



Origins 0.5
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The Rift

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The Flight

Part 1

By Steve Hargett

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**Mariella was created by Steve Hargett and Ellis Cook
Chacho was created by Steve Hargett and Saul Hargett**

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High above the ocean a solitary man hovered in the sky, powerful magic that he controlled as easily as breathing defied gravity and held him as still as any rock on the surface might.

Chacho was scouting the defences of one of the coastal forts on the largest island he had ever seen. He was further north than he had ever ventured. This was the capital island of the Empire, this was where Sinjin lived.

On the day Chacho was born his father had been executed along with all the other shipwrecked survivors aged over twelve. Only a handful of children had been spared, along with Midwif Heggarty who had cradled the newborn defiantly. Those that hadn't been hanged like his father were shot by red-coated Marines.

They had committed no crime. They were Sky-People, living a life they chose. sailing the seas in their square rigged ships. Or, through their control of Storm Magic, sailing the skies. Like his Father before him Chacho had control of this force of nature.

From his vantage point floating high above the island he scanned the fort to see where their bronze cannons were set. Two years ago Chacho had been a Colonial Marine in the service of the Empire. Those spared the noose or musket had only survived due to clemency shown by the local Governor.

Sinjin had ordered the death of all the survivors, the Governor had saved those he could. For that reason Chacho still wore the black and gold coat he had worn as a Colonial Marine to show that mercy had a place in life. Though he doubted he would show Sinjin any mercy if he came across him.

He was not here for Sinjin though, no matter how much he wanted revenge on the man who murdered his Father and stole his childhood his mission was about more than that.

He noted each weapon and how it was aligned. Seven of his people had recently been captured and unless the information that had reached the Caldera was wrong they were held in the coastal fortress he was looking down upon.

Then his eye caught sight of something else. A lone figure peering over the cliff's edge not more than two miles from the fortress. A woman it seemed though at this distance there was little detail he could be certain of. He was intrigued, as he watched he became more certain it was a lone woman, a horse was grazing not far away.

He had little interest in the locals but her behaviour seemed odd. Then, as she backed away from the cliff, he realised she was intent on throwing herself off the edge.

He should not care for one of this island's people given that they had murdered so many of his own. Yet the black and gold coat he wore reminded him that not all of them were as cruel as Sinjin, the Governor for one.

He cursed himself for a fool as he suddenly started to dive towards the woman, intent on saving her from dashing her life away on the rocks at the bottom of the cliff.

Mariella had been coming to these cliffs for months now and felt so much more at home here than in the mansion she lived in. Her mother had died when she was very young and her Father was so often too busy to be home. The only people whom she had for company most days were her Governess and the household servants.

The only reason she was out of the mansion now was because her Father was constantly trying to find a match for her. She had, perhaps selfishly, managed to get a young Officer Lieutenant Quillan, to agree to give her time alone at this spot in return for her agreeing to have regular picnics with him. Quillan was gaining favour with her Father and she had found a source of freedom.

What she had found, what she had to keep secret, was that she had a magic inside her that others born within the Empire did not ever possess. There was magic within the Empire sure enough, some had Earth Magic, others Flora Magic, some possessed Healing Magic. Mariella however it seemed had some form of Storm Magic. The magic that the Free People possessed.

She couldn't fly as the Free People could but she could hover a few feet above the ground, she could slow the speed of a fall to the speed of a falling feather, she could soar on thermals that raised up at these cliffs.

That was what she loved to do here. But more. The gulls that roosted here seemed to accept her, seemed to want her to soar with them. Her horse would go where she wished without bidding. It seemed she also had some Fauna Magic, something rarely seen within the Empire proper, though there was some to be found in the far flung colonies.

She looked over at her horse, Bruce, where he was casually chewing on some daisies. He was perfectly relaxed as he waited for his stable-mate.

Mariella looked inland, she had just over half an hour now before Quillan would be in sight and she would need to be sat waiting for him to arrive with the picnic as though nothing unusual had happened.

She walked backwards, away from the cliff, then ran forwards launching herself off the edge, flinging her arms wide to catch the thermal.

Wall patrol was dull, beyond dull. Timmis had been on duty for six hours, nothing had happened. Six long hours and another six to go.

