

*There are those with virtue
and sin but only borne from
the chaotic reality in which we
live.*

Those With Virtue Borne of Chaos

By Thomas R. Young

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The background of the entire cover is a dramatic sky. In the upper right, a bright sun with rays is partially obscured by white clouds. A vibrant orange and yellow comet streaks diagonally across the middle of the frame from the left. Below the comet, a bright lightning bolt strikes down from a dark, stormy cloud. The bottom of the image shows a calm blue body of water with a series of smooth, grey stones placed in a line across it.

THOSE WITH VIRTUE BORNE OF CHAOS

Witness the winding paths lived of those with virtue.

THOMAS R. YOUNG

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Chapter 1: The Two Queens

Violet lightly rolled the stone around in her palm one calm evening in her boutique. A boutique situated in a small quaint village duly named Vanillaville. It was a peculiar village. Peculiar in that it was always small. As Perfelot was growing sizably in a growing populace, this village was nearly always small in comparison. Perhaps it is that people were infatuated with overly populated cities, the tailor mused.

Or maybe they were scared and apprehensive of this small village.

The tailor looked out the window watching serene scenery slowly perform its play. This village had long existed before Perfelot came about, around the time of the prior kingdoms. Everyone learned of that. It didn't have all the new amenities of other places, but it got by in its renovations. The fact remained, however, that Vanillaville had always been around. The apprehension of others was found in this fact because, well, this was the village that the original Bearers of Virtue settled long ago.

Those with Virtue were both praised and apprehensively seen as an indication that something bad might happen. A curse or omen, even if momentarily a blessing or boon. Something terrible, horrendous, awful, etc. was symbolized in their presence. It wasn't because of them particularly but what it meant would happen when they're there.

Queen Angelica wanted to ease people's minds and have the stones returned to Perfelot's treasury room as was tradition after the stones had served their purpose. The box was going to be brought about tomorrow in a ceremony to collect them. With a medal, of course. Maybe a statue but mostly fearful looks on those bearing them. Violet shuddered remembering the statue depicting the original Bearers fighting the chaotic being displayed in Perfelot's courtyard. Those with Virtue bearing the stones this day and many more in the future would know what exactly that statue was about. A statue bespeaking chaotic origination and perpetual living.

The tailor let out a slow breath looking down at the stone she was lightly rolling around in her hand.

"Erika Diamond," Violet whispered in a hushed tone. "I know what you and the others went through and those that followed in carrying these...stones. It's no wonder people fear what will happen when these are carried. I...feel like something isn't quite done yet. Pandora Black...is long gone. I know this as do the others. But...something feels off. Something is stirring in the air. Erika, please. Please show me your memories again. That is...the memories stored in this stone, once again. Perhaps there is something to learn from it. Let me witness once again what happened."

The stone began to glow in the tailor's hand answering the words. For better or for worse, Violet could see the tailor from long ago walking a foreign road in a land time had almost forgotten. Walking roads was

a mainstay in that ancestor's life. When life got her down, and she needed time to think, a good walk would clear the conflicting thoughts in her head. Even if walking alone it would seem. She walked a multitude of roads searching. Never truly knew the walk she was doing alone, until it inevitably made itself apparent.

To take a walk on Erika's road, the travels in part shared by others with virtue, was...an experience not soon forgotten. Roads walked alone but leading together in their conclusion. Violet would soon be reminded of that.

Erika, a tailor renowned in her time and shamed likewise. Perhaps ashamed. She was a solitary person. Or at least she tried to be. It was hard to get attached to people when certain things kept happening. She was beautiful beyond comparison. Interestingly enough, her skin was magically enchanted to rejuvenate and restore unto a youthful flair, regeneration magic if you will. However, others noticed on first glance that this tailor was skinny. As skinny as someone that never ate...because she rarely ever did. Erika never ate, but she was beautiful, gorgeous, and all manners of pretty sentiments. This tailor from yonder olden times was walking her road heading to what some would say destiny and a fateful meeting with others.

The land of Tavrend, the largest continent of Vastria, was broken up into seven great nations. There was the peaceful nation of Emilius, its sister nation Lunaria, the high-class nation of Ucoria, the savage and war-torn nation of Trazicon, the resplendent nation of the Sky Empyrean, the ferocious beast-filled Dragonlands, and the nation of the frozen north, Syndicus. A truce was held amongst the seven (for the most part at least), but the alliances were fragile at best. A single spark would be all that was needed to set the world aflame.

Our story began as many stories do. In a run-down tavern in a backwater town. This tavern was called the Crystal Shores. It was a basic tavern and would likely be overlooked if not for its location. The Crystal Shores was the sole tavern of Huffington and Huffington, itself, was the border town between the two great nations of Emilius and Lunaria.

Emilius was a peaceful country whose focus was more on the scholarly arts of magic and diplomacy. Lunaria was a more secluded nation whose focus was more on war and its military might. With their differing philosophies the tensions were always high between the two nations although this wasn't always the case. At one time, Lunaria and Emilius were a single nation ruled by two sisters, Queen Lani and Queen Valerie, respectively. The two ruled the country together for many years. The sisters were special, after all. Both were ageless and near immortal.

