

Druid's Sword

THE TROY GAME
BOOK FOUR

SARA DOUGLASS

HARPER

Voyager

harpercollins.com.au



For all my fellow London map enthusiasts on ebay, without whom I could never have written this book, and also (although I doubt she wants this) for my editor, Stephanie Smith, without whom there would be almost no books at all.
Thanks Stephanie.

Table of Contents

[Cover Page](#)

[Dedication](#)

[Abbreviations Used In This Book](#)

[Epigraph](#)

[Prologue](#)

[Part One](#)

[One](#)

[Two](#)

[Three](#)

[Four](#)

[Five](#)

[Six](#)

[Seven](#)

[Eight](#)

[Nine](#)

[Ten](#)

[Eleven](#)

[Twelve](#)

[Thirteen](#)

[Part Two](#)

[One](#)

[Two](#)

[Three](#)

[Four](#)

[Five](#)

[Six](#)

[Seven](#)

[Eight](#)

[Nine](#)

[Ten](#)

[Eleven](#)

[Twelve](#)

[Thirteen](#)

[Fourteen](#)

[Part Three](#)

[One](#)

[Two](#)

[Three](#)

[Four](#)

[Five](#)

[Six](#)

[Seven](#)

[Eight](#)

[Nine](#)

[Part Four](#)

[One](#)

[Two](#)

[Three](#)

[Four](#)

[Five](#)

[Six](#)

[Seven](#)

[Eight](#)

[Nine](#)

[Part Five](#)

[One](#)

[Two](#)

[Three](#)

[Four](#)

[Five](#)

[Six](#)

[Seven](#)

[Eight](#)

[Nine](#)

[Ten](#)

[Eleven](#)

[Twelve](#)

[Thirteen](#)

[Fourteen](#)

[Fifteen](#)

[Sixteen](#)

[Seventeen](#)

[Part Six](#)

[One](#)

[Two](#)

[Three](#)

[Four](#)

[Five](#)

[Six](#)

[Seven](#)

[Eight](#)

[Nine](#)

[Ten](#)

[Eleven](#)

[Twelve](#)

[Thirteen](#)

[Fourteen](#)

[Part Seven](#)

[One](#)

[Two](#)

[Three](#)

[Four](#)

[Five](#)

[Six](#)

[Seven](#)

[Eight](#)

[Nine](#)

[Ten](#)

[Eleven](#)

[Part Eight](#)

[One](#)

[Two](#)

[Three](#)

[Four](#)

[Five](#)

[Six](#)

[Seven](#)

[Eight](#)

[Nine](#)

[Ten](#)

[Eleven](#)

[Twelve](#)

[Thirteen](#)

[Fourteen](#)

[Epilogue](#)

[Glossary](#)

[More Great Reading from Sara Douglass](#)

[Darkglass Mountain](#)

[The Axis Trilogy](#)

[The Wayfarer Redemption](#)

[The Crucible](#)

[The Troy Game](#)

[Threshold](#)

[Beyond the Hanging Wall](#)

[About the Author](#)

[Books by Sara Douglass](#)

[Copyright](#)

[About the Publisher](#)

ABBREVIATIONS USED IN THIS BOOK

ARP: Air Raid Precaution (i.e. ARP wardens, stations or shelters)

BBC: British Broadcasting Commission

GPO: General Post Office

IB: Incendiary bomb

IRA: Irish Republican Army mph: miles per hour

PM: Prime Minister

RAF: Royal Air Force

UXB: Unexploded bomb

We are in the middle of a conflagration which is not just a struggle between two countries. It is the struggle of two different worlds. There is no way for these worlds to exist side by side. One of them must perish.

Adolf Hitler, speech of December 10th 1940

Prologue

Epping Forest, AD 61

The woman knelt keening in the sacred glade. She was strikingly handsome despite her griefstricken face smeared with thick lines of blue woad war paint. She wore a chest plate of metal over a robe of sweat- and blood-stained tartan wool. A red woollen cape lay on the ground just behind her. Her dark hair, laced here and there with silver, was twisted into a plait that hung over one shoulder, and her bare arms glittered with metal armbands.