He looked down in to the courtyard, three of his mess mates were sat drinking cider, playing cards and telling tales. It was only early afternoon, they'd been on the last duty shift and had the next day off. He had six more hours before he could join them, though by the time his shift had ended they'd be unconscious.

Timmis had never intended to sign up as a Marine but it was the only way to avoid the noose. He'd been hungry, shouldn't hang for hunger. Worse, his siblings had been hungry. Three fish they had caught him with, not big fish either. Each fish would have graced the plate of a gentleman as one course. Three would have gone into the pottage his Ma had put together from oats she had scrimped for, seaweed they had gathered from the shore and an onion he'd found discarded outside a mansion. Three fish and he had faced the noose.

At least his family ate now. Most his pay went home to feed the young ones. His Da had died eight years ago, the youngest of his siblings still inside their Ma for half her term. At twelve he'd become the man of the house, if the lean to they lived in could be described as such.

The noose or thirty years of servitude, an easy choice for a wharf-rat from Gageton.

A movement, almost nothing, caught his eye. He shielded his face as he looked up at the sun. He was about to decide he had not seen anything when a shape started to drop from the sky.

"Pirate!" he called out as he snapped his rifle to his shoulder.

Without hesitation he fired, the bounty from bringing down a Pirate had been doubled due to the prisoners they currently held.

The figure fell, Timmis whooped and his cry was echoed by half a dozen or so that had witnessed the shot.

Chacho had reached a rate of descent that he knew would allow him to reach the falling

female before she dashed her life away on the rocks in the water beneath the cliff.

As he drew close at speed he realised his mistake, she wasn't falling, she was...

His thoughts were silenced by the bullet that struck his temple. He lost consciousness and started to fall out of control.

Mariella was shocked to see the body of a young man fall past her and crash in to the sea. She stopped reaching for the thermal and increased her own descent. To her relief she saw the young man pushed to the surface by two dolphins who began pushing him towards the shore.

She knew there was a cave nearby that was dry this time of year. She entered the water and helped the dolphins push him as far as they could, she then dragged him out of the water.

The wound on his head looked worse than it was, the bullet had hit his skull at an angle and passed on. He seemed to have a broken right arm, from the fall.

The fall, what had he been... then it struck her, his long black coat. It was a Colonial Marine uniform from the far south. He had what seemed to be a flintlock tucked in his belt. She removed the weapon and hastily examined it. No place for black-powder.

A pirate!

She flinched back from the inert body, dropping the weapon. She felt a surge of intense fear.

Then she saw the vulnerable young man. He would hang if they found him, like the others at Franklin Fort. The others, it was obvious, he was here to save them.

She realised that others would arrive soon. Her escort or one and Marines from Franklin.

She was sure he'd live, certainly his chances here were better than if the men found him.

She left the cave and swam back to where the young man had entered the water. She didn't have long to wait, Quillan was soon calling her name. He was alarmed to see her in the water. He removed his frock-coat and took a quite impressive dive in to the water and swam to her aid.

"What happened?" he said with obvious concern.

She wasn't under any misapprehension, his concern was more for the fact he had been absent when he was supposedly by her side. That would help her now and she feigned panic till he had aided her away from the rocks.

Once clear of the rocks he swam west and then came in to a small bay and helped her to shore. Marines were starting to arrive.

"Tell me quickly what happened," Quillan said earnestly.

The Marines were keeping a deferential distance, all were of low rank.

"A Pirate," she started to explain, "someone shot him but he is alive, he tried to snatch me but I struggled and he dropped me. "He cut to the West, must have passed right by here."

"You are fortunate you didn't hit the rocks," his instincts for self preservation were obviously in action, there was no concern in his voice. "Clearly I had no time to shoot the fellow, so I dived in after you. As he had come this way we waited a few minutes away from the rocks before I swam us here."

She nodded, saying nothing.

"Leave the detail to me, they will believe you can't recall detail due to stress. Describe him to me as accurate as you can."

She didn't try to hide the fact she was happy with his suggestion. The more Quillan thought he was in control the better. Quickly she described the Colonial uniform and the weapon, omitting of course that she had handled it. She described the colour of his unkempt hair but left the rest vague.

