

## A Long and Powerful Note

by Enzo Scavone

“A Long and Powerful Note” is a fantasy story about soldiers and civilians in a provisional command quarter in the center of a city which is being attacked. Since the attackers are winning and out to get everyone’s souls, the people in the command quarters are desperate and look for ways to cope with their fate.

## A Long and Powerful Note

The empty alleys of Molokene envelop him with their darkness. Naldear is making his way to the city center. Night has fallen. He carries news from the ongoing battle at the city wall. He is tense and anxious. *Where on Ethyria are they?* After a while, he enters a square and notices a building on his right with two guards in front of its entrance. *Is this it?* He looks back towards where he came from. He can still hear the battle sounds, the screaming, the thuds of iron clashing and the brawl, though only at a low volume. *Oh my god, it's so close.* He focuses and walks towards the guards. "I'm Naldear sent from the company at the Namatia Gate to report in with Captain Vutai."

One of the guards opens the door and yells inside. After a while, he gets an answer, steps aside and signifies Naldear to go in.

"Thank you." Naldear enters swiftly and stands in a hallway leading to another doorway with two more guards standing at its sides. Naldear feels uneasy. He doesn't have good news and he is about to face Captain Vutai. He swallows and takes careful steps towards the second doorway. The walls of the hallway muffle the battle sounds from outside. They die down as he gets closer to its end. About halfway through, he starts noticing music, some sort of melody. It's also getting warmer. The music becomes more distinguishable. *They must have a singer in there.* The guards of this second doorway indicate for him to come in. He walks into a bright, warm, and surprisingly calm space. He realizes that he has entered the middle of what used to be some sort of inn. An atmosphere of tranquility rests upon the room. A singer is standing in the right half of the hall, singing a ballad in the most beautiful voice. Naldear is amazed by the singing figure. Its skin is glowing all over--even through its clothes. He had only heard stories about this race, these glowers. They are made of light, he has been told. Nobody knows anything about them and they keep to themselves. It seems to be entertaining a crowd of human civilians sitting in front of it: women, children, and old men. It keeps them distracted from the battle outside and some of them seem pretty content. *Poor them.* Farther back towards the wall there are some wounded warriors. They seem quiet and even relaxed though some of their wounds are horrifying.

Naldear tries to focus. He turns towards the left and sees a handful of men sitting on benches surrounding Captain Vutai. He's conferring with his advisors. Naldear walks toward the group to report in. "Live long and soar, brothers."

Captain Vutai lifts his head, "Live long and soar. What news do you bring, soldier?"

Naldear hesitates. He finds it hard to concentrate with the singing in the background, although the music is beautiful. "News from the city wall, Captain. About three hours ago, the Asracols decided to end the siege and launched their attack. We engaged them at the wall for about two hours. Then we had to withdraw behind the buildings next to the wall. We have been suffering losses ever since. The Asracols are pushing us back towards the city center." Naldear hesitates. "We spotted a soul crystal in their ranks. I have been sent here right away to let you know about that."

Captain Vutai looks at the soldier with in an onset of terror. "They have a soul crystal?" His advisors look at each other.

"Yes, Captain," the soldier answers.

Captain Vutai looks to his advisors for guidance but they themselves appear mortified. The singing in the background accompanies their thoughts. They know that the Asracols will kill whomever they find, and capture each and every soul of the fallen inside the crystal; by doing so they gain access to their knowledge. They are looking for war secrets, positions of troops, the grand strategy and will stop at nothing to get this information. This also means that captured souls won't be able to enter the beyond. The troops are losing, all is lost.

With this realization, anguish begins to spread among the group. Some of the advisors regret having come here. Some of the less loyal think about the possibility of handing Captain Vutai over to the Asracols, to set up a deal. But Asracols are not to be trusted. While Captain Vutai is still trying to cope with the devastating news, two of his advisors stand up and move over to the other side of the hall where people are listening to the singer.

“What do you think you’re doing?” the captain asks threateningly.

One of them answers, “It’s futile, Boritan. All is lost,” and continues to walk towards the singer.

Captain Vutai shakes his head in disappointment and yells, “You are giving in. Some warriors you are. Go on, sit with the women and children. Listen to the girl-boy singing.” He turns back to the remaining advisors. “Come on, men. We will find a way out of this mess. Leave the thinking to us men.” He looks at the remaining advisors almost as if he was looking for reassurance. Nobody can give him that. “Let’s see what we got.” There is some strain to sound optimistic in the captain’s voice.

“Me too?” Naldear asks. He feels awkward. He had been standing next to the group the whole time, afraid to speak.

“Yes, come here, soldier... what’s your name?”

“Naldear.”

“Naldear, sit with us, we’re going to find a way out.” With the singer’s beautiful voice in the background, they sit together to deliberate.

The captain begins, “I heard the city has a vast sewer system. Where does that lead to?”

One of his advisors weighs in. “Yes, I was thinking about that, too, but it exits the city to the east and surfaces shortly after the city walls. We will be right in the Asracols’ camp.” The captain falls back into his thoughts. The volume of the singer’s voice seems to be increasing, still beautiful and fascinating.

Now the advisor comes forth with an idea. “We could carry some sort of container with us, put it on our heads to take air under the water surface and dive through the camp to a segment of the river that is not guarded.”

Another advisor opposes: “Do you think that is enough air? What about the women and the children?”

The advisor who suggested the container proposal looks at him, hesitates, and responds defiantly, “What about them?”