A sword lay discarded to her right, a gourd beside it.

Before the woman lay the bodies of two adolescent girls, one of whom was heavily pregnant. Their bodies were still warm, the tears on their cheeks still fresh, but whatever beauty they may have possessed was disguised by their twisted limbs and faces, a legacy of the poison they had ingested a little time earlier.

The clearing was encircled by two score of warriors, most of them wounded, all of them droopshouldered with despair and bitterness. Some leaned on spears thrust into the ground, others on the shoulders of comrades.

They were the remaining remnants of the woman's army. Twelve hours ago that army had been more than sixty thousand strong. Now it was reduced to a few desperate score, and even they would not survive much longer.

The sound of the Roman centurions could be heard to the east as they fought their way through the forest towards the sacred glade.

Her army had not been able to stop them, but Boudicca—the mother who wept over her daughters and the sad loss of her country to the invader—knew that the forest would keep them at bay long enough for her to do what she needed.

A year ago all had been well. True, her beloved land had been invaded by the Romans, but Boudicca and her husband, Prasutagus, who ruled over the Iceni, had spent months in careful negotiation with the Romans trying to come to a mutually agreeable settlement. Then, ten months ago, a terrible wasting sickness struck Prasutagus and reduced his tall, strong frame to a skeletal, shaking weakness in a few short weeks. He died, leaving a desolate Boudicca regent of the Iceni and guardian of her daughters' inheritance.

For no reason that Boudicca could understand, the Romans attacked as soon as they heard Prasutagus was interred in his hill grave. They ravaged the lands of the Iceni, whipped Boudicca, and raped her daughters.

They took all night over those rapes, and so far as Boudicca knew most of the Roman soldiers within twenty miles had enjoyed her daughters during that time.

The child that her eldest had been carrying was a Roman bastard.

Boudicca had been so devastated by their unwarranted attacks on her, her daughters and her people, that for weeks she had been incapable of doing anything.

Then anger took over and, backed by the Iceni and many of their neighbouring tribes, Boudicca raised a mighty army of over sixty thousand warriors, both men and women, and attacked the Romans.

She had stunning success. Death abounded. With Boudicca at their head, the Iceni decimated Camulodunum Colonia, and then Londinium, slaughtering any they found in their path. Boudicca took particular care with Londinium, causing it to be razed to the ground. For some reason which she could not articulate, but which she felt in every fibre of her being, she blamed the city for all her troubles. Perhaps if she razed London all might be well.

Over a hundred thousand died in the resulting conflagration.

From Londinium, Boudicca hardly paused for breath as she drove her army towards Verulamium, where more than seventy thousand died.

The Romans were stunned by the success of Boudicca's advance and appalled by her savagery. One of them wrote back to Rome that the pagan queen appeared bent, not on taking prisoners or on amassing booty, but on slaughter, the gibbet, the fire and the cross. All she wanted, he wrote, was to create a wasteland of death.

Boudicca had ravaged south aided by surprise and a lack of any substantial Roman force to stand in her way. But eventually the Romans rallied, and the previous day the two forces had met in battle atop an ancient fort in the centre of Epping Forest.

The Romans had the better of the battle, and routed the Iceni during a desperate struggle which took the entire day.

As the Iceni fell about her, Boudicca retreated a mile or two away, to this sacred glade. Whatever else, Boudicca was determined that the Romans should take neither her nor her daughters alive.

Her daughters had willingly taken the poison—the night of their rape was still violently fresh in their minds.

Now Boudicca raised her face to the men and women who surrounded her.

"I will drink of the gourd now," she said. "Witness my death, and burn my body and that of my daughters. Then flee, if you wish. You do not need to follow me into death."