He nodded, "that is perfect, clearly I wouldn't have had long to look at him before I jumped off the cliff. Well done."

Another officer arrived, junior to Quillan. He gave her his frock coat and helped her to his horse.

"My man, Timmis, was the fellow that shot him!" the young man declared proudly pointing Timmis out to them.

Quillan slapped his colleague on the shoulder, "well, my friend, your man is a damn fine shot. Had he not been wounded the fellow might not have dropped the poor young

lady, The High Admiral will be most grateful for your part in saving his daughter. I will ensure he knows all about it."

The young officer was delighted and the Marine Timmis grinned widely. Mariella thought that his extending of the credit was a master stroke. These Marines were now unknowingly accomplices to her growing web of lies.

She didn't like to have to lie but her life was so constrained she simply couldn't lose the only freedom she had found.

Quillan had stripped off his wet clothes, donned a fresh uniform and his valet was fastening a clean pair of long boots as the officer checked his hair in the mirror. "Hurry up, man!" he admonished the servant, though the man was doing the best he could to fasten the boots as his employer shifted about with ill contained energy.

The search for the Pirate that had attacked Mariella was well under way. He now needed to make a report to the High Admiral. He would play down his own part, yes he had leapt into the sea to save the High Admiral's daughter but the rest was fabrication. The more he built around facts and included others the more any gaps would seem less important.

He hadn't seen the damned Pirate because he hadn't been there. That could never come out, he would lose face, lose respect of his peers. Worse, he'd lose all the advancement he had gained by this ridiculous charade with Mariella.

The girl was attractive but her head was filled with nonsense about birds, horses, flowers. Through her though he could get closer and closer to the High Admiral.

Quillan was from an old family, though not one as well positioned in society as the High Admiral's had been. He hailed from a smaller isle, where as the High Admiral was from Capital City. He was the youngest of three sons, so had little advancement through his father, everything would pass to his eldest brother.

Even without a match if all went well now his progression was going to be ensured. He would likely have the patronage of The High Admiral, one of the most influential men in the Empire.

There was a rap at the door.

"Enter!" Quillan barked.

A Sargent stepped in, saluted and stamped to attention.

"If it pleases the Lieutenant the High Admiral has left the Palace and will arrive imminently He requests the pleasure of your attendance at your earliest convenience."

"My thanks, Sargent Guffi," Quillan responded, "compliments to his office and I shall attend presently."

"Aye, Sir!" the Sergeants formal response let through a hint of pride that the upwardly mobile gentleman had recognised him.

A key to success as an officer was to remember at least one in ten men, one in four Sergeants and all ones peers.

He checked himself again in the mirror, accepted the hat his valet offered him and checked himself again after placing the hat carefully on his head. All was as it should be.

He exited his quarters directly on to the parade ground. He was a junior officer and though he had out ranked the fellow from Franklin he needed something more than this glorified garrison Lieutenant position if he were to make a proper showing of a career.

He entered the main building at the head of the parade ground. He walked past guards that stood squarely at attention as he approached. They all knew who he was and he knew one in five of these men by name. He ignored them for the moment, they will have heard all about this afternoon already.

He entered the ante chamber, where an elderly Lieutenant sat, eye lenses perched on the end of his nose. The old man had never made anything if himself. The youngest son of a minor old family, his nephew now owned the land he had been born to and he had no issue of his own.

"Ah, Quillan," the elderly man said slowly, "so good of you to come so promptly."

Quillan ignored the obvious sarcasm. Polite though the invite had been it was nevertheless an order to attend the most senior military officer of the Empire.

"Wait here," the old man said, "I shall check his Lordship is able to see you at this time."

He stood slowly and just as slowly he approached a double door that was to his right behind his desk. All this slowness was simply show, he was exercising the only power

he had, the power to make others wait.

He tapped the door gently, almost inaudibly, but it opened instantly. The old man passed through in to the office of the High Admiral. Within moments he was at the door again, looking over his eye lenses at Quillan.

"His Lordship is ready for you." he said and stepped to one side to permit the younger man to pass.

Quillan found the High Admiral with a number of other senior officers stood at a table covered in land-charts.

"Quillan!" one of the Admirals said with enthusiasm.

