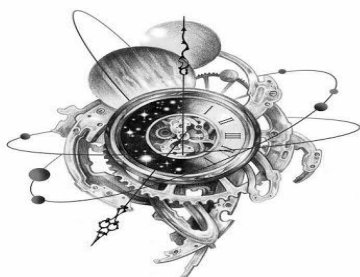


INFINITE ELIXIR



RAHUL.R

&

OVIYA.R

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Author's note-1

Hello reader,

Happy for your wise decision of choosing to read this book. Narrating a story was always a contentment for me. Brainstorming a story is my passion. Having said that, one fine morning I was discussing my idea with my sister. She is a passionate reader and writer and she enjoyed the narration and took this idea ahead by writing it as a story. In this moment I would like to extend my gratitude for her hard work and thanks to the Almighty, my family, friends and finally I extend my heartfelt thankfulness to you (my reader) Happy reading. You can reach me at rahulrengi12@gmail.com.

-Rahul. R

Author's note-2

Dear Reader,

You are special, for I am starting to write in the hope that this book will reach someone as special as you. Many thanks for picking up this book and hope you have a good time reading this story.

May the Almighty above us, continue showering His blessings on all of us. My hearty thanks to all who have been my constant source of support and energy in bringing this idea into words.

Take few moments of your time to let me know what you felt about the book, so that I can strive harder to make you feel all the more special in my upcoming works. Also try out my other novel- “QUARANTINE IS OVER”, which is available on all online platforms. You can reach me through oviyaresh@gmail.com.

- Oviya.R

DISCLAIMER

This is a work of fiction. Unless otherwise indicated, all the names, characters, businesses, places, events and incidents in this book are either the product of the author's imagination or used in a fictitious manner. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, or actual events is purely coincidental.

About the book

"When the clock strikes twelve, nature decides if it is day or night and, in the process, lives are lost forever."

When Khort and Jasper are assigned a secret mission across neighbouring nations involving a miraculous masterpiece, they gear up to complete the mission at the cost of their life. Little are they aware of the notorious claws of the multiple clans who have been waiting all their lives for this day.

This story is not about the survival of the fittest, it is the tale of the survival of the smartest.

The Prime lady (In Alinovia, a Queen is referred as the Prime lady of the country) Primrose ran her fragile hands over the archaic wooden box. She could vividly see the sparkle in the eyes of her younger self as an image, in front of her. It was a good Ninety-nine years back when she first saw the magic the wooden box and held it in her arms.

She gracefully opened the wooden box and saw the pride that came into her possession during the last days of her father, Overlord Glynn.

Having married the love of her life, the Late Overlord Harlow (King of Alinovia) She never understood till date why the story of this masterpiece remained a secret to the outside world till date. This masterpiece was also a symbol of love indeed. A love that held the duty towards the nation primary to their personal interests.

Her life had been nothing short of a fairy-tale with the best in everything one could ask for. She knew that her end was nearing and she had prepared herself for the world after death. EXCEPT..... EXCEPT.....She took a deep breath.

The one regret she had was the family treasure that lay beside her in the wooden box. In other words, the one thing her family treasured, was leaving her family forever and she had heard tales of the vicious hands waiting to lay hands on the treasure she held in her hands. She felt the pang of guilt deep in her heart. If only she could go back in time and decide on her heirloom,she immediately shook her head in disagreement with herself. That was something she and her husband had decided long back on a very different national interest. This was her family's personal possession in front of her awaiting her death.

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Moments later, the tiny snuffles that escaped her nose were the last tones the world heard from her. She was still as a stump in no time while her soul was already on the journey to the mystery, mankind failed to comprehend till date.

At the capital city of Eskimonia, Carlus sturdily walked into his office and grabbed the paper lying on his desk as he sank into his chair. After a brief two second glance at the paper, his face turned grim but it did not take long to notice the brief smile that escaped his twisty lips. The Premier Native (or PN- Equivalent to Prime Minister of the land) of Eskimonia had reached his desk before time due to the urgent news that was awaiting him. He looked smart in his favourite maroon Rayon suit and people who saw him for the first time would bet if he was in his early twenties or thirties, His physique and charm very well hid his real age (ok let me not leave it to your imagination he is fifty-five years old).

