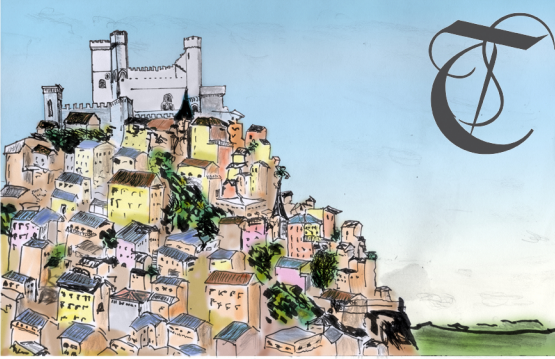


# Book One

*concerning our escape from Ruhai, and the Godlian Expansion*

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## WE MUST FLEE



**T**he back road down from the castle was narrow along the steep slope, and dangerous at a fast clip because of the switchbacks. The horses had to be reined in each time, and in between given their heads to gain speed. In sleep sometimes I am there again, afraid as if I still do not know what

will happen, whether or not we will live. The Godlians had breached the seven gates of Korshan, our ancient hilltown, and had entered the castle itself from the narrow, unguarded streets; there had been no time to lower the last iron gate, or raise the drawbridge that had long been ceremonial. Or else the rebels had come from within; by the time we got word to flee, there had been no time to find out, no servants left in the private quarters to ask. Other than my family, only Sazhio Estaban, my tutor and great friend, had stayed behind long enough to summon coachmen for us from among his own endangered people, and call in the fog to hide our escape. He was the royal tutor, and knew spells.

Down the back street our horses galloped, slowed, galloped as the coachmen shouted curses. Sometimes the slope was steep as a staircase, sometimes as narrow, and our two carriages, with their scarlet plumes pulled off for desperate anonymity, scraped against ancient stones worn smooth by countless other carriages too wide or too fast—the dimensions were ancient also, created for an earlier age than ours. In the front carriage was my elder brother, Talland, heir to our father's throne despite his refusal of an education; he had trained in the garrison rather than submit to the intimacies of a traditional Celebrant tutor, and had returned from the front only at our mother's begging. She had claimed another of her presentiments from a dream—Godlians at the gates—and this time, to everyone's surprise but her own, she was proven right.

My brother Talland wanted to stay behind and fight; our mother forbade him, insisted that he get into the front carriage and lead us to safety, leaving behind his fellow soldiers, his shield, his sword, his stallion, all but his ornamental knife—insisted with such vehemence that he shrank during that essential instant back to his cowed childhood self, obeying her, and probably that impulse saved