



Life for Gavin Durinden is about to change from puzzling to downright odd. An intellectual prodigy with blue hair and the ability to create energy from the marks on his palms, he was always told he had a mysterious condition. However, when the scientists at NeoGen Labs begin treatments, everything changes, including the appearance of blue wings.

That's not the half of his problems. From Kaira, an "angel" with black wings brought in to help him transform to look human again, he learns a truth hinted in his dreams; he's neither human nor angel, nor is his real name Gavin. He's an alien brought to Earth by an enemy known as the Shirukan, who killed his parents and changed his memories and identity with the intention of raising him as a test subject for their vile experiments. Together, Gavin and Kaira escape, but the Shirukan will fight fist and feather to reclaim him, because he holds the key to what they desire

Soriel

(Starfire Angels: Revelations Book 1)

By Melanie Nilles

Prairie Star Publishing * North Dakota

Characters, names, and incidences described in this book are fictional. Any resemblance to actual persons or situations is coincidence.

Soriel
Copyright © 2012 by Melanie Nilles

All Rights Reserved

Cover Art
Copyright © 2012 by Rachel Rivera, aka Parajunkee Designs at parajunkee.net.

Published by Prairie Star Publishing, North Dakota. Smashwords edition.

For more information, email melanie_nilles@yahoo.com or visit www.melanienilles.com.

Other available books and ebooks by Melanie Nilles:

DARK ANGEL CHRONICLES, THE COMPLETE SERIES
(Starfire Angels Books 1-4)

Also available as individual ebooks and paperbacks:

Book 1: STARFIRE ANGELS

Book 2: BROKEN WINGS

Book 3: CRYSTAL TOMB

Book 3.5: ORIGINS OF DARK ANGEL

Book 4: FOREVER DARK

METAMORPHOSIS: THREE FANTASTIC STORIES OF STRONG WOMEN AND THE
TRANSFORMING POWER OF LOVE

Also available as individual ebooks:

WHEN ANGELS CRY

(A Starfire Angels Novella)

A TURN OF CURSES

AT THE WATER'S EDGE

(Adronis Novella #1)

Books by M. A. Nilles:

TIGER BORN

(Demon Age #1)

LEGEND OF THE WHITE DRAGON: LEGENDS

LEGEND OF THE WHITE DRAGON: LEGACIES

LEGEND OF THE WHITE DRAGON: DESTINY

LEGEND OF THE WHITE DRAGON: LEGENDS, LEGACIES, DESTINY

(Three Complete Novels)

FIREBLOOD

(A Legend of the White Dragon Novel)

Coming in spring 2013:

BENEATH THE CRASHING WAVES (Adronis Novella #2) by Melanie Nilles

Coming in 2014:

Book 2 of Starfire Angels: Revelations

Soriel (Starfire Angels: Revelations Book 1)
By Melanie Nilles

Chapter 1

There. That did it!

Gavin gazed at the gentle wave of light flowing between his palms. It came so easily now that he could hardly believe it had started as an accident four years ago. After practicing in secret since then, he could make the energy move around him like a shield or into a ball in his hands, but nothing that would make him any sort of superhero.

Wicked cool but also very dangerous. He'd found that out by accident. Luckily, no one was hurt, and he'd been able to cover the scorch mark on the hardwood main floor of the house by adjusting the area rug.

He dared not tell anyone, not even his mother. He'd tried telling her about the dreams of angels using similar powers and calling him Soriel, but she brushed it off.

Only with her out did he dare practice this...magic.

The muffled ring of the phone startled him into losing his concentration and the energy flow. This could be it, the call he'd been waiting for!

Gavin jumped for the closet door in two big strides and flung it open to squeak on its hinges. His hands fumbled through the pockets of his black leather jacket hanging inside. Two rings. Two more before he missed the call as it went to voicemail.

During the third ring, Gavin's fingers latched onto the smooth, cold metal of the cell phone and pulled it out. He immediately answered, his heart pounding in his chest in anticipation. "Hello?"

His breath caught in his throat and he combed his dark blue hair behind his ear, but it was too short to stay and fell back into his face.

"Mister Durinden?" The female voice on the other end had that professional confidence he'd hoped to hear, a familiar voice that gave him his breath back momentarily. This *was* the call he'd been anxiously awaiting.

"Yes. This is Gavin Durinden."

"This is Doctor Marissa Kobaya."

Yes! Trembling with expectation, he stumbled back onto the leather sofa of the living room and sat. He couldn't have asked for better timing—day off from work, his mother gone so she wouldn't overhear. Now, if Doctor Kobaya would have an answer about his condition, everything would be perfect.

"I have some good and bad news on that blood test you requested."

Oh, no. His heart sank. He should have known the call was too good to be true. Visiting the hospital for tests had been with the high hopes that they would tell him he was all right. He didn't want to hear bad news. *Please, no...*

He combed his fingers through dark blue locks and took a deep breath to calm his nerves. Maybe it was nothing.

"The good news is that I didn't see any serious conditions indicated in your blood work. The bad news is that I've never seen blood like yours before."

His heart stopped like his brain, which tried to digest that information. Never saw blood like

his before? What did that mean?

The world seemed to have quieted in expectation of an explanation. He looked down at his open palm and the dime-sized splotch of aquamarine with short, spindly rays tapering off from it, a mark like on his other palm and nowhere else, marks which allowed him to project the energy. How was his gift possible? Was he some sort of mutant? That might explain the blood work.

In a hesitant voice that he tried to steady, he asked, "What do you mean you've never seen blood like mine before?"

"It's hard to describe without getting technical. You're a unique individual."

He knew that from the energy. What did she find? Why did she sound excited by it? "How am I different?"

"I don't know, but not to worry. We'll find an answer. I know a lab that specializes in this kind of thing. I've sent the sample to NeoGen Labs. They should have a more precise analysis..."

Oh, dear God! The last of her explanation faded with the cold dread overtaking him. Not NeoGen Labs. *Anyplace* but NGL. His mother had only ever allowed him to see the doctors at NeoGen Labs, which was where she worked. She'd kill him if she found out he'd gone somewhere else, and she would find out. He had to get that sample before anyone learned what he'd done.

Gavin switched off the phone without a word, yanked his leather jacket from the closet, and slipped his feet into his shoes. On his way out the side door to the garage, he shoved the cell phone into his pocket and pulled the jacket on.

Man, his mother would kill him, unless the doctor hadn't labeled the sample as his. Small chance.

