

The Last Vhalgenn



Duty to king and country shaped Raik's life since birth, but to protect them, she must perform a ritual that betrays all she holds sacred.

Behind the Scenes of the Last Vhalgenn

By Kayelle Allen

www.kayelleallen.com



The Gates of Life in Kellindahr as viewed from the border of Qarth

This book is a behind the scenes look at the characters and setting in Kayelle Allen's *The Last Vhalgenn*.

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The Vhalgenn is a warrior, bedmate, soulmate, companion, and friend. Trusted by the king. Hated by the queen. To save the newborn prince, the Vhalgenn will risk her position, her honor, and death itself to honor the Old Ways. But when she takes the newborn prince to the queen's homeland for a ritual blessing, she discovers a betrayal so deep the kingdom -- and her heart -- might never recover.

The Characters

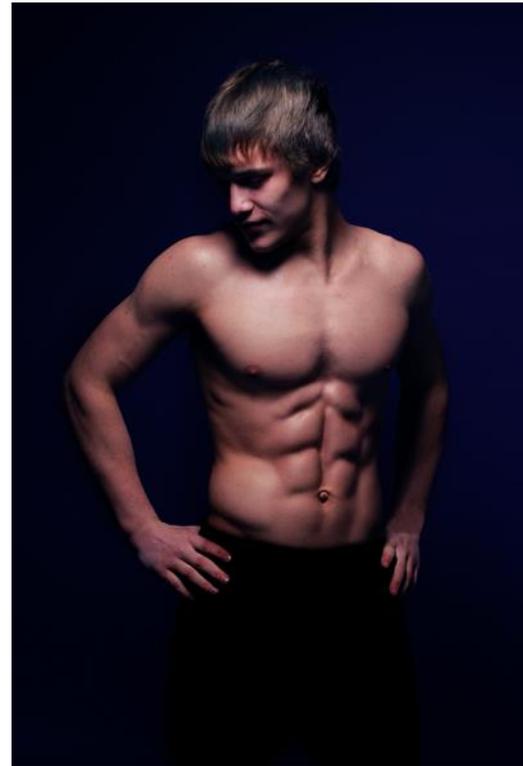
Raik - the Vhalgenn



The Vhalgenn is a warrior, and has been King Orix's companion, bedmate, soulmate, and friend since childhood. On the world of this story, relationships such as these are common. There are no slaves, but being a Vhalgenn is as close as it can come to being the property of another. Raik's full name is Raik Ty Hellesbor, clan Ddumach. The word "ty" means she is bonded by blood to the Hellesbor clan. The addition of "clan Ddumach" means she was born into the Ddumach family. She wears a cheek tattoo of ivy woven around a diadem (crown), which is the symbol of the house of Hellesbor. For the past year or so she's been serving at the front of the battle with northerly neighbors of Qarth and Kellindahr.

Orix - the King of Qarth

Orix Ayre Hellesbor, clan Hellesbor was born to be king. As a prince, his constant companion was Raik, of the Ddumach clan, born to be his Vhalgenn. With Raik at his side, Orix learned to fight, to read, and to govern. If any single person holds his trust, it was she. He also grew up knowing that one day an advantageous political marriage would be arranged for him, and it would not be with Raik. Though he adored her, she could never be his wife.



Dahr - the Queen of Kellindahr



Dahr of Kellindahr, the princess and heir of the largest nation on the planet fought to prevent her marriage to Orix of Qarth. Her family overruled her objection, and the dozen or more years of skirmishes and border wars between her people and his were settled by their union. Realizing Orix would never love her, and jealous of the time he spent alone with Raik, Dahr banished her. Dahr miscarried a child early in their marriage, and at the beginning of the story, is pregnant again, and in poor health.

Estria - the wetnurse

Estria, clan Ddumach, is the young mother of a bastard son of the king, and distantly related to the Vhalgenn. She supports herself and her son by selling her breast milk. A feisty and challenging soul, she is coerced by the queen into accompanying the Vhalgenn as a wetnurse for the queen's newborn.



Dahryc - the newborn prince

Born after a difficult labor, the young prince is sent off with the Vhalgenn and his wet-nurse almost immediately after birth. Destined to undergo a ritual that will supposedly protect him and appease the faerii, the truth about his birth could change the kingdom forever.

