

**The Tale of Albanoth
(Book One)**

A long time ago the small continent of Albanoth stood proudly in the middle of the Pacific Ocean. Its days are long gone. The growing metropolis was cut off from the rest of the world by an evil spirit known as the Dark One, who had possessed a powerful wizard named Menull. Menull and another powerful wizard called Nalf served the royal family of Albanoth. The two protected the kingdom until Menull became the Dark One's host. The land of Albanoth had been completely forgotten, until now.

It was a sunny morning on the island of Jamaica and a man named Jerry was working hard gathering bananas for a delivery to his cousin's shop in Cuba. Jerry's tall, thin body tensed as he pushed his wheelbarrow full of bananas to his truck which he drove to the airfield. He was a dark skinned man of twenty four and had been running the banana plantation since his parents, Jamal and Hannah, passed away years ago. They were reported missing and believed dead.

Once Jerry got to the airfield he was greeted by a tall, chubby man.

"Hello Jerry" said the man. "I fixed up your plane, but the engine still has a small kink. It's nothing to worry about though."

"Thanks, Henry" said Jerry. "How much will it cost me this time?"

"Not a penny this time!" exclaimed Henry happily.

"What are you talking about?" asked Jerry.

"It's New Years Eve" explained Henry. "You know, Y2K."

"Oh yeah!" exclaimed Jerry sarcastically, slapping his forehead.

When Jerry's plane was cleared for take-off, he flew straight for Cuba. His flight was smooth for the most part but suddenly his plane began to make loud sputtering noises and loose altitude.

"Come on, come on!" urged Jerry. He struggled with the plane but it continued to drop. Luckily Jerry's plane was converging on a small island. Jerry braced himself for impact as the plane crashed into the sandy beach.

Jerry slowly climbed out of the old plane, "Oh right, Henry: 'the engine still has a small kink. It's nothing to worry about,'" mocked Jerry. "Nothing to worry about, my foot!"

After checking the plane for damage, Jerry noticed that the propeller had been thrown off on impact and the left wing was badly damaged. Looking closer, he also noticed a small fire growing in the engine.

“Oh man!” shouted Jerry as he sprinted away. As he jumped into the forest for cover, the plane exploded behind him. Jerry landed on his side and accidentally rolled into a deep tunnel. When he finally came to a stop, he found himself in front of what looked like a round, stone table and on it laid an old book. Jerry dusted off his clothes; spat the sand from his mouth and out of curiosity made his way to the book.

“What is this place?” he said to himself looking around the tunnel. As he approached the book and opened it, a blinding light filled the room. The ground seemed to disappear beneath him and then reappear a short time later. The book vanished and his world went black.

When he woke, Jerry found himself in a stone room with a large window. He was lying in a soft bed with heavy blankets.

“Ah! Good, you’re awake.” a voice came from somewhere nearby.

Jerry jumped out of bed and came face to face with an old, light skinned man wearing small spectacles on the end of his nose.

“Do not worry, you have nothing to fear from me or anyone else in this kingdom.” said the old man.

“This kingdom?” asked Jerry.

“I will explain it all to you in a moment.” said the old man.

“Right, Ok so I am...” began Jerry

“Jerry, son of Jamal and Hannah.” interrupted the old man.

“How di-” began Jerry.

“My name is Nalf,” interrupted the old man again. “I am thirteen hundred years old and you are no longer in your world, but ours. We are from a time you refer to as the Middle Ages and I am the wizard, chronicler and protector of the Kingdom of Albanoth.” Nalf explained everything as promised; how he knew Jerry’s name and his parents. How Albanoth came to be and how a wizard known as the Dark One had cursed the land. Nalf also told Jerry that his parents were actually the King and Queen of Albanoth and that the Dark One was holding them captive to bait Jerry. Most importantly, Nalf explained Jerry’s role in the conflict of Albanoth.

“So my parents are actually alive and I have to help save them or else they and all of Albanoth are doomed?” asked Jerry when Nalf finished.

“Yes, that is correct. No pressure.” said Nalf with a laugh.

“H’hah... but, how do you know that they’re still alive and why can’t any of your guys take care of it?” asked Jerry.

“We know that they live because the crystal that is the beacon of the kingdom still shines. If they were not alive, the crystal would not shine so brightly. You are the son of royalty, and only you can resist the Dark One’s magic thereby stopping him from destroying Albanoth. You must learn how to use this to your advantage and like it or not, your training is about to begin.” explained Nalf.

“What? Don’t I get a say in any of this?” asked Jerry.

Nalf only shook his head and asked with a smile “Any other questions?”

“Fine! One more question,” said Jerry annoyed. “How are you thirteen hundred years old?” he added comically.

“Magic can do amazing things.” said Nalf with a wink.

The next day, Jerry began his training to become a member of a team consisting of Albanoth’s best knights. It was these knights who would accompany him on his quest to save his parents and their kingdom. Jerry learned that the Dark One was waiting for him because with Jerry and his parents out of the picture, the Dark One could rule Albanoth any way he chose.

As he began his training routine with the Knights of Albanoth, he came to know each of the nine by name: Mia, Kel, Wallace, Mallik, Sharna, William, Joseph, John and Xunn. Everyday Jerry would get up, have breakfast and then head down to the melee ring with Mia, William and Kel. There they would teach him how to fight using melee weapons like swords, axes, shields and other hand-to-hand combat weaponry. He would then go to the archery range where Sharna and Joseph would teach him how to battle with ranged weapons. After a full morning of intense training, Jerry spent his afternoons with Nalf who taught him everything he needed to know about Albanoth.

