

HOLLANDOS

EYES OF THE PRINCE

THE FIRST CHAPTER IN
THE HOLLANDOS SAGA

P.R.M. Hamer

Hollandos Eyes of the Prince
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PROLOGUE

The Hero of Hollandos

The young prince gazed from the palace balcony. His eyes fell upon the capital below. Amstos sprawled like a sea of orange rooftops, perched across thousands of different coloured buildings. Though the sun was setting, this vast city never truly slept. Bustling streets wound through the chaos, alive with citizens hauling carts, riding bikes and wagons, and selling goods. He leaned further over the balcony, his eyes following a band of musicians, before drifting to a group of children running past them. His heart raced, knowing that one day they would all look up to him.

After admiring his future domain, his gaze drifted upwards, towards a single green star blazing in the sky. Emeros. This was no ordinary star. It was one of the Seven Stars, representing the virtue of duty. A passion burned within him as he stared at it. Emeros always loomed above him, casting its green light high up in the sky, as if waiting for the day he would become king. His path would be the path of duty, as was that of all great rulers before him.

‘Are you coming?’ asked a deep voice.

The prince startled, stepping back from the balcony and into the study. Bookshelves and paintings lined the walls, and at the centre sat his father. King Frederick’s mighty black beard shimmered in the flickering light of the fireplace as he looked at him. Usually, he would tell his son which book to fetch for their nightly reading. But tonight was different. Tonight, he invited the prince to choose the tale he wished to hear.

The prince could hardly believe it; he seldom got to pick. But when he did, he never hesitated. He nearly tripped over the thick royal carpets as he dashed to the cabinet and grabbed a hefty book with a crown painted on its cover.

His father chuckled softly. ‘You’ve heard this tale countless times. Is there not another story you’d rather explore?’

The prince shook his head. Though he’d heard it a hundred times, it was the only story he ever wanted to hear. None compared to the legendary saga of King Viktor Kroon the First, except perhaps the one about the Outsider Uprising. But that was a tale for another night. The prince eagerly placed the book in his father’s hand and climbed into his lap, nestling against him.

Frederick smiled warmly, admiring his son. He flipped open the heavy cover and began to read in his deep, steady voice. ‘Dire news had reached the capital of the Netherlands: the Prince of Orange had fallen. War

was closing in on them, and the master of the port, the Herringshark Captain—'

'King Viktor!' blurted the prince.

'Not yet,' replied his father. 'The *Herringshark Captain* took matters into his own hands. He rallied his people, vowing the entire fleet would depart within a week and carry them all to safety. In desperation, thousands flocked to the harbour. Long lines stretched across the city as citizens waited to board the overloaded ships, placing their faith in his promise of a new land.'

The thought of Amstos's streets empty, of shops closed and laughter gone, made the young prince curl up tighter. He could never abandon his home.

Frederick continued reading about the long voyage. How the brave settlers sailed for months seeking land. Many people starved, while others cast themselves into the sea in desperation. And storms raged ceaselessly, claiming hundreds more.

'One endless night,' read the king, 'they braced for the worst. The Herringshark Captain tried to save them, but even he couldn't protect everyone. At his darkest moment, when all hope seemed lost, he looked to the heavens and pleaded for the storm to pass.'

The prince placed his hand on the book, his eyes wide. 'Then he saw the Seven Stars! They guided him!'

His father nodded, smiling with pride. 'Indeed, the same stars that still watch over us.' He paused until his son removed his hand, then continued. 'The captain followed the holy stars and at last, they found land. He marvelled at the bright shores of this colourful new world, where the water was as blue as the sky and the flowers bloomed in a sea of red and pink. The air brimmed with possibility. There, he declared a new home for his people.'

'Hollandos!' said the prince.

His father pulled him closer. 'Hollandos. A name inspired by the land they sailed from and the people who

had endured so much, the Original Settlers.'

The prince listened eagerly to the next part of the story. The settlers journeyed south, building a city called Herringtide. Some ventured further, forming villages along the western shore.

Frederick cleared his throat. 'As the years passed, it became clear that storm-filled Herringtide could no longer sustain the growing population. Thus, in the fifth year of their settling, the captain searched once more for a new beginning. After weeks of wandering, he found a great lake. He knelt, ran his hand through the grass, and knew this was the place: perfect for trade, fishing, even a mighty port. It was there he founded our capital, Amstos – the heart of the new world.'

