

# SAURAGIA

Journey to the Red Mountain

ALSO BY THIS AUTHOR:

*Sauragia*

*Woodland Tales*

# SAURAGIA

Journey to the  
Red Mountain

J. S. ALLEN

*For my grandmother.  
Without whom, none of this would be possible.*

This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents either are the product of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, events, or locales is entirely coincidental.

Text and Map Copyright © 2022 by J. S. Allen  
Cover Art Copyright © 2021 by Heather Bruton  
First published in 2021 by J.S.A. Books,  
an imprint of J.S.A. Media  
This edition published by Bluedrake Books,  
an imprint of Ash Tree Media

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced in any form by electronic or mechanical means, including information storage and retrieval systems, without permission in writing from the publisher, except by a reviewer who may quote brief passages in a review.

**Publisher's Cataloging-In-Publication Data**  
(Prepared by The Donohue Group, Inc.)

**Names:** Allen, J. S., author.

**Title:** Sauragia. Journey to the Red Mountain / J.S. Allen.

**Other Titles:** Journey to the Red Mountain

**Description:** [Belton, Missouri] : Bluedrake Books, an imprint of Ash Tree Media, [2022] | Series: Sauragia ; [2] | Interest age level: 13 and up. | Originally published: J.S.A. Books, an imprint of J.S.A. Media, 2021. | Summary: "A mysterious traveller arrives at Saurahall, and with him a glut of trouble. Through winter storms, bandits, and disease, it is once again up to Astron and his friends save the future of Cardolin"-- Provided by publisher.

**Identifiers:** ISBN 9781956619034 (hardcover) | ISBN 9781956619041 (paperback) | ISBN 9781956619058 (ePub)

**Subjects:** LCSH: Dinosaurs--Juvenile fiction. | Travelers--Juvenile fiction. | Imaginary places--Juvenile fiction. | CYAC: Dinosaurs--Fiction. | Travelers--Fiction. | Imaginary places--Fiction. | LCGFT: Fantasy fiction. | Action and adventure fiction. | BISAC: YOUNG ADULT FICTION / Fantasy / Epic. | YOUNG ADULT FICTION / Animals / General. | YOUNG ADULT FICTION / Action & Adventure / General.

**Classification:** LCC PZ7.1.A4386 Saj 2022 (print) | LCC PZ7.1.A4386 (ebook) | DDC [Fic]--dc23

Visit [ashtreemedia.com](http://ashtreemedia.com)

