

CRYSTALIS
ALPHA
PART 3



Crystalis Alpha (A Part of *The Crystalis Saga*)

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The Revelation

Several Gonagan fishermen guarding their boats waited for the invading Jaradians. When a rumble shook the docks, those same fishers assumed it was time to defend their property and, most importantly, their land. Instead of battling, the fishermen watched this small plane shoot from a hole that formed in the seawall near Gonaga's main port. Unbeknownst to the anglers, in the plane rode Princess Serena of Gonaga and Jaradians Jas & Jake who were heading toward Jarad in search for Gonaga's youngest princess/Serena's sister; and maybe the Queen of Gonaga herself. Impatience moved through Jake after flying for almost an hour.

"Can't this thing go any faster, Jas?" abruptly Jake asked.

Jas had a quick response for his friend, "Hey, you could always come up here and take my place. Or did you forget that you never learned how to fly?"

A visibly fatigued Princess Serena ordered her two companions to stop their bickering so she could take a nap. Jake moved from his seat at their plane's back-end to the front row directly behind Jas so their conversation wouldn't disturb the other third of their possible empress-crushing trio.

The first thing Jake said from his new position was, "Whaddya think's gonna happen if we can't get Athena back?"

When Jas didn't respond, Jake asked his question again.

Jas quietly barked, "I heard you the first time!" before calming his tone. "I don't know what we'll do. I don't even know if we can save that little girl with Oni backed by a whole army."

Jas' train of thought slowly drifted off track when he noticed the sky becoming dense with fog. Jake observed the princess shifting in her seat as if something was bothering her. As Jake approached her, he could hear Serena talking to herself. The princess' mumbled words weren't understandable. Suddenly, Princess Serena released a deafening scream. Jas yelled for his comrade to calm the wailing

princess, but Jake couldn't hear a word. Lazily opening her eyes and closing her mouth after nearly a minute, Princess Serena found Jake kneeling in front of her; clutching his ears.

A surprised Serena asked her wallowing ally, "What's wrong, Jake?"

All Jake could say was, "Huh?" until his hearing mostly returned.

Staring at Jake regaining his composure, Princess Serena needed to know what caused him to fall in front of her.

Jas said from the cockpit, "You were screaming so loud we almost went deaf! Even the plane starting shaking! What in the world was that?"

Gonaga's princess hastily apologized for her unintentional action before changing the subject by asking Jake, "What's Jarad like?"

With his balance still unstable, Jake took a seat to the princess' right. Silence swept through the plane with Jake staring forward. Princess Serena's mouth slowly opened to ask her question again.

Before she could form a word, Jake looked at Princess Serena to say, "Jarad's nothin' more than a big boot camp surrounded by miles and miles of desolation. Imagine if a volcano exploded, leveled everything, and left nothin' but ash for someone to build a fortress on. Only hatred and depression grows from its soil. And any person who attempts to stay on its poisoned ground for an extended period of time takes that poison with them. They can attempt to hide it. They can try and pretend they're just like everyone else. But deep down they know they shouldn't exist. They shouldn't exist for the simple fact no one should force them to sacrifice their lives for an evil cause. That's Jarad."

Jake's attention shifting toward a window beside him made the princess whisper to herself, "I see."

While he prepared to lower their transportation, Jas told his fellow passengers, "Hang on. I'm hoping for a soft landing, but you never know."

The passengers heeded their pilot's words by buckling up and grabbing the sides of their seats. Glancing at Princess Serena, Jake noticed something golden dangling from her right hand. Focused

inspection revealed the object to be a locket. Swinging back and forth, the jewelry hypnotized its admirer.