The race was on, although it was a race he had never expected. But if his mother and the others at NGL would have given him a straight answer, he wouldn't be in this predicament.

While rushing through the door into the garage, he reached aside and slapped the big square button on the wall for the smaller of the two vehicle doors to open. It creaked and groaned as the house door slammed behind him.

His bike sat up on its kickstand, shimmering as the light hit metallic blue sections and sparkling chrome wheel hubs. It had been his college graduation gift last year, soon after he'd turned eighteen. With its sleek, elegant lines, it cruised along the highways and mountain roads like a dream, carrying him wherever he wanted.

The bike had given him a new freedom from his mother and the doctors, who had run his life as long as he could remember because of his unnamed "condition"; a condition which seemed to be the reason for his freakish looks, from his shorter than average stature to the dark blue hair and the marks on his hands.

His hair had earned him a variety of nicknames from bullies and prompted him to dye it black a couple times in college, but dyes had burned his scalp and caused clumps of hair to fall out. As a result, he'd let his hair fade to normal and told people that the blue that was his natural color was the dye. As a computer programmer, it had been an acceptable quirk that cemented his status as a geek and the occasional sneer from those who didn't approve.

He had learned to accept his oddities, but he still wanted an answer to what caused them. Now that search would nail him with trouble.

The open road beckoned.

After securing the helmet with the tinted visor on his head, he started the bike and took off onto the blacktop, barely remembering as he roared out of the driveway to hit the button in his jacket pocket to close the garage.

An unusually cool, early August morning blew past him and his flapping jacket. Damn. He should have zipped it up before taking off, but it was the least of his worries and simple to fix. At the first stop sign in the gated hillside neighborhood, he took the time to zip the fitted jacket and adjust the strap of his helmet. After a quick check of the quiet street, he revved the engine and took off, but chastised himself for it. Getting pulled over by the police or ending up in the emergency room was the last thing he needed now.

Thank goodness it was between morning and lunchtime rush hours—the roads weren't as busy as they could have been. The doc's timing couldn't have been better, even if her news was the worst. Gavin had a chance to undo this without anyone knowing. Slim as that chance was, he had to try.

He struggled to keep within traffic laws but once on the highway, he roared away into the mountains towards NeoGen, a lab compound nestled among the rise of the hills beyond the outskirts of the continuous route of cities and towns along Redwood Highway.

From one exit to another, he zipped past cars and neighborhoods, fitting in easily between other vehicles.

He left Sausalito behind and took an exit from the freeway not long after. No one else drove the same exit to the lonely compound, and he took advantage of the open road before him, although he remained cautious of the rough road with its winding tar trails sealing old cracks. One wrong move and he'd be pavement pie or seeing flashing lights.

However, he was short on time and opted for the risk. Gavin leaned into the wind shearing past his helmet and shifted to the next gear. The sporty model rocketed down the old two-lane, maneuvering the bumps and curves as he'd practiced on the dirt racing track.

This was a different kind of race, a race to hide a secret from his mother. She would be upset that he didn't trust her. Whenever he'd asked about his special condition, she'd never looked him in the eyes, but had only said it was serious and that NeoGen was working on a cure. Something had bothered him in the last year since he'd graduated from college, even though he couldn't put his finger on it. Besides insisting that he live at home after he'd already finished two degrees, she seemed evasive about his questions.

He had gone to Doctor Kobaya hoping for an answer, the last thing his mother said any doctor but those at NeoGen Labs could provide, but NGL scientists hadn't given him any answers.

Gavin blinked at the emergence of buildings before him, where the NeoGen Labs main building rose highest at only ten stories, and realized he had made it through the worst of the road there with half his mind tuned out.

At that time of day, the gate of the tall chain-link fence was open and the guards gave him a simple wave of acknowledgment as he passed. He returned the gesture and continued into the parking lot of the compound.

The ten story building of NeoGen Labs was matched in height only by a plain gray building set off to the west of it. Large panes of glass shimmered fully along ten floors of the main structure, which bore the NGL logo near the top center. He parked his bike in an open spot nearest to the building. A small segment of manicured lawn surrounded the structure, broken by several trees and a straight-shot cement walk from the parking lot to the front doors.

Gavin strapped the helmet to the bike and hurried into the building, where a pair of security men in white shirts and dark blue ties sat behind a high desk. One was a little on the heavy side, but it likely didn't matter since nothing ever happened there. Their eyes shifted between him and the monitors beneath the countertop around the desk. He recognized them, even the younger man

who was new, and they knew him from his frequent visits there with his mother.

Getting in was no problem. He pulled his badge from his jacket pocket and scanned in at the turnstile.

The nearest guard forced a smile but said nothing.

Now for the real work.

Gavin glanced up at each of the four cameras monitoring the lobby area and headed towards the two elevators at the back. First stop, the mail room, ground level, right from the elevators, where he followed a narrow hall to the room at the end. In the midst of sorting packages and envelopes from tables into three separate carts, the four young people looked up. He knew each, but one in particular might be more inclined to help him.

"Hey, Jerrod. So...um..." Gavin distractedly glanced at the labels of a few boxes stacked on the table. "I'm wondering if you've seen a package from a Doctor Kobaya recently?"

A young man just a couple of years older with short, sandy-colored hair adjusted his glasses and looked up from a mail bag, his gaze going blank as he shifted his focus inward. After a few seconds, he shook his head. "No, I—"

"I did." A young woman with her blonde hair tied back into a tail snagged his attention. He recalled her name from seeing her a couple months ago. "We took it to Lab Two...yesterday."

"Lab Two. Thanks." Gavin rushed out with a grimace. Yesterday already. That wasn't good. Doctor Kobaya should have contacted him sooner. His mother might already know. Worse, Tarolis might already know.

The lead brick of horror slammed into his gut, but he forced his feet to keep moving. Rather than wait for one of the elevators to the third floor, he raced up the stairs next to them, two at a time, and opened the gray, metal door marked by a "Floor 3" sign next to it. Dark, polished tiles in diamond patterns on the floor reflected the overhead incandescent lights, while plain beige walls lightened the corridor and contributed a sterile atmosphere like in the hospital. Not a decoration to warm up the place but the cold unwelcome like one would expect from a laboratory.

Gavin hurried into the corridor, which branched a few steps ahead with a gray sign pointing him to the right fork for Lab Two. The other branch would have taken him past some storage rooms and the individual offices for the lead researchers.