---

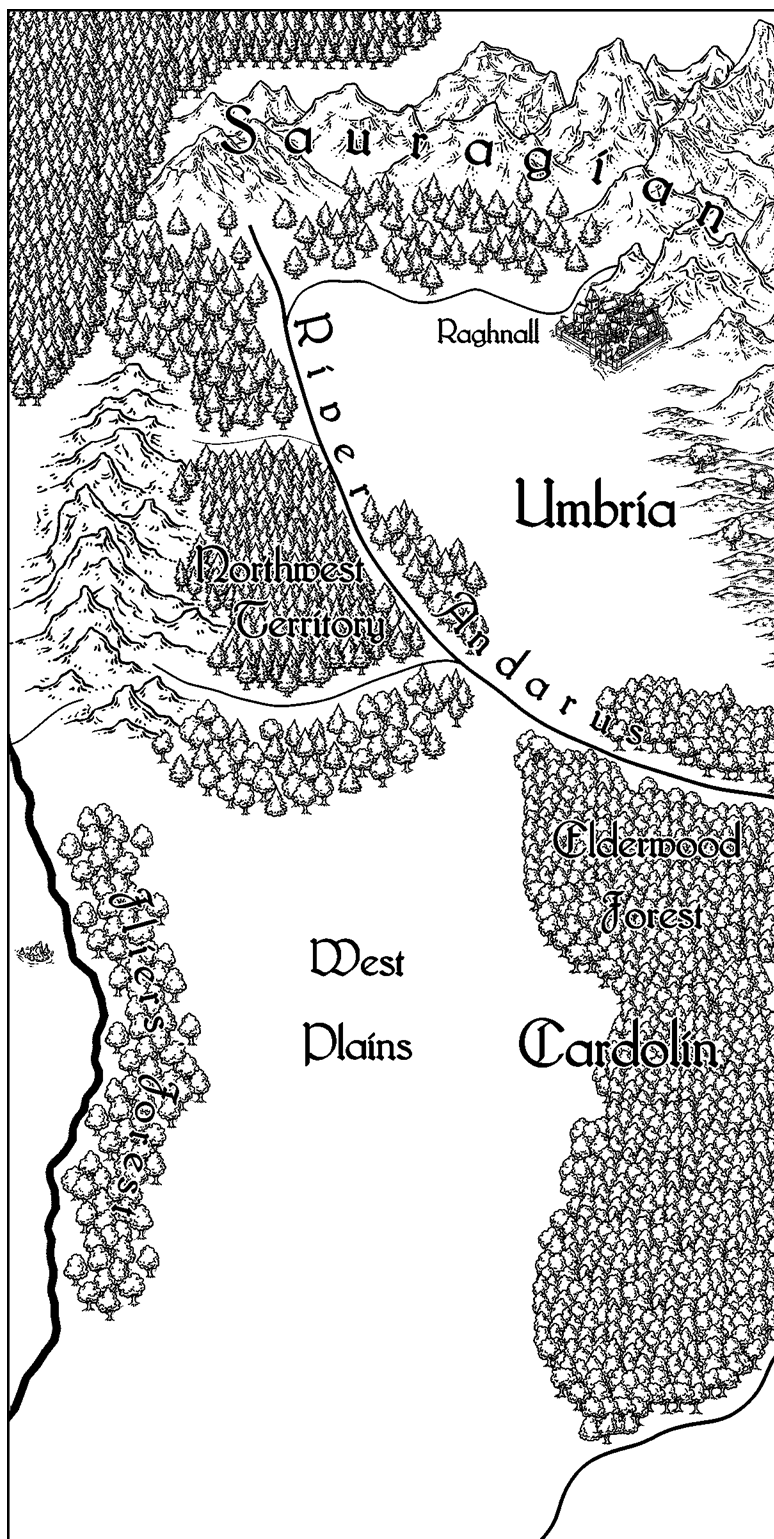
Part I:  
The Stranger  
5

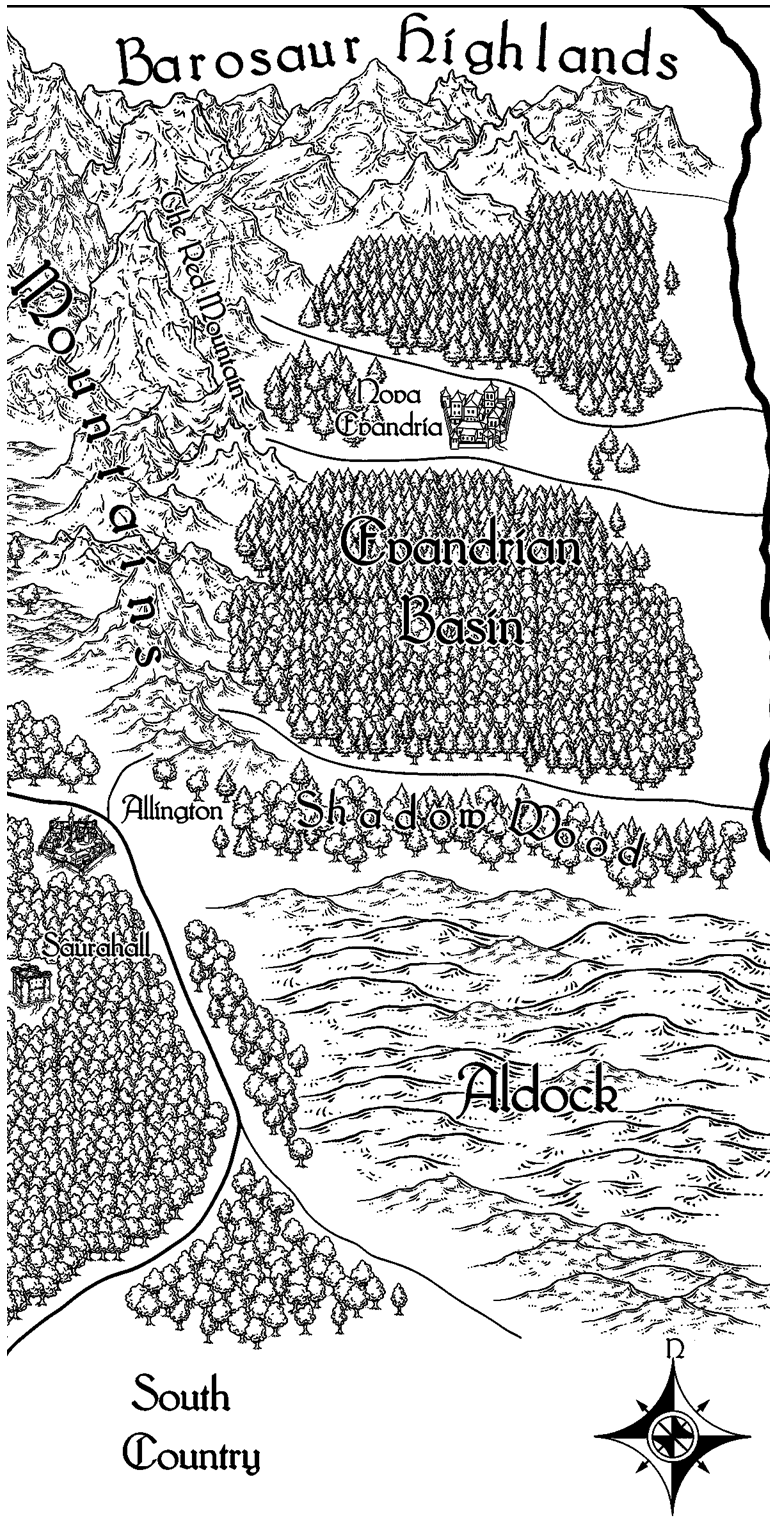
---

Part II:  
The Journey  
121

---

Part III:  
The Mountain  
229







# Prologue

A fierce northern wind blew through the trees, bringing with it the first frozen flakes of winter. The lone and weary traveller pulled his cloak tighter around himself to keep the cold off his rough green hide. This was truly a forbidding place this time of year for a dinosaur of any kind, much less a sun-loving Alvarosaurus like himself. Only the fiery heat of vengeance burning inside warmed him enough to carry on, just as it had every day for the last ten years. Then he smelt it: the faint whiff of distant mountain air. He paused briefly to savour the moment. His long journey was nearly at its end!

With a contented sigh, he readjusted the strap securing the clean but well-used broadsword to his back and continued on his way. The cold was no longer a bother.

He walked along merrily, his scarred and weather-beaten snout almost breaking into a smile. Sure, he heard the rustling in the bushes. Sure, he was being watched. But still he walked on. Bandits could not deter him now. Nothing could. From both sides of the trail came the crunching of dead leaves. It was hard to stifle the sound when they so thoroughly littered the ground.

At last they appeared all around him. Six sturdy Gorvosaurus they were, with grey-green scales, stouter limbs, and more aggressive attitudes than his own kind. These were outlaws who would not think twice about slitting his gullet, looting his corpse and leaving the rest for scavengers. He stopped, and the one in front spoke up.

