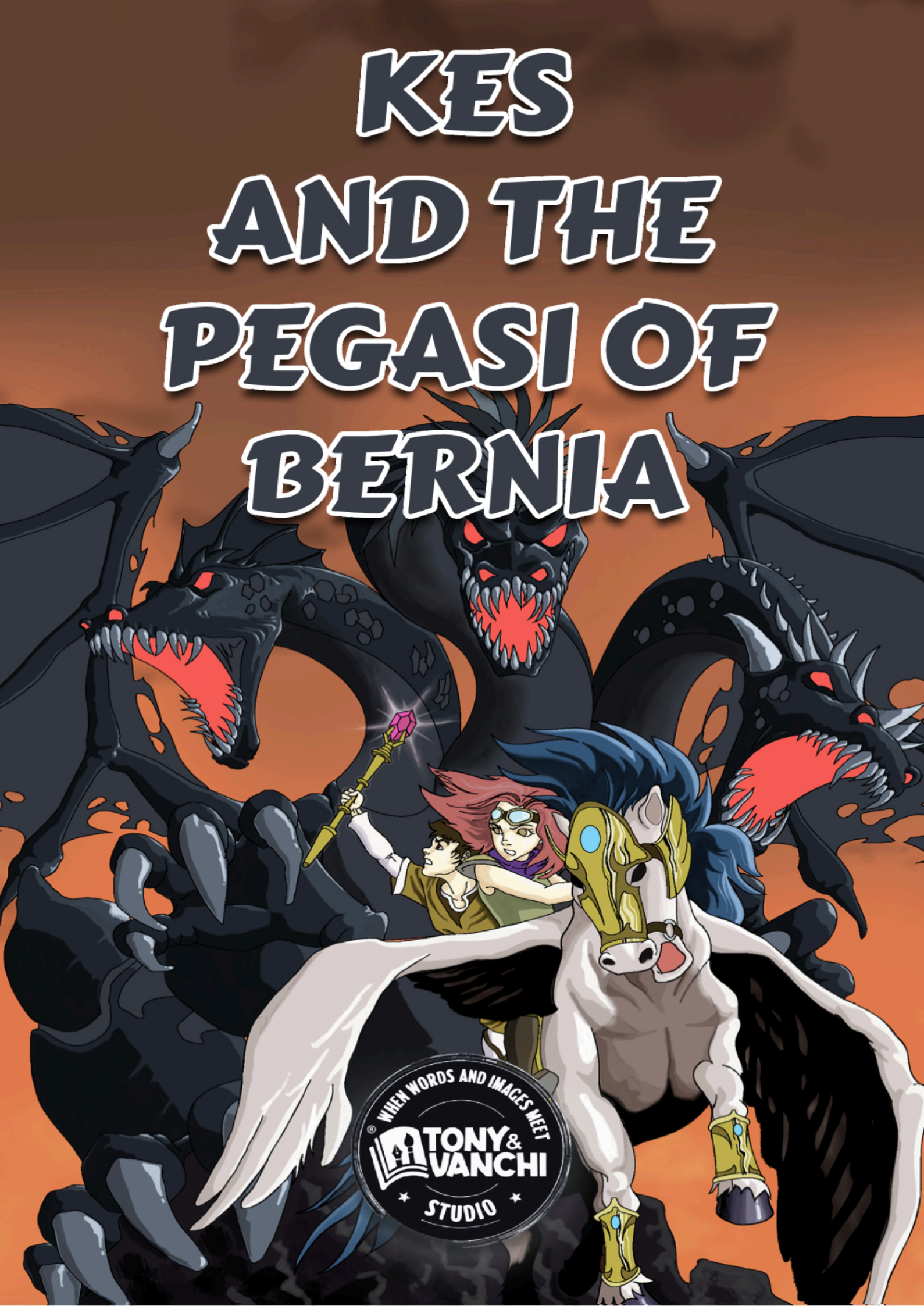
KES AND THE PEGASI OF BERNIA



KES AND THE PEGASI OF BERNIA

IVAN BOLANOS

KES AND THE PEGASI OF BERNIA – BOOK TWO

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First printed edition by Ediciones SM (Peru), 2016

Edited by Tony & Vanchi

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I. FOREVER FRIENDS

“He didn’t come for lunch, and I haven’t seen him around here all afternoon,” the mother exclaimed.

“What is it, Ila?” Palur asked who was lounging in his comfortable rocking chair as usual that afternoon.

“Did our son tell you where he was going?”

“This morning, he told me he’d visit Vaz. That old man is our best client in the entire valley. His excellent taste in wine is undeniable.”