Jake contemplated after shaking himself from a mesmerized state, *Man, I know she never believed somethin' like this could happen to her. Her mother. Her sister. Her father. Everyone taken from her without a second thought. And why would Oni care? It's just a maniacal quest for power. Maybe we shouldn't have come. King Goga didn't believe us anyway. Even with the warnin', Goga still got caught off guard. But if I didn't come, Serena could be in the same position Athena's in... or worse.*

Jake's eyes shifted left, staring at the princess' quivering legs as he continued pondering, *Serena, I know you can't hear this, but know that I'm gonna save your family. I'll make sure your life is just like it was before I came. I swear on my life that I'll protect you.*

Even in the turbulence, Princess Serena noticed little things going on like Jake slowly lowering his head against his knees.

“What’s wrong?” the Princess of Gonaga asked without looking at the person she was questioning.

Never breaking his sight from the floor, Jake somberly answered, “You.”

Hearing the princess take a deep breath made Jake explain himself, “I really wish you didn’t come with us because I don’t know what’s gonna happen. And I’d.... Serena, since the first time I met you, I knew you were different. And I don’t mean because you’re a princess or nothin’. I mean, you represent a lot of people. They look up to you. And they can’t sustain themselves without you if somethin’ happens. They feel for you like I... I don’t think Gonaga could survive without you if something terrible happens.”

Gonaga’s eldest princess verbally disagreed with Jake’s statement, “The people of Gonaga are strong-willed. Even without me, they’d survive. But you shouldn’t be mad or upset for allowing me to come with you and Jas.”

Princess Serena gracefully moved from her seat before squatting beside Jake. As Jake peered to

his left, he found Serena crouching, yet steadfast in their rocking, descending plane.

“I would’ve come if you liked it or not,” a smirking Serena informed her distressed companion. “It’s just the way I am. I’m only a princess in title. I can’t think of myself as a queen. I never have. I’m more comfortable being like a regular person than royalty. Athena, she’s what Gonaga needs. She might be young, but she’s the real future Queen of Gonaga. I know it. That’s why I came with you. I can’t sit back and let Gonaga’s future be hurt by some evil witch.”

A soothing warmth came over Jake when he felt Serena grab his left hand with her right.

The princess heard from Jake after he grasped her hand back, “Serena, you have somethin’ in you. I saw it in Gonaga. I’ve never.... it--”

When Jake went to look at the Princess of Gonaga’s face, Jas yelled from the cockpit, “Hey, Princess! You better sit down before we hit in about ten seconds!”

Gonaga’s flying royalty heeded Jas’ warning, retiring to her seat as Jake’s eyes returned to the floor. Thankfully for everyone the landing was relatively smooth.

After exiting their plane and staring at the gray haze in front of them, Princess Serena asked, “How far are we from Oni’s castle?”

Quickly correcting the princess was Jas, “It’s not a castle. It’s a giant torture chamber with an ‘optional’ brainwashing center. And to answer your question, we’re not too far. The plane’s radar showed one blip on Jarad about five or six miles east of here. Oni’s ‘palace’ is the only thing that’d give off a signal. So, east we shall go! Everyone ready?”

Barely a mile into their trek, a quiet groan exhaled from someone. The continued moaning sounded closer following each step they took forward.

Jake urged Jas to stop his ongoing joke, but Jas denied any involvement, “It’s not me. It doesn’t even sound like me.”

Before Jake could interrogate Jas any further, Princess Serena yelped, “Let me go!”

Turning around, Jas and Jake found the other third of their group kicking away something

attached to her right leg.

The Jaradians simultaneously said, “Ken?” while staring at a visibly wounded body before Princess Serena.

Kneeling at this hurt individual’s head while Jake calmed Serena, Jas asked, “Ken? Hey, Ken? Ken, is that really you? What are you doing out here?”

Princess Serena bumped Jas out of the way to confront her “attacker”, but Jake pulled his fellow confused traveler away from this near-lifeless person before the princess could speak.

“Serena, let Jas handle this,” Jake said. “I know Ken didn’t mean it.”

Following a stomp and a huff, Princess Serena turned her back to everyone. The man – this “Ken” – opened his eyes to find the voices he heard were truly those of Jake and Jas.

