

SUMMARY OF PREVIOUS EVENTS...

THE BOOK OF NAMES (#1)

After losing their mom to cancer, Hadyn (age 15) and Ewan Barlow (age 13) struggle to adjust to their new life. Making matters worse, their dad has moved the whole family from the city to an old farm in rural Missouri. One day while clearing brush, Hadyn discovers an old stone arch marked with strange runes. When four mysterious black birds fly overhead carrying invitations to a place called The Hidden Lands, Ewan has a dream of a simple song and goes to the arch late at night with his tin whistle (a gift from his mother from Ireland before she died). After playing the melody from the dream, the arch begins to glow. He crawls through...into Karac Tor. Immediately, he meets a beautiful Fey creature, who is surprised and disturbed that he can see her. She flies away. Ewan follows a gnome back to the Gray Abbey, where he is apprehended. After watching the strange Mirrorling ritual, in which a fierce, demonic creature called a Watcher is captured in a pane of glass by the Mirling named Asandra, Hadyn suddenly appears, ready to rescue Ewan. He, too, has come through the arch.

Father Eldoran and Elder Sorge (a warrior-turned-monk) explain the history of Karac Tor, a kingless land ruled by weak governors. Youth are wandering away from their homes like soulless zombies, headed towards the island of the witch, Nemesia. The three Abbeys (White, Gray, Black) each serve a different purpose in maintaining virtue in the land. Since the "Call Birds" crossed worlds to summon the Barlow brothers, Father Eldoran assumes they must be new Champions summoned by Governor Archibald to aid Karac Tor. Ancient evil is rising. But Hadyn and Ewan don't want to be heroes, they just want to go back home. Eldoran reluctantly agrees to send them to Governor Archibald. Sorge, Flogg the gnome, and Asandra the Mirling accompany the boys on their journey.

Yet in coming to this world, the release of power has alerted the forces of darkness, who now wish to destroy them. World-crossing has also deposited power into the boys. On the journey towards Stratamore, the capital city, they are attacked by emissaries of Nemesia, five "lost" youth. In this battle, Hadyn discovers a strange power to hear the names of things and have control over them. The boys glimpse many other strange wonders. Gnomes can touch the land and hear things happening far away. Sorge can mold hardened stone as if it were soft clay. Also, there is a powerful, ancient book, written long ago by the Adam-like First Man of Karac Tor. The Book of Names contains the name of every person who will ever be born in Karac Tor, from the first days of Creation to the final days of the War of Swords. This revered, prophetic book is fiercely guarded by the White Abbey. But a terrible thing is happening: the names of newly born children are disappearing from the book!

Over a series of adventures, the group is betrayed by a sea captain and attacked again by more Lost youth, until finally Hadyn is captured, and the party is forced to split. A swordsman named Cruedwyn Creed joins them, fleeing his own troubles. Creed has a magic sword that grows red-hot whenever he lies, which is often. Given his tendency to boast and exaggerate, the results are comical. Meanwhile, on the Isle of Apaté, Nemesia prepares to supplant Hadyn's identity with despair and hopelessness, as she has done to all the other nameless, lost young people. Nemesia is beautiful, seductive, corrupt and angry. Yet she is ruled by an even greater power: Baron von Gulag. He commands her to gather her army of Lost and release the darkness of the Staff of Shades. Von Gulag is revealed as the true mastermind.

After braving the dangers of Redthorn Forest, they enter Stratamore. But Governor Archibald refuses to help, caught in endless arguments with his petty earls and dukes over land and ego. Archibald, manipulated by an assistant named Jonas, claims no knowledge of the Call Birds or the scrolls. Ewan and Sorge realize with shock: the A is for Aion, the mythical, divine ruler of all worlds. The Ravna's Riddle (at front of book) is proving true!

Flogg risks his status among his kin to reveal the secret Raven Trail under Champion's Bay, as the team attempts to rescue Hadyn. Meanwhile, Nemesis unleashes the power of the Staff of Shades, spreading shadows across the world. The magical Fey Folk continue to study all these new events, remembering another human from long ago who could also see them: a powerful Mirling of old, called Tal Yssen. Supposedly, he travelled to another world and served a great king named Artorius. (These revelations are scattered throughout the book).