He strode purposefully to the right and past a glass wall looking over the lab area, where a dozen people worked at different tasks among the glow of glaring overhead lights and the shine of stainless steel and different machines, sometimes in pairs. Lab Two was busy with the work it did for local hospitals. The genetics research specialists were elsewhere working on projects held in secret by NeoGen Labs. Even he didn't know what they did, and he'd tried to find out every way he knew how, going so far as to try to hack into the computer systems and failing. There was some high-level security in place with computer languages he didn't recognize.

At the glass door, he paused and gave the room a visual scan, but he hardly knew what he was looking for. The only way to find his blood sample would be to ask someone. Hopefully no one reported him to his mother.

Gavin pulled the door open and stepped into a room pervaded by the faint scents of chemicals, the humming of machinery, and the tinkling of glass vials. Centrifuges spun vials at one of the side counters, while several different types of microscopes scattered on tables throughout the room were alternately occupied or unattended, amongst myriad other items, including several small glass boxes with gloves connected to the outside for working with dangerous samples while keeping them sealed. Blood vials filled trays throughout the room.

Where was his?

"Excuse me!" One of the scientists in white jackets rushed towards him, pushing her rectangular-framed glasses up her steep nose as she approached. Dark hair in a loose roll behind her head revealed her narrow face, which had a rather severe appearance suiting her well. "You can't be in here, young man."

Young man nothing! He had two college degrees already, one a masters in computer science, after graduating from home schooling early as a prodigy with a perfect memory. He stood his ground, determined to stand up for himself and find that vial before his mother could learn what he'd done.

The woman looked down her nose at him—he was shorter than average, standing only about five foot seven, and she was tall for a woman, especially in heels—but that didn't mean he was a child. Besides that, his mother was a large stockholder in the company as well as an employee. In a way, she was this scientist's boss, which made him so by proxy, at least by his logic.

"I'm looking for a vial from Doctor Marissa Kobaya."

The woman sneered at him and crossed her arms. "I'm afraid that is strictly confidential, both by company policy and HIPAA."

"Even if it's *my* sample?"

Her lips twisted with conflicting annoyance and uncertainty playing across her face. "You can't be in here. I'm calling security."

Exactly as he had hoped—the situation threw her off guard. He had one chance to use it to his advantage. "Call security. I'm sure when Director Tarolis hears you threw out Gavin Durinden—" Hopefully the name drop worked. "—he'll be sure to chastise you. Tell me where that sample is."

Her eyes narrowed and she fumed silently for several seconds before smugness crept into her dark expression. "Go ask him yourself."

Curse it! She'd called his bluff. He was hoping to avoid confronting Tarolis or his mother, because one was just as bad as the other—Loran Tarolis ran the company. Confronting Tarolis was the last thing he wanted.

"Just give me the vial."

"Even if I could, I wouldn't. It's in Loran's office."

His insides went cold with dread. No. No. No. Worse, she referred to Tarolis by his first name, which meant this particular scientist had close ties to her boss. Damn his luck! But he couldn't let her see his fear.

Feigning annoyance, he curled his lip in a snarl and marched from the room.

He had to find that vial and could only hope Tarolis hadn't seen it yet. Why would he have it, though?

Damn. Damn. And triple damn on himself for setting up this situation.

Instead of waiting for the elevator, he rushed the stairs up two more floors and hesitated. At the door marked as "Floor 10", he took a breath. Here went everything.

Gavin pulled the door open and looked right.

At the end of the corridor rose a floor to ceiling glass window near the arched, dark lacquer reception desk for the executive offices. Sunlight poured into the conservative area with its "L"-shaped brown leather seating in the corner opposite the desk.

His eyes went immediately to the desk with one realization that gave him hope—the receptionist was gone!

He checked his watch for confirmation. Lunch time! *Yes!* His timing was perfect. The idea

that he might be able to sneak in and out of the executive director's office with that sample hurried his steps to the double doors of the office on the nearest side of the desk.

While reaching for the lever handle, voices stopped him. Gavin swallowed his hopes and carefully put his ear to the door.

["You can no longer control the boy."] The cold threat of the man's familiar voice sent a chill down his spine. The odd language sparked familiarity somewhere in the back of his thoughts. Although not one he had studied, it was easy to understand.

["Sir. I'm aware of his independence. He has reached adulthood. Keeping him busy with schooling on this world is not enough to slow his mind."] He knew that voice! No. It couldn't be!

Gavin held his breath, his senses piqued to take in everything.

["No excuses!"] The roar of Tarolis's voice made Gavin flinch and sparked defiance in him to defend his mother, but he restrained himself. ["He was assigned to you to maintain until he was needed."]

He couldn't have heard that right. What did they mean he was *assigned* to her? Liriana was his mother. You didn't assign children.

And for what did they need him?

Gavin put his eye to the crack between the doors, but could see only a fragment of the scene. Beyond the glass-topped meeting table but in front of the director's desk at the far end of the room, his mother stood before Loran Tarolis. Tarolis stood with an overbearing authority over her, his brown eyes piercing. His face was lean and menacing but refined so that he had an almost aristocratic air. His mother had often complained that it was hard to refuse him anything for the charm he exuded on any other occasion but this.

["Perhaps the time has come—"] At a twitter from the computer on his desk, Loran Tarolis stepped back from the slim view Gavin had. Liriana remained in place, her layers of light brown hair with natural blonde highlights loose over her shoulders.

["Confirmed. Our research has reached a pinnacle, and need for the test subject has arrived."] Tarolis stepped back before his mother. ["His time has come, Captain."]

Captain? What? This had to be some weird dream. Why would Tarolis address his mother as Captain? She wasn't in the military.

["You have served us well in the capacity as the child's caretaker while we continued our research on this world."]

What? He didn't hear that right, or he was dreaming.

["It is my duty to serve, sir."]

A less than humored look fell over Tarolis, only the corner of his mouth twitching into something bearing no pleasure. ["As your team leader, I expect you to surrender the boy to us now that we are ready for testing."]

Testing? The boy?

Him?

Gavin stepped away, curious but dreading the implications of those words. He must have heard wrong. After all, it was a language he'd only heard in his dreams. How could they speak it?

That was it. He was dreaming. He'd fallen asleep on the sofa and everything was a dream. Yes. That had to be it.

No. It wasn't. It all felt too real to be a dream. This was real and yet so not.

The clap of steps on the tile floor echoing from the corridor barely penetrated the mire of thoughts swirling through his head. What did it all mean? What kind of nightmare had he stepped into? Was this because of his search for answers from an independent doctor? Had they

discovered his secret?