The first words from Ken’s mouth reassured his questioner and protector alike that he knew who two of the three voices belonged to, “Jake. Jas. My friends... why did you come back?”

Instead of answering Ken’s query, Jas had a question of his own, “Who did this to you?”

Jake helped Ken sit up as his injured comrade explained through his cracking, barely audible voice, “Oni’s troops attacked me when I tried to escape. I thought I could get off Jarad like you guys. Maybe find you in Gonaga. But they caught me before I could make it to shore with one of Oni’s emergency rafts. They beat me, took the raft, and left me for dead. When that girl came near me, I grabbed for her thinking they were here to finish me off.”

Serena’s “royal” attitude reemerged as she barked at Ken, “I’m not *some girl!* I’m the first Princess of Gonaga.”

Floating in and out of consciousness, Ken insisted his friends leave him to continue their journey.

All three refused; with Jas telling his friend, “You’re probably suffering from starvation and dehydration. There’s no way we’re gonna leave you here to die. The plane we came back on is stocked with a few emergency supplies. We can take you to it and get you back to your old self.”

Jake and Jas took turns carrying their injured friend on the trip back to their vessel. Gonaga's princess administered health care for Ken before assisting him in drinking three bottles of water. Barely an hour passed after the princess' help did Ken feel his energy and strength returning.

"Your body will play tricks on you," Princess Serena said as a warning for Ken to not get up too fast.

After a couple of moments of stretching, a slight, but deep laugh exited Ken's body; followed by, "I can't believe this is happening. The Princess of Gonaga is helping a man who was trained to destroy her?"

Princess Serena's eyes lit up as the color drained from her face.

"What do you mean?" the stunned princess asked. "Destroy me?"

Immediately, Princess Serena's attention turned to Jake in hopes that he would say she heard wrong.

Unfortunately for Princess Serena, Jake confirmed Ken's words were true, "What Oni did to your father is what she wanted us to do to you. Oni wants to wipe away every bit of your family's bloodline. When we found out about her plans to kill your family, something else clicked. We finally understood what side we were on: the wrong one. Serena, please don't hold this against us. We--"

"I understand," interrupted the listening princess. "Whatever you were going to do isn't what you did. The boys I've met – those same boys who've helped me so much already – are good people who would never take an innocent life."

The plane's inside became quiet for a while as Jas stitched up a large wound above Ken's right shoulder.

Once again, Princess Serena tried to stop Ken from moving too quickly after her assistance, but Jas verbally defended their "patient's" actions, "Ken's a fast healer. When he gets the right stuff in him, or on him, he's good as new in no time."

Jas' attention turned to Ken as he told his recovering friend, "You know you don't have to sit

here and wait for the end of the world as we know it. You could be an incredible help against Dash if it comes down to that. I mean..."

When Jas saw his statement about Dash affected Ken enough for Ken to turn his head away, Jas tried to explain himself.

Ken quickly stopped whatever Jas had in mind by saying, "No, I understand. Dash isn't the same anymore. It's beyond the brain scrambling. Dash is on another level of insanity. And I think the only way to snap him out of it is to beat some sense back into him. No disrespect to you or Jake, but I think the only one who can do that is me."

As Ken turned his back to everyone, Princess Serena noticed something familiar about him.

"Ken," the Princess of Gonaga said. "You look like someone I've seen before. You... Wait a minute. If your face wasn't so square, and had some scars on it, I would say you're a dead ringer for Dash."

Peering at their friend together, Jas and Jake couldn't believe they never noticed Ken and Dash's similar facial features.

Jas exclaimed, "She's right!" as he circled a surprised Ken. "Dash's head's a little rounder, but other than that, I'd think you guys were twins. I guess since you two are so different, I didn't pick up on it. Or maybe I did, but just didn't remember. I'd hate to be a criminal on the run if Princess saw me because it'd be over with those skills."

For some reason, Ken didn't want to talk about his resemblance to Dash; changing the subject, "Do you have anything I could use to protect myself?"