“Kes went to Zun alone?”

“I let him go with the caravan. Don’t worry. Kasif is in command. He promised that he wouldn’t let her get away from him.”

“It’s getting dark now. I hope they camped in a safe place.”

“Easy, my wife, he is accompanied by Alit. Remember that together, they are invincible.”

Ila smiled silently, remembering the joyful and adventurous spirit of the inseparable friends.

The neighboring town of Zun was a day’s walk from Herol. The trail of Efin reached a dangerous point when the aures had to defend the kingdom, but now it was not a major concern. The forest had become docile. Nature had regained its former balance after Grorn’s ultimate defeat.

“Hurry, Alit. Your father is taking advantage of us.”

“Wait for me. I am picking berries.”

“Be cautious about touching a poisonous mushroom,” Kes warned him.

“That is not possible! I know those little hats very well; succulent to the eye but so harmful to the gut. My mother taught me long ago to differentiate them from the harmless mushrooms she uses in her kitchen. For years, I have been in charge of removing them from our garden, even those that grow several steps outside the fence surrounding our house.”

“It’s okay, it’s okay. I said nothing.”

It was getting dark when Kasif ordered the vintners’ caravan to stop in a clearing in the forest. The tents were not long in rising. The fire would soon dilate his pupils, and the smell of wild pig cooking would whet the general appetite. There was an atmosphere of peace and camaraderie.

After a while, everyone was singing with joy a song known throughout the Moaslan Valley, from Ukaris to Herol:

The shadows have been banished; life triumphed.

Peace has returned, death defied.

The kingdom breathes joy. The souls sing night and day,

Terralan is a place to prevail.

“Alit, don’t eat too much!” Kasif warned. “I don’t want you to end up with indigestion.”

“I have the remedy for that, Dad. I have some of Mom’s digestive herbs on my belt.”

“In the end, you turned out to be an expert in all kinds of plants, especially medicinal ones. Kes, why do you visit old Vaz?"

“He sent me a letter a few days ago. In it, he asks me to go, accompanied by Alit. An old friend will wait for us there.”

“Who?”

“He didn’t tell me, but I’d bet it’s Diruk.”

“Our dear friend Diruk. We haven’t heard from him for a long time,” Kasif exclaimed.

“I’m very excited about the idea of seeing him again. It’s been almost two years since we were last together.”

“Don’t be impatient. Soon, we’ll be in Zun.”

After assigning those in charge of the animals during the night, Kasif accompanied the boys to their tent. A starry and calm night would shelter them until the following day.

II. A DISTANT CALL

As was customary in Kes, dawn did not catch him sleeping. He was ready to resume his journey before the last embers of the fire that lit and heated the camp the night before had died down.

Throughout the day, he kept up with Kasif, who led everyone safely and steadily along the roads of Efin. Alit, a little behind, had had a chance to collect various herbs. After a smooth journey, the rooftops of Zun were finally in sight.

There was a loud "Good morning, we're here" and a knock on the door.

“It seems they have finally arrived!” exclaimed an old man, revitalized by the voice he recognized immediately.

Upon opening, he found two boys of about twelve, accompanied by a large man with a profuse beard and long hair.

“How good it is to see you again! Come in, come in. You must be hungry. I’m going to bring you some tea and some muffins, too,” Vaz added, noticing the boys’ half-hearted expressions at the thought of not sinking their teeth into something more succulent.

Shortly afterward, Kasif exclaimed, “These muffins are so good!”

“Elyta makes them. She’s the best baker in Zun. Perhaps from the entire kingdom.”

For a moment, no one seemed to intend to break the silence. That’s how tasty those muffins were.

“Kes, Alit, you wonder why I sent it for you. Surely, you already suspect that our good Diruk is about to arrive.”

“I thought he would be here by now,” Kes exclaimed, somewhat impatient.

“He must have arrived last night. But don’t worry; the carrier pigeon warned me this morning that he’s very close,” Vaz encouraged.

“It must be something significant to have traveled here. I know Diruk now lives on the other side of the Acuantalis,” Kasif put in.

“That’s right, friend. King Balkurian commissioned him a little over a year ago to find one more town in that part of the kingdom.”

“The ancient path of the unicorns,” Kes exclaimed.

A complete silence settled over the room. With worried expressions, they all gazed at the center of the table: only one muffin remained.

“Own!” Alit said, disappearing into his mouth with a magical speed.

Everyone laughed at his enthusiasm when it came to eating. A new knock on the door interrupted the laughter.

“He’s here!” Kes exclaimed.

“How do you know?” Vaz asked. “Do you still have aure powers?”