On the Isle of Apaté, Hadyn is slowly succumbing to Nemesis's sorcery. Glassy-eyed and defeated, he leads the procession to the sacred grove where Nemesis will unleash her shadows and commission her army of nameless souls to spread evil far and wide. But Ewan will not give up on his brother. Emerging from the secret trail under the Bay, they challenge Nemesis. In the final, climactic battle, Sorge once again takes up the bow to fight, Cruedwyn Creed is matchless as a swordsman and Asandra bravely holds off the terrible Watchers. But it is Ewan who acts most heroically. Having felt despondent that he had no magic like Hadyn, he discovers his true power is actually the music he makes. Inspired, he plays the same song that got them through the arch, not knowing that it is really the ancient Song of Aion. The power of the song completely disrupts the power of Nemesis's sorcery and breaks the spell over Hadyn's mind. Together, the boys will draw on each other and their identity as Barlows. They remember their names, and fight. The lost are set free. Nemesis is overcome. When the battle is finished, they decide to travel to the White Abbey, hoping to find guidance there. Surprising revelations end the novel:

1) Gabe, one of their younger brothers, is waiting on them, having also come through the arch. His power is the ability to talk to birds. 2) Jonas and Baron von Gulag are various forms of the powerful, ancient evil Shapeshifter known as Kr'Nunos. 3) Gabe's twin, Garret, also traveled through the portal, but he lost him after that. Gabe heard a man talking to Garret in the darkness. The man's called himself Taliesen, but he didn't recognize the name. On Karac Tor, there was a famous man known by that same name. It is a name of legend— Tal Yssen, the famous Mirling of the Black Abbey from long ages past. Hadyn puts it together...Taliesin the Mirling...Merlin!

CORUS THE CHAMPION (#2)

The book begins with a conversation in the strange, watery darkness of "portal travel" between Garret and Taliesin, revealing the same dialogue that ended Book 1. Switching scenes, we see the brutal Baron von Gulag descending into the dungeons of Helheim to mock and torture a man in chains: Corus. The Baron's servants are laboring to build a brutal army of earth creatures, called Goths. Switch scenes again (there's a good bit of setup). Cruedwyn, Hadyn and Gabe have been sent by the White Abbey to warn the land barons of coming troubles. They travel with Vanya, one of the Highland "Bird Men" sworn to protect Gabe since the Highlanders revere his gift of Birdspeech. Hadyn is practicing swordsmanship under the tutelage of Creed, who is still fleeing Quilian, the assassin who has been pursuing him since Book 1 in search of Cruedwyn's magic sword.

North of the White Abbey, Ewan is using his musical powers to help Earl Har Hallas quell the problem of roaming jackals. Sorge, with him, is increasingly plagued by guilt over his friend Corus, believing the great, former Champion may actually be alive and findable. He goes in search of an old hermit monk claimed to have the power of Trulight. Ewan sneaks away to follow him. They find Barsonici in the ancient ruins of Lotsley. Though half-mad, he joins their quest. Barsonici informs them of the legends of the Sleeping King, and of Corus, who was cursed with the fate of all second-born sons of the famous Lahns of Lotsleys.

Along the way, Ewan slowly makes friends with the same Fey creature he saw in Book 1, Elysabel. Barsonici claims the Fey know where Corus is hidden. Since only Ewan can see them or talk to them, they decide to enter the secretive Fey Haven deep in Elkwood Forest—a place of music, magic and danger for mortals. There, Ewan meets the beautiful, cruel Queen, Marielle. Though he is immune to Fey magic (which enrages the Queen),

Sorge, Barsonici and Flogg are not. They become helpless, spellbound captives. In one of the most moving scenes, Ewan willingly sacrifices his power of music to gain their release. As the Fey steal it from his soul to play in Fey Haven forever, his companions are released, and Ewan demands to learn the secret location of the legendary Pillar Map. In exchange, the Fey Queen gives him a mysterious key to a doorless tower. Even as the Queen keeps her promise, it is not without trickery. Hating gnomes, she turns Flogg over to his kin to put him on trial for betraying the Raven Trail in Book 1. Sorge and Barsonici, she strands among enemies. Though Barsonici does not reveal it, he was given a vision of his own death as Ewan played his music for the last time.