Before Ken could get an answer, the ground slightly rumbled. They ran out of the plane to find another aircraft soaring above them.

According to Ken, "It seems like we're not the only ones heading toward our old home."

Instead of walking, Princess Serena insisted they fly closer to Empress Oni's fortress. Barely five minutes after takeoff, Jas landed the plane near an old, destroyed village a few miles south of the

empress' training facilities.

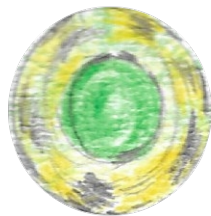
When asked about his abrupt grounding, Jas couldn't explain his actions too well, "It-it's like something's telling me to stop. It's weird. I've never felt an urge like this before."

Ken sat at the village's edge as Jake searched through dilapidated homes alongside the princess. Inside one of the few houses still standing, Jake found an old picture lying by itself. Dusting off the picture revealed a moment captured in time of a baby-cradling woman while a statuesque man stood with her. Princess Serena crept behind Jake, peering over his shoulder to find out what had Jake's attention for so long.

"That's a cute baby," the princess said.

To Princess Serena's astonishment, Jake muttered, "I think... I think that's me as a baby. I think this is a picture..."

Before he could finish his thoughts, a rush of emotion overcame Jake, bringing tears to his eyes.



Closer to their plane, Jas explored through the rubble of a collapsed home in hopes of finding something that could aid him and his friends during their travel. To Jas' surprise, a trap door leading into the basement was still intact. He slowly walked down the creaking stairs until he touched solid ground. Taking a few steps to his right, Jas felt something touch his face.

Jas started swinging his arms like a madman until he realized, *Oh, it's just a string. Glad the guys didn't see that.*

Pulling the cord turned on a weak light bulb. In the middle of this small basement sat a single

wooden chest. As Jas approached the trunk, a cold wind swept through the room. With that gust came the sounds of people talking.

“Who’s there?” Jas asked the unidentified conversationalists.

Seeing no one in the room with him, Jas calmed himself. Another chilly rush of air hit Jas when he bent over to open the trunk. Individuals chatting reentered Jas’ ear, forcing him to turn around.

Jas’ eyes widened as he watched several hazy figures circle each other. The ghostly figures opened their physical enclosure for Jas to enter. Jas stared at the focus of these ghosts’ attention: a tired, pregnant woman. A surge of energy shot through Jas’ body; topped by the feeling of something moving through him. Before he could figure out the cause of this sudden energy rush, Jas witnessed another specter dressed as a doctor appeared in front of him. This physician handed the pregnant female a baby.

“Congratulations!” Jas heard the doctor gladly bellow. “It’s a boy!”

Following the announcement, all of the apparitions vanished except a fairly tall man, the woman and her baby. In awe, Jas watched this new mother wiggle her index finger at the life she produced.

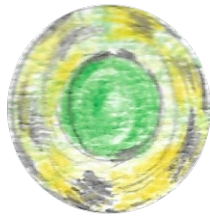
The mother whispered to her son, “I know you can’t say it yet, but just respond with your eyes. Do you know who I am?”

Simultaneously with the baby, Jas blinked.

A smile stretched across the lady’s weakened face before she exclaimed as best she could in her tired state, “That’s right! I’m your mother. And this big man is your father.”

When the boy entered his dad’s arms seconds later, the father boastfully said to his newborn, “Don’t worry, I’ll protect you as long as I live.”

Following a nice breeze, the figures spirited away like sand near an ocean.



Waiting for what seemed like an eternity, Ken decided he wanted to investigate the former township, too. Ken entered the same house Jas searched first. The sounds of people talking inside the dilapidated building startled Ken. Ken called out for his friends to make sure it just wasn't them conversing. Hearing no response, Ken noticed a door in the ground open. Assuming the people talking were still in this house's basement, Ken took a trip downstairs. The flickering light below the destroyed home revealed a paralyzed Jas staring at the cracked, concrete wall all by himself.