"Mornin' to ya trav'ler," greeted the leader with a vicious grin. He wore a black kerchief tied about his neck. "That's a nice sword you got there. Pretty little knife, too."

The worn wayfarer said naught.

"Not very friendly, are ya mister?"

Still the traveller said nothing. He merely levelled an impassive stare at the bandit leader.

"We ain't used to such rudeness, mate. See, we're the Silver Six, the most dangerous outlaws this side o' the Sauragians, an' this is our stretch o' road. We don't let nobody use our road free o' charge, do we lads?"

The others gave various signs of agreement.

"Let me pass, bandit," said the traveller in a level tone. "You'll live to cherish your wisdom."

"We'd love to, but y'see, you got too many nice trinkets for that. Couldn't leave you burdened with all them, now could we?"

"Don't try it, or I guarantee you'll neither relish nor regret the day."

"Ha! Tough talk. Get 'im!"

The Silver Six moved in, but before they knew it, two had been slain by the hardy old broadsword. As they paused in shock, the veteran Alvarosaurus set upon them with the sword in one claw and the long-bladed knife in the other. Another slumped over as it punctured his heart.

"Kill 'im!" exerted the rogue leader wildly.

The dual blades whirled around in a blur, and a fourth crumpled as the sword ran him through. The other attacked, but his blow was warded off by the sword, and the dagger found its way through his ribs. As he staggered back, the larger blade fell across his exposed neck.