The silence and looming presence of someone behind him cracked through his awareness. He whirled on two women in black uniforms looking every bit like cold soldiers, one with short, dark hair and another with an almost reddish tint in her eyes to match the hair pulled out of her face into a braid. He'd seen them around the building on other visits but had never heard their names.

From the other side, the click of a door handle made him whirl back to the room.

His mother and Tarolis hesitated. Standing only a hair taller than his mother, Tarolis smiled slyly. "You've saved us the trouble, Gavin. How thoughtful."

At a small movement of the man's head, the women moved behind Gavin, grabbed his wrists, and secured his arms at his back. He struggled, but they were stronger and held fast.

He looked up for support. "What—! Mom..."

The quiver of her chin told him she felt something, but her light brown eyes stared unfocused. She said nothing.

"What's going on?" If only he could use his powers to free himself. That was what he needed.

Tarolis lifted a small vial of crimson in his hand that turned Gavin's insides cold with dread. "I'm sorry, but we can't have anyone learning the truth."

They knew!

But he had no idea what they meant. "What truth? What's going on? What do you want from me?" Gavin struggled to free himself but his efforts were futile. They couldn't be that adamant about his condition. Could they? What did they know but refused to tell him?

["Take him to the holding area. Doctor Lindgren is waiting."]

Again with the other language. No more secrets. He deserved answers. He'd show them. "What holding area?"

One light brown eyebrow lifted on that harsh face. Tarolis's scolding eyes went to Gavin's mother. ["He's remembering?"]

Liriana's throat flashed with a swallow and her eyes flicked to Gavin in admonishment. ["Only in dreams."]

He looked from one to the other in the hopes that one would explain and finally fixed on his mother, who refused to meet his eyes. His heart cracked with the hammer of betrayal hitting it. "Mom..." Emotions choked his voice. How could his own mother do this to him?

Tarolis crossed his arms. ["You'll tell me later what he knows."]

She nodded but swallowed when her eyes caught Gavin's. ["Yes, sir."]

What Gavin knew? He didn't know anything. Or was it the power? His insides twisted with gruesome ideas of what they might do or want him to do for them, and he struggled to escape the iron lock of the guards' grips but to no avail.

Tarolis gave a sharp nod, a signal.

Gavin twisted but, before he could see what was coming, numbness washed through him and the world disappeared.

Chapter 2

Dressed in black like those with her, his mother approached and knelt down to him. He was small and wanted to fly to escape the demons before him, their wings of various colors and hers a light brown with touches of yellow. An angel lay on the floor with a blackened wound staining her chest. One hand lay open to reveal a large splotch of aquamarine in the center of her palm with rays tapering out to her fingers and wrist. The other hand palm down across her chest bore a smaller mark on the back. White-blue wings splayed out beside her matched the hair tangled around her face.

A child's tears poured from his eyes at the site of the dead woman, his heart aching as if it had been ripped from his chest.

["It's all right,"] his mother said in a tender voice, approaching slowly.

["Kill him, Captain."] The harsh voice came from one of the two women scowling down at him.

["No. She's right to take him alive,"] a man said. ["He could be useful to us."]

His mother glanced over her shoulder and returned her eyes to him with a gentle smile, while the others encircled him with cold fire in their eyes.

["Easy."] Her soothing voice dried his tears. ["I won't hurt you. Let me take you away from this."] She scooped him into her arms and pulled him into a comforting embrace next to her warm body. The fear of the child lingered, however, along with the memories of the angel dead on the floor.

["Let's go. Prime Commander Loran will decide what to do with him."]

The realism of the dreams lingered with the strange tingling throughout his body, which pulled Gavin from his sleep.

Along with a massive headache that pounded a jackhammer blow to his skull.

He groaned and rolled onto his side, curling into a fetal position with his hands on his head in a futile effort to stop the pounding. Although he'd never had a drink—because of his mother's warnings about alcohol to his condition—he'd bet this was what a hangover felt like.

Someone please stop the pain! Damn, it hurt!

"Take this." The soft voice made his breath catch in his chest. His mother.

His first mistake was to shift too quickly. Pain. Intense pain. He hissed through clenched teeth and rolled over slowly, then waited for the throbbing to ebb.

Through opening eyes and spots dancing in his vision, he saw his mother standing in her navy pantsuit holding a glass of water and a pill out to him. "Take it. You'll feel better, Gavin."

She set the glass and the pill on a table next to where he lay and helped him sit up as dream images swept through his mind. It *had* only been a dream, hadn't it?

"What happened?" The last thing he remembered was standing before Tarolis's office.

"You were...sedated. I'm sorry. Here—" She sat down on the edge of the mattress, her arm supporting him while he washed the pill down his throat with the water she offered.

He finished the water, but upon lowering the glass, considered his surroundings and the bed on which he sat. This wasn't his room. The room around him was simple, with a large mirror on one wall that he would bet good money was one-way glass. The room also contained a dresser next to the bed and a chair near the door, and nothing else. Even considering the lack of pictures, diplomas, or other familiar hangings of his room, it was clearly different.

Through the perfect clarity of his memories, he pulled up the last thing he remembered—being taken by his mother in a black uniform like... No. The women who had held him had worn the black uniforms. Tarolis had said it was his time for something and...everything had gone black.

"What is this place?" He had gone to NeoGen Labs, but he didn't remember any rooms like this any of the times he'd been there, only labs and offices and supply rooms, but he'd never been in the lower levels—access had always been restricted. Is that where he was?

His mother pursed her lips and dropped her eyes. "I'm sorry, Gavin. It's for your own good. You're not well."

Not well? What did she mean? He searched her eyes, but she refused to look at him. The fact that she hadn't answered his question made him wary. "What's wrong with me? What are they doing?"

"It's hard to explain."

"What is? You've never told me what it *is*. It's been some general, fuzzy 'condition' without any identification."

"It's...difficult, Gavin." She shook her head and rushed away to the door.

No! Don't leave! "Wait! I'm sorry. I—" He jumped off the bed to chase her, but his head gave a hard pound that dropped him to his knees in pain and made spots dance in his vision.

The door thumped and clicked behind her. She had locked him in. He couldn't even catch her, at least not with his head feeling like a train wreck.

"Don't leave me," he murmured and struggled to climb back into the bed amid the pounding in his head. *Mom...* Why did she run? Didn't she care anymore?