Ken tried to shake Jas out of his stupor by asking, "Are you okay, man? What's wrong with you?"

Jas couldn't hear or feel Ken. Before he could slap Jas, a crisp wind surrounded Ken's raised arm. Through Ken's mind, everything Jas just witnessed played out. Finally understanding what was going on, Ken stepped back; taking a seat on the stairs. Jas' body gradually turned to the chest behind him as the phantom father reappeared. The son – seemingly around the age of five or six now – sat near his dad as he loaded several items into the wooden container. One item that caught Jas' eye was a little black book titled *For Our Little One*.

Grabbing the little boy by his hands, the father commanded his child, "Son, this might seem like a no-win situation for us, but there's something about you that'll survive this. Please, come back here one day for this."

Pointing at the chest was the boy's only visible parent as he continued speaking, "It'll give you everything you need to live like we wanted you to before they took us. Son--"

Noise of someone kicking in their front door interrupted the father's words.

Ken watched his friend's head tilt upwards until Jas abruptly screamed, "No!"

Quivering a second before his mind returned to reality, Jas wondered aloud, "What just happened?"

Someone whispered behind Jas, "So, you're having them, too?"

When he realized Ken asked the question, Jas needed to know what his friend meant.

Ken took a deep breath, exhaling the word, "Memories."

Taking his one-word answer a step further, Ken explained that Jas' recollections were returning due to Empress Oni's brainwashing finally wearing off, "With that constant haze the manipulation causes decreasing day after day, our minds are finally able to remember memories from our past. The only thing I don't understand are the ghosts. You'd think we'd just remember stuff. Why are our returning memories becoming physical manifestations?"

Leaving the dilapidated home, Jas and Ken reunited with Princess Serena and Jake. No one felt like talking during the walk toward Empress Oni's palace; causing the blustering wind moving throughout the land to sound more profound. On the south side of the empress' fortress stood a warehouse. When they approached the warehouse's side door, Jake motioned for everyone to huddle up so they could formulate a plan of attack. Suddenly, Ken sprinted from his position to enter the warehouse on his own.

Jake wanted to yell at his running friend, but Jas stopped him prior to telling both his best friend and the Princess of Gonaga, "Ken's incredibly smart. He's up to something that could help us. I just wish he would've told us beforehand."

It didn't take long before the group ran into Ken inside the facility.

Ken stopped his fellow intruders as they approached an opening to his right by informing them, "Jake, there are a few guards up ahead. You know, the masked ones. If we can knock them out, we can take their outfits."

Taking their time to study the four soldiers' patrol patterns, Jas, Jake & Ken rushed the targeted

Jaradians from behind. Jas leapt, dropkicking two of the patrolmen into unconsciousness. When the two remaining guards turned to see what the commotion was, Jake and Ken used two respective elbows strikes to the sides of their necks to put them on their backs as well.

In awe, Gonaga's eldest princess said, "They just disposed of four soldiers without breaking a sweat. Not even the best soldiers in Gonaga can do that."

Princess Serena made sure to keep an eye out for any other troopers while her comrades took the unconscious soldiers' uniforms for themselves.

The Princess of Gonaga wanted to tie the guards up, but Jas had a rebuttal, "Princess, they're not waking up anytime soon. And if they do, the last thing they're gonna do is run around in their underwear."

All of the boys turned their backs to Princess Serena when she grabbed her new outfit.

Jas poked Jake's right arm; jokingly telling his friend during the princess' wardrobe change, "Don't you go peaking now. If she wanted you to see her naked she would've let you by now."

The urge to punch Jas in his face overwhelmed Jake, but Ken stopped their conflict with a simple, "Guys, save it!"

Just as Princess Serena adorned the cracked, brown, face-covering mask, a siren sounded.

Ken informed the princess that the alarm meant a mandatory assembly in the armory was about to occur and how they could use the grouping to their advantage, "This is our chance to blend in and find out what Oni's complete plan is. We must be calm, stay still, and watch before doing anything."