The bandit leader, seeing his band slaughtered in just over a minute, took off immediately at a run. He was a fast runner, and his fear propelled him further. He would escape and start a new band. He had done it before; he could do it again.

This time, however, he had barely gotten a start when a

sharp pain struck the back of his knee and he fell flat. He crawled away desperately with his foreclaws as the stranger walked up calmly and stamped down hard on his tail, pinning him. He then bent over and retrieved his smaller blade, holding it up for the bandit to see.

“This is a dirk, by the way. Not a knife.”

“Mercy!” cried the frightened robber in desperation. “Meaaagh!” The sword went through his chest and he lay still, eyes wide with terror.

Withdrawing his blade, the traveller wiped it neatly on a tattered, blood-stained cloth. He had given them fair warning. Nothing would stand in his way now. He wiped clean the dirk and sheathed both blades. Unshaken, and even a bit invigorated by the encounter, he straightened up his back and strode confidently onward. Aye, vengeance would soon be his!



Part I:  
The Stranger



# 1

An icy gust of wind brushed past the face of Oric the bandit leader, the Red One to some, and he turned away from the cave mouth. How different this cramped little hole was from his hideout in the mountains. Normally he would be back there at this time of the year tallying up the heaps of gold and jewels he had accumulated over the warmer months in comfort. He would never think of spending it. That would be absurd. Almost everything he had was stolen, from the furniture at his hideout to the highly fashionable clothes on his back. Everything save his wits, cunning, and killer instinct. Those came naturally.

But this year had been a disaster. This year his band had lost most of their haul during a bout of unseasonable flooding, and nearly their lives besides. What was more, winter had come freakishly early, complete with ice and snow. Thus, they had not been able to make it back to their mountain in time. Slaying the woodlander who had owned this cave and taking it had been his only stroke of luck, albeit a small one. The cave and food stores might be sufficient for one old Alvarosaurus, but it was slim pickings for a band of twenty hungry dinos.

Nevertheless, at that moment the thieving Gorvosaurus knew he had lost face. Their misfortune was his fault plain and simple. Though no one dared say so to his face for fear of getting a knife through the throat, there was definite grumbling from some corners. He cast a glance toward the main culprits: a heavysset Gorvosaur named Gorad and a couple of his buddies gnawing on the last of the food stores. Gorad was not the brightest, but he was cunning and vicious. It was no secret that he thought he should be the leader, and Oric knew that one day they would probably

have a reckoning. Maybe sooner rather than later, at the rate things were going.

But for now they sat huddled together inside the cramped little cave, waiting. They were waiting on two things: for the storm to pass, and for Oric's chief scout Bandor to return. He had been sent out with a couple of others some time earlier to investigate their surroundings and find out where there was treasure to be stolen. Of course, in this case it was shelter and provisions he sought rather than actual treasure. For although Oric's band, known widely as the Red Claw, could forage for food, it was easier just to take it.

Despite the whistling of the wind, Oric could hear the sound of several sets of claws approaching. He unsheathed one of his knives and held it ready. He was a deadly knife fighter, and carried no other armaments. "Proper weapons for the trade," he called them, for indeed they were subtle and easy to conceal—perfect for a true robber like himself. He quickly discovered that his knives would be unnecessary on this occasion, however, for he soon heard Bandor's voice.

"That you, Oric?" spoke the scout, the only member of the band who could get away with regularly calling Oric by his name.

"Yes, you idiot." Oric sheathed his knife and sighed with disappointment. "Did you find anything?"

"Oh, yes sir," replied one of the two who had accompanied Bandor on the patrol. "We found a nice cottage not far from here."

"A cottage?" Oric's interest was piqued. "How big? Who lives in it?"

"Just a couple Alvarosaurs, boss," replied Bandor. "And two young uns. Shouldn't be a problem for us. Probably

well stocked too, I should think."

"Finally, some real food!" spoke Gorad, standing up. Oric silenced him with a venomous glance, then turned back to Bandor.

"Young uns, you say?"

Bandor nodded.

"Excellent. Show it to us right away."

"This way." Bandor took off once more into the wind, the rest of the band following behind with thoughts of warmth and good food filling their minds. Oric, for his part, thought also of the two children mentioned.