Slowly, he pulled himself to the bed and regained his feet to climb up. Once settled, he let out a heavy sigh, his head still throbbing—the medication would take some time to work.

If only his mother would have stayed. He didn't want to be alone.

Why was he there? What did they want of him? He wanted answers, but mostly he wanted his mother to be honest with him, to console him as she used to do, like when he had scraped his knee and elbow when he fell off his bike as a child or when he'd been verbally attacked on the college campus because he was unusually intelligent for his age and had blue hair. She had always said the right things to make him feel better, but now...

Now, she wouldn't even look him in the eyes.

Tarolis had said she had been his caretaker until they were ready for testing. No. She was his *mother*. She loved him. Didn't she?

He fixed his eyes on the mirror, his heart sinking into despair. "If you can hear me, Mom, I'm sorry I disobeyed you. I'm sorry I went to Doctor Kobaya." How he wanted her at his bedside!

He lay still, wishing the headache would ease, so he could get up and find her. Although seventeen years old, inside he was still that child who clung to his mother for reassurance when life was rough and he felt confused about who he was and needed her. She had always been there for him, but not this time. Her rejection ripped out his insides.

And with the dreams he'd been having again, he needed some grounding to know what was real.

* * *

The door closed behind her in the darkened observation room on the other side of the mirror, which would never fool Gavin. Her boy was too smart for that trick, having been raised on Earth with such things commonplace on their television programs.

["You're soft on the boy, Captain."] Prime Commander Loran's voice vexed her in their

language, the use of which kept their words private from the human scientist on his other side. This was all her commander's fault—she suffered with Gavin on a vicious assault of guilt and grief.

["Only a little."] She lied, but Tarolis would completely rip her away if he thought she was a burden to their mission, or he would send her home to her Earth dwelling so that she couldn't see what they did to Gavin. The time had come to sever the ties to the child she had raised as her own. He had been allowed to live with the purpose of serving their needs, nothing more; but the more she told herself that, the more her memories returned in that perfect clarity from the Starfire in her, reminding her of the joys of raising the young man. Liriana couldn't help but to question the righteousness of using him like this. He was her child in every way, except by blood.

["Soon, he will be free of the Starfire, Captain. He will never know what he didn't miss and then we will all be free. Can you imagine being able to forget?"]

Prime Commander Loran Tarolis was right. Without the Starfire making them living recorders, they—the *meistal*, or middle blended Inari—and Keepers could actually have the bad memories fade. No more horrors from her Shirukan training to haunt her, although the joys of raising Gavin had given her better memories, ones which she didn't want to fade. For that matter, why couldn't he experiment on one of their own...except that it could prove dangerous and Keepers were abominations according to the teachings of their empress. Shirukan were too valuable to risk.

["No, sir."]

["And the Keepers will be powerless against us."]

There was that. She looked up at the ambition on the prime commander's face. The Keepers would no longer be able to use the Starfire shards. They would be as vulnerable as anyone, and then the machine known as Heffin's Gate would be appreciated once again, as its creator had intended over six thousand years ago, when it was built to harness the power of the Starfire crystal.

Her duty was to the Shirat Empire and to all of Inar'Ahben. Gavin's place was to serve as a test subject for neutralizing or even removing the Starfire. She didn't have to like it; that's just the way things were.

["What happens if he dies, if the treatment fails?"] She held her breath, her heart whimpering at the prospects of losing her son.

Tarolis's cheek twitched and his expression darkened. ["We find another subject. There are more than twenty Keepers on Earth to choose from."]

Then why Gavin, she wanted to ask, but bit her tongue. She knew the answer. This was why they had allowed her to raise him. For that, she should be grateful.

["Your contribution is appreciated, *Captain*."]

She couldn't help but to wince at the sharp reminder of her rank and, thus, her place in this mission. She was a soldier first. Motherhood was only an illusion.

He turned aside to the woman standing on his left in the white jacket, her dark hair twisted back on her head to reveal the harsh lines of her face. "Doctor Lindgren. How long before we can test the effects of the serum?"

"The first sample shows some anomalies, but it's hard to say if it's working. I'll need more time monitoring the effects regularly to observe the progress. Making adjustments at such an atomic level is delicate work. It will take some time to be sure we're on the right track."

"Do what you have to. If you don't find a cure for him, he will die."

Because Tarolis would never let a Keeper live, but the humans didn't know that Gavin would otherwise live. Liriana swallowed the explanation and refocused on the boy in the other room.

"Yes, sir." Doctor Lindgren nodded. "I'll get right on it. Miss Durinden, I'll do all I can for your son."

Liriana grimaced but forced a smile to play her part. "Thank you."

On Earth, there were rules to follow if they wanted to hide, besides changing their names around in certain cultures like that. As far as the humans knew, they were developing a cure for a very rare disease. The scientists had no idea that they were changing a whole species. Tarolis couldn't have worked like this on the homeworld. If his research was discovered, the risk of attack by any of the free cities, or even the rebel cells within the empire, would have been too great. Humans were easily manipulated with no preconceptions of what the Inari were, except to assume they were angels, when they saw them in their natural form. Without their wings, she and the other Inari appeared human.

Doctor Rebecca Lindgren stepped out, leaving Liriana alone with her commanding officer.

After the door clicked shut, Tarolis let out a deep breath in the quiet of the room. She could imagine his brown-gold wings tightening in agitation if they weren't shrunken out of sight. ["Our plans progress at last; that should satisfy Prime Commander Alshouan, if she ever contacts me again. This is a fortunate turn of events, wouldn't you say, Captain?"]

["Yes, it is."] Unfortunately.

A sly smile crawled up his face. ["Our world will be free of Keeper treachery if this works, and your years of patience will have been the contributing factor to our success."]

["Thank you, sir."] She swallowed the grimace twitching on her lips but could not erase the guilt weighing on her heart.

Tarolis's eyes lingered on her longer than normal, but he seemed to find some satisfaction and left her alone in the room. Only when the door clicked shut after his departure did she relax.

Drained by her worry for the boy, Liriana fell into one of the two chairs in the observation room.

Gavin lay on the bed, staring up at her unfocused. "I'm sorry," she whispered. Her heart sank with dread—he was doomed to die, one way or another.

Keepers were a threat to their world, but Gavin wasn't like that. He didn't even know what he really was or his true potential.