'Amstos,' whispered the prince.

'The walls rose high and gathered thousands of people. Herringtide, too, thrived, and the western villages blossomed. Yet,' his father's voice grew serious, 'tension arose. There was conflict over livestock, food, and wealth. They needed a leader. Not for Amstos alone, nor for Herringtide, but for *all* of Hollandos. Once again, the people turned to the Herringshark Captain.'

Frederick leaned forward. 'On the day of his coronation, the Seven Stars blazed above. The people watched in awe as the holy light shone upon the captain. And from the heavens, our sacred Starcrown formed upon his head.'

Carefully, Frederick lifted his crown and placed it on his son's scruffy black hair. 'Seven mighty points, each stretching towards the sky, set with gemstones echoing the colours of those holy stars: red, orange, yellow, green, blue, purple, and pink. A symbol to guide all in Hollandos.'

The prince's chest rose with pride as he felt the crown's weight. He gazed into the mirror hanging on the wall, seeing the gems shine brightly on his head, as if they knew his destiny.

‘From that day forth, Viktorsday, the captain was known as King Viktor Kroon,’ said Frederick, placing his hand over his son’s heart. ‘He saved our people. He founded our kingdom. And now his legacy lives on in *you*.’

Prince Viktor beamed. ‘How I wish I could meet him, Father. Just once.’

Frederick gazed around the chamber. Twelve majestic pieces of art lined the green-planked walls, depicting the provinces of Hollandos and their unique landscapes and cultures. ‘As do I. But four centuries have gone by since King Viktor passed away, long before either of us was born. He was a great king. A true father of our kingdom.’

‘Yet to me,’ said Viktor, thinking of everything King Frederick had accomplished, ‘*you* are both the finest king and the finest father!’

Frederick raised an eyebrow. ‘Wait a moment. Who else *could* be your father?’

Viktor’s eyes widened, then they both burst into laughter, shaking with joy until their eyes watered. But the moment ended too soon, as a heavy knock echoed through the room.

King Frederick lifted the Starcrown from his son’s head and set it back upon his own. ‘Enter.’

The doors creaked open. A pale man stepped in. He was short and plump, yet his majestic brown hair complemented his silver livery collar. It was Mayor Peter Jann Timberend, Frederick’s most trusted advisor. He strode forward and bowed gracefully.

‘Your Grace,’ he said gravely. ‘Forgive the interruption. You must come at once.’

Frederick’s fatherly smile gave way to a stern expression. ‘What transpires?’

‘It is the queen.’

‘Thank you.’ He turned to his son. ‘I shall take my leave now.’ He set the book aside and gently lifted the

prince off his lap, then knelt to meet him at eye level. With a soft smile, he said, 'I shall return shortly, Viktor. In the meantime, will you take it upon yourself to don the attire of our great first king? If you do, I shall find you in your chambers, and together we will explore the wonders of Hollandos.'

'I will!' Viktor beamed. This hour usually meant bedtime. But tonight seemed different. He had chosen the story, and now his father was allowing him to play at night. What other surprises lay ahead? Perhaps he'd be gifted his own steel sword, or even a royal steed. High with anticipation, he bolted off to his room.

He ran through the halls of the esteemed Prism Palace until a gentle female voice called out and halted him mid-sprint.

'Why the rush, Your Highness?' asked one of the servants.

'I shall be King Viktor!' he declared proudly.

She let out a warm chuckle as she swept the floor. 'Will you rule alongside your father, then?'

He straightened up, raising his chin and flexing his slender ten-year-old arms. Mimicking his father's deep voice, he said, 'There shall be *two* kings! Which means our people shall be twice as joyful. We shall feed the hungry and vanquish all evil. That is the duty of a king. And with two kings, none shall stand against us.'

'It would be an honour to serve under such kings,' she replied, curtsying.

Viktor grinned, but he didn't have time to linger. He dashed onward and burst into his room. Towering green walls loomed over the white wooden floor, and a sprawling tapestry of Hollandos covered the far wall. On his oak desk lay meticulously organised books on magic, various faiths, and the reigns of past kings and queens.

He charged towards his costume chest and took out his royal outfit: a flowing green cloak that swept past his ankles, a sturdy wooden sword, and a special paper

crown shaped like the Starcrown.