It was said that before the two were born, their parents prayed to a powerful deity called the All-Mother. Their prayers, of course, were for an everlasting lineage, one that would span the generations. The king and queen had grown old and had sired no heirs to their throne. Fearing the end of their reign, the two made a deal with the deity. It was never said what ritual the king and queen performed to appease the All-Mother but, soon enough, the two were blessed with twin girls.

The two girls were born healthy and strong. The same, however, could not be said of their mother. With her advanced age and frail body, the Queenly mother was not able to survive the birthing. Just as the second girl was born the Queen's strength gave out. The heartbroken king attempted to care for the girls, but his health worsened and soon he too joined his love in the grave. The kingdom had gained its heirs but had lost its rulers.

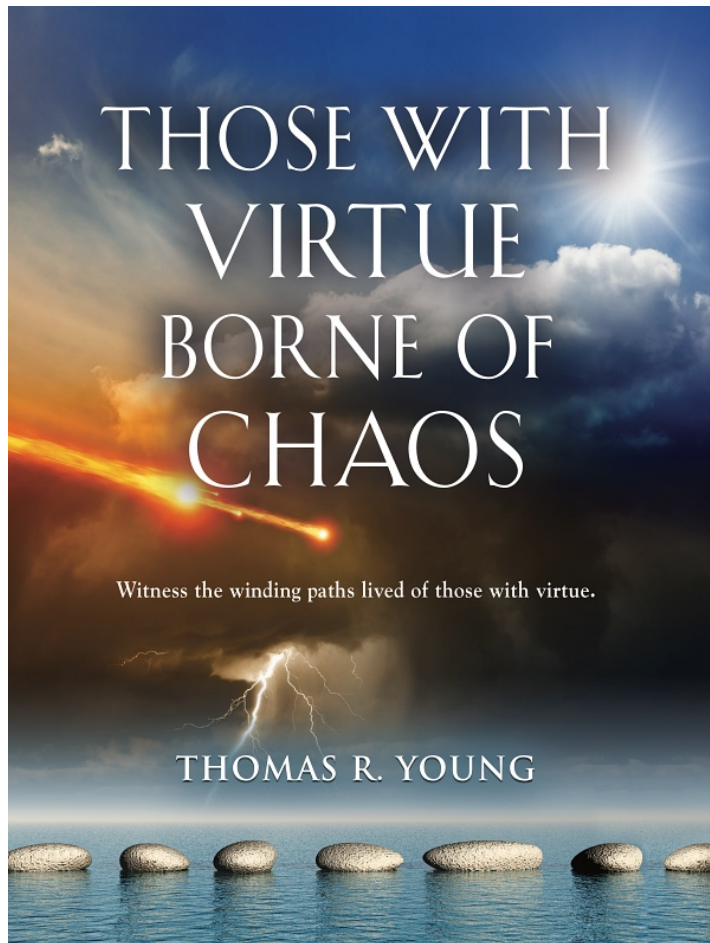
Taking quick action, the King and Queen's most loyal took in the children and did their best to raise the girls. It was, of course, not an easy task with how different the two were. From the moment of their birth, it was clear the girls were far from ordinary. The first born was a fair-skinned girl with golden locks, sparkling emerald eyes, but more importantly what set her apart were the large feathery wings that grew from her back. The second born was nearly the first's opposite in every way. Her skin was a raven black color, and her hair was an even darker shade with deep purple eyes. Instead of feathery eagle-like wings the second born had leathery bat-like wings and even had a demon-like tail.

The years were kind to the girls. Mostly the first born. They were groomed for their roles. As soon as they were able to stand, they were crowned queens of the nation. The nobles counseled the girls as was needed before they were able to stand on their own. The first few years of their rule were shaky, but it wasn't long until the girls grew into the roles.

The rule of the two Queens were some of the most prosperous years in Emilius history while residing in the nation's capital, Crestilia. The Queens were loved by the public and respected by the other nations especially the Sky Empyrean who viewed the Crestilian royal older sister as a deity. The rule of the two Queens lasted for centuries as the two had stopped aging after their eighteenth birthday. The only reason their joint rule, itself, ended was because of a schism that had come between the two.

The two Queens were as night and day, different yet still the same. The older Queen was loved by all. Her heavenly appearance was all but worshiped by the masses. The younger Queen was not so lucky. She was seen as a devil and treated as such. The tensions between the two grew until finally the younger sister snapped. Believing she and her kind (those born of demon blood) were treated unfairly the girl left the kingdom, eloped with a foreign prince, started a family, and took control over half the country. The older sister attempted to reason with her sibling, but the damage had been done and her mind was made up. The large nation would be split in two. Thus, the nation of Lunaria was born, west of Emilius.

Time became history, and the two nations continued their strained relations. The Queens never spoke to one another again, not formally at least. A great pressure started to form between the two nations and their people. A line was drawn in sand, and that divisive line between the two nations would come to the forefront of fate. The border town of Huffington would soon become the powder-keg, and the Crystal shore tavern's fateful happening would become the fuse.



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