In Hel, the Baron continues taunting and torturing Corus. But forces of destiny and fate are at work. The Baron is really Kr'Nunos, the dreaded enemy of old. He fears Corus, but keeps him alive...why? Because as the second-son in the line of Lotsley, Corus is key to finding the Sleeping King, whom Kr'Nunos greatly fears. Corus wishes he could die, but is compelled to live and fulfill the doom Artorius laid upon his ancestor, Lancelot (Lahns of Lotsley). We come to understand that Lancelot also crossed over with Tal Yssen (Taliesin/Merlin) to enter earth's history as part of the legendary court of King Arthur. Complicating matters, Corus carries a great burden of guilt along with his rage and hatred for Sorge. Once, both men had been in love with Nemesia before she turned to the ways of darkness. Sorge betrayed the Champion because Nemesia choose Corus over him (Asandra the Mirling from Book 1 is actually the daughter of Sorge and Nemesia). But it's complicated. He also exposed Corus who was about to give away the secret of the Pillar Map to Nemesia. In this, even the Champions of the land are revealed as flawed humans, capable of pride and deception.

Now we see Garret in ancient Angleand (England, on earth) with Tal Yssen, wandering through the region of Glastonbury Tor. Garret sees the true King Arthur fall in battle and his dragon-eyed sword (which is Creed's magic sword). Tal Yssen speak with a beautiful woman in flowing robes, who carries the dying Arthur away into the mist by ship. As they continue their journey, Garret knows he must get a message to his dad before they leave earth for Karac Tor. He and Tal Yssen travel to ancient Norway, where Tal gives a magic stone and Garret's Kansas City Chief's watch to a group of Vikings, commanding them to cross the ocean and mark the New World with their gift (this becomes the arch in Missouri hundreds of years later, marked with Viking runes).

The Baron sends a trial army of Goths—powerful, dumb brutes of earth and metal—south to test the will of men at Röckval. Elsewhere, Quillian and Creed fight. Quillian masters him, but Creed cleverly overcomes escapes, keeping ca'Libre, which Quillian has called "The Blade of Freedom." They journey north to old Tinuviel. Far away, Ewan travels south, alone and brokenhearted, to meet with Har Hallas, who treats him like a son. Elysabel finds Ewan on the journey. She is enraged at the actions of her queen against him and promises to risk all to make it right. She tells him the secret resting place of the Sleeping King, and gives him fairy dust to wake him. (Queen Marielle's mother, Morgiona—Morgon le Fey—was the woman who carried Arthur away at Taliesin's request).

Outside Elkwood Forest, Sorge and Barsonici flee to a watchtower to escape the foes pursuing them, unexpectedly finding four Highland Wingmen waiting for them on top of the tower. Unbeknownst to them, Gabe had been given a vision of Sorge in need. Because they revered him, the Highlanders willingly obeyed sent four valiant Wingmen to carry Sorge and Barsonici over the mountains. The flight of the Wingmen is epic as the men brave the frozen winds, soaring high in the skies to carry Sorge and Barsonici to the gates of Hel. Wounded and weak, the men descend into the darkness. Barsonici uses Trulight to see. They find the imprisoned Corus, but Barsonici must stay behind to secure their escape. He perishes. As Sorge and Corus are carried away, they spy the army of Goths moving towards Röckval. Sorge directs the Wingmen to take them to the city to warn them.

At Tinuviel, thinking Cruedwyn and Hadyn are spies, Duke Pol Shyne throws them in prison. In the distant past, we see Garret finally crossing worlds to Karac Tor, also transported by Tal Yssen to old Tinuviel to reclaim the Aeolo stone from the monk, Soriah. Aeolo grants power over the wind. In the old Keep, he finds Soriah contemplating one of Tal Yssen's diaries, seeming troubled. In fact, Tal Yssen had written in the book he is

reading that Soriah would be visited by an Outlander, whom he should entrust with the stone. Soriah aids him. Time shifts, and Garret finds himself in the present, trapped in the same dungeon as Hadyn and Cruedwyn. Immediately, Garret and Gabe sense each other across the miles. As twins, they have a mind link.

Driven to Mt. Bourne, Ewan finds the Sleeping King in cave hidden under a waterfall at the base of the mountain. The Lady of the Lake is there, guarding Artorius, King Arthur, in a state of healing sleep. She threatens to destroy Ewan for entering her domain. Using the fairy dust from Elysabel, Ewan wakes the king. Gabe uses his link to Garret to tell him Arthur is awakened. In Rockval, Sorge and Corus talk for the first time. Sorge weeps bitterly and repents, but Corus will not speak to him. As Goths approach, the viks (vikings) of Bitterland need a Champion to lead them, but Corus is a broken man. Sorge knows Röckval cannot endure.