She reached for the gourd, and none of the warriors moved or spoke to stop her. But as Boudicca raised it to her lips, a murmur of surprise and fear rustled about the circle, and Boudicca lowered the gourd to see what had disturbed them.

Pray to the gods that the Romans had not arrived yet!

A pillar of light—faint and hazy, almost a thin fog—had appeared to one side of Boudicca.

She gasped and, along with every one of the warriors, bent forward in honour before the apparition.

Was it one of the gods, come to save them?

"Nay," said the apparition, now forming itself into the recognisable form of a man, "only me, your beloved husband, come to guide you."

"Prasutagus!" said Boudicca, setting the gourd aside and holding out her arms towards the ghost. Now her initial shock had passed, Boudicca was not surprised to see him. Prasutagus had been a great king, but he had been a far more powerful druid. How like him, she thought, to oversee her journey to the Otherworld.

He drifted close to her, his insubstantial hand caressing her cheek, then he looked

at the bodies of their daughters. “They have passed gracefully, Boudicca, and are now happy in the Otherworld.”

Boudicca’s eyes filled with gratitude. “Prasutagus, will you oversee my own—”

“Boudicca,” he said, interrupting her. “I need you to do something for me.”

“Name it.”

“In death,” Prasutagus said, “I have become aware of many things. Terrible things.”

Boudicca’s eyes widened in distress, but she did not otherwise respond.

“Evil besets our land,” he said.

“The Romans,” Boudicca said, glancing behind her as she spoke, as if expecting the centurions to burst through the shrubbery at any moment.

“No,” her husband said. “They are evil enough, true, but there is a far deeper evil which has spoiled this land.”

“What?” Boudicca said.

“A foreign corruption,” Prasutagus said. “Something brought here many lifetimes ago, which has taken root in the soil of our land and infected it with utter malevolence.”

About them the circle of warriors shifted and muttered.

“It is like a great poisonous spider,” said Prasutagus, “ensnaring the entire land in its web. This spider seeks fulfilment, and we must do everything in our power to stop it, for if it achieves its goal, then, oh, then the sky itself will fall, and the land will be buried under a mountain of tears.”

“What can we do?” Boudicca said. “What do you need *me* to do?”

“In death,” said her husband, “I have met a strange little girl. She has black curly hair and dark blue eyes, and rustles about in silken garments the colour of night. Her face...” He hesitated. “Her face is cold, and she has an icicle for a heart.”

Boudicca stared up at her husband. She knew him so well, and could see the doubts that beset him.

“You don’t trust her,” she said.

“She is our only hope,” Prasutagus said. “She has agreed to aid us. She says she will be our sword, the *land’s* sword.”

“You don’t trust her,” Boudicca said again.

Prasutagus sighed. “No. I don’t. But if we don’t accept her offer, I am afraid that the land will wither and die under this evil. It grows stronger every day. It is...vile.”

“Who is this girl?”

Prasutagus took a long time to answer. “The spirits call her the White Queen for the coldness that besets her. Who is she? I don’t know. But she is powerful and she loathes this evil and wants it gone.”

Boudicca wondered about that. Every instinct within her screamed to not accept what her husband said. But she trusted his judgement so greatly that if he said this strange girl was their only hope, perhaps she should believe him.

“If this White Queen is so powerful,” said Boudicca, “and wants this evil gone, then why does she need us?”

Again Prasutagus took a long time to answer, and Boudicca wished he’d hurry up for the Romans sounded even closer. Maybe Prasutagus had no sense of time and urgency now that he was dead.

“She says she needs to be bound to the land—” Prasutagus began, and suddenly Boudicca, horrifically, knew what her husband was going to say and what he needed of her.

“No!” she said.

“She is not bound to the land,” said Prasutagus, “and needs to be if she has any hope of—”

“Prasutagus, you want me to use my death to construct a *Seething*?”

