



*From  
Reign*

TO  
ICE

*Daniel Amador*

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# *From Reign to Ice*

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*Part 1*

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Sludge sprayed high as Russel slid down the hill. Ice-cold mud splattered his armor and stung his face. When he reached the bottom, he whirled around and steel clashed with steel as an enemy descended upon him. The foe thrust his blade forward, but Russel sidestepped, and his adversary slid forward, falling face-first into the muck. Russel leaped away to face another man. In a fury of slashes, he brought the soldier to the ground with a bleeding wound on his side.

Turning away from the injured soldier, Russel looked up at the bright gray sky and grimaced. His chest heaved as he breathed in deep. Everything was going horribly. Yes, Emperor Hadeon's whole armory castle was wet, every open crevice brimming with water—even if much of the surrounding desert, including where the rebels hid, was drenched as well. Daegal had done a good job of keeping it raining with his magical water ability—that time utilizing the rain—but he didn't have enough time to rest before Hadeon found their camp in the desert dunes.

Everything depended on Daegal having the strength to use his powers significantly one more time, but he was too exhausted from the rain. The rebel leaders intended to allow him a few days to rest, but the Emperor learned of their plan and immediately set out to mercilessly devastate it.

Russel leveled his gaze and he surveyed the dreary blend of blood, mud, and metal all around him. He then spotted his commander and ran to him.

“Russel! Why aren't you helping guard Daegal?!” demanded the Major, towering over him with squinted eyes.

“I'm sorry, sire, I lost him in the chaos! Where is he?”

The older warrior leaned toward his ear, whispering directions harshly. Russel took off, batting away and outrunning anyone daring to oppose him. Then he spotted Daegal being piggy-backed to safety by a large rebel soldier, as other rebels fought off the fierce onslaught valiantly. Running through the disarray, the young captain joined his men.

“Oh, there you are, Russel! Thank the Maker you’ve returned!” exclaimed one soldier as he deflected an enemy blow and counter-attacked. “The desert-lizards are waiting for us just over that large dune with the tree! They’re set to take off to a remote safe house, and from there the leaders will decide what to do next.”

Russel nodded gratefully to him, then turned to where the massive reptiles were hiding. It might take some time to climb up, but he had full confidence in the dune-familiar warrior who carried Daegal to make it to the top.

Russel's heart stopped when a well-aimed arrow sped through the air and pierced the large warrior in his side. Both the young rebel and his bearer toppled down the hill: one weak, the other fully unconscious.

The young captain leaped forward, kneeled, and checked the noble soldier’s pulse. He was still alive.

“Help me, soldier! I need to get to safety!” Daegal wailed, as he desperately tried to gather enough strength to escalate the sludgy dune.

“Will you shut up, you spoiled—” Russel caught himself before he said anything worse, but his words had already landed.

“I’m sorry, Daegal. But this man risked his life to save yours! Thank the Creator he’s still alive! I just needed to make sure.” Russel knew explaining himself wouldn’t do much good, but what could he do? If Daegal wasn’t vital to the mission’s success, the young captain would have deliberately avoided the nuisance-of-a-man every moment.

But they had to win. Emperor Hadeon’s monster forge had to be destroyed. If it wasn’t, the first legion of fully-developed orcs would walk the world—and march for the Emperor’s goal of world conquest. They would stop at nothing. No, Russel couldn’t risk global safety just because of his dislike for a selfship brat.

He called for a medic and passed the unconscious man to the care of another soldier. Then Russel jumped into action, half-dragging Daegal upwards with one arm and using the other to swipe at enemies with his sword. They were almost at the top when a massive boulder crashed onto the dune, launching the two young men backward through the air.

The wind was knocked out of Russel’s lungs as he hit the ground hard. Everything was blurry for a moment. But then reality returned, bringing with it a painful headache.

His whole body throbbed as he was lifted up by another soldier who had helped lighten his fall.

Russel looked around. Somehow the enemy had managed to bring a catapult into the muddy desert. Beneath the boulder atop the dune were several squashed desert-lizards. Only one small lizard remained, cowering behind the bit of brush.

Russel regained balance and rushed toward Daegal, who was curled in the muck, groaning. But before he reached the youth, a sharp blade ran smoothly through his stomach. It left his body as swiftly as it had pierced it, and he collapsed onto the ground. Russel's eyes widened as looked up into the face of Emperor Hadeon. His last action was sending a desperate plea to the Maker before all breath left his lungs.

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*Part 2*

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Daegal almost choked on his own shock. Propping himself up, he smushed the mud with his feet as he hopelessly pushed himself back.

Emperor Hadeon wiped his sword with a piece of cloth and stepped over Russel's lifeless body.

