

# Ascension

By Brian J. Lambert

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You are what you dream...

Thank you-

Acquanetta (mom), Jordan (Butterup), Michael, James,  
Pamela, Douglas, Jahmal, Trent, Ben, Angel, Mike Mac,  
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Jessica, Harmony, Brandon, Marissa, Joe Cisneros, Mike  
Johnson and anyone else I bullied into reading a section for me.



# Prologue

*Dear Mother,*

*Too much time has passed, I should have told you long ago. I also know the danger of contacting you so openly because our enemies still abound. The paper sticks to my fingers as I write this. I can no longer tell whether the storm raging around me or the tears raining from me have soaked the paper. There seems no end to the pain our family endures. The expectation of strength born of our trials feels non-existent. I've written this letter so many times that I've lost count. Yet nothing helps me bear the weight thrust upon my shoulders and the hurt festering in my heart. My*

*pen scrawls across the paper and I find myself wondering whether I've said what I intended. Have my words and thoughts betrayed me like so many other things? I even doubt whether I have the right to say what I must, to say what I fear and know is true.*

*Not facing you is the only way I can see this task through. I sit in a coward's refuge, sinking from the look in your eyes, hiding from the warmth of your touch. Once my words materialize into meaning, the trials I claim to bear will pale in comparison to what will wash over you. Still I falter under its weight.*

*Before I grew to manhood, you taught me of inner strength and you made me believe I had that strength within me. Before I became a Knight, I remember waking and looking at the unconditional love swimming in your eyes. Now I fear dimming*

*that light with news most grave, news and events  
that I relive every night of my life.*

*Long before we played in this world of  
Knights, Kings, Queens and Ladies, we were  
children with dreams. You fostered those dreams  
with the love and consideration born only from a  
mother. You happily sent us into the world with the  
pride of your heart shining upon us. Now I stand as  
a man, dreading the most difficult task of my life. I  
have marched on the plains of war and showed no  
fear. I have fought and embraced a Warrior's  
death; but this I cannot do. My tale encompasses  
more than the mere words that will retell it. I  
dream that if I refuse to say it, it may not be true.  
The childish fantasies of turning back time become  
a quest when tragedy takes hold of life. As I sit in  
tragedy's grip, I dream.*

*Before my words degrade into a lament of my own device, I must let the information pour from my heart, I must speak the words I fear saying. I will say this in words only you will understand. As time passes, others may come to realize my meaning and know my sadness, but they will never understand its gravity. They will never claim the truth of our family's pain. Your precious pearls were lost to the storm, mother. On the day you left, I told you that I would protect your most precious treasures. I have failed. All the strength and faith in my body was unable to prevent their theft. I have failed in the only capacity you ever tasked me with. Please forgive me for my weakness. Please forgive me for the inability that plagued my bones and visited this upon you. In time, you may find peace for us both. Until then I shall silently endure this torment. With every sleeping moment and every*



*dark whisper, I shall know a modicum of what you  
feel. My heart shall burn with the sadness coursing  
through your veins. Perhaps that is my penance for  
a failure so grave, but I shall endure until you  
release me. With love, always;*

*Your Son,*



*Shawn*

Shawn lifted his head from the letter and red wax sealed its face. Raindrops tapped against it as the storm raged behind him. The paper hung limply in his palm. Although sealed, he knew the contents by heart. His tears and the rain destroyed the paper

but not the content. Although he said and desired otherwise, he stepped forward determined to deliver the correspondence in person. His dark brow hid beneath the deep folds of his cloak. The urge to turn on his heels seized him, but he stood fast even though his trembling fingers and closing throat begged otherwise. He stood at a large oak door, its old articulation turned deep brown and cold, a large plaque tapped against its face, blown by the soft wind. His eyes crawled over 'Fidelis', the single Latin word carved on its face and his brain flashed to its meaning. He raised his arm to knock. It hung heavy on his shoulder, his hand refused to curl into a fist. Instead it reached into his pocket and fiddled with the cold metal ring. The keys shook from his pocket as he slid them into the lock and it clicked into position. He took in a deep cold breath as he

turned the knob. The door yawned open for him and creaked as he stepped through the frame.

“Mom, are you here...? It’s Shawn... I have something to tell you.”

# One

“Hello?” Kyle asked as he picked up the communicator.

“Kyle, it’s Michael,” the man answered.

“I’m busy, what do you want?”

“Get over to my place,” Michael said.

“Why?”

“The King called a special Commission meeting,” Michael replied.

“What about the rest of the guild?” Kyle wondered.

“You worry about getting there yourself. I’ll worry about everyone else.”

“All right, I’ll be there in an hour and a half.” Kyle said, looking to his left.