“Silence!” the Captain Vutai interrupts. The two advisors immediately turn quiet. There is tension between the men. The song has turned to a pulsing rhythm. The captain goes on. “We are trapped here. It is either about barricading ourselves and withstanding the attack, or all of us sneaking out under their noses.” He looks over to the women. “Could the women sew something that looks like the Asracols’ coats? We could try to sneak into their lines and then flee undiscovered.” His advisors are quiet. Never have they seen their captain so desperate. His soul, his afterlife is at stake. Everyone’s is.

One of the advisors tries to speak up carefully “We have no fabric here. And even if we had, we don’t know exactly what their uniforms look like.”

“We could ask our soldier here,” he replies and turning to Naldear, with a hopeful look, trying to fight the oncoming desperation. “Soldier, do you remember their uniforms?”

Naldear is scared. He doesn’t want to disappoint his captain. “Yes, I saw them.”

The captain turns back to his advisors feigning hope and relief. “He saw them!” Captain Vutai waits for a reaction from them. The singing has reached a high volume now. It is not annoying, just omnipresent and dominant. It seems to hang in the air, thick and nourishing and absorbing all the attention. The captain tries to hold up his false hope. He is having trouble clinging to his intricate, desperate proposal while ignoring the music. All except him

look over to the singer.

The singer sings some words. Its voice is angelic. “Music... will save... your souls.”

Upon hearing these words, Captain Vutai bites his lip, turns around, takes a deep breath, and yells, “Shut up, you flashing son of a mother! Why don’t you go back to your lands and stay with your kind?”

The singer stops. Ignoring the captain, it stands there silently and its body billows in a calm, bright, and warm glow.

Captain Vutai takes a few steps in its direction and goes on. “If only you would do something useful instead of yowling around like a woman!” Now that the singer has stopped singing some muffled battle sounds can be heard from the outside. The captain points towards the door and yells with a slight tremble in his voice, “They are right outside!”

One of the listeners, an old man, speaks up, “What are you saying? There is no escape. They are going to trap our souls. There is no use in fighting it. Give in, come here, and indulge in this beauty. Let us be one.”

The captain seems pensive and discomfited by the old man’s words.

In this tense moment, one of the advisors who’d left before raises his voice and asks sarcastically, “Or should we hand you over to them so they leave us alone?”

Captain Vutai checks where that remark came from and stares at his former advisor angrily. Suddenly he pulls out his captain’s dagger and darts off towards the insubordinate man. Some of the men in the crowd try to stop the captain. As they grab him, he delivers some jabs but can’t reach the advisor. The men have trouble containing the captain and the women grab their children and take them away from the brawl. The captain tries to break free. His fiery stare is fixed on the man he once trusted. The loyal advisors, the guards from the door, and Naldear run up to the men restraining the captain and try to free him. There is a general commotion, yelling, crying, choked sounds of strain, and clothes being torn. In that mix, too, the battle sounds from outside.

All of a sudden the singer begins to sing again. Its voice emerges with a crescendo. Along with that it itself begins to glow brighter and brighter. Some of the brawling men notice the light. They stop and wonder. Gradually the other men stop fighting, too. The commotion dies down. Calmness radiates from the singer spreading through the room. The men look at each other bewildered. Nobody knows what’s going on. They just feel waves of serenity and tenderness hitting them. Slowly the women come back towards the singer and sit down close to its feet with their children. Soft smiles spread across their faces and joyful expressions on those of their children. The men look at what’s happening. Some of them walk over to sit and listen to the singer, as well. More and more men follow. So does Captain Vutai. After a war that has been going on for so long, they don’t want to fight anymore. They want to finally feel at ease, they want to resign. Even the warriors with the horrific wounds stand up, seemingly without pain. They go over to join the cluster of people forming in front of the singer in admiration. Its loud voice envelops everything now. The singer shines in a bright glow and harmony becomes palpable in the air. Everyone in the inn is joined in this mass in front of the singer, looking at it, enjoying a warmth and unity they’ve never felt before. The singer is holding a long and powerful note. All listen in bliss. Naldear has joined the group as well. The beauty of the song overwhelms him. He feels an enormous drowsiness. The song turns into a diminuendo and as Naldear follows the lowering volume of the melody, his eyes close slowly and steadily until there is nothing but peace.

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The briefing is in progress at the main headquarters in the capital Libetion. Supreme

Commander Phocall listens attentively to his staff member.

“The enemy troops have been advancing towards the west, pillaging and destroying everything they can lay their hands on. Two and a half weeks ago they laid siege to the city of Molokene, which you ordered to be protected by the Etracon Division.” The staff member hesitates.

“Go ahead.”

“Our scouts just reported that the Asracols attacked last night. The Etracon Division held up for a couple of hours but had to withdraw into the city center. By midnight the city had been destroyed completely. The Etracon Division has been annihilated. No survivors.”

“Oh my God,” Commander Phocall mutters, terrified.

The staff member continues, “A soul crystal was deployed in that battle.”

“A soul crystal?” the commander asks, surprised.

“Yes.”

Alarmed, Phocall asks, “What about Captain Vutai?”

“It says he died along with the whole division.”

“He knew about our hidden troops in the south. If they got his soul, by now they know, too.”

“Yes, I thought about that. But after pillaging Molokene the Asracols are moving north, towards us.”

“They are taking the bait?” the commander asks.

“It seems so. They are exposing their rear to the south where our Turacon Division is hidden. As soon as they are within twenty miles of the city limits, the Turacon Division will ambush their back and the city guards will move out to aid them.”

“So, Captain Vutai escaped?”

The staff member checks his notes. “The scouts reported he died with the whole division. They must not have gotten his soul.”

Commander Phocall stares into the void in deep thought. Never has any soul avoided being caught by a soul crystal. Unable to make sense of this he utters quietly, “What on Etytia saved his soul?”