE LISTENERS

Joran shrugged. "I'm confused about the inconsistency. Why would Elohim help us today when he plans to kill us tomorrow?"

"I know. I know. We've been over all that before." Selah slid the ovulum into her own leather bag, tied the end closed, and attached it to another hook on her belt. "Speaking of dying tomorrow," she said as she looked at the sky, "we have the ovulum, so why the rush to get home? I think we should wait for Makaidos."

"And risk facing the Watcher again? Are you sure?"

"Today we live. Tomorrow we die." Selah gripped her sword's hilt. "That demon sang the foulest song I have ever heard. If we can silence him forever, it will be worth enduring his obscenities. We have no guarantee that the flood will kill those monsters."

Joran gazed at Selah's youthful face. Sweat streamed down her smudged cheeks, and dark hair flew about her bronzed forehead in spite of her carefully tied braid, stark contrasts to her sparkling eyes. Her loosely fitting earth-brown battle tunic and ankle-length trousers also acted as contradictions. Strong and lean from her training, her frame looked almost as athletic as his own, though she stood three inches shorter, one inch for each year younger. She had proven her skill time and again, but it didn't seem right to allow a thirteen-year-old girl to endure the evil songs of the Watchers and fly into danger on the back of a dragon. Yet, what else could they do? The ark had to be protected. The ovula had to be preserved.

He caressed her dirty cheek with his hand. "I'm sorry about the Watchers' obscenities, but I can't track their songs without you."

"I know." She pressed his hand closer and kissed its heel. "Don't worry about me. Elohim has put a shield around my heart."

Joran imagined a tough dragon-scale hide surrounding Selah's heart. Her faith was so strong, so certain. Of course, no daughter of Methuselah could doubt Elohim's existence, but how could she know for sure that a distant deity cared for her ... or for anyone besides the few who would be allowed to ride to safety on the ark?



## SONG OF THE OVULUM

Breaking their locked gazes, he turned to the west. The Watchers' song, a dissonant assortment of notes, drifted into his ears. The filthy demon cried like a spoiled child, another sign of stupidity. He was nothing like the Silent One, the Watcher of legend who controlled his sound environment. It would be a great adventure to confront that demon, but he had kept himself scarce lately.

"I can still hear him," Joran said, "so if we follow the sound on foot, maybe we'll find Makaidos."

"The Watcher is close." Selah nodded toward the setting sun. "The rhythm is wild and inconsistent."

"Chasing or being chased?"

"I can't tell."

"Do you want to hide or face him?"

Her brow bent low, and an uncharacteristic growl spiced her voice. "Face him!"

"Then we'd better get ready." Joran set his bow on the ground. "How close is he?"

"It's hard to tell." Selah detached her scabbard and laid it next to Joran's bow. "But he's definitely coming this way."

"How do your lungs feel?"

She unhooked the lyre and held it at her waist. "Tired, but I can manage."

"Good." Joran scanned Selah's body. She had removed all metallic items from her clothing, as always. With the exception of the rods themselves, the sound barrier would destroy any metal it touched. "We'll need to use standard base range. Have you detected the rhythm?"

Taking faster breaths, she nodded. "It's the same Watcher. He has murder on his mind."

"I hear his threats." After stripping off his quiver, Joran reached into a pouch on the side of his trousers just below his hip and withdrew a pair of metal rods about the width of his finger and as long as his forearm. "You set the beat," he said as he gave a rod to



## THE LISTENERS

Selah. "I'll do the probe. I won't know the exact notes until I hear how the Watcher reacts to my guesses, so you'll have to adjust as I do."

"Okay." She swallowed hard. "We've never tried a face-to-face wall before."

"Today we live. Tomorrow we die." Joran positioned himself to her left, both of them facing west. As he raised his rod over his head with his left hand, she lifted her rod with her right. They hooked their free arms together, supporting the lyre, and listened. The demon's song grew slowly louder. The terror their father called "unholy wrath" would soon arrive.

Selah's body trembled. Joran tightened his lock on her arm. Her anxiety wouldn't last. The upcoming clash would bring about her usual battle-hardened poise.

Inhaling deeply, he took note of the sparse collection of sycamores in front, many of them stripped of leaves. The recent battle between Makaidos and the demon had transformed this part of the forest into a clearing, leaving only a few unbroken trees within a range of twenty paces.