“You’ve got thirty minutes.”

“All right, but...” Kyle spoke to a dead line.

Kyle lifted up his head, focused his eyes and realized he was not alone. The hazy moonlight

shone through the large window and placed lines of light on his chest. His bed sat on the wall opposite the front door and he heard the gentle purr of his companion. There were two rooms on the left and right of the bed. Both rooms remained dark and one had a dripping faucet. Just to the side of the front door, the refrigerator rumbled quietly and a view screen buzzed away. To his right was a large panoramic window; the half drawn blinds let in the slightest hint of light. Light danced over his body as he stretched. It contoured to the ripples of his arms and chest as he moved closer to the bed. He moved the covers out of his way and sat on the edge of the bed. His muscular 6'2", 223-pound frame moved soundlessly in the confines of the room. The hazy blue light of the moon reflected against his dark brown skin.

“What’s wrong?” The woman in the bed asked.

“Nothing, go back to sleep,” Kyle answered, reaching under the bed frame.

He pulled back and held a black scabbard into the light. The simple pentagonal cross guard topped a black ribbed suede hilt. A thick brown

leather belt connected twelve inches down the sheath, for slinging the blade over the back. On the floor lay another identical sword, which he placed on the bed.

“What’s that?” The woman asked.

“Don’t worry about it, just go back to sleep,” he slightly insisted.

“That’s a sword isn’t it? I thought swords were illegal for citizens,” she continued.

“Andrea, they’re only illegal if you’re not a Warrior. I said, don’t worry about it.”

“Are you a knight in training?” She bubbled, with peaked interest.

“No, I’m not,” Kyle, replied, indignantly.

“Then what are you?”

“Nothing.”

He moved to the room on the left, turned on the light and started the shower. It whispered at him as steam crept into the front of the room, carrying the aroma of flowers with it. With a tap of metal on porcelain and a slap against skin, Kyle let out a deep sigh. He reentered the front with his teeth clenched and his head and face cleanly shaven. He trimmed his mustache and goatee as

well, adding an earring to complement the malicious sparkle rising in his eyes.

“You’re still awake?” Kyle wondered, noticing Andrea still watching him.

“We never finished our conversation.”

“I realize that.”

“If you’re not a Warrior and it isn’t illegal for you to have your sword, then just what are you?” Andrea wondered, sitting up in the bed, with her hair flowing over her shoulders and the sheets covering her body.

The silk sheets molded to the folds of her body. She sat up and bent her legs beneath her. The sheets hugged her chocolate skin. A shy almost unassuming smile crept over her lips and her bashful eyes examined him. The blue of night lent her an ethereal glow, while she waited for him.

Without answering, he walked around the bed and stood in front of the door. Reluctantly he pushed the door open and turned on the light. He slowly motioned for her to come. She hesitantly got up and held the covers close to her body. Goose bumps gently peppered her skin. She moved to Kyle’s side and rested her head on his left shoulder.

Florescent tube lights lined the high ceiling of the room, larger than the two others combined. The floor was a padded mass of brown, littered with scrape marks and boot prints. Both a speed and heavy bag hung in the far corner, covered in worn leather. Two combat dummies faced each other in the center of the room. Various points on the bodies were depressed and slightly out of shape. Mirrors covered the far left wall, obstructed partially by a set of parallel bars and a gymnastic horse. On the opposite wall hung a virtual armory of swords and blades, immaculately placed and shining. Lastly, Kyle looked at the cabinet on his right. He took Andrea in his arms and peered deeply into her eyes.

“This cabinet bears the crest of my Commander.”

A skull towered on the face of the large walnut cabinet. It lay on top of a pair of crossed axes. The stark white of the skull contrasted the ebony weapons supporting it. The pits of black for eyes and hollow mouth laughed, mocking the fear of death. Forged in pain and war, the device left no illusions of remorse or quarter.



“I still don’t understand,” she stammered, looking at the cabinet.

“And here is the mark of my rank,” he continued, showing her his right shoulder. The same skull imposed over a black sword glared at her from the tattoo on his shoulder. “I am Sir Kyle Hunter, First Knight of the Sword and sworn man of the Black Knight.”

“I just spent the night, with a Knight of the Realm?” She wondered, as the frightening realism entered her mind

“That you have,” Kyle said nonchalantly.

“Then you have condemned me to death. Ladies of the Queen’s Royal Court are forbidden to fraternize with Knights of the Realm!” Andrea yelled, frantically snatching on her clothes.

“Beyond that, I am sworn to never entertain a Warrior of any class.”

“You know my secrets Andrea, perhaps it’s time you told me yours,” Kyle retorted.