It had been so simple when she had rescued him in that raid long ago. Or it had seemed so simple. But she had denied the truth within herself—she had rescued him because she had felt sorry for him and couldn't bear the guilt of letting him die like his parents. He'd barely been of the age to learn to use the Starfire within him, the very element they hoped to neutralize while keeping him alive. Although only his mother had been a Keeper, they couldn't let the father live to confirm the purge of Keepers on Inar'Ahben, Empress Marin's Prime Initiative.

Something in her had felt compassion for the boy and wanted to take away his sorrow. Fourteen Earth years with him—nearly seventeen Inari years—full of tears and laughter had bonded her with him in a way that wasn't like a partner bond. It was something special she hadn't expected. In her heart, he was her son, beloved like no one else.

Tarolis knew, though. He had reminded her of her duty and the threat Gavin could be, despite her belief otherwise in her adopted son. All Keepers were threats or potential threats to the true Inari way. It was why she had joined the Shirukan when offered the chance.

It had seemed an easy choice then, but now, she didn't know what was right. She could only hope Gavin survived the testing long enough for her to find a way to save him.

Chapter 3

From his bed, Gavin stared at the mirror, hardly noticing the blue-haired young man staring back. There were others behind that glass; he was certain. They watched him for something. He'd bet at least Executive Director Tarolis was watching. If only he knew what "truth" Tarolis had meant.

At the click of the door opening, he turned and his head gave only a weak throb. Finally, the painkiller was starting to work.

A man in blue scrubs brought in a tray with several vials, a needle, and other items that Gavin recognized for a blood draw. He'd seen it all before in the many times he'd come to NGL, and the one time that he'd gone to the hospital to see Doctor Kobaya. From behind the assistant stepped one of the white-jackets, a tall, slender woman with dark hair pulled up behind her head and the maroon-embroidered name of "Rebecca Lindgren, Ph.D." on her breast pocket.

The assistant set the tray on the dresser next to the bed. Perhaps they could tell him something, although if they knew they were being watched, they might not say anything. Still, he had to try. "Why am I here?"

The woman's somber expression twitched in uncertainty. "You were brought in for treatment of your condition after being sedated. Now, I need a sample for testing. If you'll hold still, this will only take a few seconds..."

Sure. Why not? He wasn't exactly in a position to fight, and maybe if he cooperated, she would help him.

While she pulled on a pair of rubber gloves, the man in the scrubs tied a rubbery strap tightly around his upper arm.

"You'll feel a small pinch," she said, handing the needle and a vial to the assistant.

Whatever. He knew the routine and looked away. After some palpating of his inner elbow by fingers in cool rubber gloves, the pinch came and went. He stared at the corner of the room, trying to avoid the reflection showing him the changing of vials as the man collected his blood. The sight of blood always made him nauseous and threatened to make him pass out, no matter how many times he'd had it done; he'd simply learned to look away and think of something else. This time, he stared at the drab, beige wall.

"So, why are you drawing blood now?"

"To check the results of your first treatment," the woman said matter-of-factly.

Treatment? He turned to the doctor, forgetting the blood draw for a moment as suspicions sprang up inside him. "You treated me while I was out? Then you know what my condition is?"

Her lip twisted and she avoided his gaze. "You have a unique element linked to your cells. It's like nothing I've seen, but we're hoping to cleanse it or at least neutralize it so it no longer poses a threat."

"A 'unique element?'" That was more than Doctor Kobaya had explained. She hadn't seen blood like his. Was he some sort of mutant? Was that why he had the powers? Or was this all a dream from reading too many comic books?

"It's too detailed to explain."

The assistant removed the needle. "Done. Hold this."

Gavin lifted his free hand to press the cotton ball into the crook of his elbow, while the man unpeeled a bandage strap and stuck it over the cotton. They need not bother; he healed quickly. The man should know that since he'd drawn Gavin's blood on other occasions.

After a word to the assistant, who took the tray out with the filled vials on it, the woman stepped up to his bed and shone a pen light in each eye, pressed into his neck and listened to his heart and lungs with a stethoscope. Wow. One of the scientists was an actual medical doctor, not what he would have expected. "How are you feeling?"

"I don't know. How should I feel?" Seriously, if he had such a horrible condition, why didn't he feel worse?

She gave him a look of annoyance and shook her head. "Good enough to question your care, I guess."

"Better than dead," he muttered.

She rolled her eyes and shook her head in annoyance before turning to leave. "Teenagers."

Whatever. He didn't want to talk to her, and from what he understood, she was one of the lead researchers. He recognized the name on her jacket. She would have a better idea than anyone what was happening.

"What exactly *is* my condition?"

With her hand on the door knob, Doctor Lindgren hesitated before answering in a somber voice. "I don't know. Your DNA contains strange fragments I've never seen before and there are extra chromosomes. We've been trying to isolate it for many years and to develop a formula to correct it. We're hoping the treatment does that, but you have to stay calm and rest."

Resting was the last thing he wanted. He was used to getting up and moving and his restlessness grew the longer he stayed in one place.

"Stay comfortable. You're not going anywhere for a while."

Not with a headache, he wasn't. But he wasn't staying either. Once the pain was gone, he'd be up and finding his mother for answers.

The door thumped and clicked behind her.

He knew that sound—they locked him in. This did not bode well, not after what Tarolis had told his mother. The situation was worse than he had expected. He would be bored before he could try to pick the lock.

One option popped into his head immediately—cell phone. Yes! That would give him something to do.

His hands dug into the pockets of his leather jacket next to him on the bed.

Empty.

No! Dammit! They'd taken that too. He couldn't even call his mother or entertain himself. The isolation piqued his suspicions. They were afraid of something.

His eyes went to the large mirror, ideas churning in his head. "So, I'm supposed to just sit here and be bored? Can't you at least bring me some books to read, or a television? Give me something to do or let me out."

They said they were helping him, but they locked him in there saying he was a test subject. Suspicions burned through his head.

What had his mother meant about him remembering only in dreams?

He dreamed about angels and her.

And in his dream, his mother had been an angel, or a demon. He couldn't figure that out.

He also remembered a woman of startling beauty with blue-tinted white wings and hair...

Those wings shone with an otherworldly beauty in the glaring light of day. In a silvery gown with her hair flowing over her shoulders, she appeared as a heavenly messenger. She opened her hands, which bore aquamarine splotches larger than his, and knelt before him with a generous

smile and open arms. ["Soriel!"]

He let go of someone else's hand and ran into her arms, something at his back moving in anxiety, muscles working in a strange way, but his goal was the embrace waiting for him and the love within it.

After what seemed an eternity, he reached her and melted into her, overwhelmed by the warmth and contentment.