For in addition to being a thief and trickster supreme, he also liked to collect slaves to serve him at his hideout, and even sell on occasion. The younger the better, for it was easier to teach them obedience at an early age. Most of the heavy labour was done at his fortress by these captured slaves, and many other jobs as well. Oric hoped one day to build a mountain castle so grand and so big that it rivalled even those that the ancient Evandrians used to build. It was his dream, and to fulfill his dream, he needed lots of labour from wherever he could get it. With his massive wealth, he could have afforded to hire experts. But why buy what could be stolen?

Through the snow and wind they trekked, guided by Bandor and his two helpers. The Gorfosaurus scout was a strange dinosaur. His eyes, which were almost entirely black with just a little of the usual yellow-green colour around the edges, had remarkable vision, and allowed him to see in the most adverse conditions. In a pitch black night or blinding snowstorm he could see quite clearly where other dinosaurs could not. This made him an exceptional scout and tracker for Oric, though some of the others in the gang found his appearance a little unsettling. They knew

almost nothing about him or where he came from, and nor did he reveal his true motives for anything. He had just shown up one day and asked to join the Red Claw. Thus, the rest did not completely trust him. But, they figured, if the Red One put confidence in him, they could too. For now.

Bandor led them around a small grove of trees and stopped behind a pile of boulders. Oric stepped up to him.

"Well, where is it?"

"Over there," Bandor said, pointing over the boulder pile.

Oric peeked over the rocks and saw it: a small three-room farmhouse with a straw roof and a quaint little smokestack. There was a big shed out back. Smoke was rising from the chimney, indicating that the family within had a lovely warm fire going. In fact, he could see them through a window at the side of the house. Two happy Alvarosaurs with a couple of children, nine or ten years old at most. Oric smiled at the homely little scene of the family gathered in safety and warmth around their hearth, to which he would presently put an end.

"You've done well, Bandor," he said. "We should be able to stay here in relative safety, at least until this storm blows over. Maybe all winter." He turned to a dinosaur on his left. "Renwig! You know what to do."

A relatively small Gorfosaur with a deceptively innocent-looking face smiled charmingly, then signalled to his equally diminutive mate to follow him. The two wrapped their cloaks around themselves tight to look like a couple of cold, half-starved vagabonds as they approached the front step. Oric watched with eager anticipation as his two deadliest assassins went up and knocked politely on the cottage door.

## 2

"Looks like another cold one tonight."

The young guard standing watch over Saurahall's main gate blew into his chilled foreclaws and shivered as he rubbed them together for warmth.

"Just like last night," said the other, whose arms were crossed tight and hugged close to his chest. "Hard to believe the autumn's nearly over already. Seems like summer was just getting started a couple weeks ago."

"That's just what my brother says," said the first.

"Must be something to it, then," came a more mature voice from behind them. They jumped with surprise and turned around. Before them stood an Alvarosaurus in the uniform of the Royal Guard of Saurahall like themselves. He was taller and more muscular than the two, particularly regarding his powerful legs, and was a good deal older besides. He bore a small scar on his lower left leg, and wore the bluish cloak of an officer.

"Hi there Jo...er, Lieutenant, sir!" said the first one as they both saluted smartly.

"Good morning, Harrison." The lieutenant nodded to his younger brother. "Robertson." He acknowledged the other. "Everything in order here?"

"Certainly, sir," said Robertson. "At least as well as it can be when it's bloody well freezing out here."

"It could be worse, but would you like me to send up some extra garments for you? A pair of cloaks, perhaps?"

Harrison shook his head. "No, thanks. It'd be a lot better if we could just pop down into the guardhouse to get out of the wind once in a while. Could we please do that, Johnny?"

The officer gave him a sharp reproving glance. "That's Lieutenant Harrison, to you, Ronald. And no, you certainly

can't do that. If I let you and Henry go down, then I'd have to let everyone else, and pretty soon we'd have no one to watch the walls."

"Oh, come on, Lieutenant Johnny, sir," pleaded his younger brother. "We're freezing our tails off in this wind. Can't you set aside the rules just this once? Besides, nothing ever happens out there anyway. Nobody's going to try and attack us or anything like that."

"You don't know that! It's been tried before, remember? And no, I can't. That whining might work on mum and dad, but it won't work here. You're in the Guard now, and if I made exceptions for you I'd be showing favouritism." He paused. "I'll send up the cloaks and a couple hot drinks to keep you warm. Just do your stint, and then you can go back to the barracks. It's only an hour or so more."