Carlus had no time to waste. He summoned his personal executive and called for Khort and Jasper, who ranked in the top five of the SPF (Special Police force). As he ran over the files on his table briefly, his

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mind was busy planning out the next twelve hours- the crucial time that was going to decide if his hard work turned out to be fruitful or futile.

“The country of Alinovia is grieving the loss of their beloved Queen- Lady Primrose, who breathed her last in her residence in the early hours of the day.....stay tuned with.....” Khort was sitting in the common hall of the PN office with a creme roll in one hand and mobile in another. The TV news failed to grab his attention because he was staring at the love of his life who was expecting to bring a whole new life to this world anytime now. All his mind was filled with the anxiety of whether he would be granted leave to go and hold her wife's hands tightly and reassure his love for her and his child during this wonderful moment in their life.

The TV screen that projected the nonchalant face of the news reader now turned blank and Khort looked behind him to find Jasper with the TV remote and coffee mug in his hands.

“We are summoned to the PN office immediately”,
The best thing about Jasper was that he was straight into business and when he was at first introduced to Khort, he was glad to finally work with someone with similar nature as him.

Khort instantly placed the coffee mug down and started to walk sturdily towards the door. He stopped and turned back to find Jasper sipping the last drops of coffee from his mug and cast him a quizzical look.

“Come on Partner, it is not always that you are summoned by the PN, this early and if it is happening, we know how long it is going to take before we get to sip the next coffee peacefully”.

“Twelve hours”, “The next Twelve hours is going to be crucial for you. This is a time bound mission- the mission for which the nation and an entire Dynasty and its generation is going to remain grateful to you.”

It was usual that one could not easily comprehend the words of the Premier Native. But this was more than the usual limits. But Khort and Jasper chose to remain patient and gave a brief nod.

“There is a treasure in Alinovia that awaits its return to Eskimonia and I want you both to ensure that it reaches my hands.....my hands safely. I cannot risk trusting this with someone else other than you both- the creamy layer of my support force. But the modus operandi is going to be different because there are many eyes waiting to grab the treasure in the wink of our eye. You both are going to remain as discreet as possible and follow multiple routes in common forms of transport to bring it safely into this land, into this office. I repeat, remaining discreet is as important as succeeding in this mission.”

Sensing the minor trace of fear and lack of confidence in their eyes, Carlus went on,

"You have the nation's highest ranked mission officer, Arlo, as your last resort. When things get beyond you, he will appear out of nowhere and guide you on your way forward."

In a tone relieved of responsibility Jasper asked, "Can we know his identity?"

"You will know him when he wishes to meet you or when you fail miserably in your duty that he needs to come to your rescue. Remember when he enters the mission, you can be ready for double reduction in your rank". Carlus's statement thundered across the room as clear as a bell. Khort and Jasper said no more and left the office after performing their royal salute.

Carlus sank into his chair. The hardships he faced to reach this chair came flooding in front of his eyes like the waves that crash the shore. All those years of struggle, treachery and guilt to take back what rightfully should have been with his Dynasty.

Mercetarian Dynasty, the name forgotten as pages flipped by in the sands of time, were once the masterminds behind the treasure that had the capability to swivel around with time. He had taken oath in front of his Guru Myrinn to bring the priceless possession back to his Dynasty. And he occupied the highest position in the state waiting for this day. He would not stop till he held the treasure in his hands, he affirmed himself.

In the next three hours, Khort and Jasper were outside the palace of Alinovia. They were escorted inside by the guards to the main hall that led to the treasury.

Khort stood still admiring the life size painting of the Queen in the hall. He recited a silent prayer for her soul in his mind. When he opened his eyes, his glance fell upon the brush on the floor dripping with paint. But before Khort could exclaim urging him to stop, Jasper ran his hands over the painting and got his hands tainted in pink from the colour of the Queen's shoes in the painting.

Sensing Khort gazing at him, Jasper managed, "I was trying to seek the blessings of her Highness. After all she is the focal point in this mission."

"And I can see that she has blessed you abundantly", Khort joked pointing to his paint smeared hands.

The royal commander handed over the treasured possession to the officers. Before Khort could get it, Jasper took the box in his hands only to instantly regret it. But he cleverly hid the portion of the box smeared with paint under his hands.