Viktor swung the sword, imagining himself as a hero battling enemies, like King Viktor before him.

Minutes passed, and the fight drenched the prince in sweat as he defeated his imaginary foes. Being excellent was exhausting; he needed a break. He sheathed his wooden sword beneath his arm and plopped down at his desk.

From the stack of books, he grabbed his favourite: *The Lineage of Hollandos*. He quickly flipped through the pages, their edges worn from the number of times he'd read them, stopping only at his father.

King Frederick II Kroon, the Beloved. Born on the 23rd of October, 385 AS. Son of Irene and Maurits Kroon. Husband of Queen Amelia, father of Prince Viktor Kroon.

Seeing his own name in a book filled with brave kings and queens fuelled him. He was the heir to the Starcrown, the people's favourite Kroon, and his father's pride and joy. He was unstoppable. And nothing would ever change that.

The passage continued: *The Old Queen, Juliana II, suffered a stroke two years after the death of her only son, Maurits, and his wife. The Seven Stars then turned to the fourteen-year-old Frederick and blessed him on Viktor's day, 17th of November, in the year 399 AS. His reign has seen the repayment of Amstos' crippling debt and the creation of several crucial landmarks: the Pink Bridge, linking the mainland to the province of Lillios; the twin harbours, Bolthaven and Torchhaven, making travel to the province of Vulkos more accessible; and the Veluwos Blockade, sealing off the fallen valley, which is rumoured to shelter rogue wizards.*

Rogue wizards... Viktor's eyes lingered on the words. He'd read them a hundred times, yet the idea of rogue wizards still puzzled him. Magic was a blessing, not a curse. Why would anyone use it for harm? He, of all people, understood this. Viktor was the first Kroon since

his great-grandmother, Queen Juliana, to be gifted with magic.

Viktor stood and formed a V with his fingers, trying to conjure up a spell. His fingertips tingled, but only mere sparks came of it. Despite that, he persisted. If he practised enough, one day he could even be better than the most powerful wizard alive, Magister Kenau.

He tried again. And again. Each attempt filled the room with a crimson glow, which looked impressive but reeked of charred wood. His energy slowly drained, and his body grew tired.

Flopping back into his chair, Viktor felt frustrated. In this moment of unrest, he realised his father hadn't returned yet. He stashed the book away and straightened his paper crown. If his father wouldn't come to him, he would go to his father.

He crept out into the hall, readying his sword. The prince scanned each corridor and tiptoed across the soft carpets, ducking past servants and guards. He moved like a shadow.

For such a vast palace, the route to his parents' chambers was surprisingly short. As he approached, he noticed the big oak doors were ajar, and heard voices murmuring within.

'—and summon the good people of our kingdom for a momentous announcement,' declared his father.

'At once, my king,' came the reply, followed by firm footsteps drawing near. The heavy doors creaked open, and Peter Jann stepped out. Behind him strode a towering woman, clad in full plate armour black as midnight with orange trim. An emerald-encrusted greatsword hung at her side. It was Dame Aletta, commander of the Starguard and a Knight of Mineraalos.

They passed right by Viktor, oblivious of the boy standing in the shadows. Though not everyone missed him.

'Perfect timing, Viktor! Please come in,' his father

called from within.

Viktor blinked and stepped inside the room, unsure. He found his father, together with a group of other people, gathered around his mother's bed. He joined them and stood frozen as he stared at his mother lying on woollen pelts, blood and sweat covering her, as if she were about to die. In her hands lay something very small, wrapped in soft blankets.

'My dear boy, please come to me,' she said in a fragile voice, tears welling in her eyes.

Trembling, Viktor climbed onto the bed and settled beside her. He stared into her weary face. 'Are you unwell?' he asked.

'No, my prince,' she replied. 'Quite the opposite.' She shifted the blankets in her arms, revealing a tiny, delicate baby nestled within.

The king moved to her side and placed a steady hand around the child. 'Behold your sister. Her name is Emma.'

Viktor gasped. The word *sister* echoed strangely in his head. He'd known she was coming. Everyone in the palace had spoken of the queen's blessing. But now she was here, actually here, he felt his chest tighten. Was he not enough? Why did they even need another child? He turned his face towards the shadows in the corner of the room and muttered, 'Great.'

The queen pulled him close with her free arm. 'You are my greatest joy, Viktor. Nothing will ever change that.'