Ahead, the dark orange sun bathed them in warmth, but it also posed a threat. Fully illuminated and partially blinded, he and Selah stood as easy targets, but that couldn't be helped. They needed an unobstructed line for their voices.

He cleared his throat, hoping to quell any sign of nervousness. "Now, Selah. Interpret the demon's song. Replace the obscenities with something else."

"With what?"

"Anything. Just use the same word over and over. I'll understand."

Blinking, she gave him a nod and turned toward the sunset. "Closer ... closer ... closer." Her words flowed in a moderate rhythm, taking on a hum as she stretched them out. "Hatred ... evil ... murder ... closer ... closer ... closer."



## SONG OF THE OVULUM

Joran sang out, alternating notes in time with Selah's rhythm. The music rippled through the air, probing the path ahead. Seconds later, an echo sounded, his own voice, yet warped and off-key.

His rod vibrated. The captured sound entered his hand, shot down his arm, and coursed through his and Selah's bodies. Her rod did the same. As they absorbed the altered music, a new tune entered Joran's mind, the solution to the demon's attack, and the key to his undoing.

He pulled Selah closer. "I have it. Are you ready?"

Her lips pressing together in a thin line, she nodded.

"I'll wait until the last possible moment. We don't want to give him any warning."

Another growl rumbled in her reply. "Let's make him shrivel."

As the roar of a dragon pierced the air, the Watcher flew into sight, his dark form looking like a winged smudge at the center of the sun. Another winged form took shape behind him, Makaidos giving chase, his red eyebeams clear even from so far away. The Watcher zipped around trees like a weaver's thread, and the young dragon dodged every obstacle while shooting fireballs that either missed or grazed the zigzagging demon.

The Watcher's eyes shifted toward Joran and Selah, turning black as he drew near. His flight path straightened, and Makaidos's flaming blasts stopped, apparently to avoid striking his human allies.

Joran tried to loosen his tightening throat. At this speed, the Watcher would arrive in seconds. "Start the rhythm again. Use the demon's words."

Selah's voice erupted in a rapid singsong chant. "Strike them, kill them, shatter their spindly bones. Beat them, grind them, hurtle them to the stones."

Joran let out a wailing song, a series of connected notes that followed Selah's rhythm. She joined in with a perfect harmony, still interpreting.



## THE LISTENERS

“Closer ... closer ... cut their throats ... spill their blood.”

The rods vibrated so hard, they seemed to churn the colors in the air. A wall of sound spread between the metallic poles, thick and warped, making the sun and forest ripple in their view.

“Human fools ... closer ... closer ... now you die.”

Dark beams shot from the demon’s eyes. Joran pushed all his energy into the song, strengthening the wall. The blackness splashed against their shield. Goopy resin splattered from one rod to the other and disintegrated.

The Watcher slammed into the barrier and froze in place, the wall of sound absorbing his momentum. As big as the Naphil, he jerked and squirmed. His huge bare feet slapped the ground, his white robe and golden sash sizzled against the barrier, and his massive reddish-black wings beat the rods, but Joran, Selah, and the shield held firm.

As Makaidos angled away and landed with a slide, Selah shouted, “Let’s wrap him!” She unhooked her arm from Joran’s and set the lyre on the ground, plucking the G string before rising again. The note flowed up toward the barrier, visible as a serpentine ripple in the air, and attached to the barrier’s bottom edge. The active connection between the barrier and the lyre kept the string vibrating, allowing the G note to continue feeding sound upward.

Still singing, Joran ran around the demon. Like a banner flapping on a staff, the wall of sound encircled their captive and hemmed him in. When Joran completed his orbit and reached Selah’s opposite side, she shifted her rod to her other hand and again locked arms with him, the lyre standing to her left.

After taking a quick breath, Joran continued the song. His lungs ached, but the job was almost finished.

The Watcher screamed. The barrier captured his shrill voice, thickening it. With every grunt and groan, the demon’s limbs thinned, his face wrinkled, and black vapor flowed from his mouth



## SONG OF THE OVULUM

into the lyre's G string. Like a predator serpent, the barrier constricted, squeezing the substance out of its victim.

Soon, the Watcher shriveled into a wisp, leaving only a prunish head and a gaping mouth. With a final scream, his frame dwindled to a black string and flowed into the lyre.