During the journey to Alinovia, Khort and Jasper had discussed on what might be the royal treasure that was so important to their Premier native, to the pride of their nation. And being natives of Eskimonia themselves, they already figured out what that treasure would be. And just discussing about that and realising the risk involved made them shiver. Now once the treasure was in their hands, they both badly wanted to see the treasure they had heard a lot about.

But Khort and Jasper knew the nature of the Royals very well. They would not prefer the ranked officials to open the treasured box meant to reach the Royal of

the neighbouring country. So, they kept the excitement to themselves.

Once they exited the palace, they chose an auto rickshaw to reach the border and then decided to pursue different modes of transport, once they were into their land.

About two miles from the border, the already overloaded rickshaw stopped and a young lady who might be in her late twenties got in and sat near Jasper.

Jasper felt a tickle in his stomach. What was happening to him was beyond words. He could not take his eyes off this young woman. He felt an attraction to her that was unexplainable.

Khort noticed this brief development in his colleague who was known only for his firm toughness and commitment to job nudged him to speak to her. But he hesitated.

Khort laughed under her breath and muttered with a smile,

" So, the smart interrogation lion is now lost for words.....nice"

But Jasper was too engrossed in the beauty of the lady and did not care about the comment passed by Khort.

Finally, he gathered the courage to speak and began to open his mouth but she won.

"I am Lyra. I need a small favour from you. I need to get down at the Sarokia Street, three miles into the border. But I am going there for the first time. Can you please let me know when we reach there."

"Hmm.... Yes, sure yeah.....", Jasper affirmed in all words possible. So, she was also coming in their direction, Jasper signalled Khort and Khort signalled at the wooden box warning him to concentrate on the mission.

The rickshaw journey continued with Lyra enjoying the weather and Jasper enjoying her presence.

About half an hour later, they were at the border. All got down from the rickshaw for security check.

A fair looking skinny lad in his navy-blue uniform was courteously and at the same time performing his duty diligently of checking all the inmates to the land of Eskimonia. He forcefully collected all the bags of the passengers in the rickshaw and placed it for scanning.

When it was the turn of Khort and Jasper, the lad, as a matter of routine, grabbed the wooden box and placed it in the scanner. Khort and Jasper complied not to grab the attention of the other people at the border.

Khort then went inside casually and a few moments later returned with the box. He removed the sweat from his forehead and exclaimed, “It was close.....before he could open the box, I retrieved it and told that we were on a mission and the young lad looked at us with a sparkle in his eyes and sent me with the box.”

“Are you sure that he would not leak this information to others?” Jasper was suspicious.

“He is already my fan, boss and with the dazzle in his eyes, I comprehend that he considers himself to be a part of this secret mission too. So, he is of no trouble to us”, replied Khort coolly.

Khort and Jasper got into the rickshaw and Jasper found her missing..... Lyra. They looked around to find her walking towards the fields in the rear side of the security gate.

Jasper sighed and said, “So, it is the shortest one side love story ever.”

Khort patted his shoulder enthusiastically and said, “Your love story has just begun.” And waved her passport to him.

“She dropped it during security check”

Jasper took the passport and placed it in his pocket.

“So, this is my next mission”

Both laughed and got into the rickshaw.

After they were well into the country, they cut the auto rickshaw and the duo rented a cycle for a few miles till they reached the interior of the land.

The next few minutes passed by quietly as the pair made their way along the fields into the land, until the wooden box slipped from Jasper’s hands while the cycle climbed upward in slope. Khort immediately stopped riding and picked up the box.

Just then, Khort noticed something.....

Tazlen worshipped her painting with his folded hands gripped tight. At her feet, lay the wooden box of pride. Lady Venus smiled calmly from the painting.

Even though the world failed to recognise their talent, their clan believed fiercely that, in the blood and sweat of the artisans of the Poorvinarian Dynasty stood the country of Eskimonia in all splendour. His grandmother, Lady Venus had put her heart and soul into creating the masterpiece. It was her discretion to hand over the treasure to her lover- Glynn, Father of Primrose. After all, it was her invention. But the nation thought otherwise.