Led by Ken, his disguised friends converged with the rest of Jarad's militia. Many soldiers noticed Princess Serena immediately after lining up in front of a small stage near the armory's back wall.

One Jaradian whispered to his neighbor, "Man, I didn't know we had any female recruits left."

Another trooper startled Serena by elbowing her.

"Ow!" came from Gonaga's princess following the uncalled for strike. "What do you think

you're doing?"

"I've never seen you before," the soldier responded.

When the princess didn't answer, Jake nudged Princess Serena to tell her, "You gotta answer someone if you don't wanna look suspicious."

Princess Serena heeded Jake's words; hastily saying to this inquisitive Jaradian, "Um, I'm new. I just got in from Gon--.... Uh. Uh, I come from Yafan. You know, that place near here."

Hearing Jake sigh made Serena think she said something wrong.

Instead, Jake's exhaling was that of relief when he heard the soldier speak again, "Oh. Yeah, I heard about some raiders being sent up there for recruiting. I guess you went willingly. Knowing what's about to happen, I don't blame you. Nice to meet you."

Jas knew exactly what Jake was thinking after the possible situation blew over; saying to his observing friend, "For a princess, she knows how to talk her way out of a potential problem."

"It's easy when you're me, Jas," Princess Serena whispered.

Jake, who was standing between the Princess of Gonaga and an impressed Jas, poked both of them to remind his companions that they needed to keep quiet.

Right after Jake closed his mouth, Princess Serena retorted, "Jake, I don't have a loud mouth."

Frustrated over the princess' lack of proper composure made Jake explain to her, "If the people in front of you can hear you, then you have a loud mouth around here."

At the conclusion of Jake's statement, a noticeable shift in Serena's body language occurred.

Recognizing the princess' demeanor change immediately, Jas told Jake, "You messed up again, didn't you?"

Instead of reacting to Jas' comment, Jake turned his attention to the stage as several soldiers applauded an arriving Dash.

Dash quieted his fellow Jaradian defenders with a mere utterance, "Today, we have captured the Princess of Gonaga."

The soldiers who stayed stationed in Jarad during Empress Oni's attack on Gonaga were amazed and joyous.

Once more, Dash's words calmed the enthusiastic soldiers, "Yes, yes, it is wonderful. But I have even bigger news. During our securing of the princess, we also seriously wounded King Goga. Now there's only one more step before Gonaga falls completely. We must retrieve the Gonagan Crystal and have someone of Gonagan royalty present it to our empress. Once the crystal is in Empress Oni's hands she will be the most powerful being that ever existed!"

Dash finishing his bold announcement gave the Empress of Jarad her cue. Stepping onto the stage with a kneeling Dash in her direction, Empress Oni watched her troops ferociously clapping. A sickening smile stretched across Empress Oni's face before she lifted her left hand. Dangling from the leader's bony index finger was a beautiful emerald necklace. Princess Serena gasped at the sight of this piece of jewelry.

Upon seeing the assumed treasure, Serena cried out, "That's my mother's necklace!"

Thankfully for King Goga's first child and her friends, the Jaradians' applause drowned out Princess Serena's distressing proclamation. Standing to the princess' left, Ken latched onto Princess Serena's left hand to stop her from doing something that could reveal her identity.

"Your mother isn't dead," Ken whispered to the concerned member of Gonaga's royal bloodline. "Oni knows that you won't give her the info on the crystal. Your sister probably doesn't know. And Oni can't return to Gonaga to get any answers out of your father. Your mother is the only person able to give her the information she needs. And if your mother's anything like you, she won't give in. Now be quiet and wait. We will get her back, without harm."

Princess Serena wanted to say something else, but Empress Oni's glaring at her captivated crowd removed any thoughts the princess had.

Standing before her loyal soldiers, Jarad's sole ruler declared, "This is a new dawn for my land. We have captured Gonaga's queen; interrogating her as we speak. It is only a matter of time before we

conquer the land of Gonaga!”

...to be continued