"You need to know," Hadeon began, strolling toward the retreating young man, swinging about his glorious blade. "That this day has been an incredible light to me among weeks of darkness. I'm on the verge of success—you know, with the orcs and all—terrified that something will go wrong. And mere days before something *does* go wrong, I'm informed of the cause of this impending misfortune!" The Emperor laughed merrily as he sheathed his sword and clasped his hands.

Daegal was horrified. He began whimpering. "Someone! Any-anyone! Help me! HELP! Pl-pl-please!

"Oh stop it, please. It hurts my head." The Emperor placed a boot on the boy's chest.

Leaning forward, he said, "You're an incredible young man, do you know this? Rain for four days, nearly non-stop! No, don't panic. Breathe, just breathe. In... out... yes, that's it!"

Hadeon stood back up again. He called for his men to bring him and Daegal a dune glider. The conqueror folded his arms as he grinned upon his nearing victory. Daegal was left on the ground to breathe and think.

*He was incredible, wasn't he? The plan to destroy the orc forge could have continued if it weren't for the rebels' faulty sources and lookouts. Russel could have tried harder. He even lost his men at one point. What a dolt! He could've—*

The young man glanced down at the body of Russel. The dead man still had his sword in hand.

Guilt rose in Daegal. Russel was a warrior. He literally fought to his dying breath. He fought long and hard to protect Daegal. Why? Russel needed hope for himself, his wife, and his daughter. And hope *wasn't* found in Hadeon or his orcs.

Daegal was the key to freedom for Russel's family.

Daegal wasn't anyone's god. The rebels worshiped the Maker. And to bring freedom to their home, they formed a plan to take down Hadeon.

He thought back to when he first joined. It wasn't so he could be everyone's center of attention—not really. The Creator gifted him with a supernatural ability, and He wanted Daegal to use it to help others, not himself.

Daegal got in the way of his own purpose.

In reality, most of the time he found himself admiring Russel; looking up to him. He wanted to be a selfless warrior. Just like Russel.

He then realized what he had to do, and what his loving Creator was calling him to do.

Slowly, he dragged his foot along the ground, tugging off his boot. Then he grabbed Russel's sword with his toes.

Daegal flinched. The steel was cold on his bare feet. He continued anyway, gently pulling the blade toward himself. He pulled until he could reach the burgundy leather handle with his hands.

Slipping his foot back into his boot, the young man leaped up and slashed at the Emperor.

Hadeon jumped back before he was physically hurt, but humiliation flashed in his wide eyes at almost being taken down by the ploy of a seventeen-year-old. Gritting his teeth and narrowing his eyes, he swiftly unsheathed his broadsword, holding the gem-studded handle firmly. Hadeon thrust it forward, lightly grazing Daegal's jaw. The weapon hovered an inch above his shoulder and a centimeter from his neck.

"You will drop the blade, or you feel my own brand gash your puny body," the Emperor commanded.

Voices raged in Daegal's head. *Don't fight him. Stick with your plan. The plan won't work against the- the literal Emperor! You're an idiot, Daegal! Shut up. The Maker has His hand in this. He'll help me... won't He?*

He began shaking.

*No, I'll follow through. I have to.*

Russel's sword plopped into the mushy wet sand with a *splat*. The young man hung his head, feigning submission.

Hadeon calmed himself down and sheathed his blade. "Good. Now, be glad that you have magic in you or I would have killed you already. Few people have such supernatural abilities, and I'll take whoever I can get. Come, climb aboard my dune glider," he said, gesturing to the lizard-pulled vehicle.

*Oh, I hope this works.*

Daegal nodded numbly as he wiped his sandy, sweaty hair out of his face. Hadeon folded his arms in approval.

The young man walked slowly toward the glider, taking a deep breath. *Maker, I'm sorry for my selfishness, but I need Your strength! Please!*

Then he whirled around and ran as fast as he could up the hill. The Emperor shouted after him in a fit of rage. Daegal pumped his muscles harder, nearing the top of the dune where the young lizard was hiding. He couldn't help but smile sadly when an archer permanently wounded the lizard and a triumphant laugh escaped Hadeon.

"There's no chance of you escaping, boy! Come down now, please, for your own benefit!" Daegal heard Hadeon shouting from behind him.

He gasped when he reached the top, then turned to face the Emperor below him.

"You're right! There's no hope for me. I hold myself accountable! The rebels did what they could. But at the very least, I can do them one last favor!" he yelled down.

Hadeon cocked his head. "And what would that be, Daegal?"

Daegal looked up at the sky, sent up a silent plea to the Maker, and took a deep intake of fresh, moist air.

He lifted his arms straight and forward, still looking up. Out of the corner of his eye, he saw Hadeon's jaw drop. "Don't do it, boy! DON'T DO IT!"

Daegal wriggled his fingers and controlled his breathing.

"Somebody, stop him!!" Hadeon began sprinting up the dune, his long legs making good progress. "YOU'LL KILL YOURSELF, BOY!! You're so weak that it'll end your own life!" the vexed Emperor shrieked.