“My father was the former Duke Gavindale. Peace was brokered with the promise that I would never seek a Warrior, nor vengeance.”

“Why didn’t you tell me you were Gavindale’s daughter?” Kyle asked incredulously.

“And why didn’t you tell me you were a Knight?”

“I never meant to hurt you or put you in danger. I just didn’t think...”

“No you didn’t. Now I must live with the shame of breaking my oath, or die as a traitor.”

“You didn’t do anything wrong,” Kyle began. “If you never trust anything about me again, trust that I would never lie to you.”

“Whatever we did was against the law and against my heart. If I never see you again Sir Kyle Hunter, it will be too soon!”

Kyle rubbed his forehead and dropped his shoulders as he watched her walk away. Before the door slammed, even before he told her about his Knighthood, he knew what was going to happen. Even what he felt for her lingered in his head unsurely. Why did he feel the need to protect her? Why didn’t he just leave her to her own devices the night before? And why didn’t he tell her what really happened between them? Whatever the case, he failed. Now she carried shame upon her heart

with no reason. The truth of Duke Gavindale being her father complicated their liaison. Beauty was not enough to live with the way Kyle survived, to understand what it meant to be a Knight. He sensed it the moment Michael contacted him. It always happened that way. Either a call, or a letter and the world stopped making sense. Duty rushed back in and threw personal feelings to the wind. That time was upon him once more.

He stalked across the room, never taking his eyes off the speed bag. With a lightning overhand left, the bag ricocheted against the post. A deep breath and a long look in the mirror called him back to the task at hand. He turned back to the cabinet and grabbed the crest by the two crossed axes. The smell of polished metal and leather rushed to his face when he opened the doors. On the left hung a black suit of finely engraved armor. A finely woven black suit hung on the right, complemented by a midnight blue shirt. He grabbed the suit off the hook and brushed down the front. When he pulled on the pants, he fastened the silver buckle on his belt and stretched to adjust the shirt. He put on his socks and stepped into his boots, the polished and

smooth leather hugged his skin. He grabbed a skull-faced silver ring and put it on his left hand. His face-hardened with a malicious smile, as he looked at the mirror. He flared his cape before he threw it over his shoulders and let it fall gracefully around his frame. Lastly, he grabbed a pair of black gloves from the cabinet and slung his swords over his shoulder. Darkness grabbed the room before the light clicked and Kyle disappeared. Tardiness did not become him and the Black Knight was not a man to wait.

Michael sat with his back to a large window and his hair fell over his shoulders. His fur-lined cape rustled uncomfortably under him as he placed his left fist under his chin and his right hand on his lap. A low light hung above him, shrouding the room in darkness and giving the shadows a life of their own. With his legs crossed right over left, he reclined in the large black leather chair. His black shirt shimmered as he stood abruptly and placed both of his hands on the desk. A pained shriek pierced the silence, followed by a

commotion of people and heartfelt wailing. His head faced the window before his body turned in response. He rested his arm on the window and kept the hair from his eyes. Before him lay the entire expanse of Avalon, capitol city of Avalon's Empire. The buildings grabbed and stretched for the sky. They reflected the moon with their high black tint. Scattered lights sprinkled the structures, like eyes in a dark cave. The beasts of the night were constructs of metal and concrete. The behemoths of the land, the real beasts were all iron topped. The harsh elements and tarnish turned their once deep red coloring to a mutated green. If one described Avalon as the jewel of the world, from this perspective Michael understood why. The many towers thrust themselves into the sky, like the splintering of some precious stone. The endless peaks raised their fists to strive higher than their brothers'.

The man made mountains peered at him and he peered back, unafraid of the darkness. He embraced their struggle against the ground that spawned them and the air that fed them. He saw the skyline in the distance, the deepening blues and

blacks, the endless potential. The path to be written, the fear of the unknown called to him.

Amid the endless stone, the heartbreaking wail exploded again. The unmistakable heartache of a mother echoed through the dark streets. It created an infinite chorus of pain. It was impossible to distinguish the old cry from the new and each seared the soul.

An avalanche of people poured from the building across the street. Four teams of people pushed gurneys and grabbed up victims. The blood soaked white sheets splattered against their clothes and arms. None of the victims had seen more than twenty years. They were all children, but their mothers were crying for them now. The helpers from inside the building met the chaos of victims and toppled one of the gurneys. When the victim's bloody arm hit the concrete and someone tried to plug the artery in his throat, the distant scream exploded again. The wails increased exponentially but the energy faded into nothing. The scream continued until the woman hit the ground devoid of strength. The crews scrambled to get order and organize the victims, but chaos ruled the night.