Joran exhaled. Selah did the same. Both gasping for breath, they unlocked their arms and set their rods on the ground. The barrier of sound wiggled and writhed, stirring up leaves and twigs until it settled and faded away.

Taking in a cleansing breath, Joran picked up the lyre and allowed himself a gratified smile. "It's full now. Seven demons locked up."

"*Now* will you sing them out?" Selah asked, her expression hopeful. "I'm sure Makaidos would enjoy greeting them with fire when they show their ugly faces."

Joran let his smile wither. Selah's emphasis on *now* wasn't meant to be a slap, but it stung all the same. He looked at the strings. This lyre, one of only two in the world that could entrap a living being, had been passed down by Adam himself, the first human on the face of the Earth. And Joran, the elder of the two surviving Listeners, was the only living human who had the power to extract the demons ... that is, until that fateful day.

"I can't, Selah."

"Why not? You said—"

"Never mind what I said." He set the lyre on the ground and backed away. "Let's just burn it where it stands. That will kill the demons and save a lot of time."

Selah gasped. "Burn Father Adam's lyre?"

"We're all going to die tomorrow anyway, and Noah's family doesn't know how to use it." Joran turned to Makaidos. "Good dragon, will you please do the honors?"

With a flap of his wings, Makaidos scooted toward them. When he stopped, he sat on his haunches between the lyre and





## THE LISTENERS

Joran, looking him in the eye. "Since I perceive no need to save time," Makaidos said, a sparkle of red in his pupils, "I wonder if there is an alternative reason for this decision to destroy a family heirloom."

Joran stared at his sandal as he brushed a toe across the leafy debris. This dragon had no idea how many times he had tried to sing a demon out of a string, and Selah had heard only excuses for years. Even she had never seen a successful singing extraction, only a few executions by fire. Finally, he firmed his jaw and shifted his gaze back to Makaidos, his tone assertive but controlled. "Just do as I say, or I will have to report your insubordination to Arramos."

"Joran?" Selah leaned close and whispered, "His question is reasonable. Why are you threatening him?"

"He is a servant to humans. It isn't his place to question me." He met her gaze. With a fist on her hip and her brow bent low, her stance was clear. She was right, and she knew it. She wasn't about to back down.

Heaving a tired sigh, Joran gave both Selah and Makaidos an apologetic nod. "I shouldn't have been so terse. I'm exhausted, and it takes a lot of energy to sing a demon out of a string, and extracting seven is just too much. The lyre will be destroyed in the flood anyway, so, if you don't mind, Makaidos, I would appreciate it if you would make up for my weakness."

Makaidos bowed his head. "Very well, Joran. Your weariness is quite understandable." He curled his neck and aimed his snout at the lyre. "Stand back."

"One word of warning," Joran said. "When a demon comes out, he'll be enraged. The screams will be nothing like you've ever heard before. Don't let the noise distract you, or he'll get away."

Makaidos puffed a plume of smoke. "A blast of fire will silence any escapees."

"You think it will," Selah countered, "but this is your first execution. You have no idea how resilient these demons can be."



## SONG OF THE OVULUM

“It seems that I will have to learn quickly. Your brother has made his decision.” With his pointed ears pinned back, Makaidos gave her a firm nod. “Let us proceed.”

Joran scooped up the sonic rods and slid them into their pouch. Taking Selah’s hand, he backed away slowly. With their sensitive ears, the screams would be horrific, but they couldn’t retreat too far. If one of the demons escaped, they might have to corral him again.

Twin streams of fire shot from Makaidos’s nostrils. They encircled the lyre and engulfed it in flames. As it burned, a squeal erupted, then another, both cries saturated with obscenities. Selah covered her ears, wincing. Joran glanced at the rods’ pouch. He probably should have kept the sound barrier active, which would have allowed him to shield Selah from the verbal onslaught and quickly capture an escaping demon, but it was too late now.

While Makaidos continued blasting the lyre, several thin trails of black mist rose from the strings.

“Makaidos!” Joran called, pointing. “The mists are the demons. Scorch them!”

The dragon’s river of flames shifted to the rising trails, intermingling tongues of orange in a violent swirl. One trail broke away and expanded into a body, dark and winged. As the demon took shape, it slowly solidified. Its robe smoldering and its face blackened, it let out an ear-splitting scream as it beat its wings and tried to escape from the swirl.

Makaidos’s eyes darted toward it, but he couldn’t move the fire again lest he allow the other six to escape.