A *Seething* was the most potent of rituals a druid could construct—and Boudicca *could* construct it, for she was as much druid as was Prasutagus. A *Seething* could be used to bind anything to any cause, and if this strange little girl could help, and she said she needed to be bound to the land in order to be able to do so, then a *Seething* would do that magnificently.

But a *Seething* needed a death to make it.

No wonder Prasutagus had appeared to her just as she was about to take her own life.

Boudicca didn’t know what to say. The fact of her own death did not trouble her at all, but to use it to bind the land to this unknown White Queen? What if she was as bad as that evil which Prasutagus said had infected the land? What if, by constructing the *Seething*, Boudicca bound the land to an even more terrible fate than the one it already faced?

“Boudicca,” said a new voice, a small child’s voice, and Boudicca’s head whipped about as the circle of warriors murmured again and, one by one, melted into the trees.

The child Prasutagus had spoken of now stood a few paces away. She was just as he’d described her. A beautiful face, framed with dark curls that tumbled down her back, and eyes so blue that Boudicca thought the sky must spend its days in envy of her.

And yet she was so cold. Her heart *was* ringed with icicles, and Boudicca wondered why.

“No one has ever loved me,” said the child, and Boudicca felt the breath of her speaking as keenly as she would the wintry Arctic winds that blew down from the north.

“We do not trust you,” said Boudicca. “Why should we trust you? And what *is* this evil that—”

The child slid forward, grasping Boudicca’s wrist.

Boudicca gasped and tried to pull back, but she could not. She felt as if she were frozen.

A vision consumed her.

She saw a naked man with dark curly hair just like this girl’s, and six gleaming bands about his limbs, dancing through a labyrinth atop a hill.

She saw a young girl run out from the witnesses who stood about, and plunge a dagger into the throat of a heavily pregnant woman who stood to one side of the labyrinth watching the dancing man.

She saw fire and death and destruction at the hands of an invader, and for a moment she thought that it was he who was the terrible evil.

“Not he,” whispered the cold-faced child. “Watch.”

Boudicca saw bodies pile atop the labyrinth, then, as if years passed in an instant, she saw the bodies decay into dust.

The labyrinth sank into the hill, and Boudicca saw the roots of trees become ensnared in it, and the burrowing creatures of the land become its slave.

“We need to stop the labyrinth,” said the little girl, “before it overwhelms the entire land.”

“And why should you care?” said Boudicca, finally managing to wrench her wrist free. “I can sense that you are not of this land, either. Why should you care?”

“Because I loathe it,” said the little girl.

Then she smiled, and Boudicca’s heart flipped over in horror. For an instant a death mask had replaced the girl’s cold beauty.

There was something about this girl. Something about the White Queen. Something that Boudicca could not identify, but something which screamed at her to trust this child.

Trust me.

Boudicca wondered if she were being ensorcelled.

“For a good cause,” whispered the girl, and Boudicca capitulated.

“Of course we will help you,” she said, and the White Queen gave her death’s-head grin again.

“Good,” she said. “Now where’s that poison?”

Still feeling strangely alien, as if the White Queen had taken over her entire being, Boudicca took the gourd from the ground.

“Prasutagus, watch over me,” she whispered, then lifted the gourd to her mouth as the White Queen stepped back.

The poison acted within moments. Boudicca felt it eating at her stomach, then slithering into her blood.

Agony coursed through her, and her limbs twitched, wanting to flail and twist.

But Boudicca held firm. She began to mutter in the ancient druidic language, using not only her dying, but the deaths of everyone over this past year—starting with her husband’s—to fuel the Seething which would bind the White Queen to the land.

Was she doing the right thing? As the agony intensified, Boudicca began to doubt herself.

But it was too late now, too late to call back the words of the Seething, too late to stop the slow, triumphant smile that twisted the White Queen’s face.

Her body twitched to and fro, and something shifted in the earth of the glade. Boudicca’s voice cracked, then fell silent as her body succumbed to the convulsions.

“Ah,” sighed the little girl. “It is done, now.”

Boudicca accepted the arm of her husband so that he might guide her to the Otherworld.