Had Lady Venus thought otherwise, the country would have been in shambles. But the nation swindled all her efforts and labelled her a traitor after all its needs were done. The Mercetarian dynasty took the credit of all her discoveries that reshaped and took the nation to another level. Tazlen strongly felt that Lady Venus

must have placed her love above the nation and must have married Glynn. Then she would have died a queen instead of crying herself to death in the prison.

Whatever the nation spoke failed to convince Tazlen for he felt that dissolving a dynasty and destroying it by injecting fear in the minds of the people was beyond the powers of the nation. The Dynasty and its pride ran in the blood for the generations to come. Tazlen was one among the very few of those who still stood loyal to their dynasty.

In Spite of all the pangs of the past in his heart, his face reflected the pride he felt for his proactive thinking to replicate the box. Lady Venus had drawn the box and the masterpiece during the days when she was waiting for death to take over. It reached Tazlen's hands years after her death. But Tazlen understood what the drawing meant and he knew his duty to the dynasty. He had waited for this day very patiently to execute his

plan. He had acted calmly and used his presence of mind to replace the box in a millisecond before Khort came running to retrieve the box. It must take hours before they find out that they have failed their duty. And the young lad at the border security force would have long escaped their minds by then.

When Tazlen was about to open the wooden box, he heard the bell ring. It must be his daughter from school, he thought. He felt happiness gushing all over his body along his veins, just thinking of the sparkle he would see in her eyes when she heard about his father's valour. He also reminded himself the need to control his excitement and reveal the news to her only when the buzz of the missing miracle settled down.

Tazlen was shocked to find a masked shadowy figure at the door. Before he could utter a word, he felt himself being dragged backwards to the wall and he tried to release himself from the stranger's clasp. In the fight that ensued, Tazlen was no match for the valour of the masked person in front of him who fought like a freaking beast. He soon sank into oblivion.

When Khort and Jasper broke open the back door to Tazlen's cottage, they were shocked to find Tazlen lying unconscious in the corner. They felt his pulse very low and called up the ambulance and made arrangements to shift him to the hospital. At that moment, Carlus would have acted otherwise and looked for the wooden box. But Khort and Jasper had traces of humanity still left in them.

Once Tazlen was shifted to the hospital, both returned to the cottage and shifted their attention to the wooden box. They searched each and every inch of the small cottage but found no traces of the missing box. They did not wholeheartedly hope for the box to be found. But during their search, things began to make sense. Tazlen belonged to the Poorvanarian Dynasty and tricked them with the box. But after that someone else had been to the house and had taken away the box.

Meanwhile, when Tazlen regained consciousness in the hospital, he fainted again in the weakness of the disappointment his failure offered.

Later that afternoon, Tazlen's daughter returned home to take some clothes for his father. Her mind was burdened with the words of the doctor. As per his words, her father had very poor chances of survival. She stared angrily at the painting of Lady Venus. She had a thought deeply rooted in her heart. The lady in the painting about whom she knew nothing about seemed to have a magical influence on her father. She always kept her father away from her. Her father always seemed to be staring into her picture, forgetting his world. Today for something related to this painting, her father got beaten up and is now struggling in the hospital. Based on what the neighbours told her, two men had broken into the house in the afternoon. They had also taken her father to the hospital. She had seen their faces in the hospital CCTV camera- faces her mind refused to trash out in haste.

In rising anger, she threw the vase near her at the painting. The painting landed straight to the floor but the face of Lady Venus remained as calm as before. The portion of the wall where the painting stood had a locker and Tazlen's daughter took out a large steel box from that. There were many items in the box including pictures of the lady in the painting. But the young girl took out a gun from the box with trembling hands. She shook her head firmly and held the trigger tightly and pointed it at the painting. She knew what she had to do.

Jasper and Khort sat at the pavement clueless on their next move.

“How did you know that the box was exchanged?” Jasper asked.

Khort pointed to Jasper’s hands. The paint had now dried and left a pale pink patch in his hands.

Jasper shook his head because he understood that he referred to the traces of paint that smeared the box when he got it in the morning. The paint must have been missing in the box Tazlen exchanged.

Khort’s mobile rang for the fifth time in the past ten minutes. It was Carlus. They had messaged him the status of the mission fearing to call him. They received a voice note from Carlus. It was a one liner that made Khort and Jasper rise back to their feet and resume their mission.

