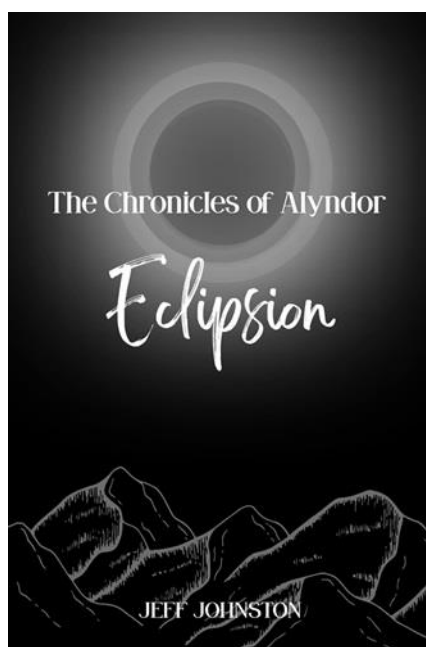


The Chronicles of Alyndor

Eclipse – Sample Chapter

By Jeff Johnston



Thank you for stepping into the world of Alyndor. *Eclipse* marks the beginning of a sweeping saga shaped by ancient magic, interwoven destinies, and the fragile balance between light and the shadows gathering across the realm. This sample chapter offers your first glimpse into Everkeep, the Dragonspine, and the forces quietly awakening beneath the Eclipse Scar.

If this chapter draws you in, the journey continues in the full novel — and expands even further in the upcoming sequel, *Shadows and Chaos*, where the truths buried in Alyndor's past begin to surface and the fate of gods and mortals grows ever more entwined.

Sincerely,

Jeff Johnston

CHAPTER 1: COMFORT OF HOME

There is something magical about the beach. Aerean often slipped away from the cold stone walls of Everkeep to lie on the warm shore. Cool ocean waves washing across her toes were a sharp contrast to the heat of the sun and sand. It was here she could find brief moments of peace and quiet away from the castle and the rigorous demands and long days of training. The hypnotic rhythm of the rolling surf and distant call of seabirds soothed her. Every now and again a pleasant breeze would dance across her skin, lightly tickling her stomach. She felt completely at peace.

Aerean had always felt a strange kinship with the sea. Its vastness mirrored the mysteries of her own past, and the rhythm of its waves whispered secrets that soothed her soul. She lay on the beach, eyes closed, and listened to the whispers of the surf. The warmth of the sand was a gentle embrace, contrasting with the cool kiss of the ocean's edge. This was her sanctuary.

"Ahem..." A shaky voice broke through her foggy relaxed mind. Aerean slowly opened her eyes and focused them on a young boy not more than twelve seasons old wearing the Orders colors of blue and gold.

"M'lady, the Commander requires your presence at once." the squire reported, his voice then softened, "Please come Aerean, he really doesn't seem himself and I don't want him any more upset with me than he already is."

"Tell my father I will be there shortly" Aerean said through a yawn. She was slightly amused by the fact the boy would not look at her directly, but then Rede was a good kid with a huge heart. Exactly what the Order looks for when recruiting children to be trained as Paladins.

The Order of Crowns had long been known as a beacon of light and honor in the lands of Alyndor. For a thousand years Paladins had been trained in its hallowed halls, then dispatched into the world to keep the forces of darkness at bay. For the same length of time those forces had subtly become a distant memory, thought to be extinct in the current age. Aerean pried herself from the comfort of the sand and brushed off her legs and backside. Rede had already started making his way back to the castle, so it took a bit of effort to catch up with him. As she began walking next to her young friend, he turned to her with a long face.

"Why is your father always so serious?" Rede asked quizzically.

"Because of his station I suppose." Aerean answered, "All the paladins are his responsibility, as is the mission they carry." Her response seemed well rehearsed and flowed smoothly. It is a question many of the young ones had asked her over the years and she had become accustomed to giving ready-made answers. Rede, being an intelligent child, picked up on this immediately.

"I'm not kidding, I ask because I don't think he likes me very much." Rede dropped his head, "I think I disappoint him."

Aerean put her arm on the boy's shoulder to comfort him, "Don't worry about that so much," she smiled, "when you get a little older you will find he is extremely fond of you."

The walk to the castle gates took the duo about twenty minutes and the closer they got, the better Rede began to feel. As they crested the hills separating the Borran grasslands from the sea, the walls of Everkeep came into view. Giant stone block walls, standing fifty feet tall and ten feet thick were first to catch their eyes. Formed centuries ago, by the great Mages of Alyndor, the structure was the largest castle of its kind. It was second in size only to the castle of the royal family in Steelraven. As they passed through the massive iron gates, the battlement guards smiled at Aerean and greeted her warmly.

"Good day Lady Silviri." The guards said in unison. As always, they stood at halfhearted attention with smiles on their faces. Over the course of her seventeen years, she had grown to be loved by all of the castle's inhabitants. Her warm, compassionate heart and cheerfully optimistic disposition had a special way with people. As they crossed the training yard, Aerean wished Rede well and made her way to the Command room alone.

"This CANNOT be true!" Grand Marshall Silviri slammed his fists on the great oak strategy table. "You mean to stand here and tell me that we lost two Paladins, and no one knows how or why?" He looked up from the table directly at the messenger who brought the disheartening news.

"S-s-sir" Osland stammered nervously, "No one was present when the incident happened, they were found after the fact."