She turned to him and said, “What have we done?”

Part One

NOAH

ONE

Waterloo Station, London Saturday, 2nd September 1939

“**M**ajor? Major? I’m sorry to wake you, sir, but the train has arrived at Waterloo and you’ll have to disembark.”

Jack Skelton jerked too fast from deep sleep into wakefulness, and for several disorientating moments stared into the face of the conductor leaning over him, his mind unable to let go the dream images that skidded through it.

Frank Bentley and his insipid wife Violet. Stella Wentworth, standing beautiful and untouchable under the Embankment light. Matilda and Ecub, suburban housewives in dressing gowns. Asterion—Weyland Orr—taking him to Pen Hill. Faerie Hill Manor, and both the Lord of the Faerie and the King of England, George VI, waiting for him.

Grace—everyone’s doom.

“Sir, I must ask you to—”

“Yes, yes. I’m awake.” Jack Skelton struggled to his feet, one hand clutching at the overhead luggage rack for support as his head reeled.

The conductor stepped back. “It’s been a bad few days, sir,” he said, watching the American major curiously as he straightened his tie and uniform jacket, then lifted his greatcoat down from the rack. He wondered why the American was here. He hoped that it might be some indication that the Yanks wouldn’t leave it as long to help out in this war as they had left it the last. “We’ve heard news on the wireless that the PM sent an ultimatum to the Nazis yesterday. Get out of Poland or we’ll go to war.”

The conductor paused, his face glum. “No chance that the Germans will back off, d’you think, Major?”

Fully awake and orientated, Jack studied the man, knowing there was no chance of peace, and wondering if the man wanted false reassurances or the truth.

“It is too late now,” he said. “I’m sorry.”

The conductor’s face tightened, and he gave a small nod. “Let me help you with your bag, sir.”

Once on the platform, Jack tipped the conductor then stood motionless, looking about. Because he’d been so deeply asleep when the train pulled in, and had probably then slept for fifteen minutes or more before the conductor woke him up, most of the other passengers had departed and the great cavernous space of Waterloo Station was all but deserted. He shivered, and tried to put it down to the cold night air.

The conductor had got back on the train, but several baggage handlers stood about an empty trolley at the far end of the train, smoking and talking.

About the forthcoming war, no doubt. The Germans had invaded Poland yesterday, and war was inevitable. Jack could *feel* it seeping over the vast stretches of land and water between where he stood and where the Poles battled desperately. It was only a matter of time before it reached London.

He shivered again and hunched into his greatcoat as he lit a cigarette then flicked the match away. He drew a deep breath, taking comfort in the smoke. Jack had first come to this land almost three and a half thousand years ago as Brutus, the exiled Trojan prince. With Genvissa, he'd thought to resurrect the ancient Troy Game, but everything had fallen apart when his then wife, Cornelia, had murdered Genvissa before they could complete the game. For three and a half thousand years Jack—as Brutus, then as William Duke of Normandy, and subsequently Louis de Silva—had fought to finish what he had started so long ago. But always, events and people (and of those, mostly Cornelia in her rebirth as Caela and then Noah) conspired to prevent him.

God, how long since he'd last been in England? Almost three hundred years, give or take a decade or two. Oh, he had come back briefly now and then, stepping through the Realm of the Faerie to meet with either Coel, the Lord of the Faerie, or with his father, Silvius, but apart from those fleeting visits...nothing. He'd walked away from the smoking ruins of London in 1666, walked away from the disaster of his hopes and dreams.

Walked away from Noah, who had abandoned her love for him to live with Asterion, and give him a child.

Walked away from the Troy Game.

Walked away from it all.

To roam.