“No, it’s the feeling you get when someone you love is around.”

“Are you going to open me up or what?” The person on the other side of the door demanded.

“It’s Diruk!” the old man exclaimed happily.

The former aure, rejuvenated during his adventure two years ago, looked much younger than his great friend Vaz.

“How wonderful to see you, dear friends!” Diruk greeted, clasping both hands.

Kes jumped up and ran to hug him.

“How are you? We haven’t seen each other for so long.”

“The little brave who saved us all from the shadows. Alit, you are not far behind. Thanks to you, everyone in Herol had the opportunity to defend themselves.”

Kes was silent. Great happiness had shaken him. His eyes seemed to be about to betray his outer strength.

After offering the newcomer a cup of tea, Vaz ensured the windows were shut tight. He didn’t want inopportune ears to hear what his old friend was about to reveal.

“What I am about to tell you must not leave this room," Diruk said.

“We won’t say anything to anyone,” Kasif promised, resting his hand on his son’s shoulder.

“I have received a very distant call for help.”

“Very distant, you say?” asked Vaz, who didn’t know much about the situation either.

“From beyond the sea. It extends beyond the boundaries of the horizon. From a place that can only be reached through a magic door.”

Everyone was surprised. Magic was almost non-existent in Terralan. Only the unicorn spirits reflected in the waters of Aquantalis remained as the power that once inhabited the kingdom.

“Who called for aid?” Kasif asked, as intrigued as the others.

“Less than two moons ago, when I was touring the north shore of the lake, the spirit of Unir spoke to me.”

“The lord of the unicorns!” Kes exclaimed happily.

“You can imagine my surprise when he contacted me. The consciousness of the purest being that ever inhabited Terralan still prevails.”

“How is it possible?” Vaz asked. “We all know that only its reflection remains on the waters.”

“I didn’t believe it at first, either. I thought maybe I was dreaming and would wake up at any moment. But it was indeed about Unir.”

“What did he say?” Kes asked.

“Two inhabitants of this land must travel to Bernia.”

“Bernia? Where is that place? And who must go?”

“I didn’t know of its existence until I met with Unir. Now, I know it is an unattainable realm for us. Pegasi live there.”

“What is a pegasus?” Alit asked, his mouth full of food. He had slipped into the kitchen without anyone noticing and returned with a plate of muffins.

“Son, don’t talk while you’re chewing,” Kasif scolded him, then took the precious treasure from his hands.

“Pegasi are close cousins of unicorns. They do not have a horn but possess two mighty wings that allow them to fly majestically.”

“You mean, they’re winged horses,” Alit concluded.

“If Unir listened to you, he’d have a thing or two to say to you!” Diruk chided. “Horses are beautiful and noble creatures, well-loved by everyone in Terralan, but you must not forget that they don’t have a magical origin.”

“Well, then, they are unicorns without horns but with wings. Flying creatures devoid of horns.”

Once again, everyone laughed at Alit's peculiar and amusing eloquence.

"Listen carefully. Elan, the most powerful of the pegasi, contacted Unir and transmitted the call for help. Something terrible is about to happen in Bernia; they need the Ruby of the Alliance to stop it."

At that moment, Diruk put a small bundle on the table. Something wrapped in thick cloth began to emit a gentle light. When the ancient aure discovered it, everyone was amazed at the beauty of the most precious gem that ever shone in Terralan.

"How does it shine so bright? Does it still have any power?" Vaz asked.

"Yes, dear friend. After our victory over Grorn, King Balkurian charged me to keep it safe. Recently, to my complete surprise, the gem had come to life."

"These pegasi you mention then require our help. They need the ruby," Vaz said. "You said that two would have to travel to that place. I'm not sure, but I think I know who it is."

Diruk and Vaz frowned at Alit and Kes, who had once again seized the plate of muffins.

"Before I had the powers of an aure, I think I would have understood why they would notice me. But Diruk, I am now an ordinary boy. Why would they want me to help them?" Kes asked.

"Elan was very specific when he asked Unir to be you and Alit to bring the ruby to Bernia. Your courage and sacrifice have made them see you as the one to help them in this difficult time."

“What is this great danger? Could you please let us know how we are expected to reach Bernia?”

“Vaz, do you have your latest invention ready?”

“Yeah, I was checking it just yesterday.”

III. A SINGULAR ARTIFACT

Morning reached the town of Zun amid a deep calm. As its residents began to rise, a scream shattered the eerie silence.

“I’m not going to dive in the water with that thing!” Alit asserted.

The night before, Diruk had difficulty convincing Kasif to let his son enter the unknown. He assured him that they would return safely from their mysterious adventure in distant lands.