“Come to me once you are done or I will ensure that you are done with life”

Carlus banged the mobile hard against the table. He had been over confident about Khort and Jasper. Carlus shook his head in despair. He rang up his last resort- Arlo. The call was brief but the message was as clear as a crystal. Carlus hung up the call and smirked. He was determined not to stop until he placed the watch under the feet of their late leader Myrinn's statue. It was a matter of what he had lived on for all these years.

“Someone must have trailed us right from the beginning. Only then they would have known about the box being exchanged by Tazlen in the security counter. And that person must have followed Tazlen directly to his house thus reaching there before we realized about the change in the box and reached there.”, Jasper spoke more to himself rather than to Khort.

“But we were extremely careful all the way.....we did not interact with anyone.....”

Both Khort and Jasper fell silent and stared at each other.

“LYRA”, they exclaimed together.

Mateo stood in front of the mirror. But the mirror went beyond its nature and failed to reflect his handsome structure. All he could see in the mirror was the reflection of his Godfather Haela. Mateo spent his entire childhood listening to the valour of Haela. Haela belonged to the Pongo troop- the army of the Royals. But their work was beyond safeguarding the nation. They were sent on secret missions to acquire powers for the nation, to procure raw material for the scientific and medical development of the nation.

Mateo's favourite part in the life story of Haela was when Haela held the magic particle in his hands. Little Mateo used to feel the enchantment in his hands every single time. His eyes used to light up in fury when the story moved on to the part when Myrinn's men took over the magic particle as the nation's property and killed him in an unfair fight. The island where the magic particle was found was destroyed in a tsunami

that occurred immediately the day after Haela took a sample of the magic particle for testing. But the magic particle then stood fundamental to the creation of the masterpiece- the masterpiece, for which every Tom, Dick and Harry claimed ownership of. Mateo shook his head as if to clear his thoughts from the past and got ready for his mission. He rolled down his sleeves up to his palms.

Lyra entered her isolated bungalow and sank into the sofa.

After sometime, she took out the wooden box from her bag and stared at it. She thought of Tazlen. Poor fellow who stood for Venus after all these years. She knew very well that she could not explain and make him understand her motive. His eyes were blocked by the pride of the dynasty beyond purpose. So, she had the only option of fighting him out and snatching the masterpiece. She was surprised at the way she easily knocked him out. She felt bad for Tazlen. But, she thought that Jasper and Khort would reach there and to save Tazlen comforted her.

She had clearly understood the signals from Jasper the moment he set eyes on her. But she had to ignore him. If only he knew who she was.....

Lyra shook her head bringing herself to her senses. She opened the wooden box and took out the INFINITE

ELIXIR in her gentle hands. The masterpiece glistened brightly radiating across the room.

She had been living futilely all these years in the hope of the success this moment might possibly offer her. She held the masterpiece tightly in her hands and closed her eyes waiting for the miracle to happen.

But fate and nature had different plans for her destiny. The reaction turned opposite to what she expected.

Her hands started trembling badly that she placed the masterpiece back into the box. Wrinkles started to wade through out her face, her hair started to turn grey and her eye sight started to diminish. She could no longer sit upright, she started to crouch.

She was aging.....No her body was now reacting and reflecting her original age- A hundred and twenty-five years. Her phase was immortality was coming to an end.

She faintly heard a knock at the door. She got up slowly and opened the door with her frail hands.

Khort and Jasper expected Lyra at the door and were ready for a fierce encounter but seeing an old lady in her place changed their expression.

“Can we speak with Lyra?”

“Please come in”, Lyra led them to the hall.

After a brief awkward silence, Lyra spoke up straight to the point, “I am Lyra”

Jasper and Khort froze.

“How..... How can it be.....You? Lyra?”, Jasper was lost for words.

“Why did you steal the wooden box? Hand it over to us”, Khort knew that Jasper’s mind was unsteady but the mission was beyond their personal whims and fancies.

“This is of no use to me now. I have failed. You can have it”, Lyra handed over the box to Jasper with shaky hands but he refused to move. Khort bent forward and got the box and opened it.

The INFINITY WATCH- THE ELIXIR that was their property to safeguard shone in front of their eyes. Their predictions and guesses turned out to be true. Both Khort and Jasper had heard legendary tales about the watch.