He wandered first in the form of Louis de Silva. Louis had gone back to his father's estates in France, and from there, desperate, restless, angry beyond knowing, he had drifted through the forests and fields and pleasure halls of Europe. Then, as the years passed, he assumed the form of a priest, because in his anger that amused him, and desecrated his way through Egypt and Arabia. From there, to India, and even further east, and as the decades spun by and his resentment and bewilderment at what had happened deepened, he became a sailor in a Portuguese man-of-war that had berthed in the Philippines, and fought and squandered his way across the oceans of the world.

Then he'd landed in America—new and brash and uncaring—and here Jack had found a home. He settled in the Appalachian mountains, finding solace in their high mountain lakes and dark forests. He lived there for a hundred years or more, spending more and more time, not as a man, but as Ringwalker, the name he took when he assumed the mantle of the ancient Stag God, roaming the wild paths and tracks through the wilderness.

He found peace and a renewed purpose. It was about this time, perhaps almost two hundred years after the Great Fire of London, that Jack made contact with the Lord of the Faerie again. Just a touch, a glimmer of friendship sent through the Faerie, but it was enough to begin rebuilding the bonds between them. From that point they'd met once every five or six years, sometimes in the forests of America, sometimes in the Faerie. These meetings lasted only a short while, less than an hour, and they rarely

talked. They just spent time together.

About forty years ago, when they'd met in a lonely spot of the Faerie, the Lord of the Faerie had put his hand on Ringwalker's shoulders, and said, "My friend, John Thornton is back, a prince of the realm now. Loth is back also, and as wedded to the Christian church as he was when last he walked."

Ringwalker had tensed. "The others?"

"None of the rest of us had to be reborn. We have all done much the same as you for the past few hundred years—moved in and out of the Faerie and in and out of mortal form as it suited us. Apart from John and Loth, we had all gone too far to be trapped by birth and death."

We're all way too powerful. Too fey.

"And *her*? Is she still with *him*?"

"Noah? With Weyland? Of course, for they love each other deeply. Ringwalker, please, the land needs you back. *We* need you back. All of us."

"I don't think I can—"

"You must," the Lord of the Faerie had said quietly, and Ringwalker had bowed his head in acceptance.

Five months ago dreams began to pervade Jack's sleep. Each night, over and over, he dreamed of arriving in London, meeting with a nervous man called Frank Bentley, then walking about London, meeting in turn each of the people who had become caught up in the Troy Game.

Everyone save Noah.

Jack never met Noah in his dreams.

He knew what the dreams meant. It was time to go back. Time to *move*.

Time to find Noah.

And here he was, Major Jack Skelton, standing on an empty platform at Waterloo Station at ten p.m., waiting for someone to meet him. Jack had sent word a week ago (together with a request he hoped the Lord of the Faerie could accommodate) that he'd be here. Surely they'd send someone.

Who?

Noah? No, they would not dare. Perhaps Genvissa-reborn, now called Stella.

Would the Lord of the Faerie come himself?

Would the Troy Game meet him?

Not the Frank Bentley from his dreams, surely. Please let Frank be a figment of his dreaming mind...please...

Then Jack saw him. A tall, imposing figure striding onto the platform from the gate that led to the station concourse. A black trilby pulled down low over his brow. Flapping overcoat, beautifully cut, over an equally well tailored two-piece, doublebreasted suit. A deep-red silk scarf rippling at his throat. Matching leather gloves that the man was even now pulling off and stuffing into the pockets of his coat.

A gleaming smile in a swarthy face, redolent with mischief.

Not Frank Bentley.

"Jack!" The man held out his arms, and Jack laughed, and stepped into them.

"Silvius!"

His father grabbed him in a huge bear hug, almost lifting Jack off his feet. Jack hugged him back, and then both men were laughing and leaning back from each other.

“Jack! Is there ever an incarnation you’re willing to make when you’re *not* as handsome as the worst renegade pirate?”

“How can I help that, with *your* blood in me?”

