

Chapter Fourteen

The Deluge

"After the flood, Noah had one hell of a mess to clean up, he never quite got over it."

- The Digest Bible, eighteenth revision.

"Sergeant, they're coming back now, just through the West Gate."

"Thank you, Ed." Bullen looked up from his desk, pushed the heap of notes and plans to one side, and stood up. The furrow on his forehead smoothed out, and he smiled in relief for the first time since the rescue mission on the killing fields. He stretched luxuriously, and slowly walked round the desk to the window. He looked out at the brilliant sunshine, glinting off the forested slopes on the opposite side of the valley and the fields of soya and wheat showing just over the massive west wall. This year's main food crops were spread all along the Wandel valley, and carried on past the pirate ship down to the chasm at the distant southern end. Ed waited silently, still breathing hard, watching the Sergeant. After some further deep thought Bullen made a reluctant decision.

"Ed, I think that Talltree's suggestion is a good one. Give Grandfather Melor a hero's return. Make sure no one who will be with him knows the real plan for tonight. With any luck the Pirates will have too much useless and conflicting information; they'll waste even more time trying to sort it out. The, ah, 'council meeting' should also help to throw them off the scent. If nothing else it will buy us another day or two."

"Yes, Sir!" Ed showed real enthusiasm. "This is just like the political science classes, but for real. The longer we can keep them guessing, the weaker their position. It's a classic siege and hostage situation isn't it?"

"Yes, but as long as we can stop them realising that, we have the advantage. That's one reason I sent back their man. A quick infusion