Then why am I getting a sister? he thought, looking at the bundle called Emma.

His father placed a firm hand on Viktor's shoulder. It felt different from usual, less comforting, more like a stern king placing his mark upon him. 'One day, you shall be responsible for the safety of millions. The people will look to you for strength, for guidance. But tell me, my son, do you know who will admire you the most?'

Viktor hesitated. 'I do not know... is it you, Father?'

Frederick chuckled softly. 'No. It is your sister, Emma. From this day until your last, she will look up to you as her hero.'

Hero? Viktor's frown deepened. What was the point of being a hero to one helpless baby, when he could rule an entire kingdom? Without a word, he slid off the bed, ignoring his mother's gentle call. He turned to his father and asked, 'Now, shall we play together? I am King Viktor!'

The king smiled wearily. 'I wish I could, King Viktor, but we must postpone our adventure in Hollandos for now. There is a significant announcement to make, and your presence is most required.'

The prince's excitement faded, overpowered by the disappointment of his father breaking his promise to play with him. The exhaustion from his attempted magic was finally catching up. His eyelids fell, fighting sleep, but he didn't know how much longer he could stall the battle.

'Would you kindly return to your chamber and change from your kingly attire back into that of a prince?' said his father gently but firmly. 'We wish to share the wonderful news of your sister's birth with our people, and your presence there would make it even more special.'

'But, Father—'

'At this very moment, Viktor.'

With a heavy sigh, the prince turned away and shuffled back to his room, each step slower than the last.

As he dressed in his finest clothes and carefully set aside his kingly cloak and sword, murmurs of anticipation drifted in from outside. He hurried to the window and peered down at the crowd below. Even this late at night, thousands had gathered outside the Prism Palace. For a fleeting moment, Viktor felt heroic. Until he

realised they had come for his sister, not for him.

The door swung open, and his father stood framed in the doorway, the Starcrown gleaming atop his head. 'Are you ready, Viktor?'

The prince nodded softly, steadying himself before joining his family. His mother now looked like a majestic queen, while his father cradled the newborn in his arms. 'Do you want to hold her?' he asked.

Viktor crossed his arms and shook his head as he stared at Emma. *You wanted her, so you can hold her.*

'Viktor, you can do this,' encouraged his mother. 'She wants to be close to you.'

Still, the prince hesitated until his father gently placed Emma in his arms. Viktor's hands trembled as he held his fragile sister, but when he met her eyes, something changed. There was no weak baby staring back, only a fierce princess.

His shaking stilled. He stood taller, as if some invisible weight had lifted from his shoulders, and finally embraced his sister. 'You can count on me,' he said proudly.

Emma stared at her big brother. He swore he saw her nod before her eyes closed once more.

I will protect you, promised Viktor silently. *I will be your hero.*

They made their way to the front of the palace, where the steady voice of Peter Jann rang out across the plaza. 'People of Amstos, all behold his Majesty King Frederick Kroon, Second of His Name, King of Hollandos, of Amstos, and Volkaania, bound by the Seven Stars and Guardian of the Twelve Provinces. His grace is accompanied by Queen Amelia Kroon and their son, Prince Viktor Kroon.'

Alongside Dame Aletta and Margo of Vlymos, the Starpriest, the royal family stepped out of the Prism Palace, flanked by their loyal Starguard. They stood before the grand stone statue of the first king, King

Viktor Kroon, whose mighty presence loomed over the plaza like a guardian.

Prince Viktor gasped as he looked upwards, catching sight of the night sky. Besides the bright moon, the Seven Stars blazed vividly in red, orange, yellow, green, blue, purple, and pink. He was used to seeing the single green star, but all seven together? He had only seen them united when the entire city poured into the streets on Viktorsday.

The crowd erupted in cheers and whispers, filling the square with excitement. King Frederick stepped forward, raising his hand to silence the plaza instantly. He looked up and proclaimed, 'The Seven Stars have blessed our kingdom with a most beautiful princess!'

The king and queen moved aside, allowing their son to approach. Prince Viktor met his father's proud eyes and the gleaming Starcrown, then shifted his gaze to his sister. Proudly, he puffed out his chest and stood tall as he presented Princess Emma to the assembled crowd.

King Frederick's voice rang out loud and clear. 'Hollandos! Greet Princess Emma Kroon!'

'EMMA! EMMA! EMMA!' the crowd roared in unison.