Gerodd Silviri furrowed his bushy grey brow and thought deeply. In his twenty-five years as Commander of the Paladin training stronghold, he had never before dealt with such unimaginable stories. A mighty man of large stature and commanding presence, Gerodd was known as fearless, but this news had caused a chill to run down his spine.

It began two weeks ago when farmers in the north had come begging for help. They told vague stories about darkness coming from below the earth devouring whole villages. When Knights were sent to investigate, the villages were completely deserted. They reported that in some cases fires were still burning in stoves. Food had been set out on tables as though meals were about to be eaten, but no villagers could be found. No villagers, animals, or livestock. The last attack was only half a day's ride from Everkeep so Gerodd sent two of his most talented young Paladins, Matheas and Trayon to investigate.

Matheas was one of the best swordsmen in the castle. His skill was unmatched among his peers, and sparring with the weapons master always seemed to end in stalemate. What Trayon lacked in martial skill he more than made up in use of divine power. The two were brothers, in their early twenties, and a force to be reckoned with when together.

Osland reported that it appeared as though the Paladins were attacked by an overwhelming force and though they had used both Holy Power and steel, they were simply ripped apart.

"There is something unnatural behind this." Gerodd whispered to himself.

"I'm sorry Sir, I didn't quite hear you." The messenger said with a nervous quiver in his voice.

“Nothing Osland,” said Gerodd as he heavily slumped into his chair, “leave me, our meeting is over.”

Thankful for being dismissed, Osland quickly walked to the door and swung it open just as Aerean had approached from the other side. Her sudden appearance startled him and caused a high-pitched yelp to escape the frail man’s lips.

“I’m sorry Os, I didn’t mean to give you a start!” Aerean laughed through her apology. Her presence was calming to Osland who also found humor in his reaction.

“Is that my daughter out there?” Gerodd asked, his demeanor changing from gruff and solemn to happy and relieved. “Get in here girl, we have much to discuss.”

Aerean slid past Osland who closed the door on his way out of the room. As she walked across the floor to her father’s desk, her movements slowly transformed from loose and flowing to rigid and militant until she reached a chair where she sat, hands folded in her lap.

Almost eighteen years ago an earthquake ravaged the countryside. Witnesses told of a fierce battle between two dueling Mages which ended in an explosion that devastated a large section of the landscape. An unfortunate bit of timing placed a merchant caravan in the direct path of the explosion leaving only an infant girl as the sole survivor. Plagued with guilt, the victorious Mage took the infant to the Paladin Stronghold where Gerodd laid eyes on his daughter for the first time. Since then, he had raised her as his own, thankful for the experience.

“My dear, tomorrow is your birthday” Gerodd began, “and coming of age is a monumental occasion for a Paladin. This is the time when you are sent on your first official mission...” He seemed to lose himself in thought for a moment. His eyes softened as he looked at her. “I love you child.”

Her father had always been a loving parent so naturally he reminded her often that he loved her. This time, however, something was different about his tone.

“Are you alright father?” Aerean asked, concern clearly expressed in her voice.

“Of course I am,” he said forcing a smile “go, prepare for tomorrow’s ceremony.

“I will father, my armor will be gleaming!” Aerean exclaimed.

Back in her chambers, the young girl set out her armor for its final polish. The Order was very particular when it came to the rigid regulations that they followed, and well-maintained armor was at the top of the list. The steel plates were polished to a mirrored shine. The gold emblems on the shoulder guards were clean and straight, tightly grasping the flowing navy-blue cape which nearly touched the floor. Once Aerean had completed perfecting her armor and helm, she concentrated on her sword and shield.

Her weapon was a steel longsword, intricately engraved with holy runes on each side of the razor-sharp blade. The hilt was wrapped with leather then crossed with blue cloth to match her cape. As the young girl worked, she saw the blemishes in the metal disappear, the wrinkles in the cloth smooth out. Now the only thing to remain in her preparation was her prayers.

Paladins, like Clerics and Priests, have a link to the divine. They can hear the whispers of the Gods of Light. It is through these whispers that they are directed throughout their lives. They

listen to the slight pull in their heart which never fails to lead them where they need to go. Aerean had yet to feel that pull. She had not once heard the whispers. For a long time, she thought she was doing something wrong. Perhaps she wasn't praying enough or correctly. Many nights would end with tears streaking down her cheeks and the weight of failure in her heart. Finally, she came to the conclusion the Gods were ignoring her.

Aerean knelt on the floor before her bed, fingers interlaced, hands in her lap. She closed her eyes and began speaking her prayer to the Gods.

"I greet thee Lady Aerathea, great Goddess of light and Mother of life. Tomorrow, I will humbly present myself for your service. I make an oath to bring your light into the world, protect life, and live with purity."

She paused briefly, anxious to hear a divine whisper. Her mind was quiet and as she waited all she received was the dull silence of her chambers.

Aerean slid into her bed, eyes heavy from the long day. The goose down mattress enveloped her body and the heavy blanket was so extremely relaxing. It did not take long before the young girl was falling asleep. Just as she began to lose consciousness, she heard a female voice whisper in her mind,

"Aereanna...."

And she was asleep.

Thank you for reading this sample chapter of **Eclipsion**. The journey continues — deeper into Everkeep, toward the Dragonspine, and into the heart of the Eclipse Scar itself.