History of the land holds that the watch was originally founded in their home land, Eskimonia. Lady Venus created the masterpiece with years of her turmoil. She had only two things to cling on to in life. Her two eyes were this infinite watch and Glynn, the then young prince of Alinovia. Their love story stands as the pioneer for all the successfully married couples. But theirs was not a story of...." They lived happily thereafter". Both had a duty towards the nation. So,

when priorities parted ways, they also chose to do so and split. Venus gifted the infinite watch to Glynn as a symbol of their everlasting love. She had a condition though. The watch must return back to her country once any of his future generations did not have an heirloom. She had made it very clear that the watch should not move out of Glynn's family to anyone else in Alinovia.

This decision did not go down well with the other dynasties. Myrinn from the Mercetarian dynasty decreed that only their dynasty had the ownership of any invention that was made in the land and they were the backbone of the nation's development and Lady Venus was just a scientist working under them. She had no absolute right to give the watch to a stranger from another land.

On the other hand, Members of the Poorvanarian Dynasty claimed ownership of the watch citing that the

magic particle that made the watch special was found by their member Haela. They also opposed the unfair death of their troop member- Haela.

So, what made the watch special?

The watch was made with the infinite particle that powered the watch. The watch would never stop running because the particle had the power to multiply infinitely and keep the watch functional. The watch was covered with a rare material that was already extinct and it was impossible to destroy the watch. The watch also portrayed world class architecture and design. There were also rumours across the nation that this watch also made time travel possible. No wonder all dynasties claim the watch as theirs.

“So, what do you have to do with the watch?”, Khort questioned.

“Before that do you have the courtesy to let us know what this impersonation drama is all about?”, Jasper finally regained his voice from the shock of the episode.

“I am not impersonating..... I am Lyra, I am hundred and twenty-five years old.”

“Do you care to explain?”

“If you will let me.”

Thus, Lyra began narrating.....

“The discovery of this watch turned out to be one of the greatest inventions mankind has ever made till date. The infinite particle the watch is made up of is nothing less of a God particle. It has the power to multiply in huge value in a short span of time and it is

infinite. This can take the lives of humans to another level and make us rule the entire universe.

During the days, Venus invented the watch, I was with her assisting her in the process. She explained me the miraculous power of this infinite particle. So, she decided to reduce the power of the particle. We split the particle into two by splitting its positive and negative characteristics. We used the negative powered particle to make the watch and preserved the positive particle in the lab to use it for destroying the watch if things became wary.

But suddenly one fine day, Myrinn and his men came gate crashing into the lab and Venus suggested that I drink the positive particle to prevent it from reaching their hands and I did so.

Days later we realised that the positively charged particle had the power to cure all diseases and it can keep a person immortal.... I enjoyed the initial days of

immortality. But then I realized that it was a curse that came with a cause. Soon after Lady Venus was put in prison life turned out to be miserable for me. My life lacked a purpose.

One day I went to meet Lady Venus in the prison. She was in her death bed; Lady Venus spoke with me with tears in her eyes. She regretted having invented the watch and said that this watch would cost many lives in the years to come. She expressed her desire to destroy the watch because it had the potential to destroy the whole world if it went to wrong hands. She strongly believed that the watch would be destroyed if the positive and negative particle came together. So, she made me promise that I would cling on to life and wait for the day when the watch would reach our country. She said that all I need to do was to touch the watch with my hands and the watch would break into pieces and I would start ageing. She was partially

correct. I am aging but the watch is the same..... I have failed my Lady.....” Lyra’s weak eyes were red with tears by the time she ended the story.

Jasper and Khort did not know how to react. They had heard a lot of legendary tales about the watch but this was something supreme and beyond mankind.

Jasper felt bad for Lyra. He held her frail hands and spoke strongly despite the pain he felt in his heart.

“Maybe Venus had over estimated the power of the watch. Maybe the negative particle was less dangerous. That is why it did not react in the watch. The watch did not cause any damage all these years in Alinovia. So, it must be safe. This watch is nothing but the pride of the dynasties that claim to have created the watch. You have already lost enough because of this watch. It is time for you to let go”

“You are right..... I have to let go. I am sorry!!!!”