For the first couple of months of training, Jerry made very little progress. He would continuously mess up battle stances in his melee training. During archery, he had the same problems and only made good progress in his classes with Nalf.

As the months progressed, Jerry gradually became better and better at everything he did and after seven months, he became a master in all his classes.

Finally, it was the day of testing. Should he pass, Jerry would be dubbed a Knight of Albanoth. To him, failure was no longer an option. After learning everything he had about Albanoth and his parents, Jerry found himself strangely connected to the people and the battle for Albanoth. As expected, he succeeded in his melee test, defeating William in a duel using blunt, wooden weapons. For his next exam, Jerry needed to defeat Joseph in an archery competition and did so with ease. Finally he was tested on his knowledge of Albanoth, which he passed as well without difficulty.

That night at dinner, Jerry and Nalf sat together and talked about the day and what was yet to come.

“Tell me Nalf, how is it that I have been able to master all of these techniques within seven months, when it took the other knights many years?” asked Jerry.

“It is in your blood, your ancestors were incredible warriors. It is only natural that you are as well.” explained Nalf.

“I see.” said Jerry thoughtfully.

“Did you know that I was one of the first to fight the Dark One?” asked Nalf.

“Yes, and that was twelve hundred years ago. The Dark One can live that long because he is immortal right?” asked Jerry.

“That is correct,” said Nalf. “But remember, he is immortal not invincible... he CAN be killed.”

“So does that mean that you and the people of Albanoth are also immortal?”

“No, but as I have told you before, magic can do amazing things my young friend.” said Nalf. “Come, it is time for the ceremony to begin.”

Nalf rose from his seat, picked up his goblet and shouted to get everyone’s attention.

“Hear ye, hear ye noble people of Albanoth!”

“We are here tonight to honour the Knights of Albanoth and welcome its newest and youngest member.”

The crowd had been still while Nalf spoke, but now they cheered so loudly the noise could barely be contained. As Nalf walked to the front of the great hall and the table where the other knights were seated, he stood amongst the people of Albanoth and raised his sword in the air.

“Jerry Curien, son of King Jamal and Queen Hannah, come forth and kneel before me.”

Jerry slowly got up from his seat. Feeling a little embarrassed and very unworthy, he walked up to where Nalf stood with his sword drawn.

Nalf began, "Jerry, these are dark times for our people and darker days lay ahead for the Knights of Albanoth. Today, I bestow upon you a great destiny. Should you wish to take this dark journey into the unknown; to fight alongside those who have chosen the same path; to willingly die for the good of the kingdom; then of your own free will, do say you: 'I accept.' If however, you wish to return to your world forever with no memory of this place and it's people, then answer: 'I refuse.' Your ancestors took upon themselves, this destiny but the question now remains, will you?"

The crowd watching fell deathly silent and Jerry finally spoke loudly: "I accept!"

"Then with this sword, I dub thee Sir Jerry Curien, noble Knight of Albanoth and bestow upon you a greater destiny than ever before." shouted Nalf.

Suddenly the crowd erupted into cheers and the celebration began. There was music, games and more food... much more than Jerry had every seen.

Hours later as the evening came to a close and Jerry stood alone in the melee ring practicing, he became lost in his imagination. He was no longer in the melee ring but surrounded by groups of the Dark One's minions. He was snapped out of his daydream by the sound of an alarm; the city was under attack.

Jerry ran up to the tower where Nalf stood. Soldiers were running all over the place, scrambling for their weapons.

"What's going on?!?" shouted Jerry.

"The Dark One's minions." replied Nalf. "It seems that their army is small; this must be a probing attack."

"What should we do?" asked Jerry.

"Our archers will hit them hard from the front. They will keep them busy while you, the other knights and two more platoons hit them from the side and then withdraw." said Nalf.

The Dark One's minions were using some kind of black magic to hit the archers. They tossed rocks that were covered in black fire. The battle quickly progressed as the archers developed ways of deflecting the rocks of black fire. Most of Albanoth's troops converged on the enemy. Their attack was swift and deadly. Up close, Jerry noticed how disgusting the Dark One's minions looked; they were not human. They were tall, with hunched backs and dressed entirely in black armour. They wielded odd, double bladed weapons along with the black fire rocks. Soon the troops were surrounded by the enemy in black and as each minion was killed another quickly took its place. Jerry's daydream had become a reality!

“Knights, to me!” shouted Kel. He then pulled a giant war hammer off his back, while Mallik and Wallace pulled out a war axe each. The three formed a triangle with Kel at the front and pushed through the minions, making a path for the soldiers to escape. Kel sent the minions flying like golf balls with his hammer. Once the last of Albanoth’s remaining troops had escaped, the archers finished off what was left of the enemy who had scattered and were now exposed. Soon all that was left was the charred battlefield.

The soldiers who did not fight in the battle helped to bury those who were killed. Thankfully, none of the ten best knights were killed or even wounded.

“Why do you think they attacked, Nalf?” Jerry asked later.

“That attack was likely to test our defenses for an invasion intent on capturing or killing you.” replied Nalf.

“So these soldiers died because of me.” said Jerry, more to himself than to Nalf.

“No Jerry, they died trying to protect Albanoth.” replied Nalf.

That night Jerry lay awake reflecting on the recent day’s events.

Wow, thought Jerry. I went from delivering bananas one day to fighting in a war to save a kingdom and the parents I thought were dead! But I know that my role is not yet complete. My parents are alive! Do they know that I am alive? How will I find them? How am I supposed to defeat the Dark One and will I survive?

One thing was certain in Jerry’s mind; this battle was far from over...