The noble and brave Kasif would be silent on his return to Herol about Kes and Alit’s departure. Both boys needed to embark as soon as possible on their all-important mission. Ila and Palur had not yet found out what was about to happen.

“Alit, you don’t have to be afraid. It’s a very reliable suit,” Vaz struggled to explain.

“Then why don’t you try it first?” the teenager argued with a suspicious look.

“I’m too old for that. Furthermore, if you want to go with Kes, you must learn to breathe underwater.”

“I’m not a fish!” Alit replied.

“I didn’t know your inventor side,” Kasif interjected, trying to calm things down.

“Well, I’m a passionate inventor. The most curious among aures. I was always interested in the operation of the various machines and devices. This is perhaps my best gadget,” Vaz asserted.

"How exactly does it work?”

“These tanks store the air you can breathe through this hose. I have been experimenting with a new material for months to create this underwater seeing mask. It is much better than glass. It doesn’t break so easily. Look how transparent it is!”

“Awesome! They should use it on all windows. You could get rich.”

“I’m not interested in money, Kasif. Since it looks like glass, I think I’ll call it Vaz-glass.”

“Hmmm… I see. It's a very original name. Have you considered adding another name similar to yours?"

Immediately, Vaz laughed at Kasif’s scathing intervention.

A few steps away, Alit relented in his refusal to use the diving suit, the underwater breathing suit that Vaz had invented.

“We’ll test them in the little pond near here,” Diruk encouraged.

“Let me deliver the wine from my cart,” Kasif said. “I’ll be back in less than an hour, and we can take the boys together.”

“Very well. I’ll tether my horse here,” Diruk added. “It will be better if we all travel together in your wagon.”

They stopped at the lagoon's edge shortly after, ready for the great test.

“Once you learn to breathe underwater, everything will be ready for you to begin your extraordinary journey,” Diruk explained.

“Where will we go?” Alit asked.

“We’ll circle Acuantalis to the west first. On its north shore, the spirit of Unir will be waiting for us.”

“How will we get to that distant realm by submerging ourselves in the water?” Kes didn’t quite understand how they could leave Terralan.

“You’ll find out soon. Now we must try on the suits.”

“I’m ready!” Alit exclaimed, seeming to take on a renewed courage. If he entered the water before Kes, he would prove to everyone that he could be as or more courageous than his friend.

“Slow down, son. First, you must heed the indications of Vaz.”

“Well said, Kasif. Guys, pay attention. To breathe comfortably, you must prevent water from entering your nose. Outside of that, breathe through your mouth using the hose nozzle. You must remain relaxed. Remember that if you do it right, nothing wrong will happen.”

Standing on the shore, knee-deep in water, Alit began to practice breathing. By then, Kes had finished putting on his suit with Diruk’s help, and with a firm step, he approached the water, stopping next to his friend.

“Don’t try anything too long,” Vaz warned. “Don’t forget that today is your first try.”

The boys continued to advance until the water was up to their necks.

“How are you? Are you fine?” Diruk asked.

Since they could hardly speak due to the mouthpiece in their mouth, both boys turned and raised a fist to signal that everything was going very well. An instant later, they disappeared under the water.

“How much time do they have, Vaz?” asked Kasif.

“I don’t know exactly. I think about half an hour.”

The father was somewhat concerned.

“That makes me a little uneasy. What will happen if they run out of air while still underwater?”

“In that case, they will have to get out rapidly,” Vaz replied.

“What an inventor you turned out to be!”

The minutes passed, and there was no sign of the boys. The three adults waited impatiently on the shore.

At that moment, they felt hands touching their back. They soon confirm that it was the two young adventurers.

“Surprised?” Kes asked.

“Not really,” Diruk replied. “It reassures me that you have been so comfortable in the suits that you want to joke on us.”

“They’re easy to use,” Alit exclaimed. “After we return from Bernia, I plan to keep it to carry out some underwater research.”

“Underwater research?” his father asked him.

“Yes, in our short walk under the water, I could distinguish a great variety of plants I must study.”

In the afternoon, Kasif said goodbye to his son, promising Diruk and Vaz that he would not tell anything about the journey the boys were about to start.

“I will tell Ila and Palur they will stay in Zun for a few days. They will be glad to hear that you have met Diruk.”

Soon, everything was ready for the first stage of that new and challenging adventure. Vaz had two beautiful and strong horses. The boys would ride one of them.

“Let’s not forget the muffins,” Alit exclaimed with exaggerated concern.

“We’ll pass by Elyta’s house in Zun,” Vaz said.