They fell silent, both men grinning hugely, unable to help themselves. For many thousands of years there had been nothing but hatred and guilt between them. During the Bronze Age, Silvius had been a Trojan prince living in exile in Alba after the Greeks had sacked and destroyed Troy. As a prince of Troy Silvius had also been a Kingman—one who was trained in the ancient Aegean mysteries of the Game, a labyrinthine enchantment that a Kingman and his female counterpart, a Mistress of the Labyrinth, constructed via dance and magic in order to protect a city. Brutus, Silvius’ fifteen-year-old son, had wanted his father’s titles and powers and had taken the first possible opportunity to murder his father. Brutus seized Silvius’ six golden kingship bands of Troy, magical limb bands that enhanced the wearer’s Kingman powers, and eventually found his way to the island of Britain, then called Llangarlia. Here, with Genvissa, a Mistress of the Labyrinth and a Darkwitch, he had resurrected the Troy Game in order to found London. But Brutus had used his father’s murder to infuse the Game with power, and for thousands of years Silvius had been trapped in the vile dark heart of the labyrinth which lay at the centre of the Troy Game (and which, in its physical form, now lay under St Paul’s Cathedral in the centre of London). It was only during Jack’s last life as Louis de Silva that Silvius had managed to escape from the labyrinth’s heart. Silvius and Brutus could have continued their hatred, but instead managed to set their violent past behind them and understand that all the other one had ever wanted was approval, and love.

Silvius’ hands tightened on Jack’s shoulders, and he sobered. “I’m glad you’re back. We all are.”

“All?”

“*All* of us, Jack.”

Jack wasn’t so sure of that. It wasn’t just he and his father who had a history of discord. Jack had a complex history of love and betrayal with most of the people caught up in the Troy Game: Cornelia, the wife he had originally despised and then come to love in her reincarnations as Caela and Noah, had betrayed him with Asterion, the creature who had lived at the dark heart of the labyrinth on Crete and who now lived as Weyland Orr; Asterion himself, who had not only stolen Noah from him, but had also spent thousands of years trying to wrest control of the Troy Game away from Jack; Genvissa, the Mistress who had originally allied herself with Jack and who had then betrayed him to Asterion; Coel, a Llangarlian man who Jack, as Brutus, had murdered but who was now Jack’s friend and ally as the Lord of the Faerie; Loth, a Llangarlian priest who had always fought against both Jack and the Troy Game; Ariadne, the ancient Darkwitch who, as Asterion’s lover, had begun the series of events which had culminated in the destruction of Troy; and, last but not least, the Troy Game itself, which had taken the form of a little girl called Catling who had manipulated everyone in the Game’s efforts to achieve completion. Jack found it hard to believe that any of these people, save his father and the Lord of the Faerie, were really “glad” to have him back. They might need him—almost everyone, save Jack himself, who remained noncommittal on the subject, needed Jack if they wanted any chance of destroying the Troy Game, which most had decided was evil incarnate—but

Jack did not believe for an instant they were happy to have him here.

“We need you, Jack,” Silvius said softly, still holding onto Jack’s shoulders.

Ah, that’s better. Yes, you all need me, but I doubt all of you are glad at my return.

“You’re a cynical laddie,” Silvius said, finally letting his son go and bending down to grab Jack’s holdall. “God knows where you picked that up.”

Jack grinned again, his humour restored, and stubbed out his cigarette under his shoe. “And you, father? What is this form you step out in? Do I detect an *Italian* accent in your voice?”

Silvius nodded towards the concourse, and they started to walk towards the gate at the end of the platform. “Mr Silvius Makris, esquire, at your service,” he said. “And a vaguely Mediterranean birth, if you please, not Italian. Not in this milieu in which we live.”

“And what does Mr Silvius Makris do in this modern world, eh?”

Silvius smiled. “He mixes with the best crowd, don’t you know, spreading vague hints of an industrial fortune at his back and buying the jolly crowd at the dance halls and nightclubs as many cocktails as they can manage before management has to drag them out by their coat-tails and mink stoles.”

“A somewhat jolly but shallow existence, Silvius?”

“Beats the hell out of living trapped in the heart of the labyrinth, sonny.”