He patted them both on the shoulder then carried on down the snow-dusted walltop, his scabbard clacking against his leg as he walked. Ron turned back to his watch, muttering to his companion, "An hour or so before my claws break off. See what he tells mum and dad then."

Henry took his friend's complaints with a shrug and a shake of his head. He knew Ron never meant anything by it, and would forget all about it by the next day. But he could be very trying in the meantime, of that there was no question.

"Come on, Freddie! Show a little initiative. Take a good swing at me like your brother. Keep it up. There's a good boy!"

The cold air of the Palace Courtyard was anything but silent as the sound of clacking wooden swords floated up from the parade ground on the east side of it. Astron, Prince Consort of Cardolin and Defender of the Realm, hopped

about with unmatched agility as he warded off attacks by his sons Frederik and Arnor. The two were practically the same age, having come from the same clutch of eggs. Frederik had hatched about ten minutes ahead of his brother, with their sister Rose having hatched in between, though to look at them one would think otherwise.

Frederik, heir to the throne of Cardolin after his mother Princess Alyssa, was of a slighter build than his brother, and was less adept at this sort of swordplay. Arnor was also slender with a healthy length of tail, but stood taller than his older siblings by just a bit. He was also a tad rambunctious, and took to the sword quite naturally. In short, he was very much like his father in every way save for his appearance, which was more like his mother's. At present he took the lead in the attack on Astron, which was not going at all well.

"Have a go, Freddie! Let's get him," he urged.

"All right, all right!" said Frederik. "You first."

At once the brothers charged, Arnor in the lead. They brandished their own smaller swords, and Astron expertly disarmed them with a clean sweep of his weapon. The two stood in awe of their father's skill, though inside Arnor was also fuming at having lost.

"How did you do that?" he asked.

"Lots of practice," replied Astron casually.

"I hope I'm as good as that when I'm older."

"You will be, given time and practice. Maybe even better." He looked up as a little girl strode up in the company of a distinguished-looking dino about Astron's age.

"What ho, old lad!" spoke the latter.

"Ah! Morning, Rob. How are you today?"

"Positively splendid, thanks for asking," replied Captain Winstone, or simply Rob to most, with a smile to

match his dashing appearance. He wore an officer's cloak of black velvet and a wide-brimmed black hat turned up rakishly on one side with a long white plume inserted in it for flair. On top of all this, he really was quite handsome, and had a cavalier charm that was hard not to love.

While their father was thus distracted, a subtle cue passed between Arnor and his brother, and they rushed him. Experienced as he was, even Astron found their combined force a bit much and backed up. In doing so, however, he made a slight misjudgment of his claw placement and lost his balance. This was all the two boys needed, and they took him down in a trice. Those standing by could not help but smile as they watched their prince switch instantly from stern instructor to loving father, embracing his sons warmly.

"How was that, dad? Did we do good?" asked Arnor eagerly.

"You certainly did," said Astron, letting them up with a proud gleam in his shimmering golden eyes.

"Looks like they caught you breaking your own rule there, old lad," said Rob, chuckling lightly. "Never turn your eyes away from a living enemy."

"Quite so, Rob. Got what I deserved, I suppose."

"That looks like loads of fun," spoke the little girl. "Can I play too?"

"Certainly not, Rose," said Astron, standing up. "Your mother would put up such a fuss if I let you dirty up your dress before noon. Besides, it's not very ladylike, sword fighting. Not to mention you could catch cold in air like this."

"That's just what old Martha said," sighed Rose.

"Afraid I have to agree with her there, missy," said Rob. "Smart dino, our Martha."

"Exactly," said Astron. "So why are you out here, young lady?"

"I might ask the same of you," she wanted to say. But, mastering her innate impudence, she replied, "Mum said to come and fetch you. She wanted to talk to you about something, and said I could play with Freddie and Arnor if I stayed clean."

"Oh yes, that'll be about the winter festival. I'd better go talk to her then. You know how she hates to be kept waiting on this sort of thing."

"That she does," said Rob. "Shall I return with you?"

"No need for that, Rob. You've your own duties to attend to."

"Very good, sir," said Rob as his old comrade-in-arms hastened back to the Palace. He shook his head.

"Fine dinosaur, your father," he said to the young ones. "Hard to believe he was once merely another new recruit in the Guard."