Silence deafened every sound, even the Watcher’s cries. The lyre exploded noiselessly, shooting flaming shards in every direction. Joran and Selah flew backwards like hurled stones. They landed on their backsides, tumbled into reverse somersaults, and sprawled prostrate.

Joran scrambled to his feet and helped Selah to hers. Makaidos blew a raging river of flames at the escaping demon. Now a



## THE LISTENERS

winged, fiery silhouette, the Watcher swelled in size and straightened to his full height. He staggered toward Joran and Selah, waving his flaming arms as he cursed in his hellish language.

“Run!” Joran grabbed Selah’s wrist, but just before he could turn, the Watcher burst open. Black-streaked flames spewed from his side. Joran threw Selah to the ground and covered her with his body. Sizzling lava-like globules rained down, some pelting his back. Scalding heat bit through his tunic. He clenched his teeth, but he couldn’t roll away. He had to protect Selah.

Something swiped against his back. The burning pain eased. Angling his head, he looked around. Makaidos stood over him, batting the smoldering flames away with a wing.

“I apologize,” Makaidos said. “I miscalculated the Watcher’s capacity. If you wish to report my inadequacies to my father—”

“That won’t be necessary.” Joran climbed to his feet and helped Selah rise. “I’m the one who said we had to burn it.”

Selah brushed off her trousers. “No need to blame anyone. All is well.”

Joran flapped his tunic, allowing cool air to waft over his scorched back. A flurry of reasons why all was not well died on his lips, including his usual complaint that he and Selah were risking their lives to protect an ark that would soon float away to safety without them.

After glancing at the lyre’s remains, a pile of gray ash and scattered strings, he offered Makaidos a conciliatory head bow. “The Watchers are dead, we’re alive, and we rescued the ovulum. That’s all that matters.”

“I appreciate your mercy.” Makaidos’s ears perked up. “But I am not sure all is well.”

Selah scanned the clearing. “Do you sense a Watcher’s song in your scales?”

“That is my mother’s talent,” Makaidos said, keeping his voice low. The tip of his tail twitched, and his head swayed. “I am able to detect danger, not songs.”



## SONG OF THE OVULUM

Joran followed the dragon's line of sight. Up until recently, they had ridden Shachar, Makaidos's mother, and her ability to detect the evil songs had been helpful. This young dragon had more deficiencies than expected. "Can you tell if the danger is close?"

"The sensation is weak," Makaidos said, "so I assume it is far from us. I will let you know if it increases."

"Then we have a spare moment." Selah withdrew the ovulum from her pouch and displayed it again in her palms. Its glow emanated beyond the glass exterior, painting her hands blue. Its song rode the smoky air, inaudible to most dragons and humans, but loud and clear to angels, demons, and, of course, the two Listeners.

As the energetic tune pumped through his mind, Joran hummed along. The vigor seemed out of place. One day remained before Elohim would send a flood to kill every creature with the breath of life. This was a time for sadness, a day of grief.

18



Letting his hum wither, Joran swallowed through the tightness in his throat. Without a doubt he, himself, deserved to die. His sins had been many, especially the one great sin that likely cost him his soul. Even Father and Arramos seemed unable to forgive him for what he did to Seraphina, and if she were still alive, she probably wouldn't forgive him either. He didn't deserve forgiveness, only death. But Selah? She deserved life, eternal life beyond this doomed world. She, like their sister Seraphina, possessed a flame that could not be extinguished.

As he looked at Selah's eyes, they reflected the ovulum's radiance. With her love and purity, she was more like an angel than a human, and every bit as righteous as Noah.

Joran shook his head. No. It just wasn't right. Somehow he would convince Father to use his prophetic influence and get Selah on board the ark. At this point, nothing else really mattered.

Another sound rode the breeze—a voice, elongated calls of "Joran" and "Selah."

## THE LISTENERS

“Did you hear that?” Selah asked.

Joran stilled his body, trying to identify the voice, a deep tone, fragile, like that of an elderly man. “Father?”

“That’s what I thought.” She returned the egg to its pouch. “We’d better get this back to him. Maybe he’s calling because the anchor ovulum needs support.”

“Although I heard nothing,” Makaidos said, “I agree that leaving is a good idea. The danger sensation is growing.”