The Setting

The Gates of Life - the sacred destination in the Vhalgenn's quest



For as long as the people of Kellindahr can remember, families have paid homage to the Faerii by carrying newborns beneath a set of tall arches. Known as the Gates of Life, these metal arches are said to hold the power of life and death. According to legend, an infant who sees his father before being passed beneath the gates will die. When Queen Dahr beseeches the Vhalgenn to take her child through the gates to protect him, she refers to this belief. To appease the queen, who is dying, she agrees. So begins the quest to reach the gates before King Orix can see his son.

Sammon Falls

"Sammon Falls, to the east of us, sent up its mist like smoke, luminous in the dawn."



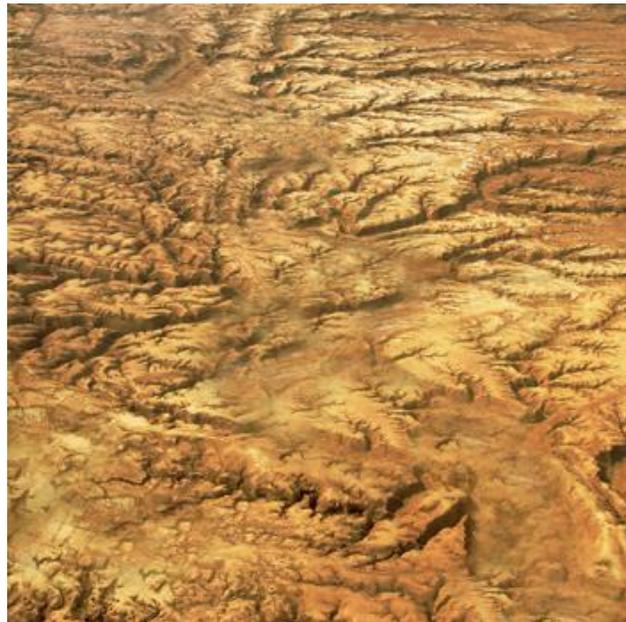


Sammon River

"The river...stretched toward the north, a silver ribbon stitched against the green velvet of Kellindahr's rich farmlands."

Denauerman Flats

"If any man 'as crossed the Denauerman Flats, 'e's not returned to speak of it in Qarth! It's salt flats, dead water and sink 'oles..."



Excerpt from The Last Vhalgenn

In this scene from The Last Vhalgenn, the heroine, Raik, is alone with King Orix. They grew up together, but his new queen barred Raik from the palace. Raik is back to deliver news of a battle and while delighted to be with Orix, she is nervous about his queen discovering them.

I followed Orix to the matching chairs where we used to sit in the evenings. The fire crackled and popped. Homesickness gnawed my heart, especially when the faithful old servant, Cyrus, greeted me. His unfeigned affection and fatherly embrace brought tears to my eyes. He set out a meal of bread, cheese, and wine and served me first, against all custom.

Orix watched, amusement touching his mouth and eyes. Before he left, Cyrus reminded me twice to call if I needed anything. Orix stood and went to the fire, hands held out to the flames.

"There's enough for four people." I broke off a hunk of crusty black bread. "Share."

He returned, nibbling while I gulped, but said little. At last, hunger satisfied and body clean, I leaned back in the chair and lifted a goblet, watching the fire through the deep red wine.

"I'm sorry, Orix. You know. About Dahr. I didn't mean to hurt. You mean more to me than anyone alive."

He reached across and took my hand; interlaced his fingers, and then folded his arms and stared into the fire.

"I need her Raik. As much as I needed you."

Needed? I choked back words that anguish hurried to mind. I was as much his chattel as any of his horses. If one person could own another, then I was his, given to him at birth. Why should it hurt if he treated me as such?

"She's in danger of losing the baby."

"Again?" There had been a miscarriage four months after their marriage. "What's wrong this time?" I poured more wine.

"Some woman thing. Her doctors fuss around her bed all day. It's been weeks and she still has to stay on her back. I can't even see her. All her doctors are from Kellindahr. I don't think she trusts ours."

"This child is crucial, Orix. You need an heir to both lands. If it helps for her to have her own people around her, so much the better."