A figure clad in white exited the front of the building, shining against the harshness of night. His thin white coat and blue coveralls shook in the breeze. The ice in his eyes surveyed the area and he quickly went to work. He raised a latex gloved hand and attendants jumped to attention. Immediately, his presence dispersed the pandemonium and put the patients in order. With the last of the injured carried in and the mother attended to, the white coat stood outside for another moment. He looked at the cross on the front of the building. Then he looked back in Michael's direction. With a deep head nod, the white coat entered the building and the street hushed again. Michael watched the building for another minute before he heard footsteps. As he turned away from the window, he ran his eyes over the sign above the cross. *Avalon Municipal Hospital, "A Beacon of Hope for All."*

The door creaked open and Michael watched Kyle glide into the room. True to fashion, Michael's crossed arms and piercing stare made him nigh unapproachable. Michael's mustache and thin triangular beard showed that his mouth was

meant to smile. His flowing hair covered the stone sides of his slender face. The intensity of Michael's eyes bordered on evil when hidden behind his shoulder length hair. Kyle approached with his head high and his swords against his back. He stopped under the dull light and looked as Michael did, out the window. The sprawling expanse of Avalon captivated both men.

"Hail Sir Michael Hunter, Black Knight and my worthy commander," Kyle said kneeling and touching his right fist to his chest.

"You honor your blood, your King and your nation, Knight of the Sword. Rise." Michael replied.

Michael's eyes belied the labyrinth of questions, answers and deadly games. The remorse and anger rumbled to the surface only in the curvature of his eyebrows. Much like peering into the heart of the city, Michael peered into Kyle's soul. The two men paused and eyed each other unflinchingly. Knight and Commander stared at each other in silence as tension hung thick in the air.

"How have you been Michael?" Kyle asked, hugging him deeply.



“Much better than you brother,” Michael smiled, with his arms on Kyle shoulders. “Look at you; you are truly our mother’s son.”

Michael’s extra two inches meant almost nothing when compared to Kyle’s shoulders. With Kyle broad and Michael slim, the brothers complemented each other. Michael started for the door first and Kyle followed. He fastened a skull pin to the front of his cape and placed his hand on the knob. The door creaked open again. He held it for Kyle, who entered the sterile hallway.

“We’re late, but hopefully we won’t miss the Caravan,” Michael informed.

“Where is the chariot? I didn’t see it on my way in,” Kyle wondered, as they entered the stairwell.

“Should be downstairs by now. With any luck, this will be to affirm the Knight of the Crown. A brief ceremony, some food and we can disappear,” Michael said optimistically.

“Do you really believe that?” Kyle asked.

“Not in the slightest,” Michael sighed.

“What about the rest of the boys?” Kyle wondered.

“Only you and I. I have no desire to linger.”

“You’ll have no complaints from me. I could still be asleep.”

Michael looked at Kyle again as they rounded the corner. Outwardly his brother the warrior glowed, magnificent in his stature. But something below the surface called to Michael. Darkness resided somewhere in Kyle.

“Are you going to make me ask?” Michael asked.

“Ask what?”

“Kyle,” Michael began. “How beautiful was she?”

“What are you talking about?” Kyle asked, with anger bubbling beneath his words.

“The girl you were with when I called. I know you weren’t alone,” Michael replied.

“There was someone there,” Kyle began as a well of emotions became trapped by duty and honor. The pain drowned his expression and in a flash it disappeared. “I have just one word, but it’s not one that you want to hear,” he continued as they approached the Hover-Chariot.

The moonlight bent around the sleek curves on the charcoal gray Hover-Chariot waiting for them. A short and stout older man stood in front of the Hover-Chariot. His smile bristled and his eyes brightened when he saw Kyle and Michael. Directly tied into the shine of the Chariot, his pride exuded his small stature. His thick mustache and beard covered his lips and hid most of his face. A thick coat of hair covered his rough and worn hands. He ran his hands along the sleek frame of the Chariot and trotted in front of Michael and Kyle. When he passed the back, he took a second to stop and pat the two posterior engines. He checked the undercarriage quickly and examined the four engines for elevation. He beamed a smile again when the brothers stopped to admire the cream interior. Michael elected to use an uncovered Chariot. A flag bearing the Black Knight crest flew from the back. Michael and Kyle nodded and smiled in approval, giving their driver all the praise he needed.

“Enough stalling, whatever it is. We’ve got to face it anyway,” Michael reassured.

“Gavindale.”

“I want to believe you’re joking,” Michael stammered. “But I know you’re not.”

“Nope. You’re not that lucky.”

“Tell me about it on the way there,” Michael finished as the driver opened the door to the Hover-Chariot. “To the Palace, Harvey.”