Thus saying, she removed her hands from the tight grasp of Jasper and fell silent. She was no more.

Khort and Jasper took a bus enroute the PN office. They felt that it was the safest given the circumstances to mingle with the crowd. The watch was safe in the wooden box in their bag pack.

Both were silent. But deep inside, Lyra's words were reverberating in their veins.

Khort thought 'Maybe Venus was right!!! The watch has been into the country for only a few hours now. Already Tazlen was in life support and Lyra was no more. The watch seemed to be dangerous!! What does it matter to them anyway. Their job is going to end once they hand over the watch to Carlus.'

Jasper wrapped the bag tightly around his arms. 'When he started his mission, he thought he needed to encounter a few thugs and take the watch to Carlus. But this was getting dangerous every minute. There are men and women out there waiting all their lives for this day. Some are ready to die for the honour of this

watch and others are awaiting death at the touch of this watch. All these thoughts disturbed him. He also started to recollect the words of Carlus. Carlus was no doubt, one of the honest straight forward men, Jasper had ever seen. But Carlus seemed to be more personally interested in this mission. These chain of thoughts along with articles from the web led him to draw the conclusion that Carlus along belonged to one of the clans that assumed ownership of the watch. But how does it matter to him anyway, he was duty bound to report to Carlus and he was going to ensure that the watch reached him. Then he was out of the mission and it was up to Carlus what he did with the watch or anybody else for that matter. He was already so sick of the mission.'

The sudden sound and halt disturbed the train of thoughts of Khort and Jasper. The bus had stopped due

to breakdown and all the passengers were asked to get down and pursue alternate modes of transport.

Khort and Jasper were left with no option and got down. They sat in the sidewalk. The other passengers started to book cabs or asking the passers by for lift.

A car stopped by near the side walk and Khort and Jasper ignored it thinking it must be for someone else. The windows lowered and a smart young man leaned out from the window.

“I guess you guys need a lift to the PN office?”

Khort and Jasper was clearly shocked but they hid it cleverly for they did not have the strength to retrieve the watch from another encounter.

“We are actually on our way to the eastern side of the state”, Jasper said pointing in the opposite direction.

“You carry on”, Khort sided with him.

The man in the car gave a wry smile and got down. He was in his late thirties and his brown full sleeved suit enhanced his features.

He spoke calmly, I am here looking for you both..... I am..... Hey!!!! Look!!!!”, The young man stopped midway of what he was telling and pointed to the tree in the nearby fields.

Khort and Jasper turned there with horror in their eyes. There she was again, with a gun ready to shoot. And Khort and Jasper stood there paralysed by guilt. It was Tazlen’s daughter aiming at them.

“Your aim is more precise in anger”, their trainer used to say. It must be right. Jasper was the first to recover and he nudged Khort signalling that they hide behind the half-built wall near them. Both turned hastily to leave but a hand held both their wrists tightly and they turned back again to find the stranger who came in the car shielding them with a big broken bill board. All

these happened in a few milliseconds and no sooner than they were safe behind the shield of the stranger, the little girl fired. The six bullets went off continuously and then the firing ceased. They men behind the shield guessed that she must been firing with her eyes closed in pure anger and agony.

The trio then heard tiny sniffles from the young girl and this assured them that the firing had definitely stopped. They came out from the shielding.

Some masked men then went running to the young girl and took her away much against her wishes. Khort and Jasper could not make out anything on what was happening around them but Jasper subconsciously checked if the bag was okay and the stranger was quick to notice it.

“The girl will be safe; Don’t worry they are my men.”

Khort and Jasper looked towards their saviour with thankful eyes.

The young man stood steady without any sign of the valour he had just exhibited.

“You must be Arlo”, Khort shook hands with the stranger and he reciprocated it.

Jasper gave him a quizzed look.

“Come on Jasper, don’t you remember? Carlus mentioned about an officer named Arlo who will come to our rescue this is him.”

In the next few minutes, the gratitude turned into a sneer as they remembered the double reduction in their rank.