The book ends with a glimpse of grief-stricken Reggie Barlow, returning to the runestone for the millionth time, clawing the earth in rage. Buried under the arch, he finds Gatlin's watch, along with the magic portal stone Tal Yssen sent with the vikings. As he holds them in his hands, the runestone begins to glow. He crawls through, finding himself in a room with a broken man (Corus), struggling to rise to his feet to prepare for battle against the Goths. Corus, the Champion, has returned. And Reggie is now trapped in the doomed city of Röckval.

THE SONG OF UNMAKING (#3)

High on Mt. Vishgar amidst deadly winds, a machine is being constructed by a determined troop of gnomes. The gnomes are skilled, the machine is huge. Beneath the mountain, the battle for Röckval is underway. With Goths storming Hooper's Road, Odessa is forced to lower a defensive wall called Kveld's Fence to block their path. A dreadful stalemate and waiting game ensues, as everyone wonders how long the blockade of stone will hold against the brutal, senseless Goths. Having recently arrived to Karac Tor, Reggie Barlow is secretly smitten with the Lady Odessa, but has little time to consider the implications of his feelings. What he really wants is to be rejoined with his sons, but war has come to Bitterland and now he is trapped inside the city. As two weeks pass, the relentless pounding of the Goths begins to fray the weary nerves of the viks. Corus, too weak to fight, is tended in bed and ministered to by Asandra, who greatly speeds his healing with her mirling powers.

The widowed Odessa is not respected by her war chiefs, leading to endless bickering and indecision every night at the Council of the Vikmass. To make matters worse, Magnor, son of rival war chief Magnus (leader of the northern vik stronghold, Yrgavien), is visiting the city, giving unwanted attention to Odessa's daughter. Magnor is a spoiled, cruel young man. As tensions mount, Sorge retreats to the inner sanctum of the viks, renounces his vow, and pledges himself to war again, but his strained efforts to reconcile with Corus are rebuffed.

Meanwhile, to the south, Lady Madwyn of Brimshane attempts to craft hope and beauty out of grief in her garden. Pained by the loss of his song, Ewan prefers spending time with her more than his brothers. Garret and Gabe steadily grow stronger in their gifts of wind and birdspeech, while Har, Cruedwyn and Hadyn lead a night raid on a group practicing pagan ways near a local standing stone. Unfortunately, the event turns into a slaughter of blood as Watchers are summoned. Har sees his land steadily succumbing to evil. Soon it becomes clear that Nemesia is directing the efforts on Mt. Vishgar. In visions, the witch commands the gnomes from the Cliffs of Felwyn. We learn from two of her gnome slaves, Worr and Wart, that Flogg has been taken to the Stone Moot for ten moons to await his judgment for betraying the path of the Raven's Trail in Book 1.

Arthur is beginning to find purpose again, remembering his destiny as king. As he, Har and the Barlows journey to the Gray Abbey to join a council comprised of Pol Shyne, the new Gray Father and a representative of Governor Archibald, they learn the dismaying news that Röckval is under siege, and that blueprints to a terrible machine have been stolen from the royal vault in Stratamore. It seems clear that someone intends to unleash the dreaded Fifth Song, the Song of Unmaking, one of nine Songs of Power. But when the brothers hear that Corus is alive and Mr. Barlow has entered the land, they determine to go to Röckval immediately, no matter what anyone else does. Hadyn makes an impassioned appeal to the various leaders to take action. To prove the point,

he kneels before Arthur and asks him to be their king. Hadyn is growing in his power of Naming, enabling a basic level of control over metals, especially iron. Ewan can only watch and long for his gift of music. Even so, he is increasingly determined to find some sort of comfort in his bitterness, just as he saw Lady Madwyn do. Cruedwyn agrees to teach him the Song of Loss, another of the nine Songs of Power. Though superstitious by nature, the affable bard increasingly voices a stubborn agnosticism regarding the existence of Aion. Under his tutelage, Ewan haltingly and poorly begins to play his flute again. The tune is hardly musical, but Ewan perseveres.

On Grym Fields outside Röckval, the Horned Lord watches the progress of his Goths. As Kveld's Fence is finally breached, the viks fight back, rallied by a newly strengthened Corus. When Watchers join the attack, all hope is lost, until a small band of mirlings appear to assist Asandra, transported by Meridian Stones from the Map Room at the Black Abbey. Bishop Cassock has come to give aid. Even though Upper Röckval is destroyed, the Goths are finally overcome when they plunge headlong into the raging Witemeld River and are washed away. Sorge rightly discerns that the Goths were compelled to reach the inner gardens of the city, and that some magic was driving them to return to that soil. A traitor is discovered who stole the soil and gave it to Kr'Nunos. This is how and why the Goths "live."