"Oh, tell us about that, will you Uncle Rob!" said Arnor excitedly. "Tell us about the time father saved Saurahall."

"Again? But I must have told you about it at least a hundred times before."

"We don't mind," said Frederik. "We like that story. Especially the part where he beat that nasty Edward."

"You see? You all know the tale well enough to tell it to me."

"Please, Uncle Rob," said Rose sweetly. The look in her little yellow eyes was enough to melt even the stoniest of hearts, so naturally Rob's soft heart gave in immediately.

"All right, my dear, I'll do it for you," relented the captain. "But do let's not stand about freezing while we tell it, eh? Why don't you lot run along and tell old Willy to have four cups of hot tea sent up to the sitting room, and then

wait for me there. And fetch your sister Violet, while you're at it. She may want to hear it too. I've got a couple of errands to run, but I promise I won't be long, all right?"

"Hooray! Thanks Captain Rob!" said the joyous children as they raced each other toward the kitchen.

Rob sighed as he turned to make one more tour of the ramparts. He had always had a knack for handling young ones, and those of his best friends Astron and Alyssa were no exception. He certainly had a close connection with them, having been there since their hatching. And he always found it endearing to be referred to as "Uncle Rob." Nor did he ever really tire of telling them how their father—with a little help from himself and some flying reptiles—had saved Saurahall from that barbarian who had once called himself king. As he reflected on it, he realized just how much had changed in nine years since the war's end.

A lot of the young ones had grown up, and several were now in the Guard under his command or in the Saurahall Defence Force (the Force, as it was called by most) under the aging Captain Humphreys. He wondered when, if ever, Humphreys would give it up, though he rather hoped he wouldn't. Humphreys was a good fellow, and the only veteran of the old school military left after Richard Torilis, Captain of the Guard before Rob, had died a couple of winters back.

As he climbed to the walltop, he found one of those youngsters on duty watching the east gate.

"Everything all right up here, Wilson?" Rob asked.

"Morning, sir! Everything's A-okay," replied Wilson with a snappy salute.

"Good show! Carry on, then."

"Righto, sir!"

It warmed Rob's heart to see such devotion from the

young. Yes, he had seen a lot in his life, out front but unscathed, and hardly affected at all. "Good old Rob," he was called, and such he was, though not really that old. But he was just as good-natured and dutiful as ever. And in such an ever-changing world, he rather liked it that way.

So many had died or moved away from Saurahall in the past few years. It was mostly due to what folks called the "Rush for Riches." After the defeat of the Saltrak in Cardolin, trade routes throughout the east had become open to merchants from Cardolin and Umbria again, and many dinos had moved away to bigger cities like Allington to the north in search of profit and adventure. In the absence of Saltrak, of course, the eastern roads were now plagued by disparate bandit gangs, but this was not enough to discourage adventurers from seeking their fortunes abroad.

Thus, there were now barely enough dinosaurs left to call Saurahall a city. His own family had remained, along with a few other stalwarts, but many were now gone. One of the few remaining factors binding them all together was King Henrik, who had occupied the throne for as long as anyone could remember. But even he was getting on in years, and Rob feared the good king had not long to go.

But he did not wish to dwell on such unpleasant thoughts as he finished his patrol and headed back to the Palace. As he headed upstairs, Rob encountered Johnny on the way out.

"You needn't bother with your circuit, old boy. Just covered it myself."

"Oh, all right," replied Johnny. "Thanks, Captain." He paused. "Off to tell the young uns another yarn, are you?"

"Same old yarn, actually. They never tire of it, wot!"

Johnny smiled. "You know, given how much you like young ones, I'm surprised you don't have any of your

own."

"Oh, don't be silly! Who'd want an old Guard Captain for a mate, eh? Besides, I've got my claws full with everyone else's."

Johnny shrugged. "Fair enough."

"What about you, old lad?" asked Rob in a lower voice. "You found anyone new yet?"

The lieutenant sighed and shook his head. "No. My heart will always belong right where it is."

Rob nodded slowly. When Astron had first come to Saurahall, he and Johnny had been very close. Astron's heart had eventually moved on: Johnny's hadn't. It was sad to see in a way, but Johnny seemed content to wallow in the memories of the happiness he'd once so briefly known, and he wasn't going to jeopardize their friendship by trying to force a change. So, with a sigh and a pat on the shoulder, he said, "Well, see you around, old lad."

"Right. Later, Rob."