*Maker, help me.*

Daegal sharply inhaled as he flexed his fingers. A stinging chill ran through his arms and seemed to burst and explode within his fingers. He let out a scream and a freezing wind rushed past him from the sky and advanced into the wet desert.

“DAEGAL-” Emperor Hadeon’s outstretched arm was mere inches from the supernatural boy, but the gale pulled him through the air and far back, where he hit the ground hard—cracking his cranium.

The hurricane overcame the Forge, completely engulfing it.

Quiet. There was a moment of dead silence—no swooshing of flags or clothes, no howling wind, no panicked cries. Every single breathing person was wide-eyed and in shock.

A horrendous groaning of wood and stone filled the air, and half the people covered their ears. Those watching the Armory saw ice expanding the crevices, pushing the holes. Directly resulting, a cacophony of cracks, snaps, and splinters rose high as the whole Forge exploded.

Pandemonium rose and screams and shrieks of the enemy numbed any nearby ear, but the cries of victory went louder. Every rebel still standing found a new vigor within, and they fought with all they had, conquering the Emperor’s soldiers.

As for Daegal, he cracked a small smile, then collapsed backward—totally unconscious.

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*Conclusion*

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A warm, wet rag on his forehead woke him to a painful reality—in more aspects than just physically.

“Oh, he’s awake! Good morning, Daegal,” said the doctor, adjusting her spectacles.

“I-” He was shocked at how difficult it was to get that one simple word out. He was too sore to even lift his head.

“No, don’t say anything. Just rest. Focus on deep breaths. You’ve been in the healer’s ward for a little over two days now, but your body was so exhausted it will still take a good amount of time to recover.” The doctor gently patted his arm, then turned to focus on some other activity he couldn’t see.

Daegal began trying to breathe deep from his stomach and letting out slow, smooth exhales, but the first line she said—the first three sentences—triggered a memory. It was...

*Oh! Emperor Hadeon said almost the same thing! Hadeon! No, what about Russel, and the rebels!?*

“Mmm... Hadeon.” was all he could muster out loud.

The doctor turned to him, fingering her spectacles with one hand. “Huh, what’s that? You said ‘Hadeon?’” A bittersweet smile crossed her kind, creased face. “It’s good news. I’ll bring Major Kennedy in here to explain it all to you. First, eat this food, then I’ll put you to sleep for a few more hours.”

She pulled over a chair and fed him some fruity mush from a bowl. When he finished it all, he tried to protest the sleeping medicine, but she insisted.

Daegal couldn’t imagine falling asleep with so much curiosity burning in his mind, but the medicine was powerful and it worked its magic quickly.

When Daegal woke up again, he felt much better. A bright, steady stream of sunlight broke through a crack in the curtains onto his chest, warming him. The soreness was almost gone, but that left more room for the questions screaming in his mind.

“Hello?” he asked, turning his head to the door. No one was there. He lay still, desperately praying to his Creator, until the doctor peeked in.

“Oh, you’re up! Very good! I hope you’re feeling better?”

He nodded. “A little.”

She rushed over and helped prop him up with some pillows.

“Thank you.”

“Of course, no problem! Would you like me to bring Major Kennedy in, now?”

“Yes, please!” Daegal exclaimed.

“Good, good,” the doctor smiled.

She left the room and a moment later, Major Kennedy strode in. He was a tall, stocky man with a rough, large beard and thick hair tied into three short braids. He had been Russel’s commander and a noble, strategic one at that.

Daegal winced when he entered, expecting a scolding for his disappointing behavior.

“Daegal! I must offer you my deep gratitude!”

“W-what?”

“Oh, let me explain. Thanks to your sacrifice, Hadeon was defeated and the Forge was demolished. We also found many important scrolls—plans and notes of his—that must have been from his private office there.”

Daegal shook his head. He was glad and all that things worked out, but he didn’t deserve the praise. He shouldn’t even be alive. Russel wasn’t. And the captain had sacrificed so much more. Not only his life, but years of dedication to his God, family, and the rebels.

“This is all amazing, thank the Maker! But I- all I did was care about myself. Russel should be alive instead of me!”

Major Kennedy sat back in his chair. His straight face twisted in pain. Daegal couldn’t know for sure, but it seemed like he was fighting to hold back tears. Finally, the

Major released a drawn-out exhale. His features softened, and he opened his eyes. The giant soldier stood and slowly paced the small room as he spoke.

“It’s a difficult thing for me, too, Russel’s death. He was a good soldier, an even better man. Rest assured I shall be praying for and visiting his family often—as well as the homes of the others. What you need to know, though,” he continued, kneeling before Daegal, looking deep into his eyes, “is that the Great One’s plans are hard to understand sometimes, but *always* for the best. And he has a plan for *you*. Russel’s story has ended. I have no doubt yours has just begun.”