["I missed you, too. I'm sorry I had to be gone."]

["Momma stay."] The voice came out high-pitched and choked by sobs bringing on tears, which blurred his vision. He wiped his face on her gown front.

["Momma must serve, my love."] Her gentle voice soothed the turmoil inside him. ["I missed you so much, though, my dear, sweet little Soriel."] Her kiss on his forehead warmed him with feelings of home and security. He curled into her loving arms tightening around him.

["He's not the only one who misses you, Callea,"] a deeper voice said.

Gavin looked up as a shadow moved across him. The woman greeted a dark-green-haired man with a lingering kiss.

When they parted, the woman frowned. ["I'm sorry. I wish I didn't have to leave so often, but they needed an interpreter. The Kr'tasik language is a very difficult one for the mechanical translators. Much of their communication is in the fine art of body language. Speech is hardly used."]

["I understand, but he doesn't."] The man with the deepest of green eyes ruffled Gavin's hair and smiled, while dark green, nearly black wings behind him lifted slightly.

The scene grew indistinct with the voices.

Gavin blinked, aware of the cold room and the bed under him. The scene felt so real. He swore the woman—Callea—had held him, her arms providing solace in their security. She had felt so familiar that it hurt to wake up and discover she wasn't there.

The scenes had come in short spurts throughout his life, but never so rich and vibrant as this. Things had changed recently, although his mother had said he always had a vivid imagination.

He liked what he experienced. They felt like people he should know, good people with generous hearts. He belonged in that other life and wanted to be Soriel and live among angels, not to be Gavin the freakish prodigy bound to Earth.

But that was fantasy. In the real world, he wished his mother would stay with him, but she had work to do. He understood that. She did what she could to protect him and care for him, and she had brought the doctors to heal him.

He had probably blown it all out of proportion. Tarolis might say he was only a test subject, because of his rare condition or because of detachment, but research needed that. Gavin understood. Still, the man gave him the creeps, especially since he'd always seemed to sneer at Gavin as if he was nothing more than a glob of gum stuck to his shoe. Liriana had been trying to help him all these years and Tarolis was her only means of doing that. Of course she would answer to him in an effort to save her son.

Yet something was missing, some connection that would explain the oddities. Tarolis and his mother had spoken the same language as the angels in his dreams. He would attribute the dreams to having heard the language from his mother, but he'd never heard his mother and Tarolis speaking anything but English until yesterday.

And why had Loran Tarolis called Liriana "Captain"?

He'd have to ask his mother the next time he saw her, although she probably wouldn't tell

him. She had been a loving mother, but she was keeping a secret from him, something important. Now that he thought of it, she had avoided certain subjects while he was growing up and had insisted that he never go to a regular doctor. Why should she tell the truth after all the years of lying?

No, that wasn't fair. She loved him. Didn't she?

He hated having so much time on his hands. He thought too much. An idle mind was the devil's workshop and his was running on overtime. He loved his mother, but she betrayed him and it cut out his heart.

Damn this torture!

"Can someone *please* give me something to do?" He was going to go nuts with only these conspiratorial thoughts to occupy him.

Only silence answered.

In the overwhelming quiet, he noticed the clearness in his head and stood up. The pain was gone.

Well, if they weren't going to give him something to do, he had his own means of passing the time, but he didn't want them to see. After a frown to the mirror and whoever stood behind it, he sat on the bed with his back to it and dropped his hands into his lap.

The familiar buzz excited the energy into emerging from his body through the marks on his palms. He stared at the glowing splotches of aquamarine and contemplated the possibilities. Anyone behind the mirror shouldn't be able to see, unless he screwed up.

Then don't, his inner voice demanded. He could control the energy.

With his palms a few inches apart facing each other, he generated the wave he'd played with earlier. The warmth tingled through his hands, exciting him with the possibilities. The energy must have had practical uses. Electricity might power computers, but it could also cause damage. Maybe if he practiced, he could figure out how to use it to escape.

Gavin closed his eyes and let the feeling that generated the energy clarify inside him. The buzz focused into a steady ring throughout his body. In his hands, the energy flared so that his fingers numbed and the tingling reached up into his forearms.

He gasped and lost the feeling and the wave. The marks lost their glow and the tingling faded. He stared at his palms in shock. Never had that happened before. It had always been a little rough, but this time it had rung clear, a pitch that sang throughout his body with a precision that made it almost too easy.

What a rush!

He had to do it again.

Remembering what he had found, he focused on it again. The note sang clear through him and his palms glowed brightly. Astounded, he stared at his hands, his heart pounding. This was it! This was the power inside him at its fullest. He knew it. He felt it. The warmth of it cleansed his spirit with its purity.

Maybe he was an angel and didn't know it. How else could he find this point of openness and contentment, and such power?

The click of the door stole his excitement. He lost the connection and the glow in time for an assistant with a tray of food to enter, while the sinister red-haired woman in the black uniform glared at him from outside the door. As soon as they left him alone, he gobbled up the meal to satisfy his hunger.

The interruption reminded him that someone may have been watching and he might expose his power while not paying attention to his surroundings. He would have to be more careful

about practicing.

But the unrestricted access to the power beckoned. He craved more, so much more, to understand it and use it. What could he really do with it? What were the limits?

Callea, the angel in his dreams, had had the same marks on her hands. Had she somehow given him that gift? Was he a part of her or she a part of him? The child part of him had called her "Momma". It couldn't be possible, yet it felt right and she had blue hair—a much lighter, almost white shade, but definitely blue.

He turned his back to the mirror, a new idea blossoming within him. His mother had been in his dreams too, dreams so vivid they felt real, like memories, but that was impossible.

So were his powers, or should have been; but there they were, glowing from the single clear note resonating through his body. Were the dreams really dreams or something else?

He shuddered in excitement at such ideas and turned his hands over.

Interesting. A pin prick of light on the back that he'd never seen before shone out, and he turned his glowing palms up again. How was any of that possible? It shouldn't have been.

Emotions simmered at the prospects that maybe they were doing this to him, had been his whole life. For that matter, maybe Callea had been an experiment too, but if she was his true mother, then Liriana had adopted him.

Where was Callea?

And why create mutations?

Why indeed? Tarolis used him—that must have been it. It made sense now that he thought of why Tarolis only considered him a test subject. And who knew how many others had come before him?