It was Yathro, the Garrison Commanding Officer. Who had so happily identified him, this boded well indeed. Yathro was his Commanding Officer and if he was pleased to see him it meant so was the High Admiral.

"Ah, the very fellow!" the High Admiral said.

He was a powerfully built man nearing sixty years but robust with health. His hair shoulder length as was fashionable, grey as autumn clouds. His eyes cold despite his smiling face.

The other officers all muttered greetings, loud enough but non committal.

"Come now gentlemen," the High Admiral admonished them, "the fellow bravely saved mi very own daughter!"

The officers all started with a muddle of 'bravo' and 'huzzah', except Yathro who had stepped forward and suddenly embraced him.

"Such a man, one of mi very own!" Yathro exclaimed.

"Enough!" the High Admiral bellowed.

The room was silenced and Yathro stood swiftly aside.

"So, tell me," the High Admiral said directly to Quillan, "tell me everything."

Chacho woke suddenly, he tried to rise but the pain in his head made him stop moving. His right arm hurt dreadfully and his vision was blurred.

He tried to move again, slower but barely raised his head off the ground. He touched his forehead with his left hand and found dried blood. He had been shot, likely he had concussion.

He could just make out he was in a cave, moonlight was bathing the floor nearby. He had been unconscious for some time it seemed.

How he had reached the cave was unknown. The only possible explanation was that the young woman must have helped him.

She had flown, one of his own people it seemed. Perhaps an orphan like himself, here as a servant.

The thought of others having their lives stolen from him burnt inside. He tried to rise again but the pain in his head and his arm was bad enough but he found his ribs also caused him pain.

Then he began to wretch.

It was a day since the incident at the cliff, they hadn't found the injured man yet nor had she had chance to go to the cave to check he was all right.

She had a guard at her door day and night and one was stationed at the foot of the wall beneath her window. The whole island was probably on alert. She had heard that the hangings would now take place earlier than planned as it was anticipated that this was part of a rescue plan.

The condemned prisoners would also be moved to a safer location.

She felt sorry for those men but she couldn't help them. She could help this injured man avoid capture and escape. First she had to get food bandages and out of the house. She had no idea how to do any of this.

Even if Quillan would escort her there was no way he'd let her out of his sight again. In any-case

She had to think of a different tactic, clearly neither slipping out the window nor Quillan were options. She couldn't see what options that left her with though.

She had no friends to speak to, no one she could trust implicitly. Not even a trusted old nursemaid. No one.

The mansion was empty, except her Governess, the servants and the guard at her door. There may well be guards at the main door also. So the window was the only way out but there was a guard at the foot of the window.

She was aware of commotion outside. Listening to the window she could here the Marine below speaking to another.

A storm, heading towards the island, the implications were obvious from the snatches she heard. Storm Magic.

Chacho was unconscious, fever had set in and he was thrashing around. There were sparks coming from his fingers, raw Storm Magic. Some called him Stormrider when they thought he wasn't listening. Some called him Stormbringer, but never in his presence.

When Sky-people were born they were born with all the potential Storm Magic they might ever possess. They couldn't harness it, it was just potential power.

Storm Magic was what they called it but in truth it was a natural energy force, one of many. As real as gravity or fire, often intangible like a wind but sometimes as striking as lightening.

Like magnetism raw Storm Magic attracts or repels and the more powerful the magic the more magic it might affect. At his birth his potential power had attracted a storm so powerful that it destroyed the sky-vessel his family had lived on. If Midwif Heggarty hadn't taken control of the raw power he had unleashed at birth he would have died due to the storm.

Now another storm was heading towards him.

**Mariella and Chacho's Story will continue
in 2014.**

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The Rift

A series of stories in a variety of settings.

The whole of existence is in a constant state of flux. If everything is left alone existence will endure.

But it is never left alone.

Those with free will seek to gain advantage and when they do they disrupt the natural order of existence.

Some fight against this, keeping those that seek to gain control in check.

This is the story of some of those people

It is about the mysterious Golden that saved The Monk General from Demons when he was a boy.

It is about Tanner, The Rift Torn.

It is about Mariella and Chacho, two young people who didn't choose their lives but shape their own destiny.