That silenced Jack and dampened the mood between them as little else could have done. He and his father may have reconciled, but Jack still felt deep pangs of guilt at the way he’d trapped his father in the labyrinth.

“I’m sorry, Jack,” Silvius said as they walked through the gate, Jack handing the inspector his ticket as they passed. “I could have said that a little more diplomatically.”

“You have every right to say it any way you want, Silvius.”

“Ah, Jack, we shouldn’t have to spend the rest of our lives apologising. In our time I’ve been a pitiful father and you’ve been a lousy son. We’ll just have to live with it.” They’d reached the revolving doors leading out from the station into the street.

“Now, what say you we see what the London night has to offer, eh?”

As he had in his dream, Jack paused once they stood on the pavement outside. There was a fair amount of traffic on the road—mostly lorries and taxicabs, all with their headlamps dimmed—but few pedestrians. Many buildings were darkened, and many streetlamps left unlit.

Most people would be home, glued to the wireless, waiting on news from Europe. Or Downing Street.

And, as he had in his dream, Jack looked northwards. It was difficult from this angle, but he thought he could make out the dome of St Paul’s across the Thames.

He shivered again, and silently cursed the fact he’d agreed to come home.

“The car’s this way, Jack,” said Silvius, nodding to a point further along the road.

“You’re driving?”

Silvius ginned. “Yes. Normally Harry would have given me a driver—he’s certainly surrounded with enough lackeys at Faerie Hill Manor—but I thought that for tonight we might like to talk. Catch you up on the news, so to speak.”

They’d been walking along the pavement towards Silvius’ car, but now Jack

stopped again. “Harry?”

Silvius shifted the weight of Jack’s holdall into his other hand. “Brigadier—retired—Sir Harold Cole.” His grin spread a bit wider as he waited for his son’s reaction.

Jack suddenly realised who Silvius meant and gave a short nod of understanding. Coel, reborn as Harold, King of England, reborn as Charles II—the Lord of the Faerie. Harold Cole now, in this mortal world. Jack hadn’t realised, as the only times he’d met with the man was when he walked in his Faerie form.

“When he’s in this land of toil the Lord of the Faerie becomes Harry Cole,” Silvius said as they moved on. “He lives as a sort of...oh, a sort of a ‘boffin’ up at Faerie Hill Manor in Epping Forest. No one—beyond those of us who have known him for the past few thousand years, of course—really knows what he does, but he is trusted within the highest echelons of government and military and is consulted by both on matters of intelligence and defence. He’s a close friend of the king.” Silvius slid a look Jack’s way. “You know...”

“That John Thornton has been reborn as George VI? Yes, I knew that.” Jack gave a short laugh.

“We’ve been handing that pretty title about our group fairly evenly, I think.”

“Very democratically,” Silvius agreed. Then he stopped by a huge black saloon car. “Here we are.”

He stowed Jack’s holdall in the boot, nodding for Jack to get in the passenger side.

When he was behind the wheel, Silvius took a moment to draw on his leather gloves. “It’s been bad without you, Jack,” he said, looking ahead at the road rather than at his son. “None of us know what we can do against the Troy—”

“I don’t want to talk about that now,” Jack said quietly, his own eyes fixed ahead. His hand fumbled about in the pocket of his greatcoat and he drew out his cigarettes and matches. “Smoke?”

Silvius shook his head. “Jack—”

“Not now, Silvius, please,” Jack said, then struck a match and drew deeply on his cigarette. “Not yet.”

Silvius sighed, started up the car, and drove off.

Within moments they were on Blackfriars Bridge, and moments after that Silvius turned the car right, up Ludgate Hill.

“Silvius?” Jack straightened in his seat. “Where are we going?”

“To pick someone up,” Silvius said. “Another reason neither Harry or I wanted a civilian driver tonight.”

Jack tensed, his cigarette forgotten in his hand. They were driving directly towards St Paul’s Cathedral.