"Aye." He rambled on about a rallying point and the Kellindahrii people's love for their queen, while I mused over how much time would be lost begetting another heir. It struck me that if Dahr was abed she hadn't met Orix's needs. My throat tightened when I thought of him sleeping alone. I dared not look at the over-sized bed we'd so often shared. Nor did I look straight at him, afraid my rampant feelings would show. There was a war to finish. I'd been foolish to bring the dispatch. Being this close to him...

I flung myself out of the chair and stalked, stiff legged and sore, over to the fireplace and leaned my head against the mantle.

Let him go! He's the king. You're a soldier. He'll never be yours. Don't lose your heart over him. Don't do it. Not again.

"I'm sorry." Orix came up behind me. "You're exhausted and here I am prating about my needs." He pulled my hand to his mouth and pressed the palm against his lips.

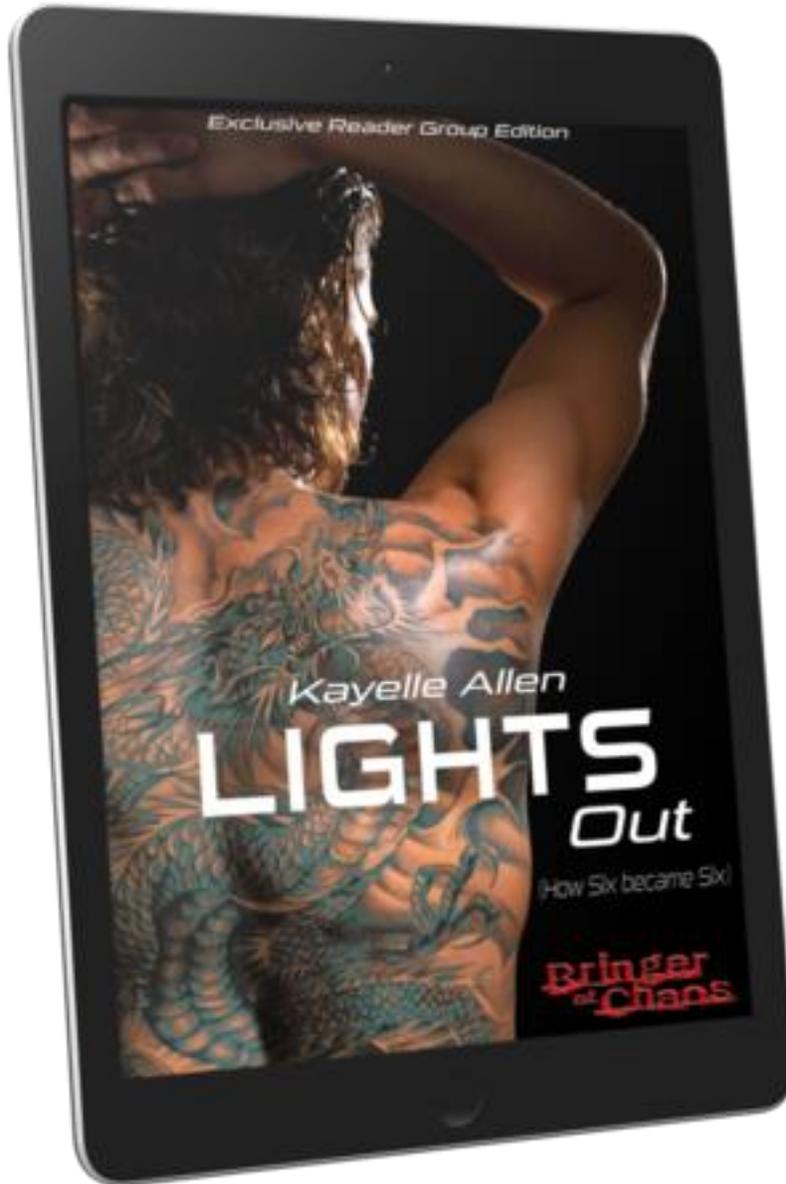
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Kayelle Allen writes Sci Fi with misbehaving robots, mythic heroes, role playing immortal gamers, and warriors who purr. She's a US Navy veteran who's been married so long she's tenured.

Website <http://kayelleallen.com>

Twitter <http://twitter.com/kayelleallen>

Facebook <http://facebook.com/kayelleallen.author/>

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