Joran kept his ear trained on the wind, but no more calls drifted their way. Selah was right. Father’s ovulum was the most important of the seven ovula, but its energy shield couldn’t protect the ark by itself for very long. Although Arramos and his dragon family even now pursued the Watchers who stole the other five, who could tell when or if they would succeed in time to augment the protective anchor?

A low groan sounded from somewhere nearby. Selah sidled up to Joran and nodded toward the giant. “He’s alive.”

Joran let out a shushing sound. “Mount. Immediately.” While he backed toward their weapons, Makaidos lowered his head to the ground, and Selah quietly climbed his neck, dodging the spines protruding from the central ridge.

Stooping slowly, Joran collected his bow and quiver, grabbed Selah’s sword and scabbard, and attached each one to his belt. The giant sat up and shook his huge, hairy head, as if casting away a dizzying spell. Makaidos straightened and curled his neck, ready to shoot fire, but Joran jumped in front of him and shook his head sharply. They couldn’t risk another battle. Time was short, and they had accomplished their mission.

As the Naphil rose to his feet, Joran ran to Makaidos’s flank, leaped up his scaly side, and with help from Selah’s outstretched hand, vaulted to his seat in front of her.

The giant charged. Makaidos launched from the ground and smacked him with his tail as he zoomed toward the sky.



## SONG OF THE OVULUM

Joran clenched a fist. Yes! Victory! Although this Naphil survived the arrow's plunge, he lost the battle and the ovulum. Now he would have to face his demonic father with news of his failure.

As wind whipped across the burns on Joran's back, pain returned with a vengeance. Selah had been kind not to press close as she usually did when they flew together, but her body contact might have been less excruciating than the barrage of stinging air.

After several minutes of flying above the lush forests surrounding the Tigris River, they passed over the remains of Eden's Garden. Below, misshapen trees bent toward the ground like crippled men bracing for a fall. Leafless bushes made up the square boundary of what Father called *The Odious Orchard*, and only weeds and thistles grew alongside short trees with thorny vines and shriveled produce. Then the cursed tree came into view. Still lush and heavy with red, oval fruit, it stood as an odd survivor, a plant that, being a curse itself, resisted the blight.

20



Finally, they passed over the holy tree, a gorgeous evergreen with hefty branches that effortlessly carried a bounteous supply of ivory fruit. An angel robed in brilliant white stood at one side brandishing a sword that emitted a beam of light. Waving the blade back and forth, he stirred the light into a semitransparent shield that covered the tree, similar to the way their rods formed a wall of sound.

As they flew past Eden's boundary, Joran looked back at the desolation. It seemed as if it might be easy to land in that forsaken garden, but every dragon and human knew what would happen if someone tried. The guardian angel would attack with his sword of light and disintegrate the intruder. Such was Elohim's wrath against anyone who dared to challenge his edicts.

Joran licked his dry lips. What would it be like to taste the guarded fruit? No one knew, of course, but stories abounded. No more thirst? Eternal life? Deliverance from the coming flood? If any of those legends were true, might it be possible to sneak past

## THE LISTENERS

the angel, snatch one, and give it to Selah? Of course, stealing the fruit would probably spoil its powers, maybe even turn its flesh into poison. Such was the way of Elohim. No one was allowed to take mercy without it first being offered.

His mind drifted back to a day when he actually dared to approach. At the age of twelve, cocky in the vulgarity of his youth, he strolled up to the cherub and demanded some of the fruit. The angel sternly warned him to leave, but young Joran's foolish stubbornness held sway, and after analyzing the sound the protective sword made, he sang a note that he thought might neutralize it. When tiny holes began appearing in the shield, the angel lowered the sword and aimed it at Joran. "Foolish boy!" the angel shouted. And Joran ran, never looking back and never returning to the tree to this day.

*Foolish boy.* The rebuke rang so true. Not satisfied with this transgression, that very day he went on to carry out his darkest deed, and the scars from his wickedness still remained. He hadn't been able to sing a demon out of a lyre string ever since, no matter how many times he tried. Even now his gifts diminished at a nearly imperceptible rate, as if the evils of that day continued to strangle and squeeze life out of him.

He breathed a silent sigh. No matter. Today we live. Tomorrow we die. He needed his gifts no more.

Biting his tongue, Joran turned toward the front. His thoughts of theft both then and now were juvenile, stupid. And Selah wouldn't touch the fruit anyway. Still, he had to rescue her from the flood somehow, and very little time remained.

