

# Prologue

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## THE KNIGHTS OF KING DAGONAUT

THIS IS A tale of long ago, when knights still roamed the land. It takes place in two kingdoms: the land of King Dagonaut, to the east of the Great Mountains, and the land of King Unauwen, to the west of the Great Mountains. The capital cities of these two realms also bear the name of their kings: the City of Dagonaut and the City of Unauwen. A third land also plays an important part in this tale, but now is not the time for stories of that place.

This account begins in the Kingdom of Dagonaut. But first you will need to know more about King Dagonaut and his knights and, with this in mind, I have transcribed a number of pages on the subject from an old, old book:

*Our King Dagonaut is a mighty king; his reign is praised as wise and just, and his realm is large and beautiful, with hills and meadows, fertile fields, wide rivers, and vast forests. There are mountains in the north and even higher mountains in the west. Beyond those mountains lies the land of King Unauwen,*

*a realm of which our minstrels sing such beautiful songs. To the east and the south, the land is flatter, and enemies from those parts sometimes attempt to invade our country, jealous of the prosperity we enjoy. But no one has ever succeeded in conquering the realm, as the king's knights guard it well and defend it with courage. Within our borders, life is good, and all is safe and peaceful.*

*King Dagonaut is served by many knights, brave and bold men who help him to govern the kingdom and to maintain order. Many of these knights are famed throughout the land. Who among us has not heard of Sir Fantumar, and Tiuri the Valiant, and Ristridin of the South, to name but a few? The king has granted many of his knights land in fief, which they govern in his name. They are duty bound to come when he calls, and to aid him with their might and with their men.*

*Some knights, however, own no land; most of these men are still young but will succeed their fathers when they are older. And there are also knights-errant, men who have no desire for property and who travel around the land and offer their services wherever they go, patrolling the borders and even journeying beyond our kingdom to bring back news of distant lands.*

*The realm of King Dagonaut has many knights, and yet joining their ranks is no easy task. Any man who wishes to be knighted must prove himself worthy. He must undergo an arduous apprenticeship, first serving as a squire to an experienced knight and then joining the king's guards for another year. Not only must a knight be able to use weapons and prove himself knowledgeable in many fields, but above all he must prove that he is chivalrous and honest, brave and true. He must be knightly in every respect.*

*Once every four years, at midsummer, King Dagonaut summons all of the knights to his city, where they remain for seven days. They inform him about the state of affairs in the various parts of the realm and give an account of their own activities and accomplishments.*

*And in that week, on midsummer's day, the young men who have been found worthy are ceremoniously knighted by the king. It is a great day! After the ceremony, there is a service in the cathedral, followed by a feast at the palace. Then comes a magnificent procession through the city, in which all of the knights ride, in full armor, with their shields and banners, and the newest young knights leading the way. Citizens of Dagonaut come from far and wide to see the spectacle. The celebration takes place not just in the palace, but all over the city. A fair is held in the marketplace, with musicians playing and people singing and dancing in every street, in daylight at first and later by the glow of hundreds of torches. The next day, the king calls his men together and the new knights are permitted to join their gathering for the first time. And the day after that, they take part in a great tournament, which many people view as the most thrilling part of the week. Nowhere else in the realm can such splendor and chivalry, such courage and agility, all be seen in one place.*

*But before those glorious days, the young knights have to pass one final test. They must fast for twenty-four hours before the knighting ceremony. They are not allowed to eat a morsel or drink a drop. And they have to spend the night in contemplation at a small chapel beyond the city walls. The young men lay their swords before the altar and, dressed in their white robes, they kneel down to reflect upon the great task that lies ahead.*

*They undertake to serve their king loyally as knights of Dagonaut, and to protect his kingdom, their own homeland. They swear to themselves that they will always be honest and chivalrous, and fight for what is good. The knights remain awake and reflect all night, praying for strength for their task. They are not permitted to sleep or to speak, or to pay any heed to those outside the chapel, until a delegation of the king's knights comes at seven o'clock in the morning to take them before the king.*

This story begins on such a night, in the small chapel on the hill outside the City of Dagonaut, where five young men were spending the night in reflection on the eve of their knighting ceremony. Their names were Wilmo, Foldo, Jussipo, Arman, and Tiuri. Tiuri was the youngest of them; he was just sixteen years old.