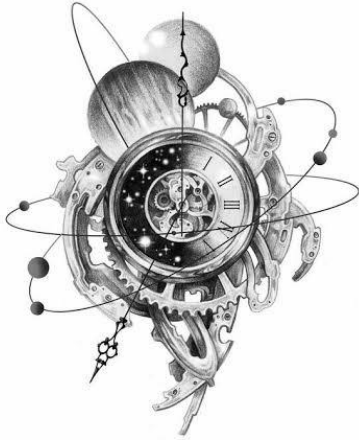
The trio later continued their journey to the PN office in the car.

Khort and Jasper felt extremely hungry. The coffee and the crème roll, they had in the morning before they had information of this mission was the last liquid or food that they had. So, they stopped for dinner at a motel.

The dinner was awkwardly silent. It was very hot than usual and this added up to the fire that was raging inside all the three to complete the mission successfully.

“Why don’t you roll up your sleeves a bit? You seem to be suffocating.”, Jasper said to his saviour trying to instigate a conversation. He reluctantly did so.

"What an amazing tattoo. Does it signify your love?" Khort asked pointing to his wrist which had the following symbol,



"Yeah, this is the symbol for the love of my life"

"We are going to call you 'Tatoodo' after this beautiful tattoo", Jasper mocked.

"Name does not matter. The fame I carry to my grave is all that matters", he replied and started to chew the food in silence.

The journey resumed. It was a one more hour journey to the PN office. The mobile rang. Jasper pressed the mobile to his ears and continued driving but the voice at the other side forced him to apply sudden breaks. He stopped the car in the middle of the road and got out in a rush to speak. Khort and Tatoodo stared at each other in dismay.

Jasper disconnected the call and stood still. It took ten minutes for Khort to break him and make him speak his heart out. He finally bursted out crying.

“My parents are my world and what a son am I to stand here in this deserted road when my father is breathing his last breaths and my mother is clueless as to where she is. She has amnesia.” Jasper went on rambling for minutes together and Khort and Tatoodo finally understood the medical emergency in his family and convinced him to leave.

“The child has been called for”- the message vibrated in the third man’s mobile. He swiped it away from the notification screen and looked at Khort, who stood still, breathing in the air of success.

“We have neared the PN office. We are almost done. I am excited beyond words”. Khort became emotional. This made the job easier for Tatoodo.

“Do you think you are right in feeling complete for succeeding in this mission? No!! Your real purpose of life is due to arrive in this world.... you have done your part in this honourable task. Now it is time to see the different realm of life..... go to your wife. She must be expecting you. This watch has reached the right place. I will take care.” Khort did not need a lot of convincing and he started on his way to the hospital with a gleam in his eyes.

Mateo, the temporary Tatoodo closed the box carefully and placed it in his bag and began walking. Behind him, the car and stolen identity card of Alro went up into flames.

Mateo thought for a second about Arlo who would now be unconscious in the dungeon.

Claire's idea of him impersonating Arlo was not that bad. It had ended up bringing the love of his lifetime- the Infinite watch back to him, back to his Dynasty.

He had met Claire yesterday morning in a café. She, a PhD student working on a thesis about the Dynasties of the country had got in touch with him to interview regarding the Infinite Elixir and the history of his Dynasty. What was supposed to happen as an interview turned out to be more of an interrogation by Mateo and through his charismatic nature, he collected all the information he needed on the watch from her study.

Then both got along well and spent the day in each other's company.

Today morning, when Claire called him for a meetup, she had excitedly given him the idea of impersonating Arlo to lay his hands over the watch. She had also spoken out heartedly on the love life she had dreamt for both of them for the rest of their life. But Mateo only heard the plan of impersonating Arlo and finetuned it in his mind. Then his mind traversed to the rules of his Dynasty. After swearing into the secrecy of their Dynasty, He was not supposed to reveal the secret to anyone else. But what had he done?

The last thing he remembered from the last night was the alcoholic welcome drink he had during dinner. It must have inebriated him heavily because he was not used to drinking. He must have told everything about his Dynasty and the watch to Claire in the state that was beyond his control. He had only one option to set

Infinite Elixir

things right. Poor Claire now lay next to Arlo motionless in her state of oblivion.

Mateo stopped in his tracks and looked at the infinite elixir as he felt both pride and heaviness in his heart. He then continued his stride when he remembered Haela's smile and his last words- "All is fair not only in war and love but also in pride and some of us choose to place pride before anything else"

..... THANK YOU FOR YOUR TIME.....