Fuming, he glared at the mirror over his shoulders. This was their fault. Tarolis and his lackeys had done this to him, had transformed him into a freak, or had created him. And Liriana had been assigned to him after they had killed his real mother, Callea.

Was that it—he was just a lab experiment?

If that's the way they wanted it, then they would see just how much of a freak he was.

Gavin closed his fists, his heart pounding in fury, and slid off the bed with his back still to the mirror.

"What have you done to me?" He ground the words through teeth clenched to restrain the betrayal tearing through him. His mother had mislead him, betrayed him, and for what?

"What am I?" He choked the words out and pinched his eyes shut to stop the tears threatening to boil over with his rage. The clear note he had found resonated through his body, warming him and setting his marks glowing inside his fists.

No one answered. The mirror mocked him. He hated it. He hated *them*.

Gavin whirled. "What—"

As he intended to expose the marks by uncurling his fingers, energy burst from his hands, shattering the mirror.

Shock caught up to him and erased his focus, leaving him cool and stunned.

Tarolis and his mother slowly rose, covered in broken glass shards.

Gavin lifted a hand to stare in awe at the power that had come from him. Elation and fear tangled from the power he wielded. There was a true gift. Not only the ability to create a beautiful wave of energy, but also the ability to release it, to defend himself as he'd wished before they had sedated him.

But he didn't want to hurt anyone. He only wanted answers.

"What am I?" he asked quietly. "Who was Callea?"

["Neutralize the boy!"]

Gavin's eyes shot up to Tarolis, who wore an oblong device on his cheek.

The door burst in and the guards in black jumped towards him. A light flashed and numbness raced up his torso.

He barely had time to turn and catch the concern on his mother's face when the world disappeared.

Chapter 4

Liriana flinched in the wake of the storm that was Prime Commander Loran Tarolis and glanced back at the two guards standing behind her at the door of his office. Commander Sarik looking particularly pleased ruffled her feathers, even if they were gone.

Tarolis stared out the window of his top-floor office. ["Captain Durinden Liriana."] His voice snapped with anger. ["You were responsible for the care of the partial Keeper, Rallenos Soriel. His memory was wiped and he was given a new identity as your son. Is this correct?"]

Liriana swallowed her anxieties about where this would lead, but stood at attention under the scrutinizing gaze of her superior officer. Tarolis had been there during the mind wipe. He knew as well as she did. ["Yes, sir."]

["You claim he had dreams of his former life yet knew nothing of who he was?"]

["Yes, sir. He reported dreams of angels, which he learned about from sources on this world. I told him nothing of Callea or Inar'Ahben or the Starfire."] She swallowed the grimace that nearly emerged.

Tarolis waved away her explanation. ["I understand the human view of what we are. Is it possible his memory returned?"]

She'd often wondered herself when he had described his dreams, but she hadn't wanted to lose her Gavin. ["I don't know,"] she muttered under her breath. She did know, but the truth simply hurt too much to face. The Starfire in Gavin was repairing his memory.

A scathing look from Tarolis, even wearing a business suit, was enough to remind her where she stood. He might have looked human, but he was Inari and still her superior officer demanding her respect and obedience.

["Does he know what he is?"]

The question made her heart ache in sympathy for Gavin, but she forced the emotions from her voice to finally give Tarolis an answer. ["No...He's never said anything to me."]

If Tarolis had his wings, she swore they would have been pressed close to his back from the anger in his posture. His lips twitched while his eyes pierced her with unspoken accusations. After several seconds of letting her sweat under that glare, he walked to his desk. ["How did he know about Callea and access the power of the Starfire?"]

Honestly, she had no idea. It had surprised her as much as it did him. Now, a new fear planted itself in her head—Tarolis wouldn't stand for the threat Gavin posed by being able to use the Starfire.

But why had it happened? They were supposed to be doing the opposite to him. Clearly Gavin didn't know who Callea was if he had to ask, but he must have remembered something.

["He doesn't know. Never has he considered himself anything but human. I swear it."]

Tarolis sat against the edge of his desk. His eyes lifted past her and he motioned with his fingers.

The other two stepped forward on either side of her—Lieutenant Pouresh and Commander Sarik. Sarik's reddish eyes gave Liriana a sideways glare that sent a chill down her spine, but Sarik had always believed Liriana was weak and always found blame with her. That look accused Liriana of incompetency, but she'd had no idea that Gavin could use the Starfire energy. She had never trained him, and when they killed his parents, he'd been too young for even elementary training.

["You'll all stay in the ship to closely monitor the boy, but it's clear that we need more

guards. Lieutenant Narees can spare some time from his assignment in Europe, and Lieutenant Oranil has been unsuccessful hunting down further Inari artifacts in the Middle East. It will take some time for them to arrive. Until then, I want the boy under constant watch. We can't afford to let him escape."] His eyes narrowed on Liriana, who would have preferred to hide behind her wings from that harsh, unspoken accusation, but she forced herself to straighten at attention with what little confidence remained.

His looked past her. ["You two are dismissed."]

Both spun and marched out, each fading step choking Liriana with the realization that she would be alone with her superior.

The door thumping closed nearly stopped her heart and she straightened for inspection. Under the glare of Prime Commander Loran's brown eyes, she held her breath.

["He'll be out for several hours. When he awakens, I want you there by him. We must maintain our cover of innocence, while learning what he remembers. Tell him nothing but let him tell you everything. That will be your task, Captain."]

She swallowed her anxiety. Although she was sure his plan would fail, she couldn't give Tarolis any more reasons to end the life of her child. ["Yes, Sir."]

["Dismissed."]

Eager to escape his presence, she spun on her heel and marched out, and didn't breathe easier until the door closed behind her.

This was her job. She wasn't supposed to love the child, only to raise him until they were ready to use him as a subject for their testing. She had a duty to her empress, a duty to destroy all Keepers, even partial Keepers like Gavin.

It was no longer an obvious, heartless duty.

She was obligated to follow orders, but she didn't have to like them.

**Read more by purchasing the full ebook from online retailers
Or purchase the paperback from your local bookstore or online retailer.**

Purchase links can be found at <http://www.melaniennes.com/books.htm#soriel>.

About the Author

Melanie Nilles grew up on a western North Dakota cattle ranch and farm and graduated with a degree in business administration from NDSU. She currently resides in central North Dakota with her family, cats, and horse. Her published works include the *Starfire Angels* series. As M. A. Nilles, she publishes darker adult fiction, including the fantasy *Tiger Born*, the first of her Demon Age series. For updates, visit her website at www.melanienilles.com.