The Barlows arrive at Röckval, alongside a belated support force of 3000 viks from Yrgavien under the control of Magnus. Odessa is scornful that Magnus has come too late to matter. She openly shames him and his son. Magnor and Ewan clash. Otherwise, the reunion of the Barlows is a joyous occasion. Gabe sends an eagle to the rumbling peak of Vishgar. For the first time, he links to the bird's mind and is able to see through its eyes. He reports that a giant machine is being constructed, which leads to the decision to send a raiding party to destroy it, comprised of viks, Hadyn and Gabe. Meanwhile, Reggie, Ewan and Garret will depart for the Tower of Dreams, Nein Dyrr. Odessa also decides to head north, along with Magnus and Magnor, to rally other war chiefs. They will travel together for a time before parting ways. Mr. Barlow is not happy about the thought of splitting, but there seems to be little choice.

The attack on the machine fails and the raiding party barely escapes back to Röckval. Arthur and Corus finally meet for first time. Corus resents Arthur, but is compelled to serve. He will fulfill his blood curse and be free, but Arthur is pained by how much Corus looks like Lancelot. On the way to Nein Dyrr, Ewan sees Elysabel wandering and weeping one night. Her wings are torn, a punishment of the Fey Queen for aiding Ewan with fairy dust in Book 2. They talk, but she will not tell him what happened. Before fleeing, she tells Ewan that Fey without wings are nothing but stone. Later, while he sleeps, she returns and steals the key he won from the Fey Queen.

Shamed by Ewan, Magnor kidnaps him in the middle of the night, hauls him to an old, abandoned well and throws him in. Trapped and cold, alone in the pit, Ewan can't climb out and fears he will not be discovered. But as he listens to the wind moving over the the well, he hears a cold, serene music. From the Cliffs of Felwyn, Nemesia takes possession of the gnomes and calls forth the Song of Unmaking, just as the Hard Breath begins to peak atop Mt. Vishgar. As the Song is played, rivers run backward, trees uproot, mountains quake, volcanoes erupt, the sea roars. What has been hidden in the hearts of men is now revealed. Lies are unbound, the truth is known. Many people are physically altered as Watchers take possession of their surrendered souls and transform them into Ravers. Cities flood or burn. Thousands die. The Song plays five times, six times. If it plays a full nine times in succession, the ruin will be complete. But a new Song arises to battle it in the heavens.

Having rescued Ewan from the well, Reggie, Sorge, Odessa, her children and Garret arrive at Nein Dyrr, where Elysabel is fading from view, slowly becoming part of the mysterious patterns etched into the stone tower. She commands Ewan to take his key and insert it into her heart. She tells Ewan to make music again—that he must understand, *he* is the music. Weeping, Ewan obeys. The strange Tower opens and he realizes it is really a giant "flute." As Reggie, Odessa and her children take shelter in an alcove in the cliff, Garret calls forth the most powerful wind ever imagined, adding his power to the Hard Breath raging through Bitterland. Ewan remembers the well shaft, the music, the sadness of his soul, and crafts a song out of the emptiness he feels. The tower

bellows forth a song of surpassing beauty and sorrow. On Mt. Vishgar, the great machine breaks apart. Overcome by Ewan's song, Nemesis flings herself off the cliffs. When it is over, Sorge and Ewan realize with dread that Reggie and Odessa are gone. The alcove, part of the Tower of Dreams, actually has a Map Room of earth carved into the floor! A mysterious cryptogram on the wall foretells a quest related to the Lost Prophet, Rianor.

The book concludes with the revelation that Thorlson and Magnor have become Ravers, and Cruedwyn's fate looks equally grim. Worst of all, in the final scene, we see Cassock kneeling before Baron von Gulag in a sacred grove in Bitterland, receiving instructions on the Severing Blade, along with intimations of more Goths to come and an army of invaders from neighboring Quil. Finally, Cassock is given a thin book which he is to deliver to Alethes: the clever, heretical Lost Oracles. Indeed, Kr'Nunos has left nothing to chance. Morally, spiritually and militarily, he is destined to conquer